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Domusstudio Architecture Fired Up About Designing Series of Fire Stations

Bulk of Firm's Work Involves
Church-Related Structures

Editor's note: The design of neighborhood fire stations has become a newer area of expertise for Wayne Helton and his colleagues at Domusstudio Architecture, a firm launched 23 years ago as Dunley + Associates. General contractor Barnhart and the city of Encinitas announced the completion of the \$3.55 million, 7,000-square-foot Fire Station No. 3 on June 24. The project, featuring a two-story concrete masonry structure with curving rooflines, is one of four stations the firm is designing or has designed for Encinitas.

San Diego-based Domusstudio is also known for its design of new churches as well as other residential structures. Helton, a graduate of the University of Minnesota with degrees in architecture and environmental design, joined the firm in 1999. He became a principal in 2007. We asked him about his efforts in designing fire stations, and about some of the nuts and bolts of moving a station from concept to completed project.

QUESTION: Why did you decide to specialize in designing fire stations, and what percentage of this work involves your business?

ANSWER: Seventy percent of our work is ecclesiastical, or church-

related, not only houses of worship, but preschools, administrative buildings, gymnasiums and multipurpose classrooms. We also do libraries, senior housing and custom residential.

Fire stations are a natural extension of the other types of "houses" we do. They are really custom residential projects — houses for the apparatus and houses for the firefighters.

We did our first station for the city of Encinitas about seven years ago. Firefighters just moved into a new Station No. 3 in Leucadia a month ago, and we are going to the Planning Commission for Station No. 2 in Cardiff-by-the-Sea later this month. Station No. 1 in downtown Encinitas has design work started and is currently waiting for direction to move forward.

We also have a station in design for the city of La Quinta, which will break ground later this year.

This market has seemed to grow over the last few years. I think it's a combination of many stations, in all municipalities, having become outdated and a new awareness of this with the catastrophic wildfires that have occurred in the last few years.

ials that reflect a concern for the environment. Our station in La Quinta is being designed to the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED Silver guidelines and Station No. 2 in Encinitas will be designed for LEED Silver accreditation.

This approach to these buildings will add marginally to the design and construction costs, but will reflect the city's concern for the environment as they develop new buildings.

Our office has used many sustainable design strategies, as just good design approaches, for many years before it became fashionable. And with the many new materials and products available, the design and finish options are extensive and not necessarily that expensive.

Q: What other design specialties are you pursuing?

A: We have recently been awarded our first project for the San Diego Unified School District as a result of our private school work experience and we have two design/build preschool projects under way for the Navy. These both represent areas of work we have experience in and new clients we are looking forward to working with.

—Tom York



Michael S. Barnhart

Wayne Helton is helping Domusstudio Architecture build up its portfolio of fire stations with structures such as this \$3.55 million Fire Station No. 3 in Encinitas.

Q: How many have you designed so far?

A: We have designed seven stations, so we are still trying to build our portfolio. We have been shortlisted for interviews for a few others. In fact, we have an interview coming up next month.

Q: How are fire stations different from other commercial, public buildings?

A: As noted, they have aspects similar to a custom residence with the add-

ed technology of the alarms and notification systems. They get heavy use by the different shifts that rotate through, must be low-maintenance from the finish materials to the landscape, and have a respect for their environment.

Q: What are the design challenges? What are the construction challenges?

A: Of the stations we've done, one of

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the main design challenges has been to have them fit into their neighborhoods. In Encinitas, for example, each station reflects the unique character of its neighborhood; from Leucadia to Cardiff to downtown. The station in La Quinta reflects its proximity to that desert city's Old Town District.

The construction challenges can vary — from working around a trailer moved on-site to temporarily house firefighters and keeping access to trucks at all times while the new structure is built, to getting the station up and raining as soon as possible to maintain coverage equally in all parts of the city.

Q: What's unique from a construction point of view about the stations you've been involved with so far?

A: I think the municipalities that are building new stations, like everyone in general, are becoming more aware of sustainable design concepts. As a governing agency, they want to set an example and design to and incorporate the sustainable design strategies and mate-



Jim Dunley

The 1970-era Encinitas Fire Station No. 3 was demolished and replaced with modern, expanded public safety facilities. With the firefighters' living area upstairs, the station includes offices, a training classroom, physical fitness area and three overvoltage bays for emergency equipment on the first floor.