

UNITED STATES CONSULATE GENERAL
MATAMOROS, MEXICO

"We began this project with a vision for a new Consulate in Matamoros that would be a benefit to visitors, improve collaboration, incorporate our building security and resiliency requirements, convey our values of openness and transparency, and be in harmony with the local environment. Richard+Bauer and the B.L. Harbert Design-Build team translated that design into a reality that represents innovation, environmental resiliency, and a thoughtful consideration of the visitor experience."

Tad Davis, Director, Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations





A Fresh Commitment to a Long-standing Relationship



The United States consular presence in Matamoros was established in the earliest days of the First Mexican Republic (1826), making it the longest continually operating Consulate in Mexico. The new Consulate General is an affirmation of the 200-plus years of friendship and commitment between the two countries.

Matamoros, which sits across the Rio Grande from Brownsville, Texas, in the Tamaulipas State, has been an important point of entry to the United States from Mexico. During the American Civil War, it was one of the busiest commercial ports in the region. Today the strength of the regional economy is based on the flow of people, goods, and services across the border. The Consulate General is one of nine in Mexico, and serves over 70,000 people per year, ranging from American citizens living and working in Mexico to seasonal workers applying for a temporary visa allowing them to travel to the United States.

Previous: Looking east across the Rio Grande River, natural border between the United States and Mexico
Opposite: The new consulate compound, sited along Álvaro Obregón within the Parque Olímpico

The new Consulate General represents the next stage in this long relationship, and was designed to meet the evolving security standards for diplomatic buildings while also becoming an active and welcoming part of its neighborhood and city. In so doing, it continues the State Department Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations' commitment to creating new diplomatic facilities that are secure, resilient, and responsive to their local environment.

Even while under construction, the Consulate General has begun to make a mark on the neighborhood and the city as a whole. In recent years, Matamoros has struggled with public safety issues, and its once-vibrant streets emptied of shoppers and pedestrians. According to Karla Obregon, Public Affairs Office at the Consulate General, there are several new restaurants and a hotel opening nearby, and more people out walking, cycling, and enjoying the park and surrounding area. The city has also created a new parkway. Just as important, there is a palpable optimism about the newfound sense of safety in the streets and opportunity for economic growth and new businesses that can grow up around the Consulate General's steady presence on Avenida Álvaro Obregón.



"As we look forward to an exciting new chapter in the life of the Consulate, I can't help but reflect on the long relationship the city of Matamoros and the people of Tamaulipas have shared with the U.S. Consulate in Matamoros since we opened in the early 19th century. The Consulate General has been here for some of the most pivotal events that shaped Matamoros, and we will be here for many more."
Consul General Neda Brown



Sister Cities: Matamoros and Brownsville

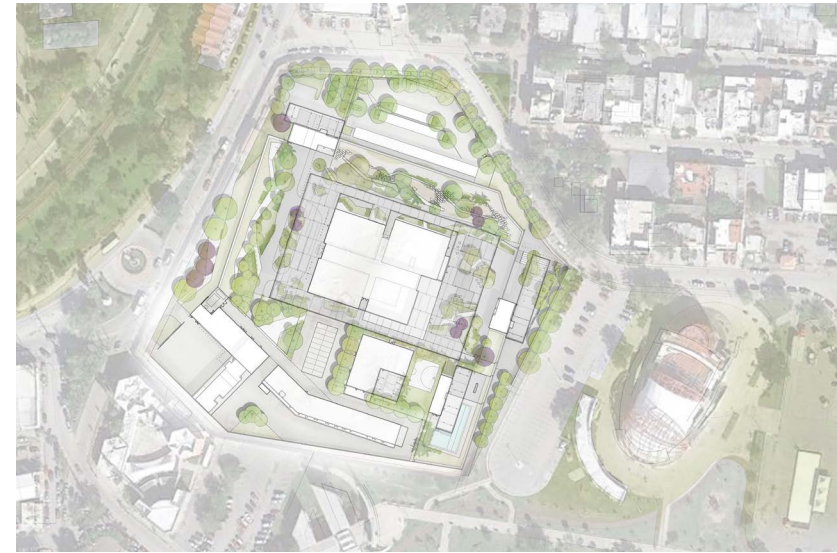
Together, the sister cities of Matamoros and Brownsville are the heart of a metropolitan region of more than 1.3 million people, and while the border between them is significant, the ties that connect them are also strong. Many residents cross back and forth regularly, and it isn't uncommon to live in one city and regularly do business, visit, or even study in the other. Since the 1930s, the two cities have held an annual festival called Charro Days, which celebrates shared culture and heritage, and begins at the Gateway International Bridge, one of two that connect Matamoros and Brownsville.

Opposite: The new consulate framed by 'Gateway to Mexico' by Mexican artist Sebastián

Opposite: Site Plan
Below: Longitudinal building section

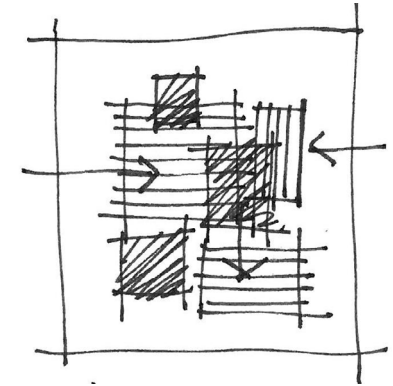
The new Consulate General sits on a site near the center of the city between two international bridges and next to the city's primary public park, the Parque Olímpico. Its consular or public-facing entrance opens right onto the park, creating a welcoming and open presence in the surrounding Jardín neighborhood.

The diplomatic entrance to the Consulate General is on Avenida Álvaro Obregón, and leads to a wide and shaded exterior entrance hall. A central gallery unites all three levels of workspace, and is suffused with natural light from clerestory windows. A central staircase of perforated metal connects all three levels, which contain open-plan works spaces for over 100 diplomatic staff, as well as a range of conference spaces and private offices.





Representing America

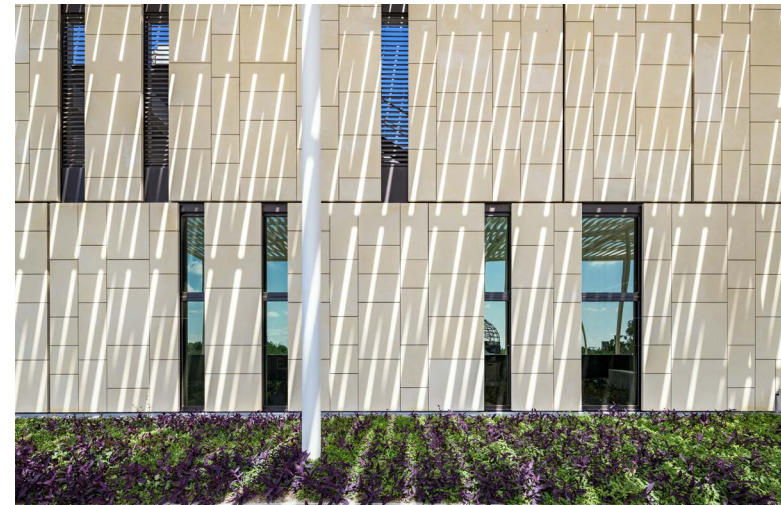


For every architect designing a new project for the OBO, a primary challenge is balancing the specific programmatic needs of the diplomatic staff, and visitors, with meeting strict security standards while finding ways to connect the building in its site and community and reflect the United States.

The Richärd+Bauer team found the unifying concept they were looking for in the latilla, which is a shade structure common all over the region. Historically, they were made of mesquite and saguaro, but no matter the material, they provide a welcome transition between the sharp light of the sun and the cool dimness of interior space. At the Consulate General Matamoros, the three-story high latilla serves a similar purpose, extending over entry plazas and portions of the building to provide welcome shade, creating links between the exterior garden spaces and the buildings of the compound. It is an architectural form that is shared by the two cultures and also unifies the compound itself.

*"We began by looking for the common language of the architecture that can express a set of values and experiences shared by people in the United States and Mexico. In this context, that was a response to the sun: Looking for shade is a uniquely unifying experience, because we all seek it out in this climate."
Jim Richärd, Principal, Richärd+Bauer*

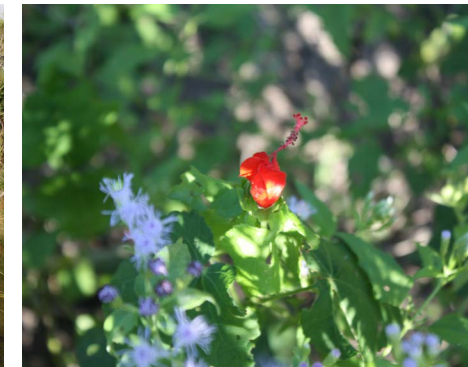




The latilla visually echoes the colonnaded entrances of traditional Beaux-Arts government buildings, and that resonated with Richârd. "The staccato rhythm and geometry of columns on civic buildings in the United States came to mind as we developed the façade. You can see it as a reinterpretation of the classicist approach to civic architecture."

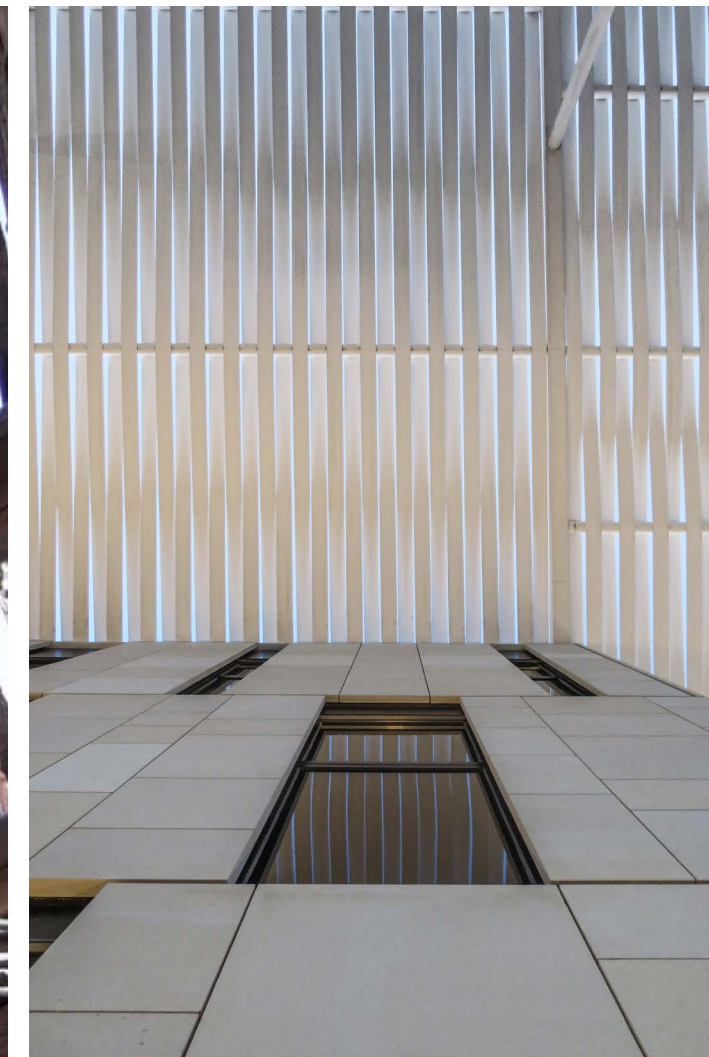
Images: The expansive latilla provides a receptive and permeable shade for the main entrance and consular gardens

"Projects with this level of complexity are very hard to deliver, and it took a wonderful collaboration from every member of the team to realize the project at the level of quality we all wanted and it needed. That collaboration was a major factor in the success of the project."
Jim Richärd, Principal, Richärd+Bauer



Sustainability

After security, sustainability and stewardship are the two most important aspects of any new diplomatic building for the OBO, and they are primary features of the Matamoros Consulate General. It achieved LEED Gold status, and was completed ahead of schedule and under budget. The latilla's PTFE fabric panels and structure also play an important role in improving the project's performance and resiliency. They reduce solar gain and the amount of energy required to cool the buildings, while allowing heat rising from below to pass through the open weave of the panels. On the north side of the compound, the canopy doesn't extend over the building, which allows more diffuse natural daylight into the workspaces without meaningfully increasing the solar gain.



Images: Response to the environment; water management strategies that promote migratory butterfly habitat, and shade abstracted from the traditional timber and saguaro rib latilla

Images: The site was reestablished with native grasses and vegetation of the Rio Grande Resaca landscape



The site itself is carefully designed to maximize its long-term sustainability and the resiliency of the surrounding neighborhood. While the climate in Matamoros is typically hot and dry, heavy rains in early fall can cause the Rio Grande to rise and flood the city's streets. Part of the 7.6 acre site had to be elevated by a meter for security reasons, and so could have exacerbated the flooding problem. To resolve that problem, the landscape and water catchment system were designed to absorb or capture 90 percent of rainwater runoff. In dryer seasons, wastewater from the buildings is treated and used to supply all of the irrigation needs.

Richärd+Bauer worked closely with Olin Studio to create a landscape that is hospitable to a very different sort of migrant: the monarch butterfly. The site is planted with a range of native plants, shrubs, and trees that provide food and habitat for monarch and other migratory species that arrive so spectacularly each winter.



"I am particularly proud of this new Consulate's eco-friendly features, which pursue rigorous resiliency, energy-savings, and sustainability goals that aim to reduce environmental impact, while optimizing building performance, to enhance the self-sufficiency of the campus."
Tad Davis, Director, Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations

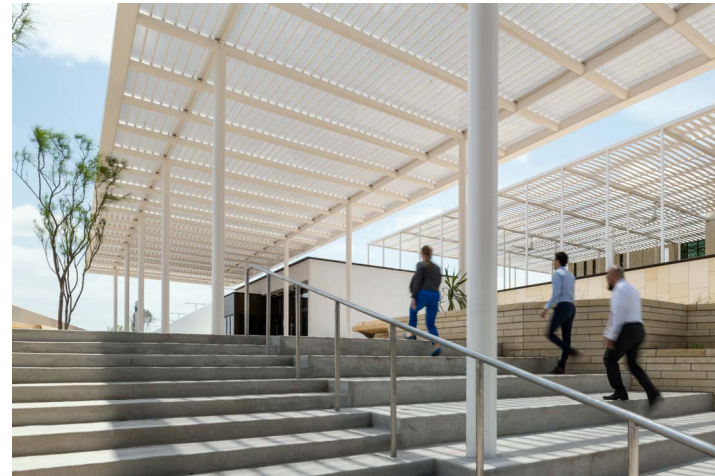
The Visitor Experience

While the everyday work of the Consulate is going to take place inside, for many of the team, the outdoor spaces are just as important for the signal they send to the wider community, which is one of welcome.

"Our new facility will not only enhance the experiences of U.S. citizen and visa applicant visitors to the Consulate, but also allows us to improve our diplomatic and community engagement with government officials and the people of Tamaulipas as we seek ways to further advance our shared goals and common interests."
Consul General Neda Brown



Below: Approaching the consulate entry from the entry pavilion



By siting the consular entrance which will be used by applicants across from Parque Olímpico, they were able to endow it with the same sense of arrival and respect as the more formal diplomatic entrance on the other side of the compound. Arriving from the park, visitors enter the large shaded and planted plazas, and can rest there while awaiting their appointments.

Below: Consular entry garden and waiting area



Matamoros Consulate General is one of the busiest in Mexico, and sees a large number of people applying for temporary work permits, often in large groups that are all planning on working for the same U.S.-based employer. These groups come in buses – sometimes as many as 120 people at once – so the spacious and flexible nature of the plaza makes that process smoother and more comfortable for everyone. The Consulate buildings are clad in the local coral limestone that has been used in civic buildings for decades on both sides of the border.



↑
Chancery
Cancillería

Main Campus Access Pavilion
Pabellón de Acceso Principal
a Campus

←

Recreation Center
Centro Recreacional

Marine Guard Residence
Residencia Guardias de Marina

Support Annex
Anexo de Soporte

Utility Building
Edificio de Servicios

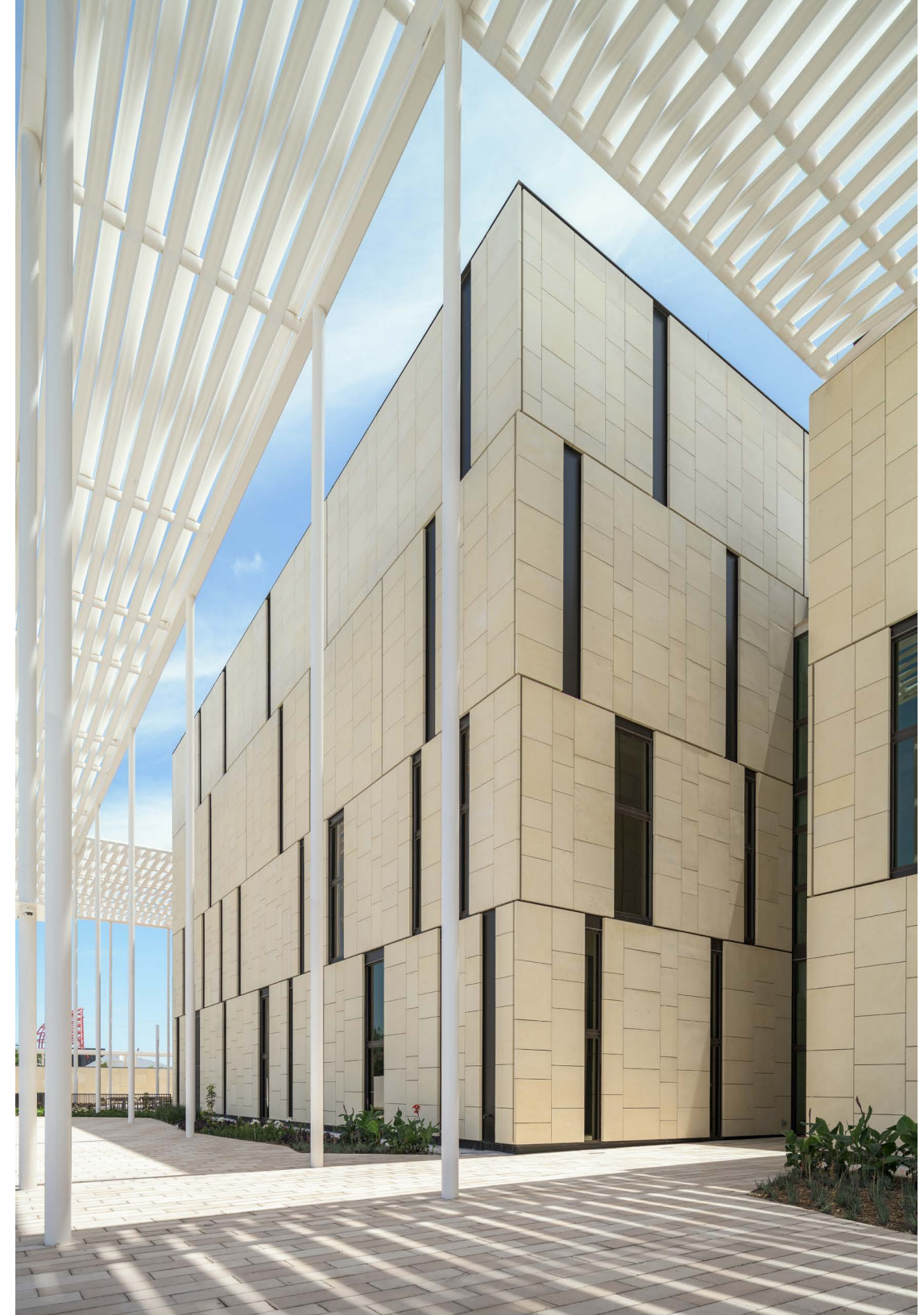
Service Center
Pabellón de Servicios
a Campus

LOS ANGELES
STATE UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SAN DIEGO

The Diplomatic Workplace

Balancing a building's security and the quality of life for those who work inside it is a daunting challenge when it comes to diplomatic buildings. But according to Christine Foushee, OBO Director of External Affairs, since the diplomatic building program began in 1999, the team at the State Department has developed a series of standards and approaches that make it possible to do just that and keep the taxpayer in mind at the same time.

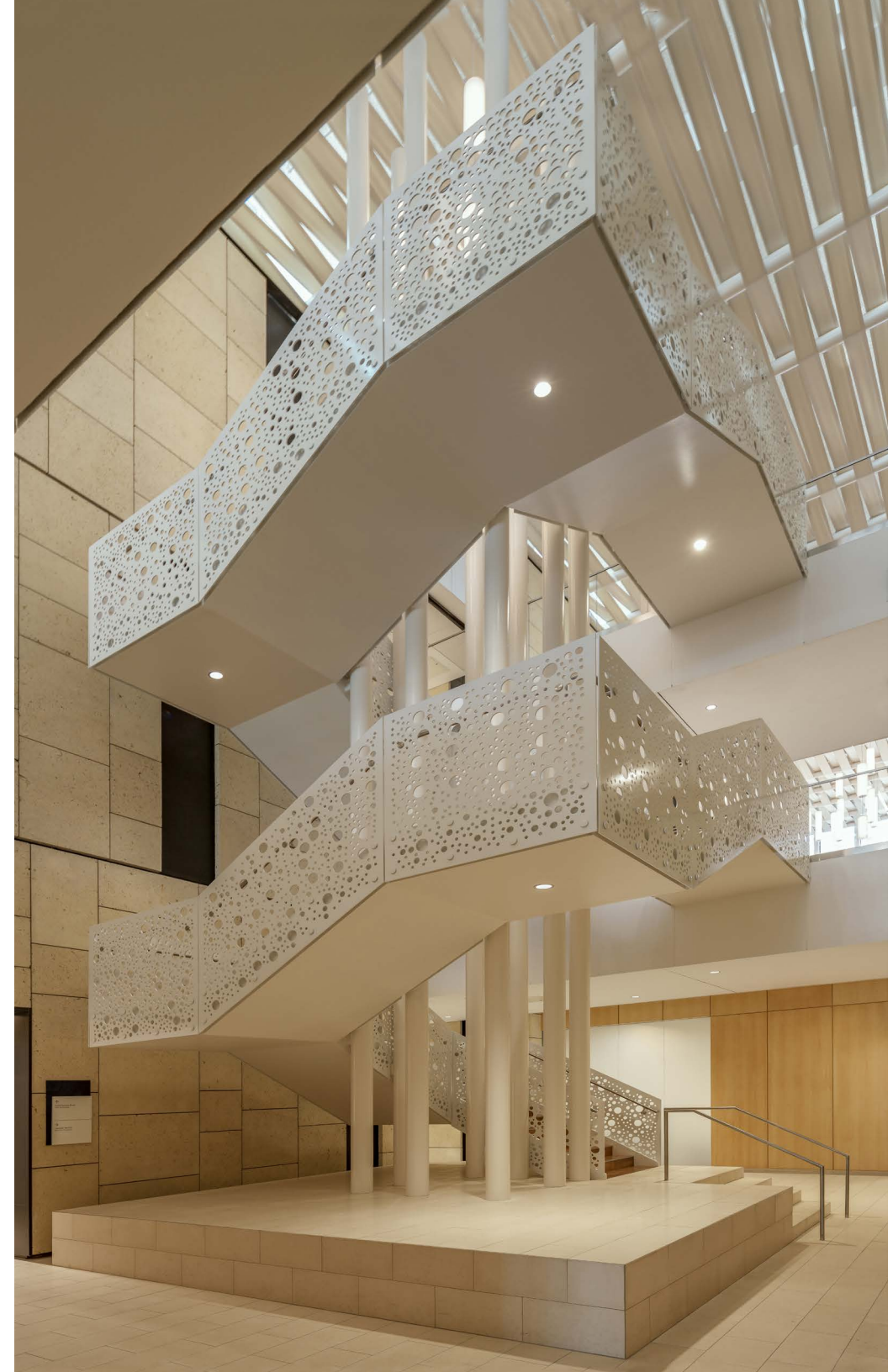
Right: A campus linked by shade



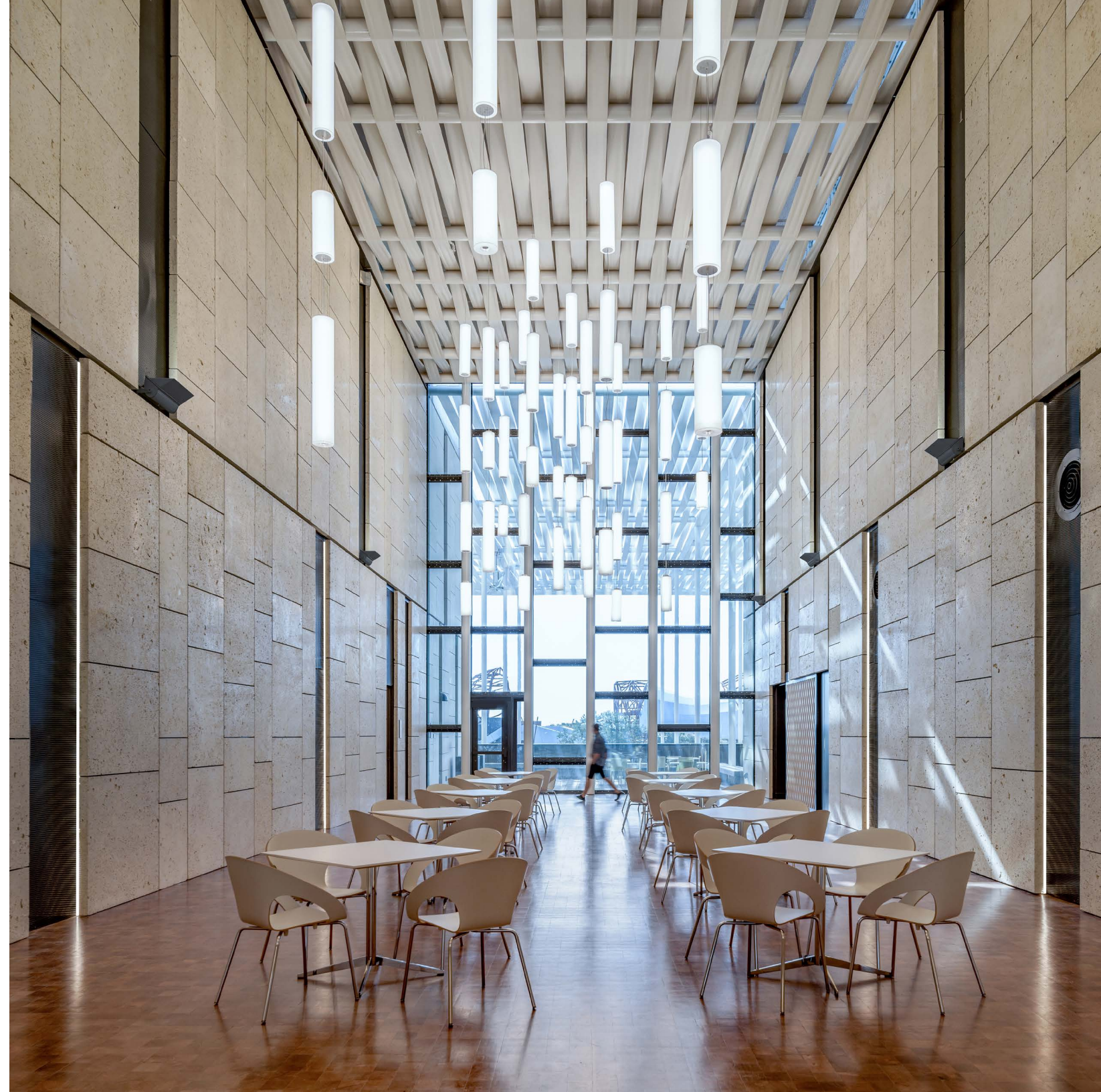
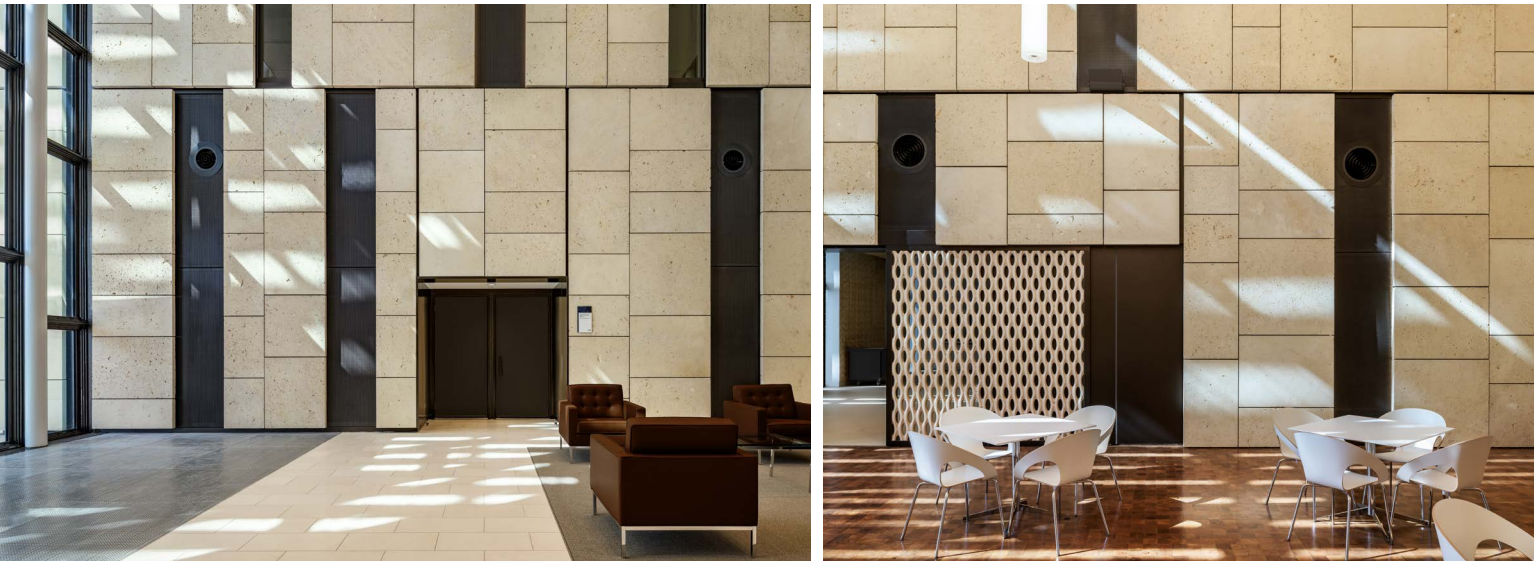
The coral limestone that clads much of the compound's exterior extends inside, and a range of other local materials and references occur throughout the building. The central gallery is paved with the traditional hexagonal mesquite blocks of the Matamoros-Brownsville boardwalk, which dates to the 1880s, and carpet tile in the office spaces references the city's pebble-paved pathways.



Right: Continuously daylight ceiling of the central office bridges interior to exterior.



Images: Central grand stair



Images: Main entry lobby and gallery



Project Information and Project Team

LOCATION

Matamoros, Mexico

INFORMATION

7.6 acre site within the Parque Olímpico, one of the primary open public greenspaces in the city.

10,170 gross square meters including: chancery, service shops, warehouse, U.S Marine residence, entrance pavilions for consular applicants, visitors and employees, twenty-one consular service windows and 105 desk positions.

GREEN CERTIFICATIONS

LEED Gold

OWNER

U.S. Department of State,
Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations

Tad Davis, Director

Henry Jardine, Principal Deputy Director

Angel Dizon, Managing Director,
Program Development Coordination and
Support

Adi Kanga, Managing Director,
Construction, Facility, and Security Manage-
ment

Alex Raley,
Project Director of Construction

Lee Dillingham,
Construction Manager

Mike Lears,
Project Manager

Mike Sewell,
Project Design Manager

Susan Kennedy,
Project Design Manager

William Prior
Project Construction Executive

Son Vuong,
Project Construction Executive

Chrissie Fields,
Project Contracts Administrator

BRIDGING DESIGN TEAM

DESIGN ARCHITECT
Rich&rd+Bauer

ASSOCIATE ARCHITECT
HGA

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
The Olin Studio

CIVIL ENGINEERING
Cowen Design Group

STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING
Arup LA

MEP ENGINEERING
Arup LA

SUSTAINABILITY
Arup LA

BLAST
Thornton Tomasetti

GEOTECHNICAL ENGINEERING
Schnabel engineering

FIRE PROTECTION
Jensen Hughes

COST ESTIMATING
Morris Wade Associates

DESIGN BUILD TEAM

GENERAL CONTRACTORS
BL Harbert International

ARCHITECT OF RECORD
Page

CIVIL / LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
Cowen Design Group

STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING
Ehlert / Bryan, INC.

SITE STRUCTURAL
Axiom

MEP ENGINEERING
Hankins and Anderson, INC.

SUSTAINABILITY
Page

BLAST
Hinman Consulting Engineers, INC.

GEOTECHNICAL ENGINEERING
Schnabel Engineering

FIRE PROTECTION
American Fire Protection

COST ESTIMATING
BL Harbert International





**Consulate General of the
UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
Matamoros, Mexico
Opened May 2019**

© 2019 All rights reserved

Book design by richard+bauer
Photography by Gabe Border

U.S. 
DEPARTMENT
OF STATE
BUREAU OF
OVERSEAS BUILDINGS
OPERATIONS