



City of San Diego Public Library Serra Mesa – Kearny Mesa Branch

Architect's Design Statement

The opening of the distinctive Serra Mesa-Kearny Mesa Branch Library on Aero Drive continues the distinguished heritage of library development by the people of San Diego. The resulting facility is the realization of more than a decade long labor that came about as the result of the vision of the Mayor, the City Council, and Library Commissioners. The library was encouraged by the committed and persistent citizen effort of the Serra Mesa and Kearny Mesa communities. The extensive community input and recommendations incorporated by a legion of city staff and departments allowed Coombs Architecture & Planning Inc., of Santee, Calif., and its team of talented consulting engineers to imagine and create a blend of art and science fitted to improve the quality and environment of the people, young and old, who will learn, grow and benefit as a result of the vision, commitment and investment of the people of the City of San Diego.

The library building and improvements were situated in harmony with the manmade surroundings in the area, while at the same time great care was taken to respect the environmentally sensitive habitat present at the site. The existing trees and natural vegetation were protected and augmented by the incorporation of native landscape plant materials. A large portion of environmentally sustainable building materials were used along with other Green Building Technology and techniques to provide a facility that is highly rated and will be economic to operate and maintain. Additionally, the accessibility needs of all individuals were given priority in an effort to provide a barrier-free design.

The Community Group asked for “a library with a look and feel that blended the styles and iconic architectural elements of the Spanish Revival, Craftsman and Arts and Crafts movements.” The building was to hearken back to the turn of the last century, a gentler era. Thus the library has a traditional library has a traditional feel, even though it contains vast technological capability and state of the art library services. Various architectural features were used to reinforce the theme of the project. The exterior plaster walls are finished with multiple textures and distinctive detailing. Warm colors were selected that are soft and subtle. The building walls were enlivened with vibrant multi-colored ceramic tile mosaic details, accent colors and other symbolic ornamentation which provides variation and sparks of whimsy.

The building walls are offset to provide shade, shadow and silent clues to the many and varied interior spaces. A tripartite scheme, consisting of firmly grounded *base*, a definitive and pronounced roofline *cap* and the somewhat simpler intervening *wall* surface, define the traditional strength and civic purpose of the building. The roof forms also vary in height, form

and material. The numerous roof heights and deeply shaded clerestory windows also define the hierarchy of the complex and multiple-use interior.

Windows are plentiful and provide varied views of the site and the wooded draw leading down to the existing Serra Mesa Park. The majority of the windows are set deeply into thick walls and covered archways shading them from the hot environment, which enhances patron comfort while lowering energy costs. The windows provide significant day lighting, which also saves energy. Additionally, the many glass exterior doors, in each area, allow natural ventilation during times of moderate weather.

The Community Room, Children and Adult Areas each have an exterior courtyard. Each courtyard is landscaped and has numerous seating options. But each has a unique feel and provides very different views and opportunities for shade or sunshine, which will enhance the library experience, in our temperate climate.

Many of the exterior architectural elements are continued inside in an inviting and colorful way. The library facility has two main areas. The Community Room that can be used during the day or evening for community meetings, art shows and the like; and the Library proper that contains all the functions of a full service branch library.

The Circulation Counter and Library Services area is right off the lobby entrance. From there the high columned Gallery, with clerestory windows, will contain displays, artwork, and showcase newly arrived volumes and seasonal library materials. Off this central Gallery there is a state of the art Computer Lab, a Reference Department and various media and homework/study areas. The Children's Learning Center, the Young Adult area and the main book stacks are on the other side of the Gallery. Within the Children's Learning Center there are learning opportunities for all ages and a special area that is being developed to assist children in the "first five" years. Lastly, at the end of the Gallery there is a light-filled Adult Reading Room with tables and big easy chairs. The extensive newspaper and periodical selections are located in this area.

Throughout the library seating of various sizes and configurations is provided, such as nooks, tables, chairs, easy chairs, homework carrels and computer carrels. The complete interior has colors, finishes and materials of great interest.

The architect, M.W. Rusty Coombs, AIA, has designed many Arts and Crafts era items of furniture that are unique and one of a kind for the Serra Mesa-Kearny Mesa community. The furniture was constructed of solid Quartersawn White Oak, Maple and Cherry with old school craftsmanship in its joinery, such as through-tenons, stile and rail construction, simple half-lap and "tusked" or pinned through mortise and tenon joints carved ornamentation accents and incorporates lead framed art glass. He has also designed several art glass windows and ceramic tile motifs. There is a subtle nature theme throughout the library, with representations of clouds, trees, leaves, flowers and creeks. The most dominant of these is the stylized roses, hollyhocks and eucalyptus.

The entire library, it is hoped, will be a magnet for young and old to gather, learn and build community ties. The Serra Mesa-Kearny Mesa Branch Library will be a fun place as well as a serious location to seek knowledge and understanding about our changing world.