

PROJECT SPOTLIGHT



Reimagining of Research Library's Space Helps Showcase History

CHALLENGE

The Auburn Avenue Research Library on African American Culture and History (AARL) is a celebrated part of the Atlanta landscape. Commemorating the contributions of both city stalwarts and those of national significance, it boasts books, documents, artwork and various forms of media that together tell the story of the African American experience.

Since opening its doors in 1994 as part of the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library System, the AARL has been steadily building its collection of materials. After only five years, the space it was in had already begun to feel cramped. With no funding for growth, accommodations were made and ad hoc storage solutions devised to house these items as conveniently as possible.

"On the first floor, they had the books and other resources for reference use. On the second floor, there was a combination of archives and reference, and the third floor was all archives with just a small amount of reference," said Dick Beery, the Patterson Pope sales representative who eventually helped re-imagine the storage for the space. "The fourth floor had an event center with a small 165-seat theatre that could only be accessed via two small elevators."

More than 75 filing cabinets were filled with DVDs, microfilm and other media. There was little if any space to showcase valuable artwork. Inadequate meeting space and haphazard book shelving had created a library whose collection, while astounding, could not be fully appreciated by the Atlanta public.

SOLUTION

Working with library staff, including Principal Librarian Sharon E. Robinson, Beery began by talking with the AARL's people to gain a better understanding of not only what the library had, but what its aspirations were. It was more than a concern of linear feet and the right equipment; indeed, "success" hinged on comprehending the vision for the AARL's present and future.

As it turned out, the terrific "assets" of the AARL included most of its existing shelving. Ingenuity and detailed planning allowed for 95% of the existing shelving to be re-used. It was simply repurposed and moved – in some cases from one area to another, and in some circumstances from one floor to another. The new design entailed not only new mobile shelving, but actually transitioning different collections to different floors.

The gallery, expanded on the first floor, will showcase African American art and artifacts. The auditorium was moved to a more accessible

location on the main floor, where it now seats 224. The research and reference area is on the second floor. The third and fourth floors now house archives, with the fourth floor also boasting a meeting room and staff lounge. Open areas on the 2nd and 3rd floors (formerly a three-story-tall open atrium) were closed in and received additional high-density and perimeter shelving.

"We also added additional new compact shelving systems, new ranges of compact shelving to existing rails, new movable art racks, and perimeter shelving," added Beery.

Through a combination of additional construction and interior changes in organization, shelving and storage design, the post-renovation AARL has an additional 10,000 square feet; it is 60,000 square feet in total.

Repurposed. Reimagined. Reinvigorated

"People are astounded when they come inside. They love it. We all do. I feel like the books and all of the many resources finally have room to breathe."

Sharon E. Robinson
Principal Librarian
Auburn Avenue Research Library

ACHIEVEMENT

Detailed planning, solid teamwork and flawless execution helped make this Atlanta destination even more inviting. The renovation has invigorated the library's staff who relishes the opportunity to share their passion for the past – and hopes for the future – with an even wider audience. *"We had great shelving to begin with,"* said Robinson. *"So, as Dick says, it was just a matter of refitting it and making it more effective. In our case, much of the work that was done through Patterson Pope involved moving shelving and carriages from one floor to another, replacing*

some filing cabinets with open storage, and clearly delineating one space from another."

The community is responding.

"People are astounded when they come inside," said Robinson. *"They love it. We all do. I feel like the books and all of the many resources finally have room to breathe. The renovation was long overdue and I can say with confidence that Dick – and Patterson Pope – helped make it a wonderful experience."*

