



Design Features

Oasis by Day; Beacon by Night



- **Site** — The new Mesa Arts Center is located in the center of downtown Mesa, Arizona. The organization of the site places buildings and features that are active and animated during the weekday periods

along the street edge, where they can contribute to daily urban vitality. Designers located the theaters, whose peak hours of use are on the weekends and evenings, in the middle of the block where the lobbies will provide an illuminated, nighttime beacon. This organization also responds to the concepts of Mesa’s emerging mid-block pedestrian path system, connecting it with its surroundings.

- **Design inspiration** — BOORA Architects drew inspiration from the Arizona landscape and climate, deriving colors from the desert, evoking interior and exterior forms from the surrounding geology and responding to the intense desert sun.
- **Shadow Walk** — The heart of the Mesa Arts Center complex is a grand promenade that knits together all of its pieces, while providing places for group gatherings, performances, and quiet reflection, comfort and relaxation. True to its theme of an oasis, this 700-foot “Shadow Walk” offers shade from the sun and a cool escape from the heat to contrast the dry desert climate. The Shadow Walk overlaps shadows from foliage, trellises and overhead canopies that create a cool and inviting place: a shared outdoor plaza for all Arts Center buildings. Colored glass canopies cast colored shadows onto the ground and are backlit with silhouettes at night.
- **Arroyo** — Another design element furthering the sense of coolness and calm found in an oasis is parallel to the Shadow Walk. A boulder-filled “arroyo,” where water rushes under stairs to the theaters, simulates the rich environment found in true arroyos that are characteristic of the desert region. The arroyo water flow travels the entire length of the site (approximately 300 feet), dries up and then is recycled to rush through the site again and again.
- **Garden entry** — Marking an inviting entry to the arts complex, designers placed a bold botanical-style garden at the front of the site, featuring unusual desert plants that appear prehistoric. The immense, 20-foot tall Boojum Tree is one of many examples of the exotic plants found there.
- **Other features** — Frosted glass skylights that glow at night; copper used in a variety of ways throughout the project to

reflect Arizona’s history in copper mining; blocks of lava that were quarried in Arizona converted into benches; and canted fly towers above the stages gesture to the gently sloping mountains around the Phoenix basin. The texture on the fly towers evokes a sense of geologic forms found in the surrounding landscape.

Theaters, Gallery and Arts Education

Each of the four theaters is expressed as an independent building in a bold stucco color and linked by a shared lobby space defined with a folded glass wall that is shaded with a series of horizontal fabric shade sails. This glass wall acts like a scrim, blurring the distinction between interior, lobby and garden. Large tensile fabric canopies cross and appear to float above the Shadow Walk. They align with the glowing entrance bays and will be uplit at night, creating a nighttime beacon on the cityscape, welcoming visitors to the theaters’ entry. Canted theater fly towers gesture to the geology of the mountains surrounding the Phoenix basin. The four theaters are:

- **Ikeda Theater** — A 1,600-seat theater designed for local and touring entertainment. The space will include four levels of seating with boxes along the sides of the theater. The design of the Ikeda Theater



placed an emphasis on bringing the audience close to the stage with a flexible and full acoustic environment. The interior of this theater reflects the eroded sandstone walls of a desert canyon. This will be an elegant theater for local and national touring entertainment, appropriate for symphony, musical theater, drama and concerts.

- **Repertory Theater** — A 550-seat theater will serve as performance space for both music and drama, showcasing local and national artists. Designers created stage runways that wrap around the audience, allowing performances to pull action from the stage closer to patrons.
- **Playhouse** — A 200-seat theater, designed specifically for theater for young audiences, will be a perfect venue for dramas and intimate performances.
- **Studio Theater** — A 99-seat theater, otherwise known as a black box or experimental theater, designed to house emerging community art groups. A ceiling grid for electrical and support allows for a wide variety of performance configurations. The small scale and flexibility of the space will also be conducive for rehearsals and meetings.

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Theaters, Gallery and Arts Education



- **Mesa Contemporary Arts** — BOORA designed the 15,500 square foot art exhibition space in five galleries to be below-grade. This keeps out excessive desert sunlight, and maintains a cool, comfortable interior

temperature through the exterior walls' direct exposure to the ground. Gallery space will be available for community art shows, national touring exhibits and the gallery's permanent collection. Designers placed the glass lobby near the corner of Main and Center streets, set within a plaza of colored glass panes, benches, planters and skylights. A curving wall extends down to the galleries.

- **Mesa Arts Center/Arts Education** — Students of all ages will have an array of art classes from which to choose: ceramics, figure drawing, glasswork, printmaking, drawings, acting, drama, music, sculpture and jewelry making all have space in the building. Many of the studios open onto outdoor terraces so classes can enjoy the open air.

A Place of Art

- Art is not just displayed within the walls of this new facility. Half of a million dollars was commissioned for public art to be incorporated into the design of the entire center. Works by well-known artists, Ned Kahn, Katherine Widgery and Beth Galston, include large scale panels that serve not only as a piece of art, but as a sun screen as well. This thoughtful integration of art into the building design and landscape can also be seen in photographer Galston's collage of the Arizona sky, which was made into glass fabrications that are edge-lit from above to light up the midnight skies and create shadows in the daylight hours. Widgery used quarter-size aluminum discs on the theater lobby floor for her artful rendition of wind-blown sand. This type of integrated design infuses the Mesa Arts Center with appreciation for the arts and arts education, as well as its desert climate and surrounding landscape.

World-class Facility Design Team

- BOORA Architects of Portland and DWL Architects + Planners of Phoenix, architects
- Martha Schwartz Partners, landscape architect
- Auerbach Pollock Friedlander, theater consultant
- Auerbach Glasow, lighting designer
- McKay, Conant Brook, acoustical consultant

Mesa Arts Center by the Numbers

- People: 350,000 - 500,000 estimated annual attendance (1,000 - 2,000 people/day)
- Events: 600 - 800 performances annually, galleries open year-round, 750 classes offered year-round
- Size: Three-building complex, 212,755 square feet on seven acres
- Capital Budget: \$94.5 million
- Groundbreaking: May 20, 2002
- Opening: Spring 2005

Contact Mesa Arts Center

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MESA ARTS CENTER



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