

Check It Out



Pittsburgh and New York-based Front Studio created a local library in Sharpsburg, Pennsylvania, that has become a magnet for the community thanks to its smart use of colors and site-specific materials that reflect the town's industrial heritage.

A little library in Pennsylvania makes a big impression thanks to Front Studio's colorful design.

Olivia Martin







In the unassuming town of Sharpsburg, Pennsylvania, Front Studio created a vibrant community library that makes a major visual impact. “Our work is based on the importance of making architecture experiential and memorable so that it fosters a higher level of awareness in people who don’t normally interact with it,” said principal Art Lubetz, who spearheaded the project.

Historically, Sharpsburg is an industrial, blue-collar town—many of its citizens work for the local H.J. Heinz Company. To reflect this heritage and to help stay within the restrictive budget, Lubetz and his team picked industrial elements, like the exterior corrugated metal paneling, concrete flooring, and exposed trusses. Each of the “building blocks” is painted

Left

The eye-catching garage door is a straight-forward design solution to open up the interior space to the library’s courtyard. Front Studio principal Art Lubetz and his team selected the interior furnishings, opting for cheery, but durable Panton Junior chairs and Eames elephants from Vitra and low, round tables from Symphony.

Below

Lime lounge chairs from David Edward offset bright purple walls and muted concrete floors by Pecora Flooring.





the exact same bright color inside and out so that the interior is clearly communicated to the street. The bold hues make the material palette feel airy and energetic, an appropriate atmosphere for the many children who frequent the space.

Due to its location—just across the way from the community center and near the community garden—the Sharpsburg Library is a major gathering center for the little town. “It’s flexible and adaptable,” said Lubetz. “There’s a dynamic overlap between the old building and the new, the interior and the exterior, and soft and hard surfaces.”

Despite its fragmented appearance on the outside, the volumes connect fluidly on the inside, even enveloping the site’s existing structure (an Indian restaurant) without breaking the flow, making wayfinding within the library simple. “The volumes intersect like a

piece of sculpture,” said Lubetz. “I like to think that there is an element of art about this place....I’ve been around long enough to believe that architecture can be art.”

Lubetz and his team also sourced the furniture, which turned out to be a challenge. “It was tricky to find relatively inexpensive stuff that was durable and colorful—like the children’s [Verner] Panton chairs,” Lubetz explained. Front Studio designed a few pieces as well, such as the library’s main desk.

Other playful touches, like the garage door out to the courtyard and the large exterior circular cutouts, not only “bond the site to its environment,” but are meant to evoke positive emotions: “Kids love this place because it’s so vibrant,” said Lubetz. “And people still call me because they saw it driving down the street and it made them smile.”

Above

Although the library looks like an industrial reuse project, it was built from the ground up, with the exception of a little restaurant that was originally on the site. To create maximum visual impact, Lubetz wrapped the existing structure within the new building.