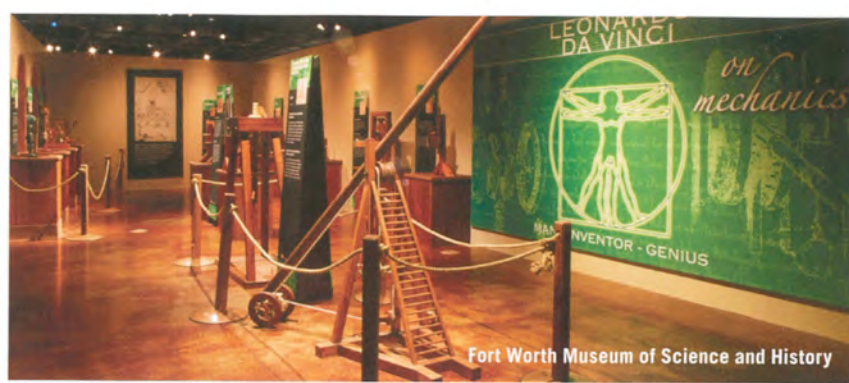


TexasArchitect

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2011



Informal Learning



Fort Worth Museum of Science and History

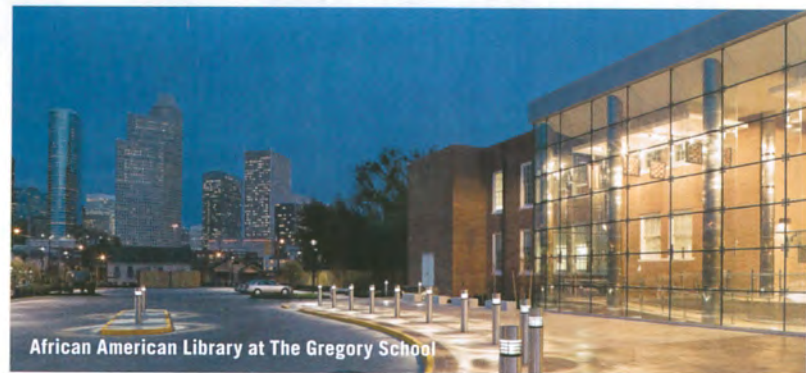
Today's architects are fully engaged with educators to design facilities for informal learning where students of all ages can benefit from nontraditional approaches to the pursuit of knowledge. In this annual "Design for Education" edition, *Texas Architect* looks at four very different types of academic projects that share a common thread in being uniquely created to accomplish the client's specialized mission. ☐



TAMU Mitchell Physics Building



Alamo Colleges Northwest Vista Campus



African American Library at The Gregory School

Lakefront Learning

by DROR BALDINGER, AIA





COMPLETED IN 2005, THE MASTER PLAN EXPANSION for the Alamo Colleges/Northwest Vista campus was a successful collaboration between Alamo Architects of San Antonio and Houston's SWA, which also served as landscape architect. The Northwest Vista Campus encompasses 137 acres bordering on Loop 1604 to the west.

The original master plan dates to 1995 and by late 2004, five buildings were realized on campus. The buildings were all laid out rigidly on an orthogonal grid, which appears to have been superimposed on the site with little consideration of topography, and has resulted in large elevated walkways and connecting platforms.

Architecturally, the existing buildings were designed with equal rigidity and uniformity, resulting in formulaic aesthetics of brick veneer exterior walls, vertically oriented rectangular "punched" windows and overhanging green standing seam hipped roofs. The architectural ambience of the campus recalled a mid-1970s corporate campus more than a college campus.

The new master plan project offered an opportunity for a change. Alamo Architects and SWA, working in close collaboration with campus leadership, sought to address the future through preservation of the natural environment, and through an exclusive use of native landscaping. They also sought to activate public areas and the spaces between buildings through a plan that relaxed the rigid formality of the existing campus. Additional objectives included the establishment of clear circulation patterns and diversification of architectural expressions. The overarching objectives, then, were to transform the campus into a place of learning with the physical distinctiveness of a university campus.

Originating the master planning process with an analysis of site utilities, building areas and impervious coverage, topography and hydrology, vehicular and pedestrian circulation patterns, and program adjacencies, the design team ultimately developed four very different typological con-



- CAMPUS SITE PLAN**
- 1 JUNIPER HALL ACADEMIC CENTER
 - 2 REDBUD LEARNING CENTER
 - 3 LIVE OAK HALL
 - 4 PHYSICAL PLANT
 - 5 PALMETTO FINE AND PERFORMING ARTS CENTER
 - 6 CYPRESS CAMPUS CENTER
 - 7 EXISTING BUILDING

PROJECT Juniper Hall Academic Center and Redbud Learning Center; San Antonio
CLIENT Alamo Colleges
ARCHITECT Alamo Architects
DESIGN TEAM Michael Lanford, AIA; Jerry Lammers, AIA; Heidi Silva; Victor Castillo; Marcello Martinez, AIA; Keith Watson
CONTRACTOR Bartlett Cocke General Contractors
CONSULTANTS Broaddus & Associates + Project Control (construction program manager); SWA Group (landscape); Bender Wells Clark Design (landscape); Goetting and Assoc. (MEP); Jaster-Quintanilla (structural); CDS/Muery Services (civil); Protection Development Inc. (code)
PHOTOGRAPHER Chris Cooper

PROJECT Cypress Campus Student Center, San Antonio
CLIENT Alamo Colleges
ARCHITECT Sprinkle & Co.
DESIGN TEAM Davis Sprinkle, AIA; Jeff Langham, AIA; Brett Davidson; Anilu Trevino; Jose Torres; Travis Lucy
CONTRACTOR Bartlett Cocke General Contractors
CONSULTANTS Broaddus & Associates + Project Control (construction program manager); Alpha Consulting Engineers (structural); CDS/Muery Services (civil); Bender Wells Clark Design (landscape); Barron Engineering (MEP); SWA Group (landscape); Protection Development Inc. (code)
PHOTOGRAPHER Chris Cooper

PROJECT Live Oak Academic Center, San Antonio
CLIENT Alamo Colleges
ARCHITECT OCO Architects
DESIGN TEAM Mickey Conrad, AIA; Carlos Constantino, Assoc. AIA; Debbie Johnson, AIA; Jose Balboa
CONTRACTOR Bartlett Cocke General Contractors
CONSULTANTS Broaddus & Associates + Project Control (construction program manager); Alpha Consulting Engineers (structural); CDS/Muery Services (civil); Bender Wells Clark Design (landscape); Barron Engineering (MEP); SWA Group (landscape); Protection Development Inc. (code)
PHOTOGRAPHERS Chris Cooper; Mark Menjivar

(preceding spread) The 82,000-sf Live Oak Academic Center by OCO Architects is among several new buildings at the Alamo Community College District's Northwest Vista Campus. A new master plan by Alamo Architects and SWA was implemented in 2005 and featured a man-made lake at the center of the 137-acre campus.

cepts. Two of the concepts – called “Academic Village” and “Linear City” – concentrated development on the western half of the site and left the heavily wooded eastern half virtually untouched. The other two schemes – labeled “Facing the Meadows” and “Summit Campus” – expanded development into the eastern half of the site.

It is important to realize that all schemes assumed, in a way, a clean site. Existing conditions simply do not appear to have been considered in the master plan. One can surmise from this that future expansion phases on the campus will first require the demolition of existing structures and parking lots. This, it can be argued, is an aggressive assumption without which a cohesive and unified campus plan will be difficult to achieve.

Ultimately, the client selected a slightly altered version of “Summit Campus” that called for three out of the four new buildings to be built towards the topographical high point of the site and facing a man-made lake. However, the current transitional realization of the master plan obviously had to contend with the reality imposed by existing conditions and their impact on how the campus is experienced now and perhaps for many years to come. In this phase, the primary challenge, where existing conditions do remain intact, was to achieve one campus, not two halves. Without a doubt, the architects faced a steep challenge.

The main features of the master plan are a man-made lake and a “campus green,” formed on three sides by new buildings with the fourth side open to the lake. The lake, which is the exclusive source of irrigation on campus, was formed in a natural drainage channel that was permanently filled. The lake collects all air conditioning condensate and surface parking runoff, in addition to San Antonio Water System re-cycled water. Fish were introduced to help maintain the lake's ecological system.

Though it is ecologically correct, and serves as a strong organizational element for the structures around it, the master plan also makes one realize that the campus is made up of two distinct halves.

The “campus green” is clearly an attempt to form a quadrangle; that is, an open space defined by the hard edges of neighboring buildings. The topography naturally cascades from the campus auditorium at the top of the hill towards the water. Much of the native vegetation was retained with only the undergrowth removed, leaving large clusters of trees in place. Near the lake, where more active student outdoor activities are envisioned, the architects supplemented natural vegetation with native, drought-tolerant grass.

Undoubtedly, the lake is the campus' defining feature. It makes for a picturesque scene but the main question in the context of a campus plan is: Can an uninhabitable space – such as a body of water rather than an accessible gathering space – become the heart of a college campus?

The designs of the structures that emerged from the master plan were the independent efforts of three San Antonio firms: Alamo Architects, Sprinkle and Co., and O'Neill Conrad Oppelt. Across the lake and across the “campus green,” they form a dialogue that brings to mind Robert Venturi's famous 1966 manifesto on “Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture,” as well as his categorization of buildings into “ducks” or “decorated sheds.” Venturi made these categorizations in his 1972 seminal book, *Learning from Las Vegas*. In the three structures one can find Venturi's polemics between “hybrids” vs. “pure,” “compromising” vs. “clean,” the “ambiguous” vs. the “articulate,” “messy vitality vs. obvious unity.” All three structures reference, in their use of materials and color, enough of the existing campus materials mentioned above to loosely tie them together contextually.

(clockwise from bottom right) The Redbud Learning Center, part of the complex designed by Alamo Architects, includes a cyber café adjacent to the man-made lake. The library within Redbud features a playful arrangement of acoustical fiber panels in various colors, angles, and heights that evoke blowing confetti. Tilted rooflines give Redbud's exterior a similar expression of exuberance.



Juniper and Redbud

Alamo Architects designed the first structures built under the 2005 master plan—Juniper Hall, a three-story building with 76,000 square feet of classrooms and faculty offices, and Redbud Learning Center, a 41,000-sf library. On the ground level, facing the lake, Redbud also includes a cyber café adjacent and an outdoor seating area. In between Juniper Hall and Redbud, one finds a well proportioned outdoor space. The space is the campus' first attempt at considering the connectivity of program functions across an outdoor space. Forming and overlooking the modest plaza are the library and its writing lab, two of the most frequently visited spaces on campus.

As the closest structures to the campus' existing buildings, Juniper Hall and Redbud Learning Center assumed the responsibility of expressing the idea of transition from past to present. In plan, Juniper Hall respects the orthogonal shape of the pre-existing campus grid, and is located parallel to its neighboring building, with which it is linked, via bridge. Juniper Hall also echoes the neighboring building's massing and roof.

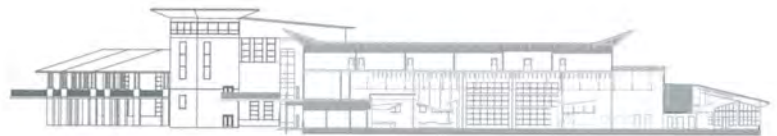
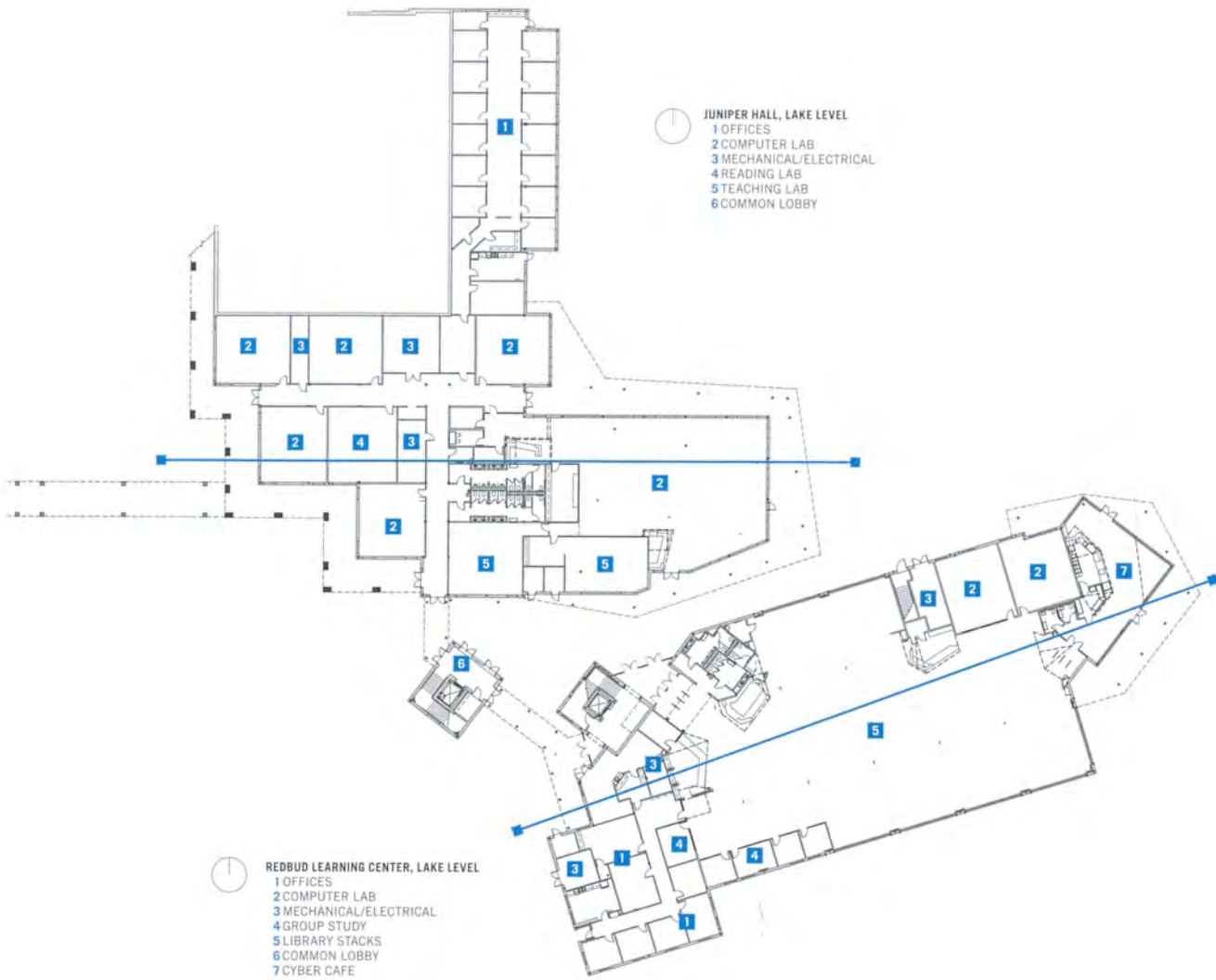
With Juniper Hall creating visual and physical transitions, Alamo Architects approached the design of Redbud Learning Center with a greater sense of design freedom. The building's long axis was rotated off the orthogonal grid as if to point the way towards the future campus. Materials, forms, and color noticeably relate to pre-existing.

To break the uniformity and monotony of existing rooflines — hipped, standing-seam metal — the architects "flipped up" the roofs of the new buildings to exaggerate a jagged appearance. With their exaggerated proportions, these soaring and tilted overhanging planes shade glass walls and provide effective cover to terraces and outdoor spaces adjacent to the building. Interior spaces were treated with the same manner of visual exuberance.

The largest and most important space in the complex is Redbud's library. Spatially, the reading room is comprised of one large room. Glass walls along the south and east sides flood the space with natural light and afford views to the lake and adjacent common spaces.

The strengths of the Juniper and Redbud academic complex are in their relationship with the surrounding lake, via outdoor terraces; spatial transparency between interior and exterior spaces; and the space formed between the complex's two structures. In this building, Alamo Architects stayed true to their core design beliefs, drawing inspiration from Venturi's "messy vitality."





REDBUD SECTION

JUNIPER SECTION



RESOURCES MASONRY UNITS: Acme, Featherlite; EXPANSION JOINT COVERS: InPro Corp.; ARCHITECTURAL WOODWORK: Terrill Manufacturing Co. (Environ Biocomposites); ROOF AND WALL PANELS: Berridge Mfg. (Port Enterprises); MEMBRANE ROOFING: US Ply (Port Enterprises); WOOD DOORS: Haley (Wessely-Thompson Hardware); GYPSUM: USG; TILE: Crossville, DalTile; ACOUSTICAL CEILINGS: Tectum; PAINT: ICI; TOILET COMPARTMENTS: Santana-Comtec (DEA Specialties); SHADES: Draper (Service Shade Shop); FURNITURE: Neinkamper, Sandler Seating, Landscape Forms, Arcadia, Bretford