Award of Excellence in Masonry Design

The Ohio Masonry Association, completing its 59th year of masonry promotion hosted its 25th Award of Excellence in Masonry Design program Tuesday February 26, 2013 at the Embassy Suites, Dublin, Ohio. The evening presentation and dinner recognized ten projects for the use, design, and installation of masonry units. Honored at the 2013 OMA Excellence in Masonry Design where the project owner, architect, member mason contractor and the producer/supplier of the materials. Winners traveled from all over Ohio to celebrate their achievements. The following is a listing of the winning projects accompanied by the jury’s comments.

Excellence in Masonry Design Award

Wireless Communications Building
Owner: Science and Technology Campus Corporation / Architectural Firm: Braun & Steidl Architects, Inc.
Mason Contractor: Adena Corporation / CMU Producer: Oberfields LLC

After a great deal of discussion and debate, the jury unanimously chose this building to receive the coveted 2013 OMA Excellence in Masonry Award. This is a building that needs to be appreciated and lauded at several scales and in the refined design development and detailing that is obvious upon careful study. The overall visual impression of this building, during both the daylight and night time hours, is one of a sophisticated piece of architecture that relies on the time-tested, tenets of Modernism. Beautifully proportioned, window-system treatments vary depending on the walls' orientations and functions within. This is reinforced by a specific design for the metal sun-shading systems that are affixed very elegantly to the face of the various wall.

The juxtaposition of the monolithic solidity of the stone-clad wall and the skeletal-like, sun-shading systems, provides for facades which are continually “in motion” due to the ever-changing, shadow-patterns on them caused by the sun as it traverses its daily path.

One of the articulated breaks in the flat-wall that wraps the building mass is the imposition of a vertical finlike, stone walls placed normal and protruding beyond the wall plane. These provide a defining edge to a full height, glass curtain wall within the entry bay. This wall not only defines the entries but also provides the anchor for a cable support for the horizontal canopy. The other break is a large corner element that is incised beyond the wall plane and clad with a metal and glass curtain wall system.

Upon closer examination, it became clear that the architects had carefully selected and detailed a range of colored stones that are randomly set within courses of various heights. The beauty of these is enhanced by the sun hitting them at various times of the day.
As one juror put it … “Wouldn’t it be great if every student in grades K-6 in the country could be as fortunate as the 550 students who attend this school! We might have more students inspired to become an architect, artist or mason!”

The jury felt that this was a building that conveyed to all who entered … whether student, teacher, administrator, or citizen … welcome to a building that celebrates the joy of learning … of seeing exciting possibilities of artistic expression in one of the most common of architectural elements … the wall.

The “Architect’s Statement” proved without a doubt that the architect of this building envisioned and used various colored brick the way a painter would see and apply different colors of paint. To quote:

Woodford Paideia Academy is a Cincinnati Public School that influences 550 Pre-K-6th grade learners. Situated on a topographically varied and treed neighborhood site, the new facilities design was inspired by neighborhood architectural landmarks and nearby park surroundings. The traditional massing silhouettes are enhanced with a tactile play of masonry products. Inspired by quality of tree bark, the primary brick is an Endicott Dark Ironspot Artisan 4x12 unit.

Contrasting the Ironspot and celebrating the schools primary and evening entrances, an ashlar patterned Arriscraft Cumberland Building Stone stitches into the rough brick. A Carolina Ceramic Pebble Beach brick was positioned along the 3 story classroom street facade to better display the playful classroom shadowed openings that recede inward to help southern shading. Further banding details create a sense of discovery and playfulness that is the result of scratching away the building “bark”—thus revealing both Carolina Ceramic’s Pebble Beach and Chestnut brick blends. Banding subtleties include a harmony between regular / organic patterns and pauses between pattern or material changes—further emphasizing a purposeful and deliberate texture. The building structure primary consists of a painted CMU bearing interior, with a color palette that provides way-finding and sensitivity to nature and the site.

The entry foyer transitions the exterior stone and brick through the entry vestibule and cast stone caps top off the school’s monumental stair. Tactile exterior textures are drawn to the interior when a few transitioning corridors use a split-face block finish to contrast the predominant smooth face unit.

The jury understood the significance of this project in terms of its historic importance to the city of Cincinnati and, especially, to the revitalization of the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood.

It felt that the design and construction team more than lived up to the challenges faced in the redesign of this park … both in its landscape architecture and the architecture. It not only lauded the resulting project but what must have been a very complex and difficult path and process to bring this project from concept to fruition. It surmised that the negotiations between multiple public, not-for-profit, and private stakeholders … especially the neighborhood residents, along with multiple funding sources and political forces probably made for more than a few newspaper articles.
2013 Award Winners

Every aspect of this park … especially the sophisticated “Barcelona Pavilion-like” main structure and incorporation of historic park elements … conveys a very inclusive and well-considered programming, planning, and design process. This is reinforced in the material selection and detailing of every element of landscape architecture including informal seating areas, masonry and ornamental iron topped walls and bollards that define varied hard and soft-scaped areas, ADA compliant ramps, lighting and paving materials and patterns. This is urban park, landscape design that carries on the spirit of the great, historic landscape architects like Olmstead and Kesseler and those of the Modernist movement including Lawrence Halprin and Paul Freidburg. It is truly something all of Cincinnati can be proud of.

Educational Honor Design Award
Oyler Pre K-12 School
Owner: Cincinnati Public Schools
Architectural Firm: Roth Partnership
Mason Contractor: Ollier Masonry, Inc.
CMU Producer: Reading Rock, Inc.

Before commenting on the project from an architectural standpoint, the jury felt it important to commend all parties involved in this project for taking a comprehensive approach to both educating and providing critical health and social services to the children and their families living in the neighborhood of Lower Price Hill.

In addition to the uniqueness of a school that serves grades K-12, the jury applauded the fact that it contains dedicated spaces for the Cincinnati Eye Clinic, the Mentoring Center, and the Cincinnati Early Learning Center … an innovative preschool day care and education center.

In addition, Oyler offers a virtual school to encourage lifelong, on-line learning. Taken collectively, the jury felt these components accommodated in this school allows it to serve as a model for other schools that serve a population living in disinvested neighborhoods.

Designed by the prominent Cincinnati firm of Hannaford & Sons over 80 years ago, this building is a great example of the integration of art and architecture that were common place in school buildings from the 1880’s through the late 1940’s when the Modernist Movement began to emerge as the prevalent school of design theory and practice. This transition was accelerated by the “white flight” from inner-city neighborhoods to the suburbs where land was plentiful and schools of one and two stories became the norm. The preservation and restoration of the brick and stone as well as that of the extensive amount of glazed terra cotta as the material for ornamentation on both the exterior and interior is very skillfully handled. Insensitive alterations over the many years of the school’s existence were reversed so as to again contribute esthetically to the building’s esthetics.

The skill of the architect is no less apparent than in the addition of the gymnasium … a large volume due to the functions contained within. The jury felt the architect achieved an addition that one could label as a “good close neighbor” to the original building. From the careful siting that created a void between the old and new and provided the space for a disabled accessible ramped, entrance to both gym and the school to the very sophisticated interpretation of the architectural style of the original building … especially the simplification of the detailing that allowed it to be both compatible with the more intricate original, yet affordable to produce and construct.
University Athletic Facility Merit Design Award
Dwight Schar Athletic Complex
Owner: Ashland University
Architectural Firm: The Collaborative Inc.
Mason Contractor: Adena Corporation

The jury began its comments by complementing Ashland University for investing in the quality of the architecture of this sports complex that includes a football stadium. This building complex typology is often relegated to a second-class status in terms of academic buildings.

The jury especially liked the inclusion of a very user-friendly plaza that is defined by a brick arcade at the base of the 3 story high seating structure which is plays both functional and esthetic roles.

However, they recognized the siting of the complex, the impressive, brick and stone, arched gateway with ornamental iron fencing, along with the inclusion of art as the major elements that convey to the students, alumni and the public that this university cares for the design quality of all buildings and public spaces on campus.

Educational Merit Design Award
Franklin Monroe K-12
Owner: Franklin Monroe Local Schools
Architectural Firm: SHP Leading Design
Mason Contractor: Tectonic Systems Inc.
CMU Producer: Wayne Builders Supply

This school impressed the jury for its use of brick on both the exterior and interior of the building. The very strong horizontal “banding” from base to cornice of walls using courses of various colored brick effectively reduces the scale of the building as well as add visual interest. This treatment, plus the breaking down of the building into various, geometric forms effectively reduces the scale so as to feel comfortable to elementary school children.

However, the use of brick to create “masonry textile banners” on selected walls is a demonstration of great creativity on the part of the designers and craftsmanship on the part of the masons. Lastly, the jury acknowledged the very powerful design statement of the central entry and circulation space that effectively incorporates masonry-clad walls with a beautiful wood-clad vault.
2013 Award Winners

**Retail Merit Design Award**
**Midas Auto Systems Center**

Owner: Midas  
Architectural Firm: Vetter Design Group  
CMU Producer: Oberfields LLC

The jury felt this project deserved to be recognized with a Merit Award for the simple fact that this building typology and its context of a “commercial strip” seldom receive any attention in terms of design quality.  
In contrast, this building uses both brick and stone masonry to make a design statement and rise above the pre-engineered, steel siding-clad building one normally identifies with an auto service, commercial building.  
The jury recognized that the vertical element clad in stone also serves as a “sign post” for the company’s appropriate scaled sign … another decision that breaks with the typical large sign atop a pole placed separate from the building.  Lastly, the jurors noted the use of brick with stone base wall treatment that carries around the entire building … not just on the front as typical of the “decorated shed.”

**University Athletic Facility**
**Merit Design Award**
**Meek Aquatic Center**

Owner: Ohio Wesleyan University  
Architectural Firm: The Collaborative Inc.  
CMU Producer: Oberfields LLC

The jury assumed that the red-tiled roofed and masonry clad style that one could label as “Collegiate Italianate,” is based on the style that has historically defined the campus architecture.  
The jury commended the university for investing in an athletic building that is often relegated to a second-class status in terms of the design quality of academic buildings.  In this case, the skillful design of the exterior in brick and stone give equal status to this building so as to add to the overall beauty of the campus.  
The three large, arched windows on the rear give notice that a major space awaits those who enter the facility.  In fact, these windows allow for a great deal of natural light to enter the pool area and also give visual relief to the outdoors for those using the pool.  
Lastly, the jury noted the very sensible use of high-gloss pained CMU’s on the interior for almost every wall surface as well as that of then raised seating area.  This use make sense given issues associated with the long term durability of surfaces exposed to the moisture and chemical vapor, content ratio atmosphere one finds in pool environments.
The jury initially was impressed with the strength of the concept that juxtaposed simple, clean boxlike elements with a very distinctive curved wall that carried through the entire building, forming the main entry on the front where it entered the building and the rear entry where it reemerged from the building.

The lauded the very successful use of CMU’s in alternating courses of light beige, split-faced and a medium brown, standard unit to emphasize the importance of this wall.

However, they realized that this scale of design decisions affecting the masonry carried through in the very sophisticated manner when one studied the large classroom blocks. Here, each façade is carefully designed through the use a 1/3 staggered bond on the wall that results in a subtle “fish-scale” pattern and stacked-bond brick above the windows. Lastly, a polished gray CMU is used to articulate the bays containing the window walls of the kindergarten rooms.

This project impressed the jury in many ways and at many scales. These included: the clarity of the plan organization with clearly identified entrances for both student and after-school, public functions; seamless transition from indoor to outdoor spaces; effective use and clear articulation of simple building forms that reduce the visual mass of the complex; celebration of natural light; limited pallet of masonry and other materials; and careful detailing of these materials.

Two aspects of this building that immediately impressed the jury was the sequence of designed elements that created a visual and physical procession. These included the masonry columned and ornamental iron “gateway,” the clean, crisp cantilevered entry canopy and the visually powerful … basilica-like… main entry hall. They envisioned this space as “main street” of the school and lauded the transparency between it and adjacent spaces, the quality of materials and natural light and the subtle reference to the vaulting of the ceilings one would have found in historic basilica spaces like this.

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They also felt the designer took extra care and concern for the detailing and articulation inherent in the masonry construction and other material systems. This can be readily seen in the stone and brick detailing on both the exterior and interior as well as the crisp handling of the metal panel fascia system, metal and glass curtain wall and the large Kalwall facades of the vaulted gymnasium space.

The jury members concluded its discussion by agreeing that it was evident to each of them that this quality of architecture is achieved only through an effective working relationship where there is mutual respect each team member including the school board, building committee, architect and his/her professional consultants, general contractor, masonry supplier and masonry contractor. Not to be overlooked are the citizens of this school district who support good architecture and, in doing so, provide their children with learning environments that both inspire and support their efforts to become educated and contributing members of society.

2013 Award Winners

Robert Zizzo, Adena Corporation, Brad Geissman, Adena Corporation, Brad Jolliff, Oberfields LLC, John Doubikin, Oberfields LLC

Dixie Carr
Jon Guldenzopf, Moody Nolan, Inc.

Robert Thomas, National Concrete Masonry Association, Tony Costello, FAIA, and Josh Naragon, OMA Executive Director

Tony Costello, FAIA, and John Jacob, J. Construction