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Architecture in downtown Phoenix has gotten its booster shot thanks to the angular facade, cuts, notches, and skewed floor plan of the new Health Sciences Education Building.

A collaboration of the University of Arizona and Northern Arizona University, the facility for students in medicine and related fields was designed by Los Angeles-based CO Architects (design and executive architect) and the Tempe office of Ayers Saint Gross Architects + Planners (associate architect and master planner). The **continued on page 8**

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268,000-square-foot building, located on the Phoenix Biomedical campus, decisively breaks the chain of rectilinear precedents established by many nearby works that mimic and conform to the local grid.

The monumental six-story structure rises from its flat site like a desert plateau. Its composition consists of a north-south base, and east-west wings that form a dramatic “canyon,” or courtyard, in their negative space. This 90-foot-tall space (as well as other slots and notches) infuses natural light into the building’s interior. Lightweight tensile structures are integrated into the roof, shading the far-falle-shaped courtyard, making it comfortable even during 110-degree summer days.

The face of the heavy massing displays “geologic” striations suggestive of millennia of sedimentary layering. On closer inspection, the textured facade is a copper rain screen—evocative of the Southwest’s

rich deposits of the metal. The skin, which is perforated in places, wraps around the exterior of the complex and snaps up in horizontal bands on the south to allow for fenestration as well as shade glazing. On the western wall, the envelope juts out as a canopy to protect the floor-to-ceiling glass of the entry and cafeteria from early morning solar gain.

The architects worked closely with the subcontractor to create 26 varieties of copper panel. Out of this mixed-and-matched scheme emerges a seemingly infinite assortment of natural patterns and facets that invigorate the surface, bringing it to life via the glints and highlights of the Arizona sun.

Inside, the building includes lecture halls, teaching and conference rooms, study spaces, an anatomy lab, simulated clinical exam suites, a library, student lounges, a cafeteria, and offices. Each floor, related to a different type of clinical and academic instruction, is color-coded. The design amplifies the trend of

Above: The staggered copper facade evokes desert earthforms; Below: Light pours into an internal stairwell. Bottom: Looking at the complex from above;

integrating medical classrooms with simulation labs, group study, and collaborative learning, bringing together health disciplines rather than segregating them.

The panels, form, and proportions of the building contribute to the success of the architects’ goal to create a “visual connection with the surrounding mountains and a sense of solidity, coloration, and striations apparent in the northern and southern mountain range,” said CO Architects principal L. Paul Zajfen. The project’s achievement must also be credited to its sustainability and responsiveness to the desert. Jack Black, principal at Ayers Saint Gross, said the school’s siting is “based on respect of the Sonora, which is strongly impacted by the presence of the sun and can have a diurnal temperature swing of as much as 30 degrees.” The architecture is not only shelf shading, but provides smooth, even light deep into the building.

The project illustrates that symbolism and meaning continue to play a role in contemporary architecture. It’s success, though, is ultimately judged by its end-users. In this case, first-year medical student Aaron Klassen said, “I think the building is excellent, and I know that my colleagues feel similarly. With the amount of time we spend here, one would expect us to begin to feel claustrophobic or cut-off from the outside world, but that doesn’t happen with such an open design and so much natural light in every space.” **BRADLEY WHEELER**

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