



THE ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW
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BIBLIOTECA "LAZARO CARRETER" en Villanueva de la Cañada. Madrid

Iberian architecture is, historically, distinguished by its employment of masonry to create heavy, thick-walled, largely imperforate volumes, reflecting the effects of climate and the availability of materials and building skills. An emerging generation of Spanish architects, such as Mansilla and Tuñón and Churtichaga + Quadra-Salcedo, whose new library is shown here, have become adept at reinterpreting traditional forms, archetypes and materials to produce buildings that though they appear formally sober, are spatially rich and nuanced.

The commission to design a new public library adds to an evolving cultural and civic complex in the Madrid suburb of Villanueva de la Cañada, its facilities complementing an existing building by Juan Navarro Baldeweg. Surrounded by low-rise housing, the site is typically placeless and nondescript, so Churtichaga + Quadra-Salcedo's new building immediately stands out as a civic landmark.

As a type, the library has undergone enormous changes, shrugging off its origins as a sternly patrolled repository of knowledge into a more flexible and inclusive organism. Internet usage, database consultation and new communications technologies are transforming libraries from hermetic places of study into realms of encounter, communication and research. Churtichaga + Quadra-Salcedo's building must contend with all these evolving aspects, as well as a more orthodox collection of books and printed matter.

The various functions are organized and divided into three volumes. A central block contains the book stacks, arranged in a rectangular spiral around a shallow ramp which meanders up through the building. Attached to this bulky and relatively impermeable volume are two smaller entities: the main reading room, a single-storey glazed box which seems to flow out from one corner, and the distinctive star shaped pavilion of the children's library which gently nuzzles up to the building's main entrance.

Both of these are conceived as lightweight foils to the solid white mass of the main volume and reveal something of the building's functions. With its clear glass walls the main reading room resembles a fish tank, brimming with lazy activity as readers come and go. Based on a five-pointed star, the children's library is like a compact bastion, with a base of red brick surmounted by a louvred clerestory. Inside, a faceted roof structure radiates out from a central column imparting an air of circus tent jollity and escapism as light dapples in through the broad horizontal slats. One 'point' of the star is fully glazed and opens out into an enclosed sunken garden, so that young users can cavort around outside on fine days.

PUBLIC LIBRARY, VILLANUEVA DE LA CAÑADA, MADRID, SPAIN
ARCHITECT
CHURTICHAGA + QUADRA-SALCEDO

CAVE OF KNOWLEDGE

Reinterpreting Iberian archetypes, this new library in a Madrid suburb employs reinforced brick to great effect.

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The new library is a collection of crisply articulated volumes in Madrid's suburban landscape.
Fish tank-like reading room flows out from the main building.





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PUBLIC LIBRARY, VILLANUEVA DE LA CAÑADA, MADRID, SPAIN
 ARCHITECT
CHURTICHAGA + QUADRA-SALCEDO

Despite its hermetic external aspect, the main volume is no less spatially complex or dramatic. The winding ramp acts as circulation route and organizing principle, rising with great ceremony through the tall, book-lined space. This languid *promenade architecturale* links and gives access to the different functions and spaces on various levels. As it ascends, these become more educationally challenging, so it literally expresses a learning curve (or ramp) from childhood in the children's library at the lowest level to the more sophisticated needs of adult study and research, finally culminating in a long toplit space for communion with the Internet and a row of carrels like modern monks' cells for concentrated private study.

En route there are places and spaces to discover, such as the little performance and story-telling space, like a giant staircase, or niches and nooks in which to simply curl up with a book. The ramp choreographs changing perspectives through the interior, and the arrangement of book stacks on the perimeter contrives to open up the space vertically, so that the building becomes, in effect, an inhabited ramp. Light percolates in through long cuts incised in the roof plane, bouncing and reflecting down into the tall space.

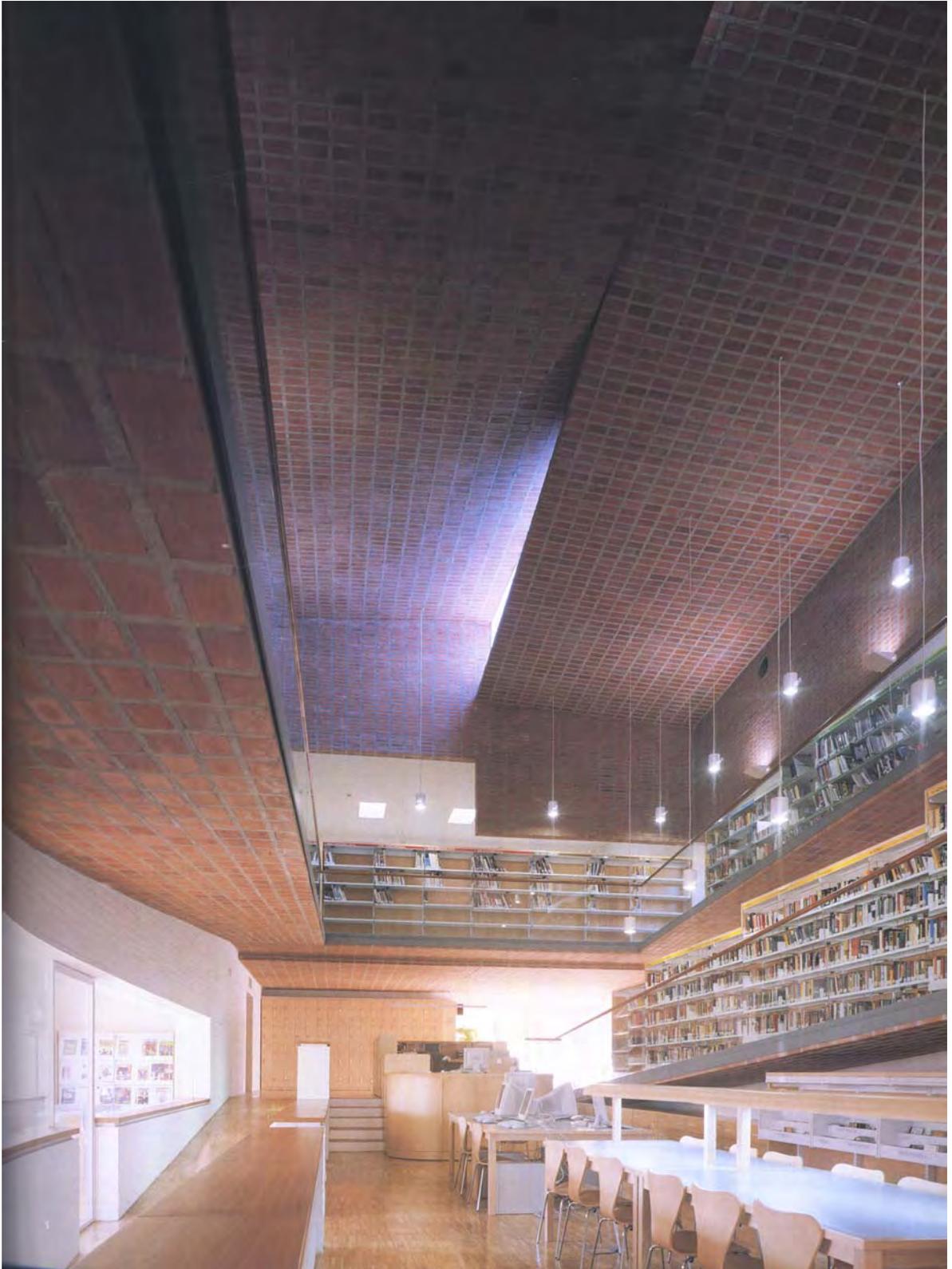
The seamlessness and continuity of the ramp finds a clear echo in the choice and use of materials. Churtichaga + Quadra-Salcedo employ reinforced brick, which is left bare, so the book stack hall assumes a mysterious cave-like quality of mass fleetingly illuminated by light. Homogenous planes of stack bonded red brick soar through the space subtly layered and fractured to admit daylight. The use of



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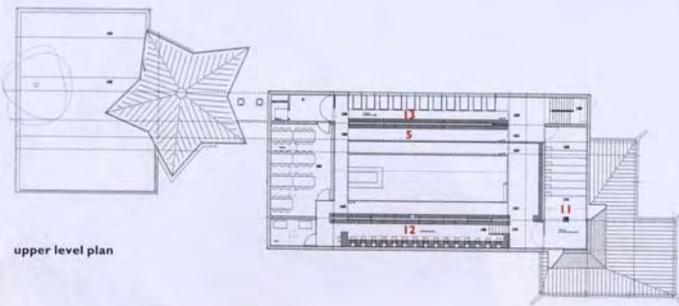
- 3 Main entrance with children's library housed in a star shaped bastion, left.
- 4 The fish-tank reading room.
- 5 The soaring book-lined volume of the main hall. A shallow ramp winds up around the edges. Planes of reinforced brick unite the space.



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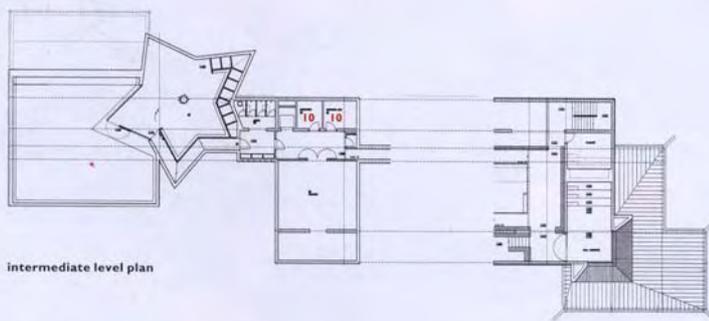


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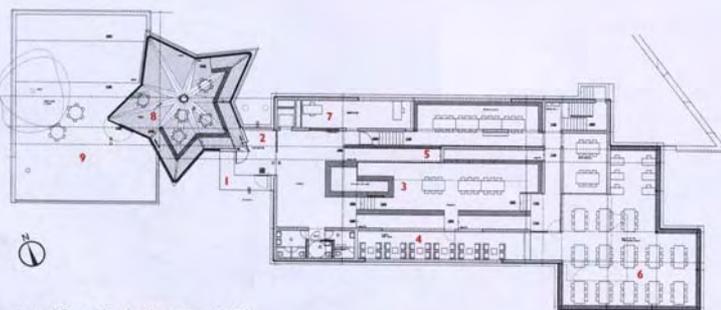


upper level plan

- 1 entrance
- 2 lobby
- 3 book stack hall
- 4 magazines
- 5 ramp
- 6 reading room
- 7 library services
- 8 children's library
- 9 external courtyard
- 10 offices
- 11 performance space
- 12 Internet studio
- 13 study carrels



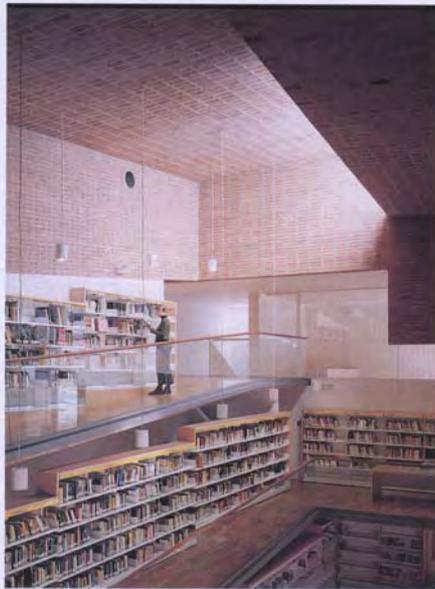
intermediate level plan



26 | ground floor plan (scale approx 1:500)

- 6 Reading room interior.
- 7 The bright, light circus tent of the children's library.
- 8 Performance and story-telling space. Here the brick is painted white, but loses none of its essential character.
- 9 Internet access studio. The library incorporates electronic technology as well as printed material.





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reinforced ceramics recalls the pioneering work of Uruguayan engineer and architect Eladio Dieste, whose folded and rippling planes of brick integrated structure and surface in an architecture of elegantly engineered economy and dynamism. The paradoxical phrase 'light as brick' was coined to describe the remarkable thinness of his vaulted structures, but such technical innovation was also matched by a poetic response to light and materials.

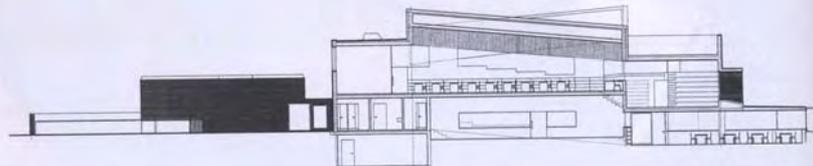
Churtichaga + Quadra-Salcedo acknowledge a clear debt to Dieste and embrace reinforced brick with great enthusiasm, citing advantages of economy, simplicity and sustainability over other methods of construction. Clay is sourced locally, cutting down on transport costs, and, compared with reinforced concrete with its accompanying paraphernalia of formwork, brick is generally easier to work and makes use of traditional building skills. Structure, enclosure and finishes are achieved in a single operation, with reinforcement bars simply threaded through the brick joints. Brickwork also has a more tactile and responsive surface texture than concrete, as manifest by the warm sensuousness of the book stack hall. Some parts are painted white to assist with light diffusion, but the essential texture and character of the material is still legible. Floors are lined with strips of oak and simple Scandinavian furniture adds to the general air of earnest endeavour.

Though modest in scale, this is a highly thoughtful building that does not rely on technical gee-whizzery or formal gimmicks. Instead it intelligently synthesizes the immemorial elements of architecture – space, light and materials – to quietly lyrical effect.

CARLA BERTOLUCCI

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SALCEDO**

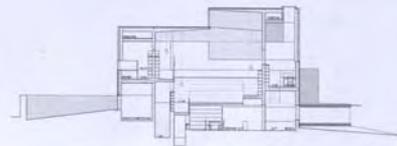
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The shallow ramp acts as
the building's organizing
principle.



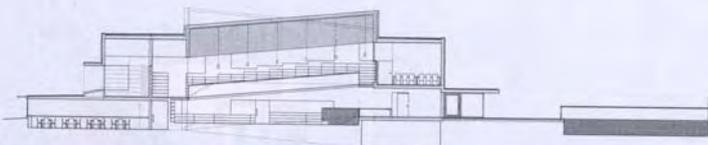
long section through main hall and reading room



long section through children's library and main hall



cross section through main hall



28 | long section through reading room and main hall

Architect
Churtichaga + Quadra-Salcedo, Madrid
Photographs
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