

### 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) on the site of a former wall-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 forthcoming changes. While stitching the new complex into the surrounding fabric, the project fuses 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 dialog is established between past and present, for an educational facility directed toward the future – a dialog 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 "common sense" culture, contributing to an elemental construction of poetic expression.



Image 1: Northwest corner main entry.

#### 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 distills the performance of each of its components. New 25cm thick concrete tilt-up walls obviate the need for waterproofing membranes and insulation, 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 distribution.

unfold freely, while stitching the new complex into the surrounding fabric. The total occupiable area of the site increases by half, and 19% of the new building is reimagined as cost effective, passively cooled and shaded outdoor communal production space. Using tilt up concrete over a precast saves construction time and USD 800,000 in material transport costs. The project is financed by local philanthropic sources.

##### 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 intertwine 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 informal enough to create in.

##### Sustainable resource management

The primary goal of the Graduate Art Studios is to retain the provisional character of the existing studios 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 use to

#### 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, KPFF; **Guy Smith**, Horton Lees Brogden; **Amy Hackney**, Simpson Gumpertz & Heger; **Chris Sterparn**, Capital Projects Group; **John Carter**, C Plus C Consulting; **Cassidy Green**, GAIA; **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**, MG&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



Image 2: Southwest corner sculpture yard.



Image 3: Sculpture yard view looking east.



Image 4: Center bay critique space in renovated warehouse.

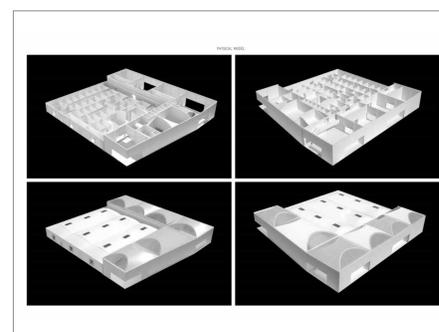


Image 5: Physical model and massing studies.



Image 6: Perspective sections through new building.



Image 7: Ground floor schematic plan.

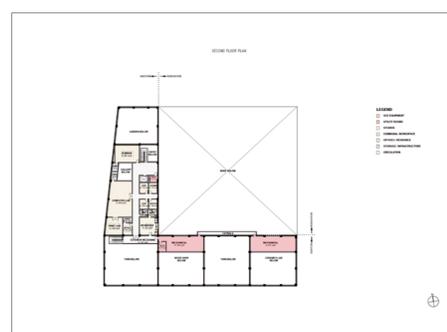


Image 8: Second floor schematic plan.

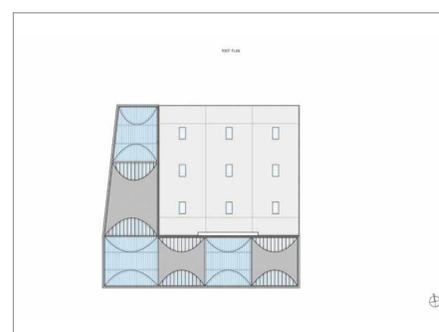


Image 9: Schematic roof plan.

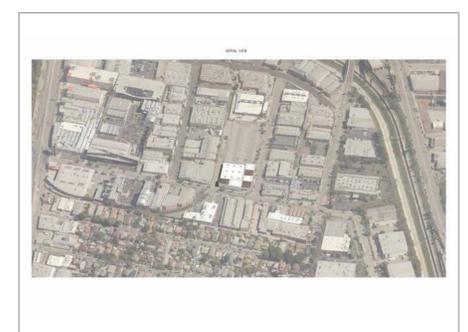


Image 10: Culver City aerial view.