Design Within

Inside:

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ON THE COVER:
The lobby at 1801 K Street, NW, by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.
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Welcome!

Although I've spent most of my professional life in the fields of design and planning, I'm still drawn to history, which was my undergraduate major. Perhaps that's why I believe milestones should be noted, and I'm proud to say that AIA | DC is coming up on two that are worthy of attention.

The first is the 10th anniversary of Architecture Week, our annual celebration of the architecture in DC, which will take place this year on September 10-21 (yes, for architects, a week lasts 11 days!). Architecture Week is designed for architecture-minded members of the public—that means you!—and this year's program, like those in previous years, offers a variety of events for learning more about architecture and architects. Whether it's CANstruction, which provides thousands of meals' worth of donated food to the Capital Area Food Bank, or our design competitions, or our discussions of what makes architects tick, the events of Architecture Week are a fun way to learn more about how architects work and the value they bring to the community. We're pleased to be collaborating with the National Building Museum on many of this year's events. Please check at the back of this issue for the full schedule, and log on to www.aiadc.com to register for the events you'd like to attend.

Hope to see you all at Architecture Week.
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Poltrona Frau Express: the emotion of owning a Poltrona Frau creation in just 15 days
Pitango, the new gelateria across from the Whole Foods Market on P Street, NW, brings yet another strong competitor to the DC dessert scene. One of three locations in the metropolitan area, the P Street store [top right] was designed by Baltimore firm Cho Benn Holback. It has already become popular, especially with the after-dinner crowd, thanks to its late hours (open until 11:00 p.m. every night). Though easy to mistake for ice cream at a glance, gelato has its own unique properties. It is made with less milk fat than traditional ice cream, yet many attest to a creamier taste, thanks in part to a churning technique that Pitango says traps less air in the product, resulting in a thick, dense texture. Pitango’s dedication to fresh, high-quality organic ingredients also makes for a great-tasting gelato. Standout flavors range from classics like chocolat noir (dark chocolate) and stracciatella (chocolate chip) to the bolder but delicious spicy chocolate. For fruit lovers, sorbet with flavors like rhubarb, strawberry, and mojito are available. A regular cup with up to two flavors will cost you $4.85. Visit 1451 P Street, NW, or www.pitangogelato.com. Open noon to 11:00 p.m. on weekdays, 11:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. on weekends.

Along the U Street Corridor, RCKNDY (pronounced “Rock Candy”) proves you can find interesting pieces for your home even on a recession budget. With a wide array of items in stock, RCKNDY can outfit your kitchen, bedroom, living room, or office. A few recent finds in the store include the brightly colored melamine “Off the Air” plate ($11) [left], a riff on the classic TV test pattern, and the Japanese-inspired “Hold Me Tight” bowl ($16.50) [above], white porcelain with a gold etching of a hand demonstrating the proper way to hold a bowl. Both are designed by imm Living, a company with a wry sense of humor. Also available in the shop is Alessi’s stainless steel Tripod Trivet ($47) [above]. Both fun and functional, it looks like dice or a piece of jewelry, but is actually designed to hold hot plates and pots. You can see more products at www.rckndy.com or visit the store at 1515 U Street, NW. Open 11:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. Monday and Wednesday through Saturday, and from noon to 6:00 p.m. on Sunday. Closed Tuesday.

Home Rule boasts a number of affordable items for your household. Arriving at the store in August are new, brightly-colored “Presso” glasses by Brazilian company Bodum. Selling in a set of two for $29.99, these 10-oz. glasses will be available in cheerful hues of green, red, pink, and purple. The double walls of the glass keep the heat on the inside and the outside cool, allowing you to drink a hot or cold beverage, even coffee (it is a Bodum product, after all). They are dishwasher-safe for easy clean-up. To make coffee, try one of the new Bodum French presses, also available in August. For $24.99, you can purchase one to match your glasses, or in a contrasting color. The 32-oz. French press is designed for longevity, both for the press itself and the coffee inside—the unique aroma seal keeps your coffee warm [top left]. Visit 1807 14th Street, NW, or www.homerule.com. Open Monday through Saturday, 11:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., and Sunday, noon to 5:30 p.m. 

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Well Connected:
VOA Designs a New Headquarters for Volkswagen Group of America

by Ronald O’Rourke

Photo by Nick Merrick of Hedrich Blessing
The Dulles Corridor is well known as a bastion of technology firms and government contractors. In September 2008, however, the area diversified a bit with the opening of the new headquarters of the Volkswagen Group of America (VGA), a division of the German automaker that includes the US subsidiaries of Volkswagen, Audi, Bentley, Bugatti, and Lamborghini. The VGA facility is open to the public, making it a rare, accessible example of spectacular corporate interior architecture.

VGA's headquarters is the product of a $33 million interior remodeling of an existing six-floor, 185,000-square-foot office building. The project was designed by a nine-member team from the DC office of VOA, an architecture, planning, and interior design firm with five US locations and additional offices in Brazil and the United Arab Emirates. VOA's DC office includes about 40 of the firm's 300 design professionals.

Heading the team for the VGA project were John Jessen, AIA, a managing principal who served as the principal-in-charge for the project; Brian Allen, LEED AP, a vice president who was the project architect; and Pablo Quintana, an associate principal who served as the project designer. Rand Construction Corporation was the general contractor.

"This is Where Our Customers Are"

The project began in 2007, when Volkswagen Group decided that the firm's business strategy called for moving its headquarters from Auburn Hills, Michigan, outside of Detroit, to the Washington area.

"One of the first things they'll tell you is, 'This is where our customers are,'" Quintana said. VGA officials "interact with their dealers in their space on a daily basis. The dealers are a direct line to the customer, and the most successful dealers in the nation are in the area. There are more Volkswagens and Audis bought in this area per capita than anywhere else in the nation."

In addition, Quintana said, "Detroit is a Big Three town—an American automaker's world. [VGA] went there [originally] because they thought that was the appropriate place to be as an automaker. But they quickly realized that they were a red-headed stepchild—their philosophy about making cars is not the same; their philosophy about selling cars is not the same."

A Fresh Start

VGA chose to lease a recently completed, unoccupied office building just off the Dulles Toll Road. The crisply rectilinear, smartly detailed structure was designed by the Atlanta-based firm of Mack Scogin Merrill Elam Architects, Inc. (formerly Scogin, Elam, and Bray).

"The building's aesthetic quite literally matches [VGA's] personality dead on," Quintana said. "It has kind of a German look," Jessen added, "and the location—right on the highway—was ideal for them. It was important for them to be visible from the highway, and to have presence. This was a fresh new start, if you will, for their US operations."

Having leased the building, VGA looked for an architectural firm to design the new interior. "They looked at web sites initially," Jessen said, "and they saw a couple of our projects that they liked. And their real estate advisors knew of us—they knew that our design philosophy is to generate unique designs that are inspired by the clients' mission or vision, not ours. We don't bring a signature design to the table; we're actually the opposite. And we think we have to be better because of that, because we start from scratch every time."

An Open-Ended Program

VGA asked Jessen's team to convert the building's interior into a headquarters that would not only house 400 to 500 employees, but also provide first-floor showrooms for Volkswagen and Audi products and meet the needs of frequent visitors, including dealers from around the country and members of the public interested in the company and its offerings. Beyond that, however, the program was unusually broad.

"Most times," Quintana said, "a client of this size would have a very detailed program. In this case, what they had were goals. They knew a number—the 500 people they wanted to have in the building—and they knew roughly how many people were in various departments. But they weren't specific. And they said to us, 'We want a facility of the future—we want a collaborative facility, we want a facility that's open, clear, and clean. You tell us what is appropriate for a company like ours in a facility like this.'"

"I would say that the biggest challenge we had was the lack of [a detailed program]," Jessen said, noting that the project's design "emerged from our visits to Germany and understanding their culture, and the architecture they have there." Recurring interactions with the client were also important. "We had many meetings through the design process," Jessen said. "And they were conceptual—they had a high-level appreciation for design and what it could do."
Neutral Backdrop, Honest Materials

First-floor showrooms in the new facility display new Volkswagen and Audi models to best advantage.

"The goal was to make their cars look great in the space," Jessen said. "We didn’t want to emulate their cars—curvilinear body panels and that sort of thing. [Instead,] what Pablo came to was [a design strategy of] using some of the materials of their cars, but in an angular fashion, so that the cars stand out."

"I always thought of the space," Quintana said, "as [consisting mostly of] three materials—aluminum, glass, and wood. All three are found in the cars—in fact, Audi is famous for their aluminum cars." A fourth key material on the first floor, he said, was white terrazzo floor tile, which helped "to create a neutral background, a gallery-like background, for the cars." The use of white materials in the area also helps to keep the area filled with light.

Materials, Quintana added, were very important to the client. "We talked a lot with the client about truth in materials—which meant, if it’s supposed to be aluminum, it better be aluminum. It better not be some powder-coated metal [of some other kind]. If it’s wood, it better be [real wood]—it better not be laminated [material] that looks like wood."

"They are very, very in tune with the craft of construction of their cars—and of their buildings in Germany, too," Quintana added. "So they recognize when materials are
"In Detroit," Jessen said, "they were in a facility that was smaller, and their staff were disconnected—from their brands, and from each other. And the leadership felt this [new facility] was an opportunity to bring them back together, literally in one building, and also connect them back to the brand visually."

And that is what the connector does. "Pablo designed this fabulous visual environment that connects them not just to their brand, but also to their [national] operation," Jessen said. "There are [two large, real-time displays] as you go up this connector space, where you can see a map of the United States [showing] immediate information about who is buying a [Volkswagen-made] car where."

"Just like the cars on the first floor showrooms are a horizontal, real-life display of the brand," Quintana said, the connector space "becomes a vertical, virtual display of the brand's history and relevance," including the firm's heritage in car making and racing. "So it is the physical connector, but it is also the virtual connector to a larger world—the entire US—and it's also a way for them to continuously remind themselves of their history, of the relevance of the brand, and their future endeavors."

"I would say the building is also symbolic in other ways," Jessen added. "This company is very sensitive to the environment—it's on the forefront of their minds, and of their customers' minds as well. And their customers are typically energetic, youthful professionals—not all of them, but that's a core. We wanted to reflect that in the design. So we have a LEED-registered design [that meets the criteria for LEED Silver certification], and we're seeking certification [from the US Green Building Council, the organization that administers the LEED system of certification for sustainable design]."

**Brand Sensitivity**

Attention to brand identities was another important element of the project.

"Volkswagen and Audi are the two largest occupants in this building," Jessen said. "They have different products, and are clearly different brands. They have put a lot of passion, time, and energy and resources into developing their brands. We had to be sensitive to the fact that it's not just Volkswagen, and that people who are dedicated to [the other brands] needed to be represented as well."

"When we were just getting involved, and were neophytes learning about this company," Jessen said, "one of the immediate ideas was that maybe the atrium is where all brands come together. [But we learned that] you do not blend brands, because they have worked for years to establish separate brand identities, and blending them would only undermine those efforts."

As a result, Quintana said, the connector area is "an equal-opportunity space. There are two large video screens, and three even-larger poster-billboards. One of the screens is Volkswagen's, one is Audi's, and of the three posters, one is Volkswagen's, one is Audi's, and one rotates" between brands.

**Symbolic Heart**

The functional and symbolic heart of the facility is the atrium and stair hall just inside the entry—a space the architects at VOA call the connector.
The attention to brand sensitivities extended to the upstairs office spaces as well. "There were many conversations," Jessen said, "about whether to have a Volkswagen floor and an Audi floor, or shared floors, and whether we should brand floors differently." That approach was viewed as problematic, Jessen said, because "they were also very concerned about flexibility, so they could grow horizontally on the floors [over time]. So we couldn't overbrand the office spaces."

Quintana added: "I would ask them sort of rhetorical questions, such as 'Shouldn't you put more logos inside? When people get off the elevator, shouldn't they see a Volkswagen logo and an Audi logo?' Inevitably, their answer would be something like, 'Well, which logo would you put on top, and which on the bottom? Or which one gets the left, and which one gets the right?' It was literally that kind of dilemma. And then we would all look at each other and go, 'No logos.' And what that led to was more restraint, and more focus on the validity and truth-of-materials concept, and a very deliberate [strategy]—almost a mission—of avoiding branding, except in the areas where branding was expected, which was in the showrooms."

Design for the Whole

In a VOA review of recent corporate interior projects done by both VOA and other firms, Jessen said, the VGA facility "stood out as a different model. There are very few offices like this project—it's almost all open spaces. And they're not [filled with] cubicles either—they're [filled with] this hybrid, customized, flexible, prefabricated system that is manufactured by Herman Miller."

When others look at plans for the VGA project, Jessen said, "they're fascinated by it, because [they're asking], 'Where are all the private offices?' And then, when they realize that it's all glass—that even the [few] offices are completely transparent—that's a cultural shift" for them. "It has to do with Volkswagen/Audi—it's a European/German influence in the office space. It's not a new trend, but [the VGA project] is kind of pushing the envelope in terms of the open atmosphere and being totally transparent."

"In this country, we typically design to the individual," Quintana added, and in such cases, "a cubicle is a perfect individual work area." In contrast, VGA officials "plan and think of their space completely differently. They think of it as a whole thing. They don't think about each individual cubicle, or about each individual office—they think about the effect of the entire environment on one person, or on 20 people. And I think that is exactly why this space differs from most 'American-made' corporate headquarters."

Murderous Schedule

Perhaps the most astonishing thing about the project, particularly in light of its size and complexity, is how quickly it was designed and built.

"We were first engaged in August 2007, and the first wave of people to occupy the space moved in April 15 of
2008," Quintana said. “The schedule was murderous, and the expectations were higher than any other project that I’ve done in a long time.”

Jessen said that the only way VOA was able to meet the schedule, which was driven by VGA’s timeline for moving from Auburn Hills to Virginia, “was to have just an awesome client that inspired everybody to work their tails off, and that’s exactly what we got all the way through.”

“There were no barriers between designers, clients, collaborators, contractors, and project managers,” Quintana said. “This was a perfect storm—a project where everybody suspended whatever they were doing otherwise, and focused on creating something special.”

Wine and Soul

The coordination and hard work paid off—construction began in January 2008 and was completed on schedule that August. The facility’s official ribbon-cutting ceremony—attended by Virginia Governor Timothy Kaine, senior Volkswagen Group officials, and others—took place on September 18, 2008.

At the outset of the project, Jessen said, VGA’s chief executive officer placed a bet with his counterpart in Germany on whether the project would be completed on time. The German counterpart doubted it could be done, and the VGA chief replied, “I have American ingenuity on my side. I am going to call you [on the target day], from my desk, to tell you that I’m working.”

“And I was there when he made that phone call,” Quintana said. “We all walked into his office. He picked up the phone, called [his counterpart], and said ‘I’m calling you from my office in Herndon—you owe me a bottle of wine.’

“Some of the [VW] folks who are now retired, but who helped us through the design process, came back for the grand opening,” Quintana noted, “and [they told us], ‘I saw pictures, I heard you explaining [the project] to me, and you showed me the materials. But I could never have imagined [the result]. You have captured the soul of the company in this place.’”

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The USGBC staff lounge is marked by brightly colored glass panels and casual furniture.

"Green doesn't mean crunchy anymore," said architect Kendall P. Wilson, FAIA, FIIDA, LEED AP, of Envision Design, just before the elevator doors opened to the headquarters of the US Green Building Council (USGBC), which his firm designed. He was right. Stepping into the wide, white, and polished terrazzo halls of the recently completed office space was an experience in the new, sleek look of sustainability.

At the end of March, the USGBC's 200-person staff moved from a single-floor office in Dupont Circle to the slick, two-level, 75,000-square-foot space in downtown DC's West End. The organization, a non-profit dedicated to making green buildings available to everyone within a generation, outgrew its old space almost as soon as it moved in. While this was an indication that the green building movement had hit a growth spurt—and a sign that a positive cultural transformation is underway, notes Linda Sorrento, director of education partnerships for the USGBC—that did not change the fact that the organization simply needed more room.

S. Richard Fedrizzi, president and CEO of USGBC, was the driving force behind the effort to create a space that expresses the organization's guiding philosophy: that within any built structure, human comfort comes first and is integrally related to sustainable practices. The USGBC worked with Envision to create a space that is clean, progressive, classically modern, and only subtly corporate, and which simultaneously protects the health and well-being of the building's occupants. No small feat.

The team had set a goal of achieving LEED [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design] Platinum status from the start. Having established new LEED guidelines for commercial interiors (LEED-Cl), USGBC leaders felt that it was only appropriate that their own headquarters become a showcase for the ideas they encouraged others to adopt. They chose to refurbish an outdated, but recently
A conference room is visible from the landing in the main staircase.

Photo by Eric Laiguel

Reclaimed wood lines the walls surrounding the staircase, which is adjacent to the main reception area.

Photo by Eric Laiguel

re-clad office building in downtown Washington. At its completion, their project was the first to be certified under the new rating system, and it far surpassed the minimum 80 points necessary to achieve Platinum Certification. A truly team-oriented collection of architects, mechanics, engineers, and corporate interior designers—among many others—not only earned an impressive 95 LEED-CI points by making the green choices they did, but they finished the project on budget and on time.

So what does it take to make an office interior LEED Platinum?Outlined below are a few of the goals established by the team, and exactly what they did to achieve them.

**GOAL: Reduce energy use by half.**

This straightforward goal involves a complex system in which the building actually senses its occupants—but think cool, not creepy. The entire office is outfitted with occupancy sensors that use both motion-detecting and infrared technologies. These sensors are connected to workstation lights, outlets, and variable air volume (VAV) systems, which enhance both human comfort and sustainability (thermostats in every other workstation allow occupants to control the temperature of their immediate surroundings). As one would expect, the occupancy sensors stop the flow of electricity when they detect an empty room.

Daylight also plays an important role in reducing energy consumption at the headquarters. Floor-to-ceiling windows make overhead lights almost unnecessary. In fact, there is so much natural light entering the office space that Envision Design chose to install a roller shade system (Ecoveil shade with automatic control system, by MechoShade) that automatically opens or closes in response to the angle and intensity of the sun. In this way, both interior lighting and temperature are moderated.
Both of these automated systems help to compensate for human nature—who among us has never forgotten to switch off the light when leaving a room, or unplug an energy-draining cell phone charger?

**GOAL: Use only natural, local, and/or recycled materials.**

When I arrived for my tour of the USGBC's new space, Wilson handed me a 23-page document outlining the specific application and manufacturing site of every material used in the headquarters. Describing each of them would make for an article too long to fit within the pages of *ARCHITECTUREDC*, but a few outstanding examples are worth noting here:

- The sleek, white terrazzo flooring that welcomes all who step from the elevators is a composite of 100 percent post-consumer recycled glass, mixed on-site.
- Wood paneling adds warmth and color without sacrificing the mature, contemporary feel of the space. What makes it so special? It was salvaged from a Tennessee riverbed where it likely lay for more than one hundred years, collecting mineral deposits that give it incredible color variation.
- Innovative Novawall systems, designed specifically for the USGBC by Envision, serve to hide storage closets, allow for adaptations to meeting spaces, and display images of green buildings from around the world. These images (as well as others throughout the headquarters) are printed with soy inks on 100 percent recycled polyester.

**GOAL: Model the interior around the biophilia hypothesis, which suggests there is an instinctive bond between human beings and other living systems.**

At the USGBC headquarters, a sense of nature abounds. Some natural touches include images of honeycomb or clouds; plants offer their soothing presence; a waterfall trickles gently in reception. Probably the most important natural element available to the building's occupants, however, is sunlight. Every seat in the office has a view to the outside world. Sound impossible? Low cubicle walls (42") make it happen. Even from a seated position, all USGBC employees can catch a glimpse of the great outdoors.

**GOAL: Create a hip, quality work environment.**

There's a break room like no other, complete with colorful, amorphous (and simply delightful) blob-shaped chairs (Lounge Pouf, by Moroso), a Foosball table, excellent coffee (or so Wilson says—this claim was re-affirmed with a hearty two-thumbs-up by a USGBC employee pouring himself a mug of the stuff), and energy-saving appliances. The break room reiterates themes of community interaction and efficiency seen throughout the headquarters.

After touring the space, it is clear that Envision Design left no stone unturned—no surface, finish, or material unresearched. Each one had an available green alternative—a testament to the fact that green has finally become mainstream. Plus, there's room for growth. Empty office spaces within the headquarters anticipate a future of inevitable expansion. The organization is currently working to establish itself as the "keeper of green building knowledge," and has already begun to transform existing offices into a knowledge center—a sort of repository for the most up-to-the-minute ideas about sustainability—that will eventually be available to the public by appointment. Included in this space will be rotating exhibits highlighting new, green building strategies.

The knowledge center, and the education it will provide, are the first steps toward a desired cultural transformation in which green buildings and sustainable practices are the norm, not the exception; where reducing energy use, promoting the use of local and recycled materials, and reconnecting humans with natural systems, are practices engrained not in futuristic lingo and glossy design magazines, but instead in our societal subconscious, and in our ways of being.
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A visit to the doctor used to mean uncomfortable metal furniture, threadbare carpeting, and atrocious overhead fluorescent lighting. If the waiting room is this bad, what is the examining room going to be like? Today, more and more doctors, dentists, and other health care specialists understand that healing begins at the office door. “Doctors know that patients need to be comfortable when they walk in,” said Andreas Charalambous, AIA, principal of FORMA Design. “It creates anxiety when we come in dreading the treatment and dreading the environment. Doctors want their offices to express who they are and reflect the high quality of their care.”

Charalambous should know. Health care office design has been an important part of his practice since he established it more than 15 years ago. Three recent FORMA Design projects reflect the requirements of different medical practices, the personalities of the doctors, and the patient populations they serve.
Many health care professionals rely on medical equipment vendors to design their space. “They say ‘buy all your equipment from us and we’ll do the lay out of your office for free,’” explained Charalambous. “This happens especially in dentists’ offices that are very equipment-driven, but it’s cookie-cutter design.” But as a specialist in health care interiors, Charalambous said, “We know the equipment really well. We can help doctors identify the equipment they need and what it looks like. And we can coordinate with several vendors to get exactly what they need instead of relying on a single source. We don’t have allegiance to one specific equipment firm, and we can get the client exactly what he needs.”

Kid-Friendly Dentistry

What Dr. Maria Meliton of M2 Dentistry wanted was something “unique and unexpected.” This office in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, was a second location for Dr. Meliton’s pediatric dental practice. Her first office layout was drafted by designers from a dental supply company. “The space is functional and nice, but I always felt that it didn’t fully grasp my sense of style and aesthetics.” For the second office she wanted “a space that was modern, yet warm and inviting...one that appealed to children as well as older teenagers.” What she really didn’t want was an office with a theme like Disneyland or Sea World.

What she got was 2,000 square feet of sophisticated, hip, and functional design. Vibrant color defines a long narrow space that is organized into public and private zones that flank a dividing central spine and corridor. The layout provides efficient flow, eliminates corridor bottlenecks, and accommodates accompanying parents. And there is plenty of room for an entire wall of flat-screen televisions with interactive video games in the reception area and more big screens tuned to kid-friendly videos in the treatment rooms. Glass walls provide sound privacy for the dentists while they are in their offices, but enable them to view the entire space at a glance in case they are needed anywhere in the office. Halogen lighting keeps the office bright and cheery in spite of limited windows.

The new office, which was built by Wohlsen Construction with MM Architects, Inc., as architects of record, had some additional benefits that even Dr. Meliton and her partners did not expect. “We originally designed the office with cabinetry to house actual dental charts. As we were installing digital radiography and multiple computer stations, we wondered why we were bothering with paper charts—why don’t we just go paperless? So that’s what we did!” They ditched the file cabinets and now view radiographs on computers from anywhere in the office as well as remotely, and can even check patient X-rays on their iPhones.

“We love to see the look on people’s faces when they walk through the front door. There’s often that look of surprise inevitably followed by ‘Wow!’ From a marketing standpoint, the office design has been a blessing.”

Serenity for Skin Patients

For a skin cancer surgeon launching his practice in Waldorf, Maryland, the office design offered by his building’s base architect resulted in the same bland, generic interior that Dr. Meliton experienced when her equipment supply company designed her first office. “I realized I wanted a specialist in health care office design,” said Dr. George Verghese of Mid-Atlantic Skin Surgery Institute. “Andreas showed us some of his medical office work and we really liked what he was offering. Patients worried about skin care are already apprehensive coming in, and they automatically relax in this space...it’s calm, serene, and peaceful.”

This 5,000-square-foot dermatology clinic, for which HBW Group served as contractor, houses six surgical rooms, five exam rooms, two waiting areas, as well as offices, laboratories, and nurses’ and reception areas. Much of the design was driven by the lab-intensive nature of skin cancer surgery, in which easy access to lab facilities from each operating room is an important functional requirement. Also, there are significant waiting periods during the procedure as cell samples are analyzed in the labs. For waiting patients, the surgery suites are spacious and equipped with flat-screen TVs and XM radio. A special waiting room near the surgical area is designated for accompanying family members and has plenty of cappuccino on hand.

The design takes advantage of the second-story corner location with natural light from tall windows flooding interior treatment rooms and corridors. A soothing waterfall in the reception area, sandblasted interior glass walls, and shots of color on a neutral background all help stressed patients relax.

“It doesn’t feel closed in; it’s light and clean, and when people come in here, they comment how different this is from any other doctor’s office they know,” said Dr. Verghese.

Design as Branding

So, in this era of boutique medicine, are medical practices adopting marketing strategies previously honed in the hospitality and retail industries? “Good design helps doctors brand themselves,” according to Charalambous. “Just as we are seeing changes in the caliber of high-end restaurants, well-designed health care offices are now seen to reflect the high standards of the doctors who
occupy them.” In addition to architecture and interior design, Charalambous’s firm offers full branding services: web site design and graphic design of letterhead, business cards, marketing materials, and signage.

A Chevy Chase dental implant specialist has embraced Charalambous’s branding concepts with enthusiasm. “FORMA Design helped me create a complete brand identity for my practice. They provided a single source for everything: from the planning and the architecture, to working with equipment vendors I had selected, designing the logo, the graphics, web site, signage, and furnishings throughout, down to the accessories,” explained Dr. Youssef Obeid of Obeid Dental. In fact, Charalambous worked with Dr. Obeid from the very outset, helping to select the office location and construction contractor, and consulting with equipment vendors.

Occupying a coveted ground-level corner location in a high-rise office building on Connecticut Avenue, Obeid Dental enjoys a commanding street presence. The FORMA-designed logo (the name of the practice strikingly rendered in the Braille alphabet) is large-scale and distinctive in exterior signage and sets the tone for this state-of-the art dental office. Office manager Laura Thurst recalled the practice’s launch party last October: “It was at night, and the blue glow of the sign and from the inside made it look like some kind of cool nightclub.”

The practice, which specializes in cosmetic dentistry, is housed in 1,600 square feet of space that includes a reception area, consultation center, exam rooms, and laboratory facilities. “The kind of dentistry that goes on here is all about precision and perfection,” said Charalambous. “The space needs to reflect that.” Abundant daylight streaming in from all directions highlights the contrast of highly polished surfaces and the rough texture of a dramatic stone wall. The paperless, all-digital office features a resin desk in the reception area, a sleek stainless steel room divider, and an airy aura of fastidious cleanliness. “I wanted an ultra-modern design that is classic and vibrant, and I wanted to stay away from the sterile and cold concept that some modern offices have,” explained Dr. Obeid.

Because some procedures require female patients to arrive makeup-free, a Zen-like restroom, complete with spacious vanity...
and movie-star lighting, is provided for quick touch-ups before returning to work. A conference room accommodates plenty of high-tech equipment to help patients visualize various treatments and results, as well as a top-of-the-line espresso machine. To ensure patient privacy, the street-facing treatment rooms are equipped with light-filtering sun screens. Capitol Construction and Cad-Con Consulting, Inc., were the contractors for the project.

In explaining why he invested so much effort in the look of his practice, Dr. Obeid said, "A dental office is a place that people associate with discomfort; we have to work to create an environment where our patients feel comfortable and special. When the architect and dentist spend so much time on the details, patients can anticipate the level of care they will receive. The office created a splash when it opened, and people are still talking about the details, the high-end dental equipment, the coffee machine, and the audio system. We have something for everyone."

FORMA Design's work on these three health care offices has been received with enthusiasm by the professional architecture and interior design community. The Northern Virginia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects recognized the designs of both Obeid Dental and M2 Dentistry with its Jurors Special Citation Awards in Interior Architecture and commended FORMA Design for "a body of work that raises the bar for small medical suite design." In 2009 the International Interior Design Association recognized Obeid Dental with its Gold Award in the health care category and M2 Dentistry with its Silver Award in the same competition.
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Washington's New Policy:
Serious Fun in U Street Corridor “Restolounge”

by L. Catherine Hader

What's black and light and red all over?

Policy.

Not policy in Washington’s wonky sense, in which politicos explore and endlessly debate arcane topics, but Policy with a capital P . . . and a couple of exclamation points. (More on punctuation later.)

Restaurant and lounge, serious and fun, dark and light—Policy, on 14th Street, NW, instantly ups the appeal of its corner of DC this past spring when it joined the Greater U Street Historic District’s pastiche of old and new, everyday and fanciful, Spartan and indulgent.

As U Street continues its transition from neglected neighborhood to nightlife nexus, Policy patrons also are offered a place to transition.

Tired of the muted subtlety, political correctness, and the traditions that are so Washington? Are you tempest-tossed? Yearning to breathe free? Or maybe you’d just like a good drink or a savory meal in a place that doesn’t look like every other place around. Policy delivers all that, and promises “Truth, Love, and Liberty” to boot:

- **Truth** in using the best quality ingredients
- **Love** and passion drives [sic] the food
- **Liberty** to explore all cultures

This all sounds very serious, and Policy owner Omar Miskinyar is serious indeed about food and hospitality. He’s also serious that his guests will have fun. A former software engineer and AOL alumnus, Miskinyar found his way to this hospitality venture by way of events promotion, there realizing a love and passion for the arts of hospitality and fine dining. With his debut of Policy, Washington residents are the richer (or better entertained) for it, steeped in a style that reflects Miskinyar’s affinity for nightlife.

Let the fun begin. Step inside Policy’s golden door.

Famished? First stop, first floor, where the American diner of yesteryear has been re-created to appeal to the discerning tastes of today’s urban foodie. In the design of Policy, the archetypal diner profile has been either well burnished or radically updated with nouveau diner-style furnishings and ultra-modern lighting in the black-and-red palette of the Rolling Stones’ *Sticky Fingers* album.

It glitters, it shines. Though most surfaces—floors, walls, and ceilings—are black, the space zings and pops with light and sparkle. Each bar seat and booth sports bright red vinyl upholstery; the street-front lounge seating area also bears the signature red vinyl. The black tin-paneled ceiling reflects every light in the place, as do the black glass tiles that edge each booth.

Looking for the necessary? Head for the giant glowing exclamation points—pink for girls and blue for boys. This concludes the punctuation lesson.

Hospitality design principal Peter F. Hapstak III, AIA, IIDA, ISP, of CORE architecture + design, employs a verbal shorthand to describe the restaurant as either “the black diner” or “the Sin City diner.” There’s nothing dark about the food, however, which is “simple, seasonal food done right” by executive chef Brian Murphy, whose credentials include L’Auberge Chez François.

Parched? Make a beeline for the second floor lounge via stair or elevator. In this visibly lighter, relaxed atmosphere, Washington’s tired, huddled masses can recharge with Truthinis, Libertinis, Lovetinis, and a host of other adult beverages issuing from the marble-and-glass bar.

Some have described Policy as a “multi-concept restaurant”—that is, one restaurant offering multiple venues. Policy’s multi-concepts are readily apparent in the contrasts between the first and second floors.

Everything that was dark in “the black diner” below is light here on the second floor, from the painted concrete floor to the high ceiling. Other than a coat of paint, the ceiling has been left unfinished, mechanical systems exposed, all the better to show off the panoply of bejeweled chandeliers that throw light upon . . . graffiti. It’s the real deal, this graffiti, the work of local artist Andrew Funk, as are the other paintings bedecking the walls of this airy space.
Seating is open and low-profile, sized for group socializing rather than tête-à-têtes. Red vinyl cushions have given way to a “graphic spin art” fabric, a near-floral digital spiral, against wood frames. Those desiring more privacy can claim the semiprivate seating areas; there, metal sheers can be partially closed for an increased sense of privacy.

Using texture, hue, light, and shadow, the designers have fulfilled the owner’s desire for a sophisticated night spot for Washington’s denizens. With two venues in a single building, Policy offers freedom of choice—“light-filled urban decay” on the upper floor or, downstairs, “a twist on the popular diner with dark undertones.”

The design professionals of CORE architecture + design, working with MCN Development as contractor, have created an environment that enables the pursuit of happiness, and a resolution is in order to recognize this welcome Policy in the U Street Corridor:

**Believing** that “three things make a successful hospitality concept: great food, good service, and stand-out design,”

**Believing** that the challenge of any project is to “find what’s unique to each client and brand the environment to express their uniqueness;” and

**Recognizing** that *Rolling Stone* magazine (June 11, 2009) has described Policy as a “swanky club, a favorite of Obama fashionistas.”

THEREFORE be it resolved that the design of Policy has successfully achieved not only an environment unique to its owner but stand-out status among its peers.
Taylor Made: Deli Brings Hoagies and Panache to H Street

by Steven K. Dickens, AIA

The story of Taylor Gourmet begins with a decision by owners and very-hands-on proprietors Casey Patten and David Mazza, who share an Italian-by-way-of-Philadelphia heritage, to rectify a Washington problem that troubled them deeply: the lack of a great hoagie.

Having purchased a former barbershop in the emerging "Atlas District" along H Street, NE, Patten and Mazza approached Grupo7 Architecture and Interiors with a lot of ideas. They had photographs from world travels, and clippings showing a broad range of possibilities for their future deli—more ideas, actually, than could possibly be incorporated into the 1,200-square-foot street level of a modest commercial row house. The central idea, though, was to create a "market" character, evoking DC's Eastern Market or Philadelphia's Reading Terminal Market: an informal, approachable space in which the utilitarian qualities of the architecture, perhaps paradoxically, make the foodstuffs seem more special.

As with most first-time retail ventures, the budget for the build-out was minimal. The owners did quite a bit of the renovation work themselves and served as general contractors for the remainder (foreshadowing their active engagement in the creation of chicken cutlets and wine selection now that the deli is open). The design process was a "highly collaborative effort," says Grupo7 principal James Cronenberg, AIA, noting that "it wasn't like many restaurants where the operations are already known." Instead, issues such as workflow, amount of storage and refrigeration space and the like were investigated simultaneously with the aesthetic aspects of the design. "There was a lot of back and forth," he noted.

Circumstance forced a "scrappy and resourceful" approach, in which found objects are exploited, and inexpensive, easy-to-assemble elements crucial. An example of the former is the...
horizontal wood boards found throughout the space, which are made from repurposed packing palettes. An example of the latter is the ceiling lighting system, which comprises plug-in fixtures mounted to an armature of modular fence components. Existing elements were utilized to the fullest: exposing existing brick walls, for example, was an easy way to provide warmth and material authenticity, while the former front window was reused at the rear of the space. Ductwork is exposed, and is one of several components that feature shiny, galvanized metal finishes.

One splurge was the glazed garage door that lines most of the narrow street frontage. It evokes the market-stall character that the owners sought, but also serves to welcome the neighborhood, which at this point in time must be viewed as a generous, optimistic gesture. Exterior signage recapitulates the design motifs of the interior, while simultaneously serving to conceal a roll-down security grating. (Currently the street is undergoing a complete reconstruction including the installation of tracks for a new trolley line. As a result, the garage door isn’t opened frequently. It is hoped that when the dust settles, the sidewalk will be wider and the trolleys will encourage further renaissance in this long-down-at-heels commercial area.)

A great hoagie consists of specialty toppings on basic-but-perfect bread. (Taylor proudly advertises that its bread comes from the premier Italian bakery in Philadelphia.) There is a parallel between high-quality hoagie construction and the design of Taylor Gourmet’s space: a simple, immaculately installed grey tile floor provides an elegant foundation for a montage of wood, metal, glass, and painted plaster that defines the deli’s interior.

Cronenberg notes that one of the owners’ interests was sustainable design, but “the budget just wasn’t there to adhere to a standard like LEED.” The Taylor space, however, would score reasonably well in the LEED rating system, thanks to all the reuse and repurposing of existing materials. Moreover, the deli operates in a sustainable manner, with recycling, use of biodegradable elements and organic cleaners, and so forth.

Taylor Deli was an immediate success, and a second outlet is already in the works, in the City Vista development at 5th and K Streets, NW. Grupo7 is again doing the design. Cronenberg promises that the “elemental ideas” of the H Street store—including taking advantage of pre-existing components—remain in force for the City Vista location. But he notes that the aesthetic will be different, accordingly, because the “found objects” in an as-yet unfinished space are very different from those in an old barbershop. Cronenberg declined to provide details, so fans of good sandwiches and well-designed markets are left in suspense for now. Construction is expected to start on the City Vista location this fall.
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It is often said that a good first impression is an important indicator on an individual's potential for success. Similarly, the character of a building lobby sets the tone for one's overall impression of the building's design. In that vein, a few recent projects along K Street exude great confidence. Both adventurous and beautiful, these spaces create distinctive identities for their buildings by engaging the visitor through sensuous natural materials and the immersive experience of light.

While the projects featured in this article still incorporate materials that may seem typical of corporate Washington (marble, dark-toned woods, granite floors, etc.), the inclusion of cutting-edge artwork or other striking design elements yields spaces that are out of the ordinary.

1801 K Street, NW
At 520,000 square feet, 1801 K Street, NW, is one of the larger non-government office buildings in Washington. While designing a complete re-skinning and renovation of the existing building, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP (SOM) worked hard to unify and connect its two entrance lobbies, one on K Street and the other on L Street, which are on different floor levels. While the final result still requires a one-floor elevator ride between the two spaces, they are strongly connected via their materials and integral art.

The spare and wide-open lobbies feature white Calcutta marble hand-selected from a quarry in the Italian Carrara region (the book-matched slabs hark back to similarly bold stone patterns in...
The thin marble panels in the elevator lobby are backlit.

Fulfilling the client’s goal to give each lobby an enduring quality in the tradition of such classic SOM New York City projects as Lever House, Chase Manhattan Bank, and Pepsi-Cola, the architects collaborated with artist Leo Villareal, who created a permanent artwork featuring changing patterns of light behind translucent planes running the length of each lobby. Jointly titled Threshold, these planes are essential components of the architecture. The artist, who is represented locally by Connor Contemporary Art at 1358-60 Florida Avenue, NE, used custom-designed software to program the LEDs embedded in the luminous walls. His thought-provoking, visually assertive work dominates the area around it, inviting the visitor not just to pass through the lobby, but to pause and enjoy the light-wall’s random, entrancing patterns.

In this large open space, there is currently no furniture. It begs the question: How do you insert an intimate couch and table so as to complete the aesthetic rather than compete with it? While no decisions have been made, the owner and architects are considering several options including oversize furniture, artist-designed pieces, and sizable abstract objects. Since the space may be rented out for events (and a conference center opening off the passageway may be added shortly), whatever is inserted into it needs to be movable and adaptable.

The lobby at 1801 K, which was built by Jones Lang LaSalle Construction, avoids the heaviness and blandness found in many such spaces. While each surface is designed to stand on its own, from the elegant marble to the smooth-skinned glowing ceiling plane, it is the art wall that truly invigorates the place, imbuing it with a sense of constant activity.

1601 K Street, NW

Two blocks down, at 1601 K, where law firm K&L Gates occupies most of the building, Lehman Smith McLeish (LSM) sought to “brand” the interiors to reflect the client’s image. K&L Gates has grown rapidly over the past decade—an era marked by numerous law firm mergers—and LSM has been involved with the design of 20 of the law firm’s 33 offices worldwide. The designers’ role has extended to consultation regarding issues ranging from basic real estate strategies to K&L Gates’s global art collection, which is a cohesive, consistent body of work that in many ways defines the firm’s brand.

LSM considers art to be an integral part of the design for K&L Gates’s DC office. The architects’ clean-lined aesthetic, where neutral surfaces are punctuated by planes of accent finish or color, lends itself to the inclusion of artwork. Art is not an afterthought; commissioned
works are initiated early in the process and can help shape the architecture of the space.

Vong Phaophanit's *Silk & Ash Wall* fills the lobby with a perpetual red glow. The glass tower contains found ashes as well as imported silk; the artist's Asian heritage helps explain the cultural resonance of the materials. While Vong submitted design sketches, the architects did most of the coordination for the engineering, fabrication, and installation of his piece. The black base houses LED light fixtures that illuminate the art from within. Its central location required detailing that can stand up to daily abuse. Visible when approaching the entry doors, this striking object draws visitors into the lobby while demarcating public and private space.

Leo Villareal figures in this project, too. Running from the second to the ninth floor in an internal stairway is Villareal's *Untitled*, which makes use of LED lights encased in long Plexiglas tubes; his customized computer software directs the lights' changing patterns and palette. The lights pulse with a random series of dots, dashes, and lines; the sequences never repeat. This hypnotic light show, reflected in the glass railings, activates the eight-story stair hall. (Another recent piece by Villareal, *Multiverse*, currently fills the moving underground walkway that connects the National Gallery of Art's East and West Buildings.)

Each level surrounding the stair becomes a hub—an internal public space. Placed near a shared conference room, elevator lobby, and coffee bar/kitchen, the animated, juxtaposed colors become a focal point and a conversation starter. Using artwork that is intellectually challenging and visually stimulating adds to the progressive image of the firm and provides visitors, professionals, and staff with a unique environment.

The contractor for the main lobby at 1601 K was Clark Construction Group, while Hitt Contracting Inc. built the K&L Gates interiors.
The "Ice Bridge" at 1101 K Street, NW, soars across the main lobby.

Five blocks further east is 1101 K Street, whose developer was set on the idea of a two-story lobby. Rather than sacrifice valuable rentable square footage on the second floor, the architects at Davis, Carter, Scott Ltd. (DCS) met their client's wishes by carving space out of the basement.

A lobby that is partially below grade runs the risk of becoming a dark and uninviting space, so the designers enlivened and brightened the space by specifying finishes that bring the outside in, developing a narrative based on earth, water, and wood.

Upon entry into the building, the visitor is met by a cantilevered "Ice Bridge" that crosses the core of the lobby below. The bridge provides a soft glow from transparent acrylic panels that are illuminated from within and accented by tempered glass panels and metal rails. A large, curved landing wrapped in warm-toned eucalyptus wood meets the bridge opposite the entryway. The wood wall provides a counterpoint to the sleek, black quartzite wall that encases the elevator core. This dark mass is in turn juxtaposed against a cast glass feature wall.

The art glass is meant to suggest a waterfall, and is lit from a curved cove at the top. The architects worked with the artisan to come up with a pattern that suggests frozen fluidity. There is also a curved monumental staircase with cast glass treads that cascades from the landing down to the sand-like granite floor. The narrative would not be complete without the 80 star-shaped light fixtures at the ceiling suggesting a sky.

DCS energized the lower level programmatically with a conference center; the lobby itself becomes the reception hall accessible from both the main entry and garage. Centralized conferencing is becoming increasingly common in commercial buildings of this kind. The projects incorporate these areas near reception in order to control visitor access to the rest of the office.

The character of the lobby, which was built by Turner Construction, is achieved through directness and simplicity. It has not been cluttered with furniture, carpet, plants, and framed art. There are discoveries to be made in a transitional space that takes the user from public street to private office.

While not on K Street and not yet under construction, a planned installation in the offices of Davis Wright Tremaine at 1919 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, offers another example of using light and "sculpture" to influence the lobby around it. Designed by SKB Architecture and Design, the office will include a lit screen made of clear, smoked, and slightly bluish acrylic rods suspended between solid anigre wood, contrasting with a very subdued, rectilinear space.

The sensory nature of the architectural screen is important to the experience of the space; it connects the DC office of this established, Seattle-based law firm back to its Northwest culture. The design is inspired by a stand of redwood trees, ground fog on a forest path, the dramatic rise of the mountains, and dappled sunlight coming in beams through the tree canopy. In contrast to a more direct geographical reference, such as, say, photographs of the Cascade Mountains, this sculptural gesture is an abstraction and a mystery. It uses LED fixtures in the ceiling that travel through dowels to make the rods glow, creating a warm, welcoming environment. It will also serve to draw attention away from a service corridor, stair door, and other functional elements. The screen will be a dynamic gesture that helps to define the space around it.

A composition of acrylic rods and anigre wood evokes geological features of the Pacific Northwest.

Rendering by SKB Architecture and Design
That Soar: Creating Art Out of a Functional Necessity
by G. Martin Moeller, Jr., Assoc. AIA

One paradox of 20th-century architecture is that for much of that period buildings were simultaneously becoming taller (in cities, mostly) and shorter (in the suburbs, where ranch houses, sprawling schools, and other one-story buildings could stretch out over vast expanses of open land). As a result of both trends, staircases gradually became less important as architectural features than they had been in the past. Many people would come to rely on elevators and escalators in office buildings and shopping malls, and might use stairs at home only to stuff more junk into the basement or attic.

Over the past few decades, however, staircases have made a comeback, thanks in part to growing density in the suburbs and the burgeoning interest in the reduction of energy consumption in buildings of all sizes. At the same time, many businesses and institutions have rediscovered the social value of staircases, which, if visible and pleasantly designed, can encourage interaction among workers.

This article presents five projects—one office, one cultural facility, two houses, and one apartment—that demonstrate the great potential of staircases for beauty and utility.
Vertical Integration

“The way attorneys use office space has changed,” says Yves B. Springuel, AIA, of Mancini•Duffy Architecture + Design. The traditional arrangement of partners’ offices along perimeter walls with adjacent stations for their personal secretaries is giving way to more informal layouts. Recent law office designs often emphasize spaces for impromptu meetings, collaborative work, and frequent face-to-face communication among the staff.

When Mancini•Duffy was hired to oversee the renovation and expansion of the Washington office of Morrison & Foerster LLP, the architects faced two major challenges in creating the desired flexible work environment: the first was the fact that the expanded office would now be spread across four floors; the second related to the shape of the base building itself.

“It’s a long, skinny building with only one elevator core,” explained Springuel. “We recognized that this elongated plan required a central gathering space, so we placed the conference center, library, café, and other shared facilities adjacent to the elevator core on the various floors.”

Then, to balance the insistent horizontality of the space and to establish a prominent, physical connection among all of the floors, the architects conceived the project’s most prominent design element—a soaring, four-story wall clad in Jerusalem limestone, lined with sleek, stainless-steel-and-glass staircases.

The circulation core, with its dramatic juxtaposition of rough stone, shiny metal, and smooth glass, provides a much-needed focal point for the sprawling office space. Raking light from above emphasizes the texture of the limestone tiles, which are mounted in a vertical running bond in order to accentuate the wall’s height. At the top, the drywall ceiling is pulled back from the stone surface, giving the impression that the wall continues upward indefinitely.

While this dramatic core unites, it also divides. At the upper levels, which include the main conference facilities, visitors may move relatively freely through the space. At the lower levels, the monumental stair switches from the front to the back of the wall. At that juncture, a glass security door separates public from private areas. Glass walls adjacent to the circulation core are covered with various films, allowing different degrees of transparency appropriate to their use.

“The conference facilities [at Morrison & Foerster] are used even more frequently than the client expected,” according to Springuel, who noted that the stone-and-glass circulation core has become something of a trademark for the firm, helping to reinforce its corporate identity.

Working with Springuel, who was principal in charge for the Morrison & Foerster project, were Anik Jhaveri, AIA, design principal, and Emily Kirk, designer. HITT Contracting Inc. was the general contractor, with Rugo Stone as the contractor for the limestone wall.

A Signature with a Flourish

When Arlington’s renowned Signature Theatre had the opportunity to move into a new building in the Shirlington Village area, longtime patrons were simultaneously delighted and anxious. Signature, after all, had built a reputation as a scrappy, can-do performing arts organization that had, for most of its existence, operated out of a barely-renovated auto garage in a decidedly unglamorous area. Many fans feared that a move to a new facility would compromise the raw, edgy spirit that had become the theater’s... well, its signature.

Not long after VOA Associates Incorporated was hired to design the new theater’s interior spaces, several Signature donors laid down the law (as paraphrased by VOA associate principal Pablo Quintana): “If you do nothing else in this design, you had better maintain the garage aesthetic.”

VOA responded by giving Signature a space that, though located in a newly built structure, feels more like a converted industrial facility. Many of the wall and ceiling surfaces consist of unpainted concrete or concrete block. Plumbing, ventilation ducts, and electrical conduits are exposed (though their patterns have been carefully composed). Lighting is straightforward, with a few modest accent fixtures defining key spots in public areas.

In this utilitarian context, the architects faced a dilemma when designing the main public staircase, which would connect the ticket office on the lower floor with the main lobby above: should the staircase simply continue the raw, industrial character that pervades the space, or might it be “celebrated” as a grand, sculptural gesture?

In the end, the architects chose to do both. The stair itself has plain concrete treads with perforated aluminum risers and painted metal grilles for railings, all of which are
in keeping with the broader material palette. The staircase achieves specialness, however; by virtue of its elegant curvature and through the incorporation of LED lighting along the treads. Because the LEDs can be programmed to change colors and patterns, Signature’s staff can design a different “light show” to complement each production.

The space surrounding the stair is made of concrete and concrete block. To soften these surfaces and control sound, the architects lined areas of the walls with inexpensive, two-foot-square, textured acoustical tiles, which are attached to the concrete block with Velcro. A simple chandelier, consisting of glowing orbs suspended from an elliptical metal plate, provides a touch of elegance without breaking the neo-garage aura.

“In their previous place, Signature developed almost a guerrilla attitude about theater,” said Quintana. “They thrived partially because of the shortcomings of the space.” In their new home, the guerrillas have gained a space tailored to their needs—and to the enjoyment of their guests—that remains true to their rebellious spirit.

StructureTone was the contractor for the Signature Theatre project.

A Seamless Suite

One of the hallmarks of early modernist architecture was an interest in blurring boundaries between the various design disciplines. Frank Lloyd Wright, for example, argued that furniture should never be a mere collection of discrete elements within a building—rather, the architecture and all of the elements in it should be conceived as a seamless and coherent whole. The German term Gesamtkunstwerk, meaning roughly “total work of art” and originally applied to musical compositions, was sometimes used to describe buildings and interiors that reflected this successful aesthetic integration.

The work of Mark McInturff, FAIA, suggests that he is an heir to this legacy. In the master suite that his firm, McInturff Architects, recently designed for the Cowan Residence, the architecture, cabinetry, and furniture are best understood as a spectrum of designed elements constituting a singular composition.

The suite occupies a three-story addition connected to the original house by a one-story, enclosed breezeway. The core of the addition is a wooden tower that contains a massage room on the lower level, a dressing area on the main level, and a meditation space on top. Adjacent to the tower and connecting the three levels is a stair that is partially hidden by a wooden cage that also serves as the backdrop for the bed on the main floor.

“Because you see it from both above and below, it seemed liked this should be a very open kind of stair—carefully detailed and sculptural,” said McInturff. “On the sleeping level the whole core is wrapped in slats to allow light and air to pass through, and to create a sense of mystery. The nice thing about using the stair is that you get this broken-up view over the bedroom and out to
the landscape, and then you emerge into the meditation room at top."

The slats that envelop the staircase and parts of the core are made of Douglas fir, which is also used throughout the suite in the cabinetry and furniture. The amber-toned wood lends visual warmth to the predominantly white spaces, while the alternation of solid and void in the slatted walls adds a strong sense of pattern without resorting to fussy decoration.

Viewed from outside the wooden cage, the stair appears to be supported by the slats on the one side and by the wall of the tower on the other. In fact, the stair itself is structurally independent, supported by a steel stringer that incorporates a track for the lighting. The treads are made of bamboo on cantilevered steel plates. In lieu of solid risers, the architects added a single steel bar between each pair of treads. Viewed straight on, the staircase appears as an abstract composition of thin, horizontal lines suspended from the simple diagonal bar running up the center.

"As I recall, the structure [of the stair] arrived in one piece," said McInturff, "and was dropped into place with everything but the bamboo treads and the railings. It was all put together like a Swiss watch." It is an apt metaphor for a finely detailed, skillfully fabricated component of a cohesively designed work of architecture.

David Mogensen of McInturff Architects was the project designer for the addition. McInturff credits Ron Isinghood, of Timber Ridge Contractors, and AK Metals for their outstanding craftsmanship on the Cowan project.

Spiraling into Control

The first time Nuray Anahtar, AIA, visited the Annapolis apartment that her firm, NOA Architecture Planning Interiors, was hired to renovate, she was astonished by what she didn't see. "It's a waterfront property and when you entered the unit there was no view of the water," she recalled. "I had to open it up."

The existing apartment had two levels connected by an ungainly, carpeted spiral staircase. The lower level was divided into separate rooms, while the upper level had an open loft space next to another, more secluded area. Anahtar concluded that a wholesale rearrangement of the plan was in order. She also decided that the clunky spiral staircase should be replaced by a more elegant version made mostly of glass, providing a sculptural focus for the apartment without interrupting views across the space.

"I eliminated a bedroom on the lower level and made the bathroom into a small powder room," said Anahtar. "That allowed me to create a line of sight as you entered the unit with a window at the end and a view of the water. It also allowed for a larger living room and better circulation. Then, using a glass partition, we created another bedroom up [in the loft area], so they did not lose any bedrooms."

Having revised the plan, the architect turned her attention to the staircase, which she conceived as an intricate composition of thick glass treads and slender, stainless steel railings. The curvature of the treads suggests motion even when no one is on the stair, while the seafoam-green tint of the glass evokes the color of the water now visible through the windows. Seen on edge, each tread reveals itself as a sandwich of three layers of glass laminated together, providing a visual complement to the central structural column, which is itself expressed as layers of glass and stainless steel.

"The staircase became the most important feature of the project," said Anahtar, "but it was also the most painful part of it." One reason for the pain was a requirement of the building code that the new stair had to match the dimensions of the old stair exactly, despite their divergent materials. After a lengthy search, Anahtar identified a firm in Florida—whose name is simply Architectural Stairs—which was capable of building the glass-and-metal spiral to her specifications.

With its glistening staircase, open plan, white-lacquered floors, and judicious incorporation of vibrantly colored furniture and art, the renovated apartment is simultaneously restrained and stylish, providing a calm yet sophisticated second home for its owners.

The clients for the Annapolis apartment served as their own contractors.
The new staircase at the Annapolis apartment brings a sense of lightness to the space.

The design of the railing allows open views from the loft to the main living area below.

**A Touch of Glass**

A clever architect knows how to take advantage of an unexpected opportunity. When Sharon F. Washburn, FAIA, discovered that there were some iridescent glass tiles left over from the renovation of a bathroom in the Southerland Residence, she had an idea: to use a few of those tiles as jewel-like accents in the new staircase she designed for the house. Set into the tops of the newel posts, which support the railings, the glass tiles provide a shimmering complement to the wood and bamboo surfaces that predominate in the space.

The original house, built in 1941, was unusual in that it was partially constructed of salvaged materials including hand-hewn beams and old bricks, which had been mixed with new materials in sometimes unexpected ways. The result was a cozy house with a unique character, but also with several elements that did not function particularly well. The original staircase, for instance, was narrow and hidden behind doors and walls. Not only did this make it difficult to move furniture and other large items from floor to floor, but it also afforded no visual connection between levels.

Washburn’s renovation included an addition housing a new kitchen, which allowed her to rearrange the previously cramped rooms on the main level while freeing up space for a larger, more open staircase. The new stair, which is adjacent to both the kitchen and the service entry, incorporates cabinetry on the landings that provides storage space for china and coats. When closed, the cabinet doors look like the sort of wood paneling one might expect to see in a house from the Arts and Crafts period. The treads in the staircase are of bamboo, adding a more modern touch, while the risers and the newel posts are faced in recycled heart pine, which relates to the original pine paneling in the upstairs bedrooms.

What makes the staircase truly special, however, are those glass inserts in the newel posts. Thinking ahead, Washburn decided not to attach the tiles permanently. “The glass tiles are almost clear,” she said. “So each of them has a piece of colored paper behind it, and if you want to change the mood you just pull the tile out and change the color.” Eventually, she may insert LEDs in the posts beneath the tiles, so that they can glow from within at night.

The contractor for the staircase in the Southerland Residence was Fine Woodworking Company.
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Iridescent glass tiles accent the tops of the newel posts in the Southerland Residence.

Photos by Sharon F. Washburn, FAIA
The Washington Architectural Foundation is pleased to announce the return of the “Art of Architecture,” its biannual auction of sketches by famous and up-and-coming architects. Since 2006 the foundation has collected and auctioned off the sketches to help support its programs in Washington. This event allows architects—both national and local—to help the community by offering for sale work that is both personal and inventive.

Earlier this year we assembled a list of architects and sent them packages that included a high-quality napkin and a Sharpie pen, and asked for a sketch. This spring our mailbox was brimming with beautiful sketches by Antoine Predock, Cesar Pelli, Thom Mayne, and many others. Local luminaries like Coke Florance, FAIA, and Ken Wilson, FAIA, have also participated. Photographer Boris Feldblyum has photographed many of the napkins for you to see on these pages.

Our wonderful auctioneer, Jim Dinegar, CAE, the CEO of the Greater Washington Board of Trade, also returns for what we are sure will be a wonderful kickoff to this year’s 10th anniversary Architecture Week on September 10. Don’t miss your chance to own an original work of architectural inspiration handsomely matted by Newman Gallery & Custom Frames on Capitol Hill. And you can feel good that your winning bid goes to support the work of the Washington Architectural Foundation. This program shows in a very literal way how architects can serve the community.

The Art of Architecture Auction will take place on September 10 at 6:30 p.m. at the offices of Hickok Cole Architects, 1023 31st Street, NW, in Georgetown. For more information and registration visit www.aiadc.com.
Thursday, September 10

6:30 PM
The Art of Architecture Auction
Earlier this year we sent letters to the world's greatest architects asking them to donate a sketch. Very soon our mailbox was brimming with original works of art from all over the world. You can own a sketch by Antoine Predock, Cesar Pelli, or an amazing up-and-comer like Craig Dykers of Snøhetta. The auction benefits the Washington Architectural Foundation, and Greater Washington Board of Trade CEO Jim Dinegar returns as our auctioneer.
Tickets: $20; registration required at www.aiadc.com. Location: Hickok Cole Architects, 1023 31st Street, NW.

Friday, September 11

5:00 - 7:00 PM
Office Tour
See the best looking offices in town – architects' offices. Five downtown architecture offices open their doors to the public.
Free; registration required at www.aiadc.com. This self-guided tour begins at VOA at 722 12th Street, NW. Metro: Metro Center.

Saturday, September 12

10:00 - 11:30 AM
Family Program at the National Building Museum
Join AIA|DC Education Manager Sarah Smith as she and others in the program perform the amazing Egg Drop. What's so amazing? The structures they build will ensure that the eggs don't break even when tossed from the second floor balcony. Tickets: $7 per child; registration required at www.nbm.org. Location: National Building Museum, 401 F Street, NW. Metro: Judiciary Square.
1:00 - 3:00 PM
How to Work With an Architect and a Contractor
Better clients make better houses. Learn the ins and outs of selecting an architect and a contractor. Our session will cover the design and construction process and show you all the resources you need to find the design and construction team that is right for you. Free; registration required at www.aiadc.com. Location: AIA | DC Chapter House, 1777 Church Street, NW. Metro: Dupont Circle.

6:00 PM - 12:00 Midnight
CANstruction Build-out
Watch teams of architects, engineers, and contractors make giant structures out of canned goods in a six-hour marathon building session. The Constructions are on exhibit for two weeks before being dismantled for donation to the Capital Area Food Bank. The public can vote on their favorites throughout the week by donating canned food "ballots." Free; registration not required. Location: The Shops at 2000 Penn, 2000 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW. Metro: Foggy Bottom.

Sunday, September 13
10:00 AM - 4:00 PM
Student Design Competition
Meet the next generation of Washington architects and watch them at work. Students from local architecture schools are challenged by an intriguing design problem (which remains a closely guarded secret until a week prior to the competition.) They will work all day to come up with a solution. Free; registration not required. Location: National Building Museum, 401 F Street, NW. Metro: Judiciary Square.

2:00 or 2:30 PM
Tour of the Lincoln Cottage
Designated a National Monument by President Clinton in 2000, President Lincoln's Cottage served as Lincoln's family residence for a quarter of his presidency and is the most significant historic site directly associated with his term in Washington aside from the White House. The cottage is located on the grounds of the Armed Forces Retirement Home in northwest Washington, DC, and has been restored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Guided, one-hour tours offer an in-depth look at Lincoln the man and president. Join AIA | DC's Committee on the Environment for a special tour. Tickets: $15; registration required at www.aiadc.com. Tours begin at 2:00 PM or 2:30 PM. Location: Armed Forces Retirement Home at Upshur Street and Rock Creek Church Road, NW. Metro: Georgia Avenue/Petworth (Yellow Green).

Monday, September 14
5:00 - 7:00 PM
Dinner with the Architect
Join architect Peter Hapstak, AIA, of CORE architecture + design, for an evening of great food and a behind-the-scenes account of how the design team combined their creative energies to produce Founding Farmers, a LEED Gold-certified restaurant in Foggy Bottom. Tickets: $65 per person includes special dinner menu and selected wine pairings. Reservations required: call Founding Farmers at (202) 822-8783; ask for "Architect Dinner" reservation. Location: Founding Farmers, 1924 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW. Metro: Foggy Bottom.

Tuesday September 15
5:00 - 6:00 PM
Student Competition Winners Announced
They toiled all day Sunday – see their solutions. Join students to hear a distinguished panel of judges discuss the entries and announce the winners. Free; registration not required. Location: National Building Museum, 401 F Street, NW. Metro: Judiciary Square.

6:30 - 8:00 PM
Spotlight on Design: Bing Thom
Architect Bing Thom, FRAC, whose design for the renovation of the Arena Stage in Washington, DC, is currently under construction and Arena Stage Artistic Director Molly Smith discuss the unique challenges in building performing art centers. Martin Moeller, the National Building Museum's senior vice president and curator, moderates. Tickets: $12; registration required at www.nbm.org. Location: National Building Museum, 401 F Street, NW. Metro: Judiciary Square.

Wednesday, September 16
6:30 - 8:00 PM
DC Architecture: Three views

Thursday, September 17
5:30 PM
Chapter Annual Meeting
6:00 PM
2009 Chapter Awards Roundtable
And the winner is...promptly at 6:00 PM, our panel of nine distinguished judges will announce their picks for the best new Washington architecture. Members should come early to hear the Chapter's annual report and vote for the 2010 Board of Directors. Reception follows. Free; registration required at www.aiadc.com. Location: AIA | DC Chapter House, 1777 Church Street, NW. Metro: Dupont Circle.

Monday, September 21
5:30 - 7:30 PM
Infrastructure Forum
Get your voice heard! Transportation and infrastructure are top issues facing local leaders. As Congress begins to work on its reauthorization, what does our region really need? Join local leaders and AIA members in a discussion on our regional needs for a more livable and sustainable transportation policy. Free; registration required at www.aiadc.com. Location: AIA National, 1735 New York Avenue, NW, 2nd Floor Board Room. Metro: Farragut West.
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masses corresponding to the various components of the complex. The windowless Walmart is literally at the center of the project, but it is largely concealed (at least from the two street facades) by the huge, glassy L.A. Fitness on top, a fast-casual restaurant on the corner, a small medical office building along one side of the existing garage, and two connective spaces: a triple-height entrance lobby and a seven-story elevator tower.

Walmart’s brand-standard, brown resin panels make an appearance on the exterior, but they share the stage with ashlar stone, glass, and light metal panels, columns, and louvers. The restaurant is small in scale and overtly pedestrian-oriented—it’s the closest element to the nearby Spring Hill Metro station and the farthest from the parking garage. The L.A. Fitness is also a first-of-its-kind facility, and, given its exposed columns and uplifted roof, the phrase “temple of fitness” really seems to apply. At seven stories, the elevator core is not very tall, but its vertical proportions, glass, and brilliant yellow-tiled walls give it considerable presence and appeal. The newly built side street (dubbed Cornerside Boulevard) has a sidewalk, and off this sidewalk are building entrances every 50 feet or so. There is an entrance forecourt, but it is modest in size and spans from the sidewalk to the main entry—unlike the over-scaled “plazas” that separate many Tysons parking lots from the buildings they serve. All this would hardly seem revolutionary in a dense city, but in car-centric Tysons, it’s almost unique.

From the Metro station one block away, the various components and their signage read clearly. At night, the L.A. Fitness becomes a glowing lantern, and the yellow walls in the elevator lobbies beckon. The parking garage may dominate the rear facades, but from the Metro, it is almost completely concealed.

For the urban Walmart project at 77 H Street, NW, just a few blocks from Union Station and the U.S. Capitol, the basics of the
urban setting were already present. This includes people, courtesy of the heavily-subscribed X2 bus line that plies H Street from the White House to Anacostia. Yet, as at Tysons West, the location was a bit of a no-man's land, part of a dead zone created by an ill-fated 1960s “urban renewal” initiative. Both of the primary components of the program—the Walmart and a 300-unit, market-rate apartment building—were somewhat pioneering for the location. “We were under strict instructions” from client JBG, said Jack Hollen. “They said, ‘Get it right!’”

JBG was also quite firm that the exterior design should draw fairly directly from two neighborhood landmarks: the Government Printing Office (GPO) and Gonzaga College High School. Both are complexes that grew over time, anchored by turn-of-the-century Renaissance Revival edifices with massive red-brick walls, pilasters, deep-set windows in regular rows, and cornices. Although the architects at MV+A consider themselves to be modernists, “We were thrilled,” said Hollen. “It just seemed like the right direction.”

The resultant facades are very convincing. Although obviously drawing from the precedential buildings, 77 H has its own identity, largely because MV+A drew from the program to provide variety. A common pitfall of historicist design is that it “fixes” the irregularities and oddities that are common to virtually all older buildings. MV+A understood that such quirks are integral to the character of historic buildings, and took that notion as inspiration. Toward the west side of the complex, for example, a stair tower is revealed, creating an asymmetrical vertical accent and a break in the façade. On First Street, the loading entrances are carefully worked into the composition, but they break the regular rhythm of the rest of the façade. The two non-street sides, like the secondary facades of the GPO, are simplified, yet introduce some new components such as balconies that provide interest and scale.

MV+A also understood that some modernist elements are appropriate and even necessary in a building that is, in fact, of the modern era. The GPO-inspired H Street façade is bookended by modern glass-and-steel corner pavilions, one the entrance to Walmart, the other the entrance to the apartment building. These are articulated as if they were additions to an older, pre-existing building, which Hollen views as an appropriate way to introduce modern elements to an otherwise-historicist façade without producing a “gimmicky” result.

Even more so than at Tysons West, the planning of 77 H—that is, how all the parts fit together and interconnect—is incredibly intricate. The contextual façades, for example, didn’t include a way to house a double-height space (as required for the Walmart) at the second floor level. MV+A solved the problem by tucking a
half-dozen small retailers under Walmart, facing H Street. These have show windows that extend some five feet above Walmart’s floor, with a big cornice above, then a row of small windows and another cornice. These elements work on multiple levels: first, the smaller retailers help attract pedestrian life to the street; second, the tall show windows lend presence and substantial signage opportunities for the small retailers; third, the façade articulation gives the impression that the first floor is tall and grand while the second floor is almost a mezzanine (approximately the opposite of the actual situation); and fourth, the windows in Walmart’s space are sufficiently high and small that Walmart’s store planners actually left most of them open, allowing natural light in, which is highly unusual for a big box of any brand.

At both 77 H and Tysons West, MV+A alternated between concealment and overt expression of underlying functions. Upon analysis, many of the design decisions seem “complex and contradictory,” to borrow another key phrase popularized by Robert Venturi and Denise Scott Brown. At 77 H, for example, the tall Walmart space is ingeniously concealed in the front façade, yet the much-smaller stair tower is articulated. A sign at the top of the stair tower, painted on the brick in old-timey style, winks at itself—“77 H Street, Est. 2013”—even as it overlooks a highly modern pool/sundeck designed by landscape architects Parker Rodriguez. At Tysons West, the medical office component was added at the eleventh hour almost solely to conceal the parking garage from Cornerside Boulevard, yet the one level of parking between the Walmart and L.A. Fitness is revealed from Westwood Center Drive, which is more heavily-trafficked. The smallest component—the restaurant space—is the most prominently located.

One quickly learns that these design moves reflect good judgment and intuition, not exercises in analytical consistency or architectural purity. They feel right, though the reasons can be difficult to grasp and express. Each element works both with and against the others, and the end result is balanced and unified.

With the arrival of the Silver Line, Tysons has started upon an ambitious program to transform its physical form into something befitting its corporate and retail heft. This initiative is so visionary and ambitious that, at times, it may seem delusional. Tysons West nonetheless succeeds with a typology that could apply to hundreds of sites throughout the area. It presents the most compelling case to date that maybe Tysons’ goals could actually be achieved.

Similarly, when Walmart announced it was coming to the District, civic leaders and design professionals raised many questions, including whether the stores could possibly fit into walkable urban settings. Others expressed social justice concerns, which may have been realized with Walmart’s recent abandonment of its plans for two east-of-the-Anacostia sites. The design of 77 H, however, should assuage skeptics who feared potential damage to the urban and architectural setting of the city. Not only is it possible for these stores to fit in, but the complexes that house them can be significant contributors to their neighborhoods. They can improve the city, while still providing the low-priced merchandise—stacked to the ceiling and lit by a white wash of fluorescent lights—which consumers seem to crave.
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Nearly 55 years ago, Tysons Corner Center opened 12.5 miles from downtown Washington, on a triangle of Virginia farmland that had been owned during the Civil War by local postmaster William Tyson. The shopping mall was bordered by the new Capital Beltway (I-495), Dolley Madison Highway (Route 123), and Leesburg Pike (Route 7)—a former toll road charging five cents a head for pigs or sheep, and 10 cents for the horse-and-carriage to drive them to market. The Tysons triangle gradually expanded west as a center for commerce and shopping, to the Dulles International Airport access road. Before long, the resulting 3.3-square-mile “edge city” was so popular that it became a traffic congestion nightmare.

To address traffic and other issues, the Fairfax County Board of Supervisors released, in 2013, its Comprehensive Plan for the Evolution of Tysons Corner to an Urban Center. It aimed to turn the 3.3 square miles into a full-spectrum downtown with a “sense of place” strong enough to attract 200,000 workers and close to 100,000 residents by 2050. The plan calls for the
clustering of up-to-40-story structures around Tysons' four Metrorail stations. The buildings are to be "iconic," "well-crafted," and "mixed-use," that will "contribute to the skyline" and be "complementary to the urban fabric." The goal is to entice people to jettison their cars and commute to work by subway, bicycle, circulator bus, or on foot. The resulting "vibrant" space would provide homes for the arts, culture, and education, while featuring nature in winding paths, rippling streams, pocket parks, and new street grids with tree-lined boulevards.

VITA (Italian for "life"), a 30-story gateway to the original mall (now called Tysons I), is the first residential tower developed under this plan. It was designed by Robert Sponseller, AIA, design principal at Shalom Baranes Associates, in Georgetown. The mixed-use building is also home to Earls, a 10,800-square-foot restaurant designed by Kevin Albaugh of MBH Architects in California, and Jennifer Hoffbeck of Earls Kitchen+Bar headquarters in Vancouver, British Columbia. In the classic Italian piano nobile ("noble floor") tradition, the formal entrances to both VITA and Earls are located one story above ground level, on a grand plaza that sits atop the building’s stone "citadel" base, and high above the din of circulating traffic.

The plaza itself also serves to deliver pedestrians elsewhere—nearly to the entrance for Tysons I and the Hyatt Regency, opposite VITA; and, farther away, to the pedestrian skyway leading over Route 123 to the Silver Line Metro station and Tysons II beyond. The landscaped plaza is perfect for outdoor dining and ping-pong in warm weather, and ice skating and comfortable seating around a glassed-in fire in winter.

Discerning the shape of the VITA building is something of a three-dimensional Rorschach test. The pedestrian skyway over Route 123 offers three successive views of the building as you approach the plaza from Metro: at first, VITA’s folded form looks like the backside of a three-way mirror in a clothing store; next, it reads as a more typical flat, rectangular tower; and finally, as one reaches the point where the skyway turns the corner, the building evokes the looming prow of a ship. If you are driving past VITA on Route 123 going west, the tower’s form looks like a zig-zag. But if you reverse your direction and pass it heading eastward, and take an immediate right onto the I-495 South entrance ramp, it is reminiscent of a fish tail. Should you have the rare opportunity to view the building from a helicopter...
Facade of VITA, showing offset window pattern.
(or just pull out your Google satellite app instead) you can see that, in fact, the footprint actually resembles a blocky, dynamic arrow with an angled shaft, metaphorically pointing to the future.

This forward-looking arrow shape was not pre-conceived, but rather an architectural happenstance. Sponseller was searching for a design to play well with the glass-sheathed, rectangular polygon of the new Tysons Tower office building next to VITA. His priorities were twofold: first, to avoid presenting VITA’s windows as fishbowls to the occupants of the office tower; and second, to afford VITA residents spectacular views of Washington landmarks to the east, and more pastoral views of Fairfax County and beyond to the west, south, and north. Starting with a hypothetical brick of clay, he pinched, pleated, and folded the form until its views to near and far were largely unobstructed. Then, he snipped and spread the back end to create the fish tail, capitalizing on the views toward Washington. “It took some gentle persuasion,” he noted, “to get the building’s owner to go along with every pleat and every fold; but now he loves the design.”

The skin of the VITA building was another challenge. Because of all the tucks and bends, Sponseller wanted to soften the exterior by wrapping it in a “fabric” of precast concrete. Whereas most precast concrete is beige, yellow, or grey, the architect wanted it dark, so that the boldly offset windows, integrated with L-shaped panels and spanning two stories each, would appear to shimmer like fish scales. “Taking the precast concrete to a level where it is artistic could have made or broken the project,” explains Sponseller.

“That was a huge challenge; but the fabricator took something ordinary and made it unique.” The skin was also conceived with sustainability in mind, and indeed, the building is designed to achieve LEED Silver certification.

The bends and folds of VITA’s exterior make for short, intimate interior hallways. These are bathed in soft beige and accentuated by a rectangular motif that repeats in the carpet and sidewall light fixtures. The 429 one-to-three-bedroom apartments with Italian cabinetry and quartz countertops range in size from about 550 to 1,800 square feet. The plaza entrance level includes two common area sitting rooms, a sports lounge, and two exercise rooms, while the rooftop terrace includes a saltwater swimming pool with views in all directions.

On the plaza level, Earls offers “upscale casual” dining in wide-open spaces featuring wood, stone, and metal, separated into quadrants by related decors. This open plan permits visitors to see and be seen, whether at a booth, table, or the bar. Additional flexible space is available indoors or outdoors, thanks to glazed patio curtain walls that can be opened in favorable weather. Whimsical accents and motifs lend an air of sophisticated friendliness: A cast bronze gorilla greets patrons holding a bronze block sporting two
Viking-type horns. A huge metal wall sculpture at the far end purports to depict the roads in the District of Columbia, but, viewed more nationally, suggests mirror images of the U.S. highway system from Colorado to the Atlantic Ocean. Light fixtures in one part of the room resemble giant, glowing paperclips. What is the combined effect of these elements? At 6:00 on a Saturday evening, the place was ringing with conversation and activity.

What factors, I wondered, might be most likely to attract tenants to VITA? Proximity to shopping? Proximity to work? On the elevator, I encountered Jennifer, a single, forty-something consultant with a doctoral degree who evaluates federal health and human services programs for a firm in Arlington. Why did she choose VITA? “Location, location, location,” she responded, referencing the confluence of highways out her front door. Another magnetic pull was her strong emotional link to Metro. Her father was Metro’s first personnel director. One of her favorite images is the story of her parents walking hand-in-hand through the new Metro tunnel under the Potomac River, before the tracks were laid. A decade later, in the 1980s, as a high school student, she sold women’s clothing at Tysons. She thus has deep roots in the area. Does she shop frequently at Tysons? “Not really,” she replied.

Spontaneously, she invited me to view her apartment—a one-bedroom she had transformed into an efficiency with a huge “walk-in closet.” Her high-up view was perfectly centered on the plaza. Except for a CB2 sleep sofa, her furniture was exclusively IKEA, complementing the Italian kitchen and bath cabinetry. Her place was immaculate, impeccable, and catalogue-worthy. In the walk-in closet she had created from the former bedroom, two tall, freestanding, ceiling-high wardrobes stood as one against the left wall. Four identical dressers balanced them on the right, and two more, back-to-back, formed an island in the center of the room. Jennifer slowly opened doors and drawers to reveal meticulous patterns and rhythms of shoeboxes and garments in every tone and hue, perfectly stacked, or perfectly spaced on identical hangers. “I thought you didn’t shop here much,” I noted. “I don’t,” she smiled. “Mostly, I order online from J. Crew [which has a store at Tysons II mall].”

Jennifer’s story, perhaps ironically, suggests that the rationale for VITA’s location and design was valid. In dense urban environments, residents have many options for places to shop, eat, and be entertained. While Jennifer may not shop much at the giant mall next door, she clearly feels that her new building offers the right mix of space, amenities, and accessibility to the key places in her life.

When I told Jennifer’s story to Sponseller, he replied, “I love to hear how people come in and use the space, and change things. That is what it is all about. The building is not complete without the people. You want people to make the space their own, and to know that what you gave birth to is doing its own thing out on the planet.”

---

**Project: Earls,**
7902 Tysons One Place, Tysons, VA

Architects: MBH Architects
Interior Designers: Earls Kitchen + Bar
Landscape Architects: Bruce Jett Associates
Structural Engineers: RLG Consulting Engineers
M&E Engineers: Schnackel Engineers
Acoustical Consultants: Charles M. Salter Associates
Lighting Designers: WSP
General Contractors: Shawmut Design & Construction

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Interior of Earls, showing “paper clip” light fixtures.

Interior of Earls, showing stylized map of DC on rear wall.

Dining terrace of Earls.
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The Boilermaker Building was built in 1919 as a factory, not a church. But like a Gothic cathedral, it employs a strong structural framework and extensive glazing to create soaring, light-filled interior spaces. With its slender steel columns, beams, and trusses capped by a three-tiered sloping roof, the building—a temple to industry of sorts—is at once muscular and delicate.

Constructed as part of the Navy Yard Annex and originally used for manufacturing boilers for Navy ships, the 320-foot-long structure has now been renovated and converted into a mixed-use building containing restaurants, stores, a brewery, and office space. The 50,000-square-foot adaptive reuse project, renamed the Boilermaker Shops, was designed by the Washington office of Gensler, a global architecture, design, planning, and consulting firm. The project is one of several new and renovated buildings that comprise The Yards, a 42-acre, mixed-use development next to the Washington Navy Yard on the city’s southeast waterfront. (For an overview of The Yards, see the Spring 2012 issue of ARCHITECTUREDC.)

“It’s rare to find old industrial buildings in DC—the city has federal office buildings to spare, but spaces that once harbored manufacturing are more common to nearby Baltimore,” said Jordan Goldstein, AIA, IIDA, LEED AP, a principal at Gensler, in a blog entry. A co-managing director of Gensler’s Washington office, Goldstein served as principal-in-charge and design director for the project. The Boilermaker Building “feature[d] a central space a block long, high ceilings, and an internal crane that lofted giant boilers and swung them down the assembly line,” Goldstein wrote. “Massive walls of windows flooded the factory floor with natural light, where workers worked on the pieces and parts of World War I and II warships.” In subsequent years, the building was used for other purposes, including an indoor parking lot and a storage facility, and its condition eventually decayed.
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"When working with historic structures, a good bit of forensic architecture work is involved," said Paul Samala, AIA, LEED AP BD+C, a senior associate at Gensler who served as the project manager and project architect for the Boilermaker Shops. "You have to identify what was original to the building and what was added throughout the building's ensuing nine lives. The challenge in rehabbing the Boilermaker Building lay in creating an economically viable retail property while also maintaining the structure's historic character."

All historical sites, Goldstein said, "have challenges, but in this case the difficulty lay in the nature of the building. Most historic structures were built with a high level of craft and finish, and many historic guidelines are written with this assumption. The Boilermaker building, however, was a pragmatic structure lacking in the ornamental décor and high finishes typical of historic structures. So we had to ask two questions: First, what does it mean to renovate an industrial structure? And second, what standard of finish should [we] aspire to?"

The answer, he said, had two parts. "First, we needed to renovate the structure so that it complied with modern standards for strength and weather resistance. And second, we took great care to maintain as much of the building's original materials as possible, while ensuring that the building's original fabric, where extant, looked sufficiently weathered. In those places where new elements were inserted, we made certain that they expressed themselves as new."

To develop its design for the renovation, the firm drew on its past experience in working with historic buildings. "Our work on
the Silver Theater in Maryland and in the renovations of older hotel buildings, like the Beverly Hills Hotel in Los Angeles, has allowed us to think about transformative architectural work that is both surgical and comprehensive,” Samala said. “Working in close coordination with local preservation authorities, the project team formed a design strategy in which new architectural elements are juxtaposed against older industrial components.”

The renovation added three glass pavilions on the building’s south façade and inserted a new second floor. Two of the three new pavilions replaced non-historic additions to the building, while the new second floor “floats within the larger open volume of the interior,” Samala said. A third design move was the use of interior glass partitions that help “retain the feeling of continuity in the large, open, naturally lit interior.”

With the Boilermaker Building, “we were surgical in our treatment of the historic façade and comprehensive in our rethinking of the interior of the building,” Goldstein said. “Our renovation replaced all of the exterior glass while preserving and repairing as much of the steel window frames as possible. We added new steel to create second floor loft offices, and repositioned the ground level to be a series of independent retail spaces that open to a new, wide plaza.”

As is often the case in renovation projects, there were some surprises. “The age of the Boilermaker building and lack of existing documentation on the building proved to be a significant challenge,” Samala said. “Many of the existing architectural elements were discovered when we began working on the building. A few elements stand out as particular challenges, such as the roof structure. We initially planned to keep it intact and renovate it as needed, but it was found to have significant structural damage and black mold, so we decided to demolish it in full and rebuild it.”

In addition, he said, “a steel plate more than an inch thick was found embedded in the floor. It had to be removed, at much expense to the owner. And hazardous materials were found in the paint coatings of the building structure. Due to these challenges, the building had to be remediated to its bare structure before construction could begin.”
The project “was a great lesson in thinking differently about older buildings and working with a creative development team to think out of the box about reuse,” Goldstein said. “Instead of knocking down a unique structure, we used adaptive reuse to imbue it with a new purpose. This allowed historic architecture to contribute to a revitalized community’s burgeoning aesthetic in a way that animates a once-neglected waterway.”

For Samala, the Boilermaker Shops “is a bold model of adaptive reuse, with a dramatic tension between the new and the original architectural features. The effort proved so successful that the developer was able to quickly attract a slew of ground-floor retail tenants.”

Prominent among those tenants is the Blue Jacket brewery and its associated brew pub, the Arsenal. With 19 fermentation vessels and a production capacity of 5,000 barrels, the brewery carries on the building’s tradition as a manufacturing site, occupying 5,600 square feet of space on three levels.

The Arsenal serves lunch and dinner, plus brunch on Sunday, with 20 Blue Jacket ales and lagers on tap daily, as well as wine and cocktails. The 200-seat restaurant and barroom was designed by GrizForm Design Architects (GFD), a hospitality design and architecture firm, in collaboration with the client, the Neighborhood Restaurant Group (NRG). Although the failure rate for new restaurants is quite high, GFD states that “in 10 years and over 40 restaurants, only two projects [designed by GFD] have closed their door.”

Located on the eastern end of the Boilermaker Building, the Arsenal occupies a high-ceilinged space adjacent to some of the brewery’s stainless steel production equipment. A tall window wall drenches the space in daytime light.

“Designing within a working brewery was new for us,” said Griz Dwight, AIA, LEED AP, principal at GFD. “The brewery equipment presented a dominant feature that we wanted to be sure was highlighted, but we also needed to layer in texture and warmth to make the space comfortable.” Toward that end, the design employs wooden flooring, tabletops, and seats, and booths with red leather benches.

“One of the main challenges was the volume of the building,” Dwight added. “The historic site had great bones, but was initially more suitable to the factory that it was, rather than the restaurant that it was to become. Bringing in a human scale was necessary.” In one part of the restaurant, he explained, “the solution was to add a large communal table and enormous pendant lights that ground the space. The tall pendants were actually borrowed from one of the NRG’s other restaurants.”

In another part of the restaurant, the solution was to design tables enclosed in thin iron frames from which small light fixtures are suspended—an arrangement that subtly defines a more intimate, lower-ceilinged space at each table without interrupting views of the room. Neighboring booths similarly feature light fixtures projecting out over their tables at low heights. The fixtures are designed in an early-20th-century industrial aesthetic, and would look at home on a Navy warship of the era.

“We worked with an amazingly talented lighting designer who handmade all of the decorative lights within the restaurant,” Dwight said. “The detail and glow that the lights provide make the space.”

“Our favorite part of the design,” he added, “are the booths and banquettes within the space. The site had the potential to feel cavernous but the custom details on the seating elements bring the scale down and create cozy nooks within the restaurant. We worked tirelessly with NRG, artisan lighting makers, and family and friends to make sure that the details were perfect.”

Views of the Arsenal. Photos © Eric Laignel Photography
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Frozen Treat

District Design Creates a Downtown Branch for Pleasant Pops

by Ronald O'Rourke
Not every small business can claim a surprise visit from the President of the United States as a part of its back story. But it's a piece of the corporate lore now at Pleasant Pops—a local seller of fruit-flavored popsicles, coffee and tea, and light foods for breakfast, lunch, and dinner—following a visit late last year by President Obama.

The president and his two daughters, Sasha and Malia, dropped by the Adams Morgan branch of Pleasant Pops as part of a local shopping excursion on Small Business Saturday—the Saturday after Thanksgiving, when consumers are encouraged to patronize small businesses as part of their holiday-season buying (possibly following visits to big-box stores on Black Friday). After pondering the selection at Pleasant Pops, the president ordered a strawberry-ginger-lemonade popsicle, while Sasha and Malia went for a Carolyn's cookies-and-cream pop and a cranberry-apple pop.

“It's been a lifelong dream for us to have the President of the United States come by, especially because I worked for his campaign for a year and a half as my first job out of college,” wrote Roger Horowitz of Pleasant Pops, in a blog entry. “We've gotten a bunch of media attention about his visit.” Horowitz and Brian Sykora co-founded Pleasant Pops in 2009, starting with a popsicle cart in Mount Pleasant, then building the business up to a food truck in 2011 and a brick-and-mortar store in Adams Morgan in 2012.

Five months before the President's visit, in June 2015, Pleasant Pops marked another milestone with the opening of its second brick-and-mortar shop, located at 731 15th Street, NW, just two blocks from the White House. The new outlet was designed by District Design, a four-person architecture and design firm founded in 2010.

“We met the client because our office is directly across the street from their first location [in Adams Morgan],” said Carmel Greer, AIA, LEED AP, District Design's principal and owner. “They moved into their first space around the same time that we moved into our retail and office space, so our neighboring businesses have grown up together. Before starting on their second location, we helped them redesign the back-of-house space in their first location.”

The new downtown branch of Pleasant Pops occupies a 595-square-foot space previously used as an Italian restaurant's wine shop. The budget for renovating the space was limited, and a lot of it was needed for buying kitchen equipment, so Greer responded with a dollar-wise design for the renovation that achieves a lot in functionality and ambience.

“We take our clients' budgets very, very seriously,” Greer said. "To that end, we looked for ways we could..."
capitalizing on improvements that had been made by the previous tenant, Potenza's wine store. We always look to make use of what's already there, which is the first step in not creating unnecessary waste," Greer said.

"In this case," she explained, "we left the bathroom and mechanical equipment in place, which enabled us to focus resources on the customer and employee experiences. We exposed the existing brick wall, and were able to reuse the [wine shop's] existing floor, which is made of Italian-villa-styled stone pavers. "This helped save resources and kept the project on budget."

To these existing elements, Greer added unfinished wood-plank walls, off-white marble at the sales counter, stained-wood display shelving and bench seating, a black chalkboard menu display, and white paint. The resulting combination of neutral tones and natural finishes lends the space an informal and somewhat rustic atmosphere—an effect accentuated by a secondary side door and its overhead transom windows, which were treated as found objects and simply painted over in white, turning them into ghostly artifacts of a previous use of the space. The overall design, Greer said, creates "a warm, inviting atmosphere full of natural materials, which I think stands apart from a lot of the generically slick offerings in that part of downtown."

The wood used for the wall planks and benches is reclaimed; the five-inch-wide oak wall planks were salvaged from a barn in North Carolina. "The existing Pleasant Pops store [in Adams Morgan] had wooden planks, albeit of a different color and layout," Greer said. "We thought it was nice to have some consistency between stores. The chalkboard stripe that runs around the left and rear of the space enables the clients to continually change their menu without discarding materials."

Against the backdrop of muted tones, the store's artwork and merchandise displays provide bright notes of color. Though small in square footage, the space feels larger due to its high ceiling and ample light coming through the west-facing window wall.

The store's layout looks simple, but in fact reflects some careful design work. "There wasn't a separate commercial kitchen designer, so we worked closely with the client to locate each piece of equipment," said Greer. "The equipment requirements were extensive relative to the size of the space. The pops require large freezers, in addition to the normal equipment you'd associate with a coffee shop. Behind the coffee bar is a jigsaw puzzle of equipment. We worked hard to create an efficient work flow for employees, while also facilitating customer movement."

"I like that each element of the project—from the wood, to the light fixtures, to the contractor, to the marble vendor—truly reflect the client's passion for supporting small businesses and local vendors," she added. "What I found most enjoyable was teaming up with another young, small business—our neighbors [in Adams Morgan]—to create something special together. I think the architecture is very much a corollary to their food offerings."

With the new branch of Pleasant Pops now only two blocks away, President Obama can indulge a desire for popsicles at a moment's notice. His choice of flavors during his visit to the Adams Morgan branch resonated at District Design. "Strawberry-ginger-lemonade is a big hit in the office," Greer said. "Though, when there is a teacher work day in the winter, my son hangs out in the office and is a huge fan of the dark chocolate hot pops. It sweetens the fact that he has to hang out in the office those days."
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Sitting by the Dock... in Bethesda

A Stylish Take on Seaside Ambiance

by Asya Snejnevski

Having worked on many projects with Passion Food Restaurant Group, Gensler’s regional managing principal, Jordan Goldstein, AIA, IIDA, LEED AP, says that meetings with the group’s leaders—chef Jeff Tunks, David Wizenberg, and Gus DiMillo—are "very much like a family gathering, all together sharing concept ideas, [discussing] where the menu is going, and really trying to blend the architecture and the dining experience in a way that is symbiotic." Their newest collaboration, completed in September 2015, is PassionFish Bethesda, a sister restaurant to PassionFish Reston, featuring fresh fish dishes with flair from all over the world.

**Project:** PassionFish Bethesda,
7187 Woodmont Avenue, Bethesda, MD

**Interior Architects (Restaurant):** Gensler
**Architects (Base Building):** SK&I
**Structural Engineers:** Rathgeber Goss Associates
**MEP Engineers:** Face Consultants
**Foodservice Consultants:** JRS
**Lighting Consultants:** Lighting Workshop
**General Contractors:** Potomac Construction Services

All photos © Kate Warren
Located in a new building directly opposite a Barnes & Noble Bookstore on the corner of Bethesda Avenue and Woodmont Avenue, PassionFish Bethesda might be described as a casual, “maritime modern” restaurant with bright colors and open views. The concept behind the seafood-focused establishment, as Goldstein puts it, is “sitting by the dock of the bay.” That theme is evident in the raw, dock-like wood floors in the entry lounge, complemented by wood paneling on the ceiling, sky- and water-blue tones in the furniture and artwork, and bright pops of yellow throughout, which suggest sun rays peeking through the water.

Circulation patterns within the restaurant reflect the architects’ desire to create long vistas through the space, punctuated by carefully placed artworks. The entry lounge is surrounded by glass-enclosed wine racks that frame the view across a large square bar toward a sculpture on the back wall that depicts a school of fish. The bar and adjacent kitchen are both open to the main dining room, thus drawing patrons into the buzz of activity involved in the preparation of food and drinks.

Gensler created a variety of seating areas in PassionFish Bethesda, evoking the nooks and crannies in which fish like to hide and gather in natural coral reefs. Cove-like round booths inspire intimate conversation and feel especially private, with muted gray padded seat backs that continue up the wall—a design element that also helps modulate conversational noise. The central open area flows through a tighter, narrow space into a back room that can be closed off for private events. An outdoor patio is easily incorporated into the restaurant when the weather is nice. These fluid spaces bring to mind the ebb and flow of the tide. On the practical side, they offer the flexibility to accommodate groups of different sizes. Flexibility was also built into some of the furniture—the tables in the back room, for instance, appear to be square “four-tops,” but actually have secret leaves that can be folded out to create circular tables accommodating larger parties.

The hidden gems in the restaurant include an old-school diver statue by the restrooms and many depictions of ocean critters hiding in unlikely places. Schools of fish can be found floating in sculptural form on several walls, frozen in a mosaic on another, and even swimming in an “aquarium”—actually a video projection on the rear wall. Pendant light fixtures hovering over the semicircular booths evoke chunks of so-called “brain coral,” while the chandelier in the back room is reminiscent of floating seaweed.

Those family-like bonds between the clients and architects of PassionFish Bethesda have yielded a space that seems uniquely expressive of the owners’ culinary concept. Not only does the space work for waiter and customer alike, but the design playfully and successfully integrates elements from the menu into the architecture to create a stylish, memorable dining experience.
Top and above: Booth seating.
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