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North End Free Library and Public Bench (2015)

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Image Credit: TCA / Their + Curran Architects Inc.
Architectural Credit: TCA / Their + Curran Architects Inc.

Libraries come in a variety of scales. They range from monumental 15 storeys academic libraries to single rooms within schools and institutions. The North End Free Library and Public Bench, designed and financed by [TCA / Their + Curran Architects Inc.](#), represents the extreme of small scale libraries, distilling the library to its very core: a place to sit, store and exchange books, and share with the community.

Located at 56 Macaulay Street West in downtown Hamilton, the North End Free Library and Public Bench consists of a simple bench of durable ipe wood slats on a sculpted steel frame and a suspended cedar library box with a cast resin window. Embracing Hamilton's steelmaking heritage, the steel is unfinished and raw, left with all the mill, tool and fabrication marks and traces. A clear-coat has been applied to protect the frame. Books are imprinted with a custom stamp, designed by TCA.



This miniature library belongs to an emerging library typology going under a number of different names: book trading posts; little free libraries; pop-up libraries; or community book exchanges. These 'take a book, leave a book' libraries typically consist of small storage containers in a variety of shapes and materials which house a number of books which the community is welcomed to read and exchange. According to the Little Free Library organization, as of January 2016 there are over 36,000 little free library book exchanges in over 70 countries – and that is only counting officially registered little free libraries.

With tongue firmly in cheek, TCA principal and lead designer Bill Curran says that "this is a unique, new building type - a typology to date addressed only by folk artists, hippies, tree huggers, amateur woodworkers and other 'granola' civic minded ne'er-do-wells. It is time that serious, highbrow, bespoke architecture focuses on this emerging building type, and especially since all the starchitects have ignored it (so far)."

As an example of tactical urbanism, the North End Free Library and Public Bench is a civic gesture and public amenity that blurs the lines between the public and private. It is about creating community and celebrating literacy. More importantly, it is a project that the architects, designers and collaborators crafted with love for the citizens of Hamilton's North End neighbourhood.



Project Credits:

Bench and frame: Escape Designs, landscape architects and builders: Nathan Stewart, steel work by Marco Lueck, *precise* German millwright.
 Library: Jeff Dowding, master craftsman, carpenter, cabinetmaker, *bon vivant*.
 Graphics: Reprodex Hamilton, Jason Morse.
 Librarian, quotes: Maryanne Scime.
 Architects / provocateurs: TCA / Thier+Curran Architects Inc.

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