

Digitization of Architectural Archives: a User Needs Assessment

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Providing access to architectural archives has constituted a perennial challenge for archivists, as the often unwieldy and fragile collections are difficult to store, retrieve, and make available to researchers. Issues regarding lack of space and shrinking budgets have only exacerbated the problem of on-site access over the years. Mass digitization projects have the potential to grant researchers remote, immediate access to materials, serving not only their preliminary research needs, but also allowing for greater ease of selection should a project mature into a publication (print, or digital, or both) or an exhibition. Self-service online browsing and downloading can also free up precious staff time and reading room space. In addition to the advantages they afford staff and end users, carefully considered and well-executed digitization projects can also benefit collections, promoting their value while minimizing their handling over time. Although several studies have been done to establish best practices for large-scale digitization of primary source materials, issues unique to architectural archives point to the need for a separate study targeting their diverse user base. How can the library and archives community most effectively digitize architectural collections in order to meet the needs of their researchers while still adhering to institutional mandates, as well as the central tenets of archival theory such as respect des fonds, provenance, and original order? In this presentation, I will examine potential audiences, assessing research needs, and how other institutions have sought to provide meaningful access to their online architectural collections. Although the Getty Research Institute has yet to embark on a large-scale digitization effort focused on architectural archives, I will discuss some potential ways of approaching such a Herculean effort in light of the successes and challenges faced by the architectural archives community at large.

[Bio] Aimee Lind is an associate reference librarian at the Getty Research Library, where she has been employed since 1996. In addition to her role providing reference services, she oversees interlibrary loan operations and is part of the book digitization team. Aimee received her BA from UCLA in History/Art History and her MLIS from San Jose State University.