

Program Summary:

A culturally rooted center fusing European tradition and modern function, celebrating heritage through space, cuisine, and community to preserve legacy for future generations.

Program Statement:

Completed in 2023, this culturally rooted community center was conceived as both a vessel of heritage and a living extension of tradition. The design aimed to create a place where identity is celebrated through the language of vernacular architecture from their homeland with the rhythm of communal life.

Spanning just over 9,000 SF, the building anchors the site with an indoor hall that accommodates up to 200 guests. A 3,600 SF open-air pavilion expands gathering capacity, and thoughtful site planning supports seamless circulation for events welcoming as many as 800 attendees.

Two full-service kitchens, including one designed specifically for oyster grilling and roasting, reflect the culinary rituals that define the community's annual festivals. During these events, volunteers prepare hundreds of chargrilled oysters in an efficient, communal setting—transforming the building into a stage for memory, flavor, and celebration. Material selection was deliberate. Exterior stone and reclaimed timber recall the vernacular of coastal European architecture, grounding the building in a sense of place and history. A hand-built oyster shell wall, created by community members, honors the deep connection between people, landscape, and heritage. In addition to event space, the facility includes administrative offices and meeting rooms to support year-round programming and operations. Every design element, from spatial organization to material expression, serves the project's larger goal: to preserve cultural legacy while offering a welcoming, functional space for many generations. This project is a celebration of identity, expressed in structure, community, and tradition.

A-150.01

Building Area: (sf)
9,000 SF

Cost per Square Foot:
\$577

Construction Cost
\$5.2M

Date of Completion:
2023



A-150.02

INTRODUCTION

Our team was honored to partner with the Croatian American Society to design their new cultural center in Belle Chasse, Louisiana—the original settlement of Croatian immigrants dating back to the 1800s.

Today, this vibrant community continues to shape the region, leading the oyster industry, global shipping, culinary arts, construction, and numerous professional fields. Their contributions to the fabric of New Orleans are as enduring as they are inspiring, deeply informing the design choices throughout this culturally significant project.

The importance of this new center was underscored by the presence of the President and First Lady of Croatia, who attended the grand opening ceremony alongside the Archbishop of New Orleans.



A-150.03

EXTERIOR VIEW

Through a collaborative and iterative process, stakeholders and the design team exchanged imagery and inspiration to establish a shared vision. After a series of thoughtful meetings, a clear direction emerged, guiding the development of conceptual schematics. These early studies also explored interior concepts and artistic elements, ensuring a cohesive and culturally resonant design.

Designed as a living tribute to culture and community, this facility seamlessly blends architectural elegance with functionality, creating a dynamic space where heritage is celebrated and connections are forged.

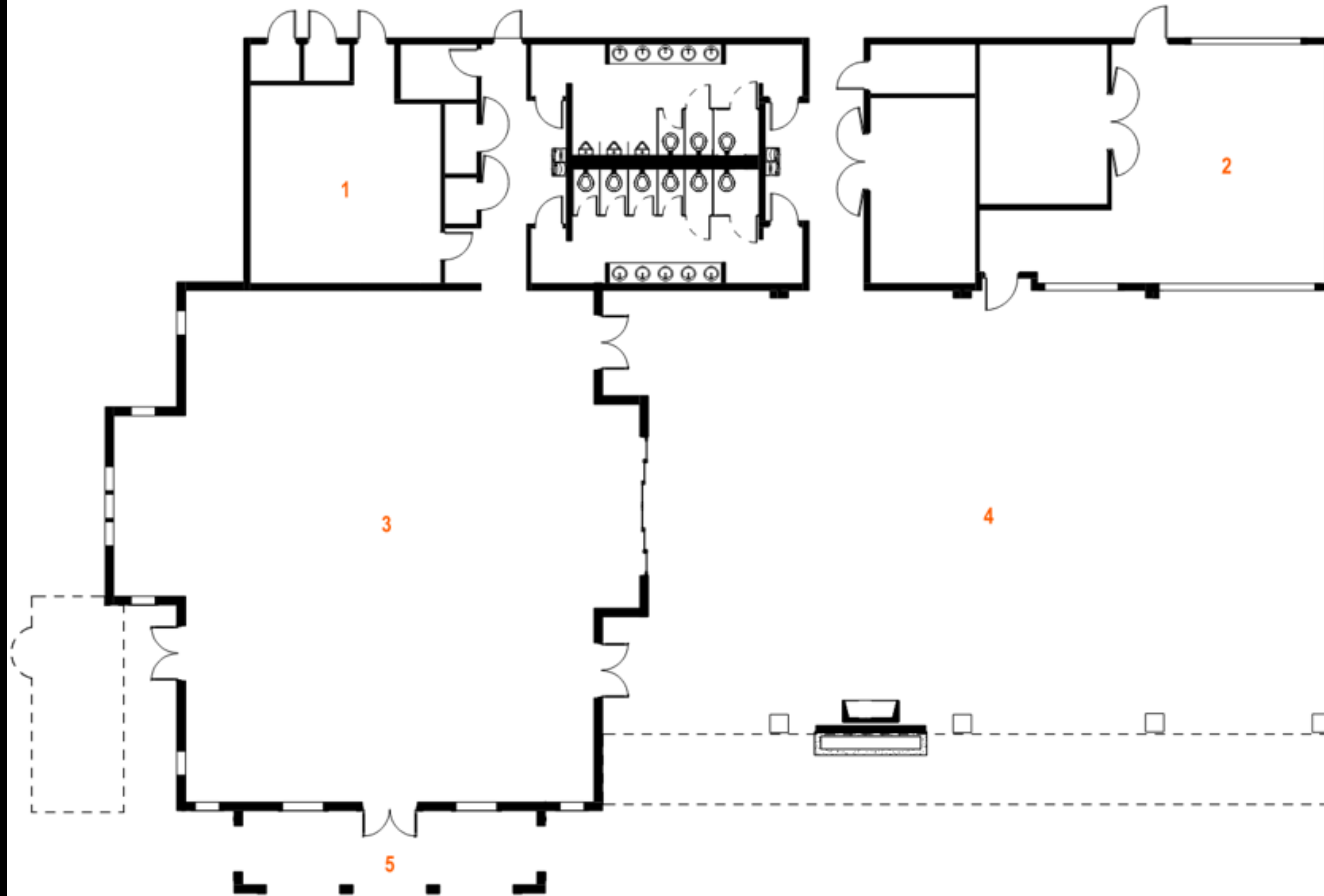


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FLOOR PLAN

- 1 Indoor Kitchen
- 2 Outside Grill
- 3 Event Hall
- 4 Exterior Pavilion
- 5 Entry Porch

The program called for a community hall to host morning gatherings where members of the Croatian community meet for coffee, prayers, and meetings. The space also needed to accommodate receptions, festivals, communal dinners, and large celebrations tied to significant Croatian religious holidays.





A-150.05

A HOME AWAY FROM HOME

The aesthetic vision for the cultural center was rooted in the architecture of their homeland—classical in style, with an emphasis on stone, symmetry, and enduring proportions.

The goal was to create an embassy of sorts, serving as both a symbolic and functional hub for the Croatian community and their extended network of friends.



A-150.06

EVENT SPACE FOR CULTURAL CELEBRATION AND CONNECTION

The 3,600 SF outdoor pavilion is a comfortable space for community gatherings and events. The maximum capacity for the property is 800 people.

The building hosts an annual cultural and heritage fest, a lively celebration featuring traditional dances, oysters, local seafood, coastal European beer and wine, and historical displays.



A-150.07

OUTDOOR PATIO & LOUNGE SPACE

The outdoor patio and lounge space extends the building's cultural vision, blending seamlessly with the landscape through natural materials and dynamic design. Thoughtfully crafted seating areas and soft lighting create an inviting atmosphere for both intimate gatherings and large-scale community events.

The space offers guests a chance to relax and engage in a vibrant, open-air setting. This design elevates the experience, encouraging connection and celebration within a space that is as functional as it is visually striking.





A-150.08

INDOOR DINING ROOM & COMMERCIAL KITCHEN

The indoor dining room offers a sophisticated, inviting space for up to 200 guests, with natural light and scenic views that seamlessly connect interior and exterior.

Adjacent, the commercial kitchen is optimized for efficiency and designed to support high-volume event programming.

A dedicated oyster grilling area celebrates culinary traditions, ensuring quality preparation for large-scale gatherings.

The lighting above the bar was intentionally chosen to evoke the form of fishing rods—a subtle but meaningful nod to the Croatian community's deep-rooted ties to the fishing industry.





A-150.09

CRAFTED BY COMMUNITY

To celebrate and honor their deep roots in oyster farming, members of the society installed hundreds of oyster shells spanning an entire wall.

The dense and striking arrangement is meticulously affixed to the surface, creating a monolithic, textured, natural mosaic. Soft downlighting enhances the visual impact of the shell-covered wall.



A-150.10

CONCLUSION: A CULTURAL
HAVEN FOR CONNECTION AND
CELEBRATION

This project stands as a living expression of heritage, bringing together history, community, and design. It provides a place where tradition is celebrated, identities are honored, and connections are forged, creating a lasting impact for generations to come.

Through thoughtful design and meaningful space, it transforms the experience of cultural celebration, ensuring that the past and future are always in dialogue.