

ARCHITECTURE

Minneapolis architect **James Dayton** brought a restrained hand to the design of the new 31,000-square-foot **Minnetonka Center for the Arts**.

'Center' piece

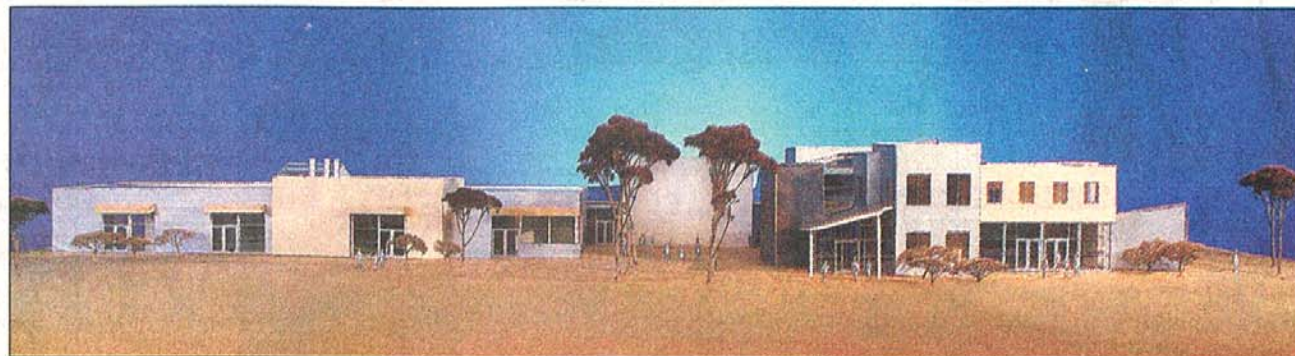
By **Linda Mack**
Star Tribune Staff Writer

When the Minnetonka Center for the Arts decided to start over rather than remodel its 50-year-old school building, it turned to Minneapolis architect James Dayton. Dayton returned to his native Minnesota in 1996 after five years "working a lot of hours and making a lot of models" in California architect Frank Gehry's office. The \$6 million facility, which broke ground Saturday, was his second local commission after he opened his own office in 1997.



James Dayton

Dayton brought to the project a deep understanding of art and the way the spaces should work for the artists, said Roxanne Heaton, the center's executive director. Over the next 14 months the 31,000-square-foot facility will take shape behind the center's current outdated building, which will be torn



The new Minnetonka Center for the Arts, to be completed in June 2002, will provide larger studios and exhibit space plus a cafe, conference room and lecture hall. Public areas will be to the right of the shed-roofed entry, studios to the left. Images provided by James Dayton Design

down after the opening in June 2002.

The design is not a cedar-shake, pitched-roof Lake Minnetonka look, said Dayton. "They wanted a creative, dynamic, expressive building for making art," he said. The exterior materials — flat and corrugated galvanized metal, Corten steel and a resin-coated exterior wood called Parklex — give the place the industrial feel of an artist's loft or warehouse, he said. The interior pieces — lobby and shop, cafe, exhibit space and art studios — are expressed as separate but related boxes, with shed roofs over the entries.

Dayton, who said his time in Gehry's office had a profound impact,

said he thinks of buildings as sculpture — "a composition of elements on the site, which is a pedestal or canvas." But the Minnetonka sculpture is a quieter sort than Gehry's Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain or the Walt Disney Concert Hall in Los Angeles, both of which Dayton worked on.

The center will welcome visitors and users with a glassy, two-story lobby. The public areas — cafe with outdoor dining, lecture room and a generous exhibit space are to the right on the main floor. The big-windowed studios stretch west along a street-like corridor that offers space for art and conversations. Both north-

facing studios for painting, drawing, mixed-media and photography and south-facing studios for ceramics and sculpture have outdoor spaces so work and working can spill out.

"In Minnesota — unlike in L.A. — there's a very strong connection to the outside," said Dayton.

A 28-foot high concrete "art wall" in the main courtyard will offer a place to display artwork. The center is "not a museum, but showing art is important," said Dayton.

Minneapolis landscape architect Tom Oslund is doing the landscape plan, which will include prairie grasses, a wildflower garden and outdoor spaces for the 800 children that come to the center's summer art camp.

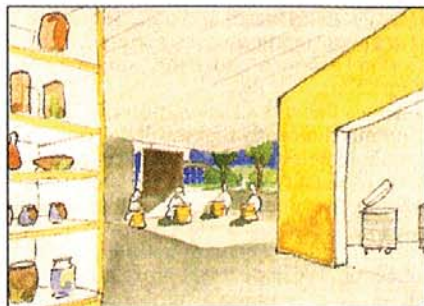
Dayton said each year in Gehry's L.A. office was "like a Ph.D." He began working there in 1991, just as the Weisman Art Museum was under construction, after earning a bachelor's from Yale University and a master's from the University of Virginia.

He said he likes the California aesthetic of metal, plywood and glass, which he plans to bring to Minnesota. Two big lessons he learned from Gehry: "Don't be afraid to integrate sunlight into buildings — just do it well. Don't be afraid of funny angles

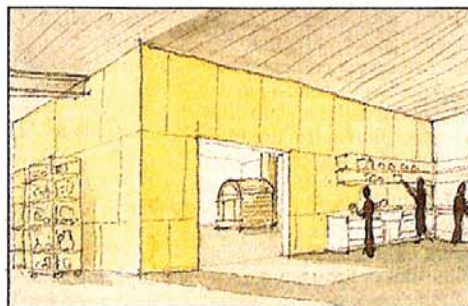
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When he returned to Minnesota, he worked a year for Meyer, Scherer and Rockcastle, where he was project designer on the Northern Clay Center. Now he's serving on the building committee for the Weisman's expansion, so he'll have a new relationship to his mentor, Gehry — as client.

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The ceramics and kiln rooms, left and right, show the character of the interior spaces, with concrete floors, white walls and exposed steel framing.



Star Tribune map

Architecture: Dayton brought restrained hand to new Minnetonka Center for the Arts

Linda Mack

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