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**The Death and Life  
of a Great American City**



DESIGN FOR LIVING: CIVIC BUILDINGS

# Investments in Public Architecture Pay Off for the City

NEW YORK CHAMPIONS DESIGN  
IN MUNICIPAL PROJECTS FROM FIRE  
STATIONS AND GARAGES TO  
LIBRARIES AND COURTHOUSES.

BY JAMES MURDOCK





**QUEENS CENTRAL  
LIBRARY CHILDREN'S  
DISCOVERY CENTER**  
1100 ARCHITECT

7. Colorful pathways and signage guide visitors through this new children's library adjacent to the borough's main branch, also master-planned by 1100 Architect. Activities inside connect to the surrounding neighborhood through sidewalk-facing glass walls.

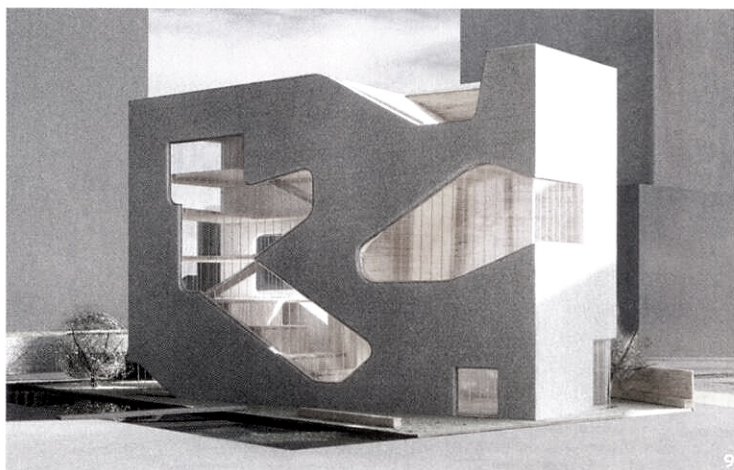
**MARINERS HARBOR  
BRANCH LIBRARY**  
ATELIER PAGNAMENTA  
TORRIANI ARCHITECTS

8. A skylit central corridor separates book stacks from a community room and staff offices in this one-story library. The design brings daylight into the building and, the architects say, was inspired by a cracked oyster — recalling the Staten Island neighborhood's maritime past.



**HUNTERS POINT  
LIBRARY**  
STEVEN HOLL  
ARCHITECTS

9. Windows on the west-facing side of this aluminum-clad Queens Library branch will give Manhattanites, directly across the river, a view of patrons walking between floors in the 80-foot-tall building.



level, design excellence is a sideshow that takes people's eye off the bigger problems of the city," says Alexander Gorlin. He and some other architects believe that the public-private partnerships behind massive projects outside DDC's purview, such as the Atlantic Yards redevelopment in Brooklyn, often result in bland architecture that is out of scale with their surroundings. "Economic models drive these projects, not quality," says BKSK Architects partner Joan Krevlin.

But other observers credit the Bloomberg administration with making New York a more livable city. "Personalities matter," says Kenneth Jackson, a professor of history at Columbia University. "In the 1960s people said New York was going to hell. Who would have thought that we'd now be selling quality of life? That's an enormous change. Municipal leadership has a huge amount to do with it."

Improving quality of life creates a positive cycle, according to Jackson, and this ultimately "underpins the architecture." Giuliani helped lower crime rates, which lured people back to New York in the Bloomberg era and gave developers confidence to build new apartments. Furthermore, projects like the High Line spur development and propel the idea that good design can be an economic engine.

For now, with the economy in decline and budgets slashed, the number of DDC projects is shrinking. But architects hope that when activity picks up again, the public will retain its newfound appreciation for good design — and the city will continue to take a chance on emerging and established architects alike.

"[The D+CE] just seems like what cities should be doing," says Deborah Berke, of Deborah Berke & Partners. "It's so enlightened, particularly for New York, where so many great architects work all over the globe. To have them actually working for their own city is both brilliant and a no-brainer." ■

*James Murdock is a writer and filmmaker based in New York City.*