

RayKo Photo Center

NEAL SCHWARTZ
California College of the Arts

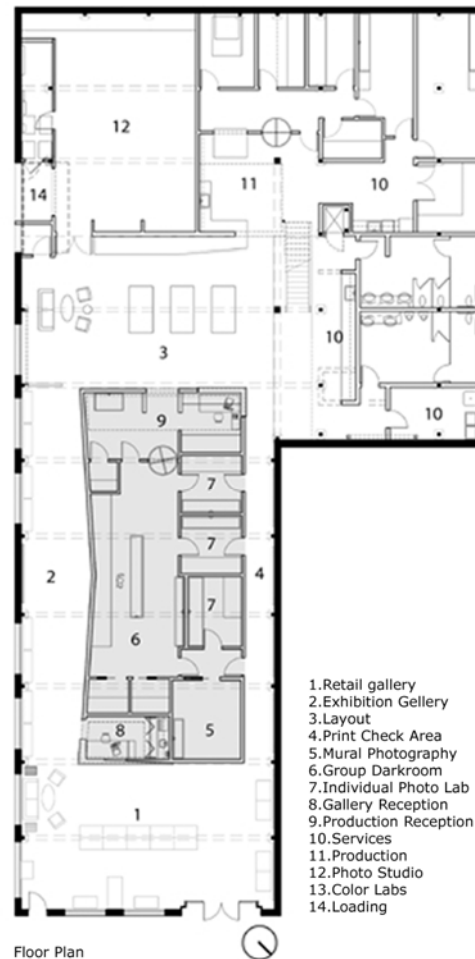
The RayKo Photo Center has had a long history as a community hub for photographers in the Bay Area. Their new facility, in a 12,000 SF warehouse space offers digital imaging and scanning tools, rental darkrooms and studios, as well as a retail space with a gallery promoting the work of regional artists.

The design is based on a critical investigation into the process of photography itself-- the control and modulation of light. This single research intention guided the evaluation of each of our design decisions.

Through the exploration of light, the project in the end aims to create an abstract, glowing icon for the photo center, the calmness of which counteracts the potentially overwhelming and frenetic technical program for the tight space.

LIGHTBOX | DAR KBOX. The interior of this building within a building houses the 'dark' programs of the communal enlarging stations, rental labs, and large format mural studio. The exterior of this volume provides for the 'light' programs of gallery, artist retail, reception, and production layout. This volume creates four distinct functional zones (Retail Gallery, Exhibition Gallery, Layout, and Print Check) and organizes the complex program while maintaining an openness that encourages the visual and social interaction of the community of users.

A 200 foot long continuous illuminated parapet (using a translucent PVC stretch fabric ceiling system), conceals the immensity of technical systems housed on the roof of the Darkbox. When not illuminated, the fabric turns opaque and is



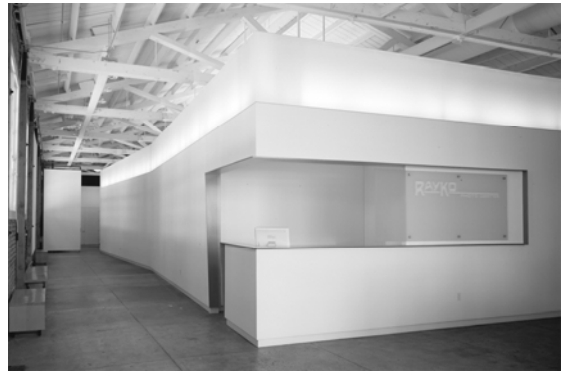
virtually indistinguishable from the sheetrock gallery walls below. When illuminated, the walls unexpectedly begin to glow, providing a soft and abstract light throughout the space. This light from the Darkbox roof also intensifies the existing roof structure and provides the majority of ambient light for the facility.



At the center of the floor plan is the LIGHTBOX | DARKBOX. The intention was to create a calm and abstract luminous body placed in tension with the existing industrial space. The design balances the need for the object to simultaneously recede as background walls for the gallery as well as to assert itself as a unified and strongly felt object in the space.

The design preserves and intensifies the existing spatial power of the raw industrial space. The tension created between the new and the old is intended to pay great homage to the previous life of the space.

The success of the project as a critical inquiry is in its ability to operate strategically at a number of scales. At the city scale, the project is strongly urban in subtle ways. For the busy street and highway above, the design casts a pronounced and unexpected glow set against the rough building exterior and neighborhood. The project relies on this light -- an obvious reference to the most essential and ephemeral aspects of the



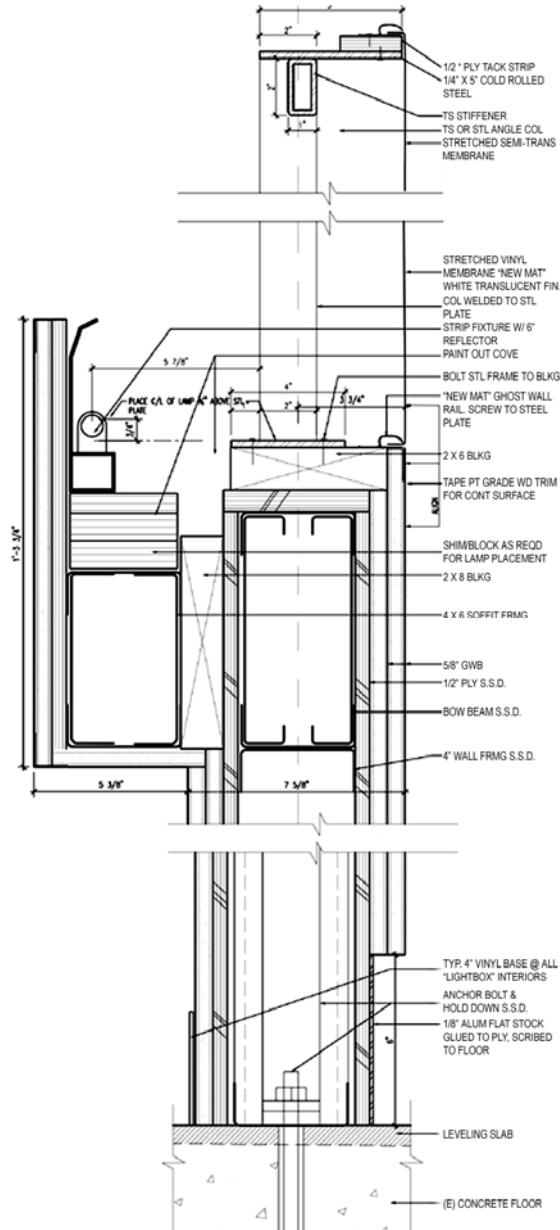
program itself-- to create an urban landmark and to identify the building as a photographic institution and community focal point.



At the building scale, the design strategically choreographs the complex and often competing programs using the most minimal of means. The scale, proportion, materials, and form of the LIGHTBOX | DARKBOX within the broader space are carefully calibrated to negotiate these demands. The volume gently pinches in plan to accommodate the gallery program-- just enough to make the expanded corridor an effective social space.

At the detail scale, the minimal expression demanded technical innovation and precision in construction detailing. The material used in the parapet was originally designed for illuminated ceiling panels. We worked intensely with the French manufacturer to refine the details of the installation for the seamless wall application.

The Darkbox has a complex set of technical requirements related to the control of light, as well as intensive plumbing, chemical waste and HVAC systems to negotiate. The illuminated parapet allows for the most technical and cost efficient routing of all of these systems while shielding them from view.



The RayKo Photo emerged from the intersection of criticality (as we encourage in the Academy) with the very real world constraints of intense technical demands. For us, it succeeds by letting the element of light lead the design process and guide the solution. In the end we believe we are left with a calm and refined civic space in the city that could have easily been overwhelmed and undermined by the technical demands of the program.



Photography: Anna Case-Hoffmeister, Gary Hesse, Monica Nelson

Project Designers: Neal Schwartz, Thomas Wright, Lauren Kogod (Kogod Smiley Architects)
Lighting Design: h. e. bankd + associates

Contractor: Brownco Construction

