

Welcome to the New

RSW



Airport terminal's architecture is designed to set spirits soaring

For principal architect Guillermo Carreras, the design and feel of the new Midfield Terminal at Southwest Florida International Airport is so functional and flowing that it is almost musical.

"You know how mathematics and music are pretty much related," says Carreras, a Cuban-born architect. "Well, I once told the director that you could play this building."

The terminal—slated to open this year—is his favorite project to date, even after twenty years' experience in Miami and prior stints in New York, Paris, and Caracas. Carreras served as the lead architect with a team of designers

from the Miami-based firm of Spillis Candela DMJM.

The terminal has an organic, well-lit friendliness that plays off its functionality. "Functionally, it has clarity. It's a very clear statement," he says. The airport barely even needs signs, he adds, "because it so clearly informs the passenger of where to go."

The signage will exist at the Midfield Terminal, but passengers may find that they rarely use it. The design, he explains, "allows you to just relax as you move rather than have all these anxieties and doubts of where you are now, which way, what now."



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Making the terminal functional was largely up to the architect. Making it feel friendly came as a result of direction by the client, Lee County Port Authority. Begun in 1999, the new terminal was always intended to reflect the ambience of Southwest Florida.

“In an era when all the architects who are working in aviation are trying to emulate the aircraft—including architecture from Asia to Europe and through North America—that was a vocabulary this client didn’t want,” says Carreras.

Instead of cold steel rails, metal skins, and fuselage forms, the \$438-million Midfield Terminal reflects the natural colors, textures, and lighting of the region.

“In fact, I always kid that the only thing of steel that got inside the building are the six or eight inches of stainless steel base that occurs on the scales where you weigh the baggage,” says Carreras. “All of the high technology materials were deliberately excluded—all of that structural exhibitionism.”

“Our goal was not to create the environment of Southwest Florida, but to let the environment in—to let the sunshine in and to use natural colors,” says Susan Sanders, marketing director for the airport. “So the terrazzo floor tiles are flecked with mother of pearl, the counter surfaces are sand-colored, and the deep-green, patterned carpet looks like a flow of seagrass,” she explains.

The design of even the two-level roadway system—above for departures and below for arrivals—incorporates the sunshine and vegetation of Southwest Florida.

“We didn’t want to have a dark, tunnel feeling,” says Sanders.

“Vegetation and light are a very important part of the design. Even when you’re in bag claim, you’ll see palm trees and light. That’s very important.”

Passengers and greeters arriving by the dual roadway system will enter through one of six vestibules, each of which is flanked by large courtyards.

“It makes it very clear and airy, with the twelve gardens flanking these six vestibules, and the basic cell repeats itself. The gardens go from the lower level up to the sky,” explains Carreras. “And we invited this landscape into the terminal, so that if you are getting a ticket or fetching your bag, you will be looking at these gardens.”

For Carreras, bringing light into the terminal itself and the great hall determined the actual placement of the terminal.

“I oriented the terminal due north, and I anticipated what the sun is going to do all year. The ends are east-west, so I could afford to raise the north roof because I know the sun will never come in through there, but the sky will,” he says.

All along the center spine of the 930-foot roof are flat vaults that let the light in. Also, the walls of each story are clear, allowing ambient light to flood the ninety-foot-wide terminal.

“Once you get into the terminal, all that natural light is just going to come in and bathe the whole space. Without that natural light, these spaces can become quite dark because they are so large,” he says. “It should be a very enlightening experience to just go through it—never dark, never grim.”



Architect Guillermo Carreras oriented the terminal northward, so radiant light will fill the inside without the intense heat of direct sunlight.





Regional Reflections

To add to the natural charm of the terminal, the Lee County Visitor and Convention Bureau (VCB) commissioned Alan Maltz, based in the Florida Keys, to create a permanent exhibition of his trademark, large-canvas-format displays of photographic images of the area.

“We really wanted something that would reflect the destination, so that when people arrived in the terminal, they would immediately know that they were in Southwest Florida,” says VCB Director D.T. Minich.

In 2003, the state’s tourism-promotion corporation, VISIT FLORIDA, designated Maltz as its official fine-arts photographer and signed him to an extensive marketing and licensing agreement. Maltz’s huge displays captured Minich’s attention.

Maltz was chosen partly because of the state designation, says Minich. “The other reason we chose Alan is that he has this really unique technique, where he takes his photographs and puts them on huge pieces of canvas. So it’s a photograph, but it almost looks like a painting as well.”

Maltz shot images locally for the past year to be included in the exhibit. Four of his works will be displayed in up to fifteen bays, with each featuring some captivating aspect of Southwest Florida, such as sunsets, birds, aials, agriculture, or, of course, beaches. A coffee-table book with reproductions of Maltz’s images and a guide to the exhibit will be for sale in the airport’s VCB information booths.



Large images of Southwest Florida scenes by fine-arts photographer Alan Maltz will set the stage for visitors arriving at the airport.

The booths will also feature state-of-the-art technology to welcome visitors to the area.

“We’re going to have a loop video on huge, sixty-inch plasma-screen TVs,” says Minich. “Also, we’ll have interactive kiosks where you’ll be able to type in a destination and it will give you the information on attractions. It will even print out driving directions.”

Through the Internet, hotels and other businesses will be able to constantly update information available at the kiosks.

Retail offerings and restaurants are also geared to reflect the region’s ambience.

“As opposed to walking in a regular shopping mall, you’d feel like you’re walking through Periwinkle Place, if you will,” says Sanders, referring to the popular Sanibel shopping center. “We want to give it local color.”



Retail Details



Local color and character come into play at the new Midfield Terminal in the form of Southwest Florida-style shops and eateries. "What we've learned is that people really want to relax and forget they're in an airport," says Ron Gomes, who oversaw the selection of bars and restaurants for concessionaire HMS Host.

To determine the offerings, the main concessionaires relied upon surveys conducted with visitors to the existing terminal. "Our research informed us just how many golfers there are in Southwest Florida," says Gomes. "So we're introducing a brand new concept with a golf theme called 'Dewar's Clubhouse' that will be a nineteenth hole kind of thing." The spot will include golf memorabilia, big-screen TVs, and a casual menu.

Retail areas will feature local businesses such as Books and The Bean of Sanibel as well as a store in conjunction with The Shell Factory of Ft. Myers, says Lynn Bennett of the Paradies Shops. Various beach stores will stock T-shirts, toys, and upscale garb to prepare visitors for the Southwest Florida scene. Other members of the retail lineup will include Brighton Collectibles, a CNBC newsstand, and Island Paradise featuring Tommy Bahama.

Food and beverage offerings will also boast local touches. In one concourse, a Palm City Market will focus on down-home southern cooking with ingredients from the Farmers Market of Ft. Myers as well as celebrated pink shrimp from the Paradise Shrimp Company of Ft. Myers Beach. In the other concourse, the Beaches Boardwalk will provide quick bites under an Italian theme with stands from La Vigna of Sanibel, Mamma Pasta, and Fort Myers Pizza and Pasta.

Casa Bacardi will serve rum-based "umbrella drinks," telltale signs of a tropical paradise. Other long-awaited options include a twenty-four-hour Starbucks and a Chili's with a to-go window.

Says Bennett, "It's completely different from the existing terminal—very dedicated to Southwest Florida."



At the new Midfield Terminal, retail and dining options will include familiar faces from the existing terminal, such as Chili's and the PGA Tour Shop. New offerings, such as Casa Bacardi and Books and The Bean of Sanibel, will help travelers get into the Southwest Florida spirit.



Because of the high volume of traffic through the airport and the increasing numbers of passengers, the new terminal had to be designed to easily accommodate growth.

When it opens, the terminal will have twenty-eight gates—compared with the existing terminal’s seventeen gates—situated in three concourses.

“What we designed are three concourses, all organized around a pattern that allows for future growth,” says Carreras.

Two more concourses can be added, providing for sixty to sixty-five gates at the terminal. Another runway that would run parallel to the first is also envisioned.

Demand might dictate the need for such growth sooner than later. Passenger traffic at the airport has been breaking records on a monthly basis.

This past August saw more than 400,000 passengers come through the airport. That number is up fourfold from the 1985 passenger count, double the traffic in 1992, and up by twenty-five percent since 2000. Year-to-date, the number of passengers by the end of August 2004 was 4.7 million—up almost fourteen percent from the same time the previous year.

Right: Lee County Port Authority Executive Director Robert M. Ball (center) tours the Midfield Terminal construction site with members of the Lee County Board of Port Commissioners and the Airports Special Management Committee.

Below: Construction of the \$438-million project began in 2002, fourteen years after the existing terminal reached capacity.

Although the design for the new terminal was already in place prior to new security regulations in the wake of the September 11, 2001, attacks, the architects were able to reconfigure without many design changes.

“The plan was so organized that it even allowed us to make some changes without drastically altering the concept after September 11, when it was required that we increase areas for baggage-screening devices,” said Carreras, adding that the security areas were moved into the throat of the terminal.

Despite its ultra-utilitarian design, Carreras intends the terminal to feel user-friendly.

“I really think that it is highly organized without being imposing or obsessive,” he says. “I definitely was seeking to give it all the characteristics of a facility that would make the users find their way easily.”

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