



BAY AREA

RICHMOND CIVIC CENTER BLENDS MODERN, HISTORIC

By Michael Walden, director of design for Nadel Architects

After nearly seven years of planning, design and construction by a multidisciplinary development group, City of Richmond employees recently moved back into the completed Phase I of its revitalized Civic Center complex, the new \$100 million-plus facility that puts Richmond ahead of the curve in urban revitalization. The new Civic Center campus celebrates the modernist architecture of famed 1940s architect Timothy Pflueger, but has all of the comforts of a 21st century property to meet the needs of the bustling city.

"The revitalization of Richmond Civic Center is one of the most significant historic civic center rehabilitations California has seen in decades," said Steve Duran, director of the Community & Economic Development Department for the City of Richmond. "With the rehabilitation and adaptive reuse of the buildings, we believe the Civic Center pays tribute to the city's architectural heritage and reestablishes Richmond's place as a city of the future."

Now complete, Phase I includes the renovation of three landmark buildings: City Hall, 440 Civic Center Plaza (the former Hall of Justice) and the Civic Auditorium. Arranged around a striking landscaped plaza, the Civic Center facilities were originally conceived by famed architects Richard Neutra and R.M. Schindler in the 1930s and executed by San Francisco's most famous civic architect, Timothy Pflueger. The low, linear forms—from the prominent colonnades that form a band around the plaza to the horizontal brickwork cladding to the slender 65-foot wide City Hall building—reflect the mid-century modern style popularized in the late 1940s and 1950s.

The development team had a goal of bringing critical city administrative functions, which had been relocated offsite for 12 years due to damage from the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake, back to downtown—honoring the original architecture while also reviving the central business district.

Richmond has always been a hard-



Historic Photos courtesy of the Richmond Civic Center; present day photos courtesy of Nadel Architects.

The central plaza in front of the original Memorial Auditorium building (top) received a new design by WRT (bottom), keeping the civic feel but also making it a comfortable outdoor usable space.

working community: home to the Rosie the Riveter Museum which features the women of the World War II war effort who "kept the home fires burning" and the shipyards humming, it has faced good times and bad, but is now poised to make a comeback. "We envisioned the Civic Center as a representative sample of the hard-working soul of the community of Richmond," Duran says. "Many of the materials used in the renovation have been sourced or manufactured locally, if not retained from the original struc-

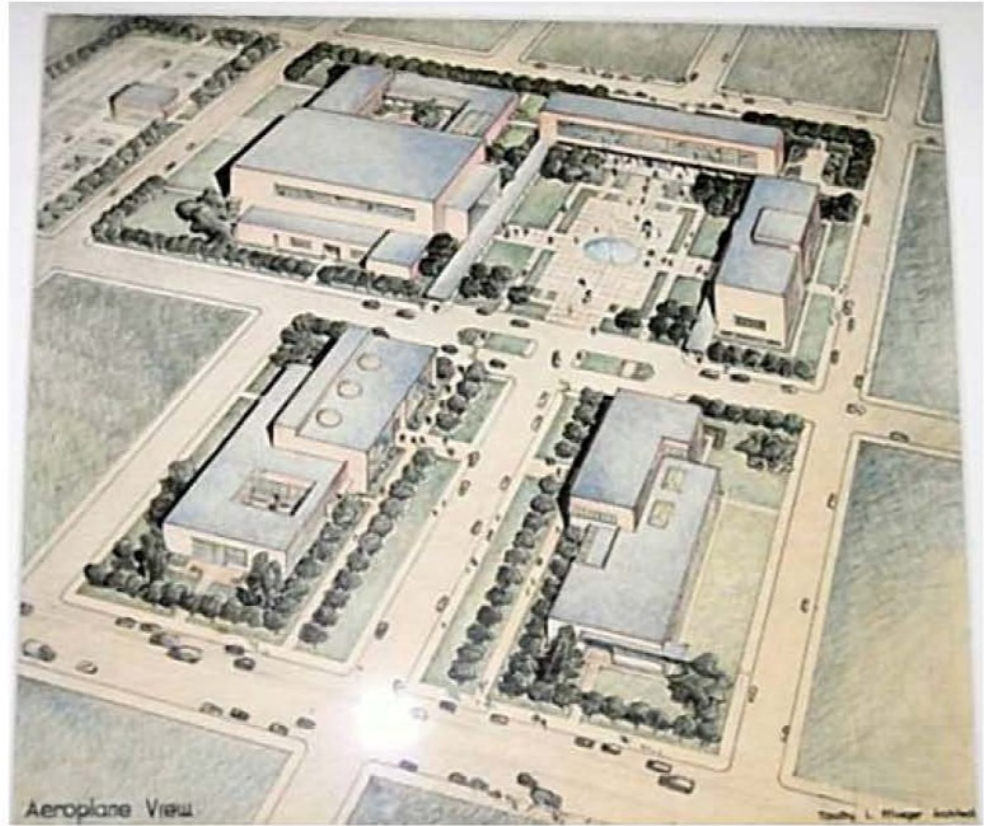
tures." A 63-foot long recycled glass and concrete service counter installed in City Hall's One-Stop Permit Center was made locally by "green" countertop manufacturer Vetrazzo. Glass art walls by artist Gordon Huether in City Hall's entryway feature a photo montage tribute to the industrial history of Richmond, showing scenes of ship-building, commercial fishing, car manufacturing and the like.

Being green in the revitalization process was a priority for the team, and such elements abound throughout the project.

City Hall's performance for energy use exceeds the State's energy code by 20 percent, and 440 Civic Center Plaza exceeds State energy code by 38 percent. Photovoltaics installed on the roof of City Hall and the Civic Center Auditorium provide 15 percent of the Civic Center's electricity.

Richmond's City Hall, 440 Civic Center Plaza and Civic Auditorium underwent complete seismic upgrades. These include exterior envelope rehabilitation, with replacement of all exterior glazing, stone panels and large portions of the brick exterior with brick that replicates the original cladding; as well as system upgrades and interior renovations. Enclosing and retrofitting the ground floor of City Hall expanded it by approximately 15,000 square feet, which creates a floor similar in size to the upper levels. City Hall's once leaky basement has been completely retrofitted and reinforced to federal standards, thus allowing it to house the City's Emergency Operations Center.

Some City Hall functions were transferred to 440 Civic Center Plaza, which opened up 56,000 square feet of space for community services, modernized City Council chambers and accompany-



Drawing courtesy of City of Richmond.

This signed Timothy Pflueger drawing from 1945 depicts two lower buildings that were never built.

ing broadcast facilities for Richmond's Public Television station, KCRT. Thanks to cost savings identified by the construction team during the process, additional funds were put towards City Hall and the Community Services Center to raise them from LEED® Silver to Gold certification.

One of the most dramatic changes to the Civic Center is the two-acre public plaza itself, which has undergone significant modifications in terms of scale, function and use. The historic brick steps remain, but the expansive "parade-scale" open interior of the plaza has been re-designed to encourage public use, with a central sculpture and water feature and the introduction of intimately-scaled relaxation areas. Landscape design reduced water use by 46 percent with new water-wise landscaping and other water-saving features.

Public art abounds throughout the property, both indoors and outdoors, in public spaces and employee-only areas. Eight pieces of site-specific, commis-

sioned art are featured and 56 pieces of existing fine art were acquired. Some of the unique pieces include: etched elevator doors in City Hall and a mural by Daniel Galvez in the Auditorium's Bermuda Room, quilts by Marion Coleman, stainless steel metal sconces by Nyls Jongewaard on the Auditorium's exterior, and the dramatic plaza fountain sculpture by local Richmond artist Archie Held.

"We see the Richmond Civic Center as the centerpiece to the revitalization of the entire Richmond community," explained Mayor Gayle McLaughlin. "It is now a gathering place that is a true representation of our City's hard-working and resilient spirit."

The project was a collaboration between the city and developer Alliance Property Group, which assembled a team that included Nadel Architects, preservation consultant Mark Hulbert, landscape designers WRT, and Pankow Builders. Perkins + Will headed the master plan work that set the stage for the current restoration.



City Hall, once perched on columns (top) now with an extra office floor slid beneath the original (bottom)