

The New York Public Library

The Science, Industry, and Business Library (SIBL)
New York, New York



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The New York Public Library's Science, Industry and Business Library (SIBL) is housed on five levels of the landmarked former B. Altman Department Store. SIBL is a full-service circulating library with storage for a collection of 1.5 million volumes, an open shelf reference collection, periodical shelving and a full catalog area.

The Library's philosophy is decidedly hands-on, with a highly trained staff of specialists supported by a complete reference department, open micro-form shelving, an electronic information center and several training rooms. SIBL is the largest branch of the New York Public Library, heralded as the "...a prototype of the 21st century Library."

Public areas are organized on the ground and lower floors, providing maximum horizontal adjacency for the Research Library below and easy street access to the Circulating Library and Reading Room on the ground level.

In addition to elegantly appointed public reception spaces and efficient reserve stacks, the facility provides 50,000 square feet of office space for library management. Storage and administration are organized on the upper floors; with staff areas surrounding the climate-controlled, structurally reinforced stacks.

Healy Hall, a 33 foot tall, two-story volume provides a highly visible forum for changing exhibitions and receptions. A stainless steel and terrazzo staircase and a pair of glass and stainless steel elevators lead down from the entrance lobby to the Research Library, which comprises extensive research facilities, a 125-seat Conference Center and an Electronic Training Center with four modifiable classrooms.

Flexibility and accessibility were the goals of the design. Workstations are separated by adjustable perforated dividers that provide lateral flexibility, create a discrete territory, and are handicapped accessible. Sight lines allow the entire library to be supervised by five people, maximizing staffing resources. A grid of removable concrete panels raises the floor six inches, permitting power and data lines to be easily reconfigured in the future.

SIBL is a classic solution to a problem of preservation and adaptive re-use: reclaiming the historic B. Altman façade while reconstituting the interior for a new purpose.

1 Exterior view of entry from Madison Avenue

2 Entrance lobby from Information Desk

3 Lower level elevator



Lewis B. and Dorothy Cullman Circulating Library and Reading Room



Information Center workstations



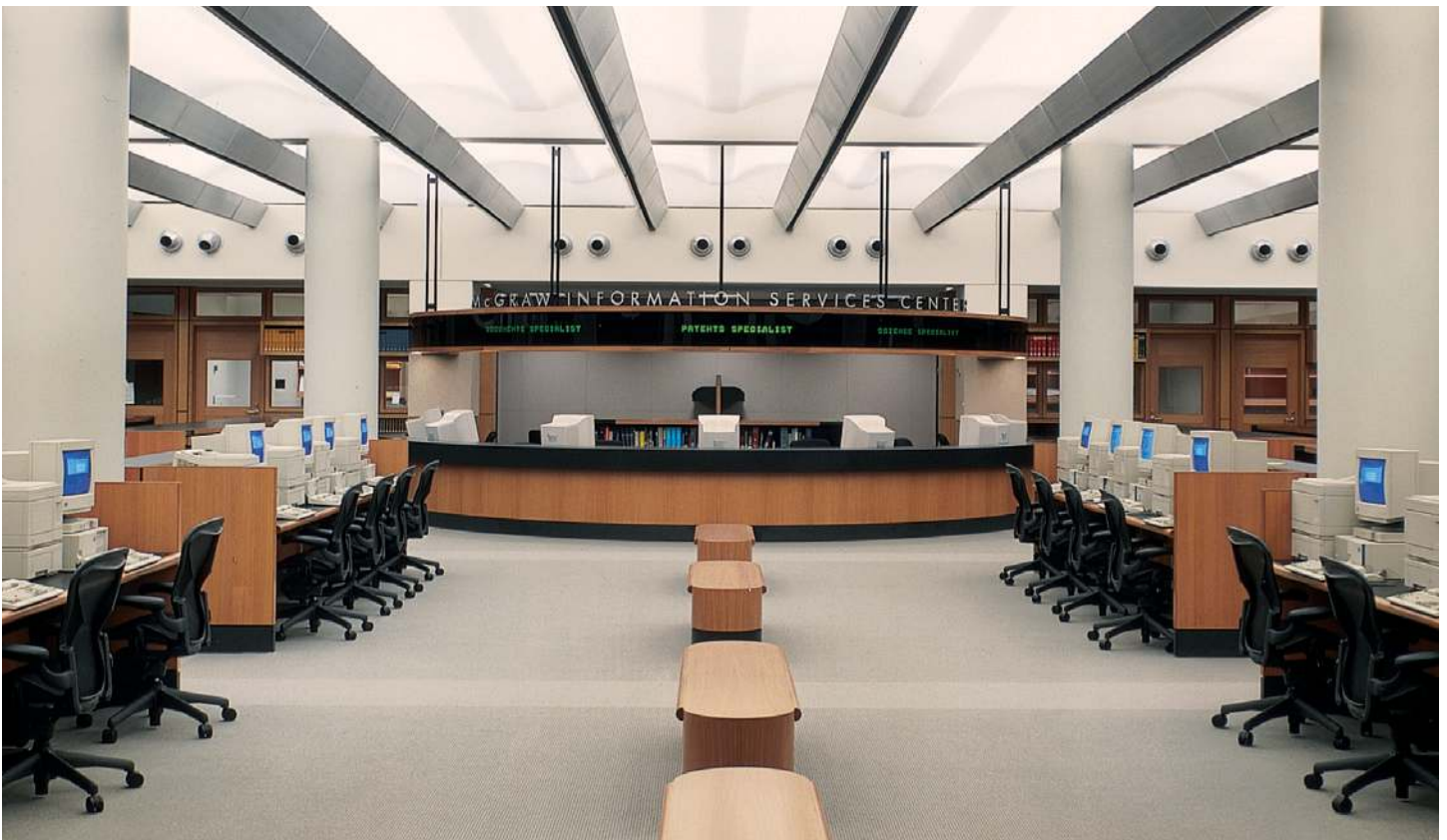
Healy Hall

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Research Library entrance from Healy Hall



Lower level Information Center

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Key Project Information

- storage and circulation of over 1.5 million books
 - 60,000 square feet of remote storage stacks
 - double height entrance hall suitable for exhibitions and social events
 - 45,000 square foot research library
 - information services center
 - full-service circulating library and reading room
 - microform and patents reading room
 - electronic information center
 - electronic training center
 - 50,000 square feet of administrative office space
 - flexible design will accommodate new technologies as they emerge
 - technically complex intervention in a landmark structure
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- completion 1996
 - gsf 250,000

"Gwathmey Siegel handled the marriage of the traditional and the new in a brilliant way at SIBL. The library is more than a space of great presence and beauty; it functions just as I hoped it would, namely as an information environment that makes a brilliant transition from libraries as we've known them to the kind of facilities they will be in the future."

Paul LeClerc, President and Chief Executive Officer of the New York Public Library

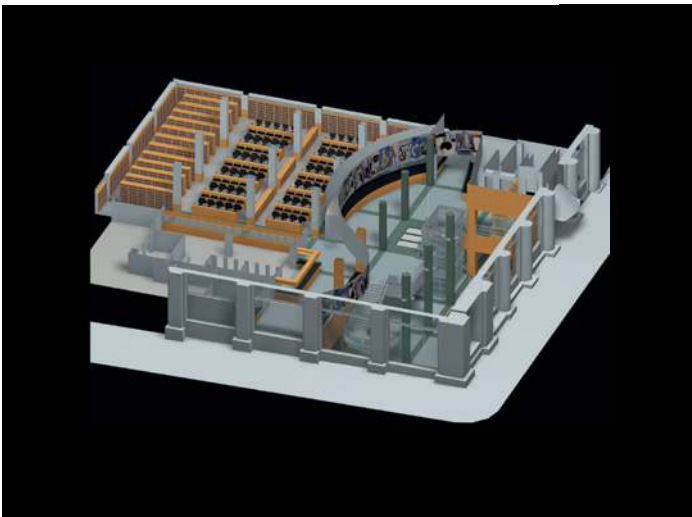
"The new Science, Industry and Business Library of the New York Public Library [...] is every bit as grand, in its way, as the library's great main building at Fifth Avenue and 42nd Street. It is just that the grandeur is of a late-20th-century sort: less a matter of grandeur than of comfort; less of sprawling physical space than of accessible cyberspace."

Paul Goldberger, The New York Times, April 24, 1996

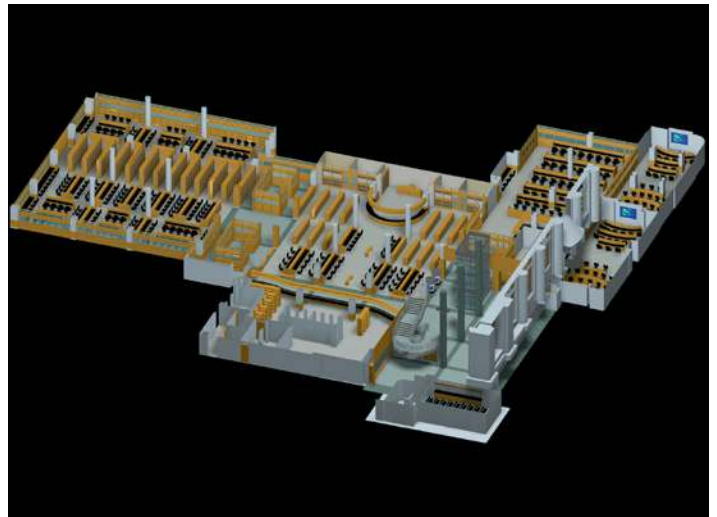
2001 AIA Award of Merit

1997 AIA/ALA Library Building Award

1996 Record Interiors, Architectural Record



Street level axonometric



Lower level axonometric