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Welcome to Architecture Ahead 2003

It's been pretty heady, the last few years, seeing the cranes go up all over town. Vacant storefronts, empty lots, and whole city blocks are changing faster than most people make it off the beaten path, so a trip to the theater or a friend's new apartment can be full of surprises.

More and more, what’s breaking ground is also mending the city. Many of these upcoming projects seek to heal the scars lingering from the riots in 1968 and the Metro construction in the 1970s and ‘80s. Now architects know how to restore a historic façade for a new use inside, how to bring people with different incomes to live under the same roof, how to build a whole new neighborhood or bridge a gap that divided two.

Hannah McCann
Editor
ARCHITECTUREDC
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This spring, there's a new way to people-watch in Dupont Circle. An 84-foot-long glass addition has recently popped out of the side of the Jurys hotel, doubling the size of its restaurant. On warm days, the glass walls will pivot open.

"This is such a great location, but the restaurant didn't serve the hotel or the neighborhood very well," explains Griz Dwight, Assoc. AIA, the project architect at Adamstein & Demetriou Architects. The new glass addition is part of a revamped restaurant with what Dwight describes as a "very graphic scheme": creamy white walls framed by black wood trim, punches of orange color, and strategically placed etched mirrors to reflect activity. "The design should take the patron's eye through the space and give it a place to rest while dining," Dwight says.

In an unusual challenge, the architects were asked to design new construction that could be easily deconstructed. Zoning requires that projects on public space be completely demountable within 24 hours. Unbeknownst to locals, Kramerbooks and Raku and other popular people-watching sites could all disappear overnight if need be. In accordance, the Dupont Grill's new glass addition could be simply unbolted from the hotel; bifold doors would seal the opening from the street.
Summer 2003  
Federal Gateway  
New Jersey Avenue and M Street, SE  
Hickok Warner Fox Architects

Change is coming to the Navy Yard area of southeast DC. Developers see new residential, retail, and office buildings ahead. With the clearing of abandoned buildings at New Jersey and M, one of L'Enfant's triangular sites is about to host the bold architecture it deserves.

Anticipating future development, each façade of Federal Gateway will present a distinct expression. On the side directly facing the Navy Yard Metro station, a glass and precast concrete wrapper will envelop the building. "When you come up out of the escalator, the whole building will be unfolding before you, not unlike the way the National Building Museum does at Judiciary Square," says Laurence Caudle, AIA, the associate in charge of the project at Hickok Warner Fox Architects.

On the narrowest corner of the site, a strong vertical element will announce the building's presence up and down M Street and reinforce its stature—at 130 feet—as one of the tallest buildings around. In contrast, the L Street side is designed to have a less monumental presence because it is expected to eventually face a residential development. A through lobby will connect the 2nd Street side of the building, where a park and retail spaces are planned for the future, with the main New Jersey Avenue entrance.

"This is a real anchor for future development," says Caudle. "It's going to secure the area economically and encourage others to invest here."
Summer 2003

**U Street Metro Building**
13th & U Streets, NW

**CORE**

When Metro came to 13th and U in 1991, they paved over the whole corner lot. But the new station started a chain reaction on U Street that has led back to this corner, making its expanse of concrete look like unmined gold. Overshadowed by the distinctive profile of the National Minority AIDS Council (designed by CORE in the mid-1990s), the site will soon house a four-story office building. "It's urban infill—the ultimate form of recycling," says CORE project manager Ramon Santos.

A challenging set of parameters confronts the architects. The new building must squeeze between Metro's easements for sight lines, structure, and utilities. Set back from the escalators, around the elevators, and over the tunnels and pipelines, the building has taken on "a very oddly shaped floor plan," admits Dale Stewart, AIA, CORE managing principal.

Fitting into the neighborhood is another challenge. The site abuts traditional rowhouses to the south and early 20th-century commercial buildings to the east, with the historic Lincoln Theater across the street. The new construction will borrow historic details, such as precast concrete panels at the base, colored to resemble limestone (see sidebar for more information on precast concrete). Oversized windows make the brick-to-glass ratio similar to that of a historic industrial warehouse. In place of the stone cornices and lintels seen on historic buildings, steel will span above and below the windows. "We weren't trying to duplicate as much as reinterpret," explains Stewart.

"Most buildings on U Street are not as wide as our building," Stewart points out. To add verticality, CORE breaks the design into thirds, "almost like bookends with something in the middle," explains Santos. Each section has different detailing and brick color. "To a pedestrian, this is not going to seem like one very long building," Santos says.

At ground level, the project will host a series of commercial spaces catering to office workers from the new headquarters for the D.C. Department of Mental Health upstairs. "It will bring people to work in the community and a lunch crowd to increase vitality during the day," Stewart expects.

**Precast Concrete**

Precast concrete refers to precisely formed concrete building components that are made in a factory under controlled conditions and then sent to the building site as finished products ready for installation. Widely used for cladding the exteriors of buildings, precast concrete can be economical to produce and erect. Other cited advantages include consistent quality from factory casting; the ability to form pieces with custom sizes, shapes, and details; a range of possible colors and surface textures; an ability to carry structural loads; high durability; low maintenance; excellent fire resistance; and energy efficiency. For more information, see www.wapaprecast.org.

—R. O'R.
The outdated facilities of Annexes 8 and 9 (right) are being replaced with a new laboratory (above).

Fall 2003
Materials Testing Laboratory
401 Emerson Street, NE
Sorg and Associates, PC

To qualify for federal highway funds, the DC Department of Public Works must test the strength and durability of the construction materials it uses on road and utility projects. For the last 20 years, two temporary facilities called Annexes 8 and 9 have served as the testing laboratories, but with makeshift systems and limited space, they have been inadequate for many routine tests.

A new Materials Testing Laboratory is coming to Fort Totten, where it will share the site of the salt dome used by snow trucks in the winter. Before designing the new facility, Sorg and Associates master-planned the site, which is across the street from a neighborhood of two-story brick rowhouses. “We paid a lot of attention to noisy truck traffic and isolating the community from that,” explains principal in charge Suman Sorg, FAIA. “The lab building will be closest to the community, and it should be more compatible than a salt dome. That’s why it’s a linear building; it will screen the salt dome and the trucks. And it’s masonry on the exterior because the houses are brick.”

Sorg visited laboratories in Maryland for a crash course in the design of these facilities: every piece of equipment, how heavy it is, and all the emergency supplies, like eye washes and showers, that need to be on hand. Working around venting needs, the architects tried to put windows in every office and lab. Heavy materials like chunks of concrete will be brought in for crash tests, so all the lab areas will be on the ground floor. A separate wing will house offices. Joining the two wings, a main entrance will open to a dramatic lobby.

“The lab is involved in deconstructing materials, so we used a deconstructive vocabulary in the lobby where the two wings meet,” Sorg explains. Rising two stories high, the space will feature exposed metal and floor-to-ceiling glass. “It announces that this is a semi-industrial building,” Sorg says. “The lab managers love it because normally these things go into pre-fab buildings, and this is a real, inviting building. It could have just been a shed.”
In 1986, Darrel Rippeteau, AIA, bought a diminutive one-story building at 1530 14th Street and opened his architecture office. “It was close enough to home to walk to work, and I fancied that the neighborhood would likely improve,” he recalls. “There was a lot of vacancy in the area. There was not a market for commercial space, though people were moving into houses.”

When the Whole Foods Market opened on P Street in December of 2000, “it was like a change overnight. Instead of people dispersing to other neighborhoods to do their shopping, they were simply walking from their houses to the store. Suddenly everyone was visible.”

In this invigorated climate, Rippeteau is putting a new building on his piece of 14th Street that should both feed off and fuel the spirit of the neighborhood. The ground floor will house retail space. The second floor will have the 12-foot-high ceilings and large windows typical of a loft and perfect for Rippeteau’s architecture office. Two apartments will occupy the third and fourth floors, featuring sleeping and bathing areas on mezzanines overlooking two-story living spaces and balconies outside. In a decision that might surprise seasoned developers, Rippeteau has designed a building that is only slightly larger than half his lot size. A sizable chunk of the site will be on-site parking and a garden large enough for shade trees.

The building’s contemporary design will fit between a Victorian rowhouse on one side and an early 20th-century, Egyptian Revival-style automobile dealership on the other. “The neighborhood has a lot of bold architecture,” Rippeteau explains. “I’ve tried to concoct a design that is modern and expressive of the interior uses, scaled to be sympathetic to its neighbors but not a copy. This is an honest new building.”

Masonry walls on the first two floors will complement those on nearby historic structures. On the third floor, frame construction will probably be clad in copper, setting the residential cop apart from the commercial base. At the juncture with the neighboring rowhouse, a strip of mosaic tile should ease the transition from new to old. Rippeteau also uses tile as “lipstick” at the storefront and building entrance. “The tilework will be designed and installed as an artistic gift to the street,” Rippeteau says, proud to be contributing to a community he’s watched grow.
Spring 2004

Sacred Trees
Chesterfield Place, NW

Panoramic Design, Ltd.

Three tree-filled lots in the Forest Hills neighborhood overlooking Rock Creek Park will showcase a new kind of luxury urban living if owner, developer, and designer Aric Moore has his way. A DC-native, Moore traces the seed of his idea to an essay he wrote his senior year at Calvin Coolidge High School that called for more beauty in the world. The essay won him a scholarship to college, where his architecture studies crossed into many disciplines, similar to renaissance-era architects. "I have always wanted to practice architecture as an art form," Moore explains. Now, twenty years later, the opportunity has arrived.

As a developer, Moore has a stretch of approvals ahead of him. One of the most arduous is compliance with the local Forest Hill Tree and Slope Overlay Zoning Regulation. This regulation requires special exceptions before removing any tree with a 12-inch or greater circumference (equal to a slim diameter of four inches) and soil engineer reports before construction on any slope greater than 25 percent.

For Moore, these challenges go with the territory. "I love the park. I want these houses to live amidst the green giants. Not many cities have this kind of living opportunity in the middle of the city," Moore explains.

When the homes are done, Moore plans to sign and date a steel plaque affixed to the cornerstone of each house, just as a painter signs his canvas. For a virtual tour of Sacred Trees, visit www.americanmasterworks.com.

Any tree with a 4" or greater diameter (shown here) cannot be removed without special exception.

Sacred Trees is designed to fit "amidst the green giants."
At the new headquarters for the National Association of Realtors, the building’s distinctive design is the work of Graham Gund Architects of New York, who won a competition sponsored by the National Association of Realtors. SMB Architects had done the preliminary "nitty-gritty of the building," as Edwards describes it, evaluating the site and determining the parameters of what could go there. Now the firms are working together to make the building come to life.

"There is a rather large team working together on the project," says Edwards. "Add structural engineers and curtain wall consultants for the floating glass surfaces, and mechanical engineers, lighting consultants, and landscape architects involved with the sustainable design. Amazingly enough, all of these players have achieved a remarkable degree of cooperation, which has allowed the project to proceed on schedule."

The building’s greenish hue will extend past its color to the "green" systems that support it. "One of the things we’re trying to do is show what you can do with sustainable design," says Edwards. Still in the planning stages, sustainable features are likely to include energy-efficient roofing, a 10,000 gallon storage tank for captured rainwater, and continuous metering equipment for mechanical systems. "The combination of a multitude of small measures, in themselves, might not capture the popular imagination," Edwards admits, "but together they allow an aesthetically daring structure to be much more environmentally friendly than a conventional spec office building."
Rising behind familiar facades on 7th, D, and E Streets, NW, a 12-story apartment and retail building will “fill the hole in the donut,” says architect Philip Esocoff, FAIA, principal-in-charge at Esocoff & Associates. Most of the building is new, but a lot of work has gone into what is old. Preservation specialists Oehrlein & Associates have worked closely on the project. “There’s just about every form of historic preservation that you can name,” says Esocoff, ticking off the categories: restoration, reuse, replication, reinstallation, and what architects call “facadesectomy,” where only the front of a building is preserved.

For example, the building at 7th & E, once known as the nightclub DC Space, is undergoing a “whole body reanimation,” as Esocoff describes it. The shell will be preserved but the interior reinvented, including two top floors of apartments designed by Oehrlein & Associates. Next door on 7th Street, replication is underway on a historic facade that was demolished in the 1980s after Metro construction unsettled its foundations. Other historic facades on Pennsylvania Avenue were removed during Metro construction, documented and deconstructed, and put in storage. Esocoff fondly terms these “facades-in-a-box”; three are
being reinstalled on this project, two on 7th Street and one on D, where it will serve as the entrance to the new Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company designed by McInturff Architects (see page 16).

Esocoff & Associates’ new building will pay careful attention to the historic structures at its feet. “We give it as refined a level of detail and ornament as you might find on traditional buildings,” Esocoff explains. Because larger mortar joints are used in modern-day construction, the architects specify larger brick sizes to compensate, so that the ratio of brick face to mortar joint will be similar to that on nearby nineteenth-century facades. Iron piers along the top of the building will look historically ornamental but, in fact, conceal exhaust pipes. Esocoff explains, “It humanizes the building. From the street, you immediately imagine, ‘There must be something going on up there.’” Inset windows with projecting sills provide surface relief and allow the building to weather more like historic buildings. “It will patinate rather than get dirty,” Esocoff explains. “Aesthetically, the building should also weather the winds of fashion,” Esocoff adds. “That does not mean the building should not be contemporary or full of character, but simply a classic of its time. We want our buildings to be worthy of restoration in fifty years, not needing renovation in ten.”

Historic facades have been saved; new construction will "fill the hole in the donut," according to Esocoff.
One benefit of being a novice is that you learn something new. For this project, McInturff undertook a whirlwind study of theater architecture, led by Shalitz to the front row and through the backstages of some of London's best small theaters. "It was a five-day master's in theater design," McInturff says.

McInturff discovered how much goes on behind the scenes. "It's like the back of a grandfather clock," he reports. With Shalitz's clear directive to design a "transparent theater laboratory," McInturff plans to reveal the gears of Woolly Mammoth—the rehearsal rooms, classrooms, and offices—through glass walls fronting a long, two-story-high lobby.

The lobby is necessarily long to reach the theater, which is housed under the courtyard in the middle of the Jefferson. McInturff likes the unusual length: "It reminds me of the back-alley theater entrances where you hang out and wait for movie stars to come out," he says. The space will have raw, unfinished surfaces. "There's going to be a lot of concrete that's not covered up," warns Shalitz. "We do plays that ask people hard questions. I want to make people comfortable but put them on edge."

Excluding fine finishes also helps the project come in on budget, a challenge this small theater company proudly put to its architect. "I am one of those people who get very excited when you have to struggle against a budget. It forces you into creative choices," Shalitz explains. "We needed an architect who could develop a basic structure that would carry the value of the design. Mark understands how to manage the volume of space. He understands the sculptural, three-dimensional demands of it."

Shalitz expects the unlikely pairing of the new Woolly Mammoth and the Shakespeare Theater up the block to instantly transform the neighborhood into a theater center. "An organization that for years has been called 'alternative' is invading two blocks from the National Mall. It reflects a commitment to the arts and to the breadth of the arts. It says a lot about Washington."
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"It was dark. It was cold. And it was very, very wet," recalls Mary Oehrlein, FAIA, of her first visit to the historic Tivoli Theater on 14th Street, NW. Her firm, Oehrlein & Associates, serves as preservation architect on many complex development projects in the city. In that role, Oehrlein is often the first one called to the scene to assess the damage.

"It makes our work environment uncomfortable, since we have to worry about something falling on our heads," Oehrlein explains. At the Tivoli, years of vacancy, vandalism, and neglect had left the theater decrepit. "All the plaster had fallen down. There was a tree growing through the roof." Historic marble, millwork, light fixtures, and hardware—all were gone. "All you can do is say, 'OK, this is where we start.' We measure what's there, photograph what's there, and start to analyze the composition of the material," she explains.

Despite its deterioration, the Tivoli still holds a proud spot on the corner of 14th and Park Road, NW, an Italian Renaissance-style remnant of the heyday of the movie house. Built in the early 1920s, the Tivoli was designed by premier theater architect Thomas White Lamb. It was one of the most luxurious movie houses in the area, with walls covered in plum damask, mahogany paneling, imported marble, and hand-painted murals. Ballets, concerts, and even operas came to the Tivoli, where the entire orchestra could be raised via a special elevator to stage level. A novel technological innovation—air conditioning—was fed through a system of subfloor tunnels.

"We start with something as opposed to nothing," Oehrlein says of the difference between her firm and architects designing new buildings. "There's an extra step in the process: you have to deal with an existing thing that has to be surveyed and handled and loved, plus you still have to have bathrooms, egress, ADA requirements, and other code requirements, just like in new construction."

Oehrlein is designing the restoration and renovation of the Tivoli Theater, which will hold new retail and office spaces and a new home for the Gala Community Theater (designed by SmithGroup). Her work is part of the block-wide Tivoli Square project.
Next to the historic theater, new construction includes a two-story office and retail building and a Giant Food store, both designed by Mushinsky Associates/MR+A, and a row of townhouses designed by Ernest Bland Associates. According to Sean Cahill, Chief Operating Officer of Horning Brothers (leading the development team undertaking the project), "We tried to get architects for the new buildings that wouldn’t compete with what’s there and wouldn’t try and copy what’s there, but make something contextual."

The new Giant on Park Road will be, by necessity, a large building that includes two upper levels of parking and loading bays behind truck-high doors. "It’s hard to break down the scale to make it compatible with the neighborhood and to make it compatible with a historic building," explains Alan Mushinsky, AIA, of MR+A. That challenge is familiar to Mushinsky, who designed the award-winning Whole Foods Market on P Street, NW, that is credited with serving as a catalyst for neighborhood development. As in the Whole Foods project, colors and patterns of brick will help mitigate the size of the building. In addition, the store will have a generous stretch of glass across the front. "This is not your normal suburban supermarket," says Mushinsky. "This is not a prototypical anything. It will glow, and that’s intentional. People will be able to see in and out, to read what’s going on."

"As a native Washingtonian who grew up coming to this neighborhood, I hope this is going to be a catalyst," says Mushinsky. "There will be uses that serve the community—a dress shop, dry cleaners—the same things that people in the neighborhood used fifty years ago when this was a midtown shopping area. It’s about time."

Circling the block: behind the Tivoli, a new Giant will front Park Road, and townhouses will stretch along Monroe Street.
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Warren Williams, Jr.'s grandparents lost their building at 7th and Q Streets, NW, when it burned down in the 1968 riots. Undaunted, they bought one on the corner across the street, opening a liquor store on the ground level and renting out three apartments above. Williams grew up stocking the shelves and operating the register. "It's where I learned business first-hand," says Williams, who now owns Club U on U Street, NW.

The Williams family's second building at 7th and Q suffered its own trauma in 1997 when a Metrobus driver fell asleep at the wheel and drove into it. Part of the structure caved in, and the apartments were boarded up. While Warren Williams, Jr., and Metro settled the claim over the past five years, Williams has been thinking about the future of the site. "People say, 'Why don't you tear it down? See how high you can build there?'' he says. But for Williams, "One of the main things I want is for the building to stay intact. This is where my family worked and earned money over time. I see it functioning as a positive place—a crown jewel for the neighborhood."

With a vision of "old bones with beautiful new structure," Williams approached Victoria Kiechel, AIA. Kiechel plans to take the empty space—"that missing tooth," as she describes it—and treat it as "a modern riff on the historic building." Her design will marry new materials, including Kalwall and steel, with the classic brick storefront. (See sidebar for more information on Kalwall.) "The Kalwall will glow at night, which is really important because this is a residential neighborhood. It will have a friendly presence," Kiechel hopes.

Even with a new design, Williams plans to keep the building's use the same: a ground-level storefront with three apartments above. For Kiechel, that function is a critical historic element in the project. "The corner store with apartments above—that's a type of building you found more often in DC a generation or two ago. I think it is endangered in this town."

Kalwall
Kalwall is the brand name of a widely used translucent skylighting and exterior wall system. Kalwall panels, which consist of two layers of translucent fiberglass separated by a supporting grid of aluminum or composite beams, admit a soft, even daylight into the interior of a building while preserving privacy or screening an unattractive view. Used for many years to bring filtered daylight into large commercial structures, Kalwall is now increasingly selected by architects for use in residential projects to produce quietly dramatic interior lighting effects. For more information, see www.kalwall.com.

—R. O’R.
Every morning, children line up in the back playground of Neval Thomas Elementary, but their new school will have a large front yard. "Children will come through the front door. That is really important to us," says school principal Willie Scudder. "The beauty of the new design—the glass, the openness—they'll have that to look forward to. It will be an inviting place and a safe haven."

Developed through meetings between EYP and the principal, teachers, and parents of Neval Thomas, the design is intended to be "friendly to the neighborhood," according to Steven Kleinrock, AIA, principal in charge of the project. Neval Thomas is the center of activity in its close-knit community, where many teachers live and some children are third-generation students at the school. "We wanted a new facility that will draw people," Scudder explains.

Visitors will enter a glass-lined lobby with curved metal trusses supporting an arched ceiling. "It pulls you into the building and welcomes you," says Sean Lyons, EYP project manager. The generous amount of glass throughout the school will be mitigated by sun shades that shield glare and light sensors that adjust artificial illumination. These and other sustainable technologies should help save energy costs over the long run.
Believing that fine art is best viewed at home, Duncan Phillips opened his Dupont Circle residence and its famed art collection to the public in 1921. Since then, the museum has sought to preserve the comfortable feel of a private home. That mandate drives the Phillips' newest and largest expansion plan: the creation of a six-level annex that will serve as a center for studying modern art.

Behind the Italianate façade of the apartment building now adjoining the museum, the new annex will expand every area of visitor services. Spaces will include a new main entrance and reception lobby, a café overlooking an outdoor sculpture garden, a gift shop, and a 180-seat auditorium. Seven new galleries will substantially expand art display in small-room settings.

The auditorium and study areas will be housed in two underground levels that will extend outward under the alley. "It will be a hive of activity," predicts David Cox, FAIA, principal in charge of the project at Cox Graae + Spack Architects. "The piece that rises above the ground is relatively small—like an iceberg. Basically it is a three-level townhouse above, consistent with the scale of the neighborhood, but sophisticated construction below."

Because the new building is going down 20 feet deeper than anything around it, Cox Graae + Spack has engaged in a year and a half of planning, a year of approvals, and full testing of soils and rock quality. A chemical rock removal system based on Italian methods of marble quarrying will allow builders to forego blasting and keep peace in the residential neighborhood.
2004 - 2005
Department of Labor
Potomac Job Corps Center
1 D.C. Village Lane, SW
Cox Graae + Spack Architects

More than 70,000 young people across the country receive training in the Department of Labor’s Job Corps program each year. Started in 1964, Job Corps provides at-risk youth with integrated academic, vocational, and social skills training. At the Job Corps facility near Bolling Air Force Base in southwest DC, students from DC, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, Pennsylvania, and Delaware study clerical work, nursing, security, electricity, plumbing, bricklaying, carpentry, and painting, among other subjects. The facility is housed in the turn-of-the-century buildings of DC Village, originally an orphanage, on a high site overlooking the Potomac.

“We get many visitors from overseas and from Congress,” says Michael O’Malley, the Chief of Facilities for the National Office of Job Corps. “We want to turn this facility into one that will provide a better view of what Job Corps does.” To renovate the existing buildings and design several new ones—including a cafeteria/culinary arts training facility, a recreation center, dormitories, and a vocational complex—Job Corps has enlisted the help of Cox Graae + Spack Architects. The facilities will be built in phases over the next several years.

Job Corps gives set directives to its architects: create flexible training areas that can be converted from one trade to another, design common spaces that can be easily monitored, use durable materials, specify systems that conserve energy, and stay within budget. In addition, for this flagship facility, “what we want from our architects is for them to interpret our program in their own way,” says O’Malley.

The approach that Cox Graae + Spack has taken is tied directly to the mission of Job Corps, according to principal-in-charge Christoffer Graae,
"Since this program trains kids in the building trades, we want to expose how buildings work."

- Christoffer Graae, AIA
Winter 2005

U.S. Capitol Visitor Center
U.S. Capitol

Architect of the Capitol

RTKL Associates, Inc.
(Associate Architect)

During peak seasons, visitors to the U.S. Capitol can wait two or three hours outside to get in. The new Visitor Center will offer more than protection from the elements. "Visitors can assemble, wait in comfort, and get some basic education in what the legislative branch of the government does," explains Rod Henderer, AIA, principal in charge of the project at RTKL.

The project has been in the works for decades and in the planning stages between the Architect of the Capitol and RTKL for the last seven years. "The premise was that this is the last major expansion that will happen and the biggest expansion that will happen," Henderer explains. "This is a 200-year-old building that needs to be brought into the 21st century."

To preserve views of the Capitol and respect the original Frederick Law Olmsted landscape plan, the Visitor Center will be located under the East Plaza. "In an underground building, the challenge is to create an uplifting experience," explains Henderer. Sunlight and views of the Capitol dome will come from two large skylights set flush with the pavement above, surrounded by a reflecting pool. At night, light from the Visitor Center will make the pool glow.
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Spring 2006

Mount Vernon Walk
Half-block bordered by L, 5th, and K Streets at New York Avenue, NW

David M. Schwarz Architectural Services (Project Design Architect)
Hickok Warner Fox Architects (Architect of Record)
Sultan Campbell Britt (Associate Architect)

This giant lot was once a destination, home to markets, a lumber and coal yard, and residences in the early 1900s. In the 1960s, it was the site of a gas station, a golf school, and a wax museum that attracted up to 6,000 visitors a day. Activity ceased after the 1968 riots. The wax museum and the other structures were demolished in the 1970s, and the site has been a parking lot since.

In a part of town developers are calling "NoMo" (North of Massachusetts Avenue), bringing this block back to life will be a crucial step in reinvigorating the neighborhood. "Look at all the cranes in the air," Sean Cohill of development partner Horning Brothers says. "This is a frontier. It's an opportunity for liveliness."

Mt. Vernon Walk will provide an urban microcosm: close to 600 apartments and condos (many priced for low- to moderate-income tenants); a grocery store; a restaurant; small, community-oriented businesses such as a bike shop; and significant arts space. The core of the project will be an elongated courtyard called Artists' Walk. Stretching from K to L, the 42-foot-wide promenade will be lined with artists' live-work residences, new homes for the Troyer Gallery and the Washington Stage Guild, a restaurant, and a community meeting space.

"We wanted a significant arts component," Joseph Horning, III, of Horning Brothers, says of Mt. Vernon Walk's inception. "We had been working on the Tivoli (see page 18) for a year and a half and
realized how much more exciting it makes the project and how much the neighborhood appreciates it.”

“The question was, ‘How do we incorporate the arts in a meaningful way?’” says Michael Swartz, the project manager from David M. Schwarz Architectural Services. The architects brainstormed in meetings with local artists. “We expanded our view of artists to include performers and people who work in electronic media,” Swartz recalls. As a result, the architects have designed units of different sizes for a variety of users and added soundproofing to accommodate musicians.

To make this large new development approachable, it is designed to appear as several unique buildings. “We purposefully avoided the monolithic look,” Swartz explains. Pushing blocks of styrofoam around on a site map, the architects determined what density could gracefully occupy the block then distinguished each piece with its own architectural style. The tallest building, at 5th and K, will recall the grand brick apartment houses along Connecticut Avenue, NW; loft-like units will span Artists’ Walk; anchoring the east end of the project on L Street, a 10-story building will refer to the deco apartment buildings built in the 1920s and ‘30s. With separate entries and lobbies, the distinctive apartment buildings will spare residents the sense of anonymity that could come with living in one high-rise.

“Washington is fortunate in that we have a number of clearly established neighborhoods. This project doesn’t make a neighborhood, but I think it’s the beginning of one,” says Swartz. As Hickok Warner Fox begins to develop the design into construction documents, speculation on the future of this part of town is rising. Stanford Britt, FAIA, of Sulton Campbell Britt Associates, predicts that “this project is large enough that its completion, in itself, should turn the area around almost overnight.”

Each piece of the project is distinguished with its own architectural style. Residents will be spared the sense of anonymity that comes with living in one large high-rise.
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