

This new library opened in 1895.

The first main renovation of the library – who got its actual name in 1926 after the Alsace region was regained by France in consequence of the First World War – happened after the Second World War, when the library had been partially damaged during a bombing. In particular, new stacks were installed, whose metallic frames, empty in the middle, went vertically through the 8 levels of the library. In the early 2000s, this structure was a serious problem: fire could have spread along this empty metallic structure and burn the library down again, in less than 15 minutes...

So it was decided to undertake a complete renovation of the library, not only to solve this security issue, but also to create a more modern and functional library.

Ten major objectives were set for the complete architecture program:

1. Having a modern building, resistant to fire and possible earthquakes, and using green technologies like thermal regulation through natural water energy;
2. Increasing the library's storage capacity;
3. Increasing the number of works available for free access from 30 000 documents to 200 000;
4. Increasing the number of seated places, from 500 to 660;
5. Reorganizing the services to the public, in particular by gathering all reading rooms in this new building;
6. Maintaining better preservation conditions for the collections;
7. Enhancing the library's assets by preserving two floors of storage space in one wing of the building as they were initially and by creating a library museum;
8. Creating a 140-seat auditorium and a 500m² exhibition space;
9. Modernising professional practices, particularly by using particularly effective technologies of the RFID type;
10. Integrating the building in an overall urban enhancement scheme, since it is one of the best examples of German architecture in Strasbourg and is a decisive feature in the application made by the City of Strasbourg for UNESCO classification.

However these ambitious goals, this project was made particularly difficult by the fact that the external facades as well as the cupola are a real landmark of the city and are thus protected as historical pieces of architecture. For that matter, only the inside spaces were concerned, and in fact quite completely destroyed, and a whole new library was built within the historical walls and under the preserved cupola. The future library, which will open to the public during the autumn 2014 after 4 years, will be a modern, light, functional one, with new services and historical pieces of architecture preserved at the same time, articulated around a central staircase letting natural light into the building.

But “*BNU Nouvelle*”, the name given to this ambitious rejuvenation programme, is much more than just an architectural concept: it intends to be an overall and strategic change of the library's identity to the best of its users, students, researchers and the general public as well. The development of an ambitious digital library is for instance one of the major projects undertaken during the past years, in conjunction with the National library of France (BnF) (Numistral, 2013) or Europeana, the European Digital Library (BNU, 2013). The institutional cooperation with other local and regional institutions, first of all the University of Strasbourg library and research institutes, is also a priority for the BNU, in order to develop common tools, research projects and even infrastructures, build collaborative competences and of course serve the academic public in the best possible way. To cite just some of the common initiatives that are under way or in



Illustration 2. The central staircase of the new library(photo. ANMA)

