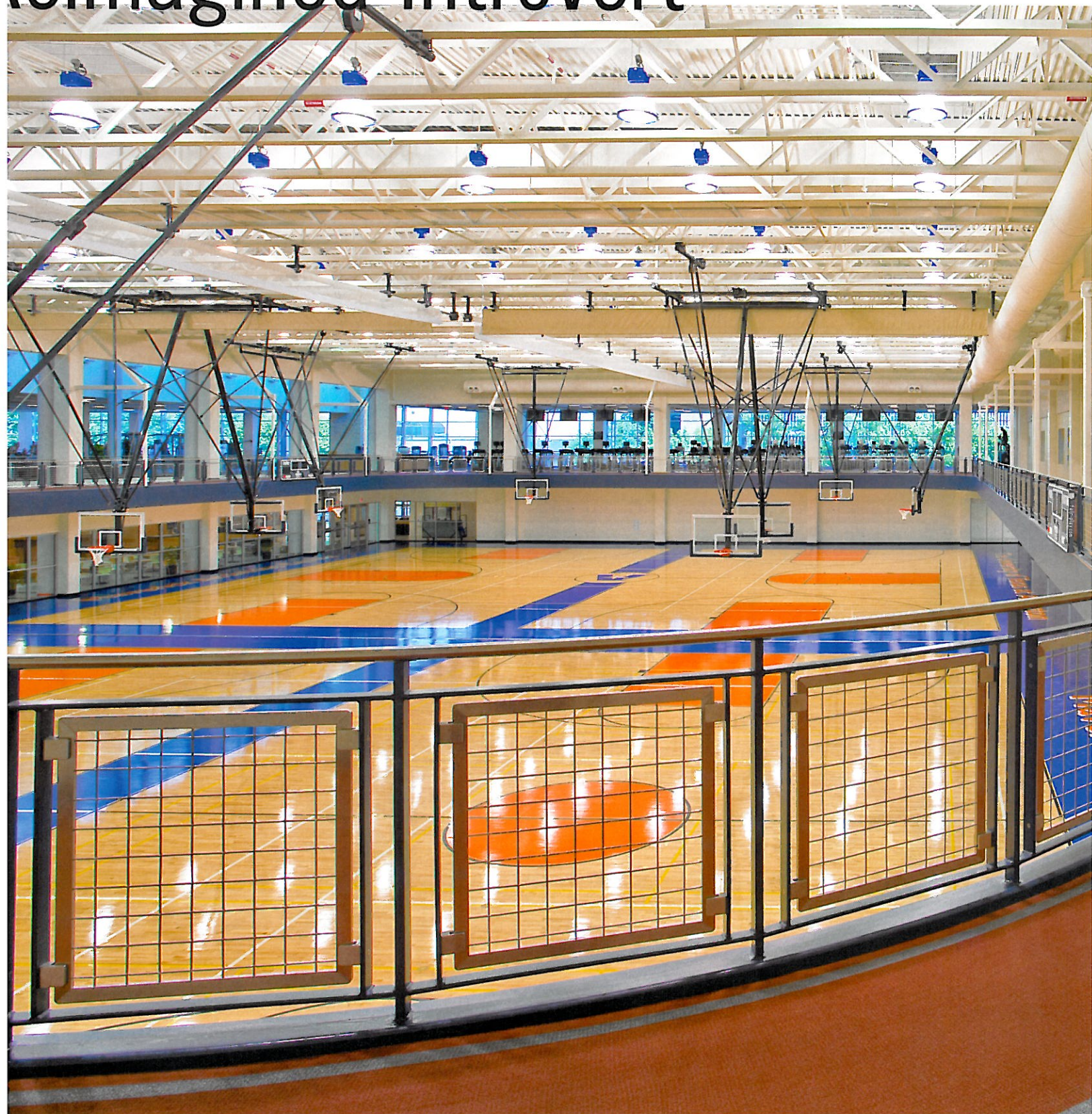


Reimagined Introvert



PROJECT Maverick Activities Center, Arlington

CLIENT The University of Texas at Arlington

ARCHITECT Page Southerland Page in association with Hughes Group Architects

DESIGN TEAM Jeff Bricker, AIA; Wayne Hughes, AIA; Amado Fernandez, AIA; Julie Rusk, Assoc. AIA; Dick Robinson, AIA; William Echterling, AIA

CONTRACTOR Hunt Construction Group

CONSULTANTS Page Southerland Page (MEP); Charles Gojer & Associates (structural and civil); Schirmer Engineering (fire protection); Cedrick Frank Associates (acoustics); JCL Landscape Architecture (landscape); Halford Busby (cost estimating)

PHOTOGRAPHER Craig D. Blackmon, FAIA

by **TODD HAMILTON**



THE NEW MAVERICK ACTIVITIES CENTER at The University of Texas at Arlington is among several new buildings erected on campus after a construction hiatus of many years. Last year the administration completed a revised master plan for the twenty-first century. The master plan, designed by Carter & Burgess of Fort Worth with Ayers Saint Cross of Washington, D.C., guides the development patterns of future buildings, pedestrian circulation, and the landscape spaces in between. For much of its history as an urban university, UTA students lived elsewhere and commuted to campus for classes. But that image has transformed into an almost around-the-clock environment with the addition of numerous privately funded apartment complexes on or near campus. The recently expanded Maverick Activities Center also has helped broaden campus life. Completed in March, the project added 80,000 square feet and revamped the existing building's 115,000 square footage, updating the original 1970s-era facility to a state-of-the-art complex for sports and exercise. Hughes Group of Virginia designed the project, with the Houston office of Page Southerland Page serving as architect of record.

The previous activities center was a massive, virtually windowless brick monolith containing large sport courts. Surrounded by parking lots and trees, the interior was dark, with poorly lit halls and institutional-like

facilities. Glazed terracotta tile in pastel colors, reminiscent of high school locker rooms, lined the hallways. Truly an introverted building, there was no visual connection with the outside at any level. The scope of the expansion project included addressing the building's visual constraints by adding clerestory windows to the large volumes, covering the glazed-block walls along the corridors, and wrapping pre-existing blank facades with outdoor sport courts (and an outdoor movie theater planned for the future). Handball courts have been modernized with frameless glass doors and better lighting. In the near future a rock-climbing wall will be installed adjacent to the handball courts.

Viewed from the exterior, the most visible improvement is the glass skin that now wraps the old activities center. With its new transparent facade, the Maverick Center addition is the antithesis of the old. Now the center is light and airy, and powerful in its architectural section. Sunlight basks the spaces during the day, and at night the building glows brilliantly like a beacon along Nedderman Drive. Nighttime activities are on display within the luminous interior where an elevated indoor running tracks encircles the sports courts and exercise rooms are filled with students, faculty, and alumni burning off calories. The ground floor of the addition contains the Department of Kinesiology, a branch cyber station, rooms for yoga,



aerobics, and martial arts, a long-overdue juice bar for the west side of the campus, and several new regulation-size sport courts. In response to the need for safe and secure campus facilities, card-swipe access is required for all who enter.

The Maverick Center is visually aligned to a generous pedestrian spine that connects the campus with the pre-existing activities building. Terminating this student spine is a grand staircase leading to a mezzanine with 360-degree visibility to the basketball courts, the street, and the campus beyond. Students use this space as a social corridor, with ample seating for individual privacy as well as small group seating. The second-floor mezzanine is where serious exercise takes place. Huge galleries of treadmills, weight-lifting equipment, cardiovascular machines, etc. are open to the double-height volume and the street. A total of 20,000 sf is devoted to physical training and individual fitness. Large flat-screen TVs are placed throughout the building keeping everyone abreast of sports and politics. A video game room provides a social outlet for those who prefer to compete electronically. The outcome is a state-of-the-art, cybernetic-enhanced environment that is extremely popular. No private fitness center in the Dallas-Fort Worth area can match the dynamic interior of this new facility.

The site relationship between the newly combined building footprint and the nearby campus buildings is less successful. Academic buildings need to be a part of the larger campus context while also maintaining an independent identity. The Maverick Center is unique in its purpose, and therefore is much different than a laboratory or classroom building. Architects must analyze this "fit" and carefully tailor the new to the existing environment. However, the main entrance, while visually prominent and bold, appears indifferent to its immediate surroundings and to the alignment of the street leading to it. Instead of offering pedestrians shelter from the sun and rain with a loggia or some other protective structure, students gathering in front of the new activities building encounter an open plaza that is too large, too hard, and too suburban in its setback from Nedderman Drive. Also, the landscape design is a freeform pattern of river rock with no geometric relationship to the Maverick Center, designed by Carter & Burgess of Fort Worth with Ayers Saint Gross of Washington, D.C.,

Symmetry drives the initial design parti with two-story glass wings flanking the entrance, although the blue low-emissivity glass curtain walls seem better suited for corporate office buildings than academic architecture. (Rumor has it that the blue color was selected to mimic

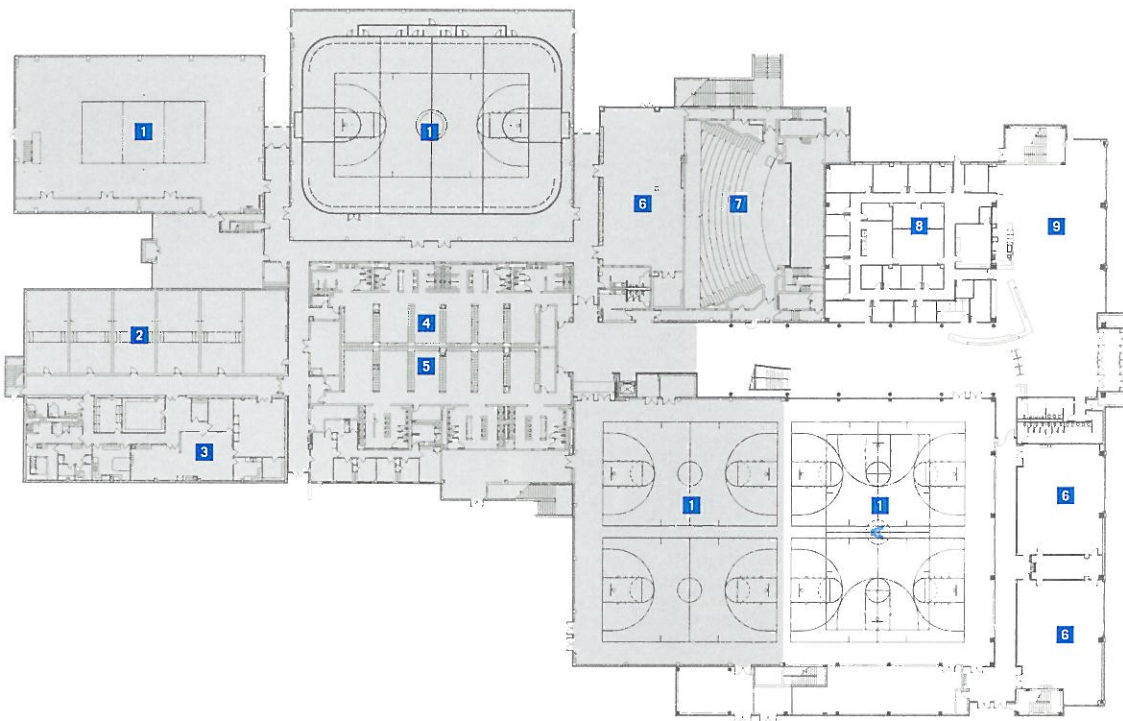


school colors.) Random residential-looking stone panels bookend the main glass entrance where classical cut-stone blocks might have been a more appropriate choice. However, none of these aesthetic aspects detract from the building's vibrant interior and intense daily use.

Most UT Arlington campus buildings are big brick monoliths with rhythmic, punched window openings. These buildings are functional and pragmatic without the trappings of architectural history or style found at many older campuses. Each tends to mirror the architectural fashion of the era they were built, starting in the 1960s with Spanish Colonial capped with red tile roofs and embellished facades with arches, but clearly designed on a human scale. More recent buildings tended to be big if not huge, scaled in response to increasingly larger enrollments of the colleges and professional programs on campus. Trees, landscape, and walkways have served to mediate any significant differences in size and scale between buildings. Despite some contextual concerns, the new Maverick Center is a successful and welcomed addition to the campus life. It gives the students and faculty a first-class exercise/sports center like those found at flagship Texas universities.

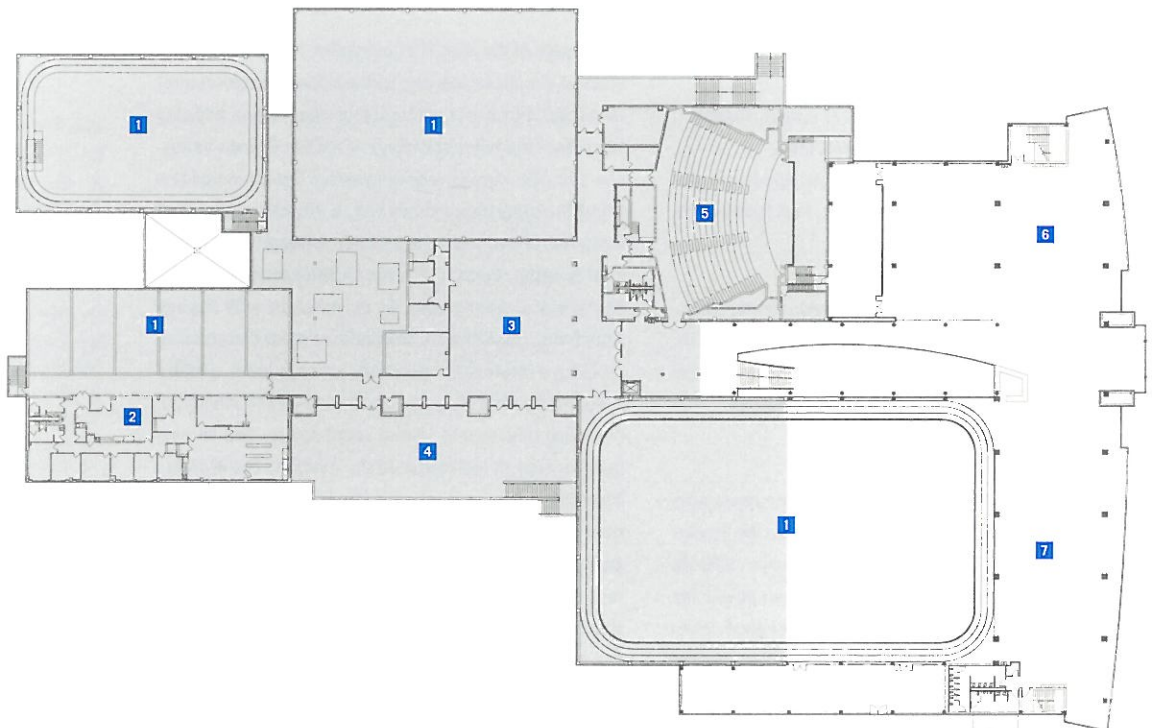
Todd Hamilton is a Dallas architect and professor of architecture at UT Arlington.





- FIRST FLOOR PLAN**
- PRE-EXISTING FOOTPRINT
 - 1. SPORT COURT
 - 2. RAQUETBALL COURT
 - 3. KINESIOLOGY
 - 4. WOMEN'S LOCKERS
 - 5. MEN'S LOCKERS
 - 6. MULTIPURPOSE
 - 7. AUDITORIUM
 - 8. ADMINISTRATIVE SUITE
 - 9. COMPUTER CAFE

- SECOND FLOOR PLAN**
- PRE-EXISTING FOOTPRINT
 - 1. OPEN TO BELOW
 - 2. KINESIOLOGY
 - 3. GAMEROOM
 - 4. PATIO
 - 5. AUDITORIUM
 - 6. WEIGHTS
 - 7. FITNESS



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