

Business Name: Lake|Flato Architects ID # : 15

Location: San Antonio, TX, USA

Contact: Tenna Florian, Associate Partner, tflorian@lakeflato.com
Three year revenue stream? Yes

Stream: SHELTERING – Businesses that enable transitions across space and time: living spaces and habitats, e.g. planners, designers, builders, ecologists, forest products, remediation, restoration, hotels, workspaces.

Wholes: (vs parts/fragments): *Take into account each Beneficiaries' life, not just purchases, in creating effects in their world. Engage as an autonomous self-determining entity.*

Response: Lake|Flato aims to evolve whole systems inside and outside the firm by creating environments that enrich communities and nurture life in each unique place through design innovation and thought leadership. Our dynamic firm's business approach is not just about designing buildings, but using the design and construction process as an instrument for developing all entities associated with the firm and affecting the larger living systems in which each project is nested by serving to develop the capacity of all stakeholders; this approach is coupled with active educational programs aimed at helping others see their participatory role they play in evolving the vitality and viability of each place indefinitely.

Lake|Flato recently established several initiatives that enable our firm to explore and develop this approach by building our capacity to nurture life and contribute to larger community health. One such initiative is the establishment of an inclusive research and development program that empowers individuals and small groups to pursue ideas and projects that play a core role in the success of the whole (firm) and nested wholes (community and/or industry). We actively engage stakeholder participation and perspectives to help us discover and co-create means for leveraging our current strengths (our essence – connecting people to nature and place) and the role Lake|Flato plays in regeneration. Some examples of this approach include:

- For over 5 years, our 1+ pro bono program has allowed young employees the opportunity to bring work into the firm for communities and non-profits with which they are associated. We are thereby furthering our potential to amplify and serve community engagement efforts by combining our 1+ program, existing advocacy efforts, and our new research and development program. We hope this will better position our firm as a disrupting influence that encourages organizations outside our firm and profession to volunteer and promote regenerative thinking in the place in which they are nested.
- Communing through establishment of peer networks and strategic partnerships where, together, we can achieve systems actualization at larger living systems levels. We believe this expands our capacity and capability to use the built environment as an instrument for advocating and developing common causes so that our industry can build its capacity to more effectively transform the health of each place.
- Promoting transparency by publishing what we do and how we do it to help beneficiaries (inside and outside the firm, students, etc.). This form of leadership has resulted in other organizations sharing discoveries and emerging potential with each other, accelerating the capacity of our profession, thus enabling us to collectively engage thinking partners to engage business practices aligned with regenerative principles.
- Using our office space as a demonstration instrument and living laboratory. We aim to create a healthy and collaborative work environment that reflects our essence and aim. These efforts strengthen both the culture of the Lake|Flato community and serve as concrete living examples to help others more clearly image the effects of their renovation and development projects.
- Creating "stretch" goals that take us outside our comfort range as architects to work more holistically with living systems beyond the building and site. We believe this leverages our strengths and deep commitment to connecting more meaningfully humans with nature, while ensuring that our projects consistently achieve aggressive performance goals and transformative effects. We provide the industry with examples that inspire other design firms to push their boundaries and develop their capacity to produce work that effectively engages Regenerative First Principles.

Essence (vs Averages/Commonalities): *Working with and from Essence and expression of Essence, for own offerings and for beneficiaries. "One of One"*

Response: Our essence is rooted in the belief that humans can deepen our connection with the natural world through the process of design and habitation. While architects may traditionally be seen as designers of buildings alone, we see buildings as instruments for engaging a much more holistic scope, where architecture merges with landscape — where humans are nature, and enclosed interior spaces actively engage the outdoors, blurring the line between inside and out beyond recognition. Similarly, our work seeks to learn from the authenticity of vernacular architecture and the particulars of each place, then to innovate through the development of local craft, local materials, copious daylight, experiential water and energy conservation, and most importantly, becoming part of the landscape.

As such, we continually grow our will to work as partners with the unique and singular land and place associated with each project. As our firm has grown along with the size, range, and complexity of our projects, this approach becomes increasingly resonant.

Lake|Flato has been at the forefront of the sustainable design movement and paving the way for architectural design that values appropriate and effective engagement with the local ecology over the invention of "interesting form." Consequently, Lake|Flato is unique and non-displaceable both within its region and within its industry for our commitment to demonstrating how place-sourced high performance design is at the same time smart, beautiful, developmental, and profitable, as evidenced by an average of 18 design awards and honors received annually. Lake|Flato has been honored with ten national AIA Committee on the Environment (COTE) Top Ten Green Project Awards in the past ten years, the only firm in the world to have achieved this. The firm was also recognized by the Interior Design Magazine Hall of Fame, an award of lifetime achievement in the design field, and was named one of Fast Company's 2016 Top 10 Most Innovative Companies in Architecture. Lake|Flato's Josey Pavilion in Decatur is the first Living Building in the State of Texas and in the entire Gulf Coast Region— further testament to the firm's disruptive design leadership. As a leader in the architectural profession, Lake|Flato has held sacred the responsibility of how our work serves as a guide for elevating and advancing the design thinking of the industry, holding the belief that our work serves to transform the building industry, regenerate the livelihood of communities, and build the capacity of our employees and associated co-creators to think regeneratively.

Enrique Norten, Hon. FAIA, of TEN Arquitectos in Mexico said, "Lake Flato is a very unique firm in the U.S., who has achieved a very well deserved position as one of the best national architecture practices by being very local. Lake Flato has been committed since their founding to reinventing the architecture of a very specific region of the Americas. Their work has radiated in concentric circles of architectural wisdom from their beloved San Antonio, influencing both Texas and surrounding Southern States of the U.S., and Northern Mexico."

Potential (vs. problems/ideals): *See specific entity engaging, increasingly, in a value-adding process to bring specific benefit to those they effect*

Response: OWe understand that the most effective way to create architecture that serves regeneration is to understand what the land's role has always been prior to development. What is its essence? What is the trajectory of its potential, grounded in its deep history of patterns across geological, hydrological, biological, and socio-economic systems? We engage our clients by helping them see the importance of connecting building inhabitants to the particulars of each place. Not long ago, we started using the term "biophilic design" to describe one aspect of this deep connection with (and love of) nature/living systems, but that began to seem like just another way to describe what we've been doing for the last 30 years, rather than evolving our thinking to aim at potential as a means for reconciling the land's essence with its development. We then began asking, "How does one serve the land and its inhabitants through restorative design?" But this also started becoming insufficient for

us when aiming toward manifesting potential. So we began shifting to ask how we might engage a regenerative approach and assess the resulting effects. The first step in moving us, and other firms, in the direction of achieving these goals was to explore a reference ecosystem in San Antonio (our place) to serve as an instrument for helping us develop deeper understanding of how to work with the essence of a place we thought we knew well, using this exploration to help us assess potential effects of regenerative design “at home”. We have begun using this approach to assess the performance and regenerative effects of local existing projects, but more importantly, as a means for developing our capacity to inform future projects in this region. Using this holistic approach, we can address how to help our clients’ pursue their aims more effectively by strengthening the connection between their built environment their community, and nature in their particular place. We have a plan to publish these experiences, their effects, and associated design principles in order to hopefully enable the profession to use projects to authentically connect people to the living systems where they live and work . . . to align our approach with helping develop the potential for local ecosystems to reciprocally serve larger regional systems and the inhabitants of both, and to help integrate comprehensive ecosystems impacts into planning and decision-making processes across interrelated municipalities and public agencies. The end goal is for there to be a living evolving database that provides the information needed for any firm, building in this (and ultimately any) region to grow their understanding of what patterns and principles are necessary to guide and inform a fully regenerative approach that aims at manifesting the potential of each particular site and place.

Developmental (vs. manipulatively): *Grow and develop each or all entities, uniquely, focusing on increasing capacity to be vital, viable, and able to evolve. (Human thinking skills and personal self-management)*

Response: Outside of the office, Lake|Flato believes that community engagement is vital to a design’s success. Through research and integrative design charrettes, our firm reaches out to community members as key stakeholders in any project; as such, we serve as collaborative architects, educators, environmental stewards, and community advocates.

Our integrative design process is an approach that involves all building project team members – including the owner or building committee, users, designers, engineers, contractors, and invested community members. We encourage team members to stretch across their disciplines to gain a more complete understanding of the project, giving everyone ownership of both the process and the finished product. This puts a process into motion to align around beliefs, philosophies, and principles before co-creating a conceptual idea before any strategies or “design” activities are engaged so that we can create a cohesive road map, underscored by guiding principles, along with measurable goals and metrics.

In one recent project for a research laboratory on the Gulf Coast in Mississippi, we began our process by aligning the team around an emerging understanding that resilience would be a key guiding principle for the owner. The client lost classrooms, laboratories, administrative offices, and exhibition areas to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, and seven years later, when Lake|Flato had begun schematic design for the replacement facility, Hurricane Isaac roared through the site. Designing for resilience on this project was redefined through the integrative design process, as the project team and client began with direct experience of the need for resilience through the lens of thinking about both acute natural disasters and longer-term effects, along with expectations about materials to be assessed for their durability in the salty environment. At the initial charrette that kicked off the integrative design process, the design and construction team came to the conversation with research that went beyond just durability and site analysis on buffered zones, to assessing the impacts of building material selection on marine life and local ecosystem health. “All buildings eventually end up in the ocean,” said a client representative at the meeting, articulating the unfortunate reality of rising storm surges that dwarf events of recent memory as well as historical benchmarks. For example, plastics are among the worst ocean contaminants, so plastic-based products were avoided in the project, and although zinc and copper are often favored for their durability, they also can leach into the watershed and wreak havoc on aquatic life; therefore, the team selected pre-weathered Galvalume coated with an alloy to resist corrosion. This inclusive co-learning process brought together and reconciled a diverse range of experience and knowledge to maximize the team and project’s potential impact and

develop the best strategies to support that potential. . . . then design began.

We are also involved (and are encouraging other firms to get involved) in transforming the built environment at scales larger than our buildings. From policy, to city/community planning, to infrastructure, we have positioned ourselves to influence discussion and ultimately influence the built environment industry. We have engaged in public dialogue and policy processes where we have had significant impacts in changing policies and regulations in a number of municipalities.

Nested (vs. Flatland): *Understand life as embedded within greater and lesser systems, each playing a role in the success of the whole and other nested wholes.*

Response: Lake|Flato seeks to transform the built environment by building our and others' capacity to use building design, construction, and operations as instruments for developing reciprocal processes of exchange between humans and the non-human natural world by deepening our understanding each site's role in serving the larger living system in which each site is nested. . . . and by deepening the human connection to the natural world through direct personal experience. The constructive disruption we create is transforming the field of architecture to value such exchange. While architects may traditionally be seen as designers of buildings alone, we see buildings as instruments for engaging a much more holistic scope, where architecture merges with and becomes part of the landscape both functionally and spiritually — where humans are nature, and enclosed interior spaces actively engage the outdoors, blurring the line between inside and out beyond recognition. Lake|Flato also looks to nature and regional climatic conditions to inform building performance, conserving scarce resources and leveraging abundant resources through passive strategies. Our approach reflects deep consideration for client and living systems as interdependent and reciprocally interrelated stakeholders.

One project that exemplifies this is the Shangri La Botanical Gardens and Nature Center in Orange, Texas. Shangri La connects visitors of all ages with nature through direct personal experience, and serves as an interpretive center for the 252-acre site's native ecosystems (cypress and tupelo swamp, wooded uplands, and prairie lowlands) as well as a facility for study and research. Hands-on learning opportunities are provided through a laboratory, an interactive children's garden, classroom and exhibition greenhouses, outdoor classrooms located deep in the cypress swamp, and a water demonstration garden that shows how plants filter pollution from water. The project began with the restoration (aimed at ultimately regenerating the health) of the land, which had been closed to the public for 50 years. Circulation is outdoors, often under wide canopies that protect from sun and rain. The structures in the natural areas were designed for minimal impact and maximum potential for the land's vitality by floating above the land on helical pier foundations with all systems powered by the site's sun exposure with photovoltaic panels. In September 2005, at the beginning of construction, the Shangri La property sustained a direct hit from Hurricane Rita, which provided salvaged fallen trees that were incorporated the new facility and replaced with tree species and plantings selected to develop additional local wildlife and hydrology.

Nodal Systems (vs. Prioritizing): *Point of highest and most systemic return. a single point or set of points are recognized as most effective for systemic regeneration.*

Response: Lake|Flato sees each project as a means for exploring how a nodal concentration of the associated convergent energies, efforts, and economic resources can serve to produce larger regenerative impacts that this work can have on nested living system scales – from individual occupants to the larger community to the watershed. The Josey Pavilion project is an excellent example of how a project can be used to shift the initial intent of the client group by evolving their mission to reach beyond the initial scope and effect larger systems while, at the same time, informing our process on future projects.

The client was the Dixon Water Foundation and their initial goals for this project were clear: Design a comfortable meeting and education facility for those coming to learn how the Foundation uses livestock as a tool to restore our native prairies and create healthier watersheds. The facility was to have no active heating or cooling and be designed to adapt to weather conditions on any particular day. This led to a building that could fold and unfold

based on temperature and wind conditions, a building that embraces the simplicity and serenity of the North Texas prairie while serving as a lens through which the land is better understood and appreciated experientially. This vision broadened once we approached the client with the idea of creating a Living Building that would seek the same ecological equilibrium achieved at Dixon Water Foundation ranches, while creating an immersive experience of biophilic place. The building now tells a much stronger story by both telling and “being” the story of the Dixon Water Foundation in order to foster a deeper understanding of interrelated reciprocal benefits and processes of rangeland conservation, watershed restoration, and prairie regeneration, while at the same time achieving carbon sequestration and water, energy, and ecosystems balance.

The effect this building has had on the surrounding community that uses the property for meetings of local ranchers and for schoolchildren to learn more about the value of the native prairie, is best stated by Dr. Lisa Bellows, a North Central Texas College biology professor that uses the facility regularly, “The pavilion is a place for learning and gathering, for laughing schoolchildren with muddy hands and ranchers swapping stories and strategies. But it is also a space for tranquility. There is no omnipresent mechanical whirring that pervades the soundtrack to most Texans’ indoor lives. Seated in the herbarium or resting on the porch, you can listen deeply, to the prairie silence, or the shush of grasses and quiet clatter of oak leaves in a breeze. You feel tapped into a purposeful stillness, like being in the middle of a grazing herd, one being working dutifully among many, interconnected in a balanced whole.”

Systemic Reciprocity (vs. Transactional): *Operating within living dynamic processes, making fitting" contributions that benefit systemic health with care for contributions and outcomes for all.*

Response: Lake|Flato’s 30-years of engaging processes of exchange employs practical strategies that explore and develop deepening interrelationships between human and ecological health. We have programs and initiatives in place to ensure that we are serving the well-being of our employees, external team members, and clients. One such simple practical example includes a comprehensive approach to managing health and commuting: In every year for the past decade, the firm has won honors in the Alamo Area Council of Governments’ Walk & Roll Corporate Challenge, which recognizes local companies for using alternative forms of commuting transportation. Lake|Flato offers employees various incentives and will-building strategies to encourage walking or biking to work, along with conducting an office-wide alternative commuting transportation plan, which achieved an initial trip reduction of 44%. The firm also offers financial incentives to individuals that participate in our health insurance’s wellness program, which tracks healthy habit indicators such as nutrition, exercise, and routine medical visits. Other examples includes programs initiated by Lake|Flato in 2008 aimed at reducing our collective carbon footprint by helping employees and associated professionals understand the effects of their choices, and then offsetting 100% of our office CO2 emissions through the non-profit organization, Carbonfund. Lake|Flato has also opted to offset not only our electricity usage, but our annual firm-wide travel mileage as well. Our annual contribution supports several carbon offset projects including renewable energy, energy efficiency, and reforestation. We have most recently recognized that these programs represent paradigms of arresting disorder and doing good, so we are now exploring and developing regenerative processes and programs aimed at developing the capacity of our employees to serve as change agents through directly experiencing the concrete and inspiring effects of directly interacting with non-human natural and living systems.

Link to video

<https://infoexchange.lakeflato.com/DownloadWeb/predownload.aspx?q=LR82FPL2GKZR6CXJ6HFWNFX6QKF62MHES2HFJWJE6DF9V5Y7PQZ87SB84MNUHGHLND2AAZXP54JLCPQ5U4DD2FHHKT95ZV43YANCTVQG8LQAHQTBM7EA8HMT4A5QSQBGA4MYET9NHJNJHEVPWRHBQ9C3MS2UZAJ9UQUQLW5ZKXP9GSHYKEHKW3VW>