



“Very Good Architectural Practice:” Hunter Xci Polyiso at UND’s Wilkerson Commons



The University of North Dakota’s Wilkerson Commons, set to reopen this year, incorporates a terra cotta rain screen system integrated with a Hunter Xci Polyiso-based continuous insulation solution. Rendering courtesy of SCB.

To help the students of the University of North Dakota (UND), Grand Forks, N.D., enjoy more daylight on cold winter days, the university’s main food service center underwent a \$29 million renovation in 2015.

Solomon Cordwell Buenz (SCB) of Chicago, Ill. and JLG Architects of Grand Forks, both award-winning architectural firms, were commissioned to redesign and modernize the 46 year-old center. Today Wilkerson Commons is a showcase facility, featuring a dramatic 250-foot long “ribbon of glass” and an innovative terra cotta rainscreen system that integrates a continuous insulation (ci) solution with Hunter Xci Polyiso panels.

SCB design principal James Curtin, AIA, SCB senior designer Mike Thompson, AIA, and envelope wall system contractor Jim Yeary of R.A.M., Inc. of Arcadia, Ind. comment on the project:

On Project Requirements

James Curtin: It’s a major building for the UND, highly visible to the public and the central food service unit for several large residence halls.

The default approach would have been to use brick. Terra cotta panels offer a more modern, engineered aesthetic that still preserves the look and feel of brick. Visually it makes sense, especially when you have a long run of glass underneath. The color falls right into place with the campus look.

Mike Thompson: We added many program elements in the update, such as study areas and a modern food service area. But the big requirement was to extend daylight throughout the building. Even if it’s -30°F outside, students want to eat and study in natural light. Now there’s ample storefront and a window wall across both floors.

On Specifying the R.A.M. EXO CI Framing System

Jim Yeary: There was consideration of a competing framing system that uses Galvalume®, a coated-steel rail. Galvalume is a 30-35 year solution. Our framing rails are made of heavy aluminum, rated at 75 years. Then compare insulation R-values between a Hunter Xci Polyiso panel and extruded. Hunter Xci R-value is 13. Extruded is just 10. Owners love the R-value bonus of Hunter Xci.

Mike Thompson: Older systems break the insulation, which means thermal transfer to the back wall. The Hunter Xci panel system seamlessly braces the insulation against the building sheeting, eliminating thermal transfer. The university liked the improved envelope performance. Meeting code wasn’t an issue. The Hunter Xci system has passed all tests including NFPA 285 certification.

James Curtin: The rain screen system means the trades don’t have to wait on the bearing wall to be built. Once the back wall is up, they’re free to proceed without any in-fill insulation to slow them down. That’s a big benefit. We had a very aggressive delivery schedule.

On Best Architectural Practice

James Curtin: Every campus is different. We never take a one-size-fits-all approach. But I can say most campuses are open to building with the proven technology of the day. A terra cotta rain screen with a continuous insulation wrap is a rock-solid option. It’s very good architectural practice. ●

A terra cotta rain screen system integrated with a Hunter Xci Polyiso-based continuous insulation solution is fast becoming a popular specification option. Architects and owners like the blend of a warm, natural earth-based material with a crisp, engineered appearance and superior all-weather performance characteristics and long life. To learn more about boosting envelope performance with Hunter Xci Polyiso panels, visit HunterXci.com/job-profiles.

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