

Creative Uses

illuminating the halls of justice on the West Coast • Backlighting wood and glass benefits a Canadian club • A futuristic model residence is wrapped with the right white light

Judicious lighting institutes an open, friendlier backdrop for true-life episodes of L.A. Law

Not far from the illuminated landscape encircling Los Angeles International Airport, the glowing exterior of a new branch facility of the LA County court system creates its own striking presence in the night sky. And when facing court appearances during daytime hours, citizens might find the transition from bright California sunlight to the sequestered halls of justice less foreboding than if they entered a dark courtroom. Collaborating architects Ellerbe Becket and Mosakowski Lindsey Associates (MLA), aided by the Mintz Lighting Group design consultants, have created a contemporary, public-friendly civic building.

"The county administrators and planners wanted an environment that signaled courthouses have changed from what they were a hundred years ago," says Rey Tuazon, MLA design principal. "They didn't want the courthouse to seem massive, insular, or bunker-style, but

instead more welcoming to visitors and the professionals who work here. The lighting design is an extension of that more open policy."

"Of course, citizens come to courthouses to be prosecuted and sentenced, but some people also enter to get licenses and permits or to pay parking tickets," observes principal lighting designer David Mintz. "We didn't want everyone accessing public services to feel as though they were going to jail."

To create less intimidating backdrops for real-life episodes of *L.A. Law*, lighting was carefully integrated within architectural forms and well-detailed materials. The entrance to the 12-story courthouse resembles the look of a high-end commercial office tower, rather than a gateway to the judicial branch. The curving glass facade wraps a two-story lobby gallery lit with metal-halide fixtures that evoke a feeling of openness. The lighting helps to provide a smooth transition

from outside to indoors. Italian porcelain-tile flooring is complemented by walls of marble and polished granite, which are accentuated with metal halides. The curved glass wall leads circulation toward an expansive inner lobby, where a 35-foot-high vaulted ceiling further reinforces openness. Fluorescent uplights wash the ceiling to emphasize its height. HID metal-halide downlights provide general illumination, accompanied by metal-halide wall washers and custom fixtures mounted in a staggered arrangement to wash the floor evenly. Compact fluorescent downlights illuminate elevator lobbies.

Within each courtroom, a semicircular judge's bench is angled in a corner to allow for optimum viewing by the attorneys, jury, and public gallery. A makore-wood-clad wall behind the judge's bench is accentuated by linear fluorescent cove lighting, while compact fluorescent fixtures set in soffits highlight

fabric-wrapped acoustical panels along side walls. The perimeter lighting helps to compensate for the absence of windows inside the courtrooms and allows low levels of ambient illumination when overhead lighting is lowered during audiovisual presentations.

The design team faced the challenge of providing versatile light levels to accommodate daily court activity as well as dimming for a variety of audiovisual needs. Budget limitations, however, overruled installation of a preset dimming system, so the lighting team opted for a cost-effective alternative. "Our solution was to install compact fluorescent downlights with lamps that are individually ballasted and circuited for individual switching," explains associate principal lighting designer Kenneth Douglas.

At the request of the design architect, recessed compact fluorescent fixtures were installed at ceiling panel intersections within the court-

rooms to leave the curved ceiling sections free of additional perforations. Judges' chambers feature compact fluorescents.

Direct/indirect linear fluorescents illuminate hallways, which offer views outdoors via the glass curtain wall. "There is always a high level of tension and emotion in courtrooms," explains Mintz. "When people take a break from these courtrooms, it is a nice feature to have a bright, open space to walk in."

Set on time-clock controls, the direct/indirect linear fluorescents keep the facade of the courthouse shining as a civic symbol during off-hours. *Leanne B. French*



The facade glows from within (left). Corridors feature daylight and views (top). Compact fluorescents light courtrooms (above).