



Withee Malcolm's Acura Design Studio Earns LEED Gold and 'Green Pride in Torrance' Award.

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Torrance City Council and the Environmental Quality & Energy Conservation Commission honored Withee Malcolm Architects and their client, American Honda, for the design of the Acura Design Studio, which recently achieved LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Gold certification from the U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC). The Green Pride in Torrance Awards are designed to recognize residents and businesses who go the extra mile in showing their concern for the environment and helping to make Torrance a better and greener city.

The story, however, extends beyond the recent recognition or the still uncommon LEED Gold status for a commercial building. Honda, Withee Malcolm, and the City of Torrance have all made serious commitments to creating more sustainable environments through their initiatives.

In 2008, American Honda Motor Company, known for their fuel-efficient vehicles, earned five LEED certifications from the USGBC -- one LEED Platinum, three LEED Gold, including the Torrance project, and a LEED Silver. "We have embraced the green building program since 1999," says Barbara van Gaasbeek, national administrator of American Honda's green building programs. "Although it takes an increased amount up front to build a green building, the payback is in reduced utility bills because of reduced water and electricity use. So for the lifetime of a building, say 20 to 50 years, that's a lot of payback."

Withee Malcolm Architects, recognizing the critical role of the architect in setting and achieving "green goals" for their clients, has launched a firm-wide initiative to accelerate the incorporation of sustainable design principles into their projects. An in-house LEED team reviews the sustainable potential of projects and has established a clear, green agenda for the practice. "We believe that we have a social responsibility to create projects that contribute to the viability of their communities," says founder Dale Malcolm. "The Acura Design Studio is a perfect example of incorporating the latest green building practices into our buildings in ways that deliver both economic and environmental benefits."

Sustainable features at the Acura Design Studio include several categories: energy savings such as the high-efficiency displacement ventilation system that moves low velocity cool air from above down to large, floor-level grills where heating and cooling are delivered at the level of the occupants; dual paned low-e glass in the exterior windows, designed to reduce the amount of solar heat gain in the building, again to reduce the amount of air conditioning and cooling needed; recycle and reuse choices such as the use of building materials with recycled content, and the use of the reclaimed water brought to the Campus (by West Basin Municipal Water District) for irrigation and water closets; quality of life design decisions such as the monitoring of carbon dioxide levels within the building, improving indoor air quality by reducing the use of contaminants in paints, adhesives, carpets, etc.; and providing a connection between indoor spaces and the outdoors through daylighting and views.

What is more is that this level of green design was achieved for this particular use and on a tight, "real world" budget. "There is a great sense of accomplishment in having achieved this level of sustainability for a building of this type," says Jeff Lemler, Withee Malcolm's Senior Associate and project manager. "It makes you realize that there is no reason why, with an integrated approach, even the smallest project can't incorporate some element of green design."

This is exactly the kind of thinking that the City of Torrance is recognizing in its awards programs. "Torrance is part of the 'coolcities' campaign," notes Linda Cessna, Deputy Community Development Director for the city. "Torrance is among those cities that have made a commitment to stop global warming by signing the U.S. Mayors' Climate Protection Agreement -- a program that empowers city residents and local leaders to encourage their cities to implement smart energy solutions, to save money, and build a cleaner, safer future."

"We are on the lookout for projects across the city that are making a sustainable difference," says Danny Santana, Senior Planning Associate. His colleague, Kevin Joe, a Planning Associate, saw the potential for the Acura Design Studio when it was just in the entitlements stage and helped point the way for recognition. Joe adds, "The stewardship of the environment was recently elevated to a priority in the City's Strategic Plan, our visioning document for the community and local government."

In horse racing they call it a trifecta. In today's environment it is win-win-win for industry, design, and the community.

For more on Withee Malcolm Architects, visit www.witheemalcolm.com.

The City of Torrance website www.tornet.com has more information, as does www.coolcities.us

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