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Interview with Bohlin Cywinski Jackson, Architects for the Nu Skin Innovation Center

The building has been dubbed the Nu Skin Innovation Center. What innovations have you included in the architecture?

Ray Calabro, principal and lead architect: One of the innovations is the building envelope, or what we would refer to as the “skin” of the building, and the way in which we are creating each of the elevations so the activity that is occurring inside the building is apparent from the exterior. Whether you’re outside the building on Center Street, in the south garden, or in the atrium – you have a sense of people and activity throughout the building.

Making the design transparent to the degree we are means that we will need to be technically innovative. To make a building that is all glass, but that isn’t too cold or too hot or too bright, will need some potentially extraordinary technical measures. Things like special types of glass that incorporate the latest technology on how glass is made and the coating they put on it, things they do to reduce glare and heat gain, or shading systems or layers of glass combined with mechanical systems. Ultimately, that will need to be quite innovative.

Another aspect of the building that is really exciting to all of us, which also requires a high degree of technical skill, is the sense of connection to the outdoors large meeting and conference room spaces. For instance, on the first floor there is a 500-person meeting room that has north and south walls made entirely of glass. We need to design doors that can be opened in mild weather so people can be outside or feel as though they are outside. But when there is an AV presentation or seminar, that same room needs to be closed and darkened and perform acoustically.

Describe the architectural considerations you have made for integrating the building into downtown Provo.

RC: I think we have done that rather successfully by making the north part of the building along Center Street two stories and then pushing the third story back and creating a terrace. Also, by placing the larger part of the project a little bit farther back, it remains out of view to pedestrians and then is revealed in a dramatic way once you are inside the building.

I think we are making a rather dynamic and special interior place, which is the atrium, that is really the link between the existing Nu Skin high rise and the north and south buildings of the Innovation Center. The atrium is essentially a new entry to the Innovation Center and will be a great public place

in downtown Provo. All of these buildings are then focused on the garden to the south, which I think has the potential to be a transition to the surrounding neighborhoods that are more residential in nature.

We are trying to knit this building into its place and yet also provide the kinds of spaces and experiences that are not currently there.

The Nu Skin high rise is an iconic symbol of the company in Utah Valley. How will the new building influence how the company is perceived?

RC: I think that the architecture is very reflective of the core values of Nu Skin, in that it will be very light, very transparent, and I think it will enhance people's experience. The activity that is occurring inside the building is apparent from the exterior – whether you're outside the building on Center Street, in the south garden, or in the atrium. You have a sense of people and activity throughout the building that is quite different from the existing Nu Skin building. By making the building as transparent as possible, people are encouraged to take advantage of the extraordinary views of the Wasatch Mountains and also reveal the activities that are going on inside.

What are your favorite aspects of the building you've designed for Nu Skin?

RC: What excites me personally about the Nu Skin project is certainly the scale. This is a very significant project, not just for Nu Skin, but for the city of Provo. We are making a place where Nu Skin will welcome visitors from all over the world. The experience is choreographed very carefully because the best architecture considers choreography in how you approach it, what you see, how you move through the building, what the views are, what the quality of light is like and how it changes as you move from one place to another.

In the new building there is lightness and a sense of calm – it is elegantly designed and detailed. I think we want people to sense the dramatic change in scale and in space from inside to outside. You'll see people and see activity in the space, and the atrium in particular will feel very lively and animated, and yet also calm.

Sergei Bischak AIA, senior associate: The atrium itself will also benefit everyone who works there, whether they are working in the original building or the new building. Ultimately, we see the atrium becoming the center of Nu Skin. This will become a big part of everyone's experience there.

What has working on this project meant for Bohlin Cywinski Jackson?

RC: This has been one of the few occasions where a client has encouraged us to go beyond what we were comfortable doing and challenged us to do more and push the design further than what we had originally expected to do. I think that is a rare and wonderful opportunity.

SB: The vibe in our office is that this is an exciting project and that we are doing things with this building that either we haven't done before or that are pushing the boundaries a little bit. That's what makes us all come to work in the morning.

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