

# State-of-the-Art Performing Arts Facility Born Out of Historic High School

## A Case Study of Colorado State University's New University Center for the Arts

by Clare Vogel

DesignShare and Fielding Nair International co-founders, Randy Fielding and Prakash Nair, have created a language of their own over the years of practicing innovative school architecture. They currently use a vocabulary of more than 30 patterns in their work, finding ways to implement their patterns in any number of cultural settings. This pattern language is typically used to describe K-12 school settings with smaller learning communities. In October 2008, SLATERPAULL Architects completed the 330,000-square-foot, \$45M University Center for the Arts (UCA) at Colorado State University (CSU) in Fort Collins, Colorado. The university's new center was born out of Fort Collins High School, originally built in 1924, and embraces several patterns and processes that Fielding and Nair's firm seek to both promote, and share, with designers of educational facilities worldwide.

### Art, Music, Performance

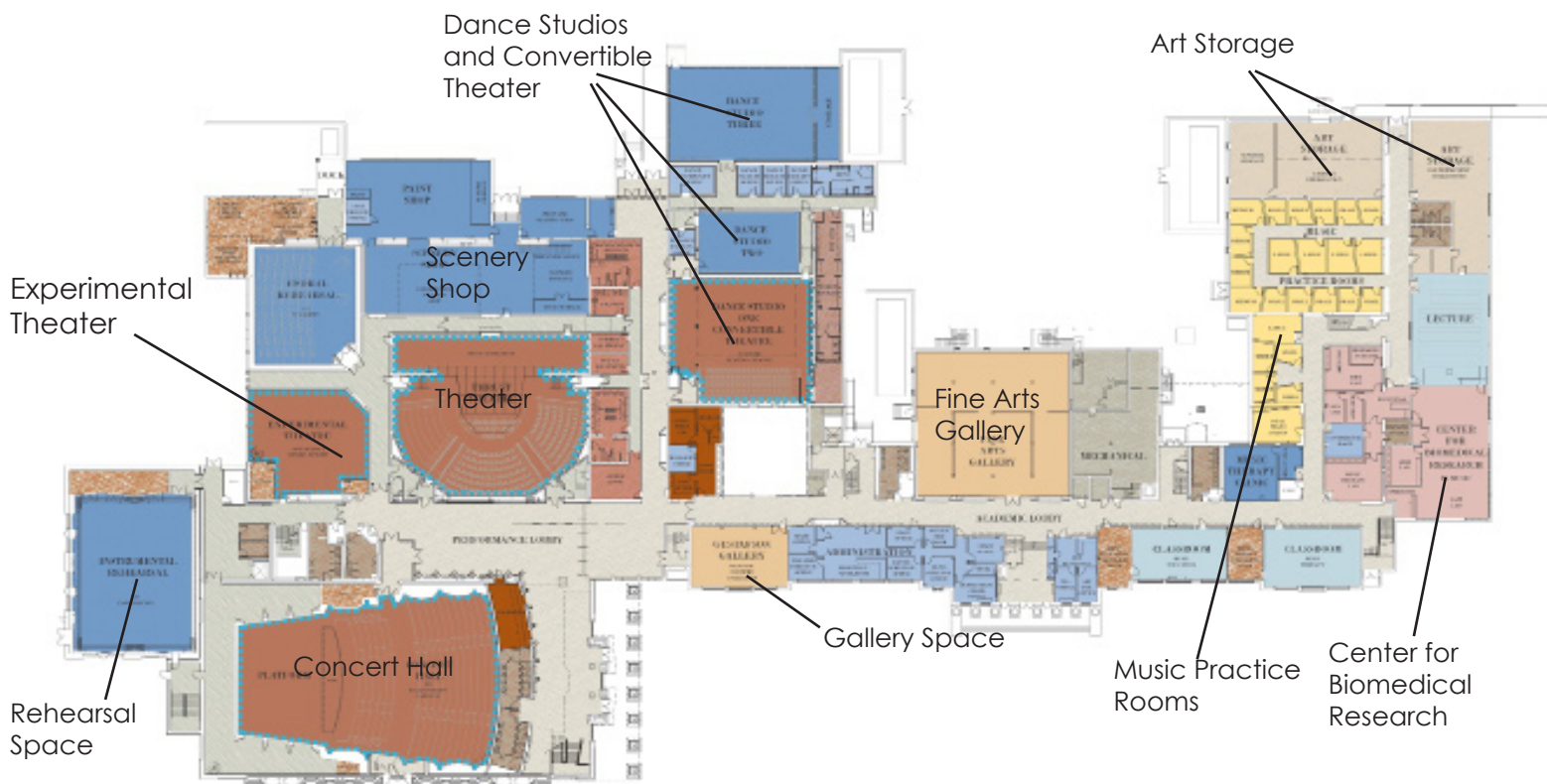
DesignShare considers facilities for art, music and performance to be a critical component in 21st century schools. With the growing awareness of how the brain works and the ability to integrate multiple-intelligences theory more fully into the learning experience, it is now evidence that the arts are part of, and not separate from the other disciplines. Even with major cuts in funding from humanities programs, universities are realizing the importance that the arts can play in the success of their students. CSU considers itself an all-inclusive art campus: "It is a comprehensive concept and philosophy of excellence in thought, discovery and knowledge that are physically embodied in a building structure that is truly an all-inclusive art campus," said Michael Thaut, co-director of the School of the Arts and chairman of the Department of Music, Theatre and Dance.



*Exterior view of the Concert Hall at University Center for the Arts on Colorado State University's campus.*



*First floor lobby maintains an historic aesthetic in this newly renovated state-of-the-art building.*



Overall floor plan of University Center for the Arts at CSU.

Completed in three phases over several years, the University Center for the Arts houses the programs of music, theatre and dance and encompasses five performance venues: the Griffin Concert Hall, the University Theatre and Studio Theatre in the Bohemian Theatre Complex, the University Dance Theatre and the Organ Recital Hall and two museums: the University Museum and the Avenir Museum of Design and Merchandising. The newly renovated building also includes two museums, the University Art Museum and Avenir Museum of Design & Merchandising, both opening in April, 2009.

### School as a Three-Dimensional Textbook

As sustainability becomes the way of the world, architects are not only finding new and innovative ways to build “green,” but are turning to educators to use these buildings as teaching tools themselves. High performance refers both to the performance of the building itself, as well as to those who live and work in the buildings. In a school setting, sustainable elements and building as a 3-D textbook become an excellent means of teaching about acoustics, sound technology, engineering and harmony with the environment. The UCA drove to preserve and integrate the historic elements and promote sustainability in a myriad of ways. A variety of techniques were incorporated throughout the facility to preserve and integrate the historic elements and promote sustainability including the re-use of the historic 1924 building shell, reuse of the existing hardwood flooring from the original gymnasium, linoleum flooring and over 10,000 lbs. of recycled building materials such as steel, copper and aluminum. Limestone building fragments salvaged from the original façade are featured in the lobby, columns inspired by the historic building have been added on the exterior of the addition and used inside the interior lobby, and clerestory windows from the original gymnasium bring abundant natural daylight into the new space.

## Dispersed Technology

For creative students in the arts in particular, technology is almost an extension of themselves. They use it to communicate, to discover the world, to collaborate, to create and to organize their lives. Dispersed technology is an important pattern for 21st century schools, according to Fielding and Nair, and essentially means that technology is not bound to one room, as with single-use computer labs in traditional schools today. UCA was designed as a high-performance environment for future generations and is infused with technology to give its students opportunities for the most advanced production skills. The center offers not one space for technology, but dozens.

Along with the performance venues, UCA houses eleven classroom and seminar rooms, a design studio, digital lab, lighting lab and sound/video booth, composition and piano labs, and the largest instrumental rehearsal hall in Colorado (194,500 cubic feet).

Theater students now have constant access to ensemble and performance libraries, two acting labs, a Computer-Aided Design (CAD) lab, costume and scenic shops and storage. Dancers have three studios totaling more than 6,500 square feet, 36 soundproof rehearsal rooms, as well as teaching studios, offices and support spaces. It is also home to the research facilities of the Center for Biomedical Research in Music – one of the world's leading centers in brain research in music perception and neurorehabilitation.



*Students rehearse on one of the stages inside the new UCA.*

## A Model for Higher Education

In a world where art and music is becoming increasingly devalued in many schools, creativity is still one of the most sought-after 21st century skills for the job market. Architects must prepare for such a future by designing facilities that support and nurture creative spirit. CSU has thoughtfully created a building ahead of the curve, and UCA is sure to give its students a competitive edge, bringing the arts back into focus and back into the limelight.

### **About SLATERPAULL Architects**

*Since 1972, SLATERPAULL has been creating spaces for education, civic services, worship and performance. For more information, visit [www.slaterpaull.com](http://www.slaterpaull.com). Photos were provided by SLATERPAULL Architects.*