

Program Summary:

Renovation, addition, and landscape design for a Louisiana Indian Tribe's courthouse and police headquarters building, featuring a new courtroom space with an iconic brise-soleil.

Program Statement:

This project involved the complete renovation and expansion of an existing tribal police station and courthouse at the entrance to the tribe's reservation in Central Louisiana. Two new wings were added to the existing structure: one expanding the police station's daily operations, and the other introducing a new courtroom.

The courtroom addition is a simple cubic volume graced with a continuous clerestory window. This band of glazing allows diffuse daylight to enter from above, creating a serene, pavilion-like interior. The absence of exterior views focuses attention inward and upward. The clerestory frames views of neighboring treetops and the changing sky, reinforcing the space's solemnity while connecting it to nature.

Crowning the clerestory is a diaphanous horizontal brise-soleil composed of terra cotta baguettes within a steel structure. These elements cast dynamic shadows across the courtroom's façade and deep into its interior. Their intricate pattern was generated from geometric motifs on tribal artifacts using a custom digital script. An ancient visual language thus informed a contemporary architectural system.

Throughout the day and across seasons, this brise-soleil acts as a sundial and calendar, projecting ever-changing shadows that register the passage of hours and the turning of the year. For the people of this tribe, who refer to themselves as the "Sun People," this building becomes more than ornament. It expresses the tribe's autonomy and the distinct system of governance of a sovereign nation. It serves as a quiet, living expression of cosmology, identity, and continuity, reified through architecture.

A-130.01

Building Area: (sf)
7,572 SF

Cost per Square Foot:
\$255.38

Construction Cost
\$1,933,753.00

Date of Completion:
December 2024

A-130.02

A long gathering lawn extends toward the building from the main access road. The lawn's axis terminates at an existing ceremonial mound near the building's main entrance. The mound is a representation in miniature of the mounds and earthworks made by Native American peoples. Such earthen monuments can be encountered throughout the region.

These elements define the approach to the justice center, framing a brick plaza that leads to the main entrance. Flanking wings separate the functions of policing (left) and judiciary (right), reinforcing institutional clarity.

The project is anchored by the courtroom mass with its signature brise-soleil, which casts shifting shadows along the façade as the sun moves across the sky.



A-130.03

The courtroom ceiling exposes the underside of the roof deck, revealing the turquoise-painted steel structure supporting the terracotta screen, along with a continuous square-shaped light fixture centered on the courtroom. These elements overlap as the strata of a multi-layered composition.

The clerestory glazing wraps all four sides, offering a view of the screen with the open sky beyond, thereby extending natural weather and daylight cycles into the interior. The resulting space is pavilion-like, imbued with a softened, ambient quality by the filtered light from above.

Proper to its role as a place of justice, the courtroom is designed to avoid feelings of intimidation or imposition upon any of its occupants, especially the most vulnerable. The space is designed to feel open, grounded, and welcoming, offering dignity and accommodation for all who enter.



A-130.04

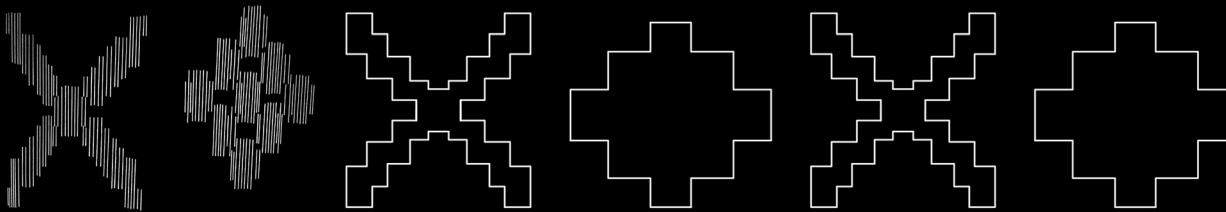
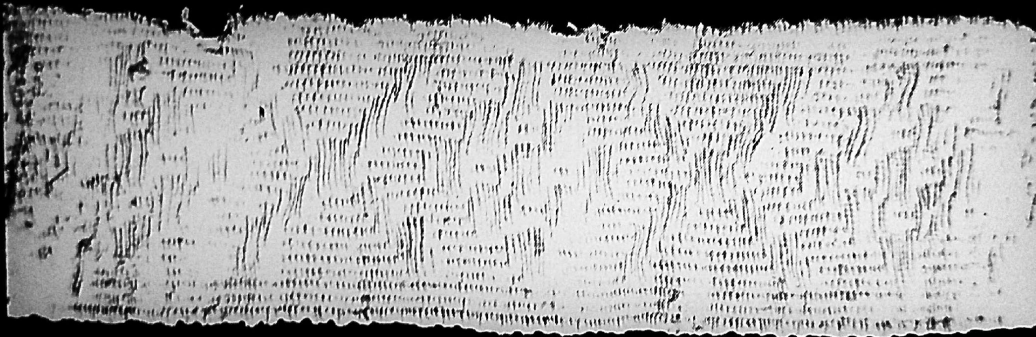
The courtroom's brise-soleil is the focal architectural element of the project. It gains a compound significance from its pattern, derived from tribal motifs as described below, in addition to its function as a sundial.

The top image at left shows a preserved woven textile from the tribe's archaeological legacy, protected from deterioration over time by the copper in its fibers. An intricate geometric pattern reveals itself in the fabric.

Below, line drawings of the motifs of the pattern, traced directly from the textile, clarify their shapes.

The bottom photo shows a gourd-shaped ceramic artifact, part of a hoard from the same tribe. The carvings on the surface of this piece echo the geometries in the textile, showing further evidence of a shared visual language across materials and generations.

The role this archaeological treasure plays in informing the design of this tribe's courthouse is especially significant. When the tribe initially applied for federal recognition, its application was denied. According to the federal government, the racial composition of the tribe's population was too mixed. It was the discovery of this treasure in the aftermath of a grave-robbing that enabled the tribe to attain Federal recognition as a sovereign nation.



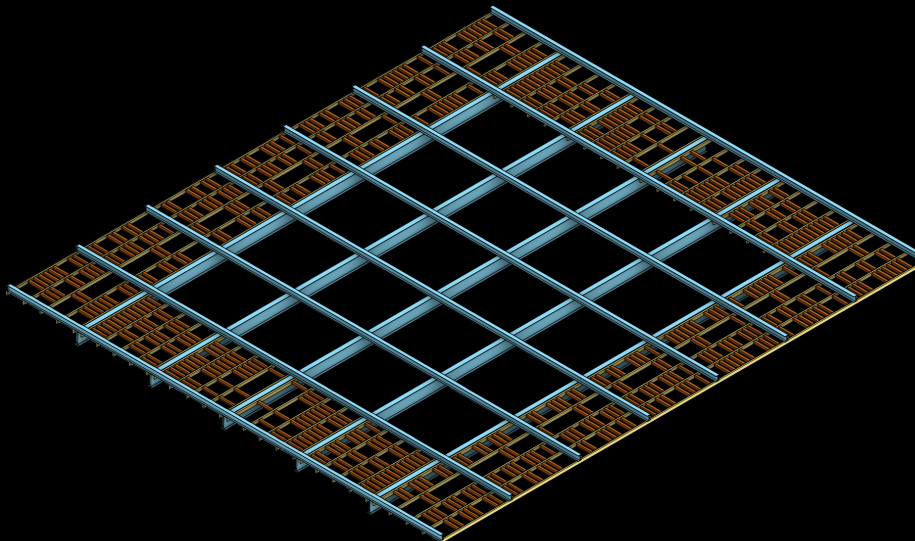
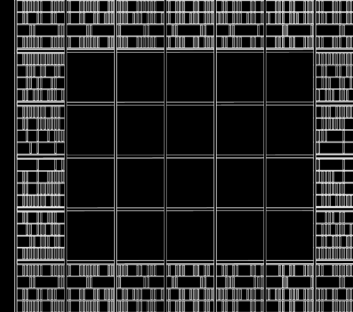
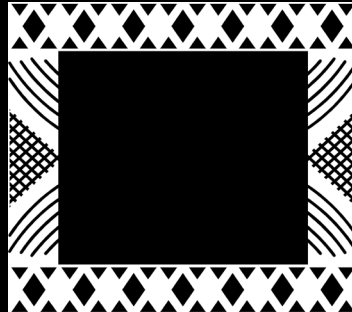
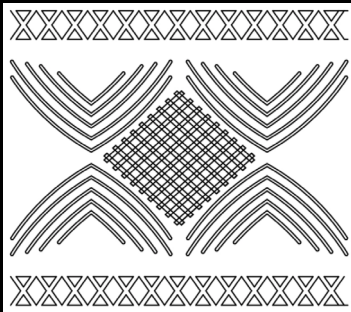
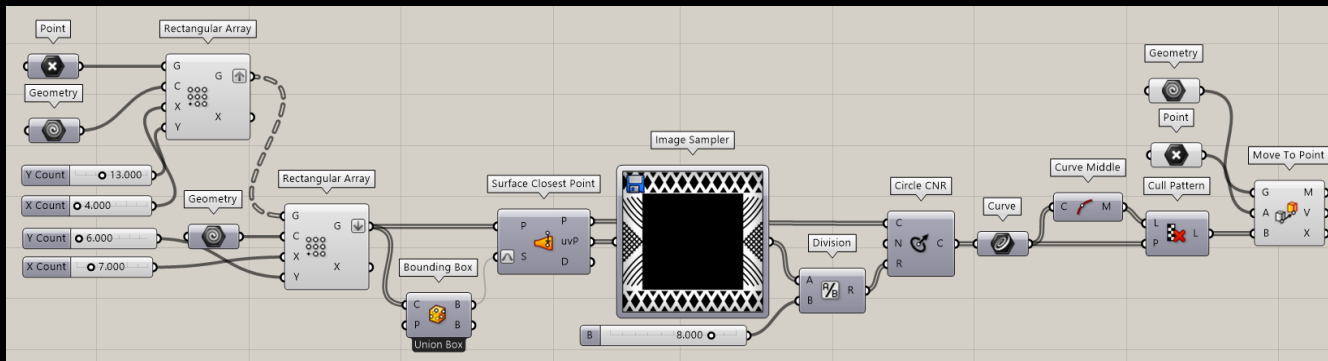
A-130.05

A custom Grasshopper script was developed to translate the tribal patterns into a constructable system of building components.

An image sampler pixelated the original designs. Each “pixel” was assigned a position and orientation corresponding to the module used in the brise-soleil. Refinements were introduced into the script to strategically randomize the position of some of the pixels. This pays homage to the hand craft of Native artisans, while acknowledging the effects of nature on human artifact as time passes.

The resulting brise-soleil is a plane of terracotta elements known as *baguettes* (for their resemblance to the elongated loaves of bread). These extrusions are suspended from secondary aluminum struts, which are in turn mounted within the panels of a primary steel framework. Though the assemblage is designed to be as thin and diaphanous as possible, the depth and spacing of the baguettes and structural elements create a subtle sense of layering and hierarchy.

The axonometric projection at the bottom shows how this digitally scripted system transforms an ancestral pattern into a contemporary architectural feature responsive to light and time.





A-130.06

Throughout the day, the brise-soleil casts shifting shadows across the skin of the courtroom volume, as shown in this sequence of three photographs showing (clockwise from top left) late morning, noon, and early afternoon conditions.

The filtered light animates the building by reflecting the sun's path overhead, projecting the changing sky onto and into the building.

These constantly mobile patterns are central to the soul of the project. Referencing traditions found throughout Native architecture across the Americas, the screen operates like a contemporary calendar, registering time through light and shadow rather than mechanical means.



A-130.07

As visitors approach the building under the canopy of crape myrtles, dappled light filters down onto the plaza, complementing the shadows cast by the brise-soleil on the courtroom walls.

This interplay between natural and architectural filtering creates a multi-layered sensory experience, linking the building with its landscape and reinforcing the idea of light as both guide and symbol.

A-130.08

Photo at left:



A ceremonial mound anchors the center of the brick-paved plaza, positioned along the approach between the two wings of the building. The brick pavers are laid in a basketweave pattern at a 45-degree angle to the wings in order to align with the lobby's diagonal orientation in plan. The woven brickwork nods to traditional Native craft while marking the transition from landscape to civic space.

The courtroom façade is clad in Norman brick. As the Norman brick module is longer than that of standard brick, the masonry unit proportions correspond more closely to the linear baguettes above. The bricks' creamy, earthen tones create a warm yet neutral backdrop, allowing the brise-soleil to project its dynamic shadows with clarity. The masonry's subtle texture further enhances the depth and complexity of the shadows cast by the screen.

The deep red hues in the terracotta baguettes are reflected in the plaza's light red brick pavers, linking the ground plane and the sun-filtering screen above with a consonant material palette.

Photo at right:

A participant at the Tribe's Spring 2019 Powwow is dressed in Native ceremonial attire, displaying the vibrant colors that informed the project's material palette.



A-130.09

The brise-soleil's terracotta baguettes are mounted between extruded anodized aluminum tracks, which are in turn suspended from the primary structure, a turquoise-painted steel frame.

The color selection for the steel references turquoise beads encountered in the tribe's archaeological record. Turquoise beads have cultural significance not only for this tribe but also for Native communities across the Americas. The beads in the tribe's treasure likely arrived in Louisiana via a continent-wide Indigenous trade network.

To streamline installation and ensure precision, the baguette grid was divided into prefabricated panels. Each panel was assembled in the fabrication shop, allowing for faster on-site installation and tighter quality control. This modular approach also reduced the complexity of aligning the pattern across the entire brise-soleil.

From certain angles, the clerestory glazing acts as a mirror for the baguette pattern, as shown in the photo. This mirrored image creates the illusion that the screen continues into the building.

Looking upward through the brise-soleil, the viewer experiences the inverse of the shadow pattern: the solid structure silhouetted against the brightness of the sky. The result is a dynamic interplay between light, structure, and perception.

A-130.10



Interior finishes cohere with the exterior palette. Porcelain floor tiles extend the warmth of the tan brick throughout interior spaces. Acoustical wall panels with a light maple veneer finish, used both at the reception desk (right photo) and throughout the courtroom, combine this warmth with sonic performance.

Carpet tiles and upholstery on chairs feature blue hues that nod to the turquoise-painted steel. Red accents, such as the vertical pulls on the main entry doors (left photo), connect to the terra cotta baguettes and brick pavers outside.

The red tones of the tribe's cultural center, located across the access road, are reflected in the storefront glazing in the left photo.



A-130.11

The passage of time and sun is visible during court proceedings. A shifting trail of light moves across the courtroom floor throughout the day, casting lacy brise-soleil shadows throughout the space.

Light wood panels provide acoustical treatment along the rear wall behind the audience and behind the judge's bench, complementing the golden cypress tone used at the ceiling. The jury box and attorney area are carpeted, while the public seating area is finished with porcelain tile, establishing a subtle threshold between the two zones.

From any seat in the room, the clerestory glazing offers a consistent upward view of the terracotta screen silhouetted against the sky.



A-130.12

The courtroom follows a traditional court layout, with defined zones for the judge, jury, attorneys, and public.

The brise-soleil's intricate pattern reappears in the courtroom rails, which separate the public seating area from the courtroom floor. Economically assembled from common lumber and then tinted with a deep espresso stain, these rails feature the same pattern generated through the scripting process used for the brise-soleil.

The tribal seal appears prominently above the judge's bench. The bench's casework features a light wood tone in keeping with the ceiling and acoustical panels.

Centering the judge in a courtroom that is inherently asymmetrical due to its relationship to other parts of the program as well as site constraints posed a design challenge. The solution was found in resourceful deployment of window openings. At the exterior wall behind the judge's bench, three of the four clerestory window bays allow the judge and the tribal seal to be centered on an opaque area of wall. A vertical band of glazing in the fourth bay at the jury box frames the view to the exterior.

This solution can be seen in the interior photo at left and also in the exterior photo on the next slide.



A-130.13

The resulting project is minimal yet complex, a layered interplay of light, pattern, material, and time. It honors the deep memory of the tribe it was built for through symbolic elements which compound upon each other, presenting themselves in multiple ways which are always in motion.

The building looks toward both the future of tribal governance and of the people it is intended to serve.

Project Name:
Tunica-Biloxi Courthouse and
Police Headquarters

Project Location:
Marksville, Louisiana

Owner/Client:
Tunica-Biloxi Tribe of Louisiana

Architect(s) of Record:
(names and addresses)
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Lafayette, Louisiana 70501

Project Team:
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Landscape Architect:
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Consultants:
MEPF Engineers: Salas O'Brien,
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Structural Engineers: Innovative Structural
Consultants, Houston, Texas
Civil Engineers: Pan American Engineers,
Alexandria, Louisiana

General Contractor:
Rusk Construction
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A-130.x

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