UTAH CONSTRUCTION + DESIGN

MARCH|APRIL 2023

Raising the Bar

Edison House sets a new standard for modern urban social clubs in downtown Salt Lake City.

+ Progress at The Point
+ Q&A: Sparano & Mooney
+ K-12: Hillcrest & Brighton HS
+ Industry Legends: Wilford Clyde

Line Upon Line

Architects John Sparano and Anne Mooney detail how the built environment can better embrace the many facets of sustainability.

Sustainability in the built environment encompasses everything from energy usage and material choices to design-life, building orientation, and more. *Utah Construction & Design* sat down with John Sparano and Anne Mooney, founders of Sparano + Mooney Architecture and Fellows with the American Institute of Architects, to better understand where the Beehive State sits in relation to sustainability—and what strategies the A/E/C community can employ to create a sustainably built environment.

Anne Mooney and John Sparano, the founders of Sparano + Mooney Architecture, in their Salt Lake office.

***UC&D:** Sparano + Mooney has been committed to sustainability since you founded the firm 25 years ago. What has changed in the conversation surrounding this topic?*

S + M: Primarily, what has changed is that we don't have to talk clients into the concept anymore. Some may still be resistant, but for the most part, they are much more aware of sustainability and its benefits in general. They're eager and willing to apply those concepts to their projects.

***UC&D:** The adaptive reuse of your Salt Lake office seems like a great starting point for a more environmentally conscious space. How does it fit in under the umbrella of sustainability?*

S + M: We believe the most sustainable thing we can do is design buildings that endure over time with architecture that can be adapted over the years to accommodate new programs and functions. Our office space is an example of what can be done with an existing building—a former ironworks—through adaptive re-use. The masonry shell of the workshop was kept, and we carefully inserted new elements, including the display windows, metal entrance door, and garage door in our shop space.

***UC&D:** Your firm has been involved in both California and Utah for the last quarter-century. What is the Golden State doing well to improve the built environment?*

S + M: The California Green Building Standards Code known as CALGreen was developed and mandated in 2007 by the State to reduce a building's energy and water use, waste, and carbon footprint. The Los Angeles Green Building Code (LAGBC) is based on CALGreen.

Many of our clients throughout the West are already on board with sustainability when we meet them. Adopting something like these California codes in Utah would ensure that all buildings are designed and built to that necessary standard.

***UC&D:** What can Utah do to emulate that success?*

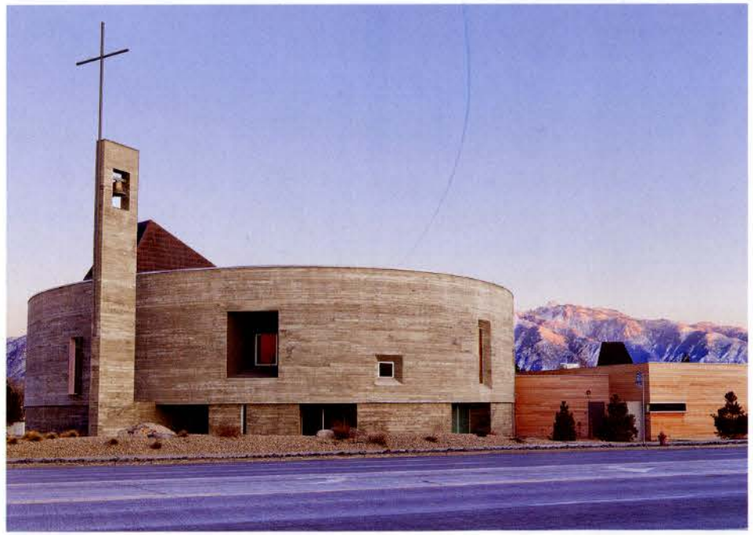
S + M: The State of Utah (DFCM) is and has been doing an outstanding job of requiring that all buildings built by the State are designed to a very high standard of sustainability. Their High Performance Building Standards are a worthy model for the performance of all buildings. Unfortunately, buildings from other entities are not currently held to this same standard.

***UC&D:** You mentioned the DFCM mandating High Performance Building Standards, covering a significant portion of public sector buildings in Utah. Can LEED function the same for the private sector?*

The Nora Eccles Harrison Museum of Art at Utah State University is a great example of a well-designed, sustainable building. (photo courtesy Jeremy Bittermann)

S + M: LEED was a good start and continues to evolve, but voluntary participation is just not good enough any longer to improve how we design and build. We should set the bar high and mandate that all new buildings be built to be Net Zero Energy. It's a substantive goal that would require buildings to be more consequential in the effort to limit greenhouse gases in the built environment.

***UC&D:** Even though Utah does not have the same mandates as California, have there been any successes where design and construction defaults to sustainable options? Or where a more sustainable option has become the norm?*



The design of Saint Joseph the Worker church in West Jordan reused fundamental elements of the old building while incorporating new elements of the parish's mining and construction history. (photo courtesy Jeremy Bittermann)

S + M: There have been great improvements with energy-efficient building systems, including lighting, plumbing, and HVAC systems. We now also have many more material selections available that incorporate recycled materials, including options for flooring, walls, and cladding systems.

It is also easy to find low-flow plumbing fixtures, Energy Star rated appliances, Forrest Stewardship Council certified wood products, reflective roofing membranes, highly efficient HVAC systems, thermally broken window systems, etc.

***UC&D:** With all of these changes, Sparano + Mooney has maintained its status as a contemporary architecture firm. Will we ever get to a point where the label "contemporary architecture" becomes synonymous with sustainability?*

S + M: I do think we are moving in this direction, and that sustainability will be ultimately infused into all aspects of the design of contemporary buildings in a way that is not applied at the later phases of the design process or easily cut from projects. I see a future where what is called "contemporary architecture" is heavily influenced by and inseparable from all things sustainable. ››

→ Sparano + Mooney Q&A

***UC&D:** What is a starting point for you all in your work that leads to a more sustainable design?*

S + M: One of the first things we think of when considering approaches to the site is the solar orientation and the impact of various design solutions on using daylight to illuminate a space throughout the year. These sun path studies help us determine optimal siting, overhangs, shading devices, and other strategies to mitigate temperature and glare and help with sizing the HVAC systems for maximum efficiency.

As for building envelope, we must take into account both performance and design. We try to consider building assemblies and systems that support the design while also contributing to the energy-efficiency and sustainability of the project.

***UC&D:** A concept you emphasize in your work is resilience. Where does this concept fit under the umbrella of sustainability?*

S + M: We design with consideration of how our decisions impact the environment. We are now experiencing more extreme weather which requires more resiliency in architecture to withstand weather events, fire, floods, and other forces that affect the built environment. Lowering environmental impact with our design choices goes hand in hand with considering architectural solutions that anticipate scenarios that will test our designs and thus emerge resilient to extreme events. Resilience also means that we can design buildings that can adapt and change over time to meet new conditions and demands.

***UC&D:** What is a sustainability concept that needs more attention from the A/E/C community?*

S + M: I think the concept of wellness is an emerging priority for design. As architects, we design for optimal experiences within the spaces we occupy. By designing for the health and wellness of occupants, we can address broad issues ranging from worker productivity to educational outcomes for students.

***UC&D:** Is there a project you all feel exemplifies your commitment to sustainability?*

S + M: Each of these projects are exemplary of our firm's holistic approach to architecture. Sustainable elements cannot be incorporated into a project as a "box checking" exercise—a successful project is not only sustainable, but also well-designed, and Canyon House, St. Joseph the Worker Church and Day Chapel, and NEHMA epitomize our commitment to these two key facets our approach. ■