A master plan and new library/arts center by Cathy Simon bring a private school up to date while recalling its original mission.

by Eric C.Y. Fung, AIA

Lick-Wilmerding High School was founded as a vocational school in a lower-middle-class district of San Francisco in 1895. Today, while focusing on college preparation, Lick-Wilmerding maintains a strong commitment to technical arts, requiring students to take at least five semesters in wood, metal, and machine shop, or drafting and design. This belief in the enabling potential of technical skills is summed up in the school’s pragmatic motto, “Education for the head, heart, and hands”—leading one educator to describe Lick as “John Dewey come alive.”

But with its academic program and reputation long since having outpaced its utilitarian 1895 campus, a new library was a top priority on the school’s long list of physical needs. Familiar with the work of Simon Martin-Vega and Weiskopf-Mori (SMVM) at other local prep schools (such as the Urban School and University High School), Lick-Wilmerding’s board of trustees hired the firm in 1988 to develop a master plan for the school.

Planning strategy
SMVM’s plan established a quad, ranging facing out toward the city to serve as the symbolic heart of the school. By terracing a new faculty parking lot 13 ft. below the quad on the east side of the property, bordering a freeway, the new building completes the quad to the north. Smooth and corrugated cement panels are used on exterior finish on the north and east facades (bottom).

Project: Library/Arts and Humanities Center, Lick-Wilmerding High School
San Francisco, California

Architect: Simon Martin-Vega
Wendell Morris—Cathy Simon, principal-in-charge
John Long, project manager; Lisa Panza, project architect;
Stephen Phillips, Dan Cheetham, project team; Andrea Verlibirdi, master plan; Donald Creners, interiors
Engineers: Siem Tipping + Associates (structural); O’Doherty & Meyer (electrical); JFA Consulting Engineers (mechanical)
Consultants: Illumination Design Collaborative (lighting); Richard Vignola (landscape); Wilson Berg Associates (acoustical)
General Contractor: Plant Construction Co.

Project Statistics
Size: 17,000 sq. ft.
Cost: $2.55 million
Cost per sq. ft.: $174
Number of students: 543
Number of teachers and staff: 49/20
Grade in school: 9–12

A classroom wing (above) faces south to residence. The new building completes a quad (plan below).
an interesting play of light. The partners themselves (whom other architects such as Jim Jennings and Mark Horton have experimented with in Bay Area residential projects) allude to the industrial characteristics of the existing buildings around the quad. At approximately $8 per sq ft, SMWM's face-fastened, caulk-joint system for the cement panels is a cost-effective alternative to other comparable exterior finish systems such as stucco and EIFS.

Interior detailing is disciplined by a proportioning system derived from the exterior grid. This system carries through to the SMWM-designed furnishings, carpeting, and signage. As a result, the design works together at different scales, while an overlay of freely disposed primary colors keeps the grid from becoming overwhelming—a pronounced de Stijl influence.

The "head, heart, and hands" trinity is felt throughout from SMWM's decision to expose the structural elements at the library's vaulted roof and cement-panel fasteners, to the choice of materials such as Italian artisan plaster and stained concrete, which evidence technique and weathering.

**Programming**
The library building was originally intended to house fine arts studios on the ground level with a 7,000-sq-ft library located on a piano noble above. Classrooms were subsequently added to the program to keep the new building from becoming the exclusive domain of the arts. SMWM sought to maintain a work-shop atmosphere below with stained-concrete floors and corrugated aluminum ceilings (later cut to save money) while providing a gallery for student projects along the main circulation spine.

Plans call for the library to eventually expand from the present 5,000 volumes to 25,000 volumes. To entice students to spend time at the library, the programmers drew from popular retailing concepts such as all-night copy centers and Barnes & Noble superstores. Thus the library is equipped with scanners, CD writers, a sound-dubbing system, a copy center nicknamed "mini-Kinko's," and a lounge with a balcony and views of the city.

**Manufacturers' Sources**
- Flat cement-board panels: Beamit (Office)
- Corrugated cement-board panels: Comfort (SuperCem)
- Composite-metal building panels: Alucobond Technologies
- Preformed-metal roofing with stainless steel: BDP
- Aluminum windows and entrance system: Visiwall
- Corrugated-metal ceiling system: USG Interior (Dann Centricities)

A wood-frame building with plywood shear walls, the library has composite glulam-and-steel rod roof trusses exposed in the main reading room (above). The colorful panels included in the grid ceiling library walls give the composition a distinctive or Stijl flavor (opposite). The eastward corridor on the ground floor was designed with light-filled kiosks to function as a long gallery for the exhibition of students' work (left).