



American Icon

An internationally beloved luncheon meat gains new notoriety with the creation of the SPAM™ Museum and an office building for Hormel Foods *By Camille LeFevre*



Design team (from left to right): Bryan Paulsen, AIA, Meray Massad-Rahme, Greg Borchert (not pictured), Michael Krager, AIA, and Lyn Dielenderfer.

It kept World War II soldiers fed, is considered a delicacy in Korea, will soon be on McDonald's breakfast menus throughout Hawaii and inspired a famous skit on "Monty Python's Flying Circus." It is SPAM®, of course, the pink-mottled luncheon meat in the rectangular blue and yellow can, introduced to the world by Hormel Foods in 1937.

Nearly as iconic as apple pie, the American processed-food product has garnered legions of fans and prompted countless jokes. There's no denying the power of SPAM. At the June 16 opening of the new SPAM™ Museum in Austin, designed by Paulsen Architects, Mankato, 30,000 people attended fes-

tivities headlined by NBC-TV news anchor Tom Brokaw and featuring a cookoff by TV moms Barbara Billingsley ("Leave It to Beaver"), Marion Ross ("Happy Days") and Debra Jo Rupp ("That '70s Show").

Perhaps it's culturally appropriate that the SPAM Museum and Hormel Foods Corporation Corporate Headquarters South are housed in a former Kmart. For Hormel Foods executives, practical concerns drove the decision. "We didn't want to build new and needed something in relatively short order," explains Larry Pfeil, vice president of engineering, Hormel Foods. "Austin is a relatively small community, so we had a limited number of buildings to choose from."



The old Kmart was close to the existing corporate office and I-90, had adequate square footage and was easily adaptable. For the design team, the challenge was “how we could modify the exterior to convey, first, the image of Hormel Foods as a corporate entity and, second, a lighter, more playful image for the museum,” says Bryan Paulsen, AIA, principal, Paulsen Architects.

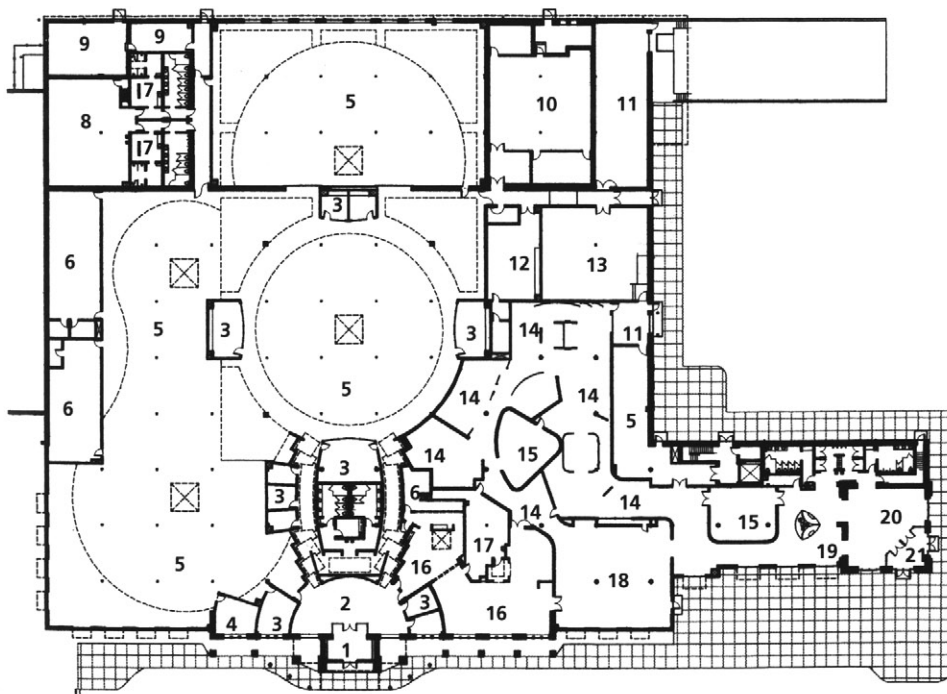
The design concept Paulsen chose was of a historic farmers’ market. Research from farmer’s markets throughout the United States and Canada indicated masonry buildings with gable roofs, arched windows and high volumes of interior space. “They were grand old buildings with lots of light and brick,” Paulsen says.

The image seemed appropriate for the agriculture-based *Fortune* 500 company and reflected southern Minnesota’s ties to a farm-based economy. In addition, the Paulsen team discovered the site had once been used as a farmers’ market. Furthermore, downtown Austin—located a block away—hosts the community’s current farmers’ market on weekends. For all of these reasons, the “old-market concept seemed appropriate,” Pfeil says.

On the north end of the 77,000-square-foot building, the former auto-service wing of the Kmart was a natural for the museum. The exterior of the 24,000-square-foot museum features



The north end of an abandoned Kmart (top) was converted into the farmers'-market-style SPAM™ Museum, with colorful interiors that include a lobby with a cyber café (above) and corridors leading to interactive exhibits (left).



Floor plan

1. Corporate entrance
2. Reception
3. Conference room
4. Office
5. Open office
6. Storage
7. Locker room
8. Exercise room
9. Mechanical room
10. Computer room
11. Receiving
12. Mail room
13. Catalog fulfillment
14. Exhibit
15. Auditorium
16. Coffee shop/caterer
17. Kitchen
18. Gift shop
19. Cyber café
20. Museum lobby
21. Museum entrance

the red brick, arched windows and gable roof reminiscent of an old farmers' market. A blue-metal roof and awnings, in conjunction with blue and yellow signage, represent the colors of the SPAM logo.

The design included raising a portion of the roof in the auto bay and removing a corner of the building to create the high spacious museum entry. On entering the museum, visitors pass through a cyber café where they can access Hormel Foods's Web page. They can browse in the gift shop, visit the auditorium and participate in a quiz show, don white frocks and hard hats and work on a simulated SPAM production line, watch holograms of World War II veterans lauding the benefits of SPAM or visit 20 different exhibits.

"The whole museum is playful, tongue-in-cheek, but includes historical components, too," Paulsen says. While the exhibits were created by Design Craftsmen, Inc., Midland, Michigan, the Paulsen team "created the environment for the exhibits, providing the consultants with construction methodologies to build economically and true to their vision."

On the south end of the building is the more conservative \$3,000-square-foot Hormel Foods Corporation Corporate Headquarters South. The client "didn't want to confuse its customers with entry points," Paulsen says, "so we created an entry canopy and image that is more corporate and different identification signage for each entrance, and tied the two buildings together with common masonry."

The design team also converted the cavernous warehouse space into light-filled, comfortable work areas for 182 people, with room to grow. From a central hub, which is sur-



The south end of the building was converted into corporate headquarters for Hormel Foods (opposite side), with light-filled comfortable interiors (above) and a coffee shop serving both employees and museum visitors (left).

rounded by curved-wall conference rooms, the space swings out into various departments, each of which has a common informal break-out space with a skylight. Cable for electronics and data access (as well as HVAC ducts) are located beneath a raised floor to allow a flexible "plug-and-play system" throughout the office.

Completed in 2001, the conversion of an old Kmart into an international tourist destination, which has seen more than 60,000 visitors thus far, has garnered "nothing but positives from the people who work here, from the community and from the public," Pfeil says.

"I've only heard ringing endorsements for the museum and about everything that's been accomplished here," he adds, confirming the cultural and culinary potency of the ubiquitous luncheon meat that continues undiminished after 65 years.

**SPAM™ Museum and Hormel Foods Corporation
Corporate Headquarters South
Austin, Minnesota
Paulsen Architects
Mankato, Minnesota**