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CELEBRATING FIFTY YEARS

january/february 2010



Designers of the Year: Graft
The Legendary Art Gensler
LEEDing Manufacturers
HLW Construction Cost Index

31st Annual Interiors Awards

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cover: Designers of the Year, Graft, photographed in the firm's Los Angeles office in November 2009. Photo by Ricky Ridecós.

CONTRACT, volume 51, issue 1, (USPS 307-970, ISSN 1530-6224, January/February 2010) is published bi-monthly, issued by Nielsen Business Media, Inc., 770 Broadway, New York, NY 10003-9595. Editorial and advertising offices: Nielsen Business Media, Inc., 770 Broadway, New York, NY 10003-9595; 646-654-4500; fax: 646-654-7370. Customer Service: For address changes (provide old mailing label and new address including zip or postal code and allow four to six weeks), single copy sales (\$10 payable in advance), and subscription inquiries (\$89/year U.S., \$94/year Canada, \$175/year all other foreign), call 800-697-8859, fax 847-291-4816 or write to ncon@nmedia.com, or Contract Magazine, P.O. Box 3601, Northbrook, IL 60065-3601. Periodicals postage paid at New York, NY, and additional mailing offices. Printed in the USA. Postmaster: Please send address changes to Contract, P.O. Box 1056, Skokie, IL 60076-8056. Canada Post Publications Mail Agreement No. 40031729. Return undeliverable Canadian addresses: To DHL Global Mail, 4960-2 Walker Road, Windsor, ON N9A 6J3.

issue 1 volume 51 www.contractmagazine.com

public space

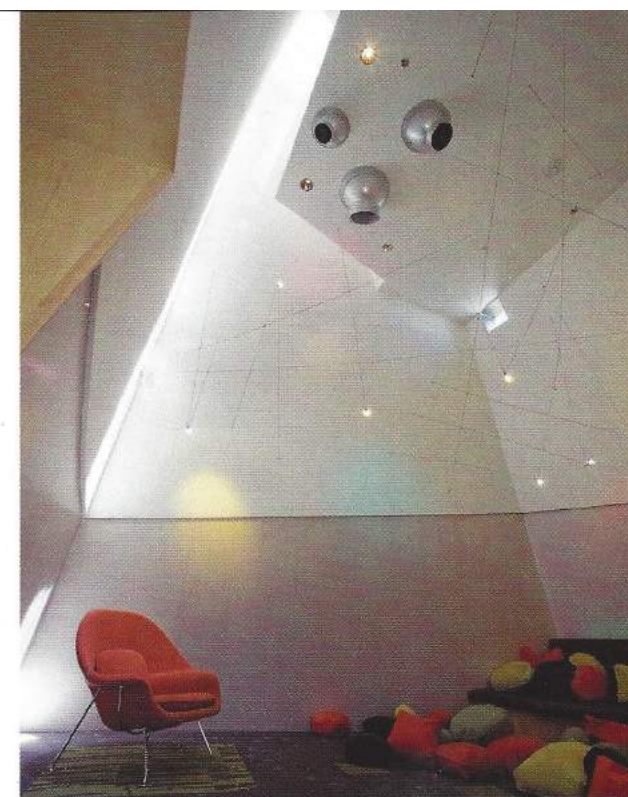
By Jennifer Thiele Busch
Photography by Bill Timmerman

project: Agave Library
client: Phoenix Public Library
location: Phoenix
designer: will bruder+PARTNERS



Agave Library, a regional branch of the Phoenix Public Library system, is located in a historically underserved area north of the city, neighboring a gas station, a fast food restaurant, a supermarket, and a car wash. At 25,000 sq. ft., it is one of the largest satellite facilities in the system, but it was subject to a strict budget to fulfill a rather typical list of requirements, including community space, access to technology, and separate, dedicated areas for children, teens, and adults. Architecturally, it is the ultimate box, like one you might find housing a Home Depot. By all accounts, it could have been a pretty unremarkable structure. So the fact that Agave Library is so visually arresting is a testament to the exuberant interior design by will bruder+PARTNERS.

No stranger to the Phoenix Public Library system, Will Bruder gained acclaim in 1989 for his much-celebrated design of the Phoenix Central Library. In the ensuing years, he has worked repeatedly for this design-savvy client creating numerous branch libraries around the fast-growing city. Nevertheless, he is particularly proud of what has been achieved with Agave, calling it, "user-friendly, intuitive, and as seamless a design as we've ever done."



jury comment:

"The redefinition of library as community center is executed flawlessly in this project. From the moment the billboard façade beckons pedestrians into the daylit interior, the project welcomes the community through a range of spatial experiences, community spaces, and resources. This project also does a great job of creating areas that nurture degrees of privacy while remaining extremely open and bright. The use of the furniture as the main source of color immediately creates a magnet for people to congregate, albeit quietly....."



The simple concept of a completely open, big-box interior with few physical divisions and uninterrupted sight lines places the children's area at one end of the structure, the teen area at the other, and the adult collections and spaces in between. Each is executed with colors, furnishings, floor and ceiling treatments, graphic signage, and art works that define the different spaces and give each its own character. Lead interior designer Marjorie Fichthorn Whitton explains that the overarching concept for the interior was that it be designed as a kind of desert reading garden. "We saw our garden as a series of outdoor rooms to be occupied," she says. "Materials and colors transitioned from outside to inside."

"The designers were able to bring in all these different kinds of slightly funky, colorful features that make the energy in the building so lovely," says Shera Farnham, assistant city librarian. Special touches include a children's story tower, protruding beyond the walls of the main building, which Farnham calls "a wonderful, magical area." A dramatic sculpture by a local artist hangs over the circulation desk, there is access to a landscaped patio off the adult area, and the placement of the teen area on the far edge of the structure intentionally draws adolescents through the entire building. "We bring them in, then take them on a journey," says Bruder. Everywhere natural light flows through an abundance of windows. "We didn't need the light, but we needed the spirit of it," he adds.

"Spirited" is an apt description of Agave, and nowhere is this more evident than in the 56-ft. metal scrim that adorns the entry façade of the building. The scrim features the word "agave" in neon letters, and acts as a marquis to give the library architectural presence in its rather banal surroundings. "Agave represents the best of what happens with great architecture and interior design," observes Farnham. "There are so many wonderful places to feast your eyes." ☐

