

Real Estate Today

Notes on real estate, architecture, green building and more

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Q&A: Ed Smith Stadium architect Michael Swartz

by [Harold Bubil](#)

Michael Swartz, AIA, of David M. Schwartz Architects (yes, the names are spelled differently) in Washington, D.C., discusses the remodeled Ed Smith Stadium with the Herald-Tribune's Harold Bubil.

Q. The new stadium is receiving high praise from baseball fans and community leaders. What other stadiums have you or your firm designed?

A. We've done one major-league stadium, for the Texas Rangers, right next to the Cowboys' new stadium, which dwarfs ours. Our stadium looked pretty big, but boy ...



"Florida Picturesque": Ed Smith Stadium. Photo by Harold Bubil.

We've done a couple of minor-leagues parks, one also outside of Dallas, and the one where the Braves play (during spring training) in Orlando. We are not a stadium architect; we don't have dozens of them in our portfolio, but they are great projects, and when we do get an opportunity to work on one, it is always very enjoyable.

I was very keen to work on this one because I have family that lives down there. I have been coming to Sarasota for 20 years and have a real fondness for the community.

Q. Were you the lead architect for Ed Smith?

A. I was one of them. We take a team-oriented approach here.

Q. Were you the starting pitcher, then?

A. I was one of several pitchers.

Q. You describe the stadium as "Florida Picturesque" in style. I haven't heard that term until now.

A. We designed the sports complex at Disney Wide World of Sports. We started looking at projects that were designed in a more traditional Florida style. There's been little at Disney World designed that way. That stadium started out to be brick in the design. But we moved away from that, to the better of the project. That building is not a pure 'anything' either. It is very eclectic in terms of how we approached it. But it does incorporate a lot of elements that you would find in this traditional Florida architecture.

Q. Florida Picturesque — hHow did you develop that?

A. It's just a term we use. It is not a recognized term. We use it among ourselves, talking about a wide category of architectural styles that were prevalent in the teens and Twenties in Florida, primarily during the land boom, when Flagler built his railroad down to the keys and they were bringing wealthy vacationers down to stay in these wonderful resorts and hotels that were being built, mostly on the East Coast.

There was a lot of development, and in Palm Beach there is a lot of that style. Sarasota has its share of it, maybe not as much, but there is enough of it that was used on some fairly significant buildings, some of them standing, some of them gone. The County Courthouse would be one example. Ca' d'Zan is one example of how Florida Picturesque is not a unique style. It borrows heavily from Venetian and Mediterranean architecture. The Ringling museum is an interesting mix of Florida Picturesque and beaux-arts styles.

Art Deco borrowed from all styles of architecture ... Classical, art nouveau. Florida Picturesque is our little invention that we used to refer to that vernacular of architecture that was common in Florida in the 1920s.

Q. We often call it Mediterranean revival. It is often used for mansions by builders, and some struggle with scale and proportion.

A. Up here where I live in the Virginia, Maryland, D.C. area, the builders all bastardize Georgian architecture. So down there you get a lot of slings and arrows being shoved at the traditional Florida styles.

Q. Were you worried about that when you did this project? You had a choice of going modern, which you did at Twin Lakes (the Orioles' minor-league facility off Clark Road).

A. That seemed like the right recipe for that building. It was this tired little building that was clearly modern – I use that generally speaking – in terms of it being horizontal, lacking in detail. So it seemed like it would be a real push to take that building in some other direction. It felt like trying to find the building it always dreamed it ought to be, or wanted to be.

Ed Smith, when we looked at that facility, it seemed like you could turn it into anything. It was a generic seating bowl, really just a functional, utilitarian structure that you could sit in and watch a baseball game. Not much more than that. Programmatically, it was more like the high school football stadium where you grew up.

Q. Without the splinters.

A. Yes. No place to go look for loose change that fell out of people's pockets.

We briefly talked about the Sarasota school of architecture, the modern aesthetic that (Paul) Rudolph and some of his contemporaries made popular in the 1950s and '60s, and concluded that it probably wasn't the right style to use on the ballpark for a number of reasons. To do it well, you have to be concerned about budget. Good modern architecture, generally, is more expensive to build.

Q. You can't hide your mistakes, can you?

A. You can't. The detailing is about expressing the constructionality of it. Talking to the client (the Orioles), their sensibility was to the more traditional forms or architecture in Sarasota.

Q. I doubt you were dealing with a bottomless pit of money on this project.

A. It actually was very economical. The number that gets reported was \$31.2 million, but that was everything — hard and soft costs — and it included three projects: the stadium, the clubhouse and the Twin Lakes complex.

Q. I went around the stadium looking for design problems. The only things that I noticed were the Doric column capitals being varied — some curvy and some cylindrical — and the towers on the end of each concourse. They appear to have a faux window treatment, like a painted on window.

A. They are just niches; it is a blank-out opening. Some of them will have tile in them, and I don't believe the tile has arrived on site yet.

Q. Others are painted black.

A. It shouldn't be black. Did they paint it black? What it is supposed to be is a slightly darker color than the stucco to pop the shadow.

Q. Fans seem to be preoccupied with the cost of parking and beer. Do you wonder if they notice or appreciate the architecture?

A. We in the office have prided ourselves on our projects not necessarily winning architectural awards. I would be lying if I said we didn't like architectural awards, but what we really like are when our buildings make it on the front cover of the phone book. We figure if the town has put our building on the phone book, then collectively they all agree that they like it.

Q. Have you done another stadium that looks quite like this one?

A. No.

Q. It's kind of a one-off just for Sarasota?

A. Absolutely it is, and that is exactly what we wanted to do.

Comments

4 Comments

1. [March 6th, 2011 10:37 am](#)

THIS PLACE LOOKS LIKE IT BELONGS AT THE DISNEY COMPLEX.....TACKY.....TACKY.....TACKY.....WE SHOULD DEMAND MORE INPUT FROM THE SARASOTA SCHOOL.....NOT SOME CHEAP IMITATION OF CAMDEN YARD AND DISNEY COMBINED...

by HAPPY FLAPPY

2. [March 6th, 2011 10:44 am](#)

ONE MORE THING.....I AM WAITING FOR SOME GANGBANGER TO TAKE POTSHOTS AT THAT STUPID WEATHERVANE.....

HAROLD ...YOU ARE THE BEST....

by HAPPY FLAPPY

3. [March 7th, 2011 7:53 am](#)

Did anybody think to ask him why the rows are so tightly spaced that my knees are pinned up against the cup holders attached to the row ahead?
I'm only 6'0" and about 210 lbs. but I feel like I'm in a sardine can each time I attend a game.

by 13 ECHO

4. [March 7th, 2011 9:05 am](#)

Amazing how everyone is up in arms with Gov. Scott's decision to kill the rail because of the jobs lost but then hire an out of state Architect to design your stadium. Hypocrisy raises it ugly head. Do you mean to imply that there are no local Architects capable of this project? Sounds like it to me.

by Roy West