

Best New Office: U.S. Bank Tower

Sacramento Business Journal - by [Robert Celaschi](#) Correspondent

Location: 621 Capitol Mall, Sacramento

Developer: [David S. Taylor Interests Inc.](#)

Contractor: [Hensel Phelps Construction Co.](#)

Architect: [Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum Inc.](#)

Engineer: [Middlebrook + Louie](#)

Size: 366,291 square feet

Cost: \$132 million

For two decades Sacramento struggled to put a signature building on an old parking lot bounded by Capitol Mall and 6th, 7th and L streets. Known simply as Lot A, it was slated in the late 1980s for a 40-story office tower and a 20-story Ritz-Carlton hotel before a recession killed the idea. Mayor Joe Serna once offered the lot for \$1 to any corporation that would put its headquarters there. He got no takers.

David S. Taylor Interests finally succeeded where others couldn't, erecting a 25-story tower that carries the name of prime tenant U.S. Bank. Taylor had already put his stamp on downtown Sacramento with projects including Esquire Plaza, the [Sheraton Grand Sacramento Hotel](#) and the new portion of Sacramento City Hall. Taylor himself was Dealmaker of the Year in the Real Estate Projects of 2007 judging.

Yet even Taylor had to cut back on the original design from 2000 to make 621 Capitol work.

"I would not be honest if I say I don't regret that the economy forced us to scale the size of the project down to its current size," said Ellen Warner, a partner in David S. Taylor Interests. "Bigger is not always better, but in the case of our Capitol Mall property, this particular larger building tower would have even more profoundly added to the drama and elegance of our skyline."

Such pragmatism, however, is one reason the office tower has been a winner.

"We were prudent and realistic about what the marketplace could bear and scaled the building accordingly," Warner said. "Ultimately, successful real estate development is a careful balance of risk and caution, and with the U.S. Bank Tower we found that balance."

As evidence, U.S. Bank grabbed the naming rights and 34,000 square feet while the property was still a parking lot. The building has proved a draw for several of Sacramento's largest law firms, the state Court of Appeals, the [California Restaurant Association](#) and high-end restaurant [Morton's The Steakhouse](#).

Taylor also honored the request of San Francisco architects Hellmuth, Obata + Kassabaum Inc. to relocate the building on the property and take better advantage of its Capitol Mall frontage. Taylor's strategy is to consider the vision of its creative team in its entirety, said Warner, "even when it causes us heartburn."

The tower makes full use of its Capitol Mall frontage with a seven-story, glass-walled atrium lobby. Floors two through seven are parking levels, so people who arrive by car also catch the view as they head for the lobby elevators to the office floors.

The lobby is also home to one of two major artworks. Titled "Rapids," the 54-foot sculpture uses a cascading group of LED panels to evoke a water theme. Artist Michael Hayden then made the sculpture do double duty, taking the light from "Rapids" and projecting it to a second art installation, "Lumetric River," along a 150-foot section of the building's crown.

The building "has taken the expectations for public art in our community to a new level," judge John Leonard said.

The unfinished top floor, with its two-story glass wall, drew extra praise from judge Tyler Babcock. "It has a jaw-dropping view," he said. "I don't know how you would get any work done in that building. I would spend my day looking out of the window."

U.S. Bank Tower in some ways seems like an obvious winner for its category. Simply getting the project built was a major accomplishment, and it literally has changed the Sacramento skyline.

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“David Taylor has a reputation for doing things right,” Babcock said. “It’s a very sophisticated, contemporary office building.”

But the judges also made it clear the award was not a slam-dunk. A winner, certainly, but with areas that might have been even better. The lobby, while well proportioned, struck some of the judges as a cold space. Something visual on the empty six-story lobby wall might help make it more welcoming, one judge suggested.

And as an indication of how far “green” building practices have penetrated the mainstream, one judge expressed disappointment that 621 Capitol Mall didn’t go for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification from the **U.S. Green Building Council**.

For all that, though, judge John Hodgson called U.S. Bank Tower “iconic.”

The judges noted that 621 Capitol Mall fills only part of the old Lot A property. The remainder was slated for the Aura condominium tower, with a pedestrian plaza between the two buildings. Aura never made it off the ground.

The U.S. Bank Tower stands on its own, Warren said, but Taylor is looking forward to the time when the market will be ready for the company to develop the empty parcel.