







▶▶▶▶ such a sense of community. Ryder's Chief Executive Peter Buchan describes the library as '...a building that speaks to the city.' He's spot on. What's more, the city is having an animated conversation with the library. Communication and community indeed.

David Fay, Newcastle City Libraries Manager, gave us the tour, starting with a pithy description of the previous library. 'The old library was a concrete '60's building. It had 'architecturally elegant concrete fins.' Fins yes, but not elegant! It was very dark with lots of hidden 'private' spaces. Somebody outside would not have known what was inside. Many thought it was a nondescript office block, or a multi-storey car park. The new library is the exact opposite: it's open, it's for everyone – and it really is elegant.

'We wanted the new building to drive the re-energising of the library network – in retail terms this is our flagship store. We've had huge political support in Newcastle for what we're doing. The Library Service used to have a number of targets, now there's just one: community participation.

'The old building wasn't loved; it was voted one of the least attractive buildings in Newcastle. Despite that, the library was relatively well used – 55% against a national average of 40%. We're aiming for 65%. We want Newcastle City Library to be a destination people want to come to.

'The other day I was talking to one of our customers in the Observation Deck on the top floor, with views south, east and west across the city; a lady sitting in a pink Fritz Hansen Egg chair. She said, 'I live in a small flat. I just love to come here to read, with the lovely views.' Lots of people come here to simply enjoy the building, to use the café, to use the free Wi-Fi. Everyone knows it's here, because we've marketed the new library, and what it offers, heavily. I'm pleased to say we've had a huge response; we've increased book issues and visits at the new city library by 125% and 197.5% respectively – comparing July 2006, shortly before the old library closed, and July 2009. Now we have people's interest it's vital we maintain it. It's crucial to get people to come back.'

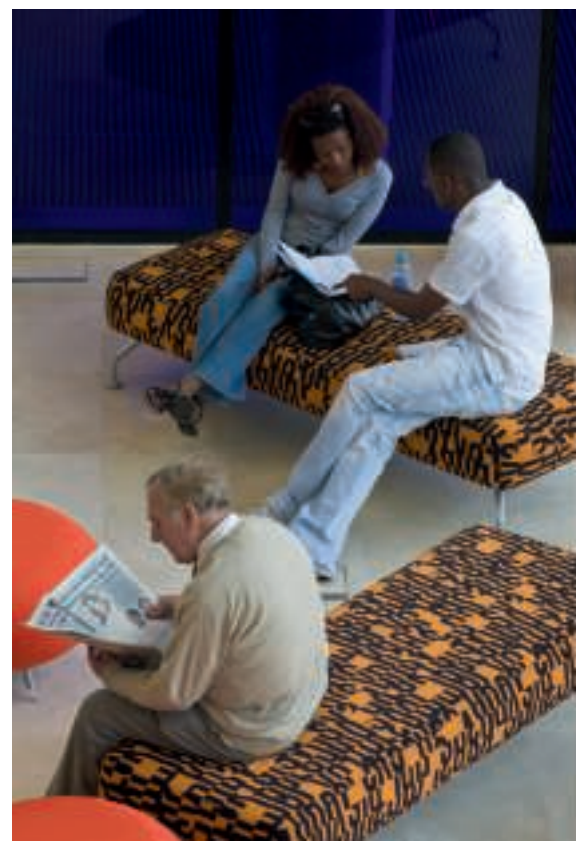
The architecture and interior design is the crucial element – Newcastle City

Library really is a destination venue for the community. 'Libraries tend to look like libraries, but not here,' comments Peter Buchan. 'The design focuses on transparency, light and legibility – the building sets the scene. It's a big space, but you're able to see it all from every level.'

The six storey library features a spectacular glazed steel frame grid which forms the east elevation. Driven by the concept that it is a giant bookcase for the city, this is the elevation that incorporates Kathryn Hodgkinson's 'Four Questions' artwork. As the light changes during the day, the images cast filtered light onto the stairs – at night something of a vast 'light box' is created. The four storey entrance atrium from New Bridge Street reinforces the highly transparent architecture.

Much of the imagination that's so apparent in myriad touches throughout the space comes from the brief, as Peter points out. 'The brief was very well articulated and thorough. It was an open minded brief too – some can be very prescriptive. Take for example the café or enquiry points – sometimes briefs say prescriptively that it's a room. We were able to have a dialogue, our professional eye was valued, and we were able to design with flexibility and flow.'

Ryder designer Emily Butt confirmed the approach. 'We wanted to get away from the old style enquiry points, to make access to the library more informal and more legible. The colour wall was developed early, the wayfinding system driving and reinforcing entry and orientation. It's driven by basics – within 30 seconds of anyone entering the library everyone knows where▶▶▶▶





▶▶▶▶ they are and where they're going.

Throughout the space people are guided simply and subtly by material, colour, furniture. It's a system that reinforces the transparency scene set by the building.'

Guides, or Floorwalkers, support the wayfinding system. It removes the transactional function (and frees up personnel), and a sophisticated conveyor sorting system backs up this integrated process. As Peter says: 'It's about the psychology of removing the barrier of the Check In Desk. This is based on a retail model, a bit SAKS Fifth Avenue. If not quite 'Have a nice day', it's all about smiling and greeting. There's been an overwhelming response.'

Peter is also very clear about how the library embraces technology. 'If you talk to anyone from the library community they will agree that during the technological revolution of the '80's and '90's there was a real fear that the library was doomed. So it

seems ironic that new forms of digital communication and information have played a key part in revitalising the role of the library in the community. Newcastle City Library is the result of embracing change and integrating aspects of a traditional library with a wide range of modern facilities and services.'

The subtle use of materials and finishes not only represent the civic stature of the building, but also help the new branding of the library service. Stone, glass, slate, wood and leather blend elegantly in the interior scheme, while wall colours link with signage and graphics to reinforce the new identity. The specification of the internal finishes was a major part of the design engagement sessions, selected after a long process of thorough research and testing. Robust, easily maintained and welcoming, the materials make a major statement of civic pride. Sustainability was also an issue – for example slate panels on the walls of the

valuable Newcastle Collection have been recycled from the old library.

The imaginative and intelligent use of furniture is a striking feature of the library. This too was subject to extensive consultation and review, complete with public testing and feedback. The flexible bespoke shelving system from Radford HMY Group was also developed to meet Newcastle's specific needs, complete with integrated lighting and signage. Above all, the choice of furniture from brands such as Buronomic, Boss, Orangebox and Senator reflects a stylish and democratic design approach.

Very much about communication and community, the new Newcastle City Library is a cultural landmark. Along with other community driven pieces of architecture (Sage and Baltic to name but two) the library is part of an ongoing and largely successful regeneration of an area. Perhaps more than any other Tyneside cultural or community project though; this library represents something particularly special. Something that gets to the absolute heart and soul of the area – more than something geographical, it's about the spirit of being from Newcastle.

Those four questions and their thousand answers tell us everything about what it means to be a Geordie ●

## essential ingredients

Client:	• Newcastle City Council
Architect:	• Ryder Architecture 0191 269 5454
Furniture:	• Orangebox 020 7837 9922 Buronomic 07967 609693 Fritz Hansen +44 84 4800 8934 Boss Design 01384 455570 Allermuir 01254 682421 Connection 01484 600100 Senator 020 7388 7621
Shelving:	• Radford HMY 01207 270611
Signage:	• Navigator Signs 0191 230 8006
Flooring:	• Milliken 01942 612846 Forbo 0800 0935 258 Altro 01462 707604