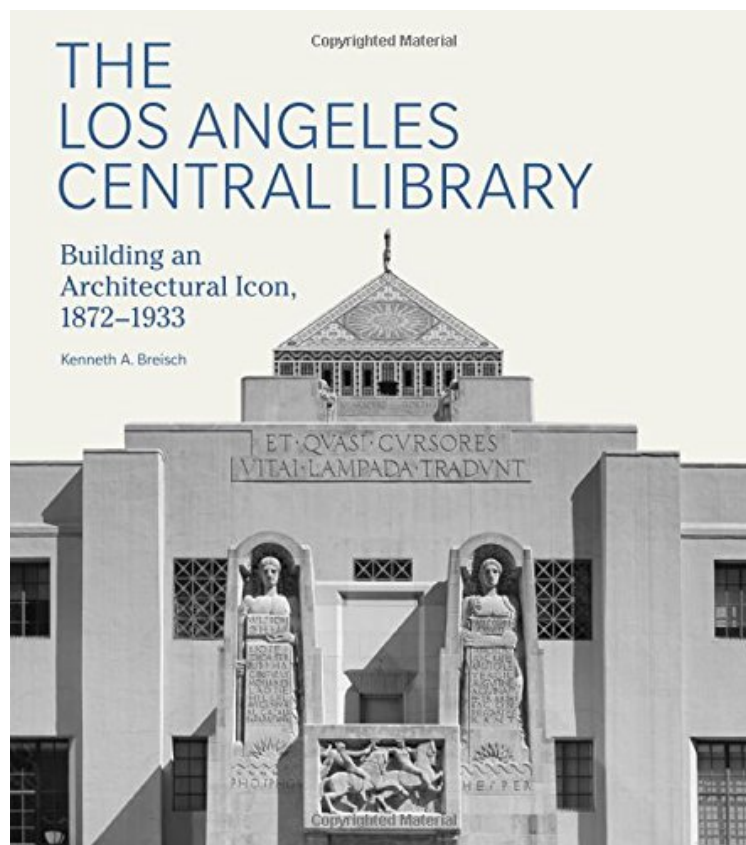


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## The Los Angeles Central Library: Building an Architectural Icon, 1872-1933 (Architecture Series)

*Kenneth A. Breisch*

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**Kenneth A. Breisch : The Los Angeles Central Library: Building an Architectural Icon, 1872-1933 (Architecture Series)** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Los Angeles Central Library: Building an Architectural Icon, 1872-1933 (Architecture Series):

4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Two competing books on an important building By kb from la Two books on the history of the Los Angeles Central Library were published in 2016 one by Stephen Gee and this volume by Kenneth Breisch. Possibly neither author or publisher was aware of the other book, because there is a fair amount of overlap. In other words, what appears to be a lot of duplicate research produced books sufficiently similar that you probably would not buy both. Gees book covers more historical territory. Bringing the library's history up to the 1990s, he details the fight to preserve Goodhue's landmark building, its subsequent restoration and the addition of a new wing that opened in 1993. Breisch offers a much more in depth look at the Central Library from its earliest locations in various municipal and rented spaces to the completion of Goodhue's original Central Library building in 1933. Which book you would prefer depends on your orientation. Gees book is a general survey containing chapters on the library

buildings history and the various architects and artists responsible for its original design and later restoration and expansion. Documentary history is Gees strength, and he effectively relates the conflicts over finances and location that caused years of delay in the original building project. In addition he presents an excellent discussion of efforts to save the library building, which during the 1970s/80s became one of our countrys key preservation battles. But Gee is not an architectural historian. There is a disappointing lack of analysis of the library buildings sophisticated design and its important place in the history of early American modernism. Breisch is an architectural historian, and it shows. In scrupulous detail he traces the evolution of Bertram Goodhues design for the library and connects that design to the architects earlier work and sources of his ideas in the writing of William Lethaby. Indeed, Breisch so emphasizes Goodhue that important aspects of the librarys overall design, for example the murals by Dean Cornwell, are given short shrift. Other than Goodhue, Breisch mainly concentrates on Hartley Burr Alexander, the philosophy professor engaged by the architect to create a program of themes and inscriptions for the library. Extensive quotations from Alexanders essays, poetry and correspondence serve to illuminate his crucial contribution to the ultimate character of this remarkable building. Both books are lavishly illustrated with new photographs and marvelous old images from the librarys own archival photography collection. (Again, a certain amount of duplication.) One complaint the Breisch books page layout is irritating. Print size is quite small, but the pages outside margin is over three inches. If the aim is to make older readers feel they are going blind, the publisher has succeeded. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Local History and a Journey into the Past By Journey I don't think there could be a better book written about and illustrating the Los Angeles Central Library. This is complete history and discussion about every aspect of the building and its architectural details and artwork and the sources that inspired the work. 1 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Steal This Book! By J. Prescott A great book on an iconic building....

In the most comprehensive investigation of the Los Angeles Public Librarys early history and architectural genesis ever undertaken, Kenneth Breisch chronicles the institutions first six decades, from its founding as a private library association in 1872 through the completion of the iconic Central Library building in 1933. During this time, the library evolved from an elite organization ensconced in two rooms in downtown LA into one of the largest public library systems in the United States with architect Bertram Grosvenor Goodhues building, a beloved LA landmark, as its centerpiece. Goodhue developed a new style, fully integrating the buildings sculptural and epigraphic program with its architectural forms to express a complex iconography. Working closely with sculptor Lee Oskar Lawrie and philosopher Hartley Burr Alexander, he created a great civic monument that, combined with the librarys murals, embodies an overarching theme: the light of learning. A building should read like a book, from its title entrance to its alley colophon, wrote Alexander a narrative approach to design that serves as a key to understanding Goodhues architectural gem. Breisch draws on a wealth of primary source material to tell the story of one of the most important American buildings of the twentieth century and illuminates the formation of an indispensable modern public institution: the American public library.

With comprehensive notes and a wonderfully detailed and navigable index, this fine example of scholarship is comprehensive in its story of the growth of support for a public library in Los Angeles; of the evolution of early designs with a signature, central ribbed dome and tiled pyramid-topped tower; and of the sculpture and murals that make the building a true Gesamtkunstwerk, or synthesis of art forms. The study is essential for all architecture and urban history collections.