

BEYOND A NEW LOOK FOR THE STATE LIBRARY OF NSW



Steak, sophisticated and accessible, the new-look Verandah at the State Library of NSW

A modern library is bright and welcoming. You can use your laptop while having a coffee, or talk to friends while reading newspapers. It's your living room in the city. But it's also a place for serious study, where you can pore over the books you requested online before you came in, or trawl through shipping lists on microfiche. Catering to this diversity was the

aim in renovating the State Library of NSW, which unveiled a new-look State Reference Library on 19 September 2011.

Architect Paulo Macchia from the NSW Government Architect's Office set out to create "a contemporary, uplifting atmosphere while complementing the existing fabric of the building". And he was guided by the library's experts in planning the layout.

As well as interviews with staff and clients, a key step in the planning process was an 'observational study'. Pairs of staff members – who were clearly identified – watched as people moved about the library. The observers noted whether people entered alone or as part of a group, the mix of resources they used, and who they turned to if they needed help (often security officers).

"As a result of the observational study we reorganised the library into three zones," said Director of Library Services, Noelle Nelson. "And it definitely seems to be working."

The first zone, the new Verandah at the front of the library, is now full of people of all ages using personal laptops and library computers, reading daily newspapers, and chatting and working at small tables.

On the first floor, the 'Ask a Librarian' service is near the entrance, the popular legal information service is easy to find, and group study areas are near the high school curriculum resources. A casual reading area with a range of newspapers and magazines uses light from the nearby atrium.

The floor below has also been reconfigured to increase natural light and views of the gardens that surround the building. It's a sanctuary of quiet study space, with the request desk and family history resources on hand, as well as group study rooms. For the convenience of family historians, historical newspapers are now located with the other materials they use.

The library has more lockers, computers and desk space, as well as password-free Wi-Fi access. LCD screens supply the basic facts about using the library, and there are roving assistants to help find information or operate technology. To replace a central copying area, there are printer/copiers at several locations on both floors.

Among the improvements, wheelchair navigation is much easier, and an upgraded adaptive technology area offers independent access and staff support for people with a disability.

It's an inspiring space as well as a practical one: spectacular images from the library's collection are reproduced on the walls, including Jane Bennett's *Closing the Gap* (1995) and Thomas Woore's *Panorama of Sydney* (1829). Adorning the Verandah tables are details from a humorous illustrated map of Sydney, issued to

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commemorate the opening of the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

The new State Reference Library is part of a two-stage renovation that will see the cafe, bookshop and auditorium expanded to create a lively foyer. With the first stage ready in time for the hectic HSC period, the next part of the State Library's \$4.2 million renovation will go ahead in 2012.

You can learn more about the State Library of NSW refurbishment at sl.nsw.gov.au.

Cathy Perkins

Marketing and Business Development State Library of NSW
cperkins@sl.nsw.gov.au



State Librarian Alex Byrne checks up on the news