



THE WAYNE MORSE UNITED STATES COURTHOUSE

It's still hard to believe, even more than a decade after it opened, that Eugene has a courthouse designed by Thom Mayne.

Now 74, Mayne is the brilliant starchitect — winner of the Pritzker Architecture Prize in 2005, which puts him in the same league as Rem Koolhaas, Renzo Piano, Frank Gehry and I.M. Pei — whose turbulent personality helped

him avoid actual commissions, as opposed to winning design awards, until he was well into his 50s.

That was about when the General Services Administration chose him to design a new courthouse in Eugene.

The sweeping organic forms of the Wayne Morse United States Courthouse, which opened in 2006 at 8th Avenue and Mill Street, are so wonderfully out of place in Eugene's otherwise dowdy downtown that the building looks like a hallucination. Its metallic skin is at its best on the cloudy days that are a Northwest specialty, reflecting and distorting the soft light until the whole structure appears to glow from within.

Mayne's selection came as a surprise to U.S. District Judge Michael Hogan, an evangelical Christian spearheading the project whose vision for the courthouse included classical columns. Despite early clashes, the two men grew to be friends.

Eugene was lucky to get Mayne when we did. His credits now include the San Francisco Federal Building, Bill and Melinda Gates Hall at Cornell University and the Perot Museum of Nature and Science in Dallas, Texas. Mayne was also the designer chosen for the Tour Phare, or Beacon Tower, which was to have been — the project was canceled before construction — the tallest skyscraper in Paris. — *Bob Keefer*

LIFE, LIBRARY AND HAPPINESS

High vaulted ceilings, natural light streaming through subtle stained glass, and an awe-inspiring rotunda capped with a skylight distinguish the remarkable building that houses Eugene's public library.

"It just feels welcoming," says Margaret Alexander, librarian manager and facilities manager. "People come in and there's a little bit of a sense of wonder. They see the gracious rotunda space. You walk into the round area under the stairs." That space is even used as a venue for singing events due to its wonderful acoustics, she adds.

The 127,000 square foot building is an award-winning feat of architecture — it won first place in the American Institute of Architects of Southwest Oregon's public architecture awards in 2003, the year construction was finished. Red brick with blue metal and glass defines the exterior, which features a barrel vaulted roof reminiscent of farm buildings and an elegant central glass tower.

Randy Nishimura, one of the Eugene architects who designed the building, says the unique barrel vaulted roof that defines the exterior of the building "might allude to old mills at one time or prominent structures in the region."

Nishimura says his firm — Robertson Sherwood Architects — wanted the library to be "a landmark that would last a hundred years or more and that would be on the historic registry someday, so we wanted an exterior

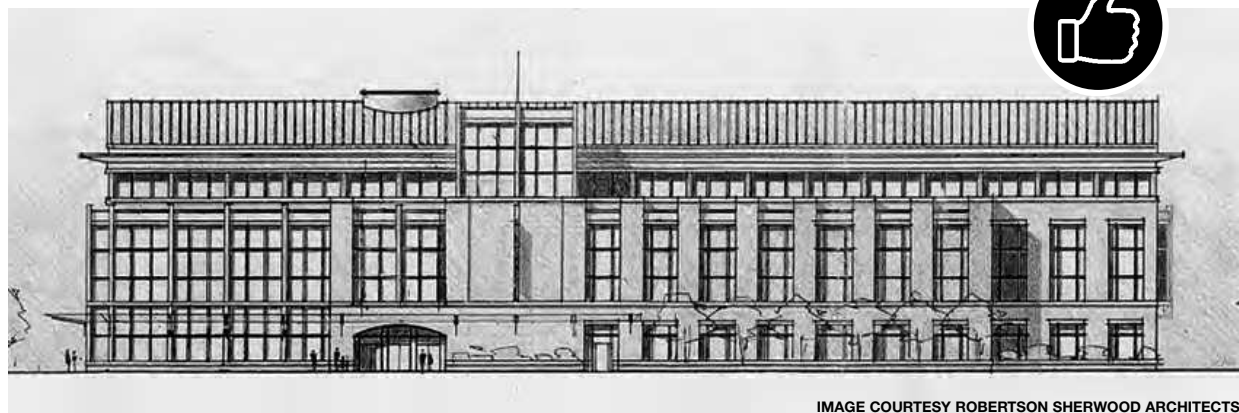


IMAGE COURTESY ROBERTSON SHERWOOD ARCHITECTS

material that would age gracefully."

They chose brick for the exterior to give it the "scale and the texture and gravity of a building that would feel timeless and like it would be around for a long time even when it was new," he says.

Alexander says the brick makes the building feel welcoming and grounded. "We wanted it to be a big beautiful anchor building, and we wanted to build it for the future." The library was built relatively green for its time, as well. "I think it was the city's first attempt to go for LEED certification," she says.

The location was similarly intentional: The proximity of the LTD bus station makes the library very accessible to the public, and it gets 3,000 or so visitors each day, according to Alexander. "We're a visitor's destination at this point —

how often can a library say that in a small town like this?"

And the building really is a wonder. The space is filled with natural light from the tremendous, two-story-high windows. The stairs spiral upward through the building, capped with a beautiful skylight. The second floor's reading rooms at the wings both have vaulted ceilings with elegant, curved wooden slats leading the eye to the bright windows. "It's a gracious institution for this town," Alexander says.

And the library has room to expand. The fourth floor is currently occupied by city offices, but Alexander says they will expand into that space when it's unoccupied and when they have the resources. "It's a very well-used and well-loved library," she says. "There are many towns that do not regard their libraries as highly, and we are very fortunate." — *Kelly Kenoyer*