

University of Arizona Poetry Center

Tucson, USA

2008

Line and Space LLC

www.lineandspace.com

“Poetry is the food of the spirit, and spirit is the instigator of all revolutions, wether political or personal, wether national, worldwide, or within the life of a single quiet human being”. These words are attributed to Ruth Walgreen Stephan (1910 - 1974) who first visited Arizona in the 1930’s. Ruth Stephan was a distinguished novelist and poet who donated a collection of several hundred books, and a cottage, to the University of Arizona campus in 1960. This modest beginning belied the vision of Mrs Stephan, who continued to generously contribute to building a distinguished collection of poetry that would, in time, gain both national and international significance.

The Poetry Center’s Reading series is now renowned worldwide since its inaugural series in 1962. Guest readers and lecturers are invited to stay in the Poet’s Cottage. When the number of

volumes grew to 70,000 items by 2004, architects Line and Space were commissioned to commence the design phase of a new building to house the precious collection. The Helen S Schaeffer Poetry Center was named in recognition of the chair of the Poetry Center’s Development Committee.

The greatest challenge facing the architects was how to reconcile the inherent contradictions in the brief and provide a place suitable for active discourse as well as quiet solitude. A similar dilemma was the desirability of harnessing natural light for reading, whilst protecting the valuable books from damaging ultra violet rays. The value of the collection meant that security had to be factored into the design without compromising the poetry’s accessibility. These apparent contradictions would both challenge and inform the design concept.

Population | 525,796

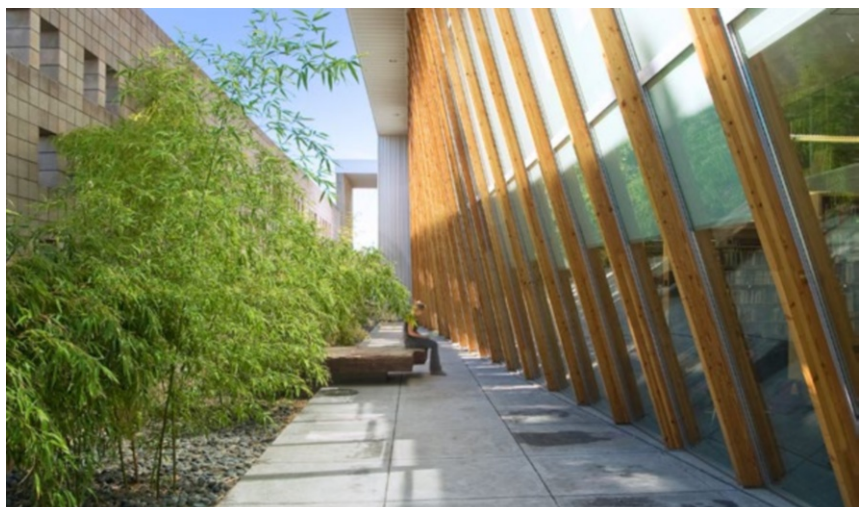
Co-ordinates | 32° 13’18”N
110° 55’ 35”W

Elevation | 728 m (2,389’)

Precipitation | 299.7 mm (11.8”)

Temperature | Average High:
37.88 C (100.2 F)
Average Low:
3.83 C (38.9 F)

Humidity | 38.5%





Innovative passive design strategies were employed specifically to enhance the visitors experience in a facility located in the harsh environment of the Sonoran Desert. The design team focused on the need to reduce the resources required for the building to function. To achieve this, the structure and fabric of the building was required to respond to its climactic environment and its topographical location.

The primary consideration was that of protecting the indoor and outdoor space from the intense heat of the desert sun. This was achieved by creating a series of stacked and overlapping roof planes (Figs. 3, 6). The architect's sections A and B illustrate the transitional shaded space outside the Humanities Seminar Room. This softly illuminated sitting area is protected by an old Mesquite tree, which provides a connection between the building and the natural world enhancing the experience of the outdoor readings on a warm desert night (Fig. 5). Utilising the Mesquite tree was part of the strategy aimed at improving the site's ecological

balance. Landscape designs targeted the existing asphalt parking areas surrounding the site. Native Sonoran desert trees and drought tolerant plants were introduced to provide shade for the new building and the car park to mitigate the heat island effect and provide a habitat for wildlife. Fractured granite and river rock were liberally used in the hard landscaping to improve ground water retention and reduce storm water run-off.

The transport strategy resolved to make use of the nearby multi-storey car park, adding only 17 spaces to the new site. Shaded bicycle racks promote the use of pedal power. From the adjacent residential neighbourhoods, via the busy 400 seat Humanities Seminar room and adjoining transitional space the visitor continues on what the architects describe as "a progression towards solitude". On their journey through increasingly more intimate spaces the poetry pilgrims pass through a myriad of considered design features before emerging into the bamboo garden; a place of quiet contemplation (Figs. 1, 2, 4).











Fig. 7 above | Fig. 8 below | Fig. 9 next page above





Energy efficiency is achieved primarily through passive solar design principles. This traditional Arizonan approach employs walls without fenestration, shaded by vegetation on the east and west elevations to mitigate direct solar heat gain. Daylight is delivered into open plan spaces via north and south windows that are sheltered by overhangs calculated by solar modelling of the site. This calculation carefully balances adequate summer shading whilst allowing the warmth required from winter sun to enter the building.

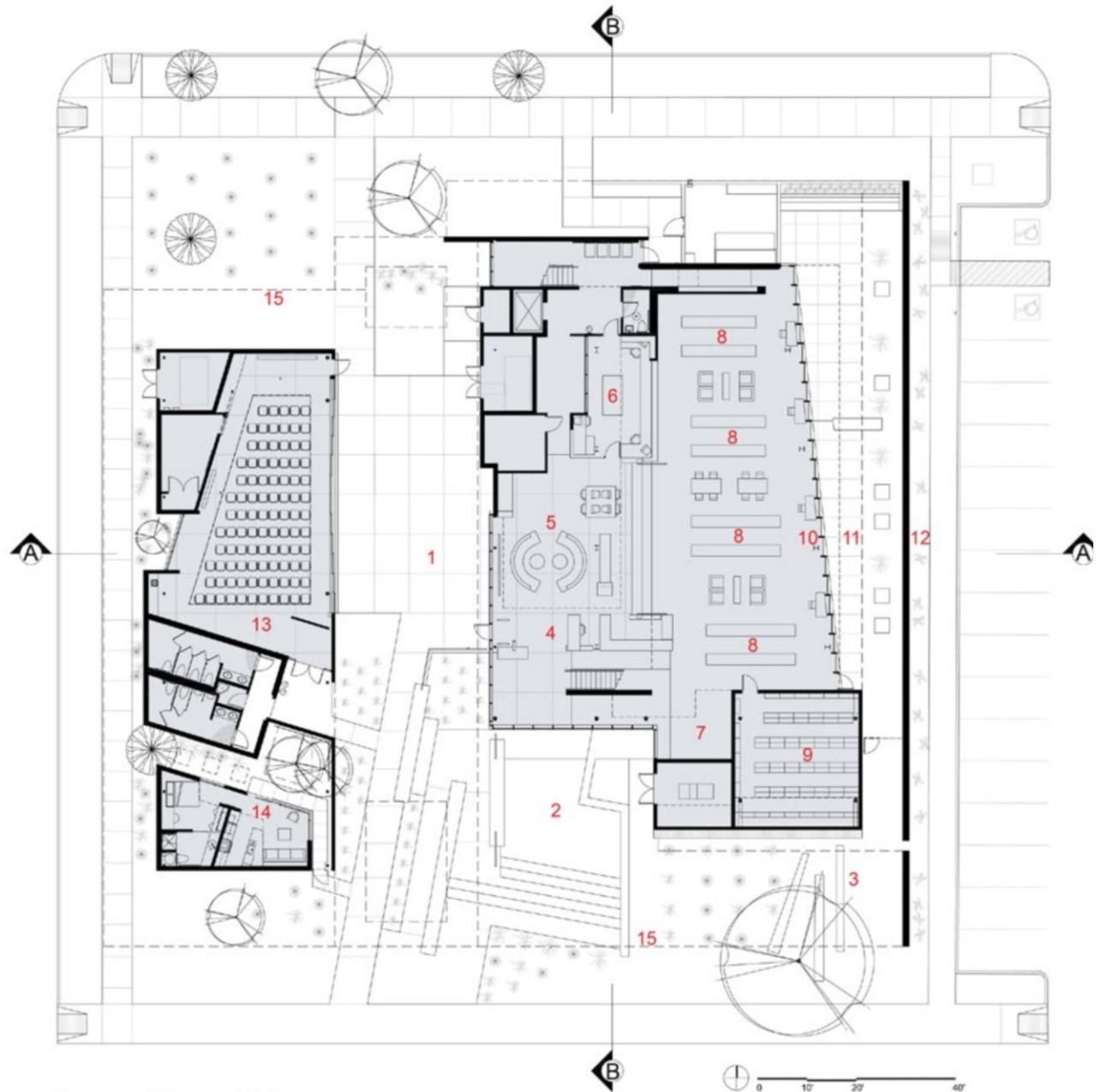
Additionally, this strategy employed in library design allows reading in natural daylight. It also minimises the U.V. damage on the reading material, however additional progressive measures have to be taken in book storage. Volumes are transferred from general access shelves to archive, restricted access, and finally climate controlled areas for the most vulnerable volumes.

The Humanities Seminar Room is naturally ventilated by the prevailing breezes from the transition space which is oriented north south and bi-sects the facility. The sum of these passive design strategies results in reduced demand on the mechanical and electrical systems. Precious

water resources are conserved by seasonally programming irrigation, use of low flush fixtures and waterless urinals. Condensation produced by the mechanical units is trapped and directed to the soft landscaped areas.

The library's interior fit-out considered the long-term flexibility and adaptability of the space (Figs. 7, 8, 9). The components within the layout were designed for ease of disassembly, versatility and durability. The sliding glazed panels of the seminar room blurring the lines between indoor and outdoor for example (Fig. 8). The images also illustrate the design philosophy for the main structural elements of the building, that of economy and ease of maintenance. The structural steel frame and concrete masonry walls are recyclable beyond the projected life cycle of the facility.

The elements of architecture that may seem intangible to the visitor; those of orientation, scale, relationship, progression and indeed line and space, are originally conceived in the architects design concept sketches (Figs. 11, 12). These sketches more than any reveal the seeds sown in the early stages of design that bear fruit in the Poetry Center's visitor experience.



Ground Level Plan

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|--|-----------------------------|
| 1. Transition Space | 9. Archive |
| 2. Odeum (covered poetry presentation space) | 10. Turning Window Wall |
| 3. Sandstone Benches | 11. Bamboo Garden |
| 4. Reception | 12. Binary Wall |
| 5. Sitting Area | 13. Humanities Seminar Room |
| 6. Librarian's Workroom | 14. Poet in Residence |
| 7. Children's Area | 15. Edge of Roof (Above) |
| 8. Collection Stacks | |

