

The Green Library Planner: What Every Librarian Needs to Know Before Starting to Build or Renovate

By Mary M. Carr. (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2013). ISBN 978-0-8108-8736-7

Reviewed by Stephanie Braunstein

A book review is, by definition, a judgment of quality at its most aggressive and a careful examination at its most benign. Either way, it implies that the reviewer is expected to do a close reading of the book and even to suggest changes to the work which s/he sees as needing improvement. Generally, reviewers overlook most of the mechanics of the writing and focus instead on the content of the writing. However, for this reviewer, Carr's *Planner* poses an especially tricky challenge: it's an example of a book needing improvement in one of the most basic of mechanics features—its readability.

To be fair, no one expects a work of this type to be a rhetorical masterpiece. Nevertheless, the awkwardness of the prose, the muddled grammar, and the intermittent typos (hopefully, that's what they are!) make it difficult to focus on and gather the information imparted (*the content*) by the book; and, unfortunately, even that information is frequently so buried under truisms and tautologies that it is lost to the reader trying to live up to the wishes expressed in the introduction:

May you read this Green Library Planner and begin your integrated planning process armed with the information needed to remodel,

■ Stephanie Braunstein is Head of the Government Documents/Microforms Department at Louisiana State University Middleton Library. She currently serves as the Louisiana Library Association's Councilor to the American Library Association and is the incoming Coordinator for the ALA GODORT International Documents Task Force. Her most recent publication of note is a chapter in the soon to be published *In Solidarity: Academic Librarian Labour Activism and Union Participation in Canada*. Braunstein with co-author, Michael Russo, provide a US perspective on Academic Librarian Union activities.

■ KEYWORDS: Green architecture; Green libraries; Sick building syndrome.

renovate, or build the best green library building your resources can afford (xiv).

What really frustrates is the suspicion that the stylistic flaws are the result of plumping up what should have been a trim but useful finding tool—such as a well-developed annotated bibliography—posted to a website. Regrettably, that trim finding tool picked up a few pounds along the way and became a rather bloated treatise.

Rhetorical criticism aside, there are some useful sections in this work: one that stands out is chapter 5, “Indoor Environmental Quality.”¹ The chapter begins with an overview of IEQ (Indoor Environmental Quality), citing its definition from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as “the quality of air in an office or other building environments” and acknowledging that “[i]f not monitored carefully while under construction and during operation, library staff members and patrons alike may be exposed to a variety of contaminants” (69).

While this beginning language is a bit on the truistic side, the segments that follow the overview show more depth. They begin with a discussion of Sick Building Syndrome and Building Related Illness (more citing to the CDC) and continue on with separate discussions of pertinent factors such as temperature/humidity levels; common pollutants found in indoor environments—for example asbestos, lead, radon, volatile organic compounds (VOCs); ventilation systems; ergonomics; visual and acoustical comfort.

It is interesting and heartening to note that Carr spends a reasonable amount of time expressing a belief that visual comfort is not simply an aesthetic concern. For example, she emphasizes how appropriate lighting—both natural and artificial—can contribute to a “sense of place” that is welcoming to and, one assumes, healthy for the people who work in a library along with the people who visit to use its services.

After Carr states that “natural, full-spectrum light is a human biological need. . . . [and] although lighting technology continues to improve, daylighting is preferred” (80), she refers the reader back to chapter 3 on “Energy and Lighting.” This chapter goes deeply into explanations of the various factors that make up lighting, both natural and artificial.

Factors involved in the successful use of natural lighting or “Daylighting,” as it is referred to in this text, include a reiteration of how important daylight is to humans’ health and psyche, a recognition of how light affects vision, a concern about glare on the many computer screens found in the 21st Century library, and even unease about how the use of glass can contribute to bird fatalities (a reference is made to the Audubon Society’s *Bird-Safe Building Guidelines*, a publication available from the New York City Audubon Society at <http://www.nycaudubon.org/our-publications/bird-safe-buildings-guidelines>).

When discussing electric lighting, Carr notes that electric lighting makes up the second highest percentage of energy usage (after HVAC systems) in the average commercial building (although we do not normally describe a library as a “commercial” building, we can logically extrapolate that data to include any public building). This observation prompts Carr to note that “once the natural world has contributed as much natural light that is possible to your library given your geographic location and good design, highly efficient electric lighting is needed to supplement natural lighting to meet the required illumination levels” (41). Thus Carr expresses the green philosophy of using natural resources wisely and supplementing them only when necessary and cautiously.

Again, Carr does have some useful information woven into this book—especially the information found at the end of chapters in the form of lists of resources; but if one is looking for a book that engages, inspires, is written with more clarity, and is written from more than one person’s perspective, one might be better off with a copy of the anthology *Greening Libraries*, edited by Monika Antonelli and Mark McCullough and reviewed by Frederick Stoss in the Fall/Winter 2012 issue of *Progressive Librarian*. Stoss’ short review is, in itself, a more engrossing and polished piece of writing than Carr’s entire monograph—a plus for Stoss and, sadly, a minus for Carr.

NOTES

- 1 On a personal note, my own interest comes from being a denizen of a library workplace that is so “non-green” that it is quite likely a serious health hazard. I speak of a leaking and crumbling basement that is a breeding ground for mold and probably every other known substance that can be identified as contributing to “sick building” syndrome. This basement, part of a structure built in 1958/59 and slated for a way-overdue remodel, sits so closely upon a water table fed by the Mississippi River that it leaks upwards from the floor as well as from the usual directions via foundations, walls, and ceilings. My motivation for reviewing this title was to find answers that I could share with the architectural firm contracted to plan the future remodel.