

Glenn Rappaport, AIA, describes his contemporary adaptation of agrarian and mining forms and their indigenous aesthetic as "post-agricultural expressionism."



# Concession Proof

**Glenn Rappaport, AIA, and his firm, Black Shack Architects, design an expressive, low-maintenance structure that surmounts budget constraints to elevate the concession stand to a new level.**

*By Sarah Goldblatt, AIA*



Greg Watts

Rarely do concession and restroom facilities in an outdoor sports park exceed one's expectations. They are typically gray concrete block rectangles with brightly colored flags or other appurtenances that identify them as something other than a detention facility. The reason? Park departments place a high premium on functional, low-maintenance facilities. Creative responses to these program-driven buildings are often squashed early on by budget-minded managers.

So what happens when you cross a talented architectural firm looking for something other than a static solution and a park director's willingness to provide some slack in the leash? Things get interesting! The Crown Mountain Park concession and restroom facility — affectionately compared to a lunar landing module, giant grasshopper or '50s drive-in — has elevated the fundamental provisions of comfort (food, shelter and restrooms) to a new level in El Jebel, Colo.

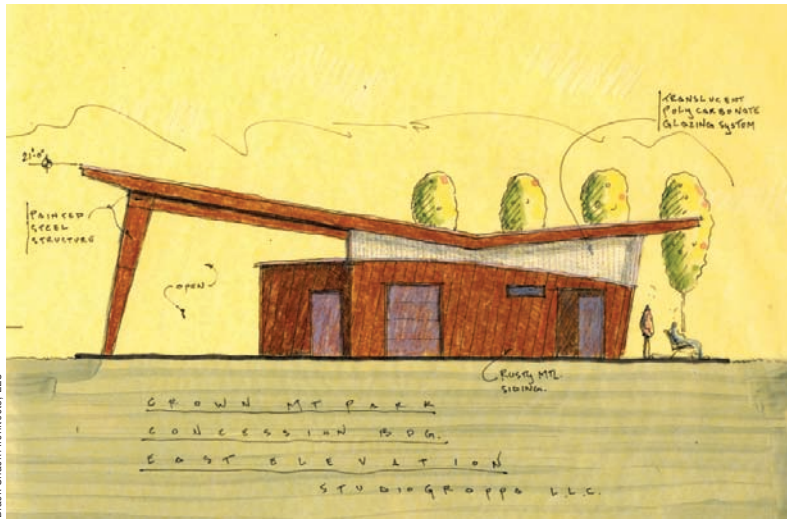
This sculptural structure is located within a 124-acre park in the center of the Roaring Fork Valley between Carbondale and Basalt, on a verdant site that was once home to the Mount Sopris Tree Farm.

Above: The exposed tapered steel plate girders and dramatic sweeping roof of the concession facility at Crown Mountain Park recall the drive-in genre of the '50s. The project received a 2008 AIA Colorado West Citation Award.

Below: A veil of low-lying early morning fog envelops the concession facility creating an "other-worldly" scene.



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Above: Architect's sketch of the concession facility.

Below: Interior view from within the restroom facility towards the interlaced planes of steel decking and corrugated fiberglass panels at the roof level. The translucent panels help illuminate the restrooms and minimize the need for supplemental light.



Established in 2003, the Crown Mountain Park and Recreation District was formed to provide a central amenity for the growing unincorporated communities in the area. Local voters approved a \$5.1 million bond issue to fund the park improvements designed by DHM Design in conjunction with local architect Glenn Rappaport, AIA, and his firm, Black Shack Architects.

The original program included trails, playground, tennis courts, baseball and soccer fields, picnic shelters, bird viewing stations, interpretive center, amphitheater, dog park, concessions and restrooms. At the end of the bidding process, it was clear that the vision exceeded the available resources and the reductive process began. Rappaport compared the district's shortfall to "a group with marching orders, but no uniforms." The combined concession and restroom facility survived the programmatic cuts, but its ultimate form was uncertain. As pressure mounted to swap the unique design for the standard alternative, Rappaport felt it was incumbent on him and his firm to salvage the integrity of the structure from the ravages of the value engineering process. "After all," he explained, "the building(s) had gone through a long involved public-approval process and this is what the public had grown to expect there."

Rappaport, a SCI-Arc graduate and student of Thom Mayne, FAIA of Morphosis, cites Mayne's ability to empower everyone that he works with, along with his collaborative design approach, as a fundamental influence on his own capacity to deal with what he terms "unintended consequences." According to Rappaport, these are unforeseen changes that occur in the life of a project that require deviation from the original design and that can be parlayed into opportunity instead of defeat. Rappaport finds himself squarely in the camp of architects who believe that "good architecture should have a life after the rendering is over and the construction process begins."

It was precisely this lesson that Black Shack Architects applied to the design of the Crown Mountain Park concession and restroom facility. As budget constraints threatened to strangle the life out of the building, the architect worked with Ross Stepp, executive director of Crown Mountain Park District, and with Mueller Construction to strategically extract elements. At one point in the process, Stepp applied for and received grant money to stay the dissection process.

To manage further changes during construction, Rappaport was a constant presence in the field, commit-

ted to coaxing quality design from the project through on-site decisions and some friendly bargaining. The result is an expressive structure that achieves a maximum effect with a minimum of means.

The approach to the park via Highway 82 provides intermittent glimpses of the concession building. Rolling berms screen the structure except for the asymmetrical butterfly roof that appears to gently levitate above the landscape. Closer inspection reveals the long trapezoidal “legs” of the rigid, moment-frame structure that emerge from the ground to expose the sculptural body with all the intrigue of a molting insect.



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Project Structural Engineer Brett McElvain noted that “the tapered steel sections were the most difficult to analyze, but give the structure the unique look that it has.”

Located at the confluence of pathways, the compact enclosure houses restrooms, storage and a covered concession area. Oriented to block the near-constant prevailing wind and minimize sun exposure, the roof form serves to deflect the western breeze while the long overhang to the east flips up like a visor to capture views of snow-capped mountains and shield picnickers from the high summer sun. Rappaport explained that the inverted roof form was also “designed to make an event of rain water coming directly off the surface instead of internally draining it.” Where the roof planes intersect, the valley tips to the south toward a

An oblique view of the concession area that has shipping container massing and is neatly sheathed in rusted non-galvanized corrugated steel. The building components are placed at opposing angles resulting in a rich, textural composition of layers and shadow.

**CROWN MOUNTAIN PARK CONCESSIONS BUILDING**

**Architect** Black Shack Architects, LLC, Glenn Rappaport, AIA

**Location** El Jebel, Colo.

**Construction Cost** \$230,000

**Scope** 1,000-square-foot concession facility with covered picnic area

**Purpose** House concession stand, park-equipment storage and restrooms for a new park complex to serve as a central amenity for a growing community in the Roaring Fork Valley

**Completion Date** 2007

**Owner** Crown Mountain Park and Recreation District

**Contractor** Mueller Construction, Glenwood Springs, Colo.

**Structural Engineer** KL & A Basalt, Colo.

**Photography** Greg Watts

**Other Notable Projects**

- Oliphant Residence, Pitkin County, Colo., AIA Colorado West Honor Award 2009
- Carbondale and Rural Fire District Sub-station #5, AIA Colorado Honor Award
- Leendertse Residence, Mesa, Colo., AIA Colorado Honor Award
- Kodiak Boat House, El Jebel, Colo., AIA Colorado Merit Award

Located at the confluence of pathways and playing fields, the concession facility — with its exoskeleton-like form — assumes a commanding position in the park.

folded, sheet-steel scupper that catches and dispatches rainfall into a formed concrete drywell below. Similar to a sundial, this sculptural scupper creates a shadow that travels along the rusted corrugated facade in a variety of shapes throughout the day.

The slim red roof edge, finished to match the exposed primed-steel structural frame, reinforces the overall geometric composition. White corrugated fiberglass is seamlessly slipped between the roof edge and the rusted steel mass of the building. The translucent panels act as a perimeter clerestory that provides diffused natural light into the restrooms and storage area. The material choice further serves to emphasize the roof form and highlight the gentle arc of the corrugated steel that subtly directs one to the front of the building. Plate steel neatly folds around each opening including the concession window that is part of a larger volume that resembles a shipping container.

It is no coincidence that what appears to be straightforward detailing and ordinary materials echoes a machine-made aesthetic. Rappaport has long looked at agrarian and mining forms in the local landscape as design inspiration and refers to their adaptation into contemporary architecture as “post-agricultural expressionism.” For example, the rusted corrugated steel that wraps the enclosure is a staple of old mining structures throughout the area. As Ross Stepp aptly explains, “The use of the material reflects the rustic roots of this area and early days of Aspen, and at the same time is also very modern. It bridges the gap between the old and new.”

The building gracefully merges the functional demands of the program with elements of surprise. “There is something original in each view,” observes Stepp. It has the dual nature of being a low-maintenance building that occupies the larger landscape with ease and confidence — a true jewel in Crown Mountain Park. ■



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