

Natural limestone completes public library design

Under the direction of OCO Architects of San Antonio, TX, the City of Boerne, TX, recently requested a design for a new public library. Constructed with regional limestone, the shape, placement and overall design of the Patrick Heath Public Library, as it is formally called, was heavily influenced by the site on which it was built.

“We placed the library in what we felt was the most desired location on the site, respecting the existing live oak trees while taking full advantage of views overlooking a dry creek bed and the vast hill country to the east,” said Jose Balboa, Project Designer at OCO Architects. “On one side, we have a very rural scene filled with trees and nature, and on the other, we have a small historic urban community in the near distance. It was this dichotomy that gave our library its life. The library would act as a connection or gateway between these two worlds.”

Relating to historic architecture

In order to link the design back to the historic “Main Street” architecture of the Boerne area, Mickey Conrad, AIA, of OCO Architects decided to incorporate a native limestone, quarried from nearby Elmendorf, TX, and supplied by R&C Builders of San Antonio, TX. “The natural limestone was used as an exterior veneer, and at times was used inside on accent walls — allowing the exterior building materials to enter the library, in an attempt to establish visual and textural connections with the outside,” he said, adding that the stone was chosen for its range in color and texture.

“We used a mix of large and small stones, with the large stones being 30 x 16 inches, and the small stones being 12 x 6 inches,” said Conrad. “In recalling the old German stone masonry structures that can be found throughout the region, we used the largest stones around the base and the corners of the building, and the smaller stones to fill the spaces and voids between the larger stones.”

Before making a final decision on the stone, Balboa noted that other materials such as brick and other types and colors of stone were considered. “But in the end, we all knew that the limestone we picked was the best choice for this project,” he said. “It was simply what the city wanted.”

In addition to the stone, other exterior materials such as stucco with iron sulfate mixed in and Cor-Ten steel were used for the design, with the intent that they would each develop a rust color over time. “With this in mind, the color of the stone we used ranges from a cream color to a rust color — playing off the other materials,” said Conrad. After several rounds of mock-ups and adjustments to get the aesthetic the way the architect intended, he and his team presented the city with different options for the building’s exterior facade.

A community effort

“The entire community was invited to vote and give input on what they wanted the library to be,” said Balboa. “The opinion of the community was exactly parallel to what we as designers knew was right for the city of



Boerne. Our designs and their vision for their new library proved to be in perfect alignment, making every step of this project very enjoyable, which resulted in an ideal library for the city.”

Because this project was of importance to the city of Boerne, Conrad, Balboa and their team wanted to achieve a look similar to that of the local historic buildings in the area. “The most challenging aspect was to mimic the buildings with the larger stones around openings and outside corners, and using ‘chinking’ to fill in smaller gaps between the larger stones,” said Balboa.

In the beginning of the installation, Conrad and his team spent an abundance of time on site coordinating the stone pattern with the masons. “After we felt that we had reached a mutual understanding of the stone pattern, we left the masons to do their work,” he said.

Completed in June 2011, after over a year of construction, the reaction to this 30,000-square-foot project has been that of overwhelming success. “The use and honesty with respect to the inherent qualities of the natural materials used in the design of this library— both inside and out — and the strong connections to nature, make the library a very comfortable and inviting environment,” said Conrad. “It provides a distinctly hill country getaway for the community to gather, learn, read and explore.”



