



AIA/COTE TOP TEN GREEN PROJECTS 2007

Government Canyon Visitor Center

Location: Helotes, TX

Architect: Lake|Flato Architects

Overview

Government Canyon Visitor Center forms the gateway to the 8,600-acre Government Canyon State Natural Area. It includes an exhibit hall, a park store, classrooms, offices, and an outdoor pavilion.

Government Canyon lies along the Balcones Escarpment on the recharge zone of the Edwards Aquifer, the sole source of drinking water for the city of San Antonio, in an area under immense development pressure. The goal of the project, a karst aquifer preserve, was to protect and restore the natural landscape while creating high-use, low-maintenance, and economical structures that reinforce the mission of the Natural Area.

SUSTAINABILITY SNAPSHOT

- Percent of total building area that is daylight: **90**
- Percent of building that can be ventilated or cooled with operable windows: **100**
- Precipitation managed on site: **100**
- EPA Energy Reduction:
- Percent total energy savings: **42**
- Lighting Load after Controls (W/sf):

Jury Comments:

"This has the great Texas vernacular ... what the world was like before air conditioning! The building opens up and shades itself and fits into the landscape in an unaggressive way. There is also something really familiar and comfortable about it."

– Susan Szenasy / Metropolis / New York, NY

"This has a really frugal feel to it, that great feel you get from a farm."

– David Brems, FAIA / Gillies Stransky Brems Smith / Salt Lake City, UT

"What's new is old. These are really historic strategies. Going back to what makes sense in a very low tech way ... not innovating just for the sake of that." – Anne Schopf, FAIA / Mahlum Architects /

Seattle, WA

"The composition is very carefully controlled, from the site plan to details." – John Quale, Assistant Professor / University of Virginia School of Architecture / Charlottesville, VA



Sustainable Design Intent & Innovation

The design team aimed to minimize impacts on the landscape and fragile water resources and to do more with less. The development was concentrated to reduce landscape water usage and physical impact on the site. Extraneous space was eliminated, reducing material use, energy use, first cost, operations cost, and maintenance needs. Exhibit and circulation spaces, originally programmed as indoor spaces, were designed as sheltered and shaded outdoor spaces, accepting summer breezes but protected from north winds. These spaces are not air-conditioned, reducing conditioned space by 35% and further reducing material and energy costs.

Rainwater collected from the project roof is filtered and used for both landscape irrigation and wastewater conveyance. The gravity-flow water system is coupled with solar-powered water pumps. All stormwater runoff from parking lots is distributed through vegetated filter strips and retained on site.

The structures make extensive use of local and regional materials while evoking the historic uses of the former ranch site. The main exhibit space was built using materials and technologies traditionally used by ranchers in cattle pens and fencing, while the stone walls echo the historic stone fences found on the site.

Primary Design Team Members

Lake|Flato Architects
Encotech Engineering Consultants, Inc.
Architectural Engineers Collaborative
Pape-Dawson Engineers, Inc.
Archillum Lighting Design
Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

Full project profile:

www.aiatopen.org/hpb/overview.cfm?ProjectID=796

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