

Each month, OPINION features contributions from invited guest writers. The opinions expressed in this column do not necessarily reflect those of the Australian Library and Information Association.

IT'S TIME TO BE BOLD



Photo: Sam Roberts

Right now around the country, there are growing numbers of libraries embarking upon a refurbishment or building brand new libraries. So it seemed like a good time to talk to the professionals helping us create these wonderful new spaces. INCITE invited Hassell Associate Yan Yan Ho to share her thoughts, fresh from completing the new City Library in Adelaide.

Libraries of the future are about more than just books. They are places for learning, socialising, knowledge sharing, creativity and collaboration. They are about building social sustainability into our communities – providing sensory and human experiences where people can meet, be engaged and connect with one another.

BE BRAVE AND EMBRACE THE UNKNOWN.

In this rapidly changing digital world, the traditional library has morphed into a more adaptable cultural space. Part library, part entertainment space, part gallery; flexibility and adaptability are the key to the next generation of libraries.

The time has come for libraries to be bold. To take the lead in shaping outstanding, functional community spaces that provide experiences and facilities that people want to be part of and use. The greatest challenge I face as a designer is encouraging clients to be brave and embrace the unknown. To understand that between us – as designers and librarians – we make an excellent team.

The most successful library and cultural spaces I have worked on have been the result of trusted and open client partnerships. Partnerships that share a single vision, where

client and designer are 'on the same page' and where both are enthusiastic about achieving the very best design outcomes.

The City Library built by the Adelaide City Council for example, is a project which illustrates the best of the designer/client relationship and is the result of an open minded dialogue and trust between project members.

One third a traditional library and two thirds a pop-up exhibition, function, digital learning and performance space, the City Library embraces the notion of flexibility and agility. The concept is people focused and 'user designed'. It is centered around key fixed elements such as Studio 1, an enclosed room with two walls which fold out to create a stage and custom pivoting bookshelf doors that provide order and structure to an otherwise 'loose' space.

In its first two weeks of opening, the library welcomed more than 15,000 visitors through the door. But it wasn't purely the client's faith in us that has made the space a success. It was their willingness to pass control over to the public and listen to what they wanted. This set a clear framework for what we needed to deliver and ensured the final design meets the needs of the end users.

Adelaide City Council has worked hard prior to and beyond the opening of the library to ensure a varied program of activity is in place. Local artists have been scheduled to exhibit in the first few months and entertainers and performers continue to make the most of the open event spaces. Community groups are welcome to use the free meeting spaces and a carefully planned marketing campaign driven through social and traditional media has boosted awareness of the newly opened facility.

Through our understanding of stakeholder needs and the library's understanding of how the design was intended to be used, we successfully delivered a space that has already surpassed expectations.

A designer will think about the space holistically right from the start. We look at not only the aspirational, functional and operational needs, but also at what the space will feel like. What impression should it make? How comfortable will people be? What mood are we creating? We want you to enjoy the design and construction process and be proud of the final outcome.

As the client, don't be afraid to ask questions. Be prepared to spend time with your designer and work with them to thoroughly interrogate the brief and ensure what you think you want is actually what will meet the needs of the end users into the future. A designer is there to be creative but also to guide and support you through the design process.

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