

Projects of Note

Jerzy Soltan Awarded 2002 AIA/ACSA Topaz Medallion

Jury calls Le Corbusier protégé "the epitome of the inspirational educator"



by Tracy F. Ostroff

Associate Editor

Everyone wants something to boast about to former classmates—a great job, a beautiful spouse, smart children, a nifty sports car, perhaps. Among friends and at his high school reunion, Los Angeles architect Kip Kelly, AIA, would have some unique bragging rights: he went back and changed his own "beloved" high school by designing its newest addition.

A 1976 graduate of Notre Dame High School, Sherman Oaks, Calif., Kelly and his firm, Nest Architecture, recently completed four years of work on a \$5.3 million new construction project, the Notre Dame High School Center for Arts and Technology. The 35,000-square-foot, two-story building features computer-networked classrooms, a photography lab, 120-seat broadcast studio, broadcast control rooms, double-height black-box theater, and music rehearsal rooms. Ten thousand square feet of terraces and walkways continue the Mission-style architecture of the original building.

Kelly says the majestic design of the Catholic high school inspired him as a teenager to pursue architecture. "When I first set foot on this campus, I had an overwhelming feeling of calm and purpose," an older Kelly recalls. "I thought that if buildings could be that powerful, then I wanted to be an architect."

A sense of stewardship

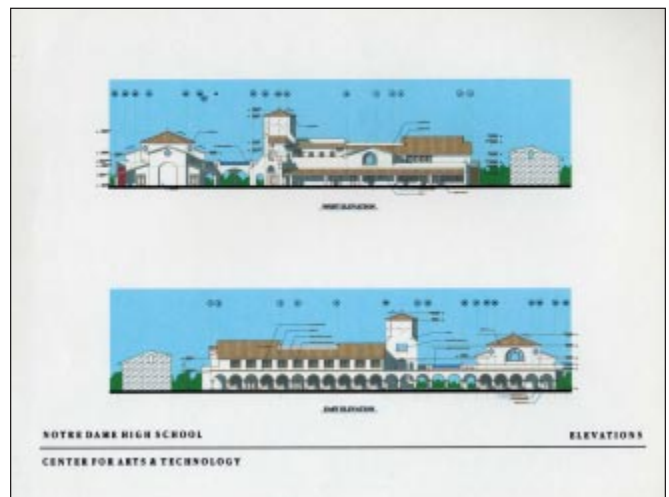
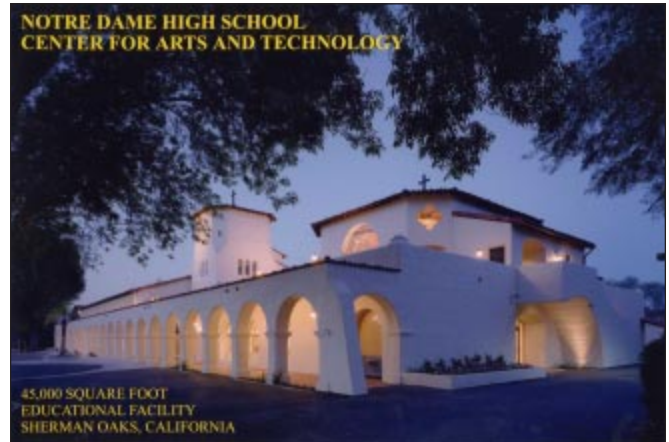
"It was really important to me that this building was done right—that it was not just an object but part of an integrated campus that frames and guides the educational experiences of so many young people," Kelly said. "The buildings here make a difference in students' lives. I felt a sense of stewardship."

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Details, such as mottled plaster walls, exposed wood, and terra cotta-tiled roofs, reflect the surrounding 50-year-old buildings originally designed by Laurence Viole.

Colorful hallways help transport students to an earlier era.

The buildings of Notre Dame High School, Sherman Oaks, Calif., inspired its student, Kelly, to pursue a career in architecture. He later created these drawings for a major renovation and addition project at his "beloved" alma mater.



Kelly, who is the principal of his own small firm, said he heard about the opportunity from the director of development at the school, who was also a former classmate. He tracked Kelly down through the AIA directory. Getting excited about the project, but learning that he would be competing against the titans of education facility design in Southern California, including Gensler, Kelly contacted Gensler President Ed Friedrichs, whom he had interned for and whom he had seen at several AIA events since his employment at the firm. A gracious Friedrichs reviewed Kelly's portfolio and put the wheels in motion for the smaller and larger companies to compete together for the project. The Brothers of the Holy Cross, who also founded Notre Dame University in South Bend, Ind., selected their team from among nine architecture firms that submitted qualifications for the job. Kelly served as chief building architect, and Gensler prepared a master plan of the campus.

The key points of Kelly's design—the third upgrade of the campus since its founding in 1947—are a 60-foot-high clock tower, an arcade with 22 arches, covered walkways, and shaded courtyards, all of which were inspired by the historic missions built throughout California by the Spanish padres, the architect says. Kelly didn't want to overwhelm the existing campus fabric," he said. During prior renovations school officials were careful to maintain the integrity of the original design. "Details, such as mottled plaster walls, exposed wood, and terra cotta-tiled roofs," in the new buildings, according to the architect, complement the surrounding 50-year-old buildings designed by Laurence Violen. Kelly met with Violen's son to review original plans and archival material.

The plans also include two-foot-thick walls that correspond to historic Mission architecture and house the electrical and telecommunications wiring. The deep walls allow for set-back windows, which cut down on heat and glare, and recessed bookshelves that are integrated into classroom walls.

Kelly wanted make sure he did right by the students and faculty of his alma mater. A key objective was to create an infrastructure that would satisfy the school now and in the future. The architect visited Southern California missions and surveyed users, such as teachers and administrators, to learn what they needed. He said there were about 10 teachers who were still there from when he was a student.

Being an alumnus certainly helped him know how the campus works, Kelly said. "The best research I could do was having been a student there, so I was able to understand all the issues for these users and see the building from a student's perspective."

After graduating from Notre Dame High School, Kelly went on to receive his BArch from the University of California, Berkeley. He has worked in the offices of Gensler, Charles Kober Associates, and Boss Agnew Architects, all in Southern California.



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Thick walls house electrical and telecommunications wiring. They also allow for set-back windows, which cut down on heat and glare, and recessed bookshelves that are integrated into classroom walls.

All photos by Tom Bonner.