

Design Trend: Community Co-Design | Year in Architecture 2025

by Daniel LaRossa
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Across the country, public libraries are redefining what it means to design with their communities rather than for them. Community co-design elevates engagement beyond dot exercises, surveys, and open houses by treating residents as active partners in shaping their civic spaces. In the Bay Area, at **Chabot College Library and Learning Connection**, Hayward, CA, library programmers, planners, and architects collaborated throughout the design process with students, faculty, and Learning Communities representatives to create a library that actively supports the social, collaborative, and individual spaces desired by the entire campus community.



Hooper-Renwick Library, GA; Cas Architecture, architect; ©Gary Gomez, photo.

This uniquely collaborative approach also extends to public libraries, beginning with careful listening. Libraries are investing in inclusive processes that reach people where they are—through pop-up events at festivals; multilingual surveys; focus groups with teens, newcomers, or unhoused patrons; and trusted “community ambassadors” who bridge cultural gaps. Even the smallest features that patrons care deeply about, like the seed library at the Indianapolis Public Library’s **Nora Branch**, can be integrated into the building’s identity—in this case, a plant wall and abundant indoor greenery.



Chabot College Library and Learning Connection, CA; Group 4 Architecture, Research + Planning, Inc., HMC Architects, architects; ©2024 Lawrence Anderson, photo.

Rather than engaging at a distinct moment in time, library designers are seeking deeper, ongoing community connections to inform not only physical spaces but programs and amenities offered within. **Hooper-Renwick Library**, Lawrenceville, GA, renovated and expanded a historic African American schoolhouse with modern library service and a permanent exhibit reflecting the building’s evolution. The revitalized structure celebrates a legacy of resilience, while actively writing a new chapter of community growth.



Indianapolis Public Library—Nora Branch, IN; Luminaut, architect; Daniel Showalter, photos.

The lasting impact of co-design continues through the strengthening of civic bonds, generation of political momentum, and creation of a sense of ownership that carries into how communities use and sustain their libraries. At **Sumner Library**, MN, one of Hennepin County’s four historic Carnegie libraries is reimagined as a cozy community living room while continuing to house the Gary N. Sudduth African American History and Culture Collection.

While the architectural response varies widely, each of these precedents reflects how the best of our built spaces are a physical outgrowth of community history, values, and aspirations.

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