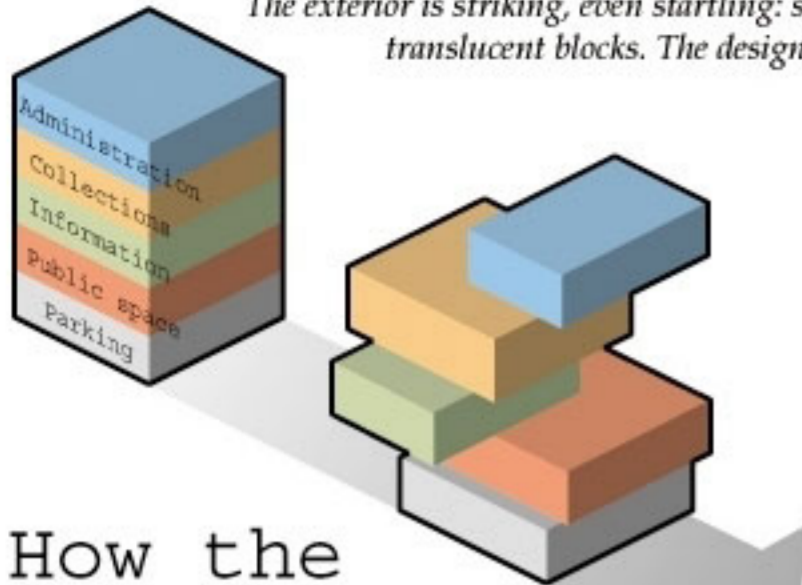


SEATTLE'S CENTRAL LIBRARY

Another provocative building is in the works for Seattle, a \$159 million library that offers revolutionary design inside and out. The mission, by Rem Koolhaas and his OMA architects in the Netherlands, in partnership with LMN of Seattle, is a building that will honor books and prepare for ambitious technology. The exterior is striking, even startling: sheets of glass and metal enclosing airy spaces inside and stretched like latticework between suspended translucent blocks. The design, according to OMA/LMN literature, "captures the five floating boxes like a butterfly net."



How the design evolved

At first glance, it is easy to miss the logic of this coppery crisscross of a building. But the design started from a practical consideration: What activities will this building be required to handle and how could similar functions be grouped together?

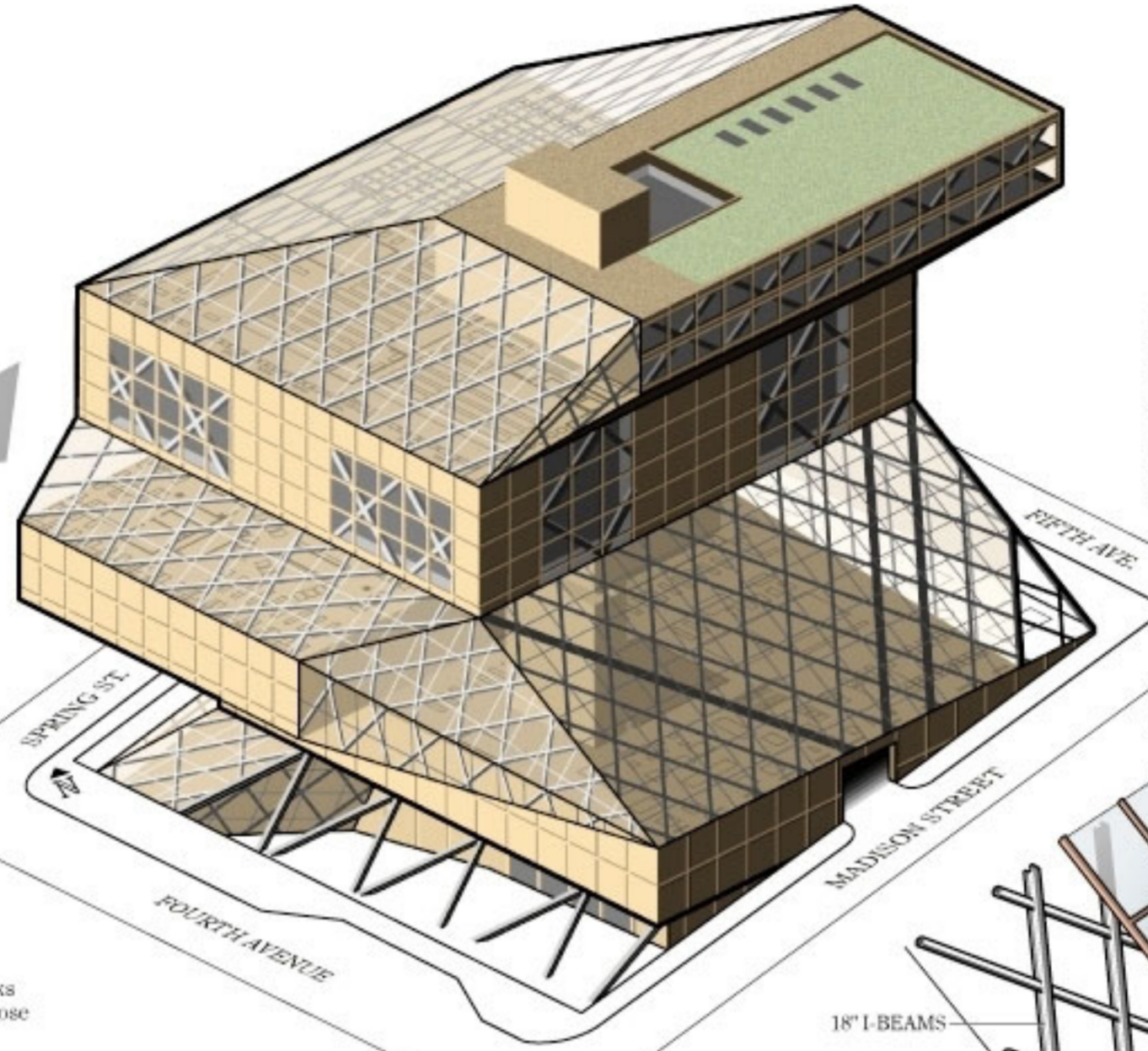
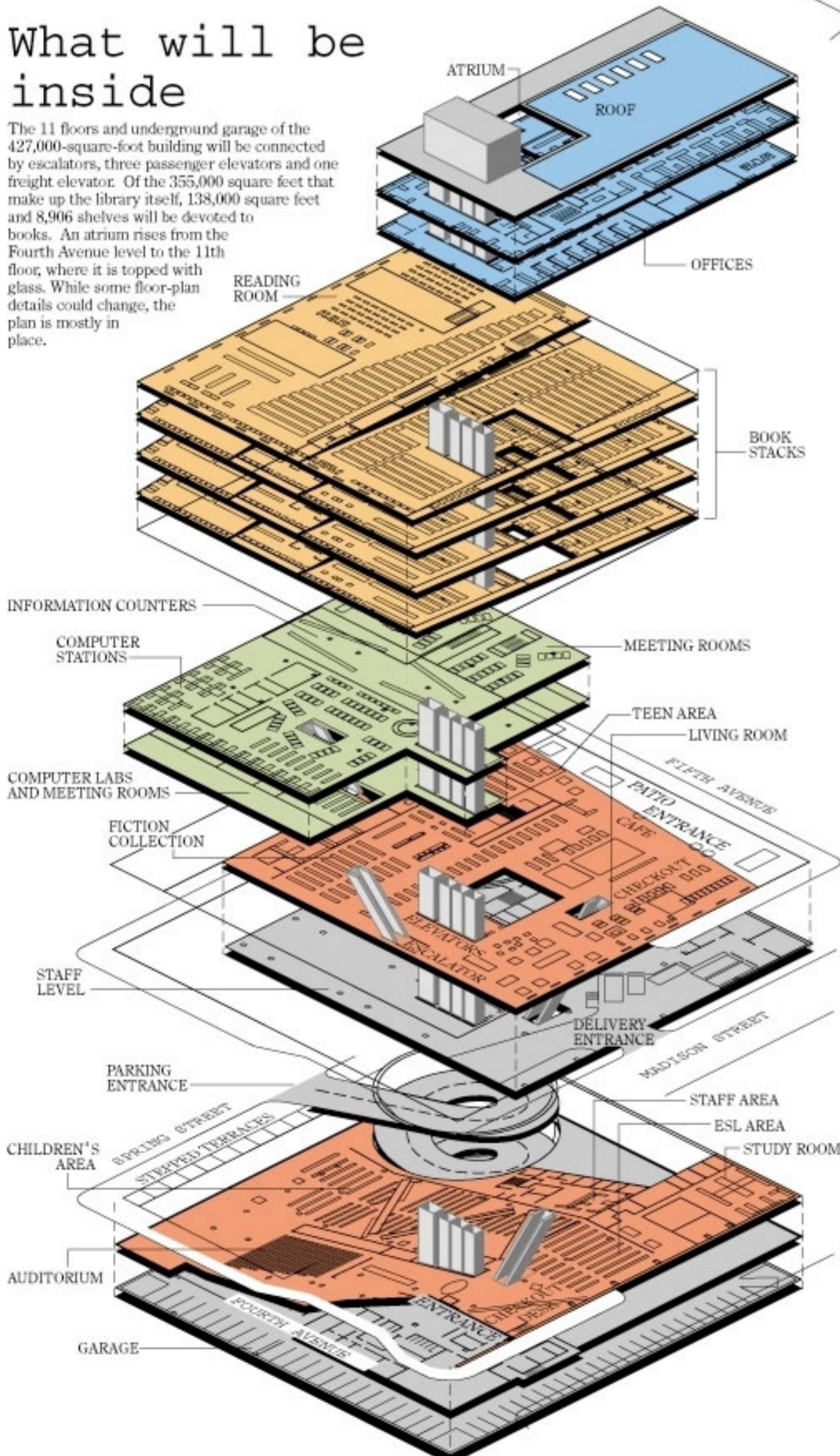
A tour of new big-city libraries showed a tendency toward generic spaces that serve either as reading rooms or book stacks, for example, depending on changing needs. The problem, as architects saw it, is that storage space can crowd out public areas, and few rooms are designed with a distinctive feel.

The goal in Seattle is to create truly separate areas for each function. After analyzing functions and space requirements, five broad categories emerged: administration and staff, collections, information, public space and parking. The architects visualized the space as five stacked boxes and used that as a starting point for the building's design.

The boxes, or sections, were repositioned to allow better views and light. The headquarters on top was pushed east to look down Fifth Avenue toward Mount Rainier, and the area holding the main book stacks was nudged north to offer reading-room views of Elliott Bay. Moving those upper floors also let more light into the lower floors.

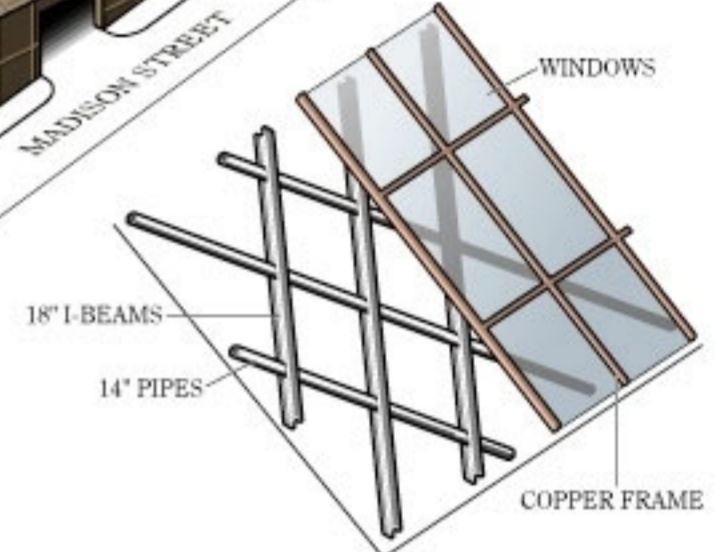
What will be inside

The 11 floors and underground garage of the 427,000-square-foot building will be connected by escalators, three passenger elevators and one freight elevator. Of the 355,000 square feet that make up the library itself, 138,000 square feet and 8,906 shelves will be devoted to books. An atrium rises from the Fourth Avenue level to the 11th floor, where it is topped with glass. While some floor-plan details could change, the plan is mostly in place.



The skin

The building will be encased in a skin of copper and glass. Steel pipes and I-beams — locked into diamond shapes — will support the glass between the boxes. The system is designed to absorb lateral movement caused by anything from windstorms to earthquakes. Heavier supports will add stability to the floors containing the main book collection.



Headquarters

Function: Administration of citywide public library system.

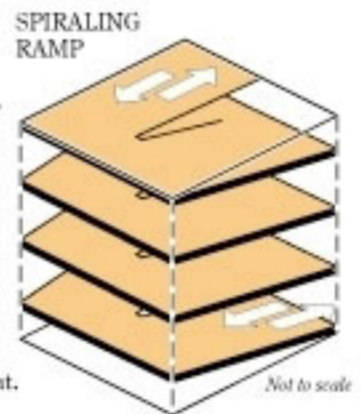
Features: Two floors of offices and meeting rooms. Views of Mount Rainier from the southeast corner. Some government publications will be stored here, and as more are issued in digital format, more office space will become available. The roof will be covered with grass so the building looks attractive from above.

Collections

Function: Housing for nonfiction collection, main reading room.

Features: A gradual slope — an angle of about 2 degrees — winds through four floors of book stacks. The design allows for both browsing and quick searches, with escalator and elevator stops labeled with Dewey Decimal System numbers corresponding to materials on each floor. Bookshelves won't be packed to capacity, so the collection can grow substantially.

The idea is to keep the nonfiction collection in one reliable, spacious place and avoid the confusion of shifting books into other rooms. The slope will be gentle enough for wheelchairs and book carts. Aisles between shelves will be flat.



Mezzanine

Function: Information and research.

Features: Two floors. On the upper floor, a cluster of information desks that architects call the "mixing chamber" or "trading floor." This is the principal area for getting started on a search. Computer stations and reading and research areas are also on this floor. The lower floor contains computer labs and meeting rooms.

Entrance levels

Fifth Avenue

Function: Public space, building entrance, fiction collection, teen area, cafe.

Features: Large, informal area known as the "living room" features seating and outlets to plug in laptop computers. Escalators lead up to information areas and down to Fourth Avenue level. Fiction collection is stored in area under mezzanine. Teen area on Fifth Avenue side.

Fourth Avenue

Function: Main entrance; area geared toward patrons who speak English as a second language, children's area, study room, auditorium, staff area.

Features: Drop-off lane in front. This floor, in particular, may see changes in layout.

Staff level, garage

Function: Parking, staff offices, shipping and receiving.

Features: Staff floor between Fourth and Fifth Avenue levels includes delivery bays with entrance on Madison Street, staff entrance on Spring Street. Ramp to underground garage is on Spring Street.

Stepped terraces along Spring Street, of translucent glass and steel, allow light into the section of the building below.

Statistics

Height	185 feet from Fourth Ave.	Book collection: <i>current</i>	850,000
Lot Dimensions	240 feet per side	on opening day	978,700
Floors	11	in 25 years	1,434,000
Floor area: library	355,000 sq. ft.	Cost: <i>construction</i>	\$119 million
garage	72,000 sq. ft.	equipment, fees, etc.	\$40 million
Garage parking	177 stalls	<i>total</i>	\$159 million
Auditorium seating	275		

Sources: OMA/LMN architects, Seattle Public Library

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