



2008 Award of Excellence  
**AIA Montana Design Awards Program**  
Merit Award

Photography by MacArthur, Means & Wells



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## Currents

In 2004, a \$10.4 million dollar aquatic project began in Missoula. It was comprised of an indoor facility in McCormick Park (called Currents), an outdoor facility at Playfair (called Splash Montana) and four splash decks in neighborhood parks. The project was publicly funded through a bond. Unfortunately, by the time the project was bid, construction costs had soared due to global demands; as a result, all projects were reduced in scope, but ultimately not fun.

Currents is located along the Clark Fork River in the center of downtown Missoula. To the south is a historic lagoon, called Silver's Lagoon, where in the past kids and adults skated in the winter and fished in the warmer seasons; the lagoon used to be a holding pond for the mill located to the west of this site. Today, the minor league baseball stadium is just over the railroad bed to the west. Two softball fields, a ropes course, picnic area, basketball courts and a skatepark complete the offerings at McCormick Park. The existing outdoor pool was demolished and replaced with the Splash Montana facility and the 222,882 square foot building for the indoor facility called Currents was built.

The original concept of the Currents building basically survived and exists today as sloped, alternating roofs and building forms at different scales to reduce the size of the natatorium form. Log columns connect the project to this mountainous location and random window openings at the natatorium bring in dappled light, similar to that experienced in a forest. The natatorium is constructed of 11" pre-cast concrete panels. The accessory parts of the building, which include the lobby, a party room, a community/Parks & Rec meeting rooms, Parks & Recreation offices, locker rooms and mechanical spaces, are wood framed and clad in metal siding. Storefront systems on the south façade address sun issues. Through the 1% for Public Art program, a mural by Missoula artist James Todd was selected to adorn the building. It was sandblasted into the concrete panels on the east and south facades and then clear coated. The imagery is that of the natural world from the aquatic to the skies.

To the west of the lobby sits the natatorium and locker rooms. The locker rooms are for men only, women only and shared family. The locker rooms spill into the natatorium. With sloping ceiling heights from 25' to 33' above the finish floor in the natatorium, glu-lam beams and metal decking are supported by large diameter logs resting on concrete bases. Connecting members from the logs to the glu-lams emulate the branches of a tree. In keeping with the concept of this facility being in region, the colors and materials chosen were all natural/earth-toned and subdued. A zero-entry pool with bear slide and a floating otter allows a place for toddlers to play with parents nearby. At the south end of the zero-entry portion of the pool is a resistance swim channel that is used for exercise and physical therapy. Attached to this is a 25 yard lap pool used for lap swimming, exercise classes, kayak lessons and inner-tube water polo, to list a few. The lap pool is connected to a plunge pool with two 25' slides located in the southwest corner. A spa in the southeast corner provided a place to relax.

The south side of the natatorium spills out onto a concrete deck that has ground sprays and lounge chairs to encourage use of the facility in the summer. From both the interior and the exterior, there are excellent views of the pond and the mountains that surround the site and define Missoula.