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## Out of this World Spaceport Features Down-to-Earth Design

It looks like something out of a sci-fi movie: an undulating glass and steel structure set against an otherworldly landscape of cloudless sky and scrub-dotted desert, broken only by the sketch of a mountain range shimmering in the distance like an extraterrestrial mirage.

But this spaceport is no longer the stuff of fantasy, as Spaceport America has moved into a remote patch of desert about 30 miles southeast of Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. It's the world's first project of its kind, a commercial spaceport designed to convey the thrill of space travel while minimally impacting the environment.

In 2007 Albuquerque-based SMPC Architects and their collaborators, URS Corporation and Foster + Partners of London, won the contract to design the extraordinary, 110,000-square-foot structure, which marries the spaceport's hangar with its terminal facilities, thus allowing "citizen explorer" visitors to experience the full breadth of spaceport activities. Its \$35-million project budget was administered by the State of New Mexico and

the New Mexico Spaceport Authority (NMSA) on behalf of Sir Richard Branson's Virgin Galactic. Says SMPC Architects principal David M. Hassard, "Nothing like this had ever been done before. We had to be patient and learn our way. It takes time to do that. And, [in keeping with] Virgin Galactic's philosophy, we were interested in safety first."

The firm also wished to respect Sir Branson's imperative that form and function should minimize environmental impact. Built with local materials and modeled after the nearby Point of Rocks outcropping, the terminal is set into the hillside earthship-style, a single story high at its far end and three stories at its south-facing entrance, which takes advantage of passive solar heating and cooling. The LEED Gold-certified facility is also solar- and wind-powered, utilizes radiant underfloor heating and cooling, and maximizes water efficiency with low-flow toilets and fixtures, xeriscaping, and 100 percent nonpotable reuse of wastewater treated onsite. Specially coated floor-to-ceiling glass curtains

A conceptual rendering of Spaceport America. The world's first commercial facility for space travel brings sci-fi style to the NM desert near Truth or Consequences.



COURTESY OF NEW MEXICO SPACEPORT AUTHORITY

The real-life version of Spaceport America presents an intriguing form that blends well with the surrounding landscape and features innovative use of available materials and sustainable technologies.

reduce heat transfer and allow for extraordinary views of both the surrounding landscape and the two-mile-long north-south runway.

The design was unique enough to have won the 2014 Jeff Harnar Award for Contemporary Architecture in New Mexico. Says the award's jury chair, Michael Fifield, "This iconic facility seeks inspiration from the context of the surrounding landscape, resulting in a powerful form, but one that blends with the larger context and landscape framework of the region. While providing Spaceport America a memorable identity, the design also demonstrates the innovative utilization of available materials and current technologies, incorporating proven sustainable practices."

SMPC will dedicate the \$10,000 award monies to its Endowment for Sustainable Design at the University of New Mexico School of Architecture and Planning.

The project is also generating vital revenue for the NMSA, inspiring companies including J. Crew to film commercials onsite. And in the spaceport's first—but undoubtedly not last—link to science fiction, it stars in a scene from Will Smith's 2013 movie *After Earth*. —Rachel Preston Prinz



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