



With its copper roof reminiscent of a saddle or a Conestoga wagon, the San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts sits like a sculpture above the Concho River (this page and opposite).

BRASH BEAUTY A bold, quirky building by HHPA's Malcolm Holzman for Texas' SAN ANGELO MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS is intentionally dissonant

By David Dillon

Malcolm Holzman, FAIA, doesn't design conventionally beautiful buildings, classically proportioned and finished with Euclidean precision. Vitruvian maxims about firmness, commodity, and delight don't run through his head as he sits at his drawing board. He prefers surprising connections. Like a jazz musician playing just off the note, he improvises as he goes, using dissonance and counterpoint as basic parts of his repertoire. "Architecture," he argues, "should wake people up. It should make their eyes pop open and say, 'God, what am I looking at!'"

To some critics, this is the shallowest kind of architectural aspiration—Hollywood special effects applied to buildings. To Holzman, a principal at Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Architects (HHPA), it represents honest enthusiasm for variety over pristine uniformity. He prefers Hawksmoor to Wren, admires Furness, and could live happily in almost anything by John Soane. "Beauty for me is broad and accepting, not pure," he explains. "By mixing things up you can get far richer effects than

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if you stick to one or two materials. That would be like eating a twelve-course meal of tofu. I couldn't do it."

Starting with early projects, such as his firm's 1983 radio station WCCO in Minneapolis, Holzman has experimented continuously—some would say obsessively—with new materials and fabrication techniques, playing rough against smooth, dumb against smart, elegant against everyday. Clients who aren't intrigued by materials, color, texture, and collage should obviously choose somebody else.

Holzman's approach has yielded dazzling results, as well as a few genuine head-scratchers. One of his more controversial projects is the \$6 million San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts, which opened last year. It is not a safe, neutral place with pure white galleries and a wash of official good taste. It's quirky, colorful, theatrical, occasionally perverse, and definitely not what a visitor might expect to find in a small (population 95,000) west Texas city 90 miles from the nearest interstate, on the road to nowhere.

David Dillon is the architecture critic of the Dallas Morning News and a contributing editor of ARCHITECTURAL RECORD.



"I'd had it with serene seriousness and decided to take a chance on something different," explains museum director Howard Taylor, who arrived in San Angelo from Philadelphia 14 years ago and never left. "Our building breaks all the rules."

Though barely 30,000 square feet, the museum sits like a monumental sculpture above the sleepy Concho River. One end bellies out into a large, semicircular lecture and reception room. There, a terrace and sculpture garden above it offer sweeping views of a downtown that has changed little since the 1930s. A long, narrow volume at the building's opposite end, containing classrooms and ceramics studios, recalls the simple structures of nearby Fort Concho, the museum's previous home. Between the two ends lie the main galleries, one 38 and the other 45 feet tall, both single-story with exposed trusses, planked ceilings, and arcs of square punched windows, challenging curatorial convention. Crowning everything is a swooping copper roof reminiscent of a saddle or Conestoga wagon, though it also responds to the sloping site.

While such forms might be considered over the top in New York or Philadelphia, they seem right at home on the prairie. Unhindered by design review boards, academic debates, or the sway of fashion, flatlanders have often embraced bold, even bizarre architecture. It was no fluke that Fort Worth got Louis Kahn's Kimbell Art Museum, or that Oklahoma City ended up with John Johansen's Mummies Theater and the eccentric houses of Bruce Goff. Just up the road, in Bartlesville, Okla.,

Project: San Angelo Museum of Fine Arts and Education, San Angelo, Tex.

Architect: HHPA—Malcolm Holzman, FAIA, partner-in-charge; Douglas L. Moss, AIA, project architect; Nestor Bottino, AIA, Chris Kaiser, AIA, construction architect; Caroline Bertrand, interior designer; Michael Connolly, Yasin Abdullah, Meys Schaff, Winslow

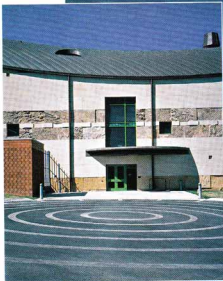
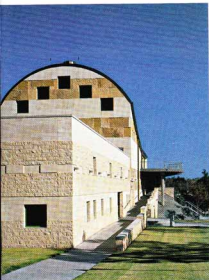
Wu, design team; Steven Stainbrook, graphics; Joyce Louie, interiors

Associate architect: Chaikos Zentner Marcum Architects

Engineer: José L. Guerra

Consultants: Robert Davis (lighting); Bomer Associates (accounting)

General contractor: Templeton Construction



Limestone from the quarry's surface acquired color and rough texture through exposure to the elements. Varied colors and thicknesses, arranged in horizontal bands, animate the facade (this page and opposite).

Frank Lloyd Wright's Price Tower sprouted. And the last skyscraper renaissance took place in Houston and Dallas.

Nobody on the museum's building committee had ever heard of Holzman. Nor had they the slightest interest in architectural theory. "Out here, architects who talk in abstract terms about what a building wants to be talk themselves right out of the job," says the director. What the committee did want was a museum with richness, some connection to the place, more civic character than Fort Concho, and enough flair to put San Angelo on the map. Everything else was up for grabs.

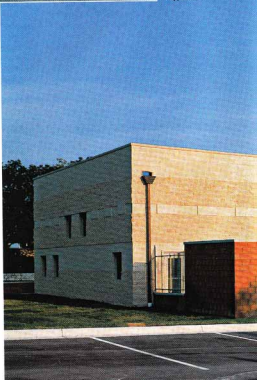
The committee liked the solidity and odd, off-key quality of HHPA's 1985 addition to the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts and kept a close eye on two other Texas projects then under way: the firm's Walsh Center for the Performing Arts in Fort Worth and their Murchison Performing Arts Center in Denton.

The Walsh Center is a canted cube faced with four kinds of stone and packed with ramps, staircases, and balconies that create a sense

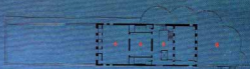
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of fluidity and purposeful chaos. One soaring wall of red D'Hanis tile looks like an abstraction of Bryce Canyon. The Murchison Center is a collage of brick, stone, tile, and galvanized zinc with blasts of red, coral, blue, and yellow and plenty of cheap materials dressed up to look expensive. The main lobby is framed by rows of metal air ducts and concrete columns that make it seem both grand and casual, like a pop version of Karnak. "My position is that there are no good or bad materials," says Holzman. "Everything depends on how you use them. You can go with the grain or against it; the only thing you can't do is torture them."

Holzman interpreted the building committee's demand for richness to mean stone, and he chose a west Texas limestone from nearby



1. Art studios
2. Museum support
3. Lobby
4. Galleries
5. Meeting
6. Sculpture garden
7. Outdoor art studio



UPPER LEVEL

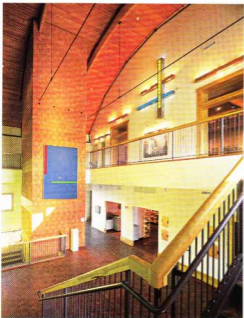
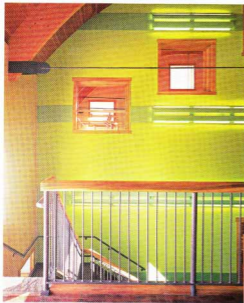


MAIN LEVEL



LOWER LEVEL





Garden City: not flawless blocks from the depths of the quarry, however, but discarded ones lying on the surface. Scoured and discolored by wind, rain, and even meteor showers, they had the textural depth and richness to animate massive walls. Holzman had the stone cut into four-by-eight-foot blocks and laid up in bands separated by narrow sawn pieces, like a quilt. The facade's colors range from ochre to creamy yellow and dusty white. Light not only bounces off the walls but seems almost to reside in them. The building committee took one look at a mock-up and approved.

Around patios, loading docks, and elevators, Holzman used the same red D'Hanis tile as at the Walsh Center. The floors are end-grain mesquite, which weathers to a deep reddish brown, and the gallery ceilings are stained pine, recalling those at Fort Concho. Throughout the building Holzman's detailing is exuberant, but often intentionally imperfect. Instead of matching the grain on the wainscoting, for example, he butt-joined pieces of slightly different color and texture to de-deify the joints. "I've learned to accept the craftsmanship of the time," he says. "Unless you've got an incredible budget, it's easier these days to get people not to line things up than to work to incredible tolerances."

Yet for all its contrariness, this aesthetic is not mocking or sardonic. Unlike Robert Venturi's, Holzman's wry smile doesn't devolve into an ironic detachment and ultimate suspension of qualitative judgment.

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Holzman positions himself as playful but serious, more blue-collar than ivory tower. "You don't have to be trained in architecture to understand what I do," he claims. "I try to get a hook into people through materials because that's what they are constantly bumping up against." The result is work that challenges, rather than soothes, the eye.

A year after the museum's opening, Taylor still meets people who tell him his building is ugly and urge him to prosecute whoever perpetrated it. Some dislike the saddle roof; others object to the motley stone or the lime green window trim. "A sculpted building like ours startles people because it challenges conventional ways of seeing," he responds. "Architecture can't be all right angles and smooth surfaces—there has to be some fun."

For the most part, however, San Angelenos are delighted with their new museum, referring to it on posters and flyers as "the jewel of the concho." The new county courthouse and the chamber of commerce headquarters have taken cues from its stone walls and swooping copper roof. It's about to appear on the cover of the regional phone book. Even architecture professors are bringing their students for a look.

What they see is a building that defies easy classification: A vernacular modern structure with Richardsonian elements and neo-Victorian decorative touches. It's risky, quirky, sometimes (though not usually) jumbled architecture—and about as far from serene seriousness as one can get. ■

Sources

Curtain wall: Kawneer

Masonry: Texasone Quarries
(Hadrian Texas limestone)

Windows: Kawneer (aluminum)

Paints and stains: Benjamin Moore

Lighting: LSI (gallery); Kim (exterior)

Elevator: Dover Oilraulic

Wall panels: Marlite (colored wood)

W/W For more information on the people and products involved with this project, go to **Projects** at:

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