



CYPRESS and 'Live Oak'—A Spectacular Combination

The new headquarters of Live Oak Bank in Wilmington, North Carolina, is a stunning reflection of the institution's attentiveness to the environment, its customers and the well-being of its employees. With views of tall trees, a pond and an occasional coyote, it's an employee's dream workplace. Couple that with the use of locally sourced cypress and the U-shaped building looks more like a recreational lodge than a bank!

Architect Laura Miller, principal at LS3P Architects in Wilmington, said the design for the 36,000-square-foot building was driven by her client's desire for a seamless transition from interior to exterior spaces. "The owner wanted the building to be as natural as possible—as if it had grown from the land and been there for years," she noted. "To add balance, we wanted to feature a soft material that would contrast with the vast expanses of glass. We knew early on that the exterior skin would be wood."

With the bank's determination to remain genuine to its coastal North Carolina roots, "Cypress was the perfect solution," Miller said, "not only due to its local availability, but also its natural durability and beautiful aesthetic qualities. Ultimately, we were able to use traditional building materials in a modern way, while optimizing views and daylighting. The result is spectacular."



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The versatile wood clads the exterior of the building as siding and soffits. “The natural aging process of cypress was appealing,” Miller added. “We decided to finish the wood with a clear sealant—no stain—to showcase its natural color. We are looking forward to watching the cypress weather to a light gray as time goes on.”

Use of the material continues to the interior, where it's incorporated as ceilings in the conference room, lounge, gym, and corridors. Custom cypress millwork also can be found at individual workstations throughout the building. In all, the visually striking structure features 50,000 board feet of cypress.

Lee Williams, vice chairman of Live Oak Bancshares and Live Oak Banking Company, said many people have preconceived notions about stuffy banks filled with suits, ties, and teller lines. “Here, we want our employees to work hard and deliver great service, but also feel comfortable like they do at home,” he added. “Our building and culture are reflections of those principles. You can see people walking around in shorts and flip flops in the summer.”

Because of its friendly, laid-back culture, Live Oak Bank has been ranked as one of the *Best Banks to Work For* in 2013 by *American Banker Magazine*. And, according to Williams, business has been good, too.

“We are in the process of creating a three-building campus and are starting construction on a bigger, 57,000-square-foot building,” Williams added. “We hope to stay ahead of future growth and have space for up to 500 employees. We really enjoy the cypress on the headquarters building, and plan on using it on this next one as well.”

For more information on building with cypress, please visit the Southern Cypress Manufacturers Association at www.CypressInfo.org.



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