

The shape of things to come



ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

Edwin S. Darden, Jr.
Darden Architects, Inc.

Arthur Dyson
Arthur Dyson Architects
and DSJ Architects, Inc.

Kiel Famellos-Schmidt
Archop and
Taylor Teter Partnership

Robert Siegrist
DSJ Architects, Inc.

Russ Taylor
Taylor Teter Partnership

Dennis Townsend
Townsend Architectural Group

Architects deal with challenges with an eye toward the future

Gabriel Dillard – ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Some of the country's most distinguished architects are based in Fresno, but chances are nobody would rate Fresno among the country's top architectural hotspots.

That's because the San Joaquin Valley lacks the concentration of dollars that makes it possible for urban centers such as San Francisco, Los Angeles or New York to develop the structures that make connoisseurs swoon. Nevertheless, the community has access to a variety of well-qualified architectural firms, and people who look close enough can see a lot of glittering diamonds in the rough.

The Business Journal reached out to some of the region's top architects to weigh in on the trends taking hold locally and outside the region. Kiel Famellos-Schmidt, a designer for Taylor Teter Partnership and curator of Archop, an organization which

seeks to awaken the local community to the architectural possibilities of the region, also shared his thoughts.

While the economic downturn has touched the industry, there is a sense that technology and trends such as green building will mold the shape of things to come. According to one architect, Fresno could be destined for great things as long as it can leave its architectural comfort zone.

Please tell us a little about your firm.

Dennis Townsend: We are a full-service architectural firm established in 2001 to serve the Central Valley and California. I am the principal architect and have a staff of project managers, job captains and technical personnel.

How has the economic downturn affected business?

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Townsend: The downturn manifested itself with a decline in backlogged projects. The almost complete loss of production and custom residential work followed. For some time, remodel projects remained strong, but they have also declined recently. Commercial work has slowed to mostly tenant improvements, master planning and upgrades with a few new projects on the boards.

What advice would you give business owners trying to find the right architect for their project?

Townsend: I recommend a series of face-to-face meetings on the site of previous projects and the proposed project site. The owner should ask a series of questions regarding the design process to gauge how willing the professional is to accept the input of the client. If the owner is comfortable with this series of meetings, they will likely maintain this level of comfort throughout the process.

What are the current trends in architectural design in this area, and what can we expect in the future?

Townsend: I see a trend toward using existing structures and the adaptive reuse



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Townsend Architectural Group

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of architecturally interesting buildings. Many see this as a cost-saving alternative to new construction. There is a heightened interest in energy efficiency, and I am be-

ing asked about both passive techniques and active designs more than ever. There is an increasing interest in using natural materials. This seems to be especially true with younger clients. As energy costs increase, energy-efficient systems become more affordable, and the trends towards efficiency will continue. The use of natural materials will also continue, but they will be used increasingly as finishes, while composites will play an increasing role as structural elements.

What kinds of clients are you serving these days?

Townsend: We are working for a bank, residential builders, developers, churches, homeowners, municipalities and do-it-yourself remodelers.

What kinds of projects are you designing these days?

Townsend: Our current project mix includes bank branches, tenant improvements, markets, offices, lease space, high density and custom residences, church work and remodels.

Gabriel Dillard | Editor can be reached at:
490-3467 or e-mail gabriel@thebusinessjournal.com