

The Weightlessness of Knowledge – the Law Library of the University of Zurich by Maryam Soliman

The Law Library of the University of Zurich has been called a “hidden gem” by many architecture travel guides. Seeing the building that houses the Law Faculty and the Law Library from above you already get a glimpse of what might lie inside.



Arriving at the front of the rather unassuming building the only hint as to what is hidden inside is a black sculpture in front of it.



Once you enter the library this is what awaits you:





As if freely suspended in air, the six reading galleries, enclosing a lens-shaped light funnel, rise up to the dome roof. Glass, white stone, white steel girders, light maple wood and bountiful daylight are all combined to create a daring shape, while generating an easy elegance. The Library of the University of Zurich Law Faculty was designed by Spanish architect and engineer Santiago Calatrava and built into an existing courtyard. As Calatrava once stated in an [interview](#) his aim was to show that knowledge is weightless compared to the weight of books.

The books and reading places are arranged along (and behind) the wooden panels.





The library was designed as statically independent from the surrounding building. The window frames you see on the next two photos are the original windows to the former courtyard. They offer an interesting connection between the library and the surrounding building.





Santiago Calatrava is not only an architect but also an engineer and artist. The Library combines all three elements in a unique and stunning way. The engineering aspect can be seen in the sun blinds / sun protection system.



Sunscreen folded



Sunscreen spread open

On the ground floor you find the information desk and the periodicals shelves.



Alongside the six reading galleries there is a 7th floor reserved for PhD-students working on their thesis. This is the view from the 7th floor:



Apart from being a well photographed architectural marvel – a google search revealed around 440'000 hits and a lot of pictures of the interior – the Library is one of the largest Law Libraries in Switzerland holding more than 200'000 items, approximately 600 periodicals and offering more than 500 study places. It was founded in 1887 as a small seminar library for practical legal training and moved into its current place in 2004.

Until the end of 2021 the Library was part of the Zurich Law Faculty which is the largest Law Faculty in Switzerland. Since the beginning of 2022 the Library is now a branch of the newly founded University Library.

In this blogpost you can find the link to the virtual tour of the library:

<https://bibliotheksblog.org/2020/09/12/semesterstart-2020-willkommen-in-der-rwi-bibliothek/>

And if you want to take a look at the library by drone, you can find the link all down in this blogpost:

<https://bibliotheksblog.org/2020/12/28/zum-jahresende-platzreservation-war-auch-schon-und-drohnenflug/>



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