



C E N T E R F O R T H E A R T S

ARTS IN THE MOUNTAINS

Jackson Hole's efforts to save its displaced art community through architecture and design

Text by Anne Hartman

Photos by Ron Johnson and Paul Warchol (opposite page)

Jackson Hole, Wyoming resident Doug

Henderson admits most Americans wouldn't call his city a hotspot. "I don't know what people think of when they think of Jackson Hole," he says. "They probably don't know what 'Jackson Hole' means. They might even wonder where it is."

Although Jackson Hole may not be as easy to find on the map as other glam mountain cities like Vail or Breckenridge, it has been quietly establishing itself as a destination for the arts community, bringing in tourists thanks to its numerous galleries and festivals like the renowned Grand Teton Music Festival. "Once people get here, they see there's a lot more to this little town," Henderson says. "It

has a rich history of art and it's a very creative community."

Jackson has become known for embracing any new talent that comes its way, and is home to many budding and veteran artists alike. Henderson himself has experienced the community's artistic flair firsthand: he's facility director of the Jackson Hole Center for the Arts, an arts campus in the heart of downtown Jackson. The center is a direct result of the community's efforts; back in the early '90s, artists in Jackson began kicking around the idea of building a facility to house the numerous artistic groups in the area. With ever-increasing rents and inadequate facilities housing many of the motley groups



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- Stephen Dynia

of artisans and performers, they feared the artistic community wouldn't be able to survive, let alone thrive.

The project took over a decade to develop, and involved input from Jackson residents and an aggressive fundraising campaign that brought in nearly \$35 million. It was built in two phases. The first phase, an arts and education pavilion with classrooms, offices and studios, was completed in 2004, and is home to 18 of the city's varied arts organizations, like the Jackson Hole Community Band and the professional dance company, Dancers' Workshop.

A performance-style theater was the next step in the process, when the Jackson residents intervened with one major requirement. During the summer tourist “high season,” the theater needed to accommodate events large enough to pack the house (like traveling Broadway shows) but it couldn't feel empty during the rest of the season's smaller, more low-key happenings common during Jackson's off season.

Henderson and the arts community turned to local architecture firms to design the 35,000-square-foot, \$21-million theater (which also houses a rehearsal space and a music wing.) Stephen Dynia Architects was the design architect, while Carney Logan Burke acted as executive architect. For the ‘star’ of the center, the theater itself, the architects decided to forgo the traditional theater seating set-up of a larger orchestra level and smaller balcony level, and instead replaced it with the exact opposite. This way, the orchestra level's 200 seats would not feel so empty during small performances in the off season, and it would still be able to accommodate up to 300 more people for larger showings. “The most unique aspect of this place,” Dynia says, “is that it works in multiple configurations for multiple events, and all of them are served quite well—from the single spoken word to orchestral events.”

Never forgetting the Jacksonite's love of natural landscape, the design team was also able to incorporate the town's trademark mountainscape within its design. Dynia



constructed a glass lobby that allows exiting theatergoers to view a stunning panorama of majestic Teton mountain range. Conversely, the glass wall also provides curious passersby with a look inside the Jackson Hole Cultural Center.

Henderson is pleased to report that the second phase of the center's design is fulfilling its goal of luring tourists and residents alike to check out events that pass through town. One such event was the New York City Ballet that popped in for a week of teaching, performances and a gala. "The three performances filled the house, which opened up new opportunities for the community," Dynia says. "Everyone has been greatly enhanced by this center." ❁

Anne Hartman is a freelance writer based in Chicago.

Left: A glass-encased lobby offers sweeping views of the Teton mountain range

Below: The two-tiered theater inside the Jackson Hole Cultural Center; at night, the JHCC's massive glass panels provide passersby a peek inside



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