The soaring lobby adds a civic scale to the otherwise low-slung building.

Overhead windows provide ample daylight (right), but fritted glass counters the ill effects of glare and UV rays.

Photos: Ron Blunt Photography

Floor Plan

0   75   150

1 Entrance	6 Fiction
2 Lobby	7 Reference
3 A/V Area	8 Non-Fiction
4 Meeting Room	9 Periodicals
5 Children's Books	10 Circulation/Staff

Computer stations and data ports are plentiful, with DVDs, CDs, and audiobooks found conveniently in the lobby (right).

Light-Filled in Loudoun

Much more than a repository for books, the new Ashburn Library by PSA-Dewberry doubles as a high-tech learning center and community gathering space.

In Loudoun County, Virginia, subdivisions sprout like spring crops. Old-timers may grumble at the rapid pace of development, but even the county's many newcomers wonder how they will forge a sense of community in a quickly changing region. The new Ashburn Library, however, may go far to help residents make those vital connections.

A recent report in *The Washington Post* noted that Loudoun County residents use libraries nearly three times more often than the national average – even more than they use local parks. Loudoun also has increasingly attracted high-tech businesses, and its residents tend to be technologically savvy. Therefore, it was imperative that the new library meet the county's growing demands for updated technology and access.

Opened in 2003, the Ashburn Library is a light-filled, 23,000-square-foot facility complete with community areas, computer stations, and data ports. PSA-Dewberry, a Fairfax architecture and engineering firm, designed the library to balance traditional uses with high-tech capabilities. "In ten years, this area has gone from mostly farmland to suburban development," says Jim Beight, AIA, the project principal who served alongside principal-in-charge Dan Moore, AIA. "This building had to be not just a library, but a community center."

Although the library keeps a low profile, it is punctuated by a two-story center section that announces the main entrance. This soaring volume is almost entirely banked with windows, inviting visitors in while offering views to the surround-

ing park. The lobby contains DVDs, CDs, and audiobooks. On either side of the center room, spaces are divided according to function. Meeting rooms and a children's area occupy one section and traditional stacks and a quiet reading room are in another.
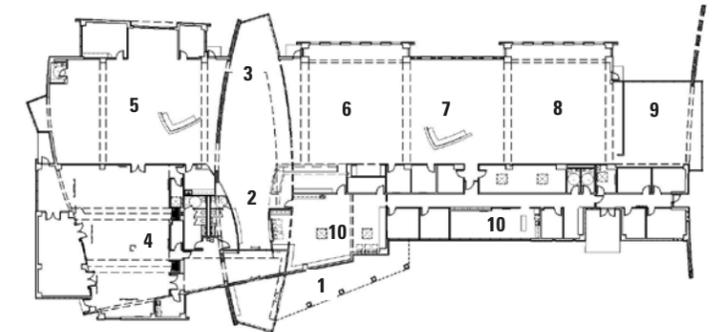
Large clerestory windows fill the space with light, but this also led to concerns about glare on computer screens and the effect of ultraviolet light on other materials. To address this issue, the designers selectively used fritted glass.

Building materials draw inspiration from the vernacular, including Virginia brick and buff-colored limestone. "From a materials and color standpoint, it blends in nicely," Beight says. "But it doesn't try to mimic the architecture that surrounds it." Already the library design has garnered several awards, including a citation from the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties.

Somewhat ironically, this modern suburban facility features a tile mural by artist Joan Gardiner depicting local history. In it, a farmer plows earth that contains Civil War bullets, arrowheads, and a shark's tooth. As new subdivisions continue to crowd Loudoun County, this image may belong only to the past – but at least the kids have a high-tech facility in which to read about it.

– *Kim A. O'Connell*

Kim O'Connell is a freelance writer based in Arlington.