



Libraries through the lens

Biblioteca Cantonale di Lugano, Switzerland

LIBRARIAN and photographer Thomas Guignard's latest Libraries through the lens article looks at a Bauhaus inspired library in Switzerland.

Thomas says: "The entry by brothers Rino and Carlo Tami to the 1936 architectural competition for a new cantonal library in Lugano was a stark departure from the Italianate Neobaroque then favoured for official buildings. Drawing direct inspiration from Walter Gropius' Bauhaus in Dessau, the book storage wing is a prime example of Neues Bauen, as the Moderne movement is known in Switzerland. The recessed lower floor gives levity to the rest of the structure, to which the extra floor that was added half a century later is a natural extension.

"The second wing of the L-shaped building is the services pavil-

lon, with the entrance stairs leading to a superb reading room opening to the park that surrounds the library. Past the service desk, a graceful spiral staircase leads to a suite of offices and a service apartment for the concierge. Another staircase leads down from the entrance hall into what was formerly a separate, 'general usage' library. Attempts to update the spaces to contemporary uses have since merged the two sections, with the unfortunate effect of relegating the main welcome desk to the lower floor away from its originally prominent position.

"Architecture was not the only aspect in which the Lugano cantonal library embraced modernity. Presiding upon its opening in 1942 was head librarian Adriana Ramelli, who a year prior became the first woman in the country to lead a research library."