

# Designs of the Times: 21st Century Buildings

*Architecture reflects the past, present and future*

Throughout history, religious, political and cultural values have been uniquely expressed in architecture. From temples built for ancient gods, to castles and palaces of the Middle Ages, to the soaring skyscrapers of the recent century, each civilization's architecture has defined the spirit of its times.

Perhaps the most significant, defining trend in today's architecture is the shift toward sustainable or "green" building. Global warming may be occurring, but one fact is indisputable — the environment can, and may already, suffer irreversible damage in our ever-increasing quest for resources and energy. To counter this, new building codes, rules and standards are being promoted in an effort to conserve natural resources while increasing the operating, energy and lifetime efficiency of new construction.

One material favored by sustainable builders and architects is brick. Although it has changed little in form and content over centuries of use, brick continues to embody the greenest of values: It is easy to create from virtually inexhaustible natural materials, it is extremely durable and all but impervious to damage, it is virtually fireproof, and when its long lifespan of usefulness ends it is totally recyclable. According to Paul Harding, FAIA, Harding Partners, an award-winning architect and principal of one of Chicago's largest commercial architecture firms, "Buildings made from brick represent a true lasting value."

Another trend in architecture today is creating visual interest by combining building materials and styles that are seemingly incompatible. The landmark Hearst Tower in Manhattan, built in 1928 with a conservative brick and stone façade suitable to that peri-

od, recently added an ultramodern 46-story lattice-like tower, a distinctive blend of contemporary and classic that has won accolades from critics across the world. Not incidentally, the new structure is also green in design — its owners have applied for certification under the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED building program, which promotes Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design. And further west in Illinois, Unity Junior High School is another example of combining different materials, such as glass and brick, for visual appeal.

A third major trend in today's architecture is driven by an altogether different consideration of nature. Hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, wildfires and other natural disasters of unprecedented magnitude in recent years are forcing municipalities, builders and architects to reevaluate their choices in building materials.

New, stronger building codes place greater emphasis on wind, seismic, water and fire resistance. Here again, brick masonry provides an ideal and, in many cases, recommended solution to most of the design problems builders face as a result.

"Trends don't last, but architecture remains," the saying goes. One building material that has played an important part of architecture since the very beginning — the humble, endearingly durable brick — has never gone out of style. **HP**



Unity Junior High School's East Campus