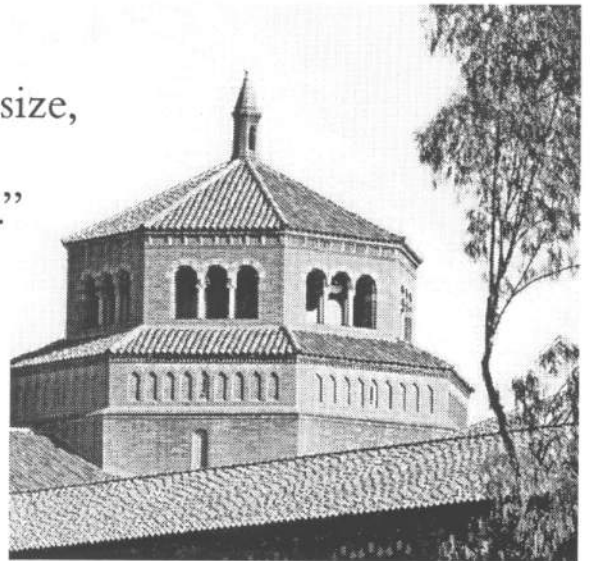




UCLA's Powell Library Building

“To enter a library,
no matter its kind or size,
is to enter the heart
of the whirlwind.”

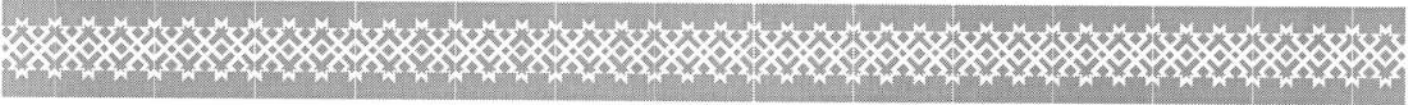
— Lawrence Clark Powell
A Passion for Books



The University of California, Los Angeles, was established in 1881, when a measure was passed by the State Senate and approved by the governor to create a branch of the state normal school. The site selected was a five-acre orange grove where the Los Angeles Public Library now stands. In 1887 the branch became an independent institution, the Los Angeles State Normal School, and, in 1914, it moved to North Vermont Avenue to the campus now occupied by Los Angeles City College. In 1919 the property was transferred to the University of California, and the first UC branch was established as the University of California Southern Branch. In 1927, under the leadership of Ernest Carroll Moore, the name was officially changed to the University of California at Los Angeles. It was no longer a branch; it was the second of what are now the nine campuses of the University of California. (In 1953 the name was changed again, to the University of California, Los Angeles.)

Having outgrown the Vermont campus, the newly formed university moved west in 1929 to a 383-acre tract acquired from the Janss Realty Company and Alphonso Bell. The Library and Royce Hall were the first two buildings on the Westwood campus. The rolling hills, the then-blue sky and clean air, the proximity to the ocean – all suggested northern Italy to the architects, George W. Kelham and David Allison, and they looked to churches in Verona, Bologna, and Milan for their models and their inspiration.

Both buildings were constructed in an adaptation of the Lombardian type of Italian Romanesque architecture, and their designs also embody many aspects of the Byzantine. In addition, because of the extensive Spanish influence in the history of Southern California, appropriate Moorish touches were added to the basic design. The Library's Lombard porch with its single-arched doorway closely resembles the church of San Zenove in Verona, although some maintain it was adapted from the rear of the basilica of San Ambrogio in Milan, the front of which inspired the design of Royce Hall. Carved into the lintel



above the human-figured capitals of the porch are two supporting Atlantes, straining under a great load. Such dwarfish figures, along with the leaf-scroll designs found on the moldings of the rounded arch of the portal, have many counterparts in Lombard churches. The spandrel above the front entrance feature the Owl of Wisdom, with the God of Light on one side and the God of Learning on the other.

The wooden star-patterned ceiling in the entrance foyer is supported by tile-clad octagonal pillars whose capitals are decorated with tiny heads of bruins. The seal of the University of California is worked in tiles on either side of the front door and is repeated in terra cotta on the floor. The mosaic on the wall to the right, just below the first landing of the main staircase, shows two men holding a book bearing the legend, from Cicero's *Pro Archia*, "Haec studia adulescentiam alunt, senectutem oblectant ..." ("These studies stimulate the young, divert the old.") On the first landing is an alcove called a mihrab, which on Moorish buildings faces Mecca and often contains a Koran; in this building it indicates the direction of the book stacks. Above the landing of the east stairway is a plaque by David Kindersley commemorating John Edward Goodwin, university librarian from 1923 to 1943. Hanging above the landing of the west stairway is another plaque by David Kindersley honoring Lawrence Clark Powell (after whom the building is named), who was university librarian from 1944 to 1961 and dean of the Graduate School of Library Service from 1960 to 1966. The stairway itself features owl newel posts and bruin bear heads on the balustrade.

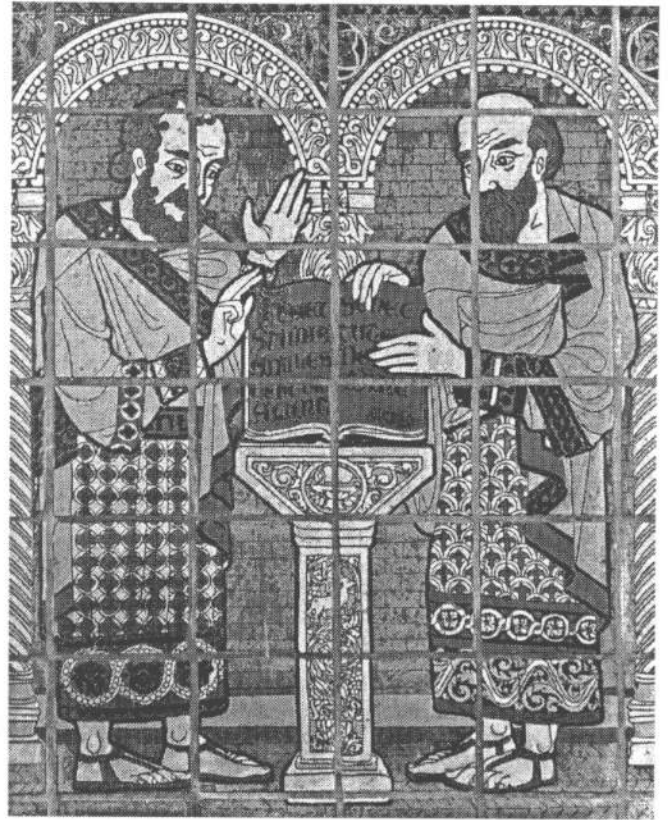


On the second floor, the architectural influence of Moorish Spain can be detected in the tiled columns, the floor surfaces of the stair landings, and the painted and stenciled simulated-wood beams and trusses of the ceiling. The dramatically scaled Main Reading Room is 212 feet long and 56 feet wide. Its octagonal central dome, which stand 63 feet from the floor, is ornamented by the marks, or colophons, of forty printers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, including such noteworthy figures as William Caxton, Aldus Pius Manutius, and Walter Chepman. Careful observation of the ceiling will reveal many symbols of truth, wisdom, and knowledge appropriate to a library: the griffin, the caduceus, the serpent, the owl of wisdom, Aladdin's lamp, and the pine cone, for example. The decorative work was done by muralist and designer Julian Ellsworth Garnsey, whose work can also be seen in the central dome of the Los Angeles Public Library. Fifty-six columns, which form a tier of blind Romanesque arches from which the dome rises, rest on 56 alternately smiling and frowning faces. The three arches forming the entrance to the Main Reading Room and those surrounding the Rotunda are supported by hand-



somely tiled octagonal columns, with capitals decorated with fine Romanesque bas-reliefs of vine scrolls inhabited by goats, peacocks, pigs, doves, rabbits, and squirrels. This decoration, which is of Scythian and Celto-Germanic origins, is typical of barbarian art. The eight-pointed star from which the chandelier hangs is one of literally hundreds of stars adorning the ceiling. Across the landing from the Main Reading Room is the Rotunda, with a dome 45 feet high. The light streaming through the 28 beautifully proportioned clerestory windows often gives the bricks a rosy-pink quality, in contrast to the yellow glow elsewhere in the building. The four tiled alcoves are also notable architectural elements.

Throughout the years the building has hosted functions and served purposes in addition to Library operations. Until Murphy Hall was constructed, the university administrative offices were in this building, which also once housed student health services and the campus telephone exchange. The building has also expanded several times. The original 137,000-square-foot structure was built in 1929 at a cost of \$837,548. The east wing added another 46,900 square feet at a cost of \$649,617 in 1948, and a stack addition of 30,500 square feet in 1958 cost \$665,807. In 1964, when the Young Research Library opened, the building was remodeled slightly, and it was further remodeled in 1970, when Unit II of YRL was completed. However, by 1993 the building was badly in need of renovations and seismic upgrading. In May 1993 the 1958 stack addition was demolished, and seismic, code, life safety, and general renovation programs began. The January 1994 Northridge earthquake caused such severe damage to the Main Reading Room plaster ceiling that more than 2000 pieces had to be removed for reinforcement and reinstallation or replication. In the Main Reading Room, as throughout the building, meticulous care was given to historical preservation; what today's student now sees in the entrance foyer, stairs, landings, Rotunda, and Main Reading Room is more similar to what the 1929 class saw than at any other time in the history of the Powell Library. Some of the new features that are strongly reminiscent of but not identical to the originals are the stone-clad columns in the stacks, the bay-windowed stack reading nooks, and the lighting fixtures in the first floor Night Powell Reading Room. In addition, the \$34-million renovation provided new book storage space, new reading rooms, a new outdoor reading garden, and new seismic safety while still preserving the architectural beauty and historic integrity of the 1929 building.





For further information, please inquire at the College Library Reference Desk where books and pamphlets on UCLA and the Library are available. Of particular interest are:

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7/96 Miriam Dudley
Photographs by T. S. Oswald

