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Everything is variable in this space for teenagers, including prints, furniture forms and colors.

The Teen Scene

LIBRARY SPACE FOR TEENAGERS FLEXES, SLOUCHES WITH THEM

By Cindy Coleman

Husband-and-wife team Sharon and Peter Exley, founders of Chicago-based architectureisfun, combined serious fun with solid design strategy for VORTEX, a teen space in the Fountaindale Public Library, located in Bolingbrook. It started with a highly energized participatory process that engaged teens around the discourse of what tomorrow's library can become.

"Teens don't want to be thought of as children," says Peter Exley, FAIA. While they

use the library for research, homework and general information-gathering like adults, the way they do it, he has learned, is very distinctive—it's more interpersonal and impromptu, and involves different settings to support not only the variety of functions, but also their different types of postures like standing, sitting or slouching.

"It was an interesting opportunity to look at what is unique to teen culture," Exley says. "They are constantly connected to

their activities, groups of friends and their technology," he adds.

In response, the new library features a young adult book collection, formal and informal study spaces, and interactive zones that support reading, research, and both individual and group study.

What did the teens want? "Teens asked for 'computers, computers and computers,'" Sharon Exley says. Therefore, terminals are near at hand and positioned to give easy access to the technology and the digital media they desire. The Media Lounge has two-sided seating that allows teens to do what teens do best: chill, relax, face a performance or sit turned to the digital console. It's their chance to be focused, social or irreverent. For the times when getting together is unscheduled, a centrally located big table is that opportunity. It supports face-time that often morphs into impromptu meet-ups, or it can become a game area or even a classroom.

All spaces, furnishings and graphics evoke elements the teens defined as "cool" during participatory workshops. Artist Mathew Hoffman of SIGHN was brought in to tag the space with anime-inspired graphic elements. The informality of the Fountaindale Public Library encourages teens to interact. But more, it suits their study habits and responds to teenagers' notions of identity and aesthetics.

"The teens weren't used to having people ask them what they wanted," Peter Exley says. "It took a while to get them to engage. But, once they did, listening to them was enlightening. It was fun."

Cindy Coleman is a strategist in Gensler's Chicago office.