The Architects for Berry Library, Dartmouth College:
Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates and
Shepley, Bulfinch, Richardson, and Abbott

The architects for the Berry Library (Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates of Philadelphia, in collaboration with the Boston firm of Shepley, Bulfinch, Richardson and Abbott) were chosen as highly respected leaders in their respective areas of expertise. They have been recognized with the highest honors of the profession of architecture. Few, if any, college libraries have been designed with a more distinguished design team. All of the architects involved in the Berry Library are recognized as leading figures in their field.

Venturi, Scott, Brown and Associates:

Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates is widely recognized as one of America’s most important architectural firms. Its principal partner, Robert Venturi, has been hailed as the source of the most influential ideas in late twentieth century architecture. His books, including Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture (1966) and Learning from Las Vegas (1972, with Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour) changed the direction of modern architecture and transformed the ways in which architects thought about modernism and its historical context.

The Venturi firm’s influential buildings have included Franklin Court in Independence National Historic Park, Philadelphia (1976); Gordon Wu Hall at Princeton University (1983), the Sainsbury Wing (1991) of the National Gallery, London, the Seattle Art Museum (1991), and projects for Dartmouth College, Oberlin College, and Harvard University. These buildings were praised as having restored qualities—such as decoration, color, history, symbolism, inscriptions, and even humor and irony—that had long been banished from modern architecture and for showing how architecture could be uncompromisingly contemporary and still honor the historic past.

Architectural critics and historians of modern architecture recognize Robert Venturi as one of the two or three greatest and most influential American architects of the late twentieth century. Although some of Venturi’s designs still spark controversy, his widespread influence and respected writings have helped him reach “old master” status within the architectural profession.
Venturi has won numerous award’s for his work, including architecture’s “Nobel Prize,” the Pritzker Architecture Prize, in 1991. His reputation puts him and his associates in a class with such historical architectural practices as those headed by Charles Bulfinch, H.H. Richardson, and Louis Sullivan. These were firms that not only designed great buildings but created the style of architecture that came to characterize the most advanced taste of their times.

Departing from the stripped-down approach of the International Style, Venturi and his firm reintroduced such things as symbolism, meaning, and decoration into the vocabulary of modern architecture. Venturi’s designs are entirely contemporary but also acknowledge the traditions and aesthetics of their surroundings. Venturi and his associates have favored buildings that make imaginative and sometimes witty use of local architectural traditions and materials and rely on careful detail and subtlety for their architectural effects.

Despite their widespread use of historical references, the Venturi firm does not rely on architectural clichés. Their buildings have sometimes been described as “second glance” architecture because they reveal their original qualities slowly and with direct experience rather than at first glance or through drawings or photographs. These buildings are not intended to overwhelm their settings, but instead reflect and comment on them in a dialogue between past and present.

Shepley, Bulfinch, Richardson, and Abbott:

Shepley, Bulfinch is a firm which dates back to H.H. Richardson and has had a very long history of designing for colleges and universities, including designs for Harvard and Dartmouth.

Through the leadership of partner Geoffrey Freeman, Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott has lately distinguished itself as an outstanding designer of libraries. Freeman’s recent work can be seen at Sterling Library at Yale University, Butler Library at Columbia University, Levy Library at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles, and the Woodruff Library at Emory University in Atlanta.