

SCIENCE CAN BE CHILD'S PLAY

By Richard M. Barrett

The young researchers and scientists currently enrolled at Elementary Institute of Science (EIS) have just become able to study science in a building that's as big as visionary Tom Watts' vision for the program—a 15,000-sq. ft. state-of-the-art facility that captures the spirit of experiencing science, as well as the enthusiasm and imaginations of the kids.

Until recently, the Institute's home was an old two-story house that was converted into a hands-on learning center, with classrooms, a library and a laboratory staffed by teachers, university level graduate students, and volunteers. But when the house got too old and too crowded, EIS, in partnership with the Jacobs Center for Nonprofit Innovation, initiated a campaign

to raise money for the design and construction of a new facility. The goal was to design a building that featured a nurturing environment with plenty of space and the latest and greatest in educational resources.

The post-modern architectural style of the new building easily complements both the nature and purpose of the two-story, \$6 million building. It was designed by local architects Westberg + White to be a fun and exciting environment, with an obvious emphasis on science and technology, that encourages learning and active participation.

For example, the design team took basic shapes and forms of scientific equipment and employed those as architectural design elements. The building's dramatic rooflines incorporate items commonly found in a chemistry lab, such as beakers, flasks and Petri dishes. Four monolithic decorative art features in the shape of the familiar No. 2 pencils serve not only as powerful symbols of learning, but also as vertical structural supports to provide sun shade for students near an outdoor play and lunch area. Cool and subtle pastel colors on the exterior are vibrant enough to



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make the building stand out from its surroundings, yet understated enough to blend in with neighboring structures. The use of colors, both inside and out, was an attempt to create the impression that the children took out their crayons and started coloring.

Inside the 15,000 square foot facility, designers Jain Malkin and Linda Williamson simply wanted to ignite the students' imaginations about the wonders of science. Knowing that kids love color, they developed a vibrant color palette, and applied it liberally to enhance and complement the use of geometric shapes and forms in the building's architecture. Color was also used to organize subject clusters and direct the students around the facility. Heavy-duty Nora flooring throughout the facility contains whimsical design elements such as swimming turtles and buzzing bees, and there are fresh and saltwater aquariums built into the walls that line the hallways.

Committed to teaching students about preserving natural resources, the facility incorporates energy conservation measures wherever possible. The building's fully automatic classroom windows open and close,



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