



CMU Profiles in Architecture

**SUMMER 2026
DESIGN AWARDS ISSUE**

These projects represent a wide variety of project types and ideas with wonderful design and craftsmanship. The jury found that the use of concrete masonry demonstrated both durability and permanence, yet was able to be made warm and appealing, particularly helped by its sunny environments. Inspired, I took the time to visit a few of these projects myself.

Head Juror Marc Mondor, FAIA, LEED® Fellow, Principal and cofounder, evolveEA





Jury Comments: *This is a delightful project. This building has aged very well and engages well today. The forms are bold and the materials play off one another, providing interesting angles and great connections of CMU to the wood frame. The honesty in the use of materials is well expressed and provides clarity to the project, while paying homage to the site's strong landscape features.*

Tahquitz Canyon Visitor Center

PALM SPRINGS, CALIFORNIA

Architect's Commentary:

Tahquitz Canyon Visitor Center, completed in 1999, stands at the ancestral home of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. Located just minutes from downtown Palm Springs, the canyon is one of the region's oldest continuously inhabited areas, with a history spanning more than 2,000 years. Prior to construction of the Visitor Center, the canyon was largely unmonitored and had become a refuge for the unhoused and a site for unauthorized activity. To protect ancestral burial grounds and cultural sites, the Tribe closed the canyon and initiated plans for a permanent presence.

In 1997, our firm was commissioned to help the Tribe develop a strategy for monitoring and stewarding the canyon. The design placed the Visitor Center at the canyon's mouth, positioned across a natural arroyo and connected by a

pedestrian bridge to create both threshold anticipation and security. The building rests lightly on the land, with portions cantilevered over the arroyo to minimize disturbance to the surrounding environment.

Why Masonry?

The architecture was conceived to complement the canyon and welcome visitors into the Cahuilla story. Durable materials—concrete masonry unit (CMU), glass, and steel—were selected for resilience against wildfire, flooding, and harsh desert conditions. CMU provides thermal stability and a sense of permanence appropriate for a building rooted in nature. Designed around seasonal rhythms, the structure opens to the southern winter sun while shielding occupants from intense summer heat and wind.

Inside, exhibits showcase Tribal artifacts, and a theater presents the legend of Tahquitz Canyon and the Cahuilla people. Today, the Center welcomes roughly 100,000 visitors annually, serving as a gateway to trails that pass ancient irrigation systems, cultural sites, and a waterfall. After 27-years, the building continues to support staff and visitors while honoring the canyon and its enduring cultural significance.

Architect:

o2 Architecture, formerly O'Donnell + Escalante Architects
1089 North Palm Canyon Drive, Suite B
Palm Springs, CA 92262

Lance O'Donnell, FAIA
Ana Escalante, AIA
Principals-in-Charge

Structural Engineer:

Koladi M. Kripanarayanan, S.E.

General Contractor:

D.W. Johnston Construction

Masonry Contractor:

D.W. Johnston Construction

Block Producer:

Angelus Block Company, Inc.

Owner:

Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians

©Photography:

Robert Markovich
Lance O'Donnell, FAIA, o2 Architecture



Jury Comments: *This is a beautiful project. The façades of this building are well-composed with a restrained use of materials and a color palette that provides a thoughtful interaction with the site. The exteriors have a planar quality with thoughtful expression where the planes meet, and the interiors have a richness of materials and forms that express durability, daylight and warmth.*

Angelus Block Office, Rialto

RIALTO, CALIFORNIA

Architect's Commentary:

The Angelus Block Rialto Office is a contemporary commercial building designed to demonstrate the versatility, durability, and architectural potential of concrete masonry. The project integrates structural and architectural concrete masonry unit (CMU) into a unified system, creating both a functional workplace and a built showcase of masonry innovation.

The building is defined by clean horizontal lines, deep overhangs, and a refined palette of Silver Split Face, Silver Precision, Silver Burnished, and Onyx Precision CMU, used across both interior and exterior applications. A signature interior curved wall executed in an ashlar pattern anchors the space, introducing a dynamic contrast to the building's linear geometry while showcasing the precision and craftsmanship achievable with CMU. Masonry extends across the façades to reinforce a strong sense of massing, permanence, and clarity of form.

Why Masonry?

Used as the primary building material, CMU provides both structure and finish on the exterior envelope as well as within interior spaces, eliminating redundant materials while improving construction efficiency. Key elements such as entry volumes, vertical piers, and screened façades are expressed directly through the masonry system. The use of dry block construction further enhances performance by helping to manage moisture within the wall assembly, contributing to long-term durability.

The project incorporates CarbonKind CMU, which reduces embodied carbon by avoiding higher-impact Ordinary Portland Cement (OPC) and instead utilizing blended cement or Portland-Limestone Cement (PLC). This approach lowers environmental impact while maintaining strength, fire resistance, and long-term durability. The thermal mass of the masonry further enhances energy performance by stabilizing indoor temperatures and reducing HVAC demand in the Southern California climate.

Sustainability is reinforced through locally manufactured materials and a design strategy that minimizes applied finishes, relying on the natural character of masonry to reduce life cycle costs and material waste. Ultimately, the project

demonstrates how concrete masonry can deliver high performance, sustainability, and refined architectural expression in a cohesive system.

Architect:

Vertrees A&E
532 East Lambert Road
Brea, CA 92821

Joe Vertrees, P.E., AIA
Principal-in-Charge

Structural Engineer:

Ghanim Structural Engineering

General Contractor:

Bremco Construction Inc.

Masonry Contractor:

GBC Concrete & Masonry Construction Inc.

Block Producer:

Angelus Block Company, Inc.

Owner:

MEA Manufacturing Properties, LLC

©Photography:

Sanduku, Inc



Ganahl Lumber

SAN JUAN CAPISTRANO,
CALIFORNIA

Architect's Commentary:

The design for Ganahl Lumber's San Juan Capistrano store combines the company's long history and connection to wood products with a modern aesthetic. Natural earth tones and materials echo the rustic designs of the area. Located on a 17-acre site at the south end of the city, this 145,000-square-foot facility optimizes operational efficiency while respecting the surrounding context and infrastructure.

Drawing upon previous work with Ganahl, the design team refined the organization of 15 structures on the site. The retail store, drive-through lumber yard, an operations facility, and supporting storage buildings are all located to minimize disruptions to nearby residences while providing an ideal experience for the customer.

Why Masonry?

While wood is the main star and selling point for the lumber yard, the cedar and Douglas fir glulam beams, trusses, and dowel laminated timber floors and roofs are all resting upon the exterior walls, which are mainly concrete masonry unit (CMU) block. For durability, structural strength, and an aesthetically pleasing and easily maintained finish, nothing compares with CMU. In this harsh retail environment of customers, carts, trucks, and forklifts constantly crossing paths, the exterior walls needed to be tough enough to take some serious daily abuse.

Fully grouted and reinforced 12" CMU blocks also proved to be more than sufficient to provide the compressive strength required to support the roofs and mezzanine floor. To reinforce the natural material theme, designers selected four standard colors of block as well as three different profile heights. By mixing and matching those variables, the architect created 12 design variations for client and

Jury Comments: *This project has a lot going on, which we realized was appropriate for a hard-working lumber yard and building materials showroom. The use of materials is creative and the project has several interesting moments, especially on the interior where the variety of forms, textures and materials provide engagement and convey activity, such as block laid to evoke stacked lumber and large glulam beams that literally are stacked lumber. Unlike typical lumber yards, the Jury appreciated the extra effort to create visual interest and animation.*

stakeholder review, yielding a unique but repeatable 48"x24" module that balances a visually appealing complexity with relative ease of construction.

The program and design criteria for the building required an exterior wall that could perform multiple tasks simultaneously. CMU was our preferred solution for that challenge.

Architect:

BSB Design, Inc.
970 West 190th Street, Suite 250
Torrance, CA 90502

Dale Malcolm
Principal-in-Charge

Structural Engineer:
Englekirk Structural Engineers

General Contractor:
Ganahl Lumber Company

Masonry Contractor:
Majestic Masonry Inc

Block Producer:
Angelus Block Company, Inc.

Owner:
Ganahl Lumber Company

©Photography:
A.G. Photography



John F. Kennedy High School, New 2-Story Classroom Building

GRANADA HILLS, CALIFORNIA

Architect's Commentary:

In expanding the New Formalist campus at the existing Kennedy High School, the new 2-Story Classroom Building doesn't just sit beside history – old and new find a common language in concrete masonry. The building adds General Instructional, Science Flex and Special Education classrooms, a Child Development Center with a dedicated entry and playground, and outdoor areas that extend learning beyond the classroom.

The campus's architectural identity – characterized by concrete masonry unit (CMU) construction, rectilinear massing, horizontal planes, roof overhangs, and vertical window expressions – guided the design from the start. Working alongside a historic preservation consultant and Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD), the team developed a strategy that honors this language without replicating it, blending historic context into a contemporary environment.

Why Masonry?

Concrete masonry was the clear choice. As the primary material of the historic campus, CMU provides a strong visual connection between old and new, while offering structural performance, durability, and low maintenance – critical considerations for LAUSD's long-term investment. The team worked directly with the CMU producer to select a honed finish block that complements the original with a more refined character, distinguishing the new construction while remaining in dialog with the old. CMU functions as both a load-bearing and lateral system, with wall thickness ranging from 8" to 20" and articulated spandrels, reveals, and vertical ribbons that give the exterior depth and rhythm.

Jury Comments: *We loved the aesthetics, craft, technology, and design of this project. The unique masonry wall was a highlight for us, displaying a clean and disciplined interaction of design and craft, almost an art piece in itself. The project has a well-executed plan and program which relate seamlessly with the existing building - a very nice 21st century interpretation. The monumental staircase effectively uses curtain wall and a daylight screen to create a delightful space. There is a lot going on, but in a sense that nothing competes with the other aspects of the project.*

Sustainable design is integrated throughout. The building will be Collaborative for High Performance Schools (CHPS)-certified and is predicted to perform 46% better than baseline design. North-facing glazing maximizes daylight while minimizing heat gain. South-facing glazing is protected by overhangs, while a decorative screen that echoes New Formalist motifs filters the afternoon sun. A bioswale filters stormwater on-site, classrooms include operable windows, and educational graphics teach students how the building performs.

Architect:

HMC Architects
633 West 5th Street, Third Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90071

Virginia Marquardt, AIA
Principal-in-Charge

Structural Engineer:

Saiful Bouquet Structural Engineers

General Contractor:

Kemp Bros. Construction, Inc.

Masonry Contractor:

Winegardner Masonry, Inc.

Block Producer:

Angelus Block Company, Inc.

Owner:

Los Angeles Unified School District

©Photography:

HMC Architects



Jury Comments: *This project is like a jewel box. Very elegant. It displays nice daylight and has a good connection between the inside and outside. It has a nice palette and simple materials with great elevations. The Jury appreciated the slender, horizontal roof edge and interaction between the building masses.*

CSU Dominguez Hills, Orthotics & Prosthetics, Science & Technology Hub

CARSON, CALIFORNIA

Architect's Commentary:

The CSUDH Orthotics & Prosthetics Education Center transforms a modest 5,000-square-foot structure into an enduring institutional landmark through the disciplined and expressive use of concrete masonry. Downsized from a former 20,000-square-foot leased facility, the project distills programmatic necessity into architectural clarity - establishing permanence and identity for a nationally recognized program dedicated to restoring human mobility and dignity.

Concrete masonry is both structure and statement. It comprises the primary building envelope, serving as load-bearing system, lateral force resistance, acoustic buffer, and fire-resistive shell for a laboratory-intensive environment. The masonry walls are not applied surface; they are the building itself. Their proportion, coursing, and tectonic expression reflect the precision inherent in orthotic and prosthetic fabrication - measured, modular, and exacting.

Why Masonry?

The program required durability under heavy daily fabrication use, long-term lifecycle value, and resilience suited to specialized equipment and high-occupancy learning spaces. Concrete masonry unit (CMU) provides inherent thermal mass, acoustic separation, fire resistance, and low maintenance - qualities that support sustainability through longevity and reduced operational impact.

Equally important is the material's honesty. In a facility dedicated to crafting devices that become extensions of the human body, authenticity matters. The exposed CMU expresses weight, texture, and permanence without concealment or excess. This direct and truthful use of material creates a meaningful sense of place - one grounded in craft, discipline, and care.

At the campus perimeter, the building's masonry massing establishes presence and pride while framing carefully scaled openings that invite daylight and human connection. Small in size yet significant in mission, the Center will serve as the official orthotics and prosthetics repair facility for the 2028 Los Angeles Paralympic Games, demonstrating how CMU can elevate compact educational facilities into enduring civic architecture.

Architect:

AC Martin
900 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 2800
Los Angeles, CA 90017

Satoshi Teshima, AIA, LEED® AP BD+C
Principal-in-Charge

Structural Engineer:

MHP Structural Engineers

General Contractor:

BNBuilders, Inc.

Masonry Contractor:

Cornerstone Masonry

Block Producer:

Angelus Block Company, Inc.

Owner:

California State University, Dominguez Hills

©Photography:

Benny Chan, Fotoworks



Jury Comments: *The Jury appreciated the elevations, articulation and the scale of the project, making a large building feel intimate. The interior is engaging and joyful with a signature entry wall and a comfortable daylit space. The Jury also appreciated the use of masonry for the benches that tie the project spaces together, inside and out. The courtyard spaces are well done with rich and thoughtful landscaping that invites and embraces.*

Belvedere Middle School

LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

Architect's Commentary:

Guided by close community engagement, the transformation of this Boyle Heights middle school weaves neighborhood scale and character into the framework of a contemporary campus. A holistic planning approach organizes the school around a central garden, establishing a green heart within a dense urban setting. The project scope included selective demolition, seismic rehabilitation of the historic 1924 auditorium, comprehensive utility and fire-access upgrades, and the construction of six new buildings. Together, new architecture, hardscape, and landscape create a cohesive environment that supports learning, student life, and community identity.

Why Masonry?

Concrete masonry is integral to the campus's identity, performance, and longevity. Chosen for its durability, efficiency, and architectural continuity, it serves as both a practical building system and a defining design element. The

33,000-square-foot gymnasium prominently features burnished concrete masonry unit (CMU), with refined texture and warmth that elevates the material beyond its utilitarian roots, lending the building a distinguished civic presence and a sense of permanence.

As the campus advances towards Certified California High Performance School (CHPS), the gymnasium benefits from the inherent thermal mass of its 12-inch CMU walls. This characteristic moderates indoor temperatures, reduces energy demand, enhances occupant comfort, and supports long-term environmental stewardship with low operational costs. Concrete masonry's fire resistance, acoustic performance, and low maintenance further make it well suited for a public school environment.

Beyond the buildings, CMU extends throughout the site in walls, seating, and campus edges. Its modular nature allows elements to be scaled to students while maintaining consistency and durability across the campus. Using a single, versatile material to unify architecture and landscape reinforces visual cohesion and establishes a clear, enduring material language—one that balances strength with warmth and reflects a long-term investment in quality, sustainability, and community.

Architect:

NAC Architecture
837 North Spring Street, Third Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90012

Dawn Brisco, AIA, LEED® AP
Principal-in-Charge

Structural Engineer:

John A Martin & Associates

General Contractor:

Hensel Phelps

Masonry Contractor:

Winegardner Masonry, Inc.

Block Producer:

Angelus Block Company, Inc.

Owner:

Los Angeles Unified School District

@Photography:

Michael Wells



Jury Comments: *The solid masonry base and soaring roofs of these adjacent buildings evoke a strong symbology for education. The adjacency of auto shop and culinary arts teaching spaces make sense within this framework, but we could easily envision any other number of programs. The jury was impressed with the simple materials palette that created these large, well lit and comfortable interiors while enabling thoughtful exterior support spaces.*

Saddleback College

TUSTIN, CALIFORNIA

Architect's Commentary:

Saddleback@ATEP re-imagines technical education through inspiring, light-filled environments for Automotive Technology and Culinary Arts programs. Purpose-driven, state-of-the-art spaces elevate learning, spark curiosity, and empower students with confidence, collaboration, and real-world readiness while strengthening ties to industry and community.

The primary design challenge was to integrate two distinct programs—automotive technology and culinary arts—into a cohesive design that integrates into the campus context, creates inspiring learning environments, and welcomes the community. The campus was envisioned as a civic learning environment with permeable edges that encourage connection to the future green space of the Tustin Legacy Master Plan. A central paseo cuts through the two programs, creating two buildings unified by a shared design language while preserving clear identities. This pedestrian spine promotes movement, visibility, and informal interaction, reinforcing collaboration and community engagement. The building massing and roof geometry align with the adjacent IDEA

building. A double-height central hub, defined by exposed glulam beams, serves as a primary gathering space for study and socializing, with classrooms on either side. Buildings are oriented to maximize north-facing daylight and minimize southern heat gain. Operable clerestory windows enable natural ventilation, reducing reliance on mechanical cooling, while south-facing photovoltaic panels support energy efficiency.

Why Masonry?

Each concrete masonry unit (CMU) building supports specialized, future-ready learning in a visually interesting, comfortable, and beautiful setting that flows seamlessly into the rest of the campus. The Automotive Technology building centers around a double-height hub of CMU and glass with classrooms and flexible labs designed for evolving vehicle technologies. The CMU Culinary Arts building includes bakery, flex, production, and all-electric labs, culminating in a public-facing restaurant. CMU supports strength and longevity of the buildings, along with thermal and fire resistance - all of which are integral to serving the programs in which they house. Wellness-driven design integrates daylight, ventilation, and biophilic elements, while operable exterior CMU walls create a shared campus "heart" that fosters connection and community.

Architect:

Gensler
500 South Figueroa Street
Los Angeles, CA 90071

Heidi Hampton, AIA, LEED® AP BD+C
Principal-in-Charge

Structural Engineer:

Saiful Bouquet Structural Engineers

General Contractor:

Swinerton

Masonry Contractor:

NuWay Inc.

Block Producer:

ORCO Block & Hardscape

Owner:

South Orange County Community
College District (Saddleback College)

©Photography:

Ryan Gobuty Photography



Jury Comments: *This is a really sophisticated project. The Jury appreciated the use of a variety of building materials to convey durability and visual variety while bringing large buildings down to human scale. The spaces are interesting and inviting and the Jury was impressed that materials are seemingly used to facilitate pedestrian wayfinding, such as long pavers in walking areas, concrete for green infrastructure, glazed walls for gathering spaces, terraced landscaping for gathering, and padded masonry window benches for seating. It was rewarding to see a wide palette of materials and forms so capably enhancing a complex and demanding design program.*

UC San Diego Theatre District Living & Learning Neighborhood Eight College - Survivance Residential Community

LA JOLLA, CALIFORNIA

Architect's Commentary:

Concrete masonry defines the Survivance building. As the gateway to UC San Diego's Theatre District Living & Learning Neighborhood, the building earns its presence through material rather than gesture alone. The building brings together students, faculty, visitors, and the broader San Diego community, with dining, retail, and gathering spaces activating the ground level at a human scale.

A continuous concrete masonry unit (CMU) base wraps the 202,320-square-foot building, marking entries, framing storefronts, and giving material weight to where student and civic life overlap. At 4 inches tall, half

the height of standard CMU, the smaller unit subdivides the surface into finer increments and makes the large building readable at pedestrian scale. At the Market Hall, 12x4x16 fully grouted masonry rises 20 feet in narrow, soaring walls, allowing the block to read with equal depth and texture on both interior and exterior faces. At extruded window boxes and quieter residential thresholds, the same block appears on both sides of the wall, absorbing heat throughout the day and releasing it slowly, creating comfortable places to pause.

Why Masonry?

The final palette developed through six mock-ups and more than thirty permutations of exploration. White CMU reinforces student-facing spaces which are open, communal feeling, while jet-black block anchors the more public edges with civic weight and presence. The darker CMU paired with black grout creates subtle variation and movement across the surface.

Plaster and cement board were rejected early for their fragility and maintenance demands. Cast-in-place concrete gave way to CMU to reduce the project's total carbon footprint. Prefabrication reduced construction waste and supported efficient installation, while the material delivers long-term durability and low maintenance. Together, these strategies support the project's LEED® v4 Platinum target, where environmental performance and material expression remain inseparable.

Architects:

HKS
8665 Hayden Place
Culver City, CA 90232

Scott Hunter, FAIA, LEED® AP
Principal-in-Charge

and

Ehrlich Yanai Rhee Chaney Architects
12524 West Washington Boulevard
Los Angeles, CA 90066

Mathew Chaney, AIA, DBIA, LEED® AP
Principal-in-Charge

Structural Engineer:

Walter P Moore

General Contractor:

Kitchell Contractors

Masonry Contractor:

New Dimension Masonry, Inc.

Block Producer:

ORCO Block & Hardscape

Owner:

University of California, San Diego - Capital Program Management

©Photography:

Lawrence Anderson Studio



Jury Comments: *This project is a bold idea, using colors and planes to express forms and uses. Horizontal intersecting roof lines contain interlocking spaces, which create the circulation nodes that organize the building program. The compositions are well designed with large masonry walls, a signature screen wall, and the use of block to create visual interest.*

Chaparral High School Athletic Complex

TEMECULA, CALIFORNIA

Architect's Commentary:

Chaparral High School, serving nearly 3,000 students, faced a critical need for an expanded athletic facilities and a stronger, more visible campus identity. In response to the district's 2020 Facilities Master Plan, Temecula Valley Unified School District approved a new 31,492-square-foot athletic complex in 2022, including a competition gymnasium, weight room, and dance studio. Strategically positioned along Winchester Road, the project transforms the school's presence along a major community corridor. The building establishes a bold civic edge, anchored by a vibrant, backlit perforated metal mural with programmable, multi-colored lighting that celebrates Puma Pride and the culture of Temecula Valley. Internally, a central "celebration lobby" organizes the program and creates a unifying spine that connects all major spaces while serving as a gathering hub for students and the community.

Each program element extends to adjacent outdoor areas, supporting flexibility, daylight, and a strong connection between indoor and outdoor activity. Influenced by Scandinavian design principles, the architecture emphasizes clean lines, functional clarity, and light-filled spaces, resulting in a modern, welcoming environment that promotes student wellness and community engagement.

Why Masonry?

Concrete masonry unit (CMU) is integral to the project's performance, durability, and architectural expression. Selected as a primary building material, CMU provides a resilient, low-maintenance enclosure well-suited to the demands of a high-use athletic facility. Its inherent strength and impact resistance ensure longevity, while its non-combustible properties enhance life safety. In a seismically active region, CMU contributes to structural stability, reinforcing the building's overall resilience. The material's thermal mass improves energy performance by moderating indoor temperature fluctuations, reducing peak loads, and complementing the building's high-efficiency systems. Sustainability goals are further advanced through the use of locally manufactured, low-carbon CMU, reducing embodied carbon and transportation impacts. Architecturally, CMU

grounds the building, creating a strong, textured base that complements the lighter metal and fiber cement elements above, resulting in a cohesive, durable, and visually compelling design.

Architect:

DLR Group
700 South Flower Street
Los Angeles, CA 90017

Alenoush Aghajanians, Assoc. AIA, LEED® AP BD+C
Principal | Senior Design Leader

Structural Engineer:

DLR Group

General Contractor:

Neff Construction, Inc.

Masonry Contractor:

Kretschmar & Smith Inc.

Block Producer:

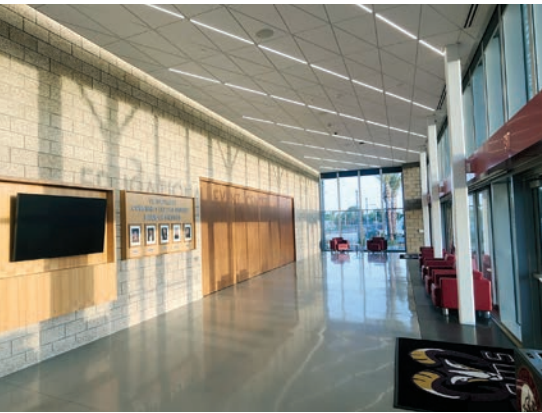
RCP Block & Brick, Inc.

Owner:

Temecula Valley Unified School District

©Photography:

Cristian Costea, Costea Photography



Jury Comments: *This struck us as a playful project. The Jury appreciated the delicate sun shading contrasting with the heavy masonry, with the contrast providing visual interest and enhancing the two. The simple color scheme incorporated the school colors and provides a limited palette that creates a focus on the spaces and forms. The delicate canopy creates inviting shadows and comfortable spaces, bringing the outside in.*

Victor Valley Stadium & Educational Event Center

VICTORVILLE, CALIFORNIA

Architect's Commentary:

Located in Victorville at the southwestern edge of the Mojave Desert, Victor Valley College sits within the High Desert, a region defined by extreme diurnal temperature swings—from frosty winter nights in the low 30s to summer days exceeding 100 degrees. These conditions required a material and structural strategy capable of long-term performance, resilience, and interior temperature regulation. Concrete masonry unit (CMU) was selected as both the primary architectural expression and structural system due to its high thermal mass, durability, economy, and local availability.

The project was envisioned as a flexible, multi-use facility that supports campus life while serving

the broader community. Designed to responsibly steward public resources and generate revenue, the building accommodates a wide range of uses through a highly adaptable program. Three large conference rooms can function independently or combine into a single venue through operable partitions, supporting events ranging from board meetings to 600 person banquets, conferences, athletic functions, and stadium graduations.

Why Masonry?

CMU plays a central role in achieving both performance and stewardship goals. Its thermal mass helps stabilize indoor temperatures, reducing energy demand in a climate with significant daily fluctuations. As a structural system, CMU provides efficiency and economy while minimizing redundant materials. Its inherent durability, fire resistance, and low maintenance requirements ensure long-term value for a publicly funded, high-use campus facility.

The building's massing reinforces programmatic and urban goals. A higher-volume form contains the conference halls, while lower masses define the street edge and adjacent parking areas, creating a more pedestrian-scale presence. Variations in CMU color articulate these volumes and respond to the surrounding landscape. A burnished CMU finish

exposes aggregate and complements the red entry portals, reinforcing civic identity, permanence, and clarity of entry, while tonal pavers shape plazas that support wayfinding and outdoor gathering.

Architect:

LPA, Inc.
5301 California Avenue, Suite 100
Irvine, CA 92617

Stephen Lathus
Architect of Record

Structural Engineer:

LPA, Inc.

General Contractor:

Bernards

Masonry Contractor:

Cornerstone Masonry

Block Producer:

ORCO Block & Hardscape

Owner:

Victor Valley Community College District

©Photography:

ORCO Block & Hardscape



Jury Comments: The jury loves this project and how the design addresses a complex program. The buildings, spaces, pathways, and how they are tied together are arranged in an appealing manner. The program helps people with various life needs from every walk of life, which the jury appreciated. The design enhances how architecture and materials address these functions, from long term housing to counseling to food service. The welcome center offers a calming reception, leading to interior and exterior spaces that are appealing and dignified, with scale, materials, and detailing that can help improve the quality of people's lives.

Cares Campus

RENO, NEVADA

Architect's Commentary:

Washoe County's new intake center, 50-unit support housing, renovated resource building, and restroom buildings on the Cares Campus opened throughout 2024 and 2025 to serve the unhoused population of Washoe County. The new welcome center includes intake, training areas, case management, cafeteria and dining, therapy and staff offices. The supportive housing units are compact apartments that blend efficiency with livability for a permanent home for some of the most challenged individuals. Each unit includes a private kitchen, bathroom, and workspace, reinforcing independence and dignity for residents. The restroom buildings include individual water closets, showers, and a group laundry area for those who are in need of short-term help. These facilities dramatically improved the County's ability to care for the unhoused and complete the campus.

Why Masonry?

The Nevada Cares Campus is a place of resilience, built to handle the demands of intensive use, but

also a place of care—care expressed through spatial dignity, daylight, material warmth, and a commitment to community integration. Concrete masonry unit (CMU) was the natural material choice to anchor all those needs. All of the new buildings at the campus are primarily built using three colors of CMU to keep consistency amongst the buildings and create opportunities for design. The intake center utilizes both a medium gray block for its entire form and darker block at planters on the perimeters of the building to create some accents. The support housing building consists of a medium gray CMU in the outward face parts of the building, while utilizing a lighter, near-white CMU on its interior face to brighten its interior courtyard, creating a space that's more comfortable for residents, while still maintaining the needed durability. Each restroom building utilizes all three colors – lighter colors to indicate entrances and the remaining two to create some differentiation from the laundry side to the restroom side.

By transforming a necessary facility into an environment of hope, the project redefines how public architecture can respond to society's most vulnerable.

Architect:

Van Woert Bigotti Architects
1400 South Virginia, Suite C
Reno, NV 89502

Structural Engineer:

Shields Engineering, inc

General Contractor:

Clark/Sullivan Construction

Masonry Contractor:

Kemper Masonry

Block Producer:

Basalite Concrete Products, LLC

Owner:

Washoe County

©Photography:

Vance Fox Photography



Jury Comments: *This project struck the jury as playful, with spaces, color, and indoor-outdoor connections that engage users and support the recreation program. The form is fun and the rooflines are engaging. The mass of the masonry is offset well against glass to provide seclusion and privacy, while allowing daylighting and clear circulation.*

Hilda L. Solis Aquatic Center

LA PUENTE, CALIFORNIA

Architect's Commentary:

Located in La Puente, California, the Hilda L. Solis Aquatic Center is a bridge, connecting an underserved community to water recreation, education, wellness spaces. The project includes a 50-meter competition pool, recreation pool, shaded seating, and a 10,800-square-foot aquatic building containing locker rooms, staff support space, and community flex-room. The site also expands public amenities with a one-acre park with fitness loop, pollinator garden, children's playground, and community plaza connecting directly to an adjacent park.

Why Masonry?

Concrete masonry unit (CMU) was fundamental to achieving performance and architectural goals. As a heavily used public aquatic facility exposed to moisture, equipment, and continuous public activity, the building required materials capable of withstanding demanding conditions while remaining easy to maintain. CMU provided exceptional durability, moisture resistance, and long-term

value compared to alternative assemblies. CMU surfaces allow the facility to be easily cleaned and maintained, an essential requirement for the county.

The design leverages the architectural versatility of masonry. Multi-color burnished CMU is used at exterior façades and interior public spaces to create a warm, refined aesthetic that reflects the textures and colors of the San Gabriel Valley. Precision CMU is used in service and mechanical areas to provide cost efficiency without compromising performance, demonstrating masonry's flexibility as both a structural and finish material.

Despite the inherently energy-intensive nature of aquatic facilities, the project achieved LEED® Gold certification through a combination of passive and active strategies. Extensive daylighting reduces reliance on artificial lighting while providing views to surrounding park spaces. CMU thermal mass stabilizes interior temperatures, reducing mechanical demand. High-efficiency pool heating systems, building automation controls, and energy-efficient HVAC systems further reduce energy consumption. Water-conserving fixtures, native landscaping, bioswales for stormwater management, and heat-island-reducing site materials support responsible environmental stewardship.

Together, these strategies create a resilient, high-performance community facility where masonry delivers lasting durability, beauty, and sustainability.

Architect:

HMC Architects
3546 Concourse Street, Suite 200
Ontario, CA 91764

Bradley Glassick
Principal-in-Charge

Structural Engineer:

Saiful Bouquet Structural Engineers

General Contractor:

Balfour Beatty

Masonry Contractor:

Haxton Masonry Inc.

Block Producer:

Angelus Block Company, Inc.

Owner:

Los Angeles County Public Works

©Photography:

Lawrence Anderson Studio
Christopher Grant, HMC Architects



GRAND
AWARD

RESIDENTIAL DESIGN
SINGLE-FAMILY

Rancho Uno

RANCHO MIRAGE, CALIFORNIA

Architect's Commentary:

Occupying a prominent corner lot, Rancho Uno is conceived as a layered desert retreat—protective and composed along the public edge, open and welcoming on the private side. Set back and shielded from the street, the entry is discreetly veiled by desert planting and strategically placed concrete masonry unit (CMU) walls that partially obscure the arrival sequence. This creates a textured, grounded public presence while allowing the home to reveal itself gradually through a protected approach, reinforcing both refuge and anticipation.

The plan unfolds as a series of horizontal, pavilion like volumes anchored by a central great room—the social heart of the residence. From this core, the home extends outward to accommodate primary living spaces, private bedroom wings, guest suites, a casita, and recreational areas. The result is a resort like environment with multiple zones for gathering and retreat, allowing varied experiences to unfold simultaneously. Circulation is choreographed through deliberate moments of compression and release: restrained passages, lowered ceilings, and framed thresholds transition into expansive living areas, extended rooflines, and broad openings that heighten spatial contrast and emphasize outdoor living.

Why Masonry?

Concrete masonry unit planes serve as the architectural backbone, providing order, permanence, and material clarity. Paired with metal detailing, wood finishes, and carefully proportioned apertures, the split face CMU balances texture and refinement while amplifying shifting shade and shadow. Its depth contrasts the floating roof assemblies, defines outdoor rooms, mediates between public and private zones, and aligns key sightlines across the site and into the garden. Its inherent resilience and thermal performance make

Jury Comments: *The jury loved the use of materials and the flow of spaces from inside to outside. The landscaping provides an evocative approach to the entrance and floating roofs provide dynamic spaces. The skillful design of masonry as planes makes the material feel weightless or as an accent that draws the eye. The restrained use of a simple palette of materials and colors helps unify the design. The jury also noted the exquisite craftsmanship and a superb lighting design help to create real moments of beauty.*

it ideally suited to the demanding desert climate, supporting an architecture rooted in restraint, longevity, and craft.

The result is a residence deeply grounded in place—guided by climate, shaped by enduring materials, and woven through landscapes that reveal themselves as effortless moments of renewal and quiet, lasting beauty.

Architect:

o2 Architecture
1089 North Palm Canyon Drive, Suite B
Palm Springs, CA 92262

Lance O'Donnell, FAIA
Principal-in-Charge

Structural Engineer:

AMG Structural Engineers

General Contractor:

Rucker Muth, Corp.

Masonry Contractor:

RAS Masonry Inc.

Block Producer:

Angelus Block Company, Inc.

Owner:

Neil and Jennifer Laws

©Photography:

Ricky Lesser



RESIDENTIAL DESIGN
SINGLE-FAMILY

Courtyard Retreat

RENO, NEVADA

Architect's Commentary:

The project goal was to create a family retreat for a Bay Area family relocating to Reno with a large extended family and three adult children. The home needed to be large enough for gatherings and playful for future grandchildren to visit. The home includes an in-ground hot tub, pool, Bocce ball court, and plenty of room for both interior and exterior family dinners.

The primary structural system is exposed steel with concrete and concrete masonry unit (CMU) shear walls, with secondary roof framing of exposed glulam beams and structural 2x6 Douglas fir decking/ceiling. The structural elements are an integral part of the design's architecture and allow for large openings of glazing to capture the spectacular views of Mt. Rose and the Sierra foothills. The U-shape plan provides a wonderful relationship between the interior and exterior via the courtyard, with privacy from the street, while opening to the courtyard and views of the mountains. The residence has a 12 kw net metered solar voltaic system and an (8) well geothermal solar voltaic system for radiant in-floor heating and cooling. The home incorporates passive solar strategies with all of the major glazing oriented to the south with views of the Sierra Nevada Range. Large overhangs protect the walls and glazing from the hottest summer exposures.

Why Masonry?

CMU was selected as a modern material that anchors the project to the site and for its load bearing capabilities with great shear wall capacity. This allowed for less solid wall and more glazing. Factory bead-blasted, natural gray CMU with added black cinder aggregate was laid in a stack bond pattern giving the masonry a modern aesthetic. Several sizes of CMU were incorporated. Additionally, the locally sourced CMU was chosen as an honest material with great fire and rodent resistance and long lasting low maintenance qualities.

Jury Comments: *This residence has extraordinary landscape, spatial design, and use of materials. The spaces are engaging, with an easy flow from inside out, accented by a wide variety of materials that are visually engaging, durable, and thoughtful. The project is a showcase for masonry and concrete, with materials exuberantly expressed in the ground plane as walls and as accent walls, yet with colorful tiles and warm wood soffits to provide relief. This gorgeous residence is warm, comfortable, engaging, and livable.*

Architect:

Hawkins & Associates, Inc.
1400 South Virginia Street, Suite A
Reno, NV 89502

Jack Hawkins, AIA
Principal-in-Charge

Structural Engineer:
Gabbart and Woods

General Contractor:
S&H Builders

Masonry Contractor:
Kawcak Masonry, Inc.

Block Producer:
Basalite Concrete Products, LLC

Owner:
Harrenstien Residence

©Photography:
Asa Gilmore, Ag Studio





Jury Comments: *This residential project is skillfully designed and elegantly executed with a clear design approach. The stacked bond masonry as a recurrent motif requires considerable craftsmanship to execute properly and provides visual fields that enable accents and contrast, such as with terrazzo flooring and wood paneling or in emphasizing the project's wonderful indoor-outdoor connections. This residence has a variety of wonderful and comfortable spaces.*

Thunderbird Cuatro

RANCHO MIRAGE, CALIFORNIA

Architect's Commentary:

Situated on a northwest facing, sloping desert site, Thunderbird Cuatro was conceived to challenge the assumption that convenient street access should dictate building orientation. Instead, the design prioritizes energy performance and passive solar strategy. The home is positioned for optimal southern solar exposure, while a long carriage style drive leads to a rear loaded garage, freeing the architecture from the visual weight of front facing vehicular massing. This allows the residence to read as a low, disciplined composition that balances privacy, openness, and a strong connection to the landscape.

The plan is organized as a series of interlocking volumes that step naturally with the terrain, creating outdoor rooms, shaded terraces, and framed views toward the surrounding ridgelines. Circulation is intuitive and direct, with primary living spaces opening fully to the exterior, while

more private functions are strategically buffered along the site edges.

Why Masonry?

Materiality anchors the project to its desert context, with concrete masonry unit (CMU) playing a defining role. Smooth plaster, warm wood accents, and expansive glazing are grounded by structural planes of 6-inch burnished CMU. These masonry elements provide visual weight, texture, and a sense of permanence, reinforcing the home's horizontal character. Used both inside and out, the CMU walls act as spatial organizers—shaping courtyards, framing long views, and mediating transitions between public and private zones—while offering durability and thermal mass ideally suited to the climate.

An inverted gable roof, expressed like the hull of a ship, extends deep cantilevers across the main living areas, providing shade and emphasizing the home's linear organization. Clerestory glazing and carefully modulated openings bring in controlled natural light while maintaining privacy from the street above. The result is a restrained, modern desert home where material clarity, spatial order, and the expressive use of concrete masonry create a calm, enduring architectural presence.

Architect:

o2 Architecture
1089 North Palm Canyon Drive, Suite B
Palm Springs, CA 92262

Lance O'Donnell, FAIA
Principal-in-Charge

Structural Engineer:

Koladi M. Kripanarayanan, S.E.

General Contractor:

HJH Construction, Inc.

Masonry Contractor:

HJH Construction, Inc.

Block Producer:

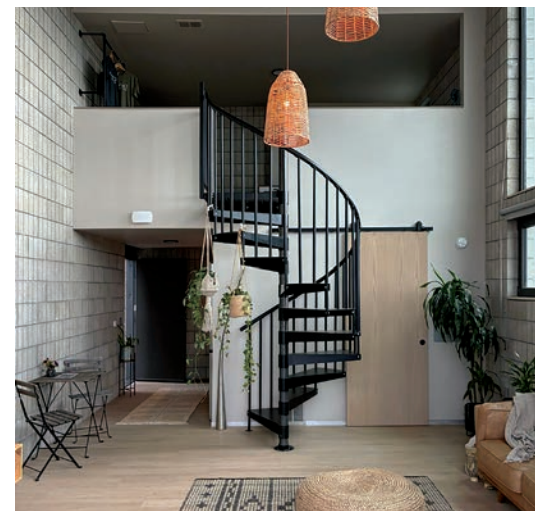
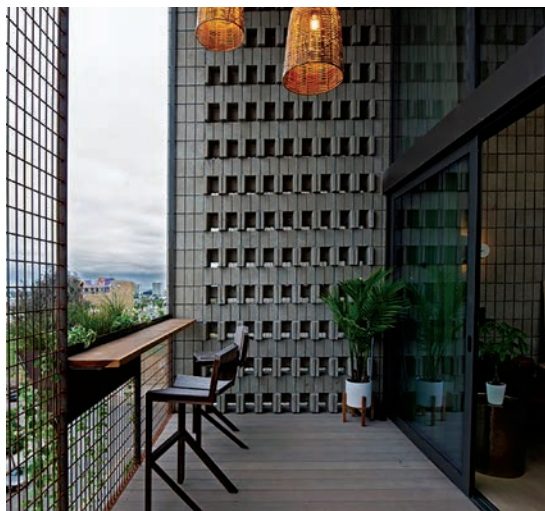
Angelus Block Company, Inc.

Owner:

Kevin and Erica Carpenter

©Photography:

Scott Pasfield



Jury Comments: *The jury was very impressed by the ambition of this infill project, with thoughtful plans and a creative and expressive honesty in the material use. There is a lot going on and the plans make use of every bit of the site as an infill project. The Jury loved the different types of units and their modest sizes contribute to necessary housing solutions. This high-rise project has engaging elevations as well, creating a signature roofline while the balconies demonstrate creative use of block for texture and as brise-soleil to control sunlight and ventilation. Very well done.*

LeParc

SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA

Architect's Commentary:

LeParc emerges as a direct response to San Diego's ongoing housing crisis and the evolving way people live, work, and connect within their homes. Guided by the opportunities created through the Complete Communities program, the design embraces infill development as a means to thoughtfully increase housing supply while strengthening the surrounding urban fabric.

At its core, the project is driven by purposeful design—where every decision, from building systems to material selection, responds to contemporary challenges. In the wake of the pandemic, the relationship between private and shared spaces has been reconsidered, shaping a living environment that is both resilient and adaptable. Increasing wildfire risks and rising insurance costs further informed a comprehensive reevaluation of construction methods, leading to a durable, efficient approach that prioritizes long-term performance and reduced maintenance.

Why Masonry?

The 32-unit development leverages Type I construction to maximize allowable height and density within the existing zoning framework, enabling more homes without compromising quality. Materiality plays a central role in the project's identity. Concrete masonry unit (CMU) is used not only for its resilience, but for its inherent warmth, texture, and human character. Its thermal mass moderates temperature fluctuations—absorbing heat during the day and releasing it at night—enhancing comfort while improving energy efficiency.

Through a careful synthesis of form, material, and system, the project delivers housing that is both practical and enduring—an intentional response to the needs of today and the uncertainties of tomorrow.

Architect:

[oo-d-a] studio, inc.
2820 Polk Avenue, Unit 1
San Diego, CA 92104

Dominique Houriet, AIA
Principal-in-Charge

Associate Designer:

Von Dimeling Studio
2820 Polk Avenue, Unit 1
San Diego, CA 92104

Christian Dimeling
Principal-in-Charge

Structural Engineer:
Envision Engineering, Inc

General Contractor:
Build Solid

Masonry Contractor:
Tier 1 Masonry, Inc.

Block Producer:
RCP Block & Brick, Inc.

Owner:
Commune Parc, LLC

©Photography:
Dominique Houriet, [oo-d-a] studio, inc.
Trevor Norkowski, @trevornorkowski

The Jury

The Jury is selected by AIA California and comprised of three leading architects from across the nation. The Jury has the duty to view projects, remain impartial, and select winning entries that best exemplify outstanding sustainable architectural design incorporating concrete masonry construction within California and Nevada.



The Distinguished Jury for the 2026 Concrete Masonry Design Awards Program includes:



Head Juror Marc Mondor, FAIA, LEED® Fellow

Marc, Co-founder and Managing Principal of evolveEA, is nationally recognized for advancing sustainability and building performance within the industry. His work includes landmark achievements such as the first LEED® certified project in Africa, the first certified market, and early Living Buildings. As President of AIA Pennsylvania and serving on several national committees, he established long-standing sustainability and equity advocacy committees.

Marc is a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects, a LEED® Fellow of the USGBC, served as Adjunct Professor at Chatham University, advises the Pennsylvania Climate Action Plan, and lectures nationally.



Maria A. Gomez, AIA, LEED® AP

Maria brings over two decades of robust experience and leadership to her role as President and Chief Practice Officer at GFF Dallas. Since joining GFF in 1999, she has guided a diverse range of projects from corporate offices and institutional facilities to transformative arts and cultural developments. Prior to GFF, Maria opened her own firm in Colombia, an experience that honed her entrepreneurial spirit and enriched her global perspective on design. Her visionary approach led to award-winning projects such as the Dallas Academy building expansion and the record-setting Park 17 multi-use building—Dallas's first office building to achieve LEED® Gold certification. Maria's active participation in industry panels, speaking engagements, and influential publications underscores her commitment to professional excellence and community engagement. With a focused belief in the power of civic involvement, she continuously advocates for design that not only meets client needs but also enriches the urban landscape.



Paul McDonnell, AIA

Paul is a lifelong resident of Buffalo, NY and spent 32 years serving as an architect in the public sector, working the last 25 years of his career as Architect and Director of Facilities for the Buffalo Public Schools. Paul also served as chair of the Buffalo Preservation Board for 11 years and was co-founder and president of Buffalo's leading preservation advocacy organization, the Campaign for Greater Buffalo History Architecture and Culture.

Paul serves as board member for the Buffalo/Niagara Freedom Station, the Buffalo State University Capital Improvement Advisory Board, and the Heart of the City. Paul was AIA Buffalo WNY president in 2010 and in 2023 served as the president of AIA New York State, American Institute of Architects, representing over 9000 architects in the NYS. Paul is currently Vice President of Government Advocacy for AIA NYS.

Partner Sponsors of the 2026 CMACN/AIACA Concrete Masonry Design Awards



MITSUBISHI CEMENT
CORPORATION





**Concrete Masonry
Association of
California and Nevada**

7844 Madison Avenue, Suite 140
Fair Oaks, CA 95628
www.cmacn.org

**PRESORT STANDARD
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 604
SACRAMENTO, CA**

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Architectural Concrete Masonry

Concrete Masonry Units (CMUs) are dimensionally and aesthetically pleasing for ANY of your existing or future designs. CMUs can be integrally pigmented and textured to meet a wide range of client and project demands. CMUs are design flexible, versatile, noncombustible, durable, economical, and locally produced.

Funding for the production and publication of CMU Profiles in Architecture is provided by:

Air Vol Block, LLC

(805) 543-1314
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

**Angelus Block
Company, Inc.**

(818) 767-8576
East Bakersfield, CA 93307
Fontana, CA 92335
Gardena, CA 90248
Indio, CA 92202
Orange, CA 92668

**Angelus Block
Company, Inc. Continued**

Oxnard, CA 93030
Rialto, CA 92316
Sun Valley, CA 91352

**Basalite
Concrete Products, LLC**

(707) 678-1901
Carson City, NV 89706
Dixon, CA 95620
Selma, CA 93662

Oldcastle

(702) 633-5787
Gilroy, CA 92337

ORCO Block & Hardscape

(800) 473-6726
Indio, CA 92203
Oceanside, CA 92056
Riverside, CA 92509
Stanton, CA 90680

RCP Block & Brick, Inc.

(619) 460-7250
San Diego, CA 92154

Design Awards Winning Projects

The 2026 and previous CMACN/AIACA Concrete Masonry Design Awards receiving projects may be viewed at www.cmacn.org



CMACN

**Concrete Masonry Association
of California and Nevada**

7844 Madison Avenue, Suite 140
Fair Oaks, CA 95628-3519

TEL (916) 722-1700 FAX (916) 722-1819
info@cmacn.org · www.cmacn.org

CMACN is nonprofit professional trade association established in 1977, is committed to strengthening the masonry industry in California and Nevada by:

- Providing technical information on concrete masonry for design professionals
- Protecting and advancing the interests of the concrete masonry industry
- Developing new and existing markets for concrete masonry products
- Coordinating Members' efforts in solving common challenges within the masonry industry

On the cover:

Grand Award in Commercial Design
Angelus Block Office, Rialto
Vertrees A&E
Photo courtesy of Sanduku, Inc

Grand Award in Education Design
*John F. Kennedy High School,
New 2-Story Classroom Building*
HMC Architects
Photo courtesy of HMC Architects

Grand Award in Public/Civic Design
Cares Campus
Van Woert Bigotti Architects
Photo courtesy of Vance Fox Photography

Grand Award in Single-Family,
Residential Design
Rancho Uno
o2 Architecture
Photo courtesy of Ricky Lesser

Grand Award in Multi-Family,
Residential Design
LeParc
[oo-d-a] studio, inc.
Von Dimeling Studio
Photo courtesy of Trevor Norkowski,
[@trevornorkowski](https://twitter.com/trevornorkowski)

 **BUILT®**
blockbuilt.org

 **WHY MASONRY**
whymasonry.org