



Farmland informs design of Thaden School building in Arkansas by Eskew Dumez Ripple



Jenna McKnight | 25 April 2022

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Rainwater is collected and stored in a pond, or “water lab”, at the Thaden School. Photo is by Tim Hursley

With a focus on learning by doing, students engage in activities such as filmmaking, constructing bicycles, and growing and preparing food.

The school is backed by the Walton Family Foundation, which is led by the founders of the retail giant Walmart.

The school’s 26-acre (10-hectare) campus was master-planned by Eskew Dumez Ripple – a studio based in New Orleans, Louisiana – in collaboration with local firm Marlon Blackwell Architects, landscape architects Andropogon and engineering firm CMTA.



The team took cues from the area's pastoral heritage for the architecture. Photo is by Dero Sanford

Eskew Dumez Ripple was tasked with designing the Home Building – a 34,000-square-foot (3,159-square-metre) facility that holds a dining hall, teaching kitchen, bookstore, library and lounge/study spaces.

"The Home Building serves as both the social and spiritual center for students," the architects said.



Eskew Dumez Ripple added a study room to the project. Photo is by Dero Sanford

While designing the facility, the team took cues from the area's pastoral heritage, including its vernacular architecture.

"The design reconciles seemingly contradictory notion: lofty ambitions for the building's design with the humble nature of local, vernacular architecture," the firm said.



A gabled, slatted canopy made of poplar wood features in the dining room. Photo is by Tim Hursley

Zigzag in plan, the wood-framed building stretches across the site, bending at several points to create porches and courtyards.

Facades are clad in shiplap cedar siding and board-and-batten siding made of white, fibre-cement Hardie panels.



Facades are clad in shiplap cedar siding. Photo is by Tim Hursley

The building's different parts are topped with either single-slope or gabled roofs, all of which are covered with standing seam metal.

Within the building, the team used basic finishes such as concrete flooring and white-painted sheetrock, and incorporated special accents like custom millwork in the study hall and a live-edge wooden table in the teaching kitchen.



Eskew Dumez Ripple used basic finishes within the facility. Photo is by Dero Sanford

At the heart of the facility is the dining room, which rises to 38 feet (12 metres) at its highest point and features a glazed wall. Hung from large, exposed trusses is a gabled, slatted canopy made of poplar wood.

"The design employs common materials and methods in uncommon ways," the team said.

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The building has a number of sustainable features, including low-flow plumbing fixtures, a geothermal well and an energy recovery wheel.

Rainwater is collected and stored in a pond, or "water lab", that serves as a teaching tool for students. The landscape is filled with native species like prairie grass and pecan trees.



The building has a number of sustainable features. Photo is by Tim Hursley

“Sustainability is placed at the forefront of the students’ education, and the landscape functions as a botanical textbook rife with plants that represent a microcosm of the region’s native species,” the team said.

With plans to install a photovoltaic array in the future, the building is designed to achieve an Energy Use Intensity score of 23. A score of 25 or less for a school building indicates that the building is “zero energy ready”, according to the architects.



Thaden School building is located in Arkansas. Photo is by Dero Sanford

The Home Building at Thaden School was a recipient of the 2022 AIA Architecture Awards.

Other projects there include the Crystal Bridges Museum of Art, designed by Sadie Architects, and a co-working, dining and recreational venue by Brand Bureau and Modus Studio that is located within a former industrial building.

The photography is by Tim Hursley and Dero Sanford.

Project credits:

Architect: Eskew Dumez Ripple

Landscape architect: Andropogon Associates

Civil engineering: Ecological Design Group

MEP engineering: CMTA Consulting Engineers

Structural engineering: Engineering Consultants

Project management: Aegis Property Group | WEI

General contractor: Milestone

Irrigation: Aqueous

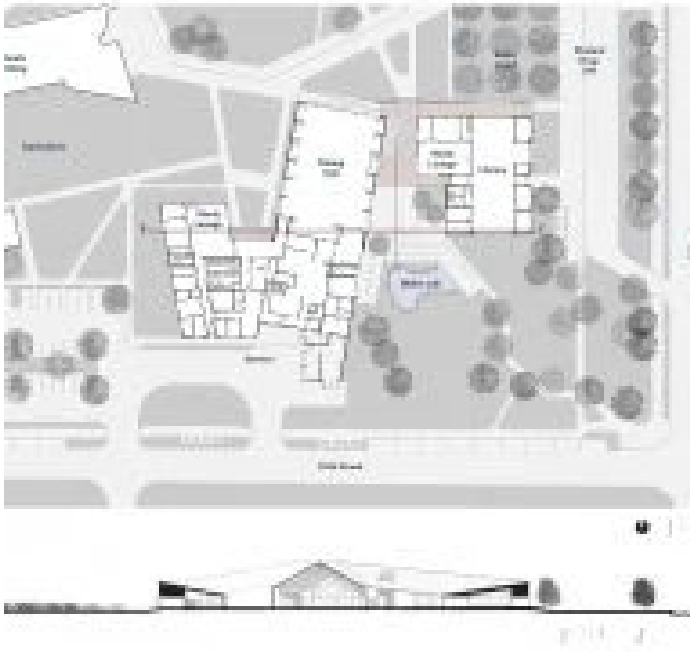
Signage and wayfinding: Tom Zetek

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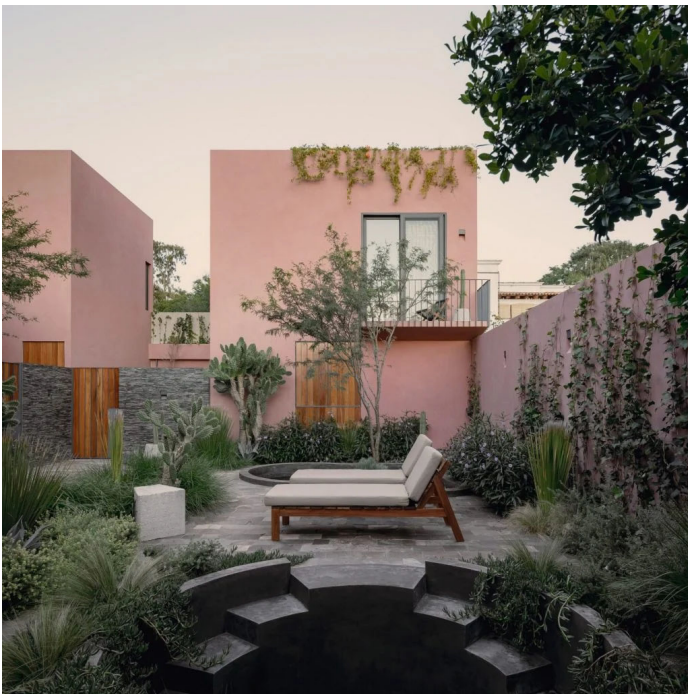
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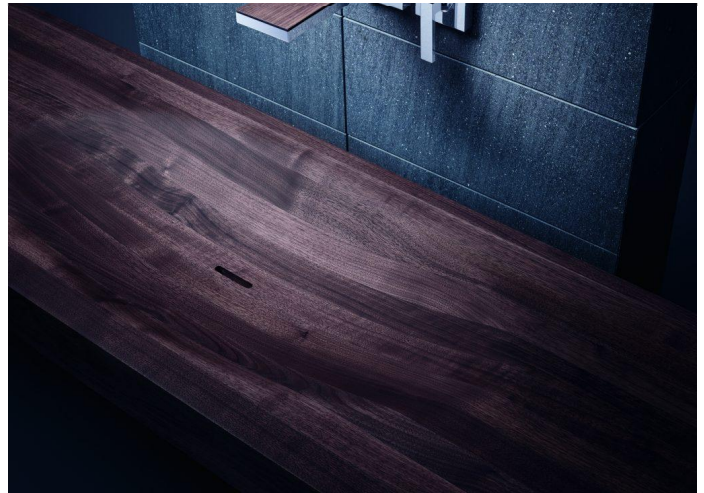


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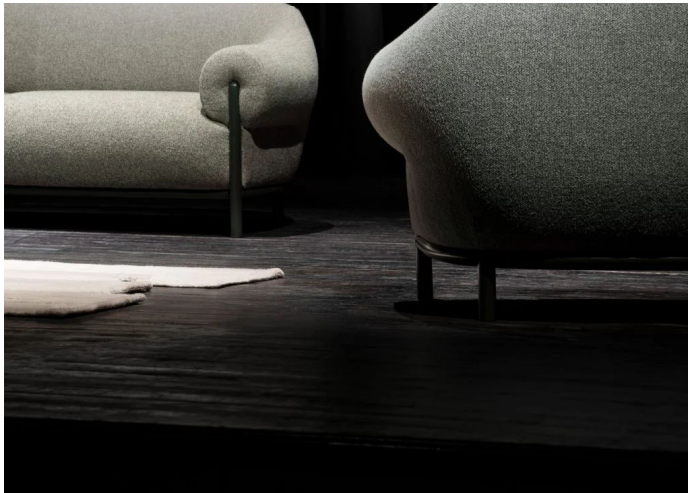
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gustavowoltmann • 18 days ago

Thanks and I liked this so much.

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Chris • a month ago • edited

Some messy elements where materials and geometries converge in the exterior wrapping. Nice landscaping.

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HeywoodFloyd • a month ago

A good amount of bang here for not a lot of bucks. Nice work.

^ | v 1 • Reply • Share >

duckusucker • a month ago • edited

Terrific building. Hard to picture students not realizing the value of architecture. Methinks I smell Walmart funding: its headquarters are in the same town. Crystal Bridges Museum of American Art, one of Sam's daughter's projects, also resides there.

It's a pity the powers-that-be don't fund a similarly impressive public school. Walmart shoppers are not drawn, for the most part, from the elite after all.

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Archi → duckusucker • a month ago • edited

It is indeed part of the NW design excellence



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