Elemental Construction

UCLA Warner Graduate Art Studio renovation and addition, Culver City, CA, USA

Main authors
Sharon Johnston and Mark Lee, architects, Johnston Marklee, Los Angeles, USA

Project data
Project group: Architecture, building and civil engineering
Client: The Regents of the University of California
Project background: Public commission
Planned start: January 2018

Summary and appraisal of the project by the jury
The proposed building provides a new home for the Warner Graduate Art Studios at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) site of a former paper factory in Culver City, Los Angeles County. The project’s basic objectives are twofold: to rehabilitate existing urban and architectural elements – through adaptive reuse and complementary additions; and to frame a discourse on the role of mundane construction as the generator of space and form. Under the motto “Adapting for a Flexible Future,” the new addition – an L-shaped building comprised of naturally ventilated spaces and a series of outdoor courtyards – is designed in such a way as to accommodate for the long-term longevities of this inherently adaptive building comes from a focus on the fundamentals of proportion, atmosphere and material economy. The architecture optimizes sequence and adjacency on the interior as well as connections to the surrounding city on the exterior in an exceptional industrial space that is informing enough to create in.

Sustainable resource management
The primary goal of the Graduate Art Studios is to retain the provisional character of the existing studies while incorporating essential student facilities. The new addition – an L-shaped building comprised of conditioned and naturally ventilated spaces – is inherently adaptive to future change by fusing together new and old structures to allow differentiated and yet unanticipated uses to unfold freely.

The jury appreciated the idea to bring a nondescript building back to life through new construction, a design respectful of the existing structure, while introducing new spatial qualities to the entire ensemble. A diagram is established between past and present, for an educational facility directed toward the future – a dialogue most clearly expressed in the sequence of spaces at the intersection of the “new” and the “old.” The jury valued the efforts undertaken to integrate low-technology principles in the design, without falling into clichés of “sustainability.” Economic, contextual, and environmental aspects are combined to form a sophisticated building in an extraordinary approach for an ordinary structure. The project gives due credit to an understanding of sustainability as a “commonsense” culture, contributing to an elemental construction of poetic expression.

Statements on the sustainability of the project by the authors
Strategic simplicity
The building integrates elemental construction methods in a new approach to spaces for exploratory studio production. Rather than adding layers of sustainable technology, the design小镇s the performance of each of its components. New 25cm thick concrete tilt-up walls obviate the need for waterproofing membranes, and minimize construction waste. The walls provide thermal mass on southwest zones, enclosing interior and exterior commingling workshops, classrooms, galleries and gardens. The lightweight roof minimizes opaque enclosure in favor of diffusing sunlight with polycarbonate panels which shade unconditioned work zones. The fluidity of interior and exterior space maximizes the benefits of passive ventilation through roof venting over conditioned air.

Sustainable resource management
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Adapting for a flexible future
21st century creative learning environments must address their environmental context and the demands for continuous change in production space. Through adaptive reuse and new construction – employing the industrial vernacular bow truss roof and tilt-up wall – our design treats space as infrastructure where combinations of underdetermined program spaces interweave individual studios and shared laboratory spaces with concentrated areas of mechanical cooling. The longevity of this inherently adaptive building comes from a focus on the fundamentals of proportion, atmosphere and material economy. The architecture optimizes sequence and adjacency on the interior as well as connections to the surrounding city on the exterior in an exceptional industrial space that is inform enough to create in.

Further authors
Nicholas Hofstede, Lindsay Erickson, David Gray, and Tori McKenna, architects, Johnston Marklee, Kevin O’Connell, structural engineer, Simpson Gumpertz & Heger; Ishwar Dhungana, civil engineer, KPF; Guy Smith, Horton Lees Brogden; Amy Mackney, Simpson Gumpertz & Heger; Chris Stierpar, Capital Projects Group; John Carter, C Plus C Consulting; Cassidy Green, GIA; Walker Donahue, Jensen Hughes; all from Los Angeles; Sean Hira, engineer, ME Engineers, Culver City, CA; Hayden McKay, Horton Lees Brogden, New York City; Reto Geiser, MGA&CO, Houston; Thomas McCorkell, Van Deusen & Associates, Pasadena, CA; Jim Good, Veneklasen; Pamela Burton, landscape architect, Pamela Burton & Company; both from Santa Monica, CA; all USA

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