



By Rob Ley

CHANGING

The architect behind Indianapolis's celebrated "May–September" garage installation explains his art and the process behind it.

ESKENAZI HOSPITAL was established in the 1850s in Indianapolis to treat soldiers with smallpox. It has since become one of the largest hospitals in the Midwest and primarily cares for low- to medium-income patients.

A few years ago, the hospital began construction of a massive expansion. Included in the new campus is one of the largest parking structures in the Midwest—it alone is more than 1 million square feet in size. Hospital officials were very aware of the challenges, aesthetic and otherwise, that are created when designing such a large parking structure. A decision was made early on to engage the most public face of this new parking structure as the host for a large-scale public art installation; this decision was part of a larger initiative to commission and incorporate many art pieces into the new hospital complex.

The Process

Urbana Studio was commissioned by the hospital to develop a design that would be interactive and visually engaging, while working within a variety of pragmatic considerations that included:

- The façade had to allow for the natural ventilation of vehicle exhaust in the structure.
- The façade was to be designed in such a way as to not impede traffic flow within the garage.
- The façade was to be durable and able to withstand large daily and seasonal temperature and weather swings (UV resistant, corrosion resistant, etc.).
- The façade needed to be able to withstand up to 90 mph winds.

PHOTOS BY SERGE HOEKSCHI



PERSPECTIVES



"May–September" makes use of colors and movement to catch the eye of drivers and passers-by, including those who catch it in their peripheral vision and come back to see more.



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With these requirements in mind, our studio began to work through various concepts. We were commissioned to design and implement the fabrication and installation in August 2012.

The Concept

We initially developed the concept of the “May–September” installation from active camouflage techniques, and then worked through the design development drawings. Camouflage was conceptually interesting initially because the main purpose of the façade was to provide an intense visual screen for what is otherwise an ordinary parking structure. As the project progressed, the interest in camouflage evolved into an approach that would create a very large, dynamic, interactive element for the city.

Instead of using an actively kinetic approach with all of the inevitable maintenance and longevity concerns that accompany those types of projects, we worked toward one that capitalizes on the fact that most viewers would be moving, themselves—walking, biking, or driving. Thus, the design ultimately became something that offers a degree of variability of color and form as one passes by the project. The awareness of this, interestingly enough, occurs whether someone is directly watching or catching a glimpse out of his periphery of vision.

The effect of a field of 7,000 angled metal panels in conjunction with an articulated east/west color strategy creates a dynamic façade system that offers

observers a unique visual experience, depending on their vantage point and the pace at which they move through the site. Pedestrians and slow-moving vehicles in close proximity to the hospital experience a noticeable, dappled shift in color and transparency as they move across the hospital grounds, while motorists driving along West Michigan Street experience a faster, gradient color shift that changes depending on the direction they’re traveling.

Installation

We worked on the design and built physical mock-ups in our studio for about six months. Custom software written specifically for this project allowed us to develop several design approaches while simultaneously keeping track of material requirements and budgetary results. To keep the project within budget, the design was developed using a modular panel system. The 7,000 panels that define the art façade are 12 inches high by 18, 24, or 36 inches long. This resulted in a 100 percent efficient use of material with zero waste as the 48-inch by 144-inch metal plates were processed.

The method of attachments throughout the façade was also thoroughly reviewed, as 21,000 bolts were required to attach all the panels. It was decided early on to use a T-slot extrusion system for the main vertical structure to mitigate the need to drill tens of thousands of holes to fasten the colored panels, while allowing for adjustability of the panels as needed.

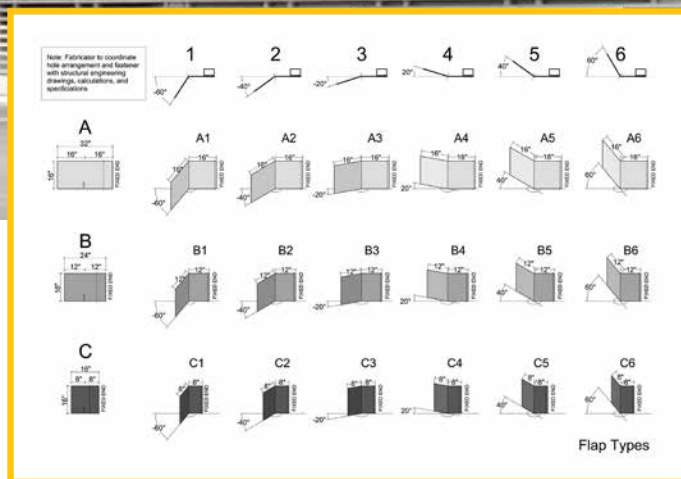


Once the system for attaching the colored panels to the main structural vertical extrusions was finalized, we worked out a system that would break the entire façade into 50 self-contained assemblies, each approximately 12 feet wide by 25 feet tall. This allowed major assembly to occur in the fabricator's facility and for easy trucking of each assembly to the site. After these assemblies arrived on site, they were lifted with a construction crane and placed in the prescribed location on the façade. During this process, large U-bolts were used to hang each assembly to the preexisting tube steel frame on the parking structure exterior. Using this method, the entire installation was completed in eight days.

The Result

Now that the project is complete, I'm not sure if it is going to be seen as a painting or a sculpture—maybe it's best to call it a façade. The colors went through many iterations and a lot of back and forth. The color scheme is quite simple as the west-side panels received a deep blue color, while those to the east received a golden yellow color. The angles themselves create the illusion of different hues. The operation or performance of this piece relies on the gradual shift of one contrasting color to another; the exact colors and the resulting vibrancy injected into the city are different during each season.

I like to investigate what it means for something to be interactive or responsive to the viewer in a lot of my work. In some projects, this has been explored through



technology and cutting-edge performative materials that can bend and flex like muscles. In other works, optical conditions, such as moiré, have contributed to a sense of movement and kinetics. This piece addresses interactivity in another way. It is static as a piece, though it was conceived as a device that would radically shift or graduate from one condition to another as one walks, bikes, or drives past it.

I particularly like that despite its size, understanding that it is changing (or shifting) may be something that happens the fifth or 10th time one drives by, as it may only be something you notice in the periphery. Once noticed, I hope it is something people then begin to look forward to as they approach.

My intent was to create something in the built environment that would help contribute to the identity of an organization or even a city, while at the same time providing an experience for the community to anticipate and look forward to experiencing over and over again.

For more information on "May–September," visit urbanarch.com.



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