



THE MORGAN LIBRARY

2000 – 2006 New York, USA

The Morgan Library is a historic landmark in New York City. Established by banker J.P. Morgan, it currently holds a collection of 250,000 works, including some of the world's most precious rare manuscripts, prints, musical scores, drawings and books.

The original structure commissioned by J.P. Morgan is a neo-Palladian building dating back to 1906, designed by Mc Kim Mead & White and located on 36th Street between Madison and Park Avenue.

Upon his father's death, J.P. Morgan Jr. decided to open the collection to the public and commissioned the construction of a new building in 1928. This building, known as "the Annex", was connected to the original and housed a reading room, along with a number of display areas.

From that time on, the Morgan Library underwent a number of additional expansions up until the 1980s, when the institution bought back the old family residence, the Morgan House.

A glass roof joining the two structures was even built in 1991.

Over the following years, the institution had such success that further expansion became necessary.

For this purpose, the owners commissioned RPBW to carry out the expansion work upon the Morgan Library in the year 2000. The structure required new public spaces, safe and organized storage areas for the collection itself, an Auditorium for chamber music with 300 seats and a new reading room.

The original buildings, classified as historical monuments, also had to be preserved.

The site could not be expanded in the direction of the surrounding streets (Madison Avenue, 36th street and 37th street), but only within the existing space between the two buildings. Any interventions, therefore, would have to be carried out within the existing perimeter and had to respect the pre-existing historical structures. The client had requested a total expansion of nearly 10,000 square metres. The adopted approach was to free the site of all of its unclassified additions and to recover the required space below ground level.

The spaces required to house the Auditorium and the storage areas for the collection were therefore recovered by excavating the perimeters of the buildings (to a depth of 17 meters). The spaces that were freed up on the surface were used to house 3 pavilions connected to the historic buildings, thus leaving a large open "plaza" that could be used for public functions. The plaza is the heart of the intervention: it's a place to stop and chat and, above all, a reference point that can be easily reached from any wing of the Library.

The three historic buildings, the plaza and the new pavilions are interconnected by a transparent steel and glass roof.



The new pavilions serve different functions: the largest, located between the Morgan House and “the Annex”, overlooks Madison Avenue and provides for a new entrance a ground level, a display area on the first floor and the reading room on the second floor.

The smaller cube-shaped pavilion, located between “the Annex “ and the original building built in 1906, hosts a single exhibition space.

The third and final pavilion, which is situated next to the Morgan House, contains office space and a number of service areas.

All of the exhibition buildings are clad in an entirely opaque steel panel structure.

The rectangular auditorium offers seating on a continuous incline for up to 299 people.

While its acoustics have been designed for chamber music concerts, the auditorium can also be used as a conference or projection room thanks to the modularity of the acoustic elements themselves.

The spaces for storing the collection have been designed as a sort of bunker and are capable of withstanding any type of external aggression.

They are laid out over three communicating floors, that are temperature and humidity-controlled in order to provide for perfect preservation conditions for the collections’ artworks.

Like that of the smallest pavilion, the new reading room’s transparent roof provides the internal space with natural lighting.

With the Morgan Library’s latest expansion, including the construction of its new pavilions and the restoration of the existing buildings, the complex has now obtained a total surface area of 15,000 square metres without violating the boundaries of its original site.

The building was inaugurated on April 25th, 2006.