



Menu



## WESTCOAST LIGHTING INSIDER

### BuroHappold and Koning Eizenberg Team Up on Make-It-Your-Own School Design



As [Koning Eizenberg](#) approached an adaptive re-use project for a new, private 6–12 school at the University of California, Los Angeles, they pursued a sort of open-ended result. To start, there was no Geffen Academy; no students and teachers, just a concept and an existing campus building designed by [Ehrlich Architects](#). “The idea was to make a building that’s really flexible and adaptable, because as you move in you realize what you need once

you're there," explained Mandi Roberts, senior associate at Koning Eizenberg Architecture. She led the design team, along with Principal Julie Eizenberg. "It makes it less precious. You feel that you can make it your own, and it's not too prescribed," Roberts said.

Lighting Designer Seth Ely, then of [BuroHappold Engineering](#) and now a senior lighting designer at [Stantec](#), was intrigued: "Inviting attachments, inviting the students to... kind of engage the building seemed like an interesting opportunity." The primary lighting system comprises Unistrut with slimline [Vode](#) fixtures mounted on top to provide indirect lighting.

For an event earlier this year, the students and staff converted the entryway "living room" into a theater space. "They moved all the furniture; they hung theatrical lights up off the Unistrut. It's just an example of how we wanted them to be able to take something that's a little raw and then make it their own - to have ownership of it," said Roberts.



Uplighting throughout the space creates a consistent sense of expansiveness. During the day, existing rolling, glass doors open some of the ground-floor spaces to the outdoors. The popular "living room" entry to the school flows up the stairs, leading to an open, multi-level library at the heart of the school. At top, a new skylight brings ample LA sunshine deep into the core of the building.



"Any time something was built in the middle of the open library, we compressed it and lit on top of it so that we could keep the ceiling plane feel consistent across the open library," Roberts said. "On the third floor, the framing above the meeting room we left exposed,

painted it white and then lit the framing.”

The compressed meeting rooms have unobtrusive lights carefully integrated into the ceiling plane: “Koning Eizenberg created a detail for each of those to use a shallow surface-mounted fixture but to keep it flush with the ceiling plane,” said Ely.



### **Lighting for young people**

The school is occupied largely during daylight hours, but there was concern among the team members that electric light levels were overall too low. But post-occupancy surveys showed that the lighting is appropriate for young people. “We thought it was a little dark. But that’s for our eyes, not their eyes. For them it was ideal,” Roberts said.

The high-ceiling classrooms have large windows and glazing to connect the rooms to the atrium/library. Koning Eizenberg chose gray acoustic materials, a spray acoustical treatment on the underside of the ceiling deck and carpeting to dampen sound; but they also absorb light. “Direct-indirect linear sources are oriented to accentuate the building fabric and be visible from the exterior,” Ely said. “On the inside they are oriented to highlight the instructional walls to a higher light level than the desk areas.” Wrapped burlap walls and other display areas throughout the school are highlighted to bring attention to special features and students’ work.

Oversize, “semi-decorative” pendants create a more intimate false ceiling in the food

service area. These were salvaged from throughout the existing building: “It seemed kind of a shame to just throw them all away. We were talking about how to reuse them, and as a team, we came up with this idea of putting them all in one room,” Roberts said. The team had to fight for the extra cost of reusing them. The chromed-aluminum housings were retrofit to LED to meet Title 24 and the framing above meets seismic codes. “It was fun that we could organize it in a way that addressed all the constructability and seismic issues, but also to reuse them and do it in a really bold way that created a sense of place,” added Ely. Geffen Academy achieved LEED Gold certification and won an award from the Association of Learning Environments Southern California Chapter.

“To meet the light level for the stairs, as well as accent it architecturally, on the bottom side of the stair stringer, we added an LED source that would highlight the stair and also provide diffuse general lighting for the stair,” Ely described. This is inverted from a typical design that would mount the lighting above the risers and shows the close integration of lighting with the architecture and mechanical systems.

On the exterior, the three-story “banner” makes a branding statement day and night. Colored cables fade from blue to white, the UCLA colors.

Linear grazing fixtures at top and bottom create a beacon at night. So as not to distract from the statement piece, the exterior stair behind the banner was refit with custom LED points integrated into the existing handrail, with remote power supplies.

“Seth mentioned that the classroom lights are oriented along the building grain,” Roberts said. “At night those lights often aren’t on, but the cable structure is, so it’s really the cables that become the beacon at night.”



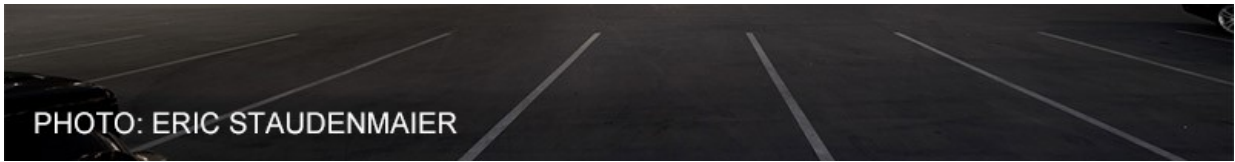




PHOTO: ERIC STAUDENMAIER

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