

ARROYO

FINE LIVING IN THE GREATER PASADENA AREA
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THE PWP GOES GREEN

Pasadena's new Water and Power building reflects the latest in environmental and humanistic design.

BY BETTIJANE LEVINE

It's a pity that Pasadena's new Water and Power building is hidden from public view in the utility's gated yard at 245 Mountain St. The award-winning structure, designed to meet Gold LEED standards, is a paragon of civic virtues, a beacon of environmental and humanistic design. It's a workplace conceived to enhance the well-being of those who work there — and to promote harmony with nature instead of stealing from it.

"Everything about this building is meant to add productivity and pleasure to the lives of the men and women who keep Pasadena running smoothly," said David L. Goodale of Gonzalez Goodale, the project's Pasadena-based architects. "It's about the sustainability of human energy." That's a noble goal for an office building, where all too often (in our humble opinion) the ambience stifles joy and productivity. Windows don't open, light is artificial and unfriendly and air conditioning is temperamental and often environmentally unsound.

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PUTTING ON A NEW FACE
Perforated steel panels
over the windows deflect
heat and light.

PHOTO: HEILPHOTO



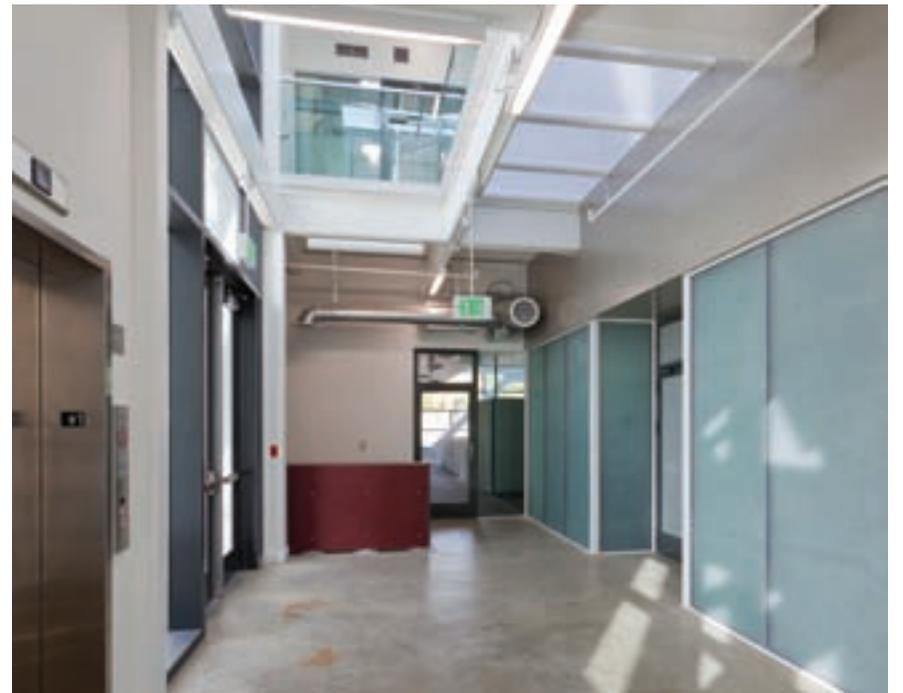
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Gonzalez Goodale's success in realizing its lofty ambitions earned the complex a merit award from the Pasadena Foothill chapter of the American Institute of Architects. Indeed, the PWP's new \$10 million building is green in the extreme, employing every available technique to eliminate environmental ills, using non-toxic recycled materials to provide healthful air and natural light.

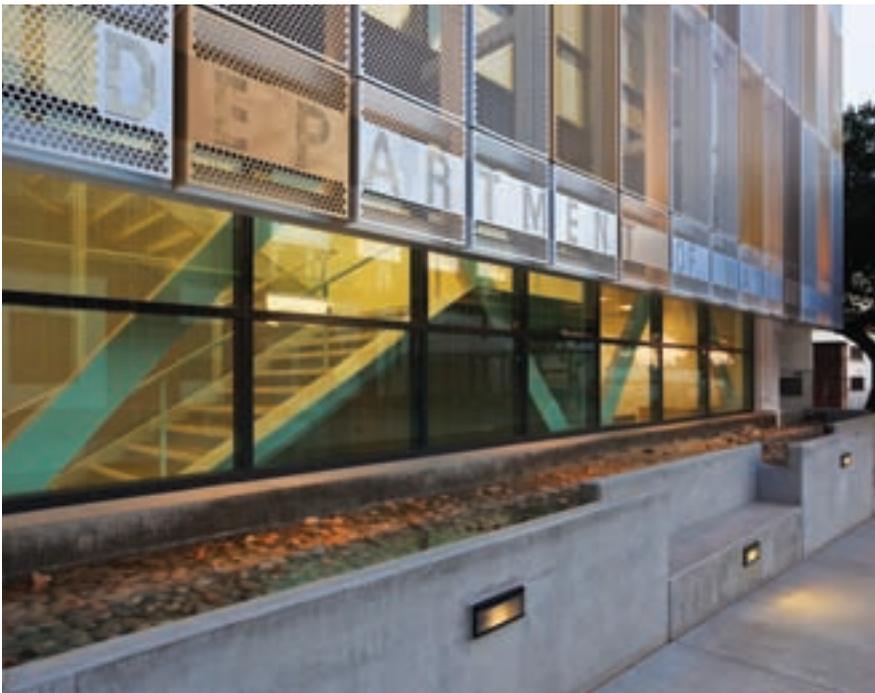
Built as the new headquarters for PWP's operations and maintenance crews as well as supervisors and executives, the steel-framed structure has a highly reflective roof and two experimental green-roof gardens, planted with sedum and Mexican feather grass, to cool it naturally from above. On the three sides where sunlight hits, windows are sheltered with perforated, powder-coated steel — panels that appear purely ornamental but help deflect heat and glare. The north side, not exposed to direct sun, is a two-story, floor-to-ceiling curtain of glare-and-shatter-proof glass, offering an unobstructed view of the San Gabriel Mountains and ever-changing sky. All workspaces in the loft-like structure face this inspiring view. Every window opens wide — even those embedded in the wall of glass. The naturally cooled interior uses less air conditioning than other buildings the same size (31,400 square feet), and the cooling system itself is "advanced and enhanced," says architect Dennis Smith, the building's project manager.

The need for artificial lighting is reduced by the Solatube system, in which roof domes capture sunlight and distribute it indoors through highly reflective tubes. These illuminate much of the building's balcony-like second-level workspace, which overlooks the ground floor and the mountain vista beyond. The railing on this second level and the stair risers leading up to it utilize the same perforated metal as the building's exterior, a decorative theme that unifies inside and out. All countertops in the offices and restrooms are formed of recycled plastic milk containers. Even the parking lot is environmentally friendly, surfaced with permeable concrete that allow rain to seep back into the ground.

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INTERNAL GEOMETRY
(From top) The second-level balcony overlooks the ground floor and a view of the mountains; the first-floor lobby.



AN ENVIRONMENTALLY SOUND EXTERIOR
 (From top) The two-story glass curtain wall helps manage the building's temperature.
 The front façade is cooled by "rain" from an evaporative water feature.

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The new headquarters replaces the original PWP building across the street, a stolid and chunky 1930s red brick structure now outdated and seismically unsafe. The old building will soon be rehabbed for continued use as a warehouse and storage space. The old PWP facility's proximity presented the architects with a challenge: to design a contemporary building that harmonizes with a historic one — and to unify both in a single aesthetically pleasing compound. What they came up with is a kind of fraternal twin, born 80 years after its sibling, but with all the family characteristics intact. Both buildings share a similar size and boxy shape, architecturally echoing each other. But while the old one exhibits clunky industrial-era roots, the new addition seems to sit lightly on the land, its identity clearly stamped by the 21st century.

A wide pedestrian path connecting the buildings will be planted with trees to form a shaded bower where employees can relax on breaks. And the PWP yard's entire perimeter will be similarly planted, so that when the trees mature the whole space will resemble a park, says Smith.

There's also an auxiliary function for this building which everyone hopes will never be needed: It is designated as Pasadena's new Emergency Operations Center. If a major fire, flood, quake or plague of parrots hits the city, the mayor and chiefs of essential services will convene here in safety. The building has backup generators and advanced technology of many sorts, Smith says. Two huge conference rooms, ordinarily used for training and meetings, have walls equipped with multiple screens that can instantly transmit live feeds from air or land transport from police, fire and medical personnel. This will allow the chiefs to assess conditions and deploy aid where it's most needed.

Gonzalez Goodale, established in 1979, designs only for public, institutional and corporate clients. The firm does not build homes. But if its architects could miniaturize the PWP building and create a community of similar loft-like, energy-efficient, safe and sustainable steel-frame dwellings, they could make an impressive imprint on Pasadena's residential future. ||||

PHOTOS: Heiphotio