

The New Courthouse for the District of Utah: A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

BY JULIETTE PALMER WHITE,
PAST PRESIDENT OF THE UTAH
CHAPTER OF THE FBA

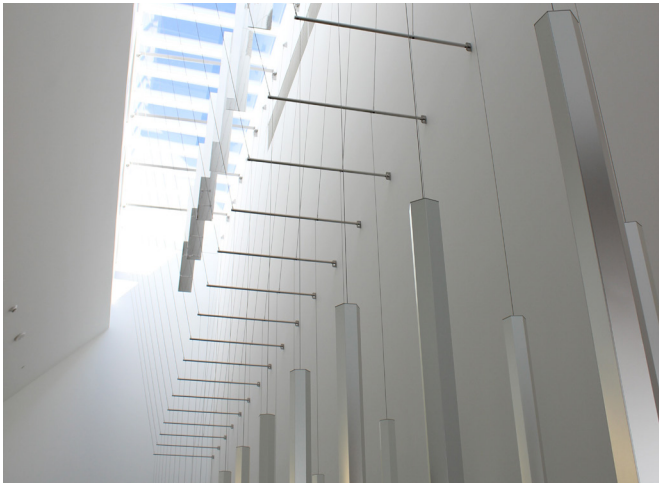
It is difficult to imagine a greater contrast than the one between the old and new homes for the U.S. District Court for the District of Utah. The old Frank E. Moss Courthouse was completed in 1905 in Classical Revival style. The new courthouse, which opened in the spring of 2014, is a distinctly modern, 10-story cube of glass and aluminum. The two stand side by side on the same block in downtown Salt Lake City and serve as a striking reminder that nothing stays the same. Yet growth, technology, and security require us to change, and change we did.

The new courthouse, quite literally, reflects the natural world around it—the brilliant blue of Utah skies in summer, the ripple of clouds on overcast days, and the citizens walking by or gazing into the reflecting pools that surround the building. The exterior of the building is comprised of glass, with hundreds of vertical aluminum slats that serve as sun screens. It is designed to draw the outside in, with abundant natural light; floors of frosted glass and white oak; and walls of windows in the courtrooms, chambers, and corridors.

Yet, if the headlines and comments in local newspaper articles are any indication, not everyone is thrilled with the modern aesthetic that informs this new building. References to the Borg from *Star Trek* are common, as are complaints about how austere and imposing the building appears.

The old courthouse has stood for more than 100 years as the symbol of the federal judicial branch here in Utah, and perhaps that is where some of the disappointment comes from. The granite-clad exterior, with its colonnade of Doric columns and classical decorative features, its marble and tile floors and courtrooms replete with oak wainscot and ornamental plaster ceilings, are of a style that is historically associated with courthouses.





For all the traditional formality of the old courthouse, the new offers a visionary space for the future. It is open and transparent, from the glass-walled, three-story lobby with its airy, circular staircase to the 10-story atrium in the center of the building with its spectacular art installation. A vertical, multistory grid of suspended hexagonal prisms, the artwork represents a cloud of ice crystals and is illuminated by skylights in the ceiling of the building. Every courtroom is paneled in different woods, and all are light, spacious, and equipped with the latest technology. The building is built to Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold Standards, and even

the construction project tried to minimize waste and emphasize recycling of materials.

The new courthouse also contains necessary security upgrades, including a setback from the street and separate elevators for the public, prisoners, and the judges and their staff—a welcome change from the old courthouse, where a judge might find himself or herself riding in the same elevator as a defendant he or she just sentenced.

While change can be challenging, it can also be exciting. The new courthouse is different than the old but in many ways that are positive changes for the District of Utah. ☉



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