Library

# PROJECT SPOTLIGHT



# University of Virginia Library

A library for the future at UVA

*Thomas Jefferson selected the University of Virginia's first library collection and designed the campus with the library at its heart. But a storied history doesn't guarantee a library can meet the evolving needs of its community. In 1938, the original library was replaced — and nearly a century later, it was time for another transformation.*

## THE PROBLEM

Shannon Library, named in honor of the University of Virginia's (UVA) fourth president, was built to reflect the school's transformation into a research university. But as UVA grew, so did its collections. Over the decades, multiple expansions created a disjointed and inefficient space.

By 2018, the library had become a maze of cramped, poorly connected areas. *"You would get to a spot where the books no longer fit on a shelf,"* said Caleb Mechem, UVA's Print Collection Strategist. *"There would be a sign that said to hop over to another section to find this run of books and then go back."*

The outdated shelving, inadequate lighting, and tight quarters made the library uncomfortable and uninviting. *"It was really hard for library users to find what they were looking for, and it was really hard for staff,"* Mechem added.

The renovation offered the chance to reimagine the library as a safer and more functional study environment for students. The library team recognized the need to balance modern design with academic demands. *"How can we create a collection that's vibrant, heavily used, and easily accessible?"* asked Director of Collections Beth Blanton.

To answer that question, UVA enlisted HBRA Architects to help transform the library into a light-filled study space. And they chose Patterson Pope to help create intuitive organization systems and improved access to resources.



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"With our new shelving and logical layout, students were able to find the books they needed right away and were checking things out just as soon as we opened."

Caleb Mechem
Print Collection Strategist, University of Virginia Library

## THE SOLUTION

Finding the right balance between housing the library's extensive collection and meeting the evolving needs of students was one of the renovation's biggest challenges. *"One of the things that I had hoped with what we were creating here was to move away from the idea of being a museum of books to being a collection that people wanted to use and could access easily."*

To achieve that vision, Patterson Pope collaborated with HBRA Architects to implement a variety of shelving solutions tailored to the library's needs. The fourth and fifth floors now feature static cantilever shelving, while the first and third floors utilize compact high-density shelving. In the basement, mobile shelving provides secure storage for special collections.

The renovation also enabled UVA to reclaim around 700,000 books from its offsite storage facility, Ivy Stacks. This move created more room at Ivy Stacks for the University's constantly growing collection while allowing Shannon Library to accommodate up to one million books. Its shelving can now hold over 15 miles of volumes if lined up end-to-end.

Blanton credited Patterson Pope with playing a critical role in the renewal project. *"We had an idea,"* she said, *"but having storage professionals to help make the vision come true" was key. "It was a wonderful experience."*

UVA's team had a lot of questions about high-density shelving and how to communicate how it works to students, and Patterson Pope was a great help. *"Patterson Pope has been really responsive to our concerns,"* said Mechem.





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Beth Blanton
Director of Collections, University of Virginia Library

## THE OUTCOME

The beautifully renovated building is a testament to modern design meeting academic needs. Reopened in 2024, the library now boasts improved safety, accessibility, and service. With an intuitive layout, natural-light-filled spaces, and clear signage, navigating the library is seamless and inviting.

The transformation has been a resounding success. *"As soon as we opened the doors, students flooded in,"* said Mechem. *"Every seat was taken within a week or two of the doors being open. With our new shelving and logical layout, students were able to find the books they needed right away and were checking things out just as soon as we opened."*

The new space is open and welcoming, said Blanton. *"The end result is a building in which we can serve up collections that will help students be successful, that will help faculty be successful, as well as support the day-to-day activities that go on around a University Campus."*

By embracing innovative storage and fully utilizing the library's footprint, UVA has transformed Shannon Library into a vibrant hub for learning and research — ready to meet the needs of today's students and faculty and support scholars for years to come.





## ABOUT THE CLIENT

The University of Virginia Library, located in Charlottesville, Virginia, serves over 25,000 students, faculty, and staff with a collection of 5 million printed books and extensive digital and archival resources. The library's mission is "to provide access to accumulated knowledge, and in so doing, increase it."

