

GREEN BUSINESS QUARTERLY

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USGBC
MEMBER ISSUE

Corporate & Retail
Architecture & Engineering
Contracting & Building
Real Estate Services
Interior Design

SIEGEL & STRAIN ARCHITECTS

Award-winning firm champions sustainability
with unique ecologically based techniques

ARCHITECTURE





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The USGBC, who works with such groups as the American Institute of Architects and Architecture 2030, among others, is working to ensure that green design becomes the new norm. And so, in recent years, a large number of architects have started aiming for LEED-quality standards in their designs, planning eco-friendly and sustainable layouts for an assortment of diverse projects. Whether it's a school or a landscape, various green designs can be found from distinguished firms like Williams + Paddon, BCRA, and Spire Architecture, who are all dedicated to providing safe and sustainable designs for their clients as green practices continue to grow.

The library reading room at The Portola Valley Town Center, designed by Siegel & Strain Architects. Photo by César Rubio.

The Portola Valley Town Center, which was named a Top Ten Green Project by the AIA Committee on the Environment. Photo by César Rubio.

ARCHITECTURE

Residential and institutional architectural design

LOCATION:
Emeryville, CA

USGBC MEMBER SINCE:
May 2000

YEAR FOUNDED:
1985

AVERAGE NUMBER OF
PROJECTS A YEAR:
15+

AVERAGE ANNUAL
REVENUE:
\$2 million+

EMPLOYEES:
20



SIEGEL & STRAIN ARCHITECTS

BY ZIPPORAH PORTON

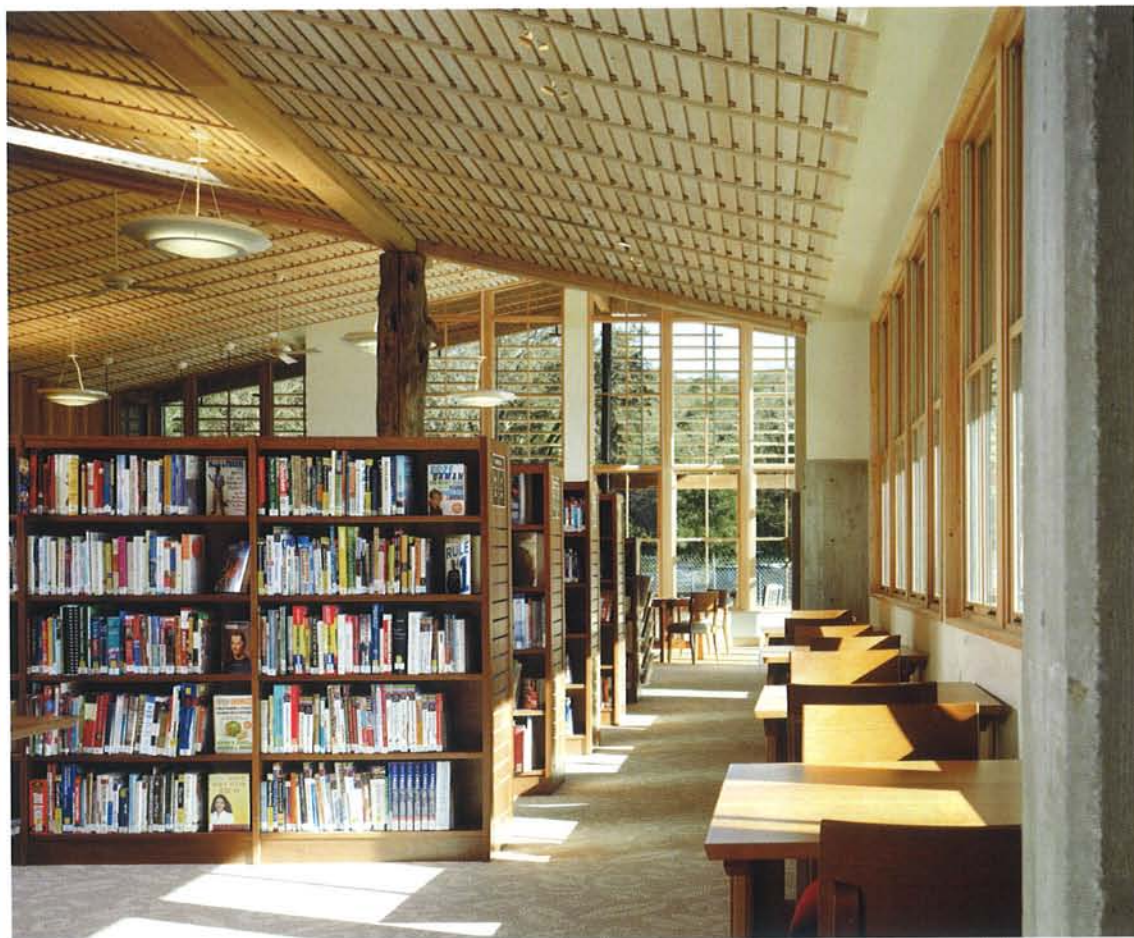
BUSINESS PARTNERS SINCE 1988, HENRY Siegel and Larry Strain, principals of Siegel & Strain Architects, have been friends for much longer. Siegel started his own design firm in 1985, Henry Siegel and Associates, and soon brought Strain on board, whose knowledge of green materials and processes took the company in the sustainable direction Siegel had always wanted to explore.

"I was interested in the sustainable movement in school," Siegel says. "[In] the first few years of my career, I just didn't see

a way to use it in my projects." In 1995, Siegel & Strain received a grant from the Alameda County Waste Management Authority (ACWMA) to research and write guideline specifications for environmentally considered materials and construction methods. Then, in 1997, the company received another grant from ACWMA to add sustainable measures to an affordable housing project it was designing a few blocks away from its Emeryville, California office. "We found that we could actually make a building significantly more efficient and lower impact than other

buildings at no extra cost by just doing small things," Strain says. By changing materials and adding more insulation, Siegel & Strain was able to make the three-unit project 30 percent more energy efficient. The project received an award for research from *Architectural Record* and was named a Top Ten Green project by the AIA Committee on the Environment (AIA COTE).

After the housing project was completed within budget, Siegel & Strain found ways to make all of its projects sustainable in some way. The company has since expand-



Library reading room looking east. Daylighting, natural ventilation, sunshades, and more all contribute to making the The Portola Valley Town Center a sustainable development.
Photo by César Rubio.

ed into working with a number of institutional clients and park districts, starting with an education camp built from scratch for the East Bay Regional Park District and the Taylor Family Foundation. The project, Camp Arroyo, was an AIA COTE Top Ten Green Project in 2002.

Focusing on passive design—which uses the shape, orientation, and climate of a building to best utilize the environment for heating and cooling purposes—the architects have a specific method to ensure every project has a sustainable aspect. “We start

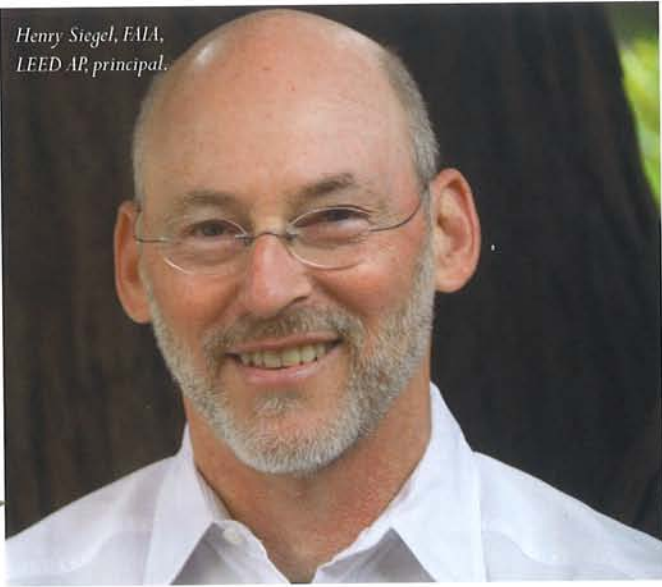
“We’re trying to not just design buildings but look at the role of the project in broader systems.”

Henry Siegel, Principal

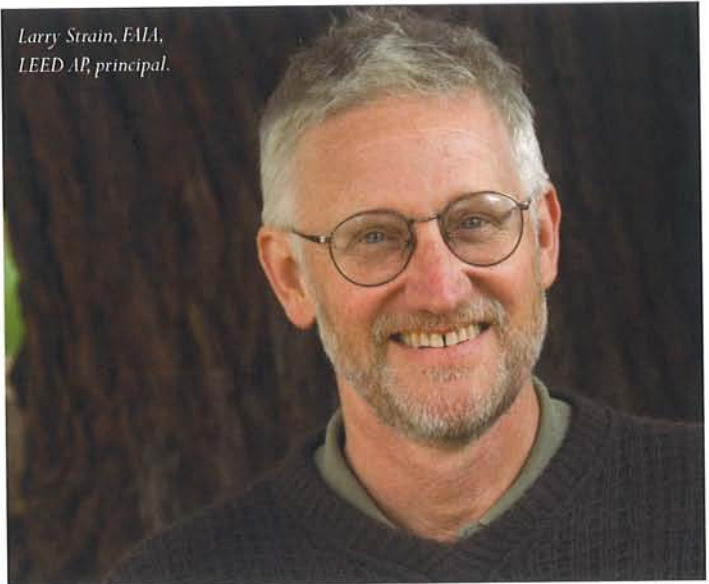
off designing the project as if it would never have any mechanical systems,” Siegel says. “The way buildings were made a hundred years ago.” Then, they look at the materials used, which can change depending on the location of the project. Lastly, the architects focus on the hardware and mechanical systems that will complete the building.

Siegel & Strain’s most recent project, The Portola Valley Town Center, is being submitted for LEED Platinum certification. The 22,000-square-foot center was one of Strain’s favorites because of the impact the green process had on the whole town. “It wasn’t just the things we did,” says Strain. “It was the fact that the whole town was as

Henry Siegel, FALA,
LEED AP, principal.



Larry Strain, FALA,
LEED AP, principal.

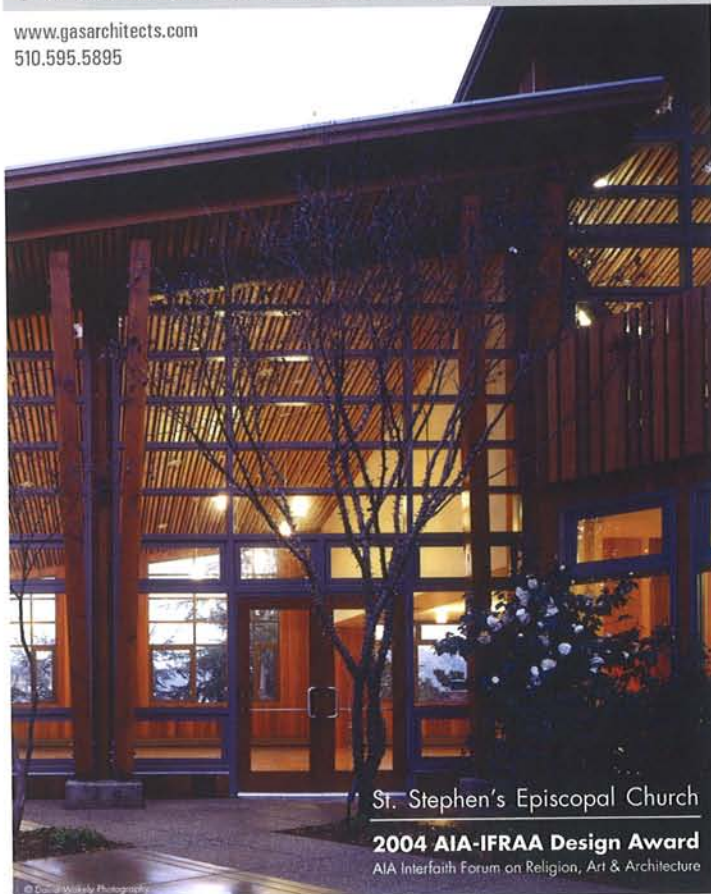


“We want to blend green goals with social equity goals. We can’t just serve some people; we have to serve everyone.”

Larry Strain, Principal

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www.gasarchitects.com
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St. Stephen's Episcopal Church

2004 AIA-IFRAA Design Award

AIA Interfaith Forum on Religion, Art & Architecture

excited as I was about green design—that was the real win.”

Siegel & Strain Architects has a number of projects in the works, but for Strain, the next goal is making green design affordable for everyone. “We want to blend green goals with social equity goals,” Strain says. “We can’t just serve some people; we have to serve everyone.” In the design phase, the company has a neighborhood center planned in San Jose for about 300 homes that Strain would like to make sustainable on a smaller budget. On a larger scale, the architects are designing an educational camp for children in Yosemite Park that will work toward net-zero energy.

Though their job is to essentially create large buildings, Strain and Siegel still concentrate on minimizing the impact their projects have on the Earth. “We’re trying to not just design buildings,” Siegel says, “but look at the role of the project in broader systems.” This process can involve collaborating with a variety of experts in fields like biology and geology. For Strain, it’s a simpler notion: “We’re just trying to do something where we’re making things better, not worse.” GRQ