



## ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE OF THE COURTS

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OFFICE OF COURT CONSTRUCTION  
AND MANAGEMENT

### DESIGN OVERVIEW: Portola Loyalton Courthouse

The Portola Loyalton Courthouse, designed by the Sacramento-based firm of Nacht & Lewis. The single-courtroom courthouse, located in Portola, a rural alpine community north of Truckee, serves the Superior Courts of Plumas and Sierra Counties, making it the first multi-jurisdictional courthouse built in California. It is also the first trial court project to be managed start to finish by the Administrative Office of the Courts.

#### **Project Overview**

The building exemplifies the state of California's efforts towards a more sustainable future. It allows for the sharing of resources between counties, minimizes travel to and from this remote location, and was designed so that local materials and labor could be used during construction.

#### **Design Approach**

The courthouse is nestled in a grove of 60' tall pines at an elevation of 4900 feet. The building needed to fit in well with the site and the community, both at home in a rural area and expressing the importance of its function as the seat of justice.

The approach also needed to employ proper snow country design principles, since Portola regularly receives several feet of snow from winter storms. Nacht & Lewis developed a design specific to the context of the site that fits harmoniously into its surroundings and appropriately represents the dignity of the courts—a building both timeless and of our time. The design is informed by regional architecture while simultaneously expressing contemporary qualities of form and detailing. Materials were selected which are durable and conjure feelings of stability and permanence. Scale was used where appropriate to convey importance and dignity.

#### **Features**

The building's key features include:

- A prominent transparent glazed entry vestibule and tall clerestoried lobby that bring in views and light.
- A covered walkway that welcomes visitors and protects them from snow and rain until they can enter the weather lock. The courtroom entry is clad in stone and is intended to represent a large hearth like you would find in a lodge. The entry is framed by a tall wood-clad backdrop that visitors pass through to access the courtroom. Two distinct seating areas flank the courtroom entry, providing privacy for opposing parties.

- A center-bench courtroom with carefully designed features. For example, the jury box is rotated slightly toward the judge's bench, and walls in the spectator area are slightly curved and tapered to reinforce the courtroom axis. The judge and clerk have a dedicated entry into the courtroom, designed so that clerks can enter and exit without disturbing or walking in front of the judge. The casework is carefully configured to enable documents to be passed efficiently between the clerk and the judge. The jury has a dedicated entry leading to the jury deliberation room in the secure portion of the courthouse. The litigation well provides generous space for counsel tables and room for additional tables if required. Power outlets, data jacks, and audio visual ports were carefully located to provide for maximum flexibility. The finishes in the courtroom draw from the exterior architecture and the building's structure, utilizing both Alaskan Red Cedar paneling and cherry wood trim. The acoustic performance was achieved by thoughtfully placed and detailed acoustic paneling.
- Use of materials that are often found in this mountainous region—cedar siding, stone, and zinc panel cladding. Exposed heavy timbers are used in the entry, lobby, and courtroom.

### **More Information**

More information about the project and photos are available at:

[www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/occm/projects\\_plumassierra.htm](http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/programs/occm/projects_plumassierra.htm)