

Building Scene

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School design: academic, my dear architect

By Doug Funke
staff writer

Coming up with a plan for a house to satisfy just one family can provide enough challenges for an architect.

So consider what's involved in trying to design a building to accommodate some 1,800 high school students, 160 teachers and support staff, and the community at large, which also will use the facilities and foot the bill.

Architects like C. William Brubaker, a partner at Perkins & Will in Chicago, know what it's all about. His firm designed the new Troy High School now under construction at Long Lake Road and Northfield Parkway.

"You analyze the site and the neighborhood and you also analyze the educational needs — those two things are the primary form generators," he said.

"We met with dozens and dozens of teachers, community groups, board of education, students and administrators to find out what is going to be taught and how it's going to be taught," Brubaker said. "That determines space needs."

"Community input is very important," added Lowell Crandall, executive director of auxiliary services for the Troy schools. "Recognizing from the outset it's a community building, we wanted to hear what they had to say."

PLANS ADVANCED from schematic design to development, working drawings, construction bidding and now the work itself.

The highlights:

- Two academic wings, one of three stories, the other two stories nearest a residential area graded so that they appear not as high.

- Sectionalization so that gym, pools and locker rooms are clustered at the opposite end of the building from the academic wings, fine arts classrooms are placed near the auditorium, and the library and cafeteria as are centrally located and easily accessible from all points.

- A spire at the main entrance pinpointing administrative and counseling offices.

- An integrated audio/visual communications system.

- A curved library wall to get away from a box look and a series of outdoor steps built off the library to produce an amphitheater.

- Three kinds of exterior brick treatment to give the building a less massive appearance.

- Air conditioning in classrooms.

BUT THAT'S not all.

There's lighted parking for nearly 750 cars.

The athletic facilities — a football stadium/track, three practice football fields, three baseball diamonds, three softball diamonds, a practice soccer field and eight tennis courts — will be placed on the 72-acre site well west of existing residential subdivisions.

The school is scheduled to open in the fall of 1992. Construction costs are estimated at \$35.5 million.

Jim DeLage is an assistant superintendent on the building site for Barton Malow, construction manager.

"The first view of the building as you approach is unique — it's not a typical box design," he said. "They have some curvature, some design. They have three kinds of brick. That's eye appealing and impressive right off the bat. That carries right through the building. There's a lot of openness."

"My personal thought is what a nice atmosphere to learn in," DeLage continued. "I think there's a little something here for everyone. It's more a college atmosphere than high school."

BRUBAKER SAID his firm has designed a half dozen high schools in the last few years.

"I think the (Troy) building has more the spirit of a college and less the feel of an old high school," he said. "We're trying to make this a good academic environment."

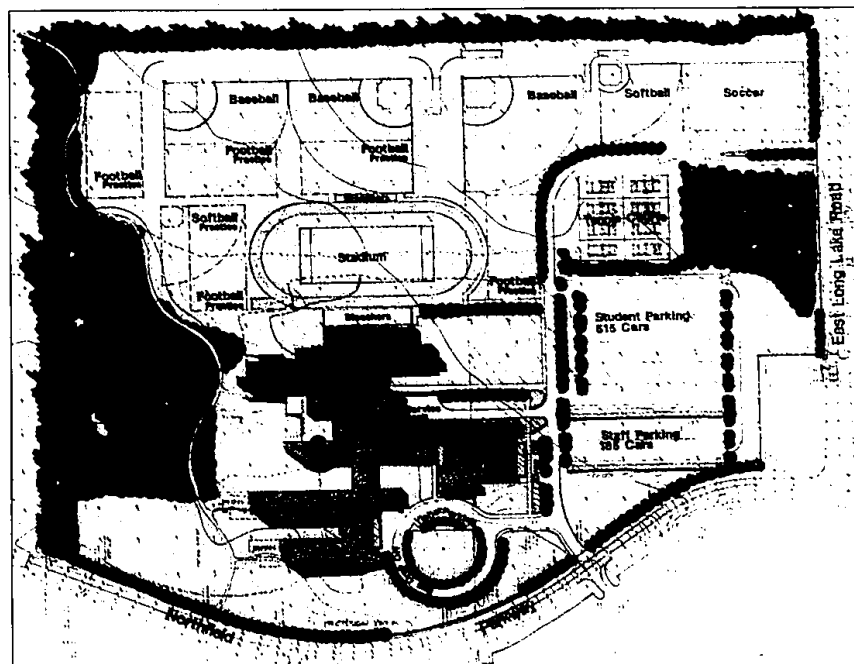
"Noise of the gym is away from the library. You cluster art and music around a big auditorium. Shops also are in the arts wing with acoustic separation. The dining area opens onto a beautiful terrace."

"Troy High School is going to have a nice entrance tower," Brubaker said. "At a lot of schools, you don't know where the main entrance is. You get dozens of visitors every day."

A naturally sloped amphitheater off the library probably will become a noon time gathering place and may prove attractive for an occasional class or low-key artistic performance, Brubaker projected.

And why only 800 auditorium seats in a school that will serve some 1,800 students? "It makes for a much nicer theater," he said. "And it's more economical."

Assemblies can be held in the main gym, which will seat 2,000. Windows — large and expansive in the library and cafeteria, moderate in the academic wings, quite small in the gym to non-existent in the auditorium — are more decorative than necessary for light, Brubaker said.



An artist's rendering depicts the tower and main entrance with administrative offices at the new Troy High School. The site plan, with the school shaded in red, shows the physical layout of all facilities on the 72-acre property.

THE INTIA-BUILDING communications system for the new Troy High goes way beyond a PA system between central office and individual classrooms.

"A teacher can come into the library and say, 'Tomorrow at 10 a.m.,

show the tape on birds.' At 10 a.m., she can hit a button on the panel and the film starts showing (in the classroom)," he said.

Educators and architects apparently have made an interesting discovery in recent years.

"Schools aren't just schools anymore, they're community centers," Brubaker said. "You have to be more sensitive to adult needs. You need better night lighting, better security, a better relationship between

building and parking. "Schools are concrete, brick and steel beams. The way you assemble them is where good design comes in. You can design well or in an ordinary manner. It (construction) will cost the same," he said.

'90s decor: paring down to mirror economic weakness

(AP) — Nancy Novogrod gives her readers more than a window on the design world. As the editor-in-chief of HG magazine, she opens the doors to some of the world's most interesting residences.

The slick, chic magazine, whose 40-something readers have a median income of \$30,000, is billed as "the authority on design, decoration and style."

"We aren't driven by those reader statistics," Novogrod said. "We have many readers in their 20s and 30s as well as in their 50s and 60s. They're sophisticated and interested in design."

Current trends go under the magnifying glass in HG, much like a museum curator examines his specimens. But Novogrod readily admits the magazine does more than report and record trends.

BY CHOOSING which designers and houses to feature, the editors make the magazine a trend-setter with the ability to change the way decorators, and the Americans who hire them, think.

Novogrod brings it all into focus, matter of fact, by saying the '90s will be characterized by a scaling or de-cluttering and pulling back in decor, mirroring the tight economic times.

"My house has to function as a family home, with some formal aspects but with places where we can be comfortable, too," Novogrod said.

"Knickknacks and crowded tablescapes are disappearing. The number of furnishings in a room will be

sparer, too, to create a more open feeling. Fed up with crowding, we want to spread out again.

"Every piece will hold its own, rather than being a generic upholstered sofa or chair. Gilded chairs or mirrors will be more important than ever for accent pieces because they'll stand out more when there are fewer things around them," Novogrod concluded.

The move away from very crowded, chintz-covered rooms and expensive window treatments with elaborately draped fabrics and dangling tassels, as well as sofas nearly concealed by assorted throw pillows, is a natural response to the excesses of the 1980s.

"The Marie Antoinette approach 'just doesn't work,'" Novogrod said. The same movement means the fading of the English country look, according to the editor-in-chief, who acknowledges that although she is tired of it, it still works on the East Coast.

NOVOGROD, WHO attained her editorial post three years ago this month, has had a sharp design focus for substantially more than a decade, first as executive editor at Clatsop Pottery (where she was responsible for their highly successful series of illustrated design-lifestyle books), and then as HG senior editor developing feature ideas and overseeing the design and art departments of the magazine.

She's in a position to see new fabrics, textures and furnishings every day. But she avoids the temptation

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— Nancy Novogrod

to change her surroundings with every trend that comes along. "I'm not a perpetual fixer-upper."

"One of the problems I've seen in decorating is that I see so many things I like. I know, however, that before I would have time to incorporate them, they'd be clichés. Besides, change is disorienting when the whole idea is to be comfortable in your surroundings."

She admits she lived with "a lot of red paisley and chintz, with yellow and red walls" and lots of clutter for nearly 15 years before she tired of it and followed her own vision of the future.

TODAY, SHE AND her attorney husband and two children (ages 8 and 11) live in an apartment decorated in soft creams and beiges. There are simple blue silk curtains and a few interesting pieces like a French Directoire desk, neo-classical

chairs covered with leopard-patterned silk velvet and an ottoman with gilded ball-and-claw feet. Of the more open look, she says, "What I love is that I can look more closely at the things I do have."

She's almost as likely to find those interesting accents at flea markets as she is by using the services of a decorator.

"I love to go to flea markets because it's satisfying to find things that have value for the way they look, rather than for their expensive price tags."

But don't flea-market acquisitions add to clutter? "No," said the admitted collector of everything from English 18th- and 19th-century porcelain to 20th-century ceramics and silver. "People are simply more careful and selective about what they buy and display," she said.

She schools readers in selecting

furnishings that will last at least five years, preferably 10. "Buy wisely; start with a color scheme, a great fabric, a rug or a great piece of classical furniture and go from there."

SHE REVIEWS design decades as quickly as a person can pull down a shade.

"Extremes of any style, like whale bones and bustles of early fashion, don't age well. The 1970s minimalist look was something of a straitjacket that isn't easy to live with. The 1980s version of English country house is a very decorative look that has been overdone. Today, Regency and Victorian decorative looks will be the next to be overdone. When a look is too identifiable, it doesn't age well, either."

"When choosing your furnishings, remember that styles do change. Pick something because of its comfort and because it appeals to your own tastes. A home that is conceived to meet the needs of people who live there, with some elegance and some comfort, will age well."

Adding a few easily identifiable antiques or quality reproductions will add interest, but avoid recreating a particular historical period. "Unless you have the help of a decorator or a great sense of the era, this is a good way to get into trouble," Novogrod said.

Mixing periods isn't without its pitfalls, either. An American country table in a Louis XIV room would clash.

Although it's possible to redecorate successfully without the help

of a professional, about two-thirds of the homes featured in HG have been professionally decorated. In some cases, the decorator is the architect who designed the home.

"SELECT A decorator on the basis of referrals. If you visit a friend's home and learn that he or she employed a decorator, ask for the decorator's name. Look at magazines to find designers' work you like. Ask to see pictures or scrapbooks of homes they've done and speak to two or three before making your choice. Consider personalities, too, because redecorating can turn out to be a very trying collaboration," Novogrod said.

No matter whether you hire help or opt to go it alone, keep in mind that the end goal is making your home more comfortable. It doesn't have to drain your wallet, either. Novogrod named a number of tactics that don't require a big budget:

"Simply by taking some things off the tables you can clean out a lot of the crowding. Lighting should be good, because poorly lit rooms aren't inviting. "A new carpet or rug, some simple new curtains or a different color paint on the walls can give a room a new look."

"Make sure the traffic flow is good, because you want to be able to go from the living room to the dining room without tripping over a bench. The seating area should accommodate you and your family or guests. Any seating should be comfortable. No one should need to clear piles of pillows before sitting down."