



Back in the Market again

By MEGAN LEE

So this is December and the Market is cheery; what a beautiful place to be, this time of year in this corner of the world. Though Europe was amazing, it is good to be back to our marvelous Market.



On the road I told tales of this place. They listened intently: people hearing about it for the first time were enchanted, and those who knew it reminisced. (look for future Street Talk: What the

streets of Europe say about the PPM)

On the road I explored the markets.

Nearly everyplace has a Saturday market, especially in summer, but the classic, everyday markets are dwindling. Permanent places to trade, shop and gossip are being swallowed up — and ones that do still exist are changing, but these markets are still important centers; for example: Neumarket in Vienna and Portobelo and Camden Markets in London..

In the ancient *Vismarkt* (Fish Market) in Brugge, Belgium, there are still three fish mongers. They say things are slow, but they set up most days (In Zeebrugge, 20 km away, mongers *throw* the fish.). *Amsterdam's Bloemenmarkt* still sells flowers, but some vendors have turned to supplemental tourist gadgets to make up for the lack of local shoppers. (See story)

This time of year many European cities, whose central markets have evaporated into re-gentrification schemes, host quaint, little, contrived “German Markets.” The clusters of wooden kiosks are cute, but without the character, substance and individuality of, say, the North Arcade.

Some right-wing factions of the Cockney Party are attempting to introduce “Crimbo” as a slang alternative for Christmas... Camden,

Portobelo and the smattering of London markets continue to bustle...

* * *

Most European markets are picturesque and draw people, but not all are as functional and alive as Pike Place — and, surely, none is more scandalous than ours!

To start with the Market's resident Elvis, aka. Cab-Elvis, aka. the Reverend David Vernon Groh, has left the state. (Mike the meat-man may be taking over his stunning view unit in the Leland.) Three years (to the date) of becoming Elvis he shaved his side-burns and made plans to set off on his next adventure: HAWAII. Where he will be helping Mick's Pepper Jelly Stand open their new locations, first in Yakima and then on Oahu. Plans are to develop new jelly-batch concoctions, with direct Hawaiian influence. Look forward to fancy flavors to be formulated in February.

The Market's own Artis the Spoonman has just been invited to to play two, eight-minute sets at the Kennedy Center in D.C....he is dead excited, and exasperated by the exciting roller coaster he lives on...he also has a seven-show West Coast tour and a visit to his family in California

Local Color's hometown hero Kris Couture's halo has been removed and he is healing exceptionally...just in time for holidays!!! Just after it was removed he came down to the Market...everyone was buying him coffees. Ask him about his thumbnail-shaped dueling scars.

* * *

The Market's infamous Mr. D is opening a new restaurant. The new venture, Greek of course, will be down in the developing antique district of Sodo-Georgetown. He plans to name the new baby *Philoxenia* (meaning friend to strangers, and is the modern Greek word for hospitality). D, in the process of developing a vision, is designing a personal Parthenon for the roof.

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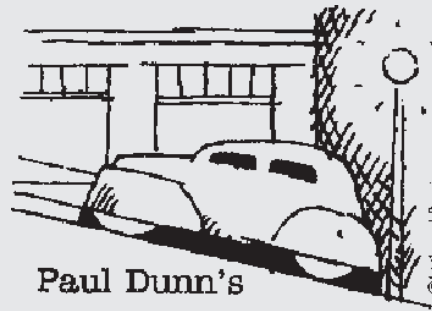
SEATTLE CENTRAL LIBRARY

Part 2: Function

“Central Library, in downtown Seattle, is the physical and functional foundation of the entire library system.”

– 1998 “Libraries for All” Capital Plan

Passages likes central city walks and spends much time observing the “built



Paul Dunn's

Post Alley Passages

environment,” but we are not an architectural critic. Yet as a reader and user of the new library, we do have some observations on how the new Central Library functions.

Herbert Muschamp, a New York Times architectural critic, famously gave Seattle's Rem Koolhaas library design a seven “bling” review. On our first much-anticipated visits, everything did seem new, good and better than before. On later, more leisurely visits, the new has become familiar, and we can begin considering the details.

After the initial structural design was published, many community and staff meetings were held and monitored by the architects to make sure the finished building suited its interior functions. Two foreseen objections were concerned with the proposed stacks spiral. It was felt that book carts would roll back on staff and the steep incline would impede the handicapped. A gentler grade of 1 inch per 5 feet was installed with clever and useful Dewey decimal floor treads. Also, regular genealogy users insisted on wider tables to hold opened ledgers and court journals, and they got them.

Spiral design successful... and frustrating

Since the base function of the library is to store and display books and information, the spiral stack design for nonfiction is both a success and a frustration to some. Eleven levels in five platforms connected by stairs, elevators and escalators in the spiral stacks present some problematic solutions. For example, exit down from the stacks is currently via an expedient stairway originally designed for staff and fire use only.

The design of the spiral stacks around the central vertical transport sleeve denies users the ability to make direct moves between areas and forces roundabout access. The elevator system is perceived as too slow and not able to handle its volumes of use.

On the other hand, the spiral stack has allowed the library to present 75 percent of the collection to open browsing by patrons, compared with only 38 percent in the old library. This is a delight to patrons who value access and enjoy random browsing. In the middle of the Spiral Stacks is a greatly improved periodical and newspaper section, plus the microfiche and microfilm archives and readers.

A platform above the spiral stacks

supports the Seattle Room, an observation deck, maps and geography, and the General Reading Room. The General Reading Room has the rather cold, industrial ambience of an airport lounge. It lacks the inviting, bookish warmth of visible book spines. It is in stark contrast with the children's section, which is bright, colorful and appropriately playful, with stuffed animals and changing exhibits.

Patrons who enter out of habit from the more pedestrian-friendly Fourth Avenue entrance experience a busy intersection of library activities and spaces rather than the grander public space of the Fifth Avenue Living Room, which they must reach from below, via escalator. The steeply sloping site mandates this reverse entry solution.

The Living Room on Fifth Avenue is an active and open public space, with a coffee cart, gift store and ample seating. Restrooms are clean and spacious, and there are enough of them.

Throughout the new library tables have good workspace with ingenious replaceable working surfaces, wired for laptops. The library is configured for WiFi. The black, silver and red common chairs are made of an innovative synthetic material, which looks hard but feels soft.

The digital age rules in the automatic self-checkout system, which uses scanners and computers, and which moves the book return at a rate of 500 books per hour. A new library cash account system speeds use of printers and copiers (and fines). Four hundred computers for public use in the Mixing Chamber on Level 5 have been up to 90 percent of capacity on all visits.

Bright meeting rooms

The bright red Meeting Rooms on Level 4 are a great resource for civic gatherings and organizational meetings for both downtown and city-wide communities. The auditorium, with its 285 seats, offers the city another much-needed, medium-sized event venue.

Tucked away on many levels are special rooms: two for music, a board room, the Seattle Room for writers and researchers, one devoted to biography, another for performance arts and one for aviation.

Public video and tactile artwork by Ann Hamilton, Tony Oursler and Seattle's Gary Hall enhance the space with visual and aesthetic sustenance. The intense colors of the escalator flumes, furniture and restroom and elevator interiors create an energetic ambience for visitors on the first or 40th visits.

Two neat extra benefits to note: The catalogue computer terminals provide users with a map to the subject referenced and the 143-car garage includes two spaces for electric cars to recharge for free. The entire structure is “green”, in that it conserves water and power with regulated motion sensor controls.

Compared to the old library, this new spectacular structure encloses a superior functional payout in size, ease of use and comfort. It is a credit to all who offered suggestions and to those who listened and to the Seattle voting public that approved Libraries for All.

In May, 2004 Passages examined the siting of the Central Library, the third at this location. This library series will continue in Spring 2005 with a comparison of Seattle's Central Library to other new libraries in the Western United States.

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