

Since its renovation by Vancouver firm Office of McFarlane Biggar Architects + Designers, the University of British Columbia Bookstore has been nicknamed “the Lantern” for its glowing transparency at night. Lime-green furniture and accents brighten an otherwise neutral material palette on the mezzanine. The university’s goal was to “draw people in and transform the building into a vibrant social space,” interior designer Michelle Biggar says.

## ONE FOR THE BOOKS

Vancouver’s Office of McFarlane Biggar Architects + Designers writes a new chapter in modern design for the University of British Columbia Bookstore.

Written by BRIAN LIBBY • Photographed by EMA PETER

### DESIGN TEAM

**architecture, interiors, and branding:**  
Office of McFarlane Biggar Architects + Designers  
**construction:** Syncra Construction  
**landscape architecture:** Hapa Collaborative  
**structural engineering:** Fast + Epp  
**mechanical engineering:** Integral Group  
**electrical engineering:** MMM Group  
**millwork:** Morinwood



*i*

he University of British Columbia Bookstore in Vancouver has long enjoyed a prominent place at the heart of campus. But the physical building, completed in 1983, wasn't inviting: the store's entrance was sunk 8 feet into the ground, and its interiors were dimly lit and compartmentalized into small sections. "It felt cave-like," recalls Debbie Harvie, UBC's managing director for university community services. So the university embraced the chance to renovate and reimagine the bookstore: to make it not only more welcoming, but also a place to linger, with plenty of public areas and gathering spots inside and out.

With its expertise in architecture and interior and graphic design, Vancouver's Office of McFarlane Biggar Architects + Designers took a holistic approach to the project. First the

**LEFT:** The designers framed a series of opened books to highlight favorite literary quotes chosen by locals. **TOP:** A simple palette of natural wood fixtures and furniture keeps customers focused on the colorful merchandise. The millwork, by Morinwood, combines natural wood and white Corian. **ABOVE:** The new mezzanine, outfitted with Spark lounge chairs and Maya Lin Adult Stone tables, both by Knoll from Inform Interiors, gives visitors places to study or hang out.

firm lifted the main space up to grade with the street, which made the bookstore "much more visible, but also lighter and brighter," explains Michelle Biggar, OMB's interior designer. The new entry is flush with the exterior plaza, and a second-level mezzanine lines the perimeter of the store's addition, providing views of the interior spaces and cantilevering over (and shading) the exterior plaza. The design also focused »



**LEFT AND BELOW:** The glass façade, emblazoned with quotes from dozens of books, provides extra sun protection for students and shoppers and casts a series of text-shaped shadows. **BOTTOM:** OMB collaborated with Vancouver landscape architecture firm Hapa Collaborative to activate the adjacent plaza with fresh greenery.



on improving foot traffic and opening sightlines. “Before the renovation, you couldn’t see from one end of the store to the other,” Biggar says. Now everything feels connected.

The firm also created a new logo for the store and unified the space’s formerly disjointed interior materials with a simple palette of exposed-concrete floors and stairs, white walls and metalwork, and natural wood ceilings and millwork. To encourage students and faculty to gather, as well as to provide informal study spaces, the mezzanine level offers a series of tables and seating. Its fritted glass walls

are emblazoned with text from books chosen by members of the community, washing the interiors with diffuse light and throwing sentence-shaped shadows.

Any college bookstore sells textbooks and supplies, but UBC’s has become something more: a place where people can meet and exchange ideas. “We’re an anchor for the campus now,” Harvie says. “People are always coming in to see what’s new, and there’s always something fresh for customers to see through the windows. The space makes me smile every time I go inside.” ✱

