

TREND REPORT: LIBRARY FURNITURE

LIBRARY FURNITURE THAT ISN'T PAST ITS DUE DATE

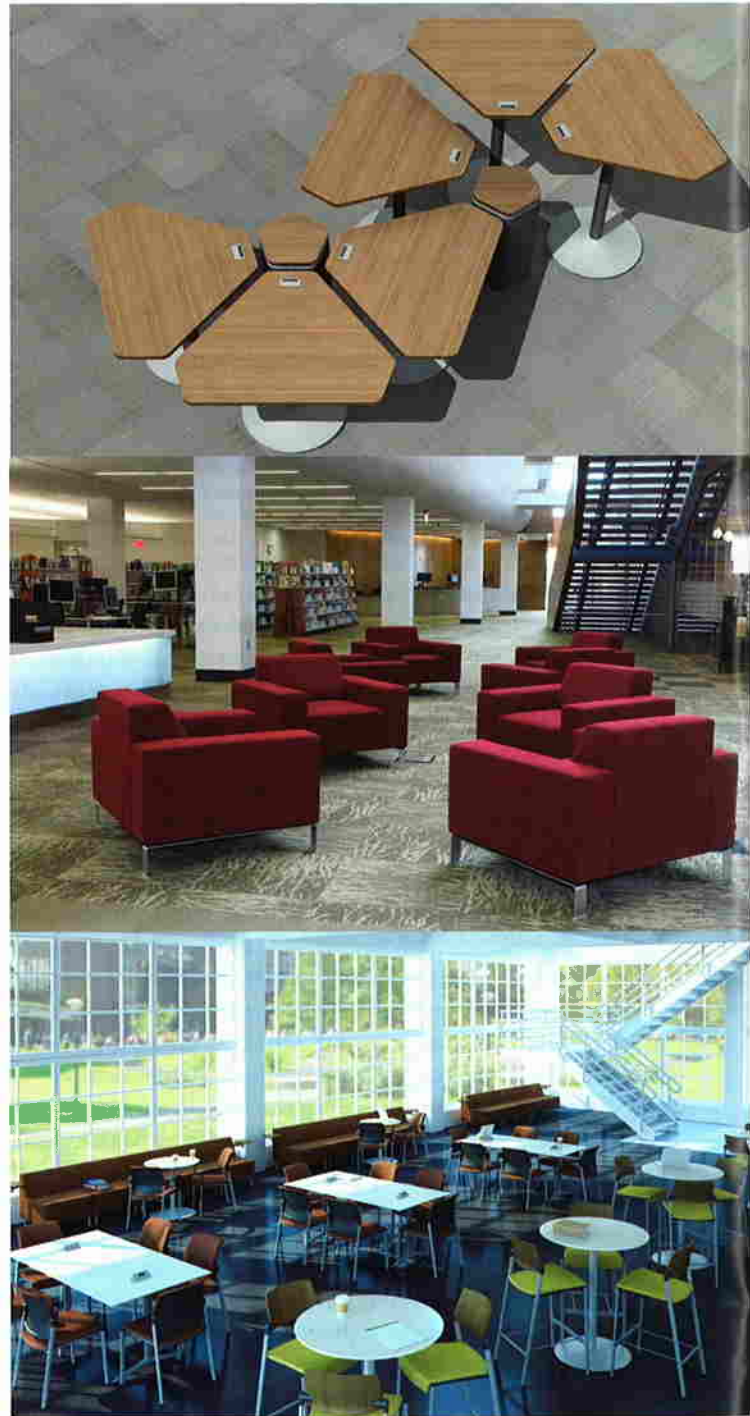
Massive, indestructible wooden furniture used to be the norm in libraries. But as these institutions become more interactive and technology-dependent, the line between workplace and library furniture is blurring

BY PAMELA YOUNG

Library furniture used to have a distinctive look to it – big, heavy, wooden and indestructible – and the companies that manufactured furniture for the library market were not the same ones that made office furniture. But libraries are changing, and as their furniture needs have evolved in recent years, some companies best known for manufacturing corporate furniture are now finding that libraries are interested in what they have to offer.

“A community or school library that must anticipate future changes and expansion, whether it’s adding bookshelves or reconfiguring a space, will have an advantage specifying systems furniture,” says Kary Minehart, national workplace advisory manager (U.S.) with Allsteel. Some of Allsteel’s lines, such as Reach storage and Merge tables, have proved popular with libraries because they are easier to reconfigure than many traditional library products. And like offices, Ms. Minehart says, libraries are moving towards open-plan benching: “This furnishing style answers the demand for private individual work areas but with instant adaptability to group collaboration.”

Canadian manufacturer Nienkämper has also found that libraries have become a lucrative niche market for its products. In recent years several public libraries have specified Nienkämper public-area seating by designers such as Karim Rashid for lounge areas – often in a mix of bright colours for the children’s section. Nienkämper’s Vox workstations, meanwhile, provide ample connectivity for libraries’ own computer kiosks and in touchdown spaces for patron’s laptops. New from Nienkämper for libraries and other public spaces are Vox Monogram Tables and Core Towers. Each tower supplies power and data connections to up to five of the tables, which have essentially triangular tops that can be grouped into petal-like or linear arrangements. “Libraries are much more interactive spaces than they were before, and the furniture within them has to be capable of being constantly reconfigured,” says Nienkämper’s design director, Mark Müller. The Monogram/Core configurations are easy to expand or change around, and they can transform awkwardly shaped, “leftover” nooks and crannies into usable space. | CFM&D



Top to bottom: Monogram Tables and Core Towers by Nienkämper; Berkley lounge seating by Nienkämper; an “Active Learning” environment featuring seating and tables by Allsteel.