

**The Crossings – WINNER Austin Business Journal
Commercial Real Estate Awards – Architectural Design 2004**

Omega at The Crossings’ Campus Blends Business, Spiritual Worlds

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Austin Business Journal

April 2-4, 2004

Omega at The Crossings is a progressive learning center and gathering place in the heart of the Texas Hill Country. Founded by Joyce and Ken Beck in partnership with the Omega Institute of Holistic Studies in Rhinebeck, N.Y., The Crossings was designed to be a welcoming setting in which to explore new ideas, spiritual paths, holistic practices, healthy living, psychology, dance, movement and art.

It was only natural that the design of the facility reflect that open philosophy.

“Our goal was a modest, welcoming, regionally appropriate escape,” says Tom Hatch, architect and founder of Hatch Partnership LLP in Austin. “As soon as you get to the property, you transform your psyche.”

It certainly made an impression on this year’s Commercial Real Estate Awards judges, as it is a winner in the architectural design category, sharing the spotlight with the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center.

More than four years in the making, The Crossings was born of the Becks’ desire to give back to the community. Ken was one of the first employees at Dell Inc. in 1988 and reaped the rewards when the company grew extraordinarily successful.

With the shared vision of wife Joyce, a certified bioenergetics therapist and student of mind-body-soul studies, the Becks put serious thought into what they wanted to do with their lives in retirement.

“We dreamed of a place that would be a retreat center, one that would encourage growth, balance, and sanctuary,” Ken says. “You go through the gate, and it’s magical.”

Hatch says great care was taken in the selection of the site – a 210-acre expanse of Hill Country landscape located in the Balcones Canyonlands Preserve.

The site includes habitat for the endangered golden-cheeked warbler, and all construction was limited to 25 acres to protect the site and leave the balance of it untouched. Outdoor lighting is used only where necessary -- as is paving – which creates a natural trail system that winds through The Crossings campus. In keeping with a general environmental philosophy, everything from road and trail design, placement of the buildings, utility layout, water dispersal and protection of trees was handled so as to have minimal impact.

Even the buildings on the campus – 15 structures such as a dining hall, meeting space, a spa, maintenance facilities and lodging – feature soft, natural colors and an adobe-like finish.

Hatch says the goal was to create an environment surrounded by modest structures that didn’t stand out in the natural setting.

“We wanted guests to feel calm and peaceful,” Hatch says. “We used natural materials wherever possible and soft, comforting colors to compose a unified whole.”

The building's interiors also reflect an environmental awareness, including guest lodges, the conference center, the Beck Welcome Center, The Crossings Wellness Center and Spa, and the Cypress Creek dining hall, café and bookstore.

Designers Sybil Case and Janet McCalister used sustainable materials wherever possible, including wood, carpet, tile, stone – even the finishes. Down bedding and natural fibers, and soft sage greens and blues are designed to complement the natural setting. And reclaimed teak furniture offers comfortable places to sit and relax, usually near water or nature.

Even the driveway to The Crossings was planned carefully to take visitors on a special journey.

“The process of getting to the top (of the property) was meant to be one of discovery,” Hatch says. “By the time you get to the top, you’re more relaxed and feel you’re in a different place right away.”

Hatch says one of the firm’s design challenges was to create an environment that spoke to people, but also symbolized The Crossings. That was accomplished through architecture.

“The architecture successfully addressed many crossings: the business world and the spiritual world; the technical world and Old World; and the natural and built environments,” he says. “People feel they’re in a every special place.”

Awards Judge Stephen Sharpe of the Texas Society of Architects, the state component of the American Institute of Architects, says the way the structures are organized conveys a sense of sanctuary.

”Each building is unique and seems to respond to its specific setting, though it lightly “touches the land,” he says. “It’s not a

bunch of buildings designed to look alike, but independently thought out for a specific setting.”

Besides winning for architectural design, The Crossings was also a finalist in the mixed-use category of the 2004 Commercial Real Estate Awards.

Hatch says that while he still sees The Crossings as a work in progress, the biggest sense of accomplishment is seeing it open to the public.

It became part of who we are as a firm,” he says. “Seeing that last coat of paint and all the finishing touches – people just love it.”