

A Spectacular New-Generation Library in the Heart of Manhattan

ARCHITECTS MECANOO AND BEYER BLINDER BELLE REVITALIZE NEW YORK'S LARGEST CIRCULATING BRANCH, THE STRAVROS NIARCHOS FOUNDATION LIBRARY



Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library. Photo by John Bartelstone; courtesy Mecanoo and Beyer Blinder Belle.

New York, NY (June 1, 2021) - The Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library (SNFL) is New York's new central circulating library, designed by Dutch architecture firm [Mecanoo](#) in collaboration with [Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners](#). Built within the 1914 shell and steel frame of the Mid-Manhattan Library which it replaces, the 16,722 m² (180,000 sq. ft.) building is topped with a spectacular angular roof and public rooftop amenities to make a new urban icon on Fifth Avenue.

Creating a library campus in Midtown

SNFL is a new-generation library for all New Yorkers, with special facilities for young users, adult learning, and business. It offers the perfect contemporary complement to NYPL's world-famous Stephen A. Schwarzman Building (SASB), located across Fifth Avenue from SNFL. SASB opened in 1911, designed by architects Carrère & Hastings in a glorious Beaux-Art style, and receives over 1.7 million visits a year as the mothership of NYPL's reference collections.

Mecanoo and Beyer Blinder Belle's concept was to leverage the synergy of SNFL and SASB and bring them together as NYPL's Midtown Campus. New features at SNFL reflect this harmony between the buildings: long tables that recall the impressive scale of those in SASB's Rose Main Reading Room, ceiling artwork in the Long Room that echoes the neo-classical paintings set in SASB's ceilings, and the use of classic materials including natural stone, terrazzo, and oak.

Mecanoo and Beyer Blinder Belle have collaborated on programming and design across both locations from start to finish. Mecanoo led the design stages and Beyer Blinder Belle led the historic preservation, acted as architect of record, and designed the environmental graphics.

Francine Houben, principal of Mecanoo, declares that "libraries are the most important public buildings of all". This is reinforced in SNFL's open, humanistic design and inclusive program, which resonates with NYPL's mission "to fight ignorance, and provide New Yorkers with the tools that they need to foster a better understanding of each other across racial and all other divides".

Elizabeth Leber, partner at Beyer Blinder Belle, says "now more than ever, New York City needs its great institutions for support and community. The new SNFL will provide both, in a building that is revitalized to provide 21st century library services."

A vertical library with a welcoming 'street' and an airy atrium

SNFL's ground floor is arranged around an internal street that runs beneath a floating linear canopy of wood beams, from the Fifth Avenue entrance to the welcome desks. Located on one side are elevators, stairs, and a mezzanine balcony. On the other side, a rectangular opening in the floorplate reveals the lower ground floor, which houses a Children's Library and Teen Center. The Children's Library play area enjoys natural light, and the Teen Center has a dedicated staircase and study and media rooms decorated with bold and whimsical commissioned murals by artist [Melinda Beck](#). An internal window in the lower ground floor allows visitors to see SNFL's book-sorting machine in action.

SNFL has an annual circulation of two million items, and this sheer volume generates challenges in access, organization, and storage. The design solution offers more space, more books, more seats, and lower shelves. The heart of the library is the Long Room, a new space that truly brings the idea of a library into the old structure, which was originally designed as a department store. "We really wanted to use the columns", comments Houben, referring to the building's steel frame. A triple height void has been cut into it, 9m (31 feet) wide and rising 26m (85 feet) from the second story to a vibrant new abstract ceiling artwork by [Hayal Pozanti](#).



*Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library Long Room.
Photo by John Bartelstone; courtesy Mecanoo and Beyer Blinder Belle.*

This dramatic linear atrium separates three floors of flexible, daylit reading areas on one side and five levels of book stacks on the other, a creative and efficient solution to balancing the need for a browsable collection and the desire for more public reading room space. Book stacks are a vertical means of storing books dating back to the nineteenth century, and here they are revived to give open access for library users. Through the library's 40th Street windows, passers-by will see the northern end of the book stacks, visible as a continuous vertical wall of book spines welcoming New Yorkers into the space to browse.

The Long Room's atrium wall at the southern end is deep red, and perforated with new windows to bring light from a pocket park to the south. Its distinctive look assists wayfinding. Ramps gently slope to connect the different floor heights of the book stack levels and reading areas. The reading areas extend from the atrium to the Fifth Avenue facade, and have bespoke reading tables assembled in situ, many supported by the building's original steel frame. These oak-surfaced tables stretch up to 20 meters (66 feet) in length. Readers at these tables sit in chairs designed in collaboration with Thos. Moser exclusively for NYPL branch libraries.

Above the Long Room, the fifth and sixth floors host the Business Center and the Pascualano Learning Center facilities. As Houben states, "SNFL's vertical arrangement of programs improves the user experience and journey of learning". The materiality of the library contributes to that user experience, for example in terrazzo flooring and travertine presented in the elevator banks.

A roof terrace and 'Wizard Hat' above Fifth Avenue

SNFL now delivers to the Midtown cityscape a sensational new public roof attraction and a striking sculptural addition. Elevators and stairs continue to the seventh floor, which is built at the original building's roof level. This new floor has pitched wood slat ceilings and contains a flexible 268-occupant conference and event center. An L-shaped roof terrace runs above the 40th Street and Fifth Avenue facades and includes a roof garden and an adjacent indoor café. It is Manhattan's only free, publicly-accessible roof terrace and offers staggering Midtown views, including across Fifth Avenue to the Stephen A. Schwarzman Building and surrounding skyscrapers.

Above the seventh floor, a dramatic new roof slopes up to cover mechanical equipment, reaching 56m (184 feet) above street level. Its angled pitches, and a patinated copper-colored aluminum surface, are inspired by Manhattan's Beaux Art copper-clad mansard roofs, two 1904 examples of which are visible from the terrace. As a new native New Yorker, the form also nods to the tapering spires of New York's art deco skyscrapers and faceted facades of its newer towers. Francine Houben declared this spectacular roof to be 'a Wizard Hat for all New Yorkers!'

A powerhouse of wisdom

Houben says: 'A central circulating library must empower the community it serves. Here, the community is all New Yorkers. Super-charged with energy, diversity and hope, America's greatest city deserves the best that a central circulating library can be. The Stavros Niarchos Foundation Library is a powerhouse of wisdom, and its street presence brings drama and magic to Manhattan, visibly expressed with its Wizard Hat'.

The project press kit can be accessed [here](#).

About Mecanoo Architects

Mecanoo, officially founded in Delft, the Netherlands, in 1984, is made up of a multidisciplinary staff of over 100 creative professionals from 25 countries. The team includes architects, engineers, interior designers, urban planners, landscape architects and architectural technicians. The company is led by creative director and founding partner Francine Houben. The extensive collective experience, gained over three decades, results in designs that are realised with technical expertise and great attention to detail. Mecanoo's projects range from single houses to complete neighbourhoods, skyscrapers, cities and polders, schools, train stations, theatres and libraries, hotels, museums, and even a chapel.

Discovering unexpected solutions for the specifics of programme and context is the foremost challenge in all of our assignments. Each design is considered in terms of its cultural setting, place and time. As such, Mecanoo treats each project as a unique design statement embedded within its context and orchestrated specifically for the people who use it. Within the practice are knowledge centres which enable us to stay current on technological and design innovations in sustainability, eco-engineering, technology, education and learning, high-rise and mobility.

Preoccupied not by a focus on form, but on process, consultation, context, urban scale and integrated sustainable design strategies, the practice creates culturally significant buildings with a human touch. Selected works include Delft University of Technology Library, Delft (1997), La Llotja Theatre and Congress Centre, Lleida, Spain (2010), Library of Birmingham, United Kingdom (2013), Bruce C. Bolling Municipal Building, Boston, United States (2015), Delft City Hall and Train

Station (2017), National Kaohsiung Center for the Arts, Taiwan (2018) and Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Library (MLKL), Washington D.C. United States.

For more information, please visit www.mecanoo.nl

About Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners

Founded in 1968, Beyer Blinder Belle (BBB) has offices in New York City, Washington D.C., and Boston. Planning, restoration, and the design of new buildings are the fundamental underpinnings of the practice. A persistent exploration of historic, cultural, and civic meaning guides the firm's work, while its design is contemporary and reflects the materials and technologies of today.

BBB has an extensive portfolio of cultural and institutional projects, including the recently renovated Enoch Pratt Free Library, Baltimore's central library. BBB's work has been recognized with hundreds of awards, including the American Institute of Architects Firm Award, the highest honor given to a practicing firm, as well as three Presidential Design Awards and the Preservation League of New York's most prestigious commendation, the Pillar Award.

For more information, please visit www.beyerblinderbelle.com

About NYPL

For 125 years, The New York Public Library has been one of the world's leading free providers of education and information for the people of New York and beyond. With 92 locations—including research and branch libraries—throughout the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island, the Library offers free materials, computer access, classes, exhibitions, programming, and more to everyone from toddlers to scholars, and has seen record numbers of attendance and circulation in recent years.

The New York Public Library serves nearly 17 million patrons who come through its doors annually and millions more around the globe who use its resources at nypl.org. To offer this wide array of free programming, The New York Public Library relies on both public and private funding. Learn more about how to support the Library at nypl.org/support.

For more information, please visit www.nypl.org

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