

PROJECT NARRATIVE | debartolo architects | may 2003

This proposed project strives to create architecture that is **regionally sympathetic** as well as grounded in the **context** and **community** of its place. We can not fall back on superficial fads or historical "styles" that are so common in this region today. If we imitate the form of these historical buildings without recognition of the original content – we have degraded the importance of history and created a skin-deep copy. We are recommending a new architecture for this place that sensitively responds to the site and the client's needs in this unique context.

The proposed development of 26.2 acres in north Scottsdale is for the congregation of the Dream Center, Scottsdale First Assembly. The native desert site along Pima Road is covered with a scattering of Ironwood, saguaros and yucca and was specifically selected for its natural beauty and physical characteristics. The mild undulating slope of the topography enriches the quality of the site, inviting an intimate and grounded design solution. The views to the nearby Pinnacle Peak provide a distant focus and landmark that locks the building into this unique place. The building complex occupies the central portion of the site adjacent to a major wash(e). The building orientation and geometry are informed by this unique land characteristic.

The proposed 27,000 square foot grouping of buildings will accommodate an assembly space, administration and Christian education classrooms. The building is a simple yet rich environment of masonry walls and trellises shaped around the owner's needs and the site. In order to select the material palette, we looked to the local sheds, fences, rails, wagon wheels, vegetation and native landscape – the rich colors, textures and materials of the desert. Complimenting the natural character and richness of the site, we have made an effort to avoid paint and artificiality; the resulting structure roots itself in weathered, humble materials organized in a simple and ordered form to create a 'new' environment for the Scottsdale congregation.

Driving into the site from Pima Road, one first passes through the natural desert and rises 10' immediately from the elevation of Pima to park in the desert-parking garden. Walking along pedestrian paths, one is shaded by native Ironwood, Mesquite and Palo Verde trees. Entering into the mesquite plaza, an urban gathering place, one is drawn by a 40-foot tall cool-tower that passively cools the plaza as it invites the cool air from above to fall to the plaza floor below. The thermal effect will be enhanced by a fine mist of cool water emitted by dozens of stainless steel atomizing nozzles located in the tower. The heat exchange that takes place as the water evaporates in the dry climate creating a cushion of air cooled 20 degrees without a mechanical system. The top of the tower, fabricated of perforated fiberglass resin, is translucent – evoking the changing ambient light of the desert and rising above the surrounding structure creating a soft edge to the sky. Shaded by native desert vegetation, the plaza becomes the central meeting point for the congregation.

The church's weathered cor-tin steel and masonry forms, like some rusted artifact from a cowboy camp, are oriented to frame prime views. The texture of the exterior contrasts with the refinement of the interior palette of white plaster, stainless steel, maple and translucent glass. The unpainted integral colored masonry walls (articulated by using a combination of 4" and 8" block) to reinforce human scale and interest while supporting the science of thermal mass absorbing heat during the day and releasing it at night. Entering the low volume lobby from the mesquite plaza – with its shaded south-facing 1" insulated low-e solex glazing, one is welcomed by an efficient and orderly space with access to the sanctuary. The sanctuary serves as the main assembly space of the project – accommodating up to 1,000 people for services and special events. The high-volume, acoustically tuned space maximizes the 24' limit and focuses itself on the ministry platform.

Access to the classrooms and administration spaces is along outdoor walkways, shaded by a simple weathered galvanized trellis – the connection to the site is maximized and the visitor is united repeatedly with the place and views to the mountains and washes beyond. Using a simple palette of thermal mass materials, natural ventilation, shaded trellis walkways, deep set windows and weathered cor-tin steel – the weathered desert church will quietly and respectfully blend into the desert site.

With the significantly increased setbacks, the site lends itself to preserving the quality of the desert without limiting the vision of the church. Through sensitive development and preservation of nature, this new congregation will gently occupy the site and fulfill the demand for culture and faith in the north Scottsdale community.