ARCHITECTURE by the BOOK

California Architectural FOUNDATION

Let's Learn About Architect

Philip Freelon

Credit: Mark Herboth, courtesy of Perkins and Will

What is Architecture?

Architecture is the art or practice of designing buildings and structures.

Who is an Architect?

A skilled professional who plans, designs, and oversees the construction of buildings or structures.

Why does it matter?

Where you live, work, and play is affected by architecture. Buildings which make up our “built environment” make a big difference in how things look and work. They can help us feel better, connect us to each other, and even do better in school.

Good architecture is important for all parts of our lives.

Oak Valley Elementary School | Photo by David LaLush

Frazier Park Elementary School | Photo by Mike Urbanek

Who is Philip Freelon?

Philip Freelon, born March 26, 1953, in Philadelphia, PA, emerged as a prominent architect, renowned for his designs reflecting African American history and culture. Inspired by his grandfather, a notable Harlem Renaissance painter during the Civil Rights Movement, Freelon's work aimed to amplify marginalized voices through architecture, driven by his belief in making the unseen visible. Despite early struggles with reading, he found his strength in the language of color, shape, and form. Drawing inspiration from African American heritage, Freelon believed in designing spaces that brought unsung people and places into the spotlight.

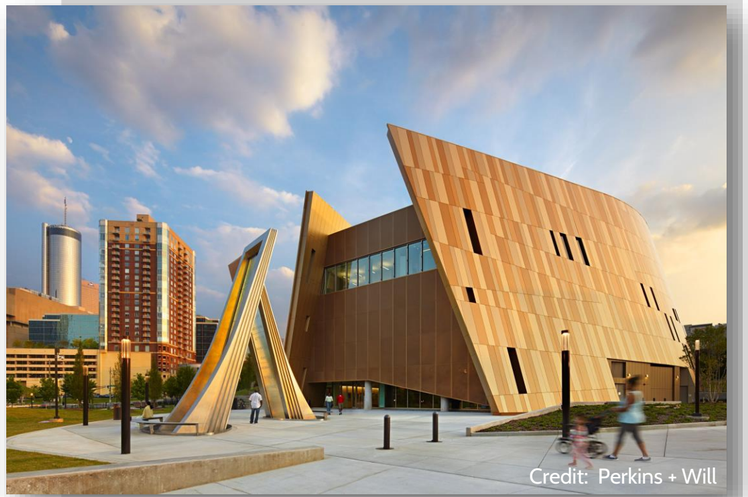
Here is what's special about Philip:

- **1989**: Received Loeb Fellowship & spent a year of independent study at Harvard University Graduate School of Design
- **2012**: Appointed to the US Commission of fine Arts by President Barack Obama
- **2016**: Lead design team of Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of African American History & Culture
- **2017**: Named "Architect of the Year" by Fast Company, honoring him as "America's Humanitarian Architect"

What Inspires Philip?

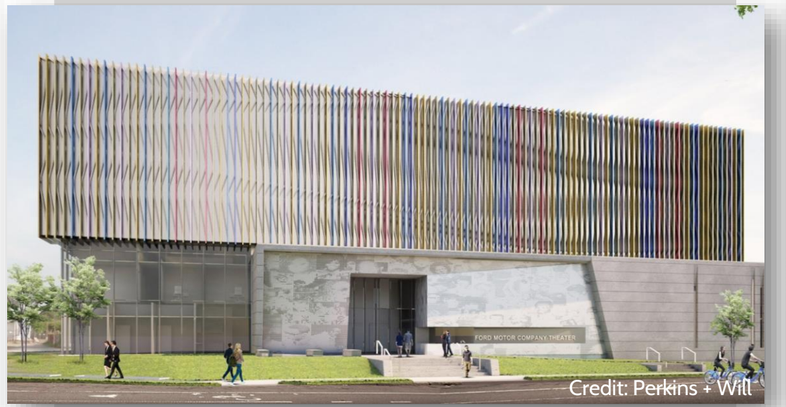
An architect's design may be inspired by elements such as location, history, purpose, nature, story, shapes or objects.

What Inspires Philip?



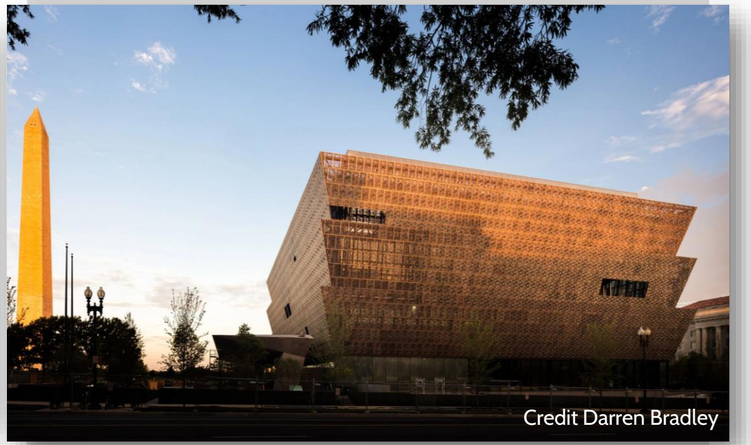
National Center for Civil & Human Rights
Atlanta, Georgia

Two slanted walls are divided by a glass curtain wall, which is an evocation of two hands coming together. The structure is covered in multi-colored panels, designed to represent skin tones.



Motown Museum
Detroit, Michigan

Detroit is the home of Motown music. Philip wrapped his design in colorful strips, inspired by the spines of LP records.



National Museum of African American History & Culture
Washington D.C.

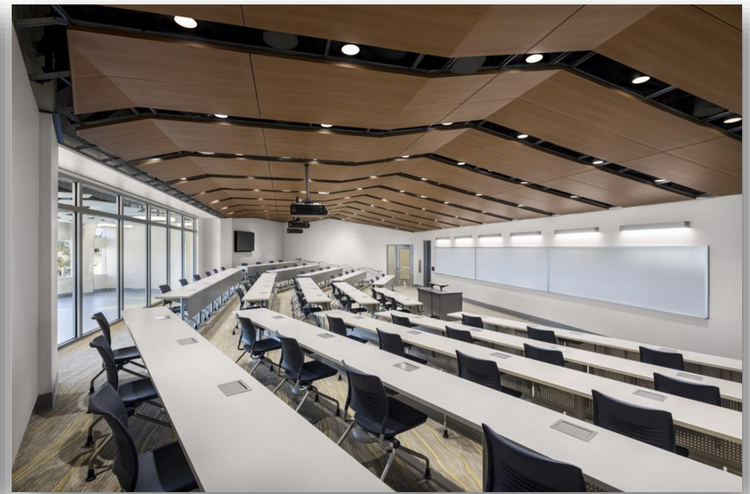
The museum has a 3-tiered shape inspired by a symbol from the Yoruba people of West Africa featuring a crown.

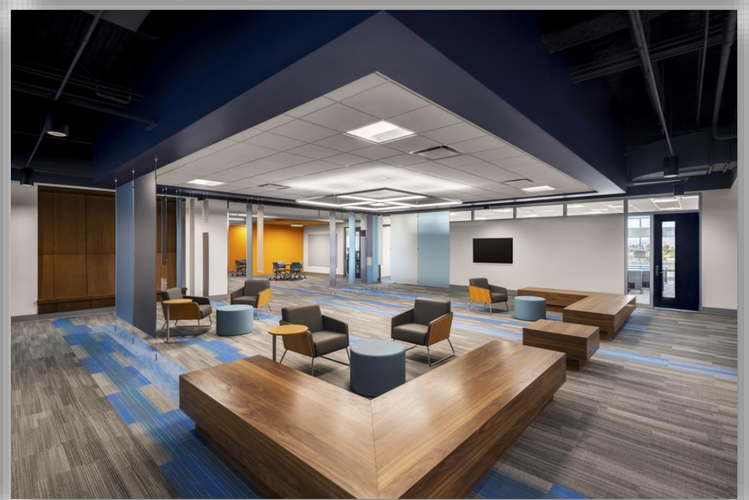
What Inspires You?

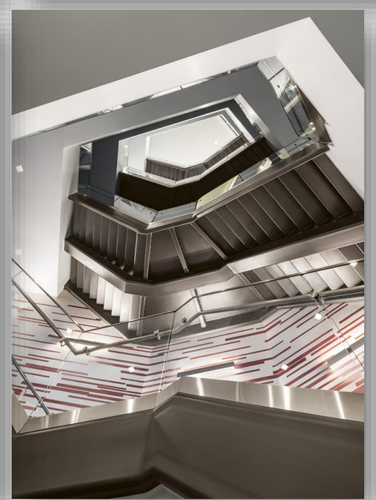
Mt. San Jacinto CCD

Temecula Valley Campus

Photography by Lawrence Anderson







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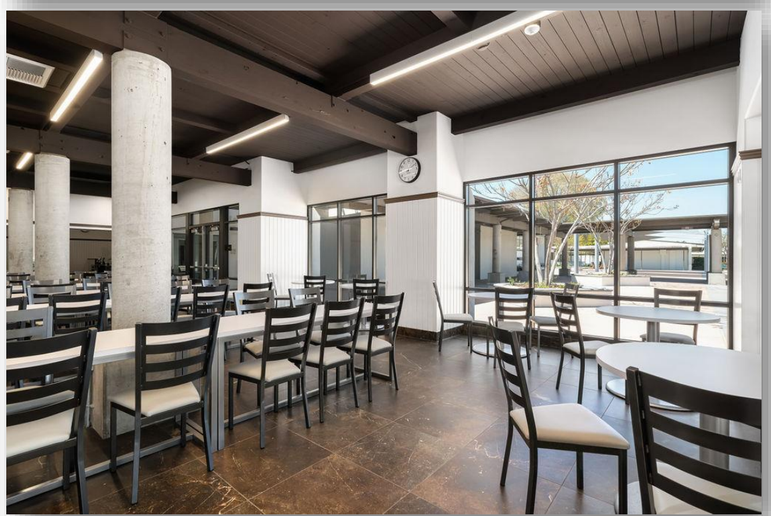
What Inspires You?

Santa Ynez USD

Valley Union High School

Photography by David LaLush



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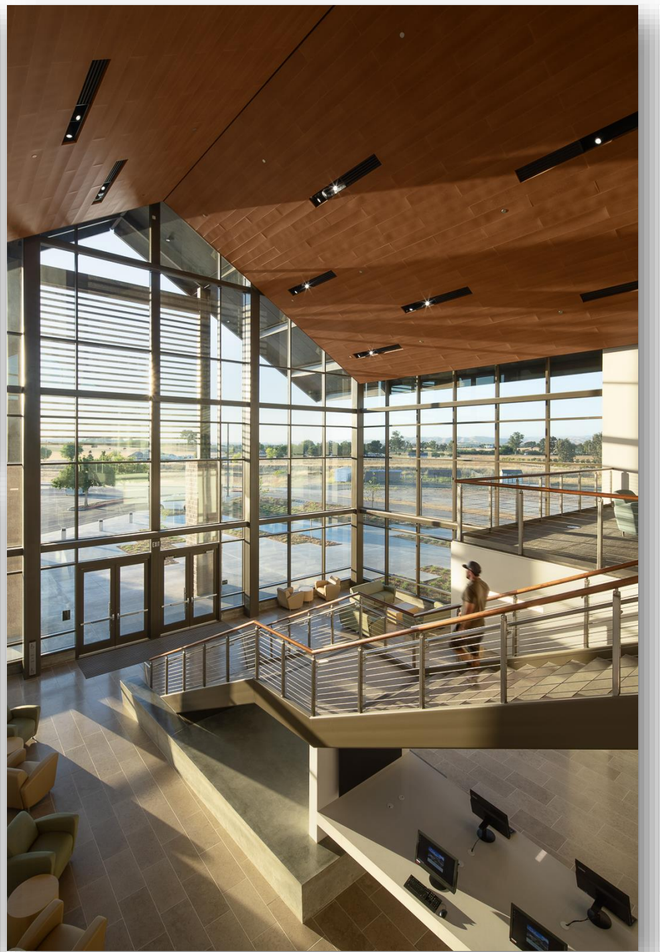
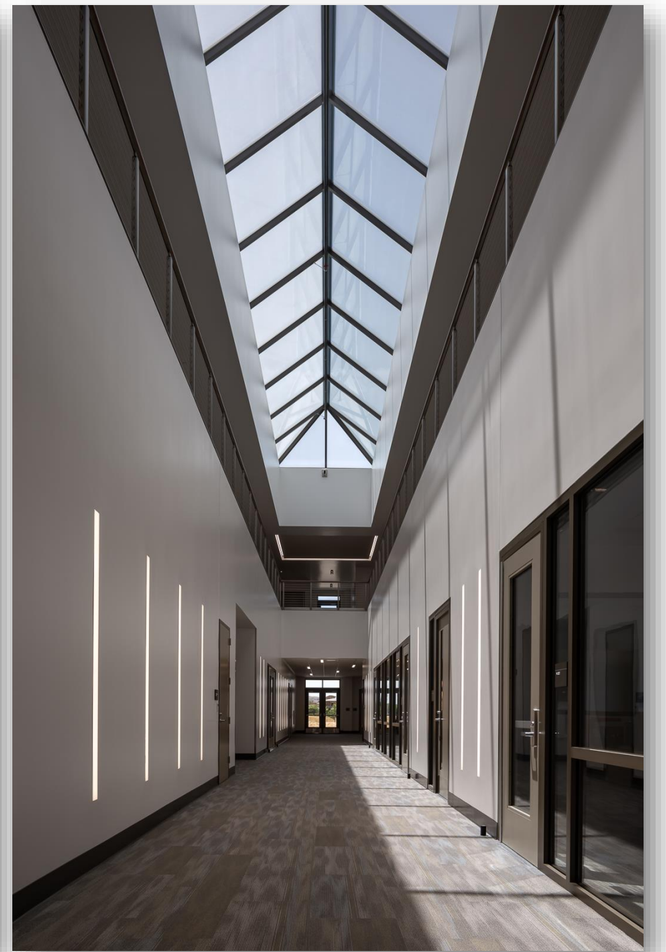
What Inspires You?

San Luis Obispo CCD

Cuesta College NCC – Campus Center

Photography by Lawrence Anderson



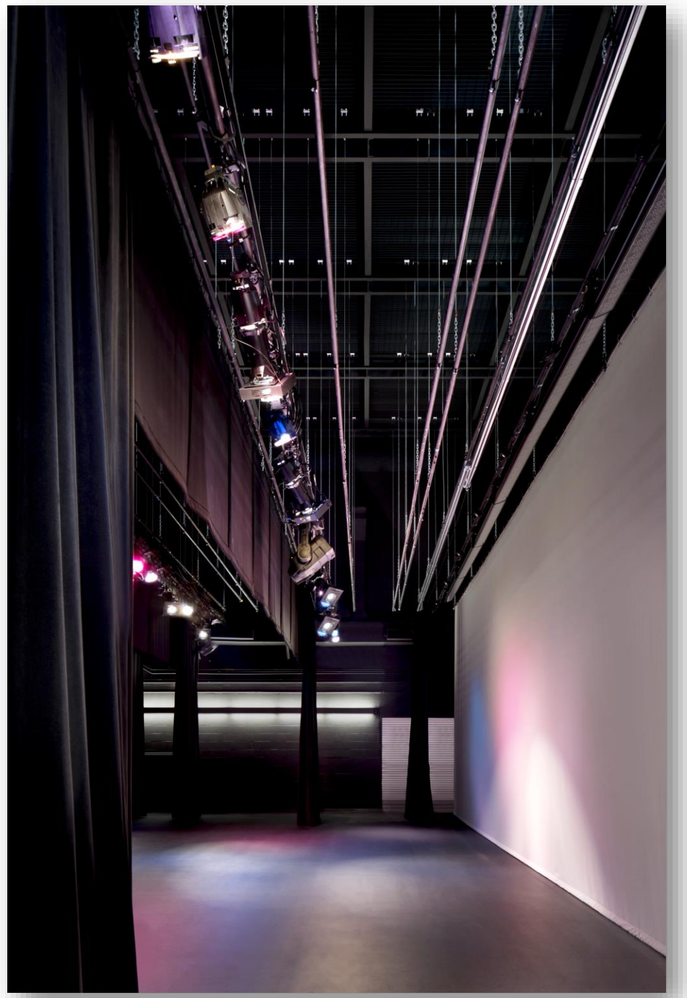


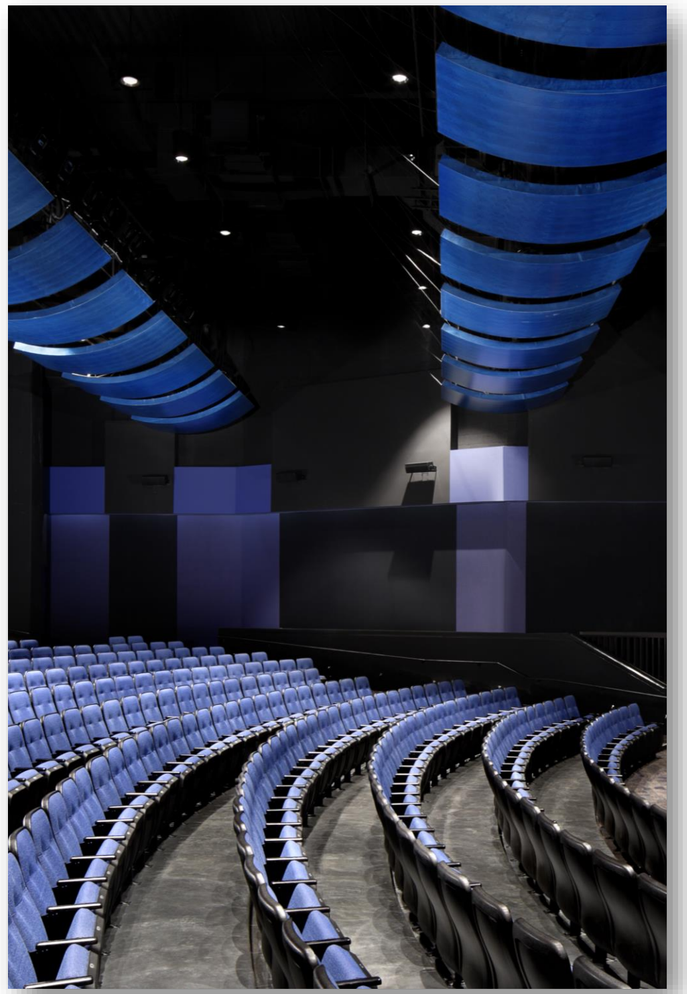
What Inspires You?

William S. Hart USD

Golden Valley & West Ranch High School

Photography by Lawrence Anderson





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Now It's Your Turn!

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Santa Maria High School CTE & Ag Farm | Credit: David LaLush

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