

# Mesa Community College Performing Arts Center

Mesa, Arizona

**ARCHITECT:** Jones Studio, Inc.,  
Phoenix, AZ

**BLOCK PRODUCER:** Superlite Block,  
an Oldcastle Company, Phoenix, AZ

**MASONRY CONTRACTOR:** M.A.G  
Construction, Gilbert, AZ

**PHOTO CREDIT:** Timmerman Photography

## CMU Offers Surround Sound

At the centerpiece of the new Mesa Community College Performing Arts Center (PAC) sits a 450-seat variable acoustic theater, designed to accommodate a broad range of musical performances.

Two separate enclosure shells and a steel frame define the new performance hall. The exterior shell is a composition of exposed concrete masonry and raked, unpainted cement stucco over metal stud framing. The interior shell consists of an exposed concrete





masonry enclosure that serves as the primary acoustic volume of the hall.

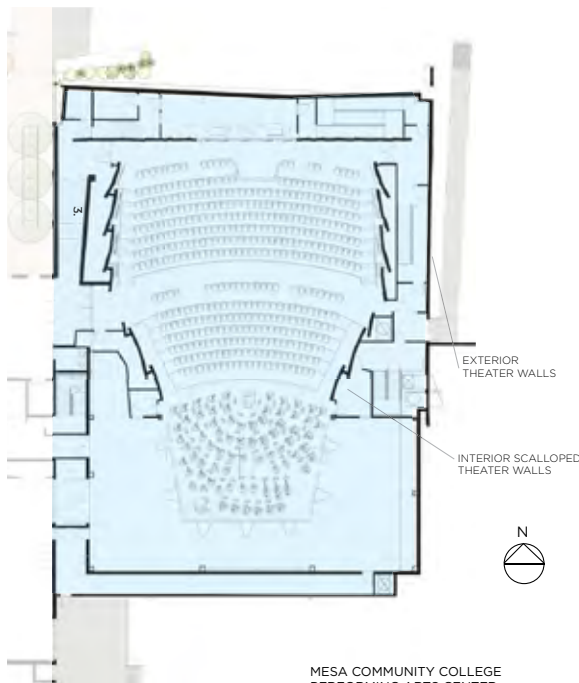
Concrete masonry is an important material for the PAC, as the two shells are shaped and detailed expressively to achieve independent goals. The north and east exterior walls of the hall are arranged with a running bond pattern and are sloped and folded to both emphasize the “waterfall” downspout at the northwest corner and point to the vertical marquee sign identifying the main entry courtyard. The dramatic folded masonry wall slopes away from the sign, lifting it up and emphasizing its presence. The slope is 2 degrees off the horizon and was achieved by carefully cutting the stem courses of the masonry at the footing.

This “marquee” wall is also folded by virtue of an offset coursing detail that slips each block a maximum of  $\frac{5}{8}$  inch (17 mm) off center from the one below, according to the architect. The line of the fold ascends diagonally across the north elevation and has no offset. As the wall splays out in either direction, the offset goes from zero to  $\frac{5}{8}$  inch (17 mm), creating the fold. The grey 8x8x16-inch (203x203x406-mm) concrete masonry units change to charcoal-colored units at this diagonal, and as the two tones blend together, the line culminates at the marquee sign.

The interior acoustic shell is a progression of masonry types. From the very basic grey 8x8x16-inch (203x203x406-mm) block that changes to charcoal on the exterior shell, the interior utilizes the same charcoal coloration, but with a ground face.

This acoustical concrete masonry shell has many jobs to accomplish: sound distribution, interior structure, a durable finish and a comfortable, visually rich interior. The hard and dense nature of solid-grouted concrete masonry provides an excellent surface for the reflection of sound. Sidewalls of the hall are scalloped in design, a series of convex curves designed to spray sound waves evenly across the audience chamber. Contrasting with the exterior detailing, the interior walls use a stacked bond arrangement—also with an offset coursing detail of  $\frac{5}{8}$  inch (17 mm) from the unit below.

In all, the variations in block, the bump outs that aid in sound distribution and hard surface sound reflectivity all add up to a building volume that enhances and distributes sound in an enveloping manner. Concrete masonry is the material that makes that possible.



MESA COMMUNITY COLLEGE  
PERFORMING ARTS CENTER  
GROUND FLOOR PLAN





**“This unique use of concrete masonry pushes the structural component to be so much more than just an architectural statement.”**

*—Design Awards Jury*