Hawaii State Capital Building

“The structure of life I have described in buildings - the structure which I believe to be objective - is deeply and inextricably connected with the human person, and with the innermost nature of human feeling” (Christopher Alexander). Defined by Merriam-Webster as, “the art or science of building, specifically: the art or practice of designing and building structures and especially habitable ones”. Although this definition accurately describes what architecture is, it fails to take into account the connection between architecture and society. Located at 415 South Beretania Street, the Hawaii State Capital Building is a prime example of culture combined with design. In this paper I first and foremost intend to go over the history and planning of the building, secondly, describe its design and construction, and conclude with structural renovations.

History

Upon the overthrow of the monarchy by the Committee of Safety in 1893, 'Iolani Palace was converted into the statehouse of the newly formed Provisional Government of Hawaii. It would later serve as the capitol building for the Republic of Hawaii (1894-98), Territory of Hawai‘i (1898-1959 and State of Hawai‘i (1959-Present); housing the offices of their respective governors and legislatures. In May of 1957, ACT 150 passed through the Territorial Legislature, establishing the Territorial Planning Office. The Office’s director was to “…study the need for a Capitol Site and shall consider the long-range needs of the agencies of the Territorial Government and the related needs of the City and County of Honolulu” (HWTP 1). The new building followed for basic assumptions.
First and foremost, “the state capital building should occupy a central location with respect to the population of the Territory”. Secondly, “assume that the center of the Territory will not shift to a significant extent during the next 30 to 50 years”. Thirdly, “most of the Territorial government offices particularly those which serve the general public, and federal and municipal offices, will remain or be located in the future in the existing Honolulu civic center.” Fourthly, “the new capital building will house the legislative function, the chief executive, and some staff functions of the Territorial government” (HTPO 7).

The initial plans recommended that new capital be built along the Honolulu waterfront on the Fort Armstrong-Kewalo promontory because of its cheap cost, positive economic and cultural effects, and “excellent” setting. Other sites considered by the commission were the: slopes of Punch Bowl and Diamond Head, Magic Island, Ala Wai Golf Course, Oahu Country Club Area, and the Iolani Palace area (HTPO 28). On December 4, 1960, the fourteen members Commission concluded that the new capital building should be constructed on the old Iolani Palace grounds, in the face of widespread objection to palace’s removal.

Design and Construction

The Commission selected Belt, Lemon, Lemman &Lo, and John Cark Warnecke and Associates of to design the building. To construct the capital the commission chose Reed and Martin Inc, a local construction company.

Architect: Warnecke has had long and successful career architecture. John Carl Warnecke was born in 1919 in Oakland, California. He received his BA degree from
Stanford University, and entered Harvard University's architectural school in 1941. He completed the three-year course in only one year, receiving his Bachelor of Architecture degree in 1942. Warnecke worked as a draftsman for his father's architecture firm until 1947, when he opened his own office in San Francisco, becoming one of the most successful contemporary architects, and gaining national and international acclaim for his designs of numerous prestigious structures, such as the pedestrian mall in front of the White House. Warnecke was chosen by the First Lady to design the gravesite memorial of John F. Kennedy at Arlington in 1963. Other notable Warnecke buildings include the White House Pedestrian Mall, AT&T Long Lines building, American Embassy in Thailand, and number of college libraries (U.C-Santa Cruz, Berkley and U.S Navel Academy).

**Construction:** The capital ground breaking ceremony occurred November 15, 1965 and was finally completed on March 15th, 1969 at a cost of $24,576,900. In order to construct the capital the construction firm Reed and Martin Inc required 7,000,000lbs of reinforced steel and 49,100 cubic yards of concrete (McFarland). The exterior structure measures 360 by 270 ft and is 100 ft high, the equivalent to a 10-story building.

**Design:** The design chosen by Warnecke is considered to be an adaptation of the Bauhaus style called Hawaiian International Style. Warnecke used the open-air, common in Hawaii, as the centerpiece of his design. He chose this to take advantage of the recurring ocean and mountain trade winds. The structure has five levels above ground and two below. On the first floor is the open-air court where the public can gather in the public gallery view legislative proceedings on the lower level. The second and third
floors house the Senate House of Representative offices. The attorney general, Department of budget and finance, and additional members of the house are housed on the fourth floor. The fifth floor is home to the governor, lieutenant governor, and staff. Underground, the building holds the two senate and house chamber, as well as parking for 440 cars (McFarland).

Symbolism: Included in his capital design are several symbols to represent the unique beauty and geography of Hawaii. Take the buildings columns for example. The columns not only represent the number of islands (8) but also represent the state’s most recognizable vegetation, the palm tree.

On the top of the building the cone shaped openings at the top of the roof represent the Hawaii’s geographic birth from the volcanoes. The forty ribs running along the top of the structure symbolize the palms leaves many lines.
A vast pool of water was but around the capitol building in order to symbolize the fact that Hawaii is the only island-state in the nation.

On the northern and southern sides of the building hang large Bronze replicas of the state seal, 15 feet in diameter, each weighing 7,500 pounds.

Other key parts of the building are:

- The mosaic design in the center of the rotunda, "Aquarius," was created by island artist Tadashi Sato and shows the changing colors and patterns of Hawaii's seas.
The two chandeliers in the legislative chambers represent the "Moon," in the Senate and is made of polished aluminum and chambered nautilus shells; "Sun, “in the House of Representatives, is made of gold-plated copper and brass.

Renovations

Since the capital's completion in 1969, the building has been plagued by expensive structural problems. The air-conditioning system could not provide sufficient temperate control resulting in vast differences between the upper and basement levels (SA 5). Worse still, was the fact that system could not cool the building when the legislature was in session. Renovation also had to be made to accommodate new technology. By 1991 the capital was in need of significant repair, renovation and asbestos removal. The original appropriation for the work totaled $47,000,000, however by 1996 this total had jumped to 69.2 million dollars (SA 3). In the end, the building cost 71,900,000 to repair, almost three times the amount the building cost to construct.

Conclusion
In summarizing, the Hawaii State Capital is an amazing architectural monument. The building provides a uniqueness not found in any other state primarily because of Warnecke’s decision to include important features of Hawaiian culture and geography. Though the building has a host of design problems, the intended meaning of the building will continue to echo throughout the decades to come.

Work Cited:
