

East Hampton Rec Center

East Hampton, New York

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DAVIS BRODY BOND STRIPS AWAY SOME OF THE USUAL WRAPPINGS TO SHOW OFF A SWIM-AND-FITNESS CENTER'S WELL-TONED MUSCLES.

By Clifford A. Pearson

Project: East Hampton Rec Center, East Hampton, New York

Architect: Davis Brody Bond, LLP—Steven Davis, FAIA, partner; Frank Michielli, AIA, design partner; David Manty, AIA, Ron Eng, Fred Chomowicz, AIA, project team

Owner: Town of East Hampton

Engineers: S.L. Maresca & Associates (structural); Mottola Rini Engineers (mechanical)

Lighting designer: Anita Jorgensen

General contractor: Sandpebble Builders, Inc.

Size: 21,000 square feet

Cost: \$3.6 million

Sources

Standing-seam aluminum panels:

Atas International

Mahogany-frame windows: custom

by Sandpebble Builders

Clear, low-E glass: Otto Glass

Metal doors: Vista Wall

Plastic-laminate work surfaces:

Formica

Unglazed ceramic tile for pool:

American Olean

Ground-face masonry units: Tren

Wyth Industries

Recycled rubber-roll floor cover:

DodgeRegupol, Inc.

WWW

For more places of leisure and more information on the people and products involved in this project, go to Building Types Study at www.architecturalrecord.com

The situation

The Hamptons may be famous for beaches and outdoor parties, but they have never had many indoor recreational facilities. A nonprofit organization called the East Hampton Youth Alliance decided to fill the void with a multipurpose center that would provide a place for young people to exercise their bodies and minds on rainy days and during the long winter months. By including areas for computers and for just hanging out, in addition to swimming and exercising, the group hoped to attract a broad range of users and give the facility some of the attributes of an unofficial community center. After its completion, the project was leased to the YMCA, which now runs the facility.

Although conveniently located within walking distance of the train station, the site abuts a residential neighborhood where homeowners worried that a large institutional building would change the character of the area. Height restrictions and a tight budget of just \$3.6 million (\$175 a square foot) provided further challenges in an area where \$350 a square foot is considered a reasonable price for private houses.

The solution

To relate the new building to the area's rural history, the architects at the New York City firm Davis Brody Bond thought of the 21,000-square-foot rec center as if it were a large



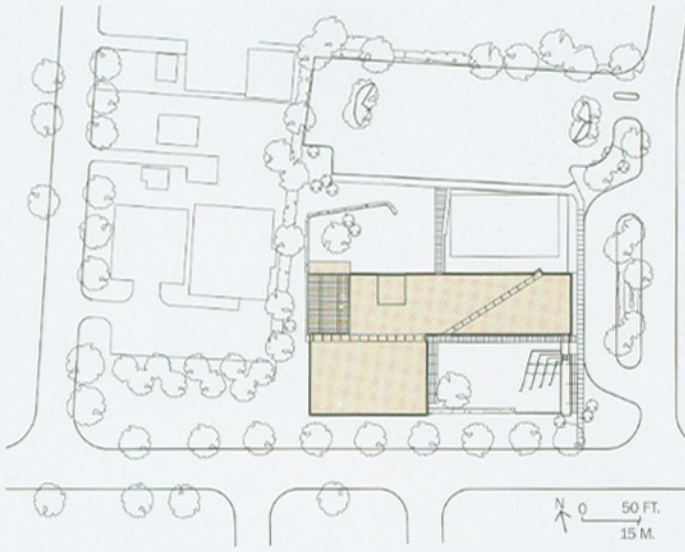
farm building. "We saw the project as a tailored barn—a cross between a rough farm structure and a refined cabinet," says Frank Michielli, AIA, design partner for the project.

The architects clad the building in Western red-cedar lapboard laid flush between cedar battens. The distinctive fenestration on the main (north) facade echoes a ramp running through the east half of the building and other interior features such as a lounge and a set of offices. "We wanted to project the building's section on the facade to hint at what's going on inside," says Michielli. The wood cladding and a design that recalls the area's vernacular buildings helped convince local homeowners that the rec center would be a good neighbor. "We met with the neighbors a lot and talked about the materials, scale, and height of the building."

Structurally and functionally, the rec center is really two buildings:



a steel-frame one for the swimming pools and a wood-frame one for fitness and computer activities. A concrete-block core with offices, locker rooms, and showers connects the two halves of the building. Although the architects had originally hoped to make the entire building wood-framed, steel was a more economical way of spanning the 65-foot-wide volume enclosing the two swimming pools.



Individuals enter the building from the north (opposite, top), but groups are dropped off on the east side (opposite, bottom), where they can congregate in a grassy courtyard. Mahogany-slatted elements help protect the south-facing elevations from the sun (below).



A ramp separates the tech lounge from the fitness area and provides access to a cafe on the mezzanine.





In both halves of the building, the architects exposed the structural framing, using it as an essential element in the project's architectural expression. In the fitness and lounge area, 24-foot-high wood studs set four feet on-center establish a visual rhythm that holds the large space together—literally and figuratively. In the swimming area, steel columns create eight-foot-wide bays that help give this portion of the building its own character. "In this building, the structure is the enclosure," states Michielli.

The architects applied a similar kind of stripped-away approach to the ceilings, exposing roof trusses under long, narrow skylights. Showing off the building's bones seems appropriate for a place dedicated to building human bones and bodies. It also works well with an open plan that relies on ramps and low balustrades instead of walls to separate areas. Indeed, as visitors walk along the ramp that divides the fitness area from the computer-equipped tech lounge, they have the chance to see everything happening here. "I wanted the circulation to be part of

the life of the building," says Michielli. The ramp, which leads to a mezzanine cafe, also eliminated the expense of having an elevator.

Controlling sunlight was an important consideration since swimmers and computer users need to be protected from glare. So south-facing elevations are shielded by mahogany sunshades cantilevered from the building and stabilized by metal cables. In the pool area, south-facing glass starts only 15 feet above the ground, while on the east, glazing is floor-to-ceiling.

Commentary

With sunlight rippling between its exposed-stud frame, the East Hampton Rec Center is a magnet for kids and adults alike. "The building is really welcoming," says Roberta Bisignano, executive director of the facility for the YMCA. "It doesn't have an institutional feeling," adds Bisignano. Without a budget for refined finishes or details, the architects used simple materials in a straightforward manner and gave it a rugged, honest charm that seems just right for a place where people pump iron and sweat. ■

A six-lane, 25-yard lap pool and a small children's pool occupy the steel-frame portion of the building (above), while lounges and workout areas are in the wood-frame portion (above right).

1. Fitness
2. Tech lounge
3. Cafe
4. Lockers
5. Children's pool
6. Lap pool
7. Courtyard

