

Renzo Piano's Pavilion at the Kimbell

Description

A + A recently interviewed Eric Lee, director of the Kimbell Museum in Fort Worth regarding Renzo Piano's addition to Louis Kahn's 1972 masterpiece:

Oh, the architectural irony:

The centerpiece for Renzo Piano's new addition to the Kimbell Museum in Fort Worth drew its inspiration from the vista outside museum director Eric Lee's below-grade office.

It's a view of a poured-in-place concrete wall a few feet away from his desk.

"I always say I have the most beautiful view in all of Fort Worth," a slightly facetious Lee says.

That's because he's looking into a light well strategically placed by architect Louis Kahn in the late 1960s, as he designed what some call this nation's finest building.

"The view is so beautiful because of the way the light plays on that wall during the day," Lee says. "It's constantly in play."

Kahn once said that light is the theme of the Kimbell. Sure enough, Lee's well of sunshine not only brightens his office, but reflects light back up into the building's portico too.

None of that was lost on Piano.

The architect created his own 300-foot-long light well, more than 40 feet tall, and aligned it as a backdrop for the new building's lobby and 100-foot-wide auditorium. It's not only longer and deeper than Kahn's light well, but adds canted walls to harvest more light.

It's a gesture that looks to – but certainly does not emulate – what's come before it. "There's a magic to it," Lee says. "Piano has designed a building that understands and complements and defers to the Kahn building, yet it's a strong building in and of itself."

Still, his 82,000 sq. ft. addition, due for completion in mid-September, takes more than a few cues from Kahn's 120,000 sq. ft., barrel-vaulted masterpiece. The length of his facade is split into three parts, like Kahn's tripartite structure. Columns are the same dimension as those supporting the porticoes in its predecessor. And a clerestory window has been lifted from a similar one along a travertine wall in the original Kimbell.

"There are lots of nods to the Kahn building, lots of little echoes that are subtle and not obvious," Lee says. "There's a conversation going on."

Tomorrow: Expanding and complementing Fort Worth's best-known architectural jewel.

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Image Credit:

Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Texas

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