



**ALLIANCE MORGAN
MCKINZIE HIGH
SCHOOL & MIDDLE
ACADEMY 8**

East Los Angeles, CA
Completed 2016



The heart of Chicano culture in Los Angeles, Boyle Heights is a neighborhood adjacent to downtown with deep roots. Gentrification weighs heavily on this community, and designing two new charter schools, a middle school serving 450 students and a high school serving 600, on a dense urban site along the main thoroughfare of the neighborhood meant honoring the past, while making a bridge to the present and future.

The former First Street Store was to be demolished for the construction of these new schools. Sitting next to the historic Pan-American National Bank building, both buildings with their iconic arched facades, the site had more than sentimental value for the community – the tile murals embedded in those arches, titled “The Story of Our Struggle,” held the history of the residents. It was important to find a way to preserve and integrate these stories into the design of the new schools.

PROJECT DATE: 2016

PROGRAM: Middle & High School

SITE CONDITIONS: New Construction

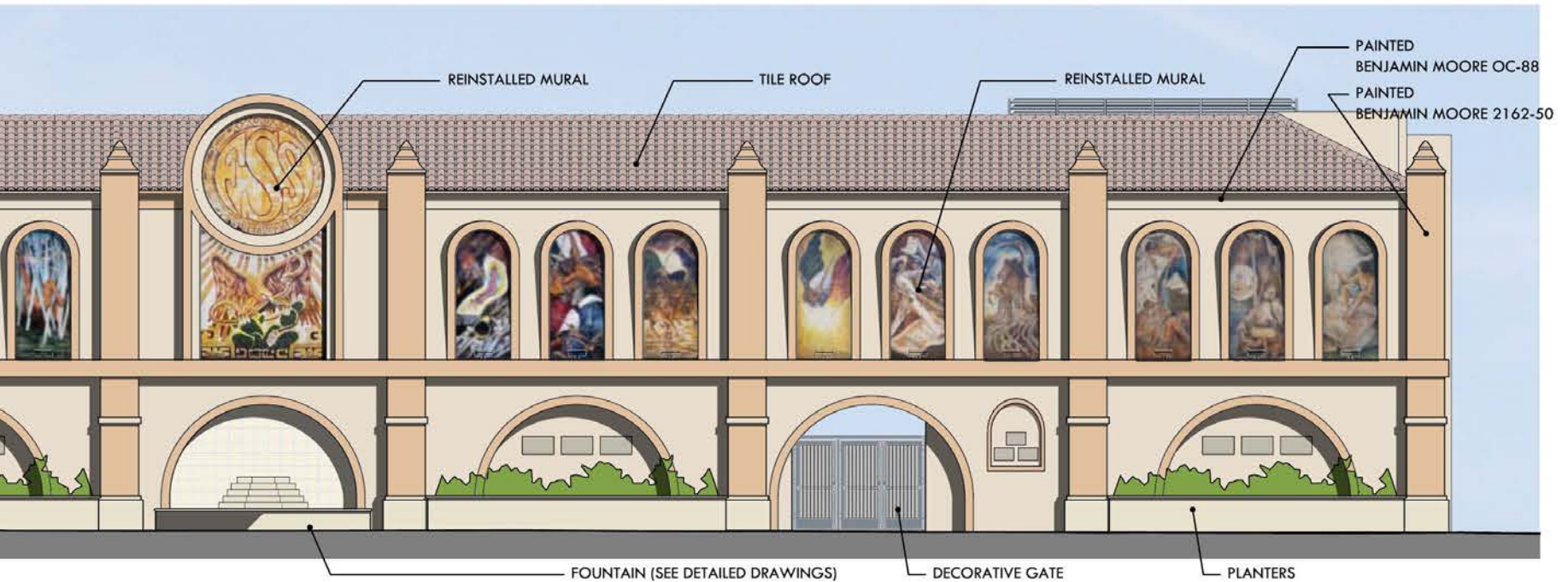
SIZE: 58,068 SF

BUDGET: \$13,485,641





The site chosen for Alliance's new campus necessitated a great deal of communication and mediation between the clients and the community. A pre-existing building on the site featured a series of historic tile murals produced by Chicano artist Johnny D. González in 1974; we played a key role in helping stakeholders in the Boyle Heights community reach a consensus on the preservation of the murals in a series of meetings. Ultimately, the county provided the funding to restore and preserve the murals, which were then integrated into Alliance's campus for the appreciation of students and community members for years to come. The murals have since been featured in LACMA's exhibition "UNFRAMED Self-Guided Driving Tour of L.A., Part 2."



Taking inspiration from the arches on the older surrounding buildings, the new buildings integrate the curved forms in a modern context. The shared inner courtyard that the two schools are built around recalls a traditional plaza or “zocalo” and provides a secure environment in which to study and play. Conversations with the community led to preservation of the murals, which are integrated into the street-facing façade as a reminder of where the students came from, with the new school buildings encouraging them to dream big for their futures.



BEFORE



The updated facade not only preserved and reinvented the murals, but formed the main buffer between the school's courtyard and busy First Street. When designing the new facade, we also incorporated a deeper set back from the street to create more pedestrian space. The widened sidewalk allowed space for benches, landscaping, and a decorative fountain so that the community could more comfortably enjoy the murals.

AFTER



There is a multi-purpose room, shared by both schools, at the south edge of the central courtyard, frames by the classroom buildings running around the other three sides. The back of the MPR forms the entrance to the school high school on one side and middle school on the other, both along the drop off and pick up area. It's position on the site means it doesn't have to mind the urban edges in the same way the other buildings are required too - its form and geometry are purposefully more playful. The multi-purpose room's north facade, facing the courtyard with its back to the entrance, is composed entirely of storefront, with large folding doors allowing student events and community gatherings to spill out into the courtyard, protected by the large cantilevered roof 30 feet above.



Careful master planning was essential to making the mixed-grade Alliance campus work on a relatively small, urban site. Although the new campus was designed to cultivate an air of community and openness, it could not sacrifice security to do so; it was also necessary to create a certain degree of separation between the middle and high school portions of the campus while allowing for access to some of the same facilities. These issues had to be resolved while simultaneously navigating the difficulties of a site which was owned by two different entities, all for a school which was receiving its funding from both public and private sources.



EAST FIRST STREET



A solution to many of these issues was to design the campus around a large central courtyard. This opening in the center of the school provides a common gathering and recreation space for students without exposing them to an unsecured environment. Separate entrances were laid out for the middle and high schools, giving the impression of two separate facilities on one campus and allowing younger students to feel safely sheltered from the older students.





We strove to reconcile Alliance's vision for a contemporary learning environment with the need to acknowledge and preserve the historic elements of the site. The arches of the First Street Store inspired curved elements throughout the new campus which, while not directly mimicking the historic architecture, create a subtle visual continuity between old and new. This blending parallels the compromise between the school and the community: Alliance can introduce something which is new and unique in the neighborhood, while simultaneously paying respect to the established culture and history of the people who live there.



Open air walkways with overhanging roofs provide fresh air to the classrooms while providing shelter from sun and rain and bringing daylight into every classroom. The courtyard creates an oasis from the busy, urban street and can be used for school and community events.





Much of our interest in taking on the Alliance project stemmed from the school's intended student demographic: largely Latino children in a lower-income neighborhood. Aside from standard design work, we assisted the school in securing Prop 1D funding, allowing their vision of a new educational space for underserved youth to become a reality.



Alliance Morgan McKinzie High School's first graduating class achieved an astounding 99% college acceptance rate, an achievement which the school's faculty claimed was due, in no small part, to having an effective and welcoming school facility. Transparency and collaboration with the community throughout the design process ensured collective understanding about the value of the past and a bright vision for the future. By including and valuing the voices of the community members in Boyle Heights, we were able to build an inspiring educational environment meant to become a cornerstone of their neighborhood.