The Design of Berry Library, Dartmouth College

Interior spaces of the completed project:

The interior spaces of the Berry Library are designed to provide a smooth flow of functions between Berry and Baker Libraries.

Berry Library encompasses a major pedestrian crossroads of the Dartmouth campus. When completed, pedestrians will be able to pass from the east and west sides of the Dartmouth campus through the interior of Baker Library and from the north and south sides of the campus through the united interiors of Baker and Berry Libraries. Particularly in cold winter weather, these interior pedestrian passageways will not only add to the functionality of the two libraries but will enhance the use of the buildings as a community meeting and crossing place, as a kind of interior forum.

New multi-media teaching and library service areas form the center of the new building.

The wide range of spaces allows everything from individual study, individual computer use, to classroom, group study and discussion, to informal exchanges in the ground level cafe.

Library information services and computer consulting and support services are concentrated on Levels 1 and 2. The centralized arrangement of library and computing facilities is close to the theoretical ideal form for a contemporary library, making Berry Library truly a library of the twenty-first century.

A mix of spaces, allowing everything from formal lectures, to computer classes, to discussions over coffee, reinforces the idea of the library as a crossroads of the campus serving the entire community.

Functional uses, the site, and the need for flexibility dictate a long, open, unobstructed space directly behind Baker Library.

Berry Library will also finish, with its north facade, the existing utilitarian “backside” of Baker.

Exterior spaces of Berry Library:

The basic design of the Berry Library exterior has been dictated by the interior spaces, which in turn have been determined by the
program of the building, the needs of the campus, and the existing structure of Baker Library.

The needs of the building have dictated a building with a large footprint adjacent to Baker Library.

The architects have used a number of classical techniques to reduce the apparent size of Berry Library and to enliven its facades. These include the narrow end facades, the set-back roof line, the disengaged ground level arcade, the subtle variation in window size and placement, the bend in the facade, and the building’s site, concealed from the Green by Baker and placed in such a way that the entire façade will not be viewed at one time.

The architects have also incorporated design elements that help the new building relate to its surroundings and to the shapes and materials used on the Dartmouth campus. These elements include the use of red brick, traditional roofing materials, and roof-level set-backs that reflect the older buildings around it. Historical references in the design subtly tie the building to the architectural traditions of New England, which in turn reflect building types used in Georgian England and Renaissance Italy (see below).

The main facade has been designed to be experienced by pedestrians, who will pass the building obliquely. An overhang will shelter these pedestrians from the weather and large windows will create a transparent view into the interior, revealing the cafe and other community spaces to those outside. The large areas of glass on the ground level are intended to create a welcoming, and easily penetrable building and a dialogue between inside and outside which is quite different from the fortress effect found in many traditional library designs.

A detached arcade all along the main façade, set forward of the building’s protective overhang, will provide sculptural depth and architectural interest to the exterior while enhancing the welcoming and sheltering effect of the building. The arcade will be unroofed to preserve the views from inside while allowing natural light to reach the interior despite the building’s northern exposure. The arcade will also provide some protection from wind, rain, and snow blowing across the facade during the winter months. Its subtly varied intervals will provide a pleasing visual rhythm to passing pedestrians. The outward-facing side of the arcade will be engraved with witty allusions to the building’s interior functions which will also provide human-scaled design details to the facade.
The buildings surrounding the Berry Library site mean that its main facade will be largely or entirely concealed from view along nearby streets and open spaces, particularly while the nearby buildings remain standing. As the architects intend, the main facade will be seen mostly by pedestrians passing by and through the building, who will see it as a progression rather than as a fixed image.

**Historical antecedents of the design:**

The “New England loft” that Venturi refers to as inspiration for the Berry design is a well-known type to New Englanders, although they might not recognize it as such. The type originated in the late eighteenth-century as New Englanders began to need larger buildings to suit a number of new purposes.

The “loft-type” offered a number of advantages to practical New Englanders: it was relatively economical to build, it was well suited to the New England climate and to locally available materials and building techniques, it offered large open interior spaces that could be adapted to rooms of very different types, and it could be adapted to many kinds of buildings.

The New England loft-type building was typically several stories high, to make maximum use of its expensive foundations and to make best use of winter heating systems, was long and narrow with many windows to allow natural light to reach most of the interior, and had large and small interior spaces designed to fit a variety of different uses.

The loft design was particularly useful for buildings that had to accommodate a wide variety of interior functions, such as “old college main buildings,” including those at Dartmouth, and Shaker dwellings, both of which housed meeting and dining spaces, offices, and dormitory space in a single building. The flexible format allowed the building to help its different functions work together efficiently.

The exterior of the New England loft-type was usually executed in locally available materials, such as painted wood, red brick, or local stone, which allowed it to blend in easily with surrounding buildings. Decoration was typically simple, functional, and graceful, concentrating on the frames of windows, doors and pediments, exterior porches or arcades, and on roof lines, which were decorated with dormer windows, cupolas, towers, and balustrades.
The loft-type was also used in mill buildings, though the examples relevant for the Berry Library design are not the large industrial complexes of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, which can be seen in places like Manchester and Claremont, NH, and Lowell, MA, but the small scale town mills built before the Civil War. Restored examples can be seen in Laconia, NH, and Bradford and Harrisville, VT.

Examples of original New England loft-type buildings and loft-type ensembles include:

- Old State House, Boston, MA
- Massachusetts Hall, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA
- Original campus, Dartmouth College, Hanover, NH
- Original campus, Bates College, Lewiston, ME
- Restored buildings of Harrisville, VT
- Restored mill buildings of Laconia, NH
- Restored mill buildings of Bradford, VT
- Shaker villages of Enfield and Canterbury, NH; Hancock, MA; and Sabbathday Lake, ME
- Restored Sears Crescent Building, Government Center, Boston, MA
- Restored nineteenth-century business blocks, Newburyport, MA
- New London Inn, New London, NH
- Colby Academy Building, New London, NH
- Tontine Crescent, Boston, MA (Charles Bulfinch design, demolished)
- Faneuil Hall and Quincy Market, Boston, MA

European precedents for the New England loft-type and Berry Library include:

- Foundling Hospital, Florence, Italy, by Brunelleschi (1377-1446).
- “Basilica” or Palazzo della Ragione, Vicenza, Italy, by Andrea Palladio (1508-1580), a Renaissance remodeling of a medieval building.
- The Adelphi scheme, London, by Robert Adam (1728-1792) and his brothers.
The Quadrant, Regent Street, London, by John Nash (1752-1835), the original design of which has a curving facade and arcades comparable to the one on Berry Library. Similar schemes were designed by various architects for Bath, England and for numerous sites and squares in London.