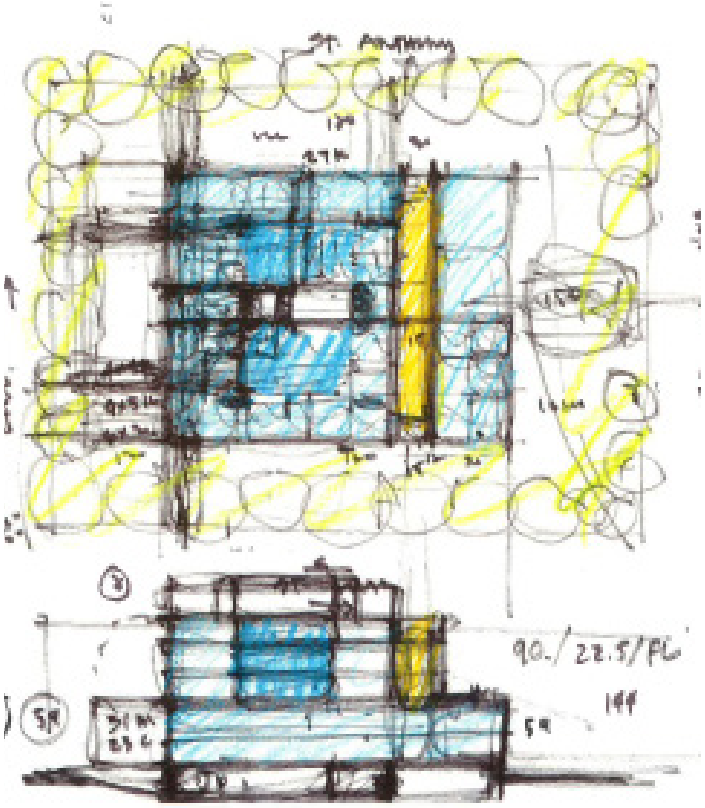
Federal Courthouse

Mobile, Alabama

The new federal courthouse is located immediatley North of the existing John A. Campbell U.S. Courthouse, which is currently being renovated. The new courthouse is intended to complement, both aesthetically and functionally, its historic counterpart. Housed within the new courthouse are six courtrooms and nine judge's chambers serving both U.S. District and Magistrate Courts, as well as tenant space for the U.S. Marshals Service.

Concept

The site is located within the walkable area of downtown Mobile where users can easily access public transportation, associated services, as well as health, food service, and convenience shopping options such as restaurants, public plazas and other cultural amenities. The courthouse is symbolic of the importance of the rule of law in our land and its classical design complements and links it visually with the historic Campbell Courthouse. However, the new courthouse is detailed with Greek Doric columns, entablature, and profiles, drawing parallels to other historically significant structures in the downtown area and serves as an appropriate architectural transition from the high rises of the central business district to the historic DeTonti Square neighborhood to the north adding to Mobile's rich architectural heritage, particularly in relation to its civic and religious institutions, while also remaining sympathetic to nearby residentially-scaled spacing and the realities of modern building codes and construction budgets.



Watercolor Rendering with Historic J.A.Campbell Courthouse in the Background

Adjacent DeTonti Neighbourhood

Adjacent DeTonti Neighbourhood

Challenges

Flood Plain:

The site sits at an elevation 9' above the mean sea level, well within both the 500 and 100-year flood plains. The entrance and key program elements are lifted above the flood plain and set back from the street to provide both security and a contextual relationship to similar civic buildings in the neighborhood.

Building Scale:

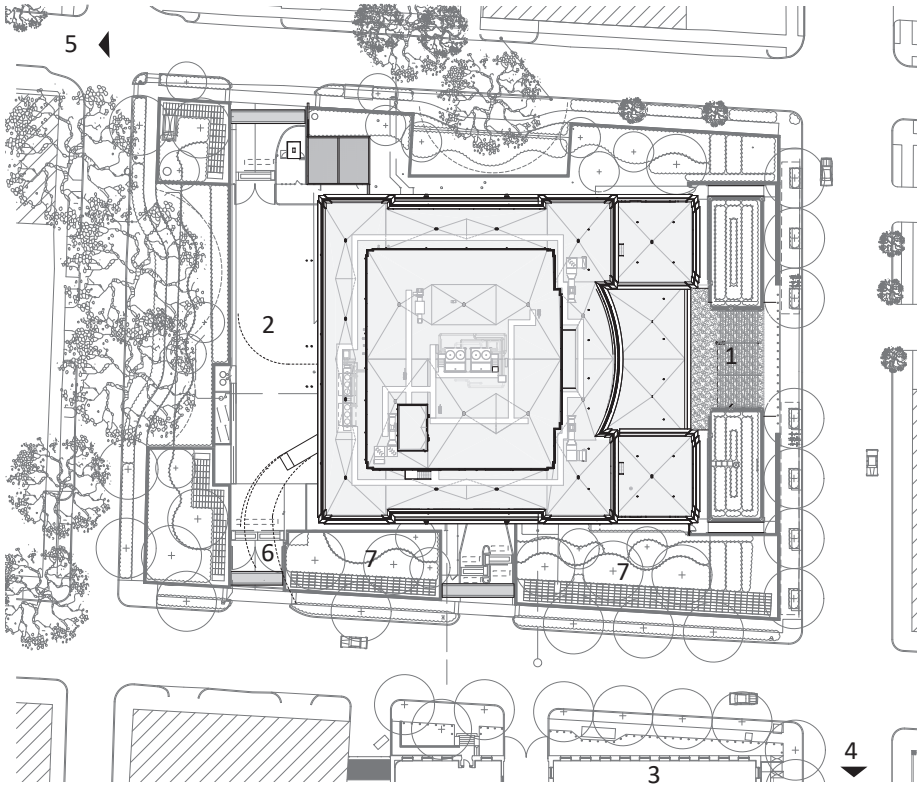
The volumetric massing steps down toward the perimeter to provide a civic presence without overpowering the nearby collection of two and three-story residences of the DeTonti neighbourhood.

Resilience:

The design protects against both blast and hurricane loads which have opposing requirements. Blast protection requires a degree of elasticity so the building facade is able to absorb threatening shockwaves. Conversely, resisting hurricane-force winds and projectile debris requires maximum strength and rigidity to reduce the likelihood of penetration. Large-scale precast concrete panels were engineered to satisfy these divergent project goals.

Precast is clad in locally-quarried and fabricated, hand set Alabama limestone, maintaining a visually-appealing facade with a level of craft in keeping with the original 1934-39 Campbell Courthouse.

Rendered Siteplan

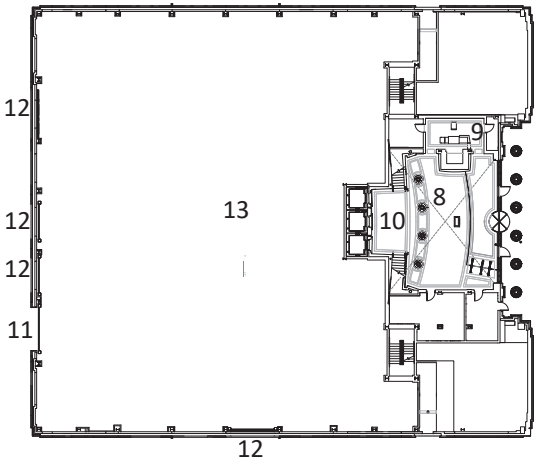


Site Plan

0 48'

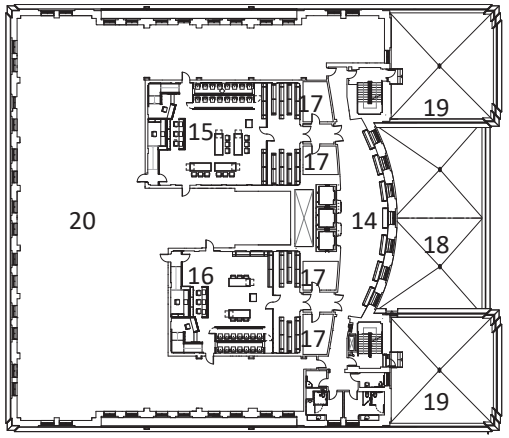
Key

1. Entry terrace
2. Vehicle access/ loading dock
3. Campbell Courthouse
4. To Commercial Business District
5. To DeTonti Histroic District
6. Vehicle and Flood gate
7. Stormwater retention tank
8. Entry lobby
9. Security Screening area
10. Elevator Lobby
11. Loading Dock
12. Vehicle Access
13. Tenant Parking
14. Public Waiting Area
15. District Courtroom
16. Magistrate Courtroom
17. Attorney-Client Conference Room
18. Lobby and Portico Roof Below
19. Roof Below
20. Tenant Space



Entrance Lobby Floor Plan

0 30'



Typical Floor Plan

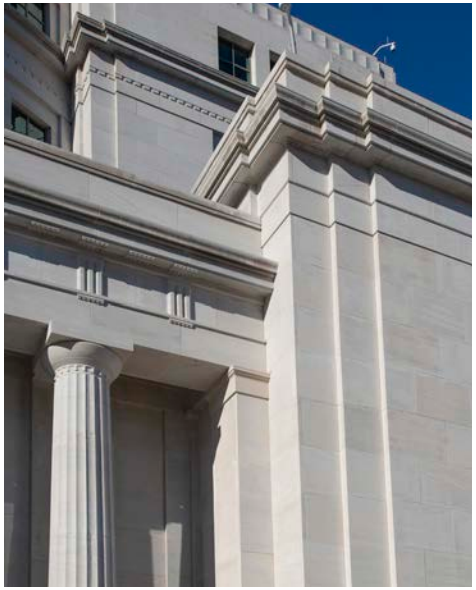
0 30'

St. Joseph Street (East) Elevation

Exterior

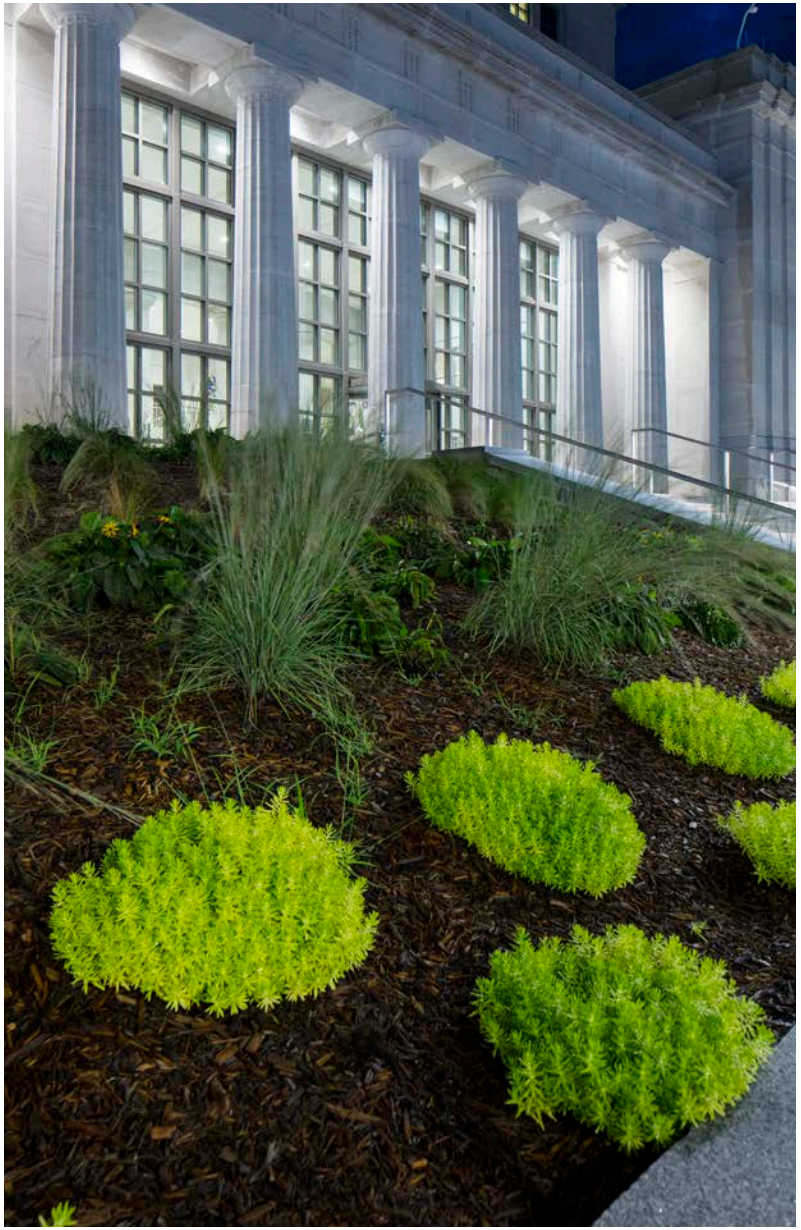
The exterior is clad in Alabama limestone with a granite base, linking it visually with the historic Campbell Courthouse. The new courthouse is detailed with Greek Doric columns, entablature, and profiles, drawing parallels to other historically significant structures in downtown Mobile. The Greek Doric entry portico invites visitors off the street and serves as an obvious entrance point. Above the entry portico, the facade steps back to prevent the 5-story massing from overwhelming the streetscape. A gracious curve anchored by strong terminating corners reinforces the entrance symbolism.

St. Louis Street (South) Elevation



Conception Street (West) Elevation

Interior The Alabama limestone continues into the lobby, providing a deliberatley muted palette. The exterior curve of the upper floors is supported by an interior set of Greek Doric columns, separating the entry from the elevator lobby and mezzanine. At the upper floors, the curving facade expresses the public waiting area on the exterior and provides sweeping views of Mobile from within. Courtrooms are detailed in wood to provide warmer tones at the feature wall, wainscoting, pilasters, furniture, and spectator rail. Fabric wrapped panels optimize the acoustics of the space. Large luminous lighted panels provide uniform light throughout.



Sustainable Initiatives

Flanking the entry plaza are planted areas consisting of native plants that promote pollinator activity and don't require irrigation. Underground collection tanks capture close to 95 percent of stormwater and allow it to naturally percolate through the soil witout surcharging the water management systems. Visual and thermal comfort is ensured by providing shared spaces with lighting and comfort controls.

Art and Architecture

Artistic elements were incorporated that pay homage to Mobile's rivers and deltas. The window spandrels include five reeds, symbolizing Mobile's five rivers. The interior features Italian glass mosaics of native plants by artist Jason Middlebrook. Justitia, a canoe sculpture by New Orleans-based artist Raine Bedsole, greets newcomers on the front lawn.