YOU WORK...
Our Annual Office Design Wrapup

MILAN 2019
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Salone Internazionale del Mobile
and Euroluce

Plus: Universities, Coffee shops,
Pizza joints, Gyms, and a School
Stanford University’s academic reputation precedes it. Its architectural one is almost as laudable, as the institution is considered to have one of the loveliest university atmospheres in the US. But the most familiar buildings at Stanford adhere to a particular contextual genre and era. This new 18,000 sqft addition to the institution goes another way. Denning House is home to a new facility at the university; the Knight-Hennessy Scholars Program, which invites collaboration between distinguished scholars and students working on a variety of issues. The building offers these smart people classrooms, dining room, meeting rooms, and many casual, unprogrammed nooks and spaces – both indoors and out – to bump into each other and spark intellectual brilliance.

The project’s site is unique, set beside Lake Lagunita on what was previously a parking lot, and surrounded by picturesque California Oak trees. It is bucolic and redolent of the state’s superb climate and ample sunshine.

To take fuller advantage of the site, Ennead put the more public spaces up on the second floor, where they could overlook the views, and moved the administrative, conference and service spaces to grade level. You reach Denning House primarily via a curved, pleasing ‘forest pathway’ leading to the porch of the building and then the lobby, then up the public staircase to the main level, with its expansive glass walls towards the visual reward. The building curves gently on its lake-facing elevation, and attaches a long, somewhat narrow outdoor terrace there, where occupants frequently carry their thoughts or conversations to.
The character of Denning House is particular and strong, largely because it is realised almost entirely in Douglas fir and cypress wood, both for structure and cladding. With its informal, compartmentalised massing and verdant site, it becomes something like an oversized treehouse or retreat, more than a stuffy academic institute. You could be inspired to big ideas here... or lose your thoughts to the opposite, perhaps just watching the birds. The use of the wood is moderated for different surfaces. It includes open screens, patterned decorative sections, and straightforward vertical boarding. The fact that almost all surfaces are in wood guarantees a consistency to the mood set at Denning House. This building doesn’t just add the stuff where it’s prettiest; it seems to emanate from trees.

There is a nice tradition of intellectual retreats in America, and this one eases itself right into that. It is a welcoming, humble building that offers its amenities and facilities on open hands. No one will be rushing to finish up and get home. And in so far as Denning House hosts thinking on solutions to global problems, its architectural respect towards nature, in both aesthetics and sustainable technologies, is a fine symbol. Ennead Architects have fashioned a warm, intelligent place... which seems very ‘Stanfordian’, come to think of it.