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MCA's Rust Hall Turns 50

POSTED BY KIMBERLY KIM ON THU, FEB 5, 2009 AT 4:00 AM

Award-winning architect Roy Harrover was honored Monday at a reception for the 50th anniversary of Memphis College of Art's Rust Hall.

During the reception, Harrover, who designed the building in 1956 as part of a local architecture competition, also donated an original model of Rust Hall to the school.

"I put the Fine Arts Center and the Art School together in one building, instead of putting it in several separate buildings," Harrover says. "That's probably why I won."

One of the first examples of modern architecture in Memphis, the building includes exterior screens that shade the building but still allow lots of natural light to stream in.

Once called the "Taj Mahal of Memphis," Rust Hall opened its doors in 1959 and won the national Progressive Architecture award the following year. It was also named the "Building of the Decade" for the 1950s by the American Institute of Architects (AIA).

"The first part of the building was the north end," Harrover said. "Several years later, the art school had grown, and with more students, they needed more space. Then the south block of the building was built."

The building was a result of a public-private partnership between the City of Memphis and the college's Board of Trustees.

"[The partnership was] an alliance that envisioned a great and growing city as the home of a unique institution focused on developing creativity at the highest level," MCA president Jeffrey Nesin said in a released statement.

Harrover, an AIA fellow, has designed other local buildings, such as the Memphis International Airport and the Mississippi River Museum on Mud Island.

He and his wife, Stephanie, live across the street from Rust Hall, but she says that's just a coincidence. — by Kimberly Kim