

You are here: [Home](#) / The Theatrical Library

# The Theatrical Library

By Janice Davis on  September 15, 2009



As libraries around the world today adapt to the new parameters of the Information Age, what used to be rooms full of book stacks are now centers for digital information, community meeting places, film and lecture halls, and—oh, yes—book stacks. A library is no longer just a place to look up information or find an enjoyable novel; these days, a library needs to draw patrons in with a wider range of services and attractions, and suddenly style and aesthetic appeal are more a part of that draw than ever before.

## Touch customers

What's going to entice two-year-old Emily away from *Sesame Street* or 12-year-old Tim away from his X-Box? The next generation's appreciation of reading is riding on the answer. In order to meet the challenge, libraries are taking a page from retail stores and themed restaurants: get them in the door *just* because it's a cool place to be, and *then* sell your product. Entice them inside and there the books—and their minds—can begin to open. The greatest opportunity for imaginative fun is, of course, the children's section.

Janice Davis Design LLC (JDD) started off in the business of theatrical set design, segued into exhibits, and finally into theatrical décor for public spaces, including libraries. Theatrical décor designers are called upon to pick up where architects and interior designers leave off, as theatrical elements require different skills, construction methods, and materials than traditional interior design. Combining theatricality with practical needs can therefore result in all manner of magic, such as a forest (of display cases), a castle (activity room), a cave (for video viewing), or a pirate ship (as a quiet reading nook). Theatrical décor can happen in tandem with new construction or renovation or can be installed in existing spaces for an entirely new look without the expense of total renovation.

## Magic in the making

Recently completed in November 2008 was JDD's work on the children's section of the Bay Shore-Brightwaters PL on Long Island, NY. Library director Eileen Kavanagh and head of children's services Linda Clark were excited about the renovation for their whole building as designed by New York architects Beatty, Harvey & Associates, but they wanted something that went beyond beautiful interior design to capture the fancies of local children—they wanted fantasy and magic that children would relate to.

Fundraising efforts were ongoing, with ultimate results still uncertain, so the early planning stage designs had to have flexibility to fit a budget that might wind up being smaller or larger than projected. This meant prioritizing the décor elements involved. The top priority for everyone was the entrance arch to the children's section, the design of which would be echoed in various places once inside.

A concept was chosen: famous children's book characters were to be tumbling out of and scrambling around their books. For this nonprofit purpose, copyright allowed use of the characters—without alteration. It was surprising how many illustrations easily lent themselves to our theme. The tumbling books and characters create an entrance arch, at the top of which is the largest of all the open books, proclaiming the long-standing motto of the children's section, "The Magic Lives Here."

Originally, the support columns in the children's area were to be surrounded with sculptural books and characters in continuation of the entrance arch theme, but by the time plans were drawn and bids came back from several theatrical construction shops, fundraising would not allow much more than the arch itself. Nonetheless, it was important to bring some of the sensibility of the entrance inside, so the solution became to design custom digitally printed "murals" to surround the lower portions of the columns on all sides. And so, as did their friends on the entrance arch, Pippi Longstocking, Peter Rabbit, and a dozen or so others could escape from their books as well to mingle with young readers seated nearby.


## A continual process

Because theatrical scene shops never have the luxury of missing a deadline (opening night *is* opening night), theatrical décor installation tends to go remarkably smoothly. In the case of the Bay Shore-Brightwaters installation, the only thing that needed to be altered on Beatty Harvey's original plans was that the entry into the children's area had to be raised by one foot in order to accommodate the tent-like book that tops the arch. Chris Howard, project manager from Springboard, Inc., the fabricator of the décor elements, built the piece in sections so that installation and touch-up took only three days.

The total design, construction, and installation of the dimensional arch and printed column surrounds cost approximately \$75,000. Initial discussions included ways to build on the design concept and enhance it with additional sculptural elements and murals in the future as funds allow. The hope is that each new element will be a new reason for kids to be excited about coming back to pick up a few more books.

### Author Information

Janice Davis, originally a theatrical set designer, is President and Founder of Janice Davis Design LLC ([www.janicedavisdesign.com](http://www.janicedavisdesign.com)), a company that designs theatrically styled interiors.

 Filed Under: [Library by Design](#), [LJ Archives](#)



### Design Institute Heads to Washington!



On Friday, October 20, in partnership with Fort Vancouver Regional Library—at its award-winning Vancouver Community Library (WA)—the newest installment of *Library Journal's* building and design event will provide ideas and inspiration for renovating, retrofitting, or re-building your library, no matter your budget!

[LEARN MORE](#) | [REGISTER NOW](#)

ScanSnap

Book smart

Scan thick & large documents  
Superior image functions




SV600  
contactless scanner

[see more](#)

### RECENT & POPULAR


Recent PostsMost CommentedMost Viewed

Feedback: Letters to LJ, September 1, 2017 Issue




Carl Grant on Virtual Reality and How to Build an Interdisciplinary Hub


House Approves IMLS, LSTA, IAL Funding for FY18




Design for Life



Great Outdoor Spaces | Library Design



Librarian Superpowers | Office Hours



2017 National Book Award Long-Lists Announced

### INFODOCKET BY GARY PRICE

- Report: "A New Tool for Deep-Down Data Mining" ([GeoDeepDive](#))
- Reference: U.S. Copyright Office Begins Release of Refreshed and Updated Circulars
- New Research Article: Measuring Cost per Use of Library-Funded Open Access Article Processing Charges: Examination and Implications of One Method
- Blog Post: "Recovering and Rebuilding after a Hurricane — What Librarians Learned from Hurricane Katrina"
- Just Announced: American Geophysical Union (AGU) and Atypen are Developing Earth and Space Science Open Preprint Server
- University of Arkansas Libraries: Construction of a New High-Density Storage Facility is Underway

### ADVERTISEMENT

LIBRARYJOURNAL  
School Library Journal  
WEBCASTS

DEFYING  
DEFINITIONS:  
TOP GRAPHIC  
NOVELS FOR FALL

OCTOBER 4 | 3 PM ET

SPONSORED BY









LIBRARYJOURNAL  
Online Courses

Mission Possible

Empower Your  
Community with Coding

Live Sessions  
Every Tuesday  
Oct 31-Nov 21

ADVANCED DISCOUNT!  
Register by September 22  
to SAVE 20%!

VIEW COURSE AGENDA

