

## ARCHITECTURE

## Stately new arts center shows its metal

Mix of materials, dynamic design suit both site and purpose

By Linda Mack  
Star Tribune Staff Writer

If an arts center in Minnetonka conjures the image of a quaint frame building with gingerbread trim, think again. A new \$6.3 million facility in Orono is anything but gingerbread.

Minneapolis architect James Dayton used big blocks of Cor-ten steel, corrugated and galvanized metal, and resin-coated wood to create a building of quiet power. Its modern idiom might not be typical for the western suburbs, but the dynamic design fits both the building's place and its purpose.

Until March, the 50-year-old arts center was housed in a since-demolished 1948 school building on the same property. At 32,000 square feet, the new digs are a third larger. They're also lighter, airier and made for art.

The long, low building is set back from North Shore Road, but it's no shrinking violet. A shed-roofed vestibule juts out to welcome visitors. To the right are the public areas: a glass-walled cafeteria, a small lecture room covered in galvanized metal and, behind them, a taller gallery sheathed in already rusted Cor-ten steel. To the left stretch the studios, sheathed in corrugated metal and the Finnply exterior wood made famous by California architect Frank Gehry (whose office Dayton worked in for five years).

These interior functions aren't instantly readable from the outside, but it doesn't take long to figure them out once inside.

A large window in the simple vestibule frames views into a small retail space and the understated cafeteria. Once inside, a two-story skylit lobby sets the building's architectural tone: unadorned, informal and yet some-



Photographs by Mike Zerby/Star Tribune

The new Minnetonka Center for the Arts at 2240 North Shore Dr. in Orono manages to be both dynamic and reserved. Minneapolis architect James Dayton used Cor-ten steel, glass, galvanized metal and exterior wood to create an assemblage of parts. Minneapolis landscape architect Tom Oslund has planned a landscape of prairie grasses and hedges.

## REVIEW

how stately. The high-volumed space and mix of materials — the gritty steel, soft-looking galvanized metal, textured plywood and sealed concrete floors — create a place where you could feel comfortable wearing clay-spattered jeans or a tuxedo. A glass wall overlooks an outdoor courtyard focused on a 28-foot-high concrete wall that will become a canvas for large-scale outdoor art.

The 3,000-square-foot gallery — the center's first properly designed exhibit space — draws visitors down the broad corridor, where they can't help but catch a glimpse of the painting and drawing studio, with its classic north-facing skylight. It's an instant advertisement for the center's offerings: more than 500 classes each year for adults and children.

The seven studios — the education center's heart — line a quirky streetlike corridor. Light-sensitive media such as

painting, watercolor, textiles and photography are on the north side. The larger sculpture and ceramic studios are on the south, where they can spill out into outdoor yards. Storefront-like windows allow each studio to display art and enliven the corridor — the center's umbilical chord. Here budding artists have a chance to bump into one another and see one another's work.

A small second floor holds offices for the center's staff of 11, a lovely small library that can double as meeting space, and a smartly furnished lounge.

So much contemporary architecture — including the work of Dayton's mentor, Gehry — uses arm-waving tactics to prove its sophistication: eccentric forms, colliding shapes, gravity-

defying engineering. Dayton's arts center design takes the opposite stance. Its sophistication is clothed in simplicity.

Do you notice that the corrugated metal ceiling in the corridor slopes up to the north in one stretch and to the south in another? No. But you notice that the corridor never feels long. Do you notice that the steel wall of the gallery continues inside? Perhaps not, but you feel an inside-outside connection. Do you notice the many skylights? Not all of them, but you feel surrounded by light.

The Minnetonka arts center is a great place for learning art. It's also a work of architecture worth studying.

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James Dayton, architect of the art center.



Roxanne Heaton, the center's director.

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