

ALBUQUERQUE'S UNIQUE AIRPORT WILL RETAIN ITS REGIONAL STYLE AFTER THE EXPANSION

by Edna E. Heatherington

"Spirited Design" is the headline on a story about the Albuquerque Airport published last summer in the Albuquerque Journal's "Impact" weekly feature magazine. "Here at the Albuquerque International Airport, where the jet age comes to ground in adobe style, the spirit of the past has always waited to enchant newcomers," says the author, Frank Zoretich.

The expansion and renovation of the Airport, officially titled Master Plan Improvements, is the largest construction project in New Mexico, and its construction, in this time when so many people travel by air, directly affects a great many people, including most newcomers to the city and region. Since the major portion of the work on the terminal began in the spring of 1987, it has been the topic of many news stories, most of them explanations or warnings of change and confusion, as operations and construction continue simultaneously.

A primary concern of people in the street has been whether the drastically remodelled and much larger new airport will retain the "adobe style" and special quality which they are familiar with in the 1965 terminal building. When the designer of that building, William E. Burk, Jr., died this winter, he had lived long enough to see the younger generation of architects go through the post-World War II period of Modernism (the International Style) and evolve both a functional method of regional design and an appreciation of the history, meaning, and architectonic potential of regional styles.

The Burns/Peters Group (now BPLW Architects and Engineers), architects for the current expansion, approached the project fully appreciating the success of the 1965 building, and ready to design spaces, facades, spatial transitions, details, and ornament in sympathy with the "spirit of the past" which has indeed enchanted the airport's users for two decades.

ALBUQUERQUE'S AIRPORT HAS ALWAYS BEEN REGIONAL

In 1939, one of several Works Progress Administration projects in Albuquerque was the adobe airport terminal designed by Ernest H. Blumenthal, which still stands at the end of Yale Boulevard and is the location of the project office of Burns/Peters. Resembling Blumenthal's Fire Station No. 3 of 1936 (now the Monte Vista Fire Station Restaurant), the airport is not only in the puebloan style but is in fact genuine adobe and timber construction. Its forms follow its functions, and include a tall chimney and the observation tower, but its mass and framing are inevitable results of its being built in the local manner. However, in an early photograph, a picturesque pueblo-style ladder adorns a parapet above the shaded entrance, suggesting that the style was consciously selected and enhanced with details.

When the office of William Burk was selected in 1965 to design an airport master plan and new terminal, Burk worked directly with then Aviation Director Clyde Sharrer. According to Burns/Peters Partner-in-Charge Ron Peters, who talked with Sharrer before his death a few years ago, neither the Director nor the architect thought that Albuquerque would ever outgrow the terminal as it was designed, with its eight gates and master plan for adding two more satellites. For one thing, they supposed

ed that another important commercial airport would be built in Santa Fe.

By 1965, twenty years after the end of World War II, many practicing architects, as well as teachers and students of architecture, embraced the modern principle that to design "in a style" was dishonest. To acknowledge both the modern materials and methods of construction, and the forces of the time, another architect would have designed the Albuquerque airport to be up-to-date, scientific, of the "space age." To Burk, the opposite was true, for New Mexico. He said to Zoretich, "Modern architecture fits New Mexico like a sock on a rooster."

Burk, who left architectural studies at Cornell to complete his degree in architectural sculpture at the University of Southern California, regarded Modernism's absence of ornament as the result of economic necessity and the loss of crafts skills. He regarded it as a style among other styles, and occasionally, when he found it suitable, turned his hand to it.

He said of the airport, "It would give the public, especially air travelers, an experience of the architectural beauty of the Southwest....The work was a dedicated effort to produce a monumental structure that says: This is New Mexico." In a different interview, he described how he considered the Spanish-puebloan and the Territorial styles, and chose the first because its weighty massing and heavy timbers were most appropriate to the large scale of the building.

Talking with Zoretich, Burk acknowledged the problem of maintaining the essential style in a structure of such physical size. Especially the lobby, which is the key space which has so pleased and satisfied the public: "It was a challenge to build a space that large - and maintain the theme," he said.

REGIONALISM COME OF AGE IN THE 80'S

Zoretich also interviewed Peters, the lead designer for the present expansion. "We want people to say: I've never been in an airport like this! That's the city's main objective," says Peters in that interview.

Not only has the puebloan-style airport been a success with the general public, but architects and critics all over the United States have come to recognize the continuing merit of the Southwestern regional styles. In its March 1984 issue on "The Desert Southwest," *Architecture*, the journal of the American Institute of Architects, includes an article on Albuquerque by David Dillon which opens: "Albuquerque airport makes one of America's great first impressions....You know immediately that you're not in Dallas or Atlanta."

"It's amazing that architects were judged by how well they repeated the past. Now we'll be judged on how well we respected the past, how we respect those details"...

Ron Peters

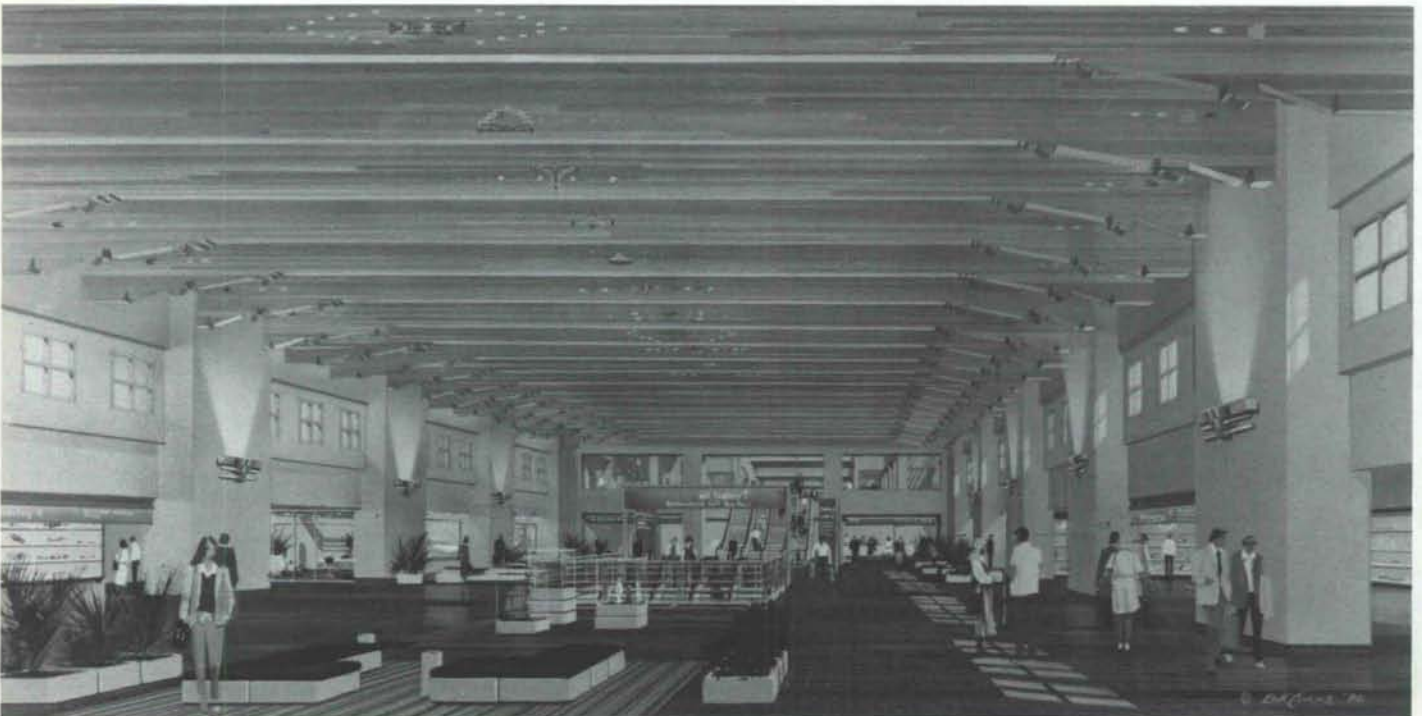


[Exterior]

The north-facing facade and transportation links, called "Landside" in airport parlance. The new parking garage is shown on the left, set into the hillside site so as not to obstruct views from the terminal building. Passengers arriving at Albuquerque emerge from the terminal at the lowest level. On the upper roadway, departing passengers may be dropped off under the portales, and proceed to the new ticket counters on the same level.

[Interior]

The existing lobby will be renovated and slightly remodelled. The new windows will be similar in shape and proportion to those of seventeenth-century New Mexico mission churches. The new main concourse will be on a new third level, from which access to all aircraft will be by loading bridge. In the drawing, the new escalators to this level are seen at the rear of the renovated Great Hall.



EXPANDING WITH THE FUTURE IN MIND

Although the lobby of 1965 was so big as to stretch the use of the puebloan style apparently to its limit, the current expansion of the terminal increases the scale several times again, bringing capacity to 19 gates, with 32 in planned expansion, each able to accommodate the largest type of airplane. However, not every space must be gigantic; the design process focuses on planning movement: traffic flow of airplanes, support vehicles, passengers on foot and in wheelchairs and strollers, cars, buses, taxis.

The planning effort began with a study of airport statistics and history, and of the 1983 master plan prepared by Greiner Engineering Sciences, Inc. In 1987, more than four million passengers passed through the airport, with nearly 8 million expected annually by 1995. One and a half times as many people visit the airport to meet or part from those who take a plane, or for other activities, so the population of visitors other than passengers will grow from an added six million to 12 million during the same time.

Since 1965, when it appeared that Santa Fe also would build an airport, western airports in Denver, Phoenix, and Dallas have developed as "hubs" where particular airlines center and connect their flights. The present expectation of the Aviation Department and the architects is that Albuquerque will remain a destination airport rather than a transfer point. However, the terminal as designed could be further expanded to accommodate a carrier's hub in an independent eight-position terminal.

Another key to planning is that funding of the new construction is entirely through revenue bonds, with no dependence on funds coming directly from airlines. This means that airlines don't own their own gates (with the exception of TWA's gates 14 and 15 which are leased until 2025), and all gates may be used by arriving airplanes in sequence, and assigned by ground control. Peters estimates that this doubles the capacity of the airport at peak hours.

An aspect of the new terminal of which users have been most aware during the first year of construction is the total redesign of

ground transportation and parking. Arrival and departure will be separated on two levels, and a four-level, 3,500-car parking garage will replace the old upper parking lot. The new larger building will have baggage claim at the lowest level, with exits directly to ground level and vehicular pickup area. On the second level, departing passengers may be dropped off and proceed directly to the new ticket counters. This is also the level of the aircraft aprons, and the gates for smaller commuter airplanes, which are boarded without loading bridges, will open here. The third level will be the main concourse, leading to gate lobbies all equipped with loading bridges. The gate lobbies have been designed to take advantage of the magnificent views of valley and mountains.

THE STYLE OF THE NEW DESIGN

In keeping with both the enormous scale of this phase of expansion, and with the increased specialization of architects in the face of the expanding body of technical knowledge, the Burns/Peters Group engaged consulting architects TRA of Seattle. Among many others, TRA has designed the new McCarran Airport at Las Vegas, Nevada. To begin the joint task of creating a modern, expandable airport while maintaining its unique regional style, the local architects took TRA staff on a tour of Albuquerque and Santa Fe, including local pueblos and in particular the buildings of John Gaw Meem. Zimmerman Library, with its great study halls and exquisite detail, is Peters' favorite example. For "the scale and the feel of regional architecture," he says, he wanted the architects from Seattle to experience not recent buildings built in the rational regional style developed from Modernism, but Meem's graceful translations of puebloan architecture into "permanent materials."

Besides the new concourses leading to the added gates, the expansion will create a second Upper Hall above and south of the renovated lobby. The lobby is now called the Great Hall - a term Burk thought pretentious, but which reflects the magnitude and unique quality of its effect. Renovations in the Great Hall will

The 1939 airport with its WPA sign still in place, just after completion. The mast at the left carries some of the weather instruments. The control tower is the square element above the shadowy portal of the main entrance.

Photo courtesy of Albuquerque Museum, No. 72.255/1





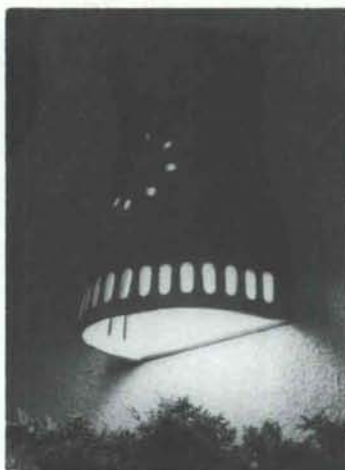
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include the change of floors to brick (a change taking place throughout the terminal), and the replacement of the large high windows with smaller divided windows. The new windows will be more reminiscent of the proportions of the high windows of seventeenth-century New Mexico mission churches, and will revise the appearance that the beams rest on glass.

The new Upper Hall will also have a thirty-foot ceiling, but is designed to be harmonious in style but different in appearance from the Great Hall. The concourses will have comparatively low ceiling, with the pedestrian paths marked by a ceiling finish of wood rails suggesting the traditional *latia* ceiling of the pueblo. Where corridors intersect, plaster ceilings are higher, with a stepped form and special colors.

The new exterior facade, with the upper and lower roadways, will be broken up into several masses, both by changes of level in the parapets of the main facade and by projecting portales at the entrances. Metal roof shades suggestive of exposed timber construction extend between these projecting entrances to shelter the upper level and add patterns of light and shadow to the upper facade. The parking garage is set down into the site so that the view from the terminal building to the mountains is unobscured.

Within the terminal, the furnishings are a key element which will be refurbished and added to rather than changed. The Department of Aviation gets many letters praising the size, comfort, and unique western style of the square leather seats and the heavy carved tables. The existing ones will be refinished and will receive new leather upholstery, and more seats will be added. Leather was again selected for the seats, despite its cost, because the existing chairs and couches have lasted in good condition for more than 20 years, while the expected life for other materials would be half that.

In this aerial view taken in mid-March 1988, from just west of the airport, traffic is visible on the temporary road while the new two-level roadway is under construction along the terminal's north facade. On the left, steel for the new parking structure is stacked in the excavation where it will be erected, and another section of elevated roadway can be seen to the east. Out of the picture on the right (south) is the new concourse, already in use while the lobbies and connecting structures are under construction. (Photo courtesy of Eagle's Eye Photo Specialists.)



RENEWING AND PRESERVING

Reflecting on the challenge and the accomplishment of this major revision of a popular and important public building, Ron Peters remarked that although when he was a student he didn't like to study architectural history, he finds that now that he is a practicing architect he has come to enjoy reading about his predecessors. "It's amazing that architects were judged by how well they repeated the past," he said. "Now we'll be judged on how well we respect the past, how we respect those details."

E.E.H.

MASTER PLAN IMPROVEMENTS ALBUQUERQUE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT

Construction started spring 1987; Terminal Building to be completed during 1989.

OWNER: City of Albuquerque

MANAGING AGENCY: Department of Aviation
R. Lowell Pratte, AAE, Director
Robert E. Gurule, Project Coordinator

ARCHITECTS: The Burns/Peters Group PA/BPLW Architects and Engineers, Inc.

CONSULTING ARCHITECT: TRA Airport Consulting, Seattle, Washington

ENGINEERS:

Greiner Engineering Sciences - Civil
Boyle Engineering - Structural
Bridgers and Paxton - Mechanical
Uhl & Lopez - Electrical
BPLW Architects & Engineers -
Structural/Mechanical/Electrical

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Campbell/Okuma/Perkins

INTERIORS: TRA Interiors

GRAPHICS: TRA Graphics

CONTRACTORS:

Terminal Building: PCL Construction, Denver
Landside Civil, Phase A: Sundance Mechanical
Landside Civil, Phases B, C: PCL Construction
Apron: Mountain States Construction
Parking Structure: Jaynes Corp.
Maintenance Building: Britton & Rich
FAA Environmental Building: Talon Corporation, Tijeras
Terminal Bldg. Casework: J. R. Lavis Construction
Loading Bridges: Jetway Corp., Ogden, Utah

The total project consists of 13 construction projects. Total project cost is \$120 million; construction cost is approximately \$95 million.

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David Dillon, "Albuquerque," in *Architecture: the AIA Journal*, March 1984.



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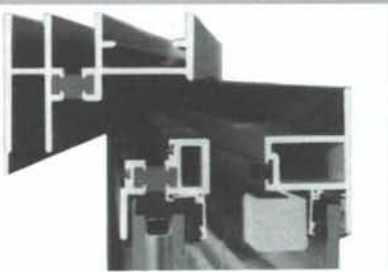
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