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Jan Kattein Architects delivers redesigned children's library at Swiss Cottage

By Hollie Tye | 30 June 2025









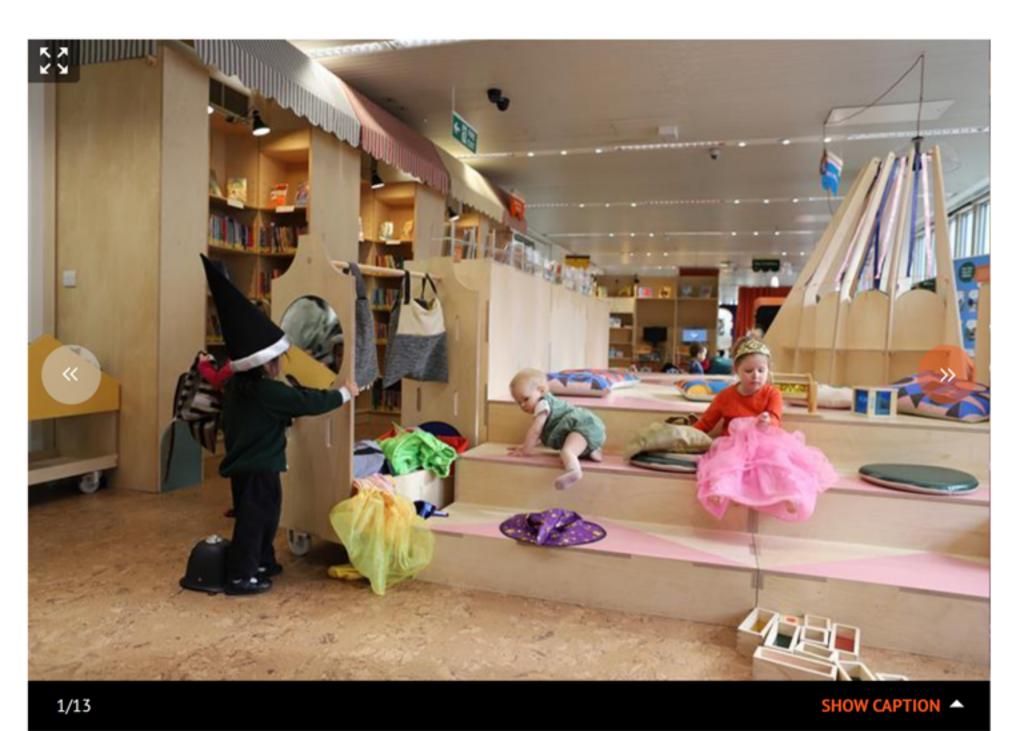








The redesign introduces flexible, activity-based zones tailored to contemporary storytelling formats, following consultation with local children, educators and families



Jan Kattein Architects has completed the redesign of the children's library at Swiss Cottage Library in Camden, north London. The project, commissioned by Camden Council, marks the 60th anniversary of the grade II-listed modernist library, originally designed by Basil Spence and opened in 1964.

The refurbishment, completed in March 2025, focused on adapting the children's area to reflect how young people now engage with stories across multiple formats, including spoken word, audio, and hands-on creative activities.

The project followed an extensive consultation process. The design team engaged with local schoolchildren, special educational needs teachers, parents and library staff to understand user needs. Input from children included the creation of shoebox model libraries, used to inform spatial planning and design decisions.

The updated library is divided into four zones: acting, writing, hearing and making. Original features have been reinstated where possible, including a storytelling stage that was part of Spence's initial design. New features include a magnetic poetry wall, a listening pod connected to a refurbished jukebox loaded with audiobooks, and a crafting table paired with a projector to support workshops. A soft-furnishings installation, designed as a large octopus, provides informal reading areas.

A separate teenage library was also introduced as part of the project, providing a dedicated space for reading, study and social activity.

To reduce environmental impact, the project reused vintage furniture, specified natural materials, and incorporated locally made signage and textiles repurposed from garment industry offcuts. All furniture elements were designed for modularity and flexibility to accommodate evolving programme needs.

The project continues Camden Council's wider approach to adapting public libraries as multi-use, inclusive spaces that support both literacy and community engagement.

Project details

Architect Jan Kattein Architects

Client Camden Council

Main contractor Cuttle Construction

Joinery Paxman Joineries

Internal walls Dulux Trade

Cork flooring Amorim WISE Flooring vinyl graphics Hexis

Felt panels Acoustock

Upholstery fabric Osborne & Little, Vescom

Curtains Cotswold Wool

Ceiling drapes Vescom

Furniture awnings Modelli Fabrics

Curtain tracks Doughty Engineering

Stage lighting ADJ

Clip lamps Nordlux

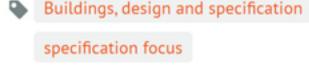
Festoons Turnock

Projector Epson Pendany speakers Cloud

Directional speaker SoundTube Entertainment

Adjustable height tables Office Boffins

Vintage furniture UK-DK Furniture



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