Sunrise Mountain Library
Peoria, Arizona
Richärd + Bauer
By Jenna M. McKnight

IN THE POLITICAL realm, Phoenix generally toes the conservative line. Fortunately, when it comes to civic architecture, the city takes a more progressive stance. A case in point: In 1995, residents celebrated the opening of Will Bruder’s colossal Burton Barr Central Library, which quickly earned icon status in the Valley of the Sun. In the following years, as Phoenix expanded at breakneck speed, prominent Southwest architects were tapped to design a string of branch libraries, many of which have appeared in ARCHITECTURAL RECORD.

The Sunrise Mountain Library, conceived by the local firm Richärd + Bauer and finished in 2009, marks yet another example of the city’s willingness to embrace singular architecture. Constructed for $7.7 million, the 22,000-square-foot building rises from a partly developed swath of land in Peoria, a municipality in northwestern Phoenix. Surrounded by rows of bland, beige homes, the library adds some much-needed pep to a suburban neighborhood.

This is familiar territory for Richärd + Bauer. In addition to the Sunrise project, the 14-member practice has designed four other libraries on its home turf, including Desert Broom Library [RECORD, January 2006, page 96] and Arabian Library [RECORD, June 2008, page 96]. The firm, paired with Haydon Building Corp, won the Sunrise commission in February 2006. “We were rooting for them from day one,” says David Hunenberg, Peoria’s library manager. “Our residents had put up with a branch library in a high school for 10 years, and we thought they deserved the very best.”

The design team was handed a blank slate: a flat, 4-acre dirt lot in a sprawling development still in the blueprint phase. A park was planned for a site bordering the library. In terms of existing reference points, the architects didn’t have much to work with. “We were faced with this denuded piece of desert,” explains James Richärd, firm principal. Also, the budget was tight. “This was a design-build project,” he says, “which tend to be cost-driven and very sensitive to constructability.”

In the end, the firm created an economical, distinctive landmark. The low-slung building comprises three shifted bars clad in glass and concrete. On the north, self-supporting 14-by-12-foot tilt-up slabs are spaced several feet apart, permitting views. In contrast, the southern facade, which fronts a road and drainage area, features a band of tightly stitched panels. All of the slabs have an attractive rough-hewn surface – a clever manipulation of a prosaic material.
**CREDITS**

**ARCHITECT:** Richärd + Bauer — James Richärd, design architect; Kelly Bauer, project manager and interior design; Stephen Kennedy, principal project architect; Will Craig, construction administration; Andy Timberg, Ben Perrone, project architects

**ENGINEERS:** PK Kland (civil); Schneider (structural); OMB (electrical); Kunka (m/p)

**CONSULTANTS:** Haydon Building Corp (general contractor); C.F. Shuler (landscape)

**CLIENT:** City of Peoria

**SIZE:** 22,000 square feet

**COST:** $7.7 million

**COMPLETION DATE:** January 2009

**SOURCES**

**GLASS CURTAIN WALL:** Arcadia

**CONCRETE:** Riggs Contracting (tilt panels); Trenwyth Mesastone (masonry)

**GLAZING:** 3form

**FURNISHINGS:** Steelcase, Herman Miller, Nienkämper, Wausau, Geiger, Hickory Business Furniture, Landscape Forms

**STACKS:** Estey

**CARPET:** Shaw

**SUSPENSION GRID:** Armstrong
ABOVE: The southern facade, which overlooks a road and drainage retention area, features a band of textured concrete slabs. A large clerestory brings daylight into the facility.

LEFT: Covered, Wi-Fi-enabled courtyards on the east side of the building offer visitors a pleasant area to chat, read, and surf the web. In the summer, misters cool the outdoor space.
The library’s most striking feature is its undulating roof, which extends slightly beyond the exterior walls. The roof actually consists of three parts. Two rolling planes, supported by steel columns, float above the outer bars. A flat roof, held up by concrete masonry walls, covers the central bar and accommodates mechanical equipment.

The roof’s wavy form was inspired by Lake Pleasant, a popular nearby attraction. This aquatic theme is evident in other parts of the building. Evoking boat portholes, circular cutouts are found in roof overhangs and concrete slabs. The designers also used blue-tinted glass throughout. Richärd notes that the library’s cool color palette — charcoal, azure, sage — is a departure for his firm. “It’s very different from our traditional Southwestern response,” he says.

The building’s layout is relatively straightforward. A recessed main entrance leads into the central volume, where visitors find just-released books, computers, and, at the rear, a teen zone. The south bar houses the adult area and multipurpose room, while the children’s zone and administrative functions occupy the north volume. Shaded, Wi-Fi-enabled courtyards provide pleasant areas for retreat.

The facility has a hip vibe, due in large part to funky lounge chairs and bold artwork. It also boasts a number of green features, and its LEED Silver certification is pending.

Hunenberg says the library’s new home is a hit with residents. Circulation is up 108 percent, and thousands of additional patrons are streaming in each month. “I’ve not heard one negative comment, not even from people who don’t like contemporary architecture,” he adds.

The sole downer: The recession has stalled development in the area, and it’s unclear when the planned park will be built. For now, the library overlooks a depressing vacant lot.

Despite the lackluster view, Sunrise Mountain Library is an exuberant landmark that serves a vital public function in a budding community. Richärd + Bauer has succeeded in creating another civic gem for the expansive Valley of the Sun.
1. The library’s central “bar” contains a reception desk, computers, and a teen area. A dropped metal ceiling not only conceals mechanical equipment, but also accentuates the high ceilings (16 to 18 feet) in the neighboring two volumes.

2. In the children’s zone, oculi of varying sizes frame outdoor views and add a whimsical touch to the space. The library’s cool color palette is evident in the sage-colored wall panels and blue-tinted glass.

3. The adult zone, like other areas, features modish lounge chairs and bookshelves on rollers. A concrete block wall provides structural support.