



Shhh!

readallaboutit

Don't believe
everything you read
about libraries being
close to extinction.

Barry Divola discovers
a hip new temple of
books in Surry Hills,
a big rise in library
memberships and
a wide range of fans
of the borrowed book.

Photography: WIK

Kiersten Fishburn and her son,
Zachary, at the Surry Hills Library.

Libraries are dim, dusty, depressing places that no one visits any more because they're full of ancient relics known as "books", which we all know are on the way to extinction. Right? Um, wrong. In fact, over the past financial year, libraries in the City of Sydney network (**Customs House**, Glebe, Haymarket, Kings Cross, Newtown, Paddington, Ultimo, Waterloo and Surry Hills) have experienced a 3.3 per cent increase in visits, a 10 per cent increase in loans and a 19 per cent increase in membership. And it's not just about the books. It's 2009 and all City of Sydney libraries have free Wi-Fi access, while various libraries across our city provide computer access, newspapers, magazines, toys, reading groups, children's story time, author talks and a range of CDs and DVDs to borrow. And it's all free, which has resulted in an increase in usage and membership since the global financial crisis hit last year. Add to this the fact that Sydney's newest library, in Surry Hills, is a beautifully designed building and it seems that libraries have become desirable places to hang out rather than institutions to be avoided. And from what we've seen while visiting many of them over the past month – and meeting the people who use them and work in them – librarians might still favour sensible shoes but not one of them looked at us primly and said, "Shhh!"