Prince Kuhio Federal Building

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The Prince Kūhiō Federal Building, formally the Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalanianaʻole Federal Building and United States Courthouse, is the official seat of the United States federal government and its local branches of various agencies and departments in the state of Hawai‘i. Completed in 1977 with a total of 929,857 square feet (86,000 m²) of working space, it houses the United States District Court, United States Court of Appeals, United States Attorney, offices of the United States Senators and those elected to represent the First Congressional District of Hawai‘i and the Second Congressional District of Hawai‘i. The Prince Kūhiō Building is also home to the United States Secret Service, Central Intelligence Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Internal Revenue Service, Veterans Administration, among other entities. The building was named after Prince Jonah Kūhiō Kalanianaʻole, heir to the throne of the defunct Kingdom of Hawai‘i and Republican territorial delegate to the United States Congress.

The Prince Kūhiō Building was constructed to replace the aging Federal Court, Customs House and Post Office building fronting Kōlōlani Palace and adjacent to Ali‘iōlani Hale. The building was given back to the state of Hawai‘i and was renamed the King David Kalākaua Building in December 2003. Construction of the Prince Kūhiō Federal Building was not without controversy. Statutes provided that all buildings between the shoreline and the foot of Punchbowl Crater could not be taller than the Hawai‘i State Capitol. The federal government, which was not legally limited by local statutes, defied the statutes and constructed the Prince Kūhiō Federal Building to become the tallest structure in the path of the capitol building’s view of the shoreline.

The Federal Building is located at 300 Ala Moana Blvd, Honolulu. It is ocean front building located in between a big shopping plaza and the downtown area of Honolulu.

The Prince Kūhiō Building was one of the most interesting projects in Hawaii’s construction history. First Lady Rosalynn Carter dedicated it in June, 1977. It costs total of $37 million to build. It had a history of a legal battle between Hass & Haynie and GSA (General Service Administration). The two sides were bolstered by high-priced attorneys and witness paid lofty sums, some received several hundred dollars a day as consultants, while the merits of certain claims from the contractor were sorted out. The construction problems and contract disputes which gave rise to the claims have added $9 million to the total cost of the project and delayed its completion by about 19 months. During all these early years, the architects kept working. “It was a dream assignment.” Said Joe Farrell, the building’s designer. “But at times, later, I wondered if it wasn’t turning into a nightmare.” From 1960 to the start of construction, there had been changes.
from the Kennedy and Johnson administration to the Nixon administration, the Vietnam War and funding delays, land squabbles, and bureaucratic in fighting. Farrell had to fight for his design, and GSF backed him up. There was a fight over the size of the courtrooms at a time when U.S. Judicial Conference decided minicourt, rooms would be better. Federal Judge Martin Pence fought for the larger courtrooms and prevailed in Washington. The spacious federal office building includes room for expansion. (Honolulu Star Bulletin, March, 1977)

The firm selected to design the Prince Kūhiō Federal Building was Architects Hawai’i limited. Established in 1961, it is one of the largest architectural firms in Hawai’i and the Pacific region. AHL landmark buildings also include the American Saving Bank Tower, the Pacific Guardian Center, and the watermark Waikiki that would be completed in 2007. (http://goten.arch.hawaii.edu/site/index.php?id=163)

At the time, the building’s designer Joseph Farrel was the vice president of the firm and also a member of the State Foundation for Culture and the Arts. (Honolulu Star Bulletin, April, 1977) He is an architect who likes to handle project administration as well as design, seeing a project through from beginning to end. He developed the first double helix parking structure in the United States. (http://www.hawaii.edu/ur/News_Releases/NR_March99/farrell.html)

He wrote an article on the Honolulu Star Bulletin about why the building looks like it does. His idea was to combine art and landscape. The low rise structure had a purpose to be complimentary to the growing number of high-rises in the downtown are,
and to present a pleasant contrast. He tried to create a strong design statement, which is symbolic of a major federal government facility. "We would achieve this with a monumentality of mass which would generate a sense of strength, durability and security."

His design also enhanced the fabric of the Honolulu cityscape, trying to fit properly with the odd angles of streets and buildings and waterfront and other environmental elements. The use of a sandy-tone aggregate concrete evoked some of the feelings of the beach environment. The split faced concrete masonry imparts a sense of warmth and weathering.
The non-symmetrical design means people could walk around and experience exciting visual surprises. The sculptured water fountain, art pieces, trees, panters, red tile deck and flowers in the inner courtyard defined a “people place”.

There also enormous amount of window space, which purposely designed to increase the enjoyment of inside workers by providing the unique views. (Honolulu Star Bulletin, June 20, 1977)
The Federal Complex was incorporated with many pieces of abstract art work. George Rickey of New York designed the kinetic stainless steel sculpture. Its two rectangular arms made of a jull-length mirror of tract housing vintage, made a quiet geometric dance on the makaiewa end of the open courtyard.

The bronze pipe sculpture was designed by Peter Voulkos from California. The twisted contortions of the huge pipes, oiled black, provocatively situated on the courthouse end of the courtyard.
Another art piece was the semicircular fountain back dropped like a waterfall, with a wall of sculpted Hawaiian forms made of Waimanalo limestone aggregate concrete. The fountain is the focal point of the open courtyard. The aesthetic feature in the courts building came from the use of Hawaiian koa wood for the walls and recessed ceiling panels in the courtrooms and offices. (Honolulu Star Bulletin, April, 1977)

Prince Kūhiō Federal Building is a unique landmark in the city of Honolulu. Its architectural design is a good combination of utility, structure and beauty.
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