



Library podcast

Joshua Prince-Ramus

[00:00:00] Joshua Prince-Ramus: One of the reasons we were selected, by no means the only reason, but one reason, probably a small reason, was that the partner in charge of the project was from Seattle meant that the firm would feel a certain kind of responsibility. And the way I articulated it was that my mother would be publicly stoned in the grocery store if a \$111.9 million of public money goes to waste to something that's not successful. We all realize that we were at a kind of cusp of change or a precipice that none of us knew what was beyond. The reality that in 1999, this was very unusual, in 2014 in which everyone has a, you know, a handheld phone that can get them onto the web or whatever, seems less prescient. But at the time, a kind of radical position was that access to information would be ubiquitous. And so if access to information is ubiquitous, what value does a central library have that makes it particularly unique, and what thing must be emphasized? That meant that we had to design the building in which the librarian was less a docent, which is sadly how many librarians are treated, you know, that they help you find a thing. And evolve into someone who is a curator of an exponentially expanding field of information. So, you know, if you Google Finnegans Wake, and you get 3,000 possible hits today, and in five years you're going to get 19,000, and in another five years you're going to get 45,000, you need someone who is highly educated, highly articulate, who understands how to assimilate information to guide you through that.

[00:01:43] We had to design a building that went from being book-centric to being librarian-centric. But I think the most exciting thing is actually seeing the disabled community use it. Perhaps one of the most exciting moments in my experience of the building was going through the building with someone in a wheelchair, and their delight by the fact that they had immediate access to the entire collection as an able-bodied person, a non-disabled person. And that they were not forced to move always back to an elevator and to wait where another person could simply use the stairs to make a quick connection. The thing that makes me happiest about the building is that the vast majority of people who come into it, whatever esthetic preconception they have, either "Hey, wow, this is amazing and I'm excited to see," or "Why isn't it stone, and where are the columns? And where's the gold leaf door?" Almost all of them leave and look up at the building and think, "Whatever my preconception was about it esthetically, damn, it worked. And damn, I enjoyed it. I may have thought it was ugly, but I had a great experience in it."

[00:03:00] [MUSIC]