

Fleeting Design

The San Diego International Airport Car Rental Center is among the more distinctive structures to come online in the past year. The project blended efficiency, function and design.

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SPECIAL REPORT: STRUCTURES

BYE, DESIGN

Architectural Style Often Takes Back Seat to Practical And Price Considerations, Creating Buildings That Blend in Rather Than Stand Out

BY KATIE CALLAHAN

Increased focus on volume, cost and function over style and appeal has led to a less regionalized architectural style in San Diego and other cities.

Architects and San Diego planners must wrestle with the question of how important a recognizable architectural style is in relationship to minimizing costs and maximizing amenities for new, large building projects.

Bigger, national architectural firms are taking on the larger construction projects. This is among the factors making the style of buildings less distinctive, said Victor Navarro, an architect with his own firm, **Taller Emergente Architecture**. Navarro also teaches at the **NewSchool of Architecture + Design**.

"Everything (in the built environment)... is becoming less regional than it at one point might have been," Navarro said.

Watered Down

In the frequently used design-build model, architects and contractors must create a plan together. Such a model results in less time and money for "cutting-edge architecture," Navarro said. It leaves less chance to preserve a distinctive architectural form for San Diego.

From an architectural perspective, when doing design-build, sometimes the design gets watered down after considering expenses by the contractor, said **Kevin Bussett**, public awareness commissioner for the **American Institute of Architects San Diego** and an architect at **Safdie Rabines Architects**. "A lot of it comes down to the client appetite for novel design," he said.



Kevin Bussett

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Profiles of 13 distinctive structures new to San Diego County, **Pages 22-40**

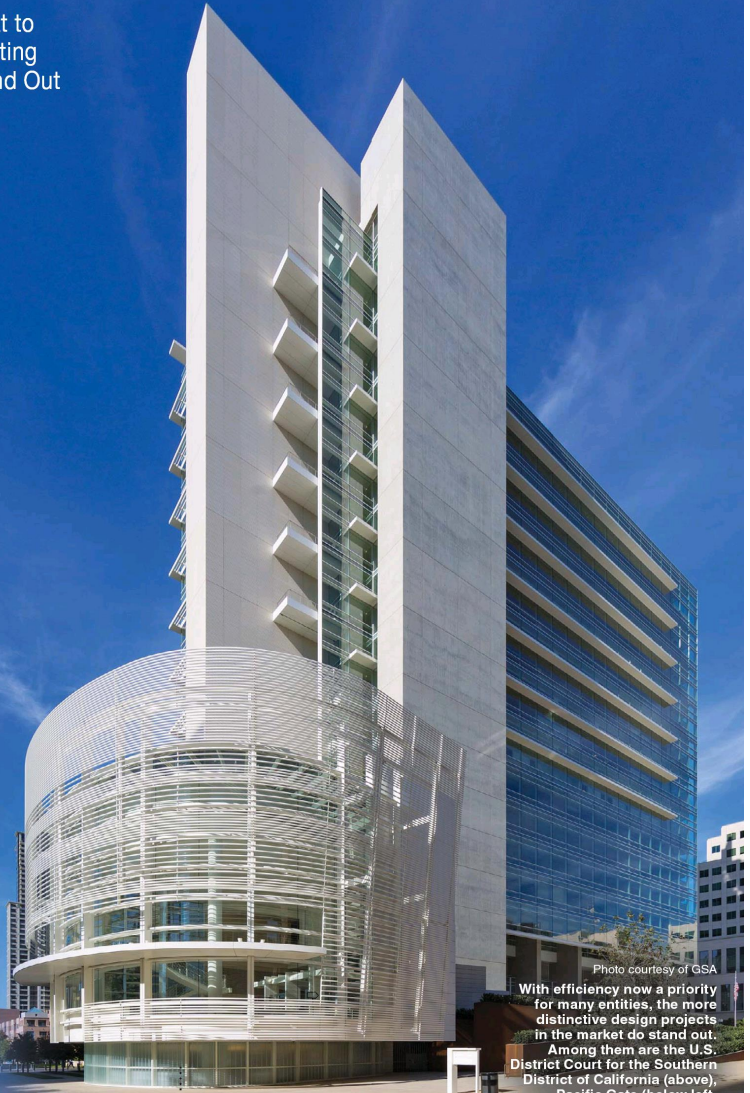


Photo courtesy of GSA

With efficiency now a priority for many entities, the more distinctive design projects in the market do stand out. Among them are the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California (above), Pacific Gate (below left, under construction) and the Qualcomm AY Building.

THE LISTS

26 General Contractors

30 Largest Construction Projects



Rendering courtesy of Bosa Development



Photo courtesy of Hope-Amundsen

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Developers are more driven by the cheapest way to build and meet building and energy codes, according to **Bastiaan Bouma**, executive director and chief executive officer of the **American Institute of Architects' San Diego** chapter. Such priorities do not lend themselves to innovative design, except in residential building.



Bastiaan Bouma

Climate's Control

Even the weather in San Diego also contributes toward generic buildings. Bussett said the climate in San Diego defies the need to be artistic, whereas in places like Scandinavia, extreme temperatures create a critical regionalism demand.

San Diego contractors commonly use tilt-up concrete construction. Tilt-up concrete construction builds the pad of the building and pouring the walls directly on the pad and tilting it up with a crane. It uses concrete as a building material rather than steel.

According to an article in **Architectural Review**, San Diego construction primarily attends to economic costs, construction and labor. It requires that architects do less formal design experimentation and instead explore construction methods. Generic design triumphs over local distinctiveness.

Bouma said this isn't unique to San Diego. Office and commercial developers must decide between maintaining the



Photo courtesy of the City of San Diego

One architect describes the San Diego Central Library design as a merging of Spanish traditions and Yankee ingenuity.

building and creating a signature look. Developers now work toward efficiency per square foot and a focus on amenities over design.

"For the (tall) commercial and office buildings, I don't think there's a city in the country where you could say there is a Chicago-style tall building or a New York-style. That's gone away," Bouma said. "Now the globalization of engineering and design services and the rapid advancement in materials technology, people are ready to embrace it. It doesn't really matter where it comes from."

Nevertheless, cities determine what they will allow in the planning process, Bouma said.

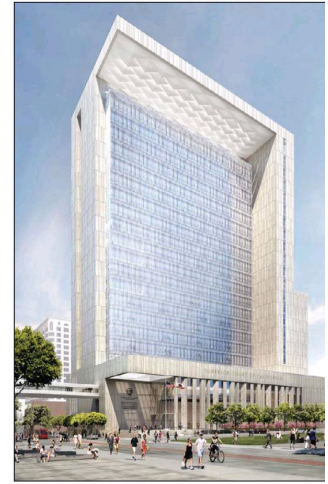
Chicago provides an example of a city that wouldn't let developers construct a generic, homogenized building that looks like it could be anywhere; they're looking for distinctive contributions downtown.

San Diego Themes

Therefore, a local stamp to a distinctive San Diego's architectural brand still exists in some cases. **Rob Quigley** is a regionally specific architect in San Diego. His design of the downtown library showcased his idea of style in Southern California: a merging of Spanish traditions and Yankee ingenuity, Bussett said.

Such architecture portrays San Diego as a stylistic frontier town with a mild climate, one that is not characterized as button up, but informal, ambiguous, unfinished with a blend of influences. He said he thinks the themes of informality, pragmatism and scrappiness resonate with a lot of San Diego design professionals.

Bouma mentioned **Bosa Development** and **Jonathan Segal** as those in the field who have been design innovators. He also mentioned the new courthouses as design innovations.



Rendering courtesy of SOM

The new San Diego Central Courthouse for the Superior Court of San Diego County is among the more distinct new designs.

The **Qualcomm Building AY** provides another example of regional specificity in architecture, Bussett said. It showcases energy efficiency and passive building with solar shading that creates different facades on the building. The building's positioning makes it so that it couldn't really exist anywhere else.

Creating a sense of place in a city may allow for that to change, to develop a regional character, he said. That would come from above the architect and contractor, at the urban planning level.

"The city sets the tone," Bussett said. "If the city is pro-business or pro good design, it smooths the way for a lot of projects."