

## UA building wins U.S. architecture's top honor

By Tom Beal

The bold copper-and-glass monument to optics on the University of Arizona Mall has received American architecture's highest honor.

The Meinel Optical Sciences Building has received the Honor Award of the American Institute of Architects, one of 11 buildings worldwide selected by the group this year and the only Tucson building to receive an Honor Award from the group in its 59 years of awarding the prizes.

The building, actually a 47,000-square-foot addition to the existing classroom, office and lab building at North Cherry Avenue and the UA Mall, was designed by James Richârd, 44, a graduate of the UA's College of Architecture and a partner in the Phoenix firm of Richârd + Bauer.

Richârd's partners — Kelly Bauer and Steve Kennedy — were part of the design team and are also UA graduates.

Chuck Albanese, dean of the UA's College of Architecture and Landscape Architecture, said he is extremely proud of his architecture graduates, Richârd and Kennedy — and of Bauer, who studied interior design at the UA.

He also credited the university for breaking free of its longtime architectural styles. "It takes great courage for a client to have a building that is so unique," Albanese said.

The Meinel Building, built without a single red brick, is clad in copper on three sides, presents a faceted glass wall to the north and uses a series of apertures and light shafts to light its interior spaces.

"This building is expressing an idea and a concept that is bigger than the materials it's built with," said Albanese. "It's a really strong and wonderful expression of where this university is going."

Richârd said the building was a collaboration between his design team, campus architects and the College of Optical Sciences, "which really wanted something that spoke about them while at the same time working back into the campus vernacular."

The building's embrace of the rest of the campus is not obvious. Richârd said the sunken entryway, lined



The Meinel Optical Sciences Building graces the University of Arizona campus Mall with its faceted glass wall and copper-clad sides, its apertures and light shafts that illuminate the interior. It is one of just 11 buildings in the world the American Institute of Architects selected for the Honor Award this year.

*dean knuth / arizona daily star*

in rock, is a bow toward Old Main, the original campus building and the center of the Mall on which Meinel sits. The copper cladding hints at the predominant red brick color of the rest of the campus, he said.

But the science of optics dictated its main features. The north wall's faceted glass is patterned on the Fresnel lens, the design found in headlights and taillights, he said.

The nature of the research being done there called for the three "blind sides," Richârd said, where light can be totally controlled.

A series of light shafts that direct light to the intermediate spaces between the darkened laboratories and the window-walled offices, with views of the Catalinas, mimic the camera obscura, he said.

Richârd said he can't apply a term to his architecture. "We approach every project specific to a particular place, and we hunt for those little seeds of what it's all about — the soul of the project."

Richârd + Bauer also designed the Quincie Douglas Library in Tucson at 1585 E. 36th St., and is working on a library for the town of Marana which he says will look like a kite flying in a park.

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May Carr, a senior architect with the UA's Facilities, Design and Construction Department, said it took a remarkable team to go beyond building an addition that simply functioned well and would be on time and on budget.

Lloyd Construction committed to the \$17.2 million price before construction began in 2003 and, fortunately, locked in its prices on concrete, steel and copper before those material costs spiraled, she said.

"We had a really good team," Carr said. "I can't say enough about the architect and Lloyd Construction and the people in optical science."

She said the team recognized that "optical sciences and the study of light is just so intriguing as it relates to architecture."

She knew the end result was special but never dreamed it would rise to the level of national acclaim.

"There was some concern it would be a screaming building," she said, "but it actually is a very quiet building."

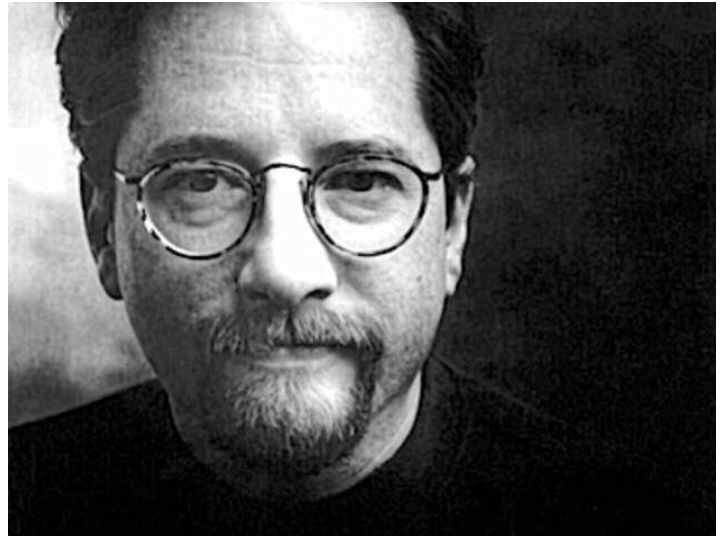
James C. Wyant, dean of Optical Sciences, said visitors have been impressed. "It does look nice and it's very functional," he said. "I'm hoping it will help on recruiting both students and faculty."

Robin Shambach, president of the Southern Arizona chapter of the AIA, said the building's selection is a first for Tucson. Architect Arthur Brown won national AIA recognition for a house he designed in 1949, but at that time the association's prizes were divided into "honor" and "merit" categories and Brown's was the latter.

Shambach, an architect with Burns and Wald-Hopkins and a classmate of Richard's, said his selection is "fabulous, it's a really big deal" and well deserved.

"The building is not only beautiful from the Mall where you see the monumental quality. It's also very well built throughout, and the landscaping fits so nicely. All of these things speak to the quality of the work. It's really an accomplishment."

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Grover Swartzlander, professor of optical vortices in the Optical Sciences College, accompanies David Levenson, right, who was visiting the UA's innovative Meinel Optical Sciences Building.

*James Richard*