

## Interview: Architect Gregg Stewart

Q: How did you become involved in designing Century High School?

A: Well, the school district needed to design a school, so they put out what is called an RP, and they asked architects to put in proposals for the design of the school. Our firm put in a proposal. We were one of three or four firms selected and they interviewed each firm, and based on those interviews we were selected to be the architect of Century High School.

Q: What were the considerations for being selected

A: They are usually based on your experience, past jobs you've done, references from those past clients. It's based on your proposal and how you manage the project and your past designs.

Q: How were you qualified?

A: I personally was not involved in the interview process. I became involved in the project as soon as we began working on it, but I had done a lot of school work at least as far as (...?)

Q: What was the relationship between the educational program and the design of the building?

A: We were also involved in developing the educational program when we began work the district had done very little work on developing that program, I think there were some discussions within the district on what they wanted, but nothing had been finalized and so we met with a group of thirty people and I brought a copy of the and we started talking about the vision of the school and what they wanted this to be, how they were going to conduct their educational programs how they wanted to use the facilities we got in to discussions of what was going to be in the facility, how many classrooms. How many classes were going to be taught, how many athletic fields what was the theater going to be like we also got into discussions about the feeling of the school, what did they want the school to be like, a couple things that come to mind one thing that was very important to the community was that the school had a presence in the community, and it had a very obvious and important front door if you turned up to the school, you knew where to go. In a lot of past school designs when you drive (...?) So that was very important to them and they wanted a school that really was collegiate it was going to be for adults, and students here are on their way to adulthood, and it was really designed to help them make that transition.

Q: How would you describe the basic vision?

A: The vision of the school, I think was based on the curricular delivery, and trying to design a school that would have what they call strands of interest and there was a large communication area that had all the classrooms associated with that plus the general classrooms so it was not a departmentalized high school, probably the majority if not all of the high schools in Oregon until century was built on a

departmentalized program, you had English and social studies and history and science and in century they wanted to develop programs where a student could go to one area of the school and have all of their curricular activities and plus they also wanted to be able to go back to the old model. I think the most significant thing about century was the breaking up of science rooms to distribute the science rooms throughout the building. I think that was a major decision on how the school was going to function, because you can never go and have a science department, because the science rooms are everywhere.

Q: Why were the science rooms spread apart?

A: They wanted the students if you were arts and communications they wanted you to be able to have your science room, your English, you history, your arts. And also there was a lot of discussion of integrating the curriculum, so some science projects would be integrated with history projects. Teachers working as a team to support, rather than have all the science teachers working as a team and all the English teachers working as a team.

Q: Is there anything that didn't go over quite as you planned, anything that backfired?

A: I don't think it has backfired because we're doing liberty high school for Hillsboro school district, and when we first started that program, we met with people from this facility and asked them those questions, what works, what doesn't. And the layout of the classroom concept is the same. Some of the classrooms changed, because the program has changed. I think in century the business classrooms had a very specific case where we found that that really wasn't necessary so the business classrooms are more engineering classrooms. But they were pretty minor changes.

Q: How many models/sketches did you have to make before they decided on one?

A: Oh, countless. I think in this book in the back are some of the beginning of the concept drawings. And so we ended up- we had at least scheme "H". So from A to H but there were many more in between that we didn't document. But the first process after we get the numerical program and the verbal program we began drawing and laying out the building in different ways. So in this scheme you see all the classrooms basically in the front of the building with the gym and the theater in the back, so we went through countless different schemes. Scheme B is two classroom lanes with the gym and the theater and the commons in the middle, closer together. How we did this process is we came to the district and we set up in the conference room in the main office, we were there for two one week sessions and we would basically just set up our own office and people would come in during the day and look at what we were doing and then we would have key meetings throughout that week go over our schemes and get their reactions "yes that's going to work, now that's not going to work". So it's just experimenting and trying a lot of different ideas seeing how they work.

Q: Is there anything that people wanted out of this besides the obvious front entrance?

A: I think they wanted a theater class production theater full fly loft, first class theater. There was a strong desire to have that (...?).

Q: I understand there was a request for a main hallway, how did that work within your designs?

A: I think in some of these schemes it was more of a U shape corridor rather than a long corridor, and I think the thing that drove that idea was to get all the lockers away from the classrooms, so the idea of having that long corridor, what we call the student street, was to get all of the lockers away from the classroom areas, so there would be no closing lockers by the classroom doors, basically. That's really what's driving the idea of having this main circulations space through the school

Q: What were the considerations you had to take into account? (inre Main hallway)

A: Well we looked at other schools, measured their hallways, talked to the people to see if... are they wide enough, are they congested? The hallways actually were wider than they are, in our design. But because of budget reasons we had to lose some area, and that was one of the areas where we had to lose some area. So there was a lot of discussion about ... congestion.

Q: Was that a result of the first bond being turned down?

A: Not being turned down, when a bond is passed, there is only so much money you have to spend, there's a budget, and the school was so big, there's so much area, and it's the nature of humans to want more than they can have, so it's a constant balance of the size of the building, quality of the materials you want to use, and the complexity of how the building is going together.

Q: About the quality of the materials used- somebody said century would have a look of pristine expensiveness but not necessarily be pristine. How do you respond to this?

A: It wasn't presented that way. They wanted quality materials, and originally the entire building was going to be block and brick, was our original plan. And in the courtyards, that's a stucco material, and there's a stucco material in the back of the building, so we basically put the brick and the block in the front of the building where people would see it the most and the less expensive material in the back

Q: What was the goal in having courtyards?

A: One of the goals of the school was to have natural lighting in the classroom, so the courtyards really evolved to allow light into the classrooms. Rather than having a double wide corridor that's long, light coming in from both sides, we chose to have a donut shape basically, for light to get into the classrooms. That's why the courtyards were developed- to get light to the classrooms.

Q: Was there anything you had to overcome to build the school?

A: Well, when were building the orchestra pit, started digging the hole, there was a spring under it. Water started gushing out. So the orchestra pit is not as deep as it originally was designed and it's not as large as it originally was designed because of that.

Q: What do you think are some of the best features of the school?

A: I think the natural light. I think almost any place you stand in the school you can see out, you have a sense that there's light. The glass by the classroom door is lined up

with the window, and that was done very purposely, so you can see out through the classroom, almost any place in the hall you stand you get a glimpse of daylight. That to me is one of the most significant things about this building.

Q: Do you think that was one of the reasons this school won an award for its design?

A: I think so, yeah. I think when I first walked through, that really struck me and it still strikes me. Yeah I think that was one of the reasons.

Q: Was there anything else that might have been taken into account?

A: I think the organization, it's organized in a very clear way. The administration, the media center and the commons as one block and the classroom blocks and the theater and the gym. I think the organization we planned is layed out really well, that probably would have appealed to them.

Q: Is there anything you would change if you were working on the Liberty project?

A: Well I think on Liberty one of the comments was that the commons is at a dead end and it's not used as much as it could. So we tried to make the commons area more in the circulation path used easier used more as a reception area for the theater or the gym. So it's not so isolated from these two functions. Some of the circulation issues that you have here we talked about and tried to correct. The congestion at the servery and congestion at the center stair. We were here to watch, one of the times we actually saw it. We tried to correct things like that. All of the exterior skin on Liberty is a masonry material. Because we had some technical difficulty with the stucco here so we didn't want to go through those problems again

Q: Did you expect that there would be 2100 students?

A: No, we thought there would be 1800. That's part of the congestion problem. There are more students here than the school was designed for.

Q: Did you take that in mind for the next project?

A: No I don't think so, I think all schools are designed for 1800. Because you have a certain budget and that's what you're designing from. I think that's the size the district wants their high schools to be and if they get larger, then that's the time they pop another high school up.

Q: Was the school completed on time?

A: Yes, once the bond has passed there was a relatively short time for design construction and building. And actually in the conventional way of designing the building, doing the documents and bidding of the building, there wasn't enough time, so they hired a contractor who began working with us when we were doing the documentation, and what we did is we started designing the building in packages so the contractor could start building the building before we were done designing the building. And that's one way we made our schedule

Q: Did that create any problems?

A: Oh, sure. You design a foundation and they're building it, and you find out later you want to change something and it's already being built. That's why you bring them out early and then you work as a team. Is there a way we can change it without having a huge impact on cost and budget. But it's a better solution, and everybody works together to try to make these things happen.