About the Site:
The project site is a narrow, former residential, lot located directly across the street from the University of Nevada Reno (UNR). This side of the street, the west side of N. Virginia street, is undergoing rapid gentrification of older residential properties. Most of these properties involve complete demolition and replacement of existing houses. The replacement building use of the new structures are independent from the University, yet directly supportive to student-based services such as housing and café/restaurant-oriented properties. All of the properties slope up to the west from North Virginia Street to Terrace Drive.

About the Client:
University Studies Abroad Consortium (USAC) provides university students with affordable, study abroad programs. The UNR location is the institution’s international “Headquarters” facility for 32 other U.S. universities offering programs in 26 countries. USAC helps students explore something different than routine curriculum by expanding avenues of knowledge beyond traditional education and experiences; connecting with the world.

Client’s brief:
USAC requested an “iconic modern facility that is engaging and attractive”. They wished for a building design that would attract students and represent the Consortium’s forward-thinking mission to expand horizons, inspire minds, and accomplish more that imagined; beyond the traditional education, with a focus on “distinguishing yourself”. Creating an identity and exposure with this new facility were important goals, as a large percentage of students were not familiar with the USAC program. They requested to have a welcoming atmosphere that makes people feel safe and encourages interaction and also be able to have an entrance from the residential street, Terrace Drive, and the major arterial, N. Virginia Street.

Design Concepts:
The Client’s wish, to address an entrance from both streets, inspired the parti. Essentially, the design bifurcates the site with a south facing court that offers an East-West pedestrian thoroughfare to connect N. Virginia Street and Terrace Drive and a 3-story building to accommodate the program requirements. With this approach, pedestrian activity is celebrated and, inherently, USAC’s exposure to the students and visitors is amplified. With this one site gesture, rather than maximizing the building footprint on a small site to obtain the square footage needs, the design team was able to provide a celebrated connector and passageway that also results in a weather protected court amenity also enjoyed as a view from the inside. In addition to this space being a link between streets, it also addressed the client’s wish to enter from either street. It becomes a place of arrival, gathering space, and conduit. The iconic shade structure filters the sun with a metal screen die cut repetitive graphic of the USAC logo. As requested, the overall design concept encourages activity and interaction; a street connector, a people connector and an indoor-outdoor connector. The wish for iconic identity is further provided in the building’s form through careful composition of volume and transparency, color and details. A donor recognition wall is presented at the court’s south edge which can also be seen from the building’s interior. Generous amounts of glass are integrated to bring natural daylight deep into the space during the day and offers a sense of safety at night; the building holds its place as a street lantern within a relatively dark context. The open floor plan creates direct connection to the outdoors and the Board of Directors enjoy a conference room on the second floor with a balcony facing the court and the street toward UNR. The structural sheer wall in the center of the lower level defines the workroom and accentuates the entry with international phrases to celebrate USAC’s student abroad opportunities. USAC purchased the adjacent site to the north of this site for a future expansion/addition to this building. Therefore, the north face remains intentionally simple and without additional finishes. There is a portion of the CMU wall that is designed to be cut away in order to provide future connection to a second phase.
Orienting the building along an East-West axis responds ideally to the sun’s path. The design maximizes the use of the trellis as a protector against the elements along the longest elevation facing south. Heat gain is reduced by extending the trellis to protect the south face of all 3 floors. The trellis creates shade to cool the outdoor space during the summer and help protect the building envelope from the south winds during the winter. The shade structure filters the direct sunlight and diffuses direct heat gain to lower energy use and utility costs. To address the cold temps and chilling north winter winds, the north wall of the buildings has no openings and is a fully insulated concrete masonry wall that creates an appropriate temperature barrier. Natural light is the building’s primary source of lighting, with the direct benefit being a reduction in electrical demand.
documentation of specific material choices

• Steel construction and metal wall panels are a very sustainable material and highly recyclable. It is one of the only materials used in construction today that can be 100% recycled and re-used. Steel offers less waste on-site, less pollution from onsite fabrication, and virtually lasts forever.
• Concrete Masonry Units (CMU) construction was selected as one of the building materials to provide permanence, efficient constructability, virtually no maintenance, excellent structural properties, aesthetic integrity, and protection against rot and mold. The greater the resilience, the lower the maintenance and reduced use of virgin materials. Also, CMU’s thermal mass and its ability to store heat and help hold the temperature of conditioned spaces can reduce energy bills and improve thermal comfort in the building. Pavers are utilized at all perimeter outdoor spaces fall into this same category of responsible material use.
• Single-ply roofing is utilized as a positive impact on the environment. The longevity of single-ply roofing reduce waste as it is recycled during the manufacturing process and also recycled once it has reached its life’s use. Removing these materials from the waste stream significantly reduces burden on landfills and waste processing efforts. In addition to its recyclability factors, it provides a reduction in urban heat island effect (UHI), it has a long service life, and when compared to other roofing materials, less energy is needed to produce the material and process it into the end product.
• Non-toxic low VOC carpet tiles are utilized in nearly the whole interior with a low VOC, water based, pressure sensitive acrylic adhesive. Low VOC’s are good for both the environment and living organisms.
• All paint surfaces are low VOC and zero-lead content.
• Though not a local material of Reno, Bamboo is an eco-friendly material. The interior casework, wall paneling and stairs are components of the design where we specified bamboo in lieu of the more traditional, less sustainable materials. Bamboo’s rate of self-generation alone is incredibly high, make it one of the more eco-friendly building materials available. As a perennial grass, it continues to grow with having to be replanted after harvest. Because it is lightweight, it is less energy intensive to transport than many other materials of comparable durability.
• The glass is a Low-E coated glass with a U-factor of .28 maximum and a Solar Heat Gain Co-efficient of .27 maximum. Exterior shade structure along the most of the south facing glass provides a dramatic reduction in solar heat gain at the glass assemblies. Extended overhangs at the east and west as well as recessed glass walls with exterior covered deck areas, greatly reduce the heat gain on the East and West walls.
• All plant materials specified are drought tolerant species which significantly reduces water demand.
site context

UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA, RENO CAMPUS

N. VIRGINIA STREET

“GENTRIFICATION” ZONE (WEST SIDE OF VIRGINIA STREET)

STUDENT HOUSING DISTRICT

TERRACE DRIVE

PROJECT SITE

NVBCA19044
SITE PLAN  CUT FROM  SECOND FLOOR

NVBCA19044
SECOND FLOOR PLAN

NVBCA19044
THIRD FLOOR PLAN

NVBCA19044
Integrating the USAC logo as the screen pattern created a personalized identity for USAC. This figure ground composition adds interest and embeds the spirit of symbolism in the details.
NORTH VIRGINIA ST. FACADE

NVBCA19044
Requested by the owner, the window film shown is based off Gemika 50 by Nestor Basterretxea Arzadun, a Basque artist, and friend to both USAC and UNR.
Requested by the owner, the window film shown is based off *The Comb of the Wind* by Eduardo Chillida Juantegui. Much of his work can be found in Donostia-San Sebastián, a sister city of Reno, NV and USAC’s first study abroad program.
South facing courtyard - approach from N. Virginia St. main entrance. With donor wall to the left.

TRELLIS

NVBCA19044
Donor wall for future name recognition (to right) made as guardrail to adjacent property and shade screen structure.
STAIR CASEWORK

The owner requested a place to display artifacts from around the world. A casework system was created to be located under the main interior staircase of the first floor.

BASQUE ART - WINDOW FILM

Both south and east window etchings are derivations of sculptures created by important Basque artists and help emphasize USAC’s connection with the culture.