

PHILIP ROTH PERSONAL LIBRARY NEWARK PUBLIC LIBRARY

NEWARK, NJ



CELEBRATING A LEGACY

Ann Beha Architects Completes the Philip Roth Personal Library for the Newark Public Library

Ann Beha Architects has transformed a historic space for the Newark Public Library to create a home for the Philip Roth Personal Library, a research and exhibition center capturing the author's engagement with reading, writing, and Newark. In 2016, Roth announced the bequeathal of his personal collection of 7,000 books to the library. After his death in 2018, the library received not only his books, but furniture and other personal items as well. ABA was retained to design the new center as both a destination for researchers consulting Roth's works and an exhibition space for sharing material related to the author's work and life.

"An early visit to Roth's Connecticut home, an early American farmhouse, allowed us to experience its restored rooms and contemporary furnishings just as he left them," notes ABA Principal Thomas Hotaling. "The time we spent there made clear his appreciation for craft and his ability to beautifully balance heritage with modernism. We wanted to bring a corresponding balance to this renovation, respectfully restoring the space as Roth himself might have known it in his youth. It serves as a setting for a contemporary presentation of his work and life, highlighting his deep connection to Newark, the library, and design itself."

Partnering with Shawmut Design & Construction, ABA upgraded this double-height room with all new mechanical, electrical, plumbing, and fire protection systems, as well as new climate control and LED lighting systems, to create a museum-quality research and exhibition space. Period details in the c. 1898 building — such as plaster molding, pilasters, wainscoting, and double doors — were repaired and restored, and new oak flooring was installed to return the room to its original luster.

A broad range of design options, critiqued with library staff and exhibit designers C&G Partners, designers of the bold and vibrant Philip Roth Inaugural Exhibition, led to the final spatial organization of the center, with a flexible exhibition area at one end and a studio-like reading room at the other.

"Roth left us his books, memorabilia that mattered to him, and endowments to support programs, outreach and the library's broader needs," says Joslyn Bowling Dixon, director of the Newark Public Library. "This beautiful space, thoughtfully designed by Ann Beha Architects and the entire team, encourages exploration and fresh thinking. Programming developed specifically for the Philip Roth Personal Library will examine different perspectives, challenge norms and provide insights into how literature often reflects or predicts current realities, much as Roth did through his novels."

Photo Courtesy of C&G Partners

Philip Roth Personal Library

**"Books have been central to my life,
as central as my writing."**

Philip Roth,
2014

Philip Roth (1933–2018), one of the most celebrated American writers of the 20th century, was a son of Newark. As a student, he spent hours in this building, reading books that shaped his sense of literature and writing. Roth's personal library of more than 7,000 volumes gathered over his lifetime and bequeathed to the Newark Public Library, reveals him not only as novelist, but as friend, teacher, and intellectual. This room creates a sense of how Roth chose to write and read. Books are shelved according to his own system with selected volumes displayed to show inscriptions, notes, and comments.

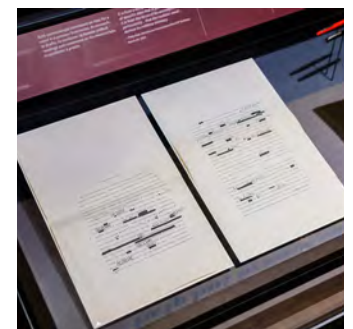
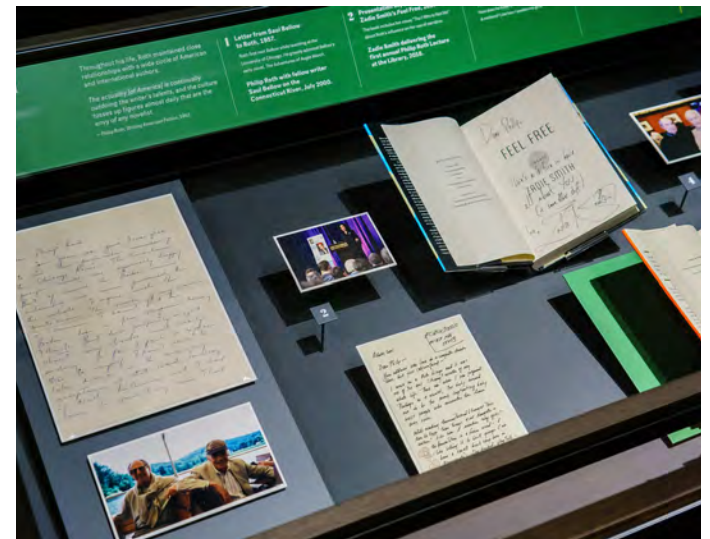
Enjoy your visit, whether as an introduction to Roth, or a chance to explore further his work and mind.



The design team drew inspiration from Roth's Connecticut farmhouse. The table and chairs in the book-lined reading room stood on the porch outside Roth's kitchen. A sliding glass door, reminiscent of a barn door on rails, separates this area from the exhibition gallery, yet allows a visual connection between them.

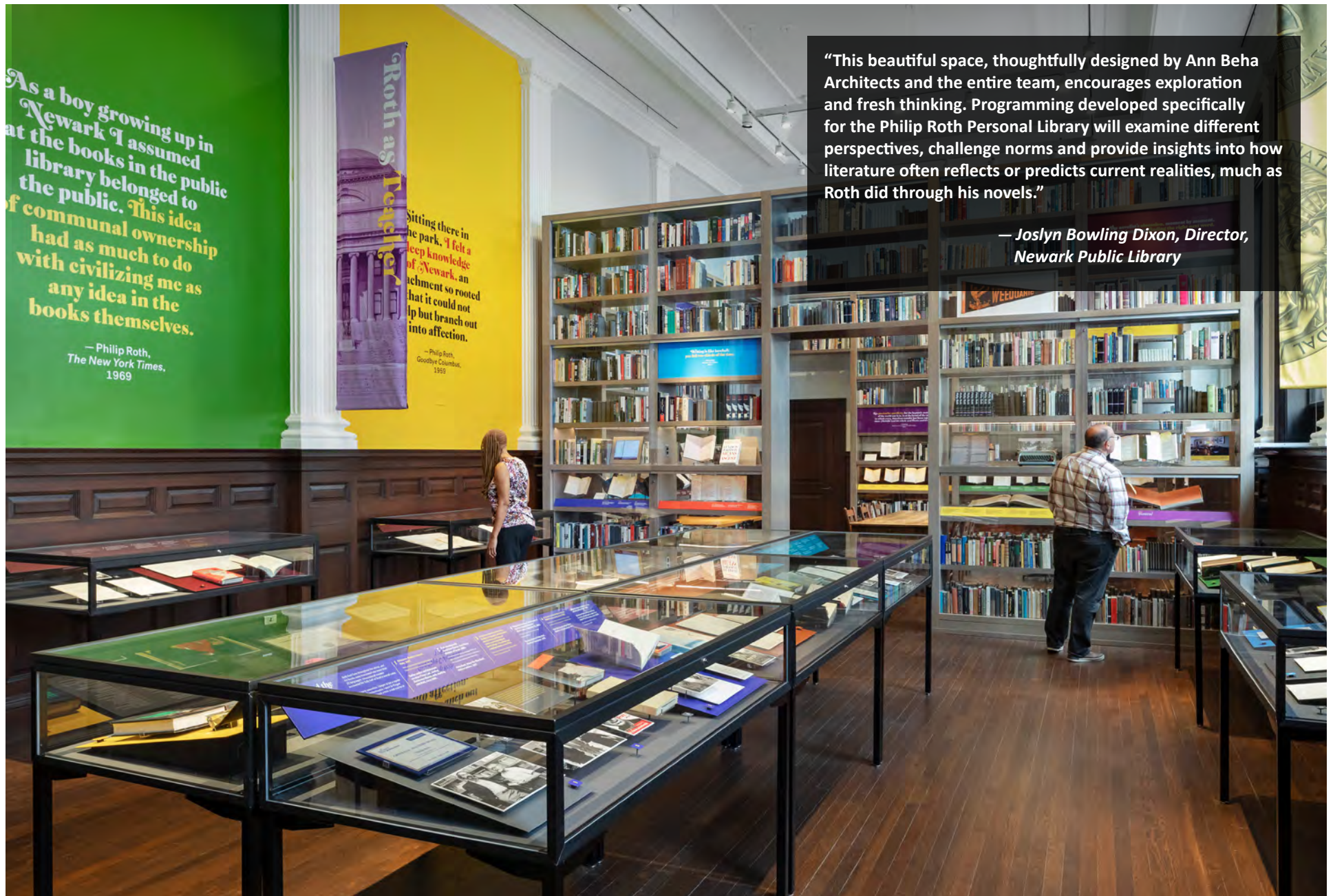


ABA restored the room to its 1898 origin, rejuvenating or replacing millwork, molding, pilasters, and other classical details. Glass-fronted shelves and an Eames lounge chair, bequeathed to the library by Roth, add a modern touch to the space. Solar film on windows and operable sun shades help protect collections and moderate the room's climate.



▲ Photos Courtesy of C&G Partners

The Philip Roth Inaugural Exhibition, designed by C&G Partners, brings to life the colors and typefaces of Roth's signature book jackets in a bold and vibrant manner. Display cases share Roth's personal memorabilia, letters, and books, offering additional insight into his work and life.



As a boy growing up in Newark I assumed that the books in the public library belonged to the public. This idea of communal ownership had as much to do with civilizing me as any idea in the books themselves.

— Philip Roth,
The New York Times,
1969

Sitting there in the park, I felt a deep knowledge of Newark, an attachment so rooted that it could not slip but branch out into affection.

— Philip Roth,
Goodbye Columbus,
1969

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— Joslyn Bowling Dixon, Director,
Newark Public Library

Glass-fronted wood and steel shelves separate the gallery from the reading room. Movable display cases allow staff to quickly convert the space to an open gathering area for library events.



Working with Shawmut Design & Construction, ABA relocated exposed fancoil units to be hidden behind wood wainscoting modified with discreet access panels. Additional structure was added under the floor to support the increased loading of shelving, with new oak flooring installed throughout the room.



PROJECT TEAM

ANN BEHA ARCHITECTS

ABA establishes a dynamic discourse between heritage and the future, with work equally dedicated to contemporary architectural expression and the revitalization of historic resources. Planning and designing for cultural, civic, and academic institutions worldwide, ABA sees architecture as a transformative and enduring force for change, growth, and celebration. The firm's projects shape and strengthen community life, establishing new directions, identities, and settings for education, the arts, and the civic realm.

CLIENT: Newark Public Library

ARCHITECTS: Thomas M. Hotaling AIA, Ann M. Beha FAIA, David Elzer AIA, Ric Panciera AIA

EXHIBIT DESIGN: C&G Partners

CONSTRUCTION MANAGER: Shawmut Design and Construction

MEP / FP ENGINEER: Legacy Engineers

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: Silman

EXHIBIT CASE & SHELVING FABRICATION: Hadley Exhibits Inc.

LIGHTING: Lightcraft

PHOTOGRAPHY: Michael Moran, C&G Partners

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