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Architecture + Design

in the Mid-Atlantic

1997: number two

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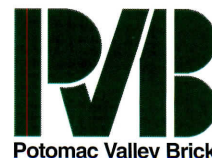
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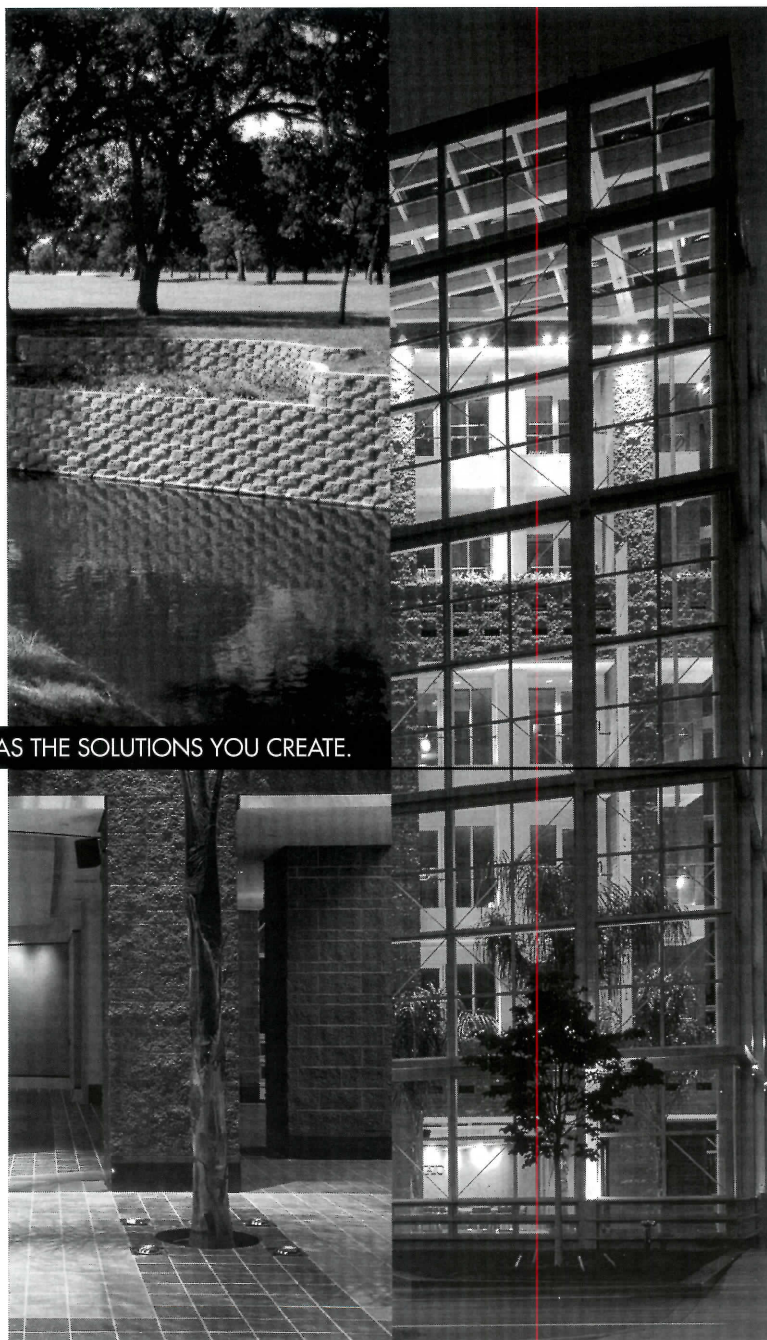
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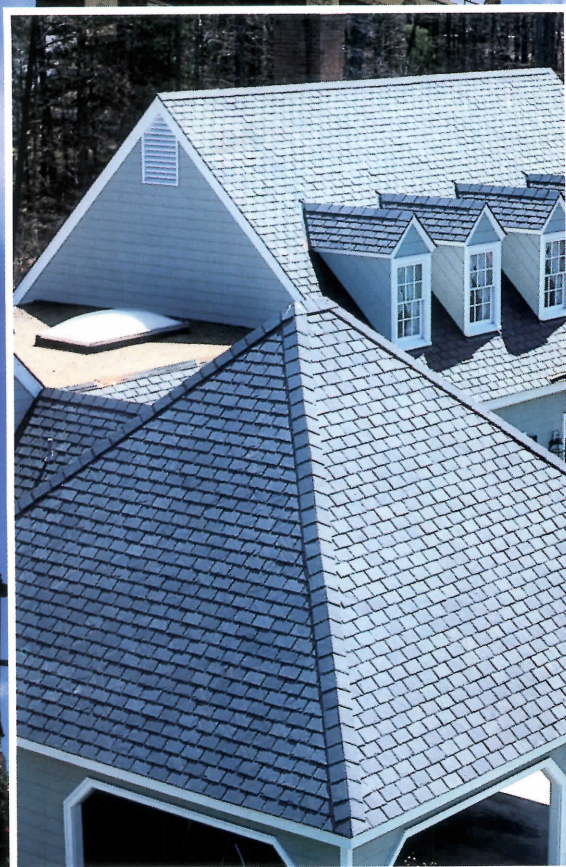
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The Tradition of Craft

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Tower of Learning

The William Smith Morton Library offers a fresh interpretation of the Gothic tradition while making deft urban design gestures on the main quad at Union Theological Seminary. *By Vernon Mays*

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The Barter Theater, McKinney Boyd Architects
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Caretakers of History

Following the strictest standards for the ongoing restoration of Poplar Forest, the lesser-known second home of Thomas Jefferson, historians and workmen are reviving the skills and traditions of 19th century Virginia building trades. *By Vernon Mays*



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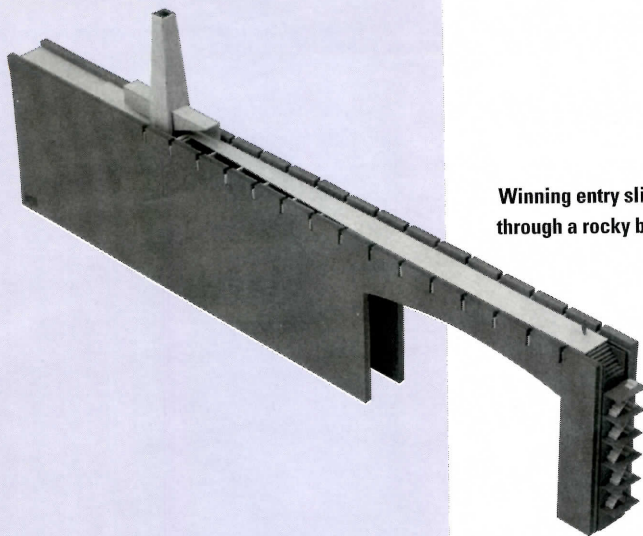


Taking Note

doing the small thing well

On the cover:
William Smith Morton Library.
Photo by J. Christian Wildman.

In our next issue:
Inform Awards



Winning entry slices through a rocky bluff.

tapping the Lynchburg Riverfront

6

Combine a cooperative civic effort with a college weekend design charette and the result is 51 novel ways to get from here to there in downtown Lynchburg, a city that is separated from its riverfront by a fifty-foot-tall bluff.

Joe Freeman, president of Lynch's Landing Inc., a local non-profit group, said the architectural competition held in the spring attracted local attention to the lack of direct pedestrian access. The winners' solutions "give us an opportunity to see some options," says Freeman. "Whether these particular (designs) make it remains to be seen." Lynch's Landing is an umbrella group for organizations, businesses, and citizens leading the push to revitalize Lynchburg's riverfront and downtown. Paul Harvey, a planning official with the city said that while City Council and the administration have seen the competition entries, the particular problem addressed by the students is low on the city's priority list because the five-block-long area is accessible by pedestrians at both ends.

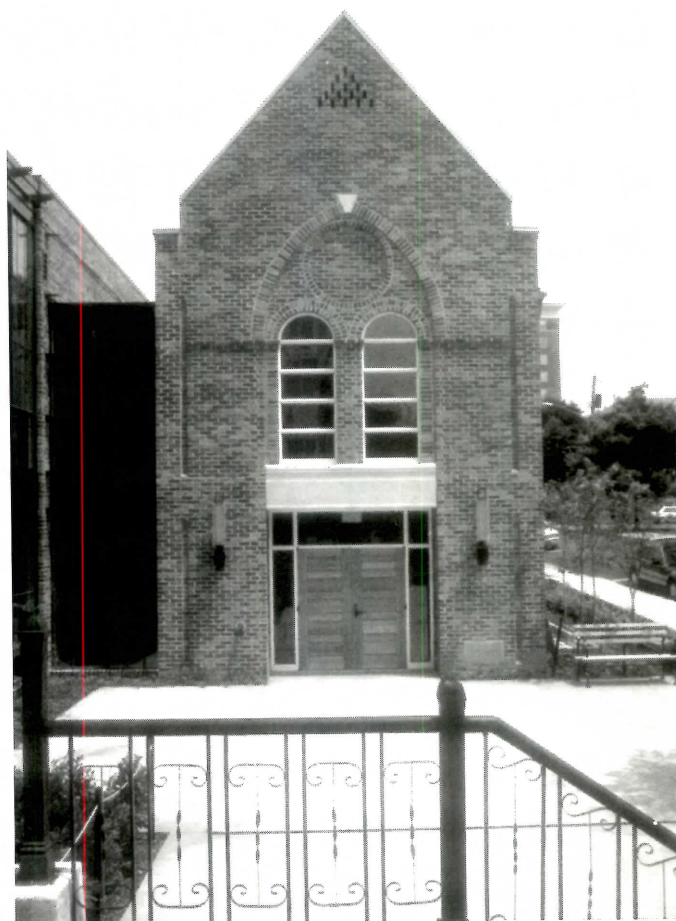
The competition, which was held at the Virginia Tech College of Architecture and Urban Studies, sought proposals for a vertical pedestrian route between Jefferson Street along the river and Commerce Street at the top of the bluff. There is no connecting street for five blocks because of the steepness of the grade between the streets. The four winning entries shared a purse

of \$2,000, which was donated by some 20 Lynchburg businesses and civic organizations. The firm Craddock-Cunningham Architectural Partners championed the competition idea to "get a spark from the local community," said architect William Withers.

The intention is to organize a competition every year to focus on downtown projects and generate ideas for the city's riverfront. Withers maintains that competitions serve two purposes: first, to create the spark of energy and focus around which other forces can rally and, second, to cultivate relationships among city officials, the College of Architecture, and the architecture firm.

Matt Sleightholm, a fourth-year student, won the \$1,000 first prize with a design that slices through the rocky bluff. Second-place winner Twittee Vajrabhaya, a fifth-year student, sculpted a path out of the cliff and inserted resting places along the way. Two honorable mentions went to designs submitted by Ryan Bacha and the team of Brandon Pass/Mark Timmins. The awards were chosen from 51 entries by a panel of judges composed of Lynchburg architects and artisans and two architecture faculty members from Virginia Tech.

MASONRY



Temple Beth Israel addition by architect Bruce Wardell (above) frames a new courtyard.



Best in Show: Shockoe Plaza by CMSS.

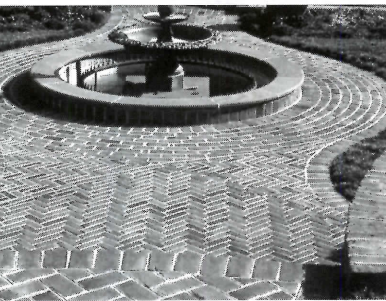
AWARDS

Shockoe Plaza, the new headquarters for The Martin Agency in Richmond's historic Shockoe Slip, is the recipient of this year's Best-in-Show Award in the annual design competition sponsored by the Virginia Masonry Council. Also receiving awards are Temple Beth Israel in Charlottesville; the West Main Street/Norfolk Southern Railroad bridge in Charlottesville; the Virginia Biotechnology Center in Richmond; and the Lingerfelt Residence in Henrico County.

CMSS Architects of Virginia Beach designed Shockoe Plaza being mindful of the context of cobblestone streets, Italianate buildings, and the soon-to-be-refurbished Kanawha Canal. The Slip's brick warehouses and shops provided a wealth of historic details, some of which were updated in CMSS' design. The jury gave high marks for the architect's sensitivity and success in reducing the scale of the massive building and praised the use of mortar joint details that were reminiscent of the surrounding structures.

A chapel and classroom addition to Temple Beth Israel by Charlottesville architect Bruce Wardell won the award for religious/institutional buildings. The congregation decided to add to its existing historic temple after a fruitless search for more down-

town space. Wardell's concept for a village of spaces maintained the pre-eminence of the original synagogue, while allowing for an addition that contains two-and-a-half times the space of the existing facility. A large multipurpose room is flanked – and, to a



Curving walks at the Lingerfelt Residence.

degree, hidden – by the new chapel and service wing and the original temple.

Another award-winner was commissioned by Norfolk Southern railroad, which needed more clearance under the West Main Street bridge for double-decker cars. The challenge to Ralph Whitehead Associates in Charlottesville was to maintain rail, pedestrian, and vehicular traffic while building over the tracks – all the while employing construction methods to protect nearby historic buildings and selecting appropriate materials. The jury expressed its hope that the award, made in the government construction category, would inspire better infrastructure design.

The Virginia Biotechnology Center (see Inform, 1997: number one), winning in the commercial/industrial category, utilized contrasting colors of brick and a ground-face block in its construction. The two-part building was designed by Baskervill & Son in association with Kelso & Easter, both of Richmond. The interior and exterior passage separating the two buildings retains the masonry finishes and detailing introduced on the street elevations. The jury cited the architects' attention to detail of the large forms.

Receiving an honorable mention was the Lingerfelt Residence, whose landscaped walks make wise use of a variety of patterns of brick and bluestone to link the house with its surroundings. Jurors praised the variety of the plan by Gerstenmaier Design Studio.

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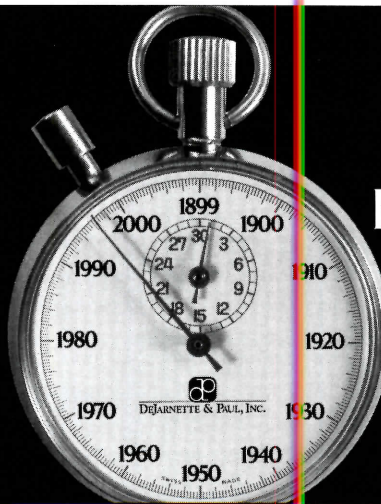
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A conversation with

Will Bruder

Arizona architect Will Bruder spoke to an overflow crowd in March at Virginia Tech's College of Architecture, revealing his thoughts on buildings that range from his unassuming desert houses to the celebrated Phoenix library. Here, in excerpts from a conversation with Virginia Tech architecture professor Sal Choudhury, Bruder shares his ideas on practice and teaching.

Inform: How do you characterize your vision of architecture?

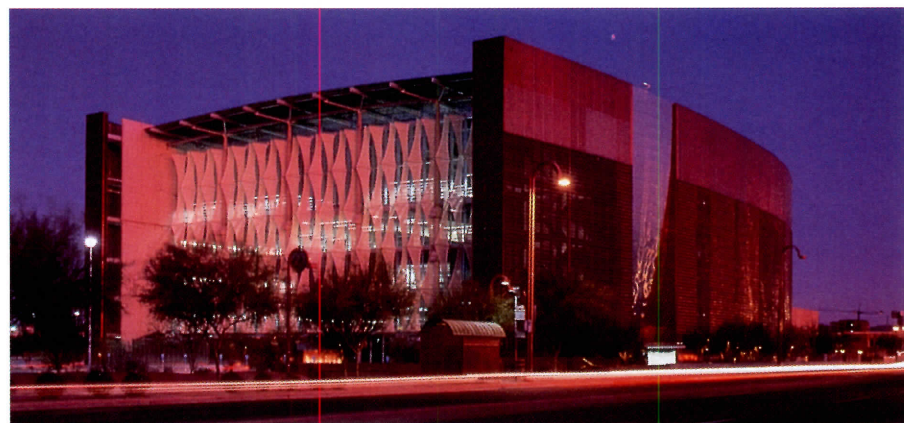
Bruder: My vision of architecture is that buildings should be succinct to their purpose. They should be about the idea of listening. They should search the pragmatic as well as poetic needs of civilization. They should be searching for the appropriateness of a place in the community, in the landscape. They hopefully are about comfort and simplicity. And they are buildings that are about ideas.

Is that happening now in the United States?

Not at all! It is the exception rather than the rule. We don't have enough people asking questions; we have people who don't know how to listen. We work too much in style and fashion. We're more interested in getting on that magazine cover than we are about doing background or foreground buildings. We as a society do not listen well and we don't use the tools that are so readily available to us – the tools of listening to the craftsman, of respecting the client. We build in spite of the client rather than because of the client. And we look at indigenous buildings with great love and infatuation, yet we don't learn from them when we make buildings of intention.

Let's shift to the role of education. What is happening in the schools that either follows your vision or doesn't?

I've been talking a lot to the kids about what architecture is. It is like a scale – there are two trays with sets of weights that balance measures of worth. On one scale, we weigh poetry; on the other, we balance it with prag-



Timothy Hursley

Bruder's Phoenix Central Library evokes associations from the industrial to the natural.

matism. And architecture emerges when that scale comes to perfect symmetry. In that sense, the schools are failing. There is an attitude that worry about the real issues of building somehow inhibits the potential of creativity and the freedom to think and dream. Most academics are afraid of reality and most practitioners are afraid of ideas. Nobody really challenges themselves to seek this balance in their work. But the great buildings always have that interesting balance – the Salk Institute, Ronchamps, the Johnson Wax Building. That is why they are icons.

What other things are important complementary aspects of architectural education?

Architecture schools exist within the confines of many disciplines, and there could be more interrelatedness of those disciplines. One of my memorable moments here is that we went to the quarry that supplies all the stone for buildings at Virginia Tech. I was with four car loads of kids and several professors – none had ever crossed that road before. The schools can really empower students, as well as themselves, with the ability to discover such a place. A big problem in contemporary architecture is how little value we place on our immediate surroundings. We're always looking across the sea, or down the block, or in the magazines. We are not carefully looking and understanding all the qualities of our place in its natural, climatic, and geologic variations and its richness of flora, fauna, history, craft, and materiality.

What are the cultural and architectural roots of the wonderful houses you designed for the Arizona desert?

The influences include architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Paul Schweickert, and Blaine Drake. The houses have roots in the Case Study Houses of California. They look at the severe climate I live in. They are inspired, maybe, by the fascination of some Scandinavian with the idea of light in a place that has so little of it, and a place that has so much. They learn from the roots of the Alhambra. They have a vast heritage. Yet, hopefully they find their own identity based on the present. I don't believe in style and I don't believe in trends. I believe that throughout time there has been a universal quality of rightness and beauty.

Anything you'd like to add?

I look for a profession that is optimistic and whose work celebrates optimism. Architects should take on the responsibility for challenging themselves to create memories. My challenge to Virginia is not to get caught up in the past. Try to create an architecture that defines this place in time and doesn't live cheaply on nostalgia. Look to Thomas Jefferson as a role model of invention and innovation. He wasn't doing things to be cloned 200 years later. We should be driven by the same intensity of invention. You have one of the treasures of world architecture at the University of Virginia. It should be looked at for what it is and not copied for what it isn't.



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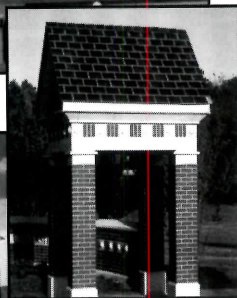
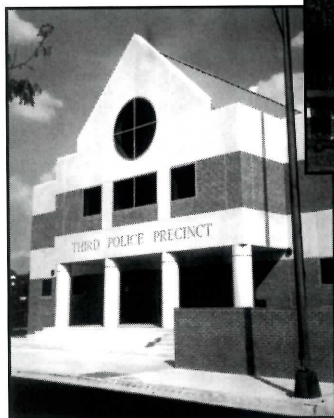
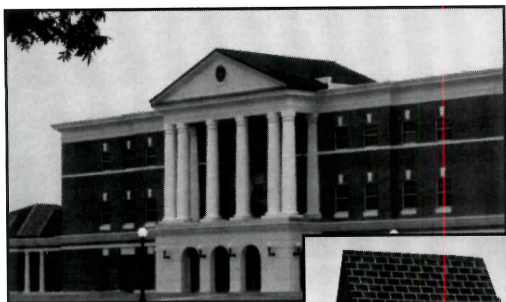
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■ **"Lying Lightly on the Land."** This exhibition traces the development of scenic parkways and roads in America's national parks from the creation of Yellowstone to the current deliberations on rebuilding flood-ravaged Yosemite. No charge. Through Jan. 10, 1998, at The National Building Museum, Washington, D.C. 202-272-2448.

■ **"Architecture in Virginia: The Old Dominion."** A photographic exhibit of buildings constructed from 1780 to 1861. Organized by the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. No charge. Through Aug. 29 at The Barret House, Richmond. 804-644-3041.

■ **"The Decorative Art of Louis Comfort Tiffany."** More than 100 objects including lamps, tiles, mosaics, vases, desk accessories and picture frames. Through Aug. 31 at the Chrysler Museum, Norfolk. 757-664-6200.

■ **"Planet Neighborhood."** This PBS documentary, hosted by U.Va. architecture Dean William McDonough, addresses sustainability in the home, workplace, and community. Scheduled for Sept. 8 at 8 p.m. Check local TV listings.

■ **"Papers on Architecture and the Decorative Arts."** An architectural history symposium presenting new discoveries on the marketing of 19th century decorative arts; the architecture of black Virginians; and transformations in Anglo-American chair design. Sept. 26 at Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond. Fee. 804-828-2784.

■ **"Capital Visions."** Contemporary Washington architects' reinterpretations of Pierre L'Enfant's 19th century plan for the capital city. No charge. Through Aug. 24 at the National Building Museum. 202-272-2448.

■ **"Frank Gehry."** The California artist/architect discusses his expressive brand of architecture on Sept. 23 at 6:30 p.m. at the Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Seating limited. Fee. 202-639-1770.

■ **"Main Street Five-and-Dimes."** Vintage photographs and drawings explore the architecture of the S.H. Kress & Co. variety store chain. No charge. Through Oct. 2 at the National Building Museum. 202-272-2448.

■ **"Facets and Reflections."** The Octagon and artist Peter Waddell present a collaboration of architecture and art through 25 paintings that tell the story of the building and its owners. Fee. Through Jan. 31, 1998, at the Octagon, Washington, D.C. 202-638-3105.

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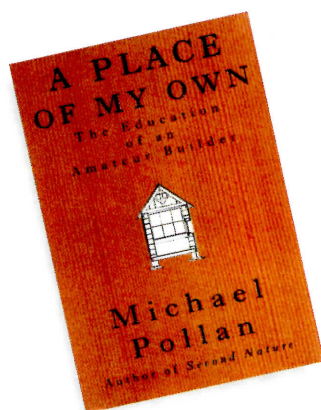
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A Place of My Own. By Michael Pollan. 302 pp. Illustrated. New York: Simon & Schuster. \$24.00 cloth.

Review by Douglas Greenwood

This book is a powerful reminder, if architects need reminding, of how widely misunderstood architecture is by the public. Architects don't just knock out designs in a couple of long days at the office. There's much more to it, as Michael Pollan discovers, even with something as simple as a one-room building in the back yard. And give Pollan credit for being not just an interested client, but a careful listener who explores the nuts and bolts of design and construction in depth. Above all, credit him for giving voice to the fruits of his explorations.

Ostensibly *A Place of My Own* is about one man's desire to build a little cabin behind his house, a place that would serve as a kind of refuge from such distractions as TV and the kids, a place where he can write in the relative solitude of a space he not only imagined, but helped create. It is the sort of dream many of us have, analogous in its own way to an idyllic spit of white sand with palm trees, except that one of the driving elements for Pollan was his desire to be as involved as possible in the making of his humble cottage. What he learns, of course, is that moving from conception to housewarming is far more complex than he imagined. And then there's the bottom



A Very Personal Space

line. By the time he becomes the proud owner of a one-room bungalow, he can appreciate the implicit irony of Thoreau, who claimed in *Walden* to have spent only \$28.12 building his cabin.

In essence, though, the book more closely parallels Thoreau's philosophical account of his experiences in the woods outside Concord, Massachusetts. For Pollan, an accomplished writer in his own right, the place he's initially intent on escaping is Manhattan. But he soon realizes even the Connecticut house he and his artist wife have bought doesn't offer the longed-for reclusiveness. He needs what Virginia Woolf called "a room of one's own" — that is, a space with almost talismanic qualities where one can meditate, write, or read.

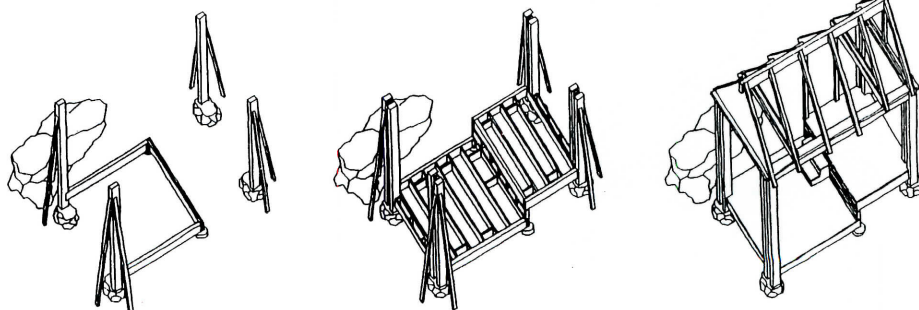
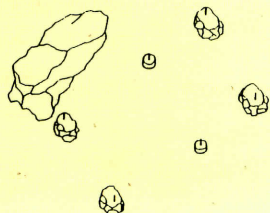
What saves *A Place of My Own* from mere self-indulgence — in addition to Pollan's excellent writing — is its intelligent inquiry into disciplines far removed from Pollan's normal orbit. Writing well is not merely clever thoughts couched in a pleasing style any more than good architecture is merely the resourceful use of materials arranged in such a way as to have structural integrity and charm. Good writing requires a particular point of view, an engaging intellect, and the ability to shape words into phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that not only hold together, but help readers see things that they had never seen before or fully understood. Pollan approaches architecture and occu-

pations such as carpentry with the respect of one who knows that both are honorable, demanding professions from which he can expect no special dispensations.

Part of this book's special charm, too, derives from the author's up-front admission that he is too much a dreamer and "a total klutz." As he freely admits, "I've been bitten in the face by a sea gull, and once broke my nose falling out of bed."

By training and inclination a literal-minded sort, Pollan decides that the first thing he ought to do is conduct research to determine what options are available, what he ought to be focusing on, what others in similar situations have done. He decides not just to read up on architecture, but to pursue his vision with all possible rigor. This aspect of Pollan's journey from innocence to experience is at the heart of the book. And, to put it mildly, it is somewhat disconcerting — not so much for Pollan's initial naivete and plodding through all the muck, but because he so clearly relished the adventure and had both the means and fortitude to see it through. After all, who among us can afford this sort of luxury?

Once he decides to build a tiny bungalow, Pollan contacts an old college friend, Charles Myers, a Cambridge, Massachusetts, architect who had helped the Pollans remodel their small cookie-cutter house. After several discussions with Charlie and a series of protracted readings on architecture and other



subjects, Pollan puts his thoughts on paper in hopes of avoiding any misunderstanding. He sends his rambling missive off to Charlie, who responds weeks later with a hand-made booklet of pictures selected for Pollan's review.

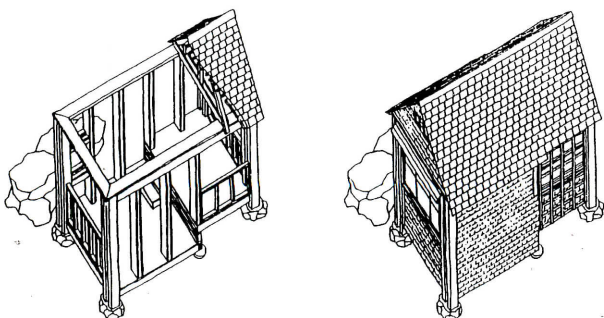
Pollan examines Charlie's booklet in dismay. There is no text, just images – some clipped from magazines, some photo-copied – ranging from grass huts to Postmodern structures. Charlie also announces that he has given Pollan a subscription to *Progressive Architecture* magazine, with the caveat that he may find it a bit "wild." When the first issue arrives, Pollan eagerly thumbs through it. Astonished to see what passes as prize-winning architecture, he is relieved to find that, unlike Charlie's booklet, at least there are captions and text that make the images somewhat comprehensible. Had Pollan known beforehand what it meant that his friend studied architecture first with Charles Moore and later with Peter Eisenman, perhaps Charlie's baffling approach to a one-room structure would have made more sense.

In filling out the chapters with short philosophical ruminations, Pollan has in effect created a syllabus for those who would understand the issues inherent in architecture and building. The "Sources" section at the end is a godsend. In addition to the far-ranging books and articles he consulted, Pollan provides excellent notes for the interested reader. His asides about various subjects (One example: "Lumber is an abstraction – a euphemism really.") reveal the hand of the poet at work.

As for the actual construction of his building, Pollan takes us step-by-step from foundation to finishes in a series of chapters that outline the educational tack he follows in each phase of the project. About a third of the way through, we are introduced to a local journeyman, Joe Benney, who serves as a fitting foil for the high seriousness of Charlie's exhortations. Much of the book's best humor involves the clash of Joe's in-the-trenches experience with Charlie's ivory-towered blueprints. Pollan aptly summarizes Joe's innermost thoughts about architects: "On building sites all over the world, architects are figures of ridicule, their designs derided for their oddness or impracticality and their construction drawings, which on a job site are supposed to have the force of law, dismissed as cartoons or 'funny papers.'"

Typically, Pollan concludes his narrative with considerations about the Renaissance roots of the modern study, and somewhat sheepishly confesses to having spent more than \$125 per square foot – even with an uninsulated, unplumbed building, numerous compromises, and an abundance of free labor. Pollan's little project, with its newly installed telephone and microchip-driven heater, provides not merely pride of ownership and critical involvement, but as he so eloquently puts it, "the bright promise of all beginnings, of departure, of once upon a time."

Douglas Greenwood, a Vienna freelance writer, is a frequent contributor to Inform.



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TOWER OF LEARNING

WILLIAM SMITH MORTON LIBRARY

UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

**Oversized chandeliers
punctuate the library's
soaring atrium (left).
The new wing rests on
a stepped platform
along one edge of the
main quad (right).**



By Vernon Mays

During the 1960s, when heroic Modern architecture was the rage and old buildings were regarded much like out-of-fashion clothing, leaders at Union Theological Seminary made a decision whose effects are still being felt today. Weighing the options to keep their eclectic collection of turn-of-the-century buildings or to remake their quaint Richmond campus with an ensemble of gleaming new structures, they elected to stick with what they had.

"From the 1960s forward, they swam against the tide to respect and cherish the architectural heritage of their buildings," says architect Randolph Holmes, a principal at The Glave Firm of Richmond. "So when they came to us for a new library, they just wanted to build on that tradition."

The seminary's new William Smith Morton Library has the comfortable look and feel of a building that fits among the assemblage of classroom, residential, and administrative buildings designed in a historicist vein by Charles H. Read, Jr., the son of a prominent Presbyterian minister. Positioned at the narrow end of a tree-lined quadrangle, the brick library's castellated towers and steady rhythm of masonry piers lend an element of scale to the grassy lawn and provide a focal point for the seminary campus.

The library emerged from the shell of Schauffler Hall, a neo-Gothic sanctuary and classroom building constructed in the

1930s as a kind of laboratory for ministerial students to hone their skills as preachers. Somehow the idea never caught on and the church was little used for decades. But as the beginnings of a library, the building had possibilities. The Glave Firm stripped it down to the bare walls and designed appropriate new spaces inside for archives storage, open and closed stacks, offices, and study rooms. Beside it – but not touching – they built a new wing for book stacks, study rooms, periodicals, and a commodious reading room. Then, in the space left in between, they created an atrium with a louvered ceiling that soars four stories overhead. Monumental in scale and rich in materials and detail, the room is a fabulous asset to the small institution.

The program for the 68,000-square-foot building sought to make up for shortcomings in the old library. "Some of the requests were unusual, such as they didn't want to have any traditional study carrels," recalls Holmes. Because Union's students pursue graduate degrees that emphasize reading and writing, the seminary wanted the carrels configured as private offices that offer greater privacy and security, especially for items such as computers. Also lacking was an archival storage and reading room. The new library addresses those concerns with a secure, climate-controlled space for the rare books and documents and 80 enclosed carrels with doors that lock.



Maxwell MacKenzie

The valued placed on quality craftsmanship at the library becomes evident from the moment one first encounters the building. Visitors enter at the base of the prominent corner tower and proceed through heavy, wood-paneled doors to an arched foyer. From there, the space explodes into the atrium, where daylight filters through baffles secured in a framework of Gothic-inspired vaults. Here the relationship of the old building and the new becomes clear: The brick exterior wall of Schauffler Hall forms the east wall; the oak paneling and articulated columns of the new section form the west.

Reading lamps and chandeliers were custom designed to complement the mill-work and one-of-a-kind furniture in the library's public spaces, including the reserve reading room (above left) and reference room (right).



PRESERVING A LOST ART

Lighting is Woody Crenshaw's game, but the fixtures his company manufactures are only a means to pursue his real love, which is craft. From the unlikelyst of spots – a former skating rink alongside a creek in rural Southwest Virginia – Crenshaw Lighting has started tongues wagging among top lighting designers from New York to Washington.

Built on a 40-year tradition of producing new church fixtures and restoring historic chandeliers, lanterns, and sconces, the family-owned business has broadened its mission to include high-style fixtures for corporate, institutional, and residential clients. "I had a lot of interest in it from the very beginning," Crenshaw says of the company his dad founded in Raleigh, N.C.

When his father died in 1986, Crenshaw inherited everything. Without much time to ponder it, he and his wife Jackie decided they liked the business and wanted to work as a team. Preferring life in the mountains, they sought a new location in North Carolina. But while visiting a friend in Floyd County, they stumbled across a deserted skating rink and concluded it was just right. They bought the building, moved in, and hired a crew.

Unlike other shops that start small and evolve toward mass

production, Crenshaw Lighting is committed to preserving a lost art. "If you look at our shop, what you see is that many of the tools and procedures we're using are very much turn-of-the-century – in the way metal is formed, castings are cast, and patterns are made," explains Crenshaw. His portfolio includes historic fixtures at the old U.S. Courthouse in Richmond, Cabell Hall at U.Va., the Warner Theater in Washington, and Wilson Library at UNC-Chapel Hill. New designs appear in corporate offices and at Morven Farms Coach Museum near Charlottesville, whose fixtures recall the hardware of 19th century coaches (photo at left). At the UTS library, Crenshaw teamed up with lighting designers Fisher, Marantz,



Renfro, Stone to develop a family of eight fixtures, from small-scale reading lamps to the atrium's 8-foot-tall chandeliers.

Ironically, Crenshaw may introduce a line of off-the-shelf fixtures to even the company's work flow and accommodate the erratic frequency of the custom work. But the emphasis will remain on craft, he says. "We want to be able to say with confidence that the quality of what we do is significant. Everybody says that, of course. But we want to feel like it's true." – V. Mays

Throughout the library, Christian and literary symbols are incorporated in the design of the lamps, carpets, furnishings, and building elements. The tradition of craft plays out most visibly in three study spaces located on the first floor. In the reference reading room overlooking the main quad, wooden bookcases set between the buttress walls create a fitting enclosure. Custom-made tables and reading lamps take their design cues from the columns that flank the room. In the reserve reading room, large windows from the original building now incorporate window seats that provide cozy spots to spend with a book. Reading tables designed to conceal data and electrical connections were made by The Century Guild of Research Triangle Park, North Carolina, and shipped to Richmond. The furniture maker's signature piece – a square reading table inlaid with the UTS logo – occupies the center of the rare book reading room, which is located in the base of the original Schaffler Hall Tower.

Lighting plays a key role in the project. Taking cues from existing historic fixtures and details from the campus, eight different fixtures – from the

reading lamps to the 8-foot-tall chandeliers in the atrium – were designed to create a cohesive family of fixtures. The design process included the frequent involvement, ranging from fabrication recommendations to full-scale mockups and lamping evaluation, of Crenshaw Lighting of Floyd County and lighting design consultants Fisher Marantz Renfro Stone of New York.

TMS Corporation of Richmond constructed the library's built-in shelving and fabricated the interior wall panels. Holmes praised the company's millwork as being built "to a custom furniture level" and noted how much they contributed to refining details. "They built a full scale mockup of the atrium arches and swung them up into position to test the scale. That's unusual for a company to do."

While the quality of construction achieved at the library is the desire of many clients, Union Theological Seminary made the commitment to achieving it. "It was at the insistence of the seminary that the design retain the high level of finish," says Holmes. "And I think it's visionary for them."



The scroll fixture in the rare book reading room casts a soft light on the custom inlaid table.

FASHIONED IN THE GUILD TRADITION

Nick Strange never took shop in high school and had no wood-working experience when, in 1976, he began a six-year apprenticeship with a family-owned furniture reproduction business in Durham, North Carolina. But somehow he knew that building furniture was his calling. The realization hit Strange while working as a mail carrier in Chapel Hill and putting his wife through graduate school. They lived in a log cabin and he became captivated by the beauty of the material that surrounded him.

When he grew tired of reproduction work – "I spent four years making nothing but beds." – Strange decided to strike out on his own. He dubbed his company The Century Guild, chosen in honor of another guild of the same name founded in 1882 by British architect A.H. Mackmurdo, who designed a chair that was a precursor to the Art Nouveau style. "I thought the idea of a guild and the crafts that come together would be inspirational for us," says Strange. "We incorporate leather, metal, and stone produced by craftspeople who pay attention to detail and contribute to our mission."

The Guild built 20-plus tables for the seminary library and contributed

what Strange says he does best – "pay attention to structural aspects so that it holds up over time." Unlike the cobbler whose children have no shoes, Strange says he keeps a lot of his furniture around the house as a learning tool. "I see what holds up and what doesn't. How finishes perform."

The Guild's work is evenly distributed among corporate, residential, and church clients and varies stylistically from traditional Colonial to clean-lined Modern. The common thread: a high standard of craft. Although Strange's studio has produced tables for corporate boards from Richmond to Raleigh and altars for churches from Silver Spring to Savannah, he allows that his masterwork is the columbarium built for St. Thomas Church in New York (photo below). Designed to accommodate 500 urns, the

piece has ebony inlays and a series of progressively smaller doors that open like a Russian puzzle box.

Strange works in his shop outside Durham with two carpenters and his wife, Meredith, who manages the office. "She is the most aesthetically attuned one," says Strange. "When we are stuck and don't know where to go, she's the arbiter." – V. Mays





SPIRIT OF INVENTION

SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC CHURCH



Members of the congregation donated money for the stained glass panels behind the altar.

The flock was growing. And the congregation of Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church in Charlottesville came to realize that it was pushing the limits of its existing church, built in 1966. Space was not the only limitation – the budget for expansion was minimal and the sloping land on the church grounds posed a challenge to construction. Faced with these obstacles, the church turned to VMDO Architects of Charlottesville for assistance.

The result is a new sanctuary placed adjacent to the old one – a fitting counterpart to the existing church by virtue of its independent geometries and spare aesthetic, and a good citizen within the 19th century context of the nearby University of Virginia because of its use of material and structure.

But beyond the typical opportunities for spiritual interpreta-

tion, the commission presented an rare occasion for the architects to design a cohesive interior atmosphere. According to church tradition, each Catholic parish is encouraged by the diocese to consider the liturgical furniture an extension of the building, adding that a proportionate level of design and monetary resources should be directed towards the furnishings. Beyond that, liturgical furnishings are consecrated and holy – like the building. Each piece is customized to accommodate a particular ritual; each one marks a sacred place where ritual occurs.

Members of St. Thomas' congregation donated money for the design and fabrication of four liturgical pieces as well as a cross, candle holders, and three groups of stained glass windows, including one large multipaneled piece behind the altar. The furnishings draw their logic from the building design, which relies



Stone, steel, and cherry wood come together in the ambo and altar (left). In the baptismal font (below), water trickles from a stainless steel bowl into a soapstone basin.

on natural materials and emphasizes the points where different materials connect. The base for each piece is a solid soapstone block, quarried in nearby Schuyler. Stainless steel assemblies are then inserted into slots cut in the soapstone. In each piece, the steel makes a transition to a cherry wood element that accommodate the function of the object, such as a table top for the altar, a box containing the eucharist, and a lectern for the ambo. Because the function of the font as a vessel to hold water is incompatible with wood, a stainless steel bowl for holy water is substituted on the soapstone base. Water trickles from the upper bowl into an octagonal basin below.

Detailed designs developed by project architect Joseph Celantano were a starting point for the fabrication by stonemason Randy Tinnell, who was called in specifically for this project by New Albereen Stone Company. "Joe did the drawings and gave us a basic idea of what he wanted," says Tinnell. "We just took it from there." Based on his familiarity with the nature of soapstone, Tinnell suggested modifications to the pieces. Due to its weight and softness, moving straps would very likely have chipped sharp corners. Tinnell suggested beveled edges instead. Similarly, the altar pedestal was divided into four smaller pieces, because a single block would have been too difficult to work with and transport to the church. Most challenging of all was the baptismal font, because every discrete component had to be cut to exact tolerances to ensure a proper fit during final assembly. Tinnell also sculpted the tabernacle and ambo.

In its completed form, the church is filled with a soft light that penetrates the stained glass windows and an oculus placed overhead where the great wood beams converge. The clarity of the building's organization and materials, experienced in combination with the architect's attention to the details of the major furnishings, create a setting that is unified, inspired, and well suited to worship.



ETCHED IN STONE

The one-of-a-kind liturgical furniture at St. Thomas Aquinas Church is, in part, the skillful product of stonemason Randy Tinnell. A Nelson County resident, Tinnell was called in by New Albereen Stone Company, who knew where to look to find the right expertise for the delicate operation.

Although he is only 38, Tinnell has worked with stone for 24 years. "My uncle used to run a plant when I was about 14 years old," he says, "and my brother and I started out working the night shift after we got off school." Workers at the plant showed him how to polish stone correctly, but he taught himself to finish the edges. Now he works primarily in soapstone and credits his ability to select carving-grade pieces to Jerry Porter, a local stoneworker who culls top-quality pieces from Virginia quarries and ships them to carvers nationwide.

Tinnell's instincts for shaping stone and his familiarity with the tools of the trade come from years of experience in metal-working machine shops. Among the lessons he learned there: soapstone has the same brittleness as cast iron. The shop also introduced him to the lathe, which he later used to make stone pedestals, birdbaths, bowls, and sundials of his own design.

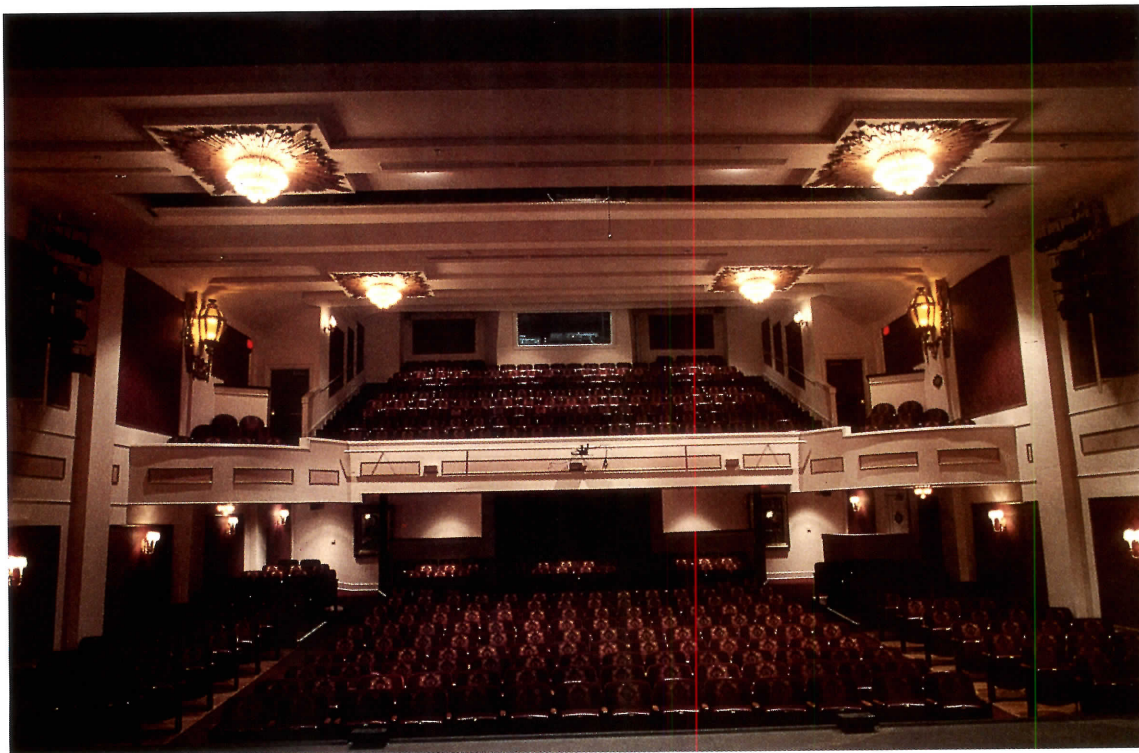
For the furniture at St. Thomas, Tinnell hand-selected the white-streaked soapstone from blocks at Old Dominion Quarry in Albemarle County. "If it has veins in it, they discard the blocks. But the veining adds character," says Tinnell. He used a power saw and grinder to shape the stone and a router to prepare it for the stainless steel elements. Then he chiseled and polished the stone smooth by hand.

Today Tinnell works mostly on countertops and flat, architectural stone. But he also selected the material and did the preliminary shaping of the sculpture in front of the Charlottesville/Albemarle Juvenile Courthouse by artist David Breen.

—Martha Tuzson Stockton, AIA

THE PLAY'S THE THING

THE BARTER THEATRE



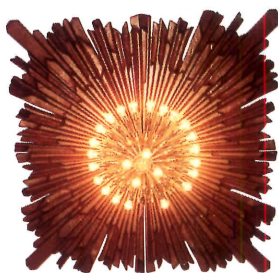
Photos: Ivan Scott

Improvements include better sight lines, more seating, and a decorative surround for the old Empire Theatre chandeliers.

When the curtain rose on the Barter Theatre's first production in the summer of 1933, admission for the Depression-era audience was 35 cents, or its equivalent in produce. By the time it closed for renovation in late 1995, the Abingdon theater had long since become a Virginia cultural institution. And like many things Old Virginia, it had acquired that familiar "shabby genteel" quality.

Those days are gone at The Barter, which reopened last year with an expanded seating capacity, new lighting, improved visitor facilities, and a decorative scheme that puts the former house to shame. The \$1.7 million renovation and addition by McKinney-Boyd Architects upped the capacity to 506, while incorporating changes to improve the building's physical accessibility.

Part of the Barter's charm for many years has been the number of artifacts salvaged in 1953 from Broadway's Empire Theatre. Prior to the Empire's demolition, Barter founder



Robert Porterfield negotiated a deal allowing him to take whatever he could remove from the building in 48 hours. Porterfield returned to Abingdon with four truckloads of seats, lighting fixtures, carpeting, curtains, furniture, and paintings.

In the renovation, McKinney-Boyd highlighted the Empire's surviving ornament in a new way. Four Empire Theatre sconces used on the side walls of the auditorium, for example, are now framed by whimsical sculptures. Based on designs by architect Peyton Boyd, the sculptures were fabricated from resin in the theater's production shop by Mary Filapek, the Barter's properties master. Based on old photographs of the Empire, Boyd also designed starburst shields to complement the bare-bulb chandeliers that have hung unadorned for years in the Barter. Finally, the architects produced a design for the theater seat upholstery, starting with a fleur-de-lis inspired by the crest on the old Empire Theatre seats and incorporating the new Barter Theatre logo.



Boyd's design included crests for the theater seating.



GOTHIC ARTISTRY

MODLIN CENTER FOR THE ARTS • UNIVERSITY OF RICHMOND

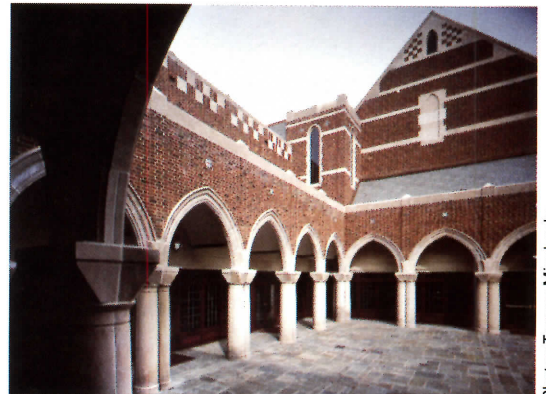
In keeping with updated plans to enrich their facilities for visual and performing arts, the University of Richmond commissioned Marcellus Wright Cox & Smith to design a facility that joined the existing Keller and Modlin halls into a comprehensive “arts village.” Surrounding campus buildings, built in the Collegiate Gothic style established in the early part of the century by the university’s original planner and architect, Ralph Adams Cram, remain true to a vocabulary of brick with limestone details. That tradition is carried forward in the new \$22.5 million George M. Modlin Center for the Arts.

The 165,000-square-foot arts center capitalized on the proximity of the two older buildings that were available to be integrated into the new facility. For example, a 1935 gymnasium was converted into visual arts studios, a 1962 swimming pool was remade into a 125-seat studio theater and art gallery spaces, and a multipurpose fine arts building and auditorium built in 1966 was upgraded into a 600-seat concert hall and home for music. Stitching these disparate parts together is an addition containing a 500-seat drama theater, a bridge over a campus street, and a landmark tower containing the Music Department library. The new construction also includes much-needed public spaces, most notably a vaulted lobby and the new Marsh Art Gallery surrounding a cloistered Gothic courtyard, which will be used to host arts center functions and exhibitions.

Blended waterstruck brick laid in Flemish bond is the definitive material in the architecture’s palette of limestone, slate, copper, and tile. These traditional materials unify the buildings and set the tone for a campus design that conveys a sense of permanence and quality.



The campus tradition of limestone, slate, copper, and tile is perpetuated at the Modlin Center (above). New courtyard (right) is surrounded by a Gothic colonnade.



Photos: Tamara Mischenko

A VILLA THROUGH TIME

THOMAS JEFFERSON'S POPLAR FOREST



22

By Vernon Mays

Thomas Jefferson, the perpetual tinkerer where his own residences were concerned, was the consummate Virginia gentleman when he invited a neighbor in 1815 to visit his retreat at Poplar Forest. "You must," he warned, "come with your ears stuffed with cotton to fortify them against the noise of hammers, saws, planes, etc. which assail us in every direction."

In that regard, things are much the same again at Poplar Forest. Scaffolding

shrouds the eight-sided house, Jefferson's lesser-known second home near Lynchburg, and summer has brought a flurry of activity by work crews restoring crumbling masonry chimneys, installing tin roof shingles, and rebuilding the front and rear porticos. This is a critical moment in the house's rebirth, with completion of the major exterior work anticipated before winter arrives.

Stewards of the house have gone to great pains to rebuild it using construction

methods and materials authentic to the Jefferson original, which was begun in 1806. "Instead of doing a modern roof frame that will be covered up by shingles and plaster, we've gone to the trouble to build it with historic-sized pieces and historic fasteners, because it is on view while it is being done," says Travis McDonald, director of architectural restoration. "But it's more than that — it's really a spirit of doing it right. And that intones a whole philosophy among



Restoration of the north portico is being completed along with other exterior repairs this summer.

Philip Beaurline

everybody involved that we are doing somethingspecial."

The Bedford County land Jefferson and his wife inherited in 1773 proved to be the perfect setting for the type of country villa he had read about in classical literature and dreamt of building for himself. By the time Jefferson turned seriously to constructing it, he was mature as a designer and experienced as a builder, having completed the State Capitol at Richmond and the first version of Monticello.

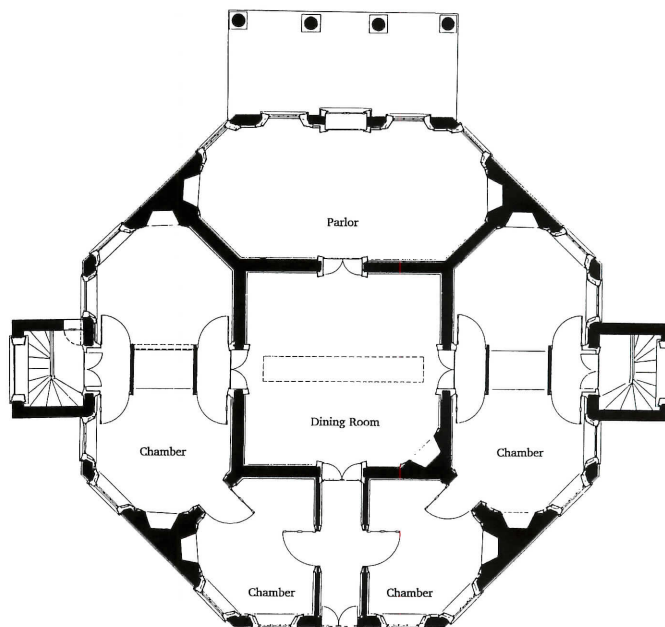
As in many of Jefferson's designs, the planning of Poplar Forest was strongly influenced by the 16th century Italian architect Andrea Palladio. Jefferson followed Palladio's rules of design and the idea of blending the architecture with the surrounding landscape. He also incorporated many details he had observed while in Paris, including floor-to-ceiling windows, alcove beds, and a skylight. He also found an appropriate expression for the geometrical shape that had long fascinated him – the octagon.

Following his second term as President, Jefferson visited the house three or four times a year and stayed anywhere from two weeks to two months. At the estate he enjoyed what he called "the solitude of a hermit" – far from the stream of visitors at Monticello. As his health began to suffer, Jefferson deeded the house to his grandson, Francis Eppes. Two years after Jefferson died, Eppes sold the house. It remained in private hands until 1984, when the non-profit

Corporation for Jefferson's Poplar Forest was organized to save it.

By then, only 50 acres of Jefferson's 4,800-acre plantation remained with the house. The surrounding farmland had been sold to developers and much of it was peppered with suburban-style houses. Since 1984, purchase of adjacent acreage has increased the buffer zone to 473 acres and the corporation has paid off the acquisition loans, at the same time initiating a model restoration project which has set demanding standards for stabilization, research, and restoration.

An intensive three-year construction phase draws to a close this year, guided by the remarkably detailed record of the house's original construction. Fire consumed the house in 1845, but because Poplar Forest was built during Jefferson's Presidency, most of the work was directed via correspondence that still exists. The letters back and forth between Jefferson and his supervisors make Poplar Forest one of the best documented private



The scope of work includes restoration of the original floor plan (above) and Jeffersonian proportions (top).

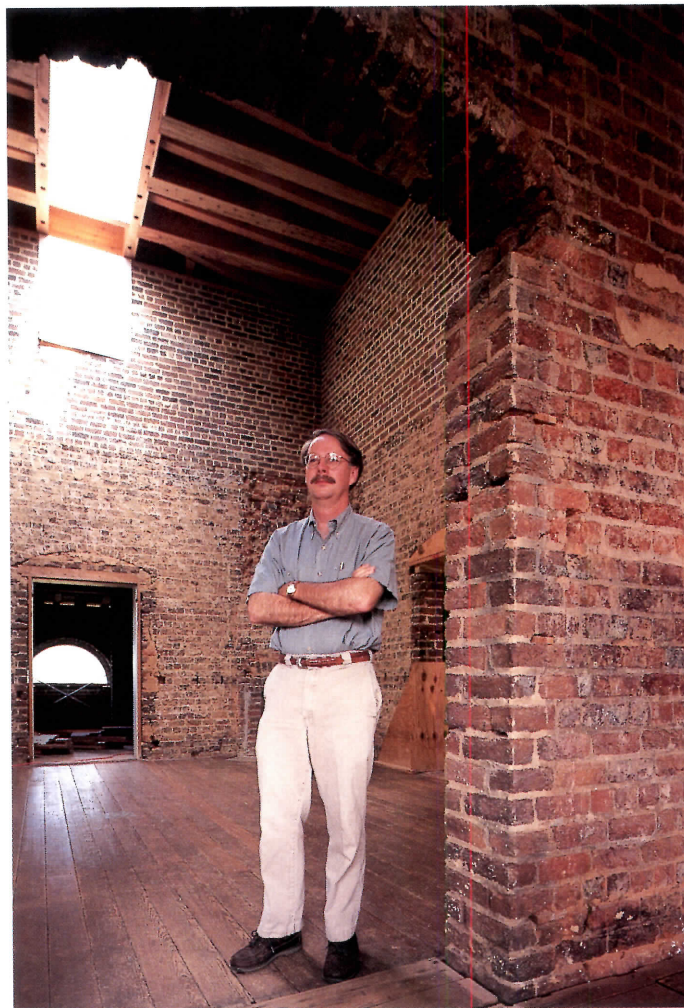


Cross-section through the house (left) shows soaring height of dining room and narrow skylight.

construction projects of any time and justify many of the restoration decisions.

Prior to altering the house, the corporation hired restoration architects Mesick Cohen Wilson Baker of Albany, New York. Their analysis confirmed the staff's findings that Jefferson made major last-minute changes to the house, including the addition of the porticos on the north and south sides and the stair pavilions on the east and west. Study of the house also determined that its proportions were a perfect interpretation of Palladio's system, right down to the design of the baseboards, chair rails, entablatures, door casings, and mantels. Jefferson even improvised an indoor privy.

For five years, the house was analyzed brick by brick. In 1993, conservation of the basement-level support structure began with the installation of a foundation that Jefferson had neglected to provide. To make matters worse, he had sunk the house into the crown of a hill for aesthetic purposes, which encouraged surface water to flow toward the house rather than away from it. The soft brick and mortar absorbed water and, in time, walls settled, material deteriorated, and the portico piers and columns leaned precariously. The building was stabilized by underpinning the outer walls and



Restoration director Travis McDonald in the threshold of the "cube room."

porticos with concrete footings and by waterproofing the below-grade walls.

Last year, workers rebuilt the window openings in their original locations and proportions and reconstituted the shell of Jefferson's spectacular "cube room," the skylit dining parlor that measures 20 feet high, 20 feet wide, and 20 feet tall. After the 1845 fire, the Hutter family sliced the space into halves by lowering the ceiling and adding an attic above. The latter-day ceiling and roof were removed, then the masons rebuilt the upper portion of the central room's brick walls, recreating the cube. Under

the direction of restoration craftsman Doug Rideout, the carpenters rebuilt the complex serrated roof Jefferson had placed above the dining room. Complete with a 16-foot-long skylight, the roof was crafted in the shop during the winter. Then each piece was labeled and numbered, disassembled, and rebuilt in its final location. The perimeter sections of the roof, all framed in heavy timbers, were rebuilt as well.

This year carpenters are installing the roof deck, trimming it with a Chinese railing, and erecting the balustrade that runs along the perimeter of the roof. They are also replacing the entablature that rings the building and rebuilding the pediments over the north and south porches. Each stage of the project is an exercise in problem solving, says McDonald. "Not a day goes by that we don't have to wonder: How would they have solved it in the early 1800s? By doing the work in the same manner, we have had many more unforeseen questions and challenges, but we have learned a lot about the reality of constructing something like this. In a sense, we are repeating history."

Brickmason Jimmy Price is among those rediscovering the old world ways. In restoring the cube room walls, Price and his bricklayers examined the lower

Philip Beaurline

section in order to repeat the quirks of those who built it nearly two centuries before. But Price has no illusions about the glamour of historic reconstruction. "It's just backup work," he observes. "They were just making time, because they knew eventually it was going to be covered with plaster."

The exterior is a different story. Wherever possible, original material from the house is being conserved and repaired with modern technology. The Tuscan columns on the front of the house are a good example. Often what appear to be bricks are not bricks at all, but replacement pieces built up and sculpted into shape by Price with a Dutch material called *Jahn*. Broken or cracked bricks all around the exterior are repaired with the mortarlike material which is tinted to match the colors of the original bricks.

Reproduction bricks are hand-molded in six different colors to imitate the original bricks burned in kilns on the plantation. Mortar is hand-made from a blend of three sands, two dirts, and two limes which replicate the original Jefferson-era mortar in color, strength, and characteristics.

Master carpenter Doug Rideout has been a constant force in the Poplar Forest restoration since 1990. "We have the luxury of doing it right and not having to hit it and run like the contracting firms do," he says. "We try to use power tools whenever we can. But if the material is going to be seen and a power tool leaves a telltale impression on the wood, then we will go back over it with a hand tool." Indeed, it is common to see the carpenters wielding chisels, planes, arcing gauges, scribes, and other tools that are long since obsolete on most construction sites today.

In the original house, Jefferson used a variety of woods including poplar, oak, walnut, and pine. Antique heart pine recovered from old buildings is used for door and window frames, doors, exterior trim, and the roof framing over the cube room. Upper-floor window sash are being constructed of antique walnut; lower-floor sash are made from antique heart pine and fitted with German-made reproduction crown glass.

In the 1820s, Jefferson's workmen replaced chestnut shingles with tin-coated iron shingles, which are no longer available. Today's roofers are using tin-coated stainless steel shingles. Wrought-iron brackets and nails used to secure the timber-frame elements of the roof are fabricated in the blacksmith's shop at Colonial Williamsburg under the super-

vision of artisan Peter Ross.

Poplar Forest's commitment to keeping each stage of the work-in-progress open to public view is a generous step toward public education, but the decision to include the reconstruction as part of the interpretive program for the house has, in some cases, mandated slower and more costly methods. "We think it has great payback in terms of what visitors get out of it," says McDonald.

Once the comprehensive work on the outside of the building is done, the next step is uncertain. Possibilities include restoring the wing of offices located east of the house, recreating the historic landscape, continuing the archaeological study of the plantation site, or completing the house interior, which remains in an unfinished state. In the meantime, the public can rest easy that an American treasure once threatened with self-destruction has been preserved for the enjoyment of future generations.



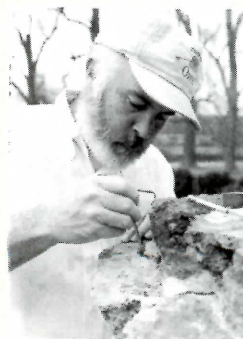
Restoration craftsman Doug Rideout shapes a lintel for one of the arched windows.

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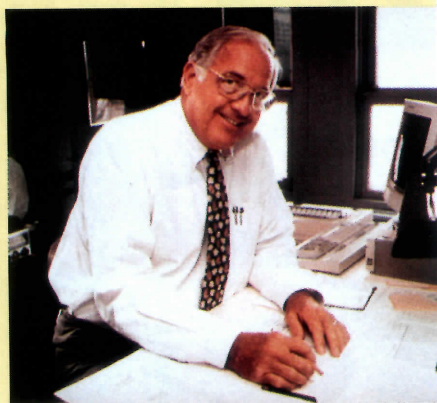
Work has a new meaning for Jimmy Price now that he's at Poplar Forest. Last year, the easygoing mason cut his business back from 30 men to five and devoted his energy solely to rebuilding Jefferson's Bedford County home. "Everybody's got the same goal here," says Price. "You enjoy coming to work every day."

Price broke into bricklaying "pushing a wheelbarrow" when he was 19, and learned to stock scaffolds and make mortar before proving himself with a trowel. In the early 1980s he only moonlighted as a bricklayer while he was working full-time as a railroad engineer. But when the railroad consolidated, Price took his severance pay and went home to Amherst to open up shop again. He decided to specialize in preservation and took classes at Colonial Williamsburg to learn new skills. Since making the switch, Price has stabilized the main house at Point of Honor, an 1815 plantation house; rebuilt the steeple of Lynchburg's 1886 First Baptist Church; repaired the loom house, summer kitchen, and other outbuildings at Green Hill Plantation; and reconstructed the old Episcopal Church at Clifford, c. 1780.

Price arrived at Poplar Forest just as attention was turning toward full-scale exterior repairs and rebuilding the central cube room. With epoxy and an innovative Dutch mortar, Price restored cracked and broken sections of the exterior walls brick by brick. In raising the cube room walls to their original height, he followed the lead of early 19th century bricklayers—up to a point. When their work got "a little screwy," he sought restoration director Travis McDonald to clarify the limits of historical authenticity. Preservation also means repeating old techniques, such as drawing grapevine joints in the wet mortar, a practice originally used to give the impression of even brickwork. But the most important skill required of a restoration mason, says Price: "Patience." — V. Mays



Jimmy Price at work.



By Alex Marshall

It's been a pretty good year for David Rice. From a window near his office atop a 14-story Norfolk office building, he can see bulldozers shoving rubble around to make way for a new \$300 million shopping mall in the city's downtown. If he bends his head down and looks to the right, he can see the home of a planned new hotel. And if he walks to the opposite side of the building, he can see where four new blocks of urban rowhouses and apartments will emerge from property which, like the other sites, has long been vacant.

After decades of drought, the parched fields of Norfolk's downtown are being revived with infusions of new development. It starts with a mammoth shopping mall and ends with smaller projects, from new townhouses and apartments to renovations of abandoned office buildings. And the Norfolk Redevelopment & Housing Authority is leading the way. Although some of the projects, particularly the mall, involve multiple city departments, it's the NRHA that usually owns the land, signs the leases, and sets up the deal.

For Rice, it's a very good time indeed. As executive director of the agency for the past 20 years and only the third director in its history, Rice has spent most of his career staring at Norfolk's blank spaces and thinking of how to fill them up.

With roughly a \$100 million budget and 370 full-time employees, the agency Rice leads is of enormous size, power, and scope. Besides numerous redevelopment projects scattered around the city, the agency also supervises subsidized housing for about 15,000 residents.

The Steady Reshaping of **Norfolk**



Redevelopment of East Ghent (above) brought middle-class housing back into the heart of downtown Norfolk. Rice (above left) has steered the ship at NRHA since 1977.

But downtown has always been the agency's most visible arena and the litmus test of the city's health. The authority fills the entire Royster Building, the largest and perhaps most ornate of the city's surviving early skyscrapers. Towering over its neighbors on Granby Street, the building watches over downtown like a sentry.

Created in the 1940s, NRHA has always been one of the most active and aggressive redevelopment authorities in the country. In the 1950s, under the leadership of its first director Lawrence Cox, the authority tore down hundreds of acres of the old city, including some of its most historic streets and buildings. According to one architect who witnessed the destruction, the city lost one of the largest collections of pre-Civil War architecture on the East Coast. "Norfolk probably had as many 18th and early 19th century buildings as Georgetown," says Frederick Herman, a retired local architect. "And they were basically intact until the early 1950s. Some were run-down, but a lot of them could have been rehabilitated."

Even Rice, a big man with a beefy frame who often gestures while he talks,

admits the agency would do things differently now. "I expect that if urban renewal were being done today, more of it would be saved – more of the buildings and streets," Rice says. "People know a lot more about how to do it right now."

A 1994 travel article in *The Washington Post* summed up one visitor's reaction to Norfolk. "Apparently, the latest urban renewal has launched before Norfolk's powers-that-be heard about historic preservation. On a gray and windy Saturday afternoon, many downtown blocks were bereft of little but condemned buildings, blowing newspapers, homeless men, clucking pigeons, and a few such bewildered tourists as ourselves," said the writer. "Downtown, I blurted out to an evidently startled woman, was 'a mess.'" Rice says he doesn't doubt some visitors would liken downtown to a bombed-out Hiroshima. But his hope is that the construction of the mall and spinoff development will change that.

Rice joined the authority in 1970 after laboring in the city's planning department for most of the 1960s. The Massachusetts native immediately earned

Photos: Courtesy NRHA

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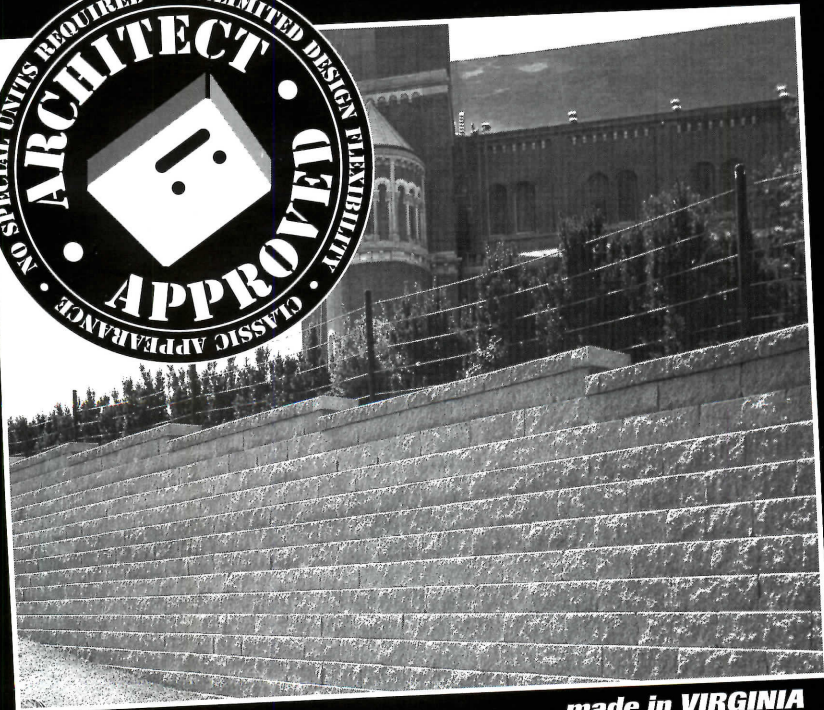
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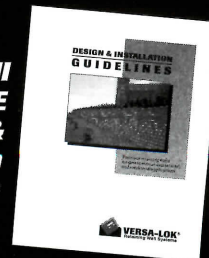


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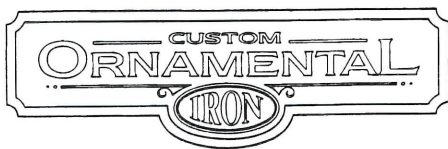
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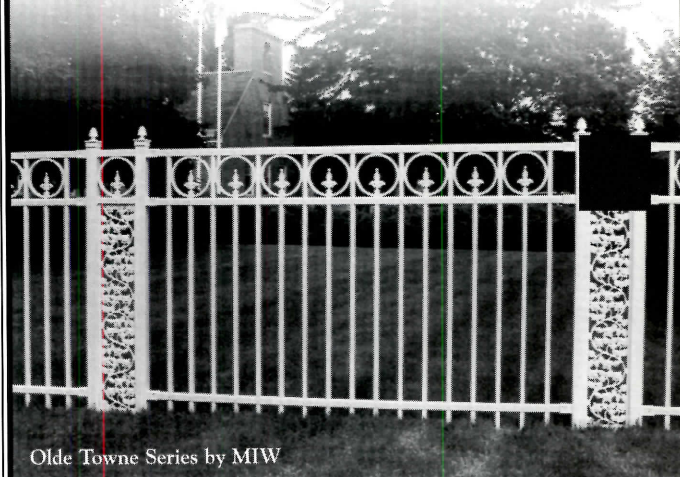
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During Rice's tenure, Norfolk has been transformed into a progressive city. Site of the soon-to-be-built MacArthur Center is at top left.

a name for himself at NRHA redesigning East Ghent, a historic turn-of-the-century neighborhood which was leveled beginning in 1969. The project cleared away a historic neighborhood and pushed out 1,200 poor black families. In the process, the city lost a huge collection of houses and apartments which, in retrospect, could probably have been renovated.

In East Ghent, however, the NRHA did not erect tall towers on plazas, as was common in redevelopment projects of the 1950s. Instead, low-rise, luxury urban rowhouses were built close to the street. It was New Urbanism two decades before the phrase was ever invented. The luxury homes sold well and gave

the city a stronger tax base, although property values there have sagged in recent years.

Rice was responsible for the physical design of the neighborhood, and can justifiably claim to be decades ahead of the rest of the country in designing properly-scaled infill projects for a center city. The redeveloped East Ghent is not without flaws – it is cut off from surrounding streets to some degree, for example – but it is still much better than the city's previous efforts.

With a bachelor's degree in art and architecture and a master's in planning, Rice unquestionably has the heart of a designer beneath the tough skin of the big-time administrator. He talks about street widths and other aspects of urban form with both proficiency and passion. And he still gets angry recalling how assorted bureaucrats and traffic engineers thwarted – or tried to thwart – parts of his redevelopment plan for East Ghent.

Rice was named executive director of the agency in 1977. Under his leadership, the NRHA has advanced its role as one of the most ambitious authorities in the country. In both redevelopment and the management of public housing, the agency has been adventuresome and bold. It has won numerous awards, and been consistently rated as a "high performing" agency by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development.

One recent project that graced architectural magazines around the country is the renovation of the Diggs Town housing projects (see *Inform*, 1995: number two). The agency carved new streets through the large complex of low-rise brick buildings and built front porches with simple white columns at each front door. Under neo-traditional theory, the renewed "public space" is intended to make the 428-unit project more livable and safe. It's too early to judge the project's long-term success, but the transformation is certainly dramatic.

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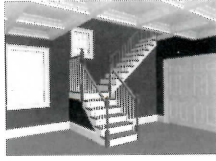
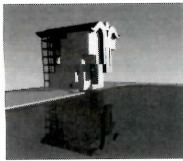
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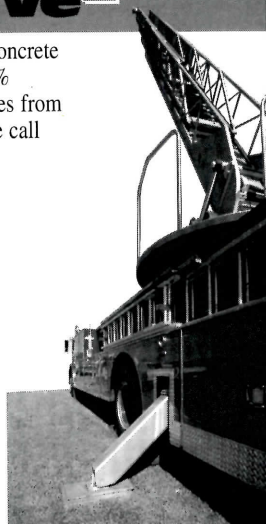
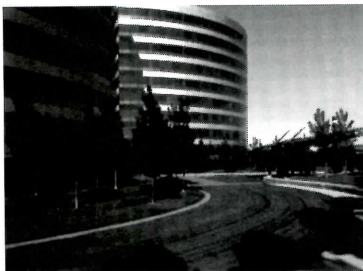
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John H. Crouse, of CMSS Architects in Virginia Beach, said Rice is always willing to be bold. "He's got a definite sense of vision," says Crouse, whose firm managed the Diggs Town project. "He's always wanting to take a chance, as far as different ways of doing things. Some are controversial, some are not. I don't always agree with him on everything, but he's been a very good influence on the city of Norfolk."

No doubt the agency has its critics. Some in the black community still nurse resentment over the redevelopment of East Ghent, and others also view the agency as too quick to call in the bulldozers. Decades after other agencies have pulled back from redevelopment, the agency continues wholesale clearance of neighborhoods. Perhaps its biggest current project is in East Ocean View. At a cost of some \$70 million, the agency is clearing roughly 90 acres of land containing 1,500 homes and making way for a new upscale neighborhood of about 500 residences designed by Miami architect Andres Duany.

"I don't agree with that," says Crouse, questioning the fairness to former residents and wondering if razing an area is the best way to lift it up. "The final product may look nice, but the soul of the area is going to be ripped out. Cities need to evolve."

Rice and the NRHA also battled with critics over the giant MacArthur Center mall, now under construction downtown. Critics, including a coalition of local architects, said a giant enclosed suburban shopping mall was not the best design for an old downtown, even one with few remnants of its pre-war core. Patrick Masterson, then-president of AIA Hampton Roads, helped lead the opposition. But construction is proceeding as planned and, notwithstanding its design flaws, the mall has already spurred new investment in the city's downtown, which was one of the principal goals.

Norfolk's political structure has changed dramatically over the past five years. With the imposition by federal courts of a ward system, there is no longer a unified council, backed by Norfolk's business elite, ready to support most neighborhood clearance, downtown redevelopment, and other NRHA projects. The cry has come for more neighborhood investment and less downtown spending.

Rice, nevertheless, has managed to stay on good terms with most of the council, despite the occasional cries for tighter control over NRHA by some of the newer council members. Paul Riddick, one of the new black councilmen, calls Rice an able administrator, even though he said the NRHA was too often the city council's hired gun, pursuing unpopular projects and allowing the council to avoid community wrath. Herbert M. Collins, another new black councilman, has good words for Rice's management of NRHA's 4,000 units of public housing. "He has improved both the quality and the design of public housing," said Collins, who helped form and lead a commission examining ways to reform public housing.

Councilman Mason C. Andrews, a former mayor who has stood at the forefront of redevelopment policymaking for more than three decades, says Rice has been a good leader. "I'm repeatedly impressed with his judgment and vision," Andrews says. "We owe him a great deal."

At age 60 and with almost 35 years of service planning Norfolk's reconstruction, Rice has given no hint of intentions to retire any time soon, even though the construction of the mall will complete his grand plans and fill one of the last remaining undeveloped spaces downtown. As Rice once said: "Where else could you spend your entire life working on the same project?"

Alex Marshall specializes in writing about planning and design issues. A former staff writer for the Virginian-Pilot, he is currently at work on a book about the dynamics of cities.

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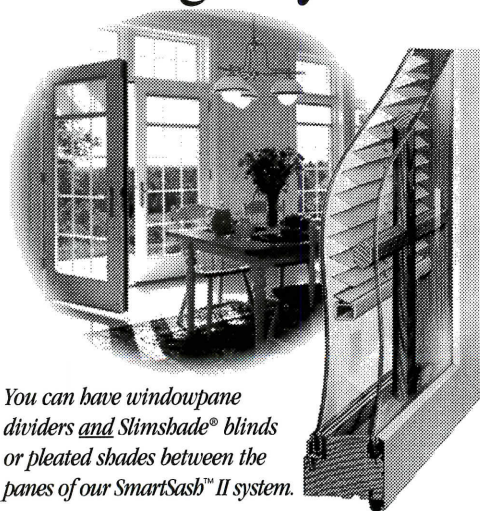
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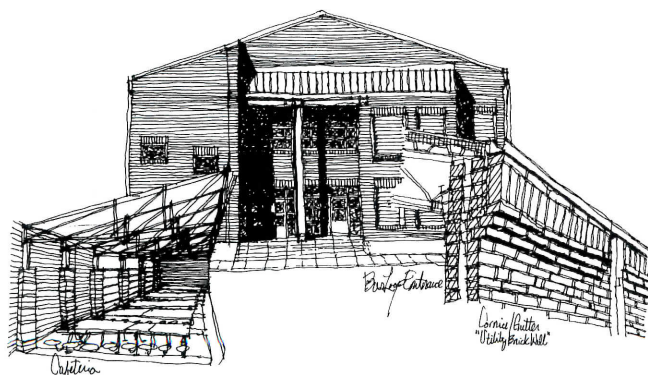
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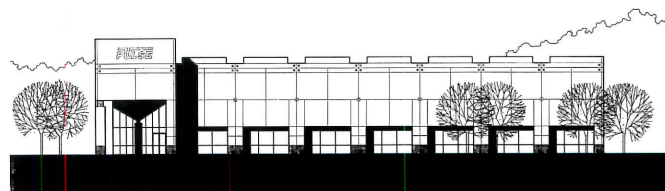
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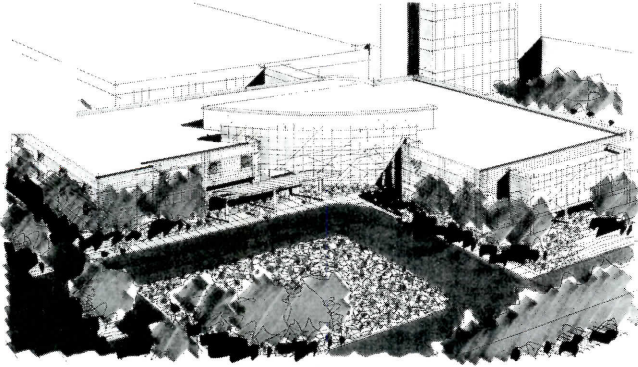
Architect: Bond, Comet, Westmoreland + Hiner Architects, Richmond
Project: Greenville Elementary School

A distinctive feature of this elementary school/community fine arts complex is the 900-seat community fine arts auditorium. Common core facilities connect primary school and upper elementary with a two-story atrium as the focal point. A two-story plan reduces the size and scale of the complex. 804-788-4774.



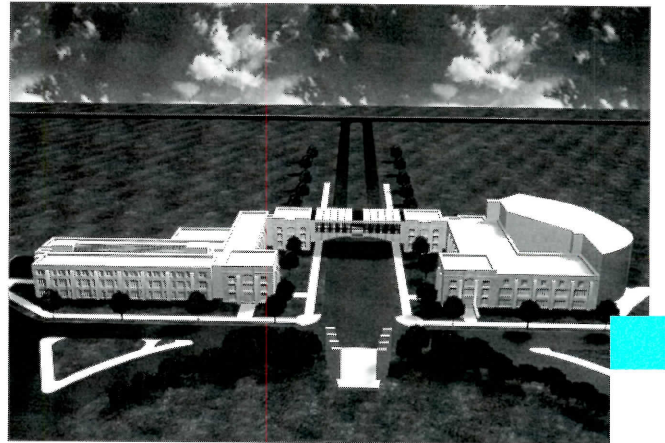
Architect: Morgan Gick & Associates, P.C., Falls Church
Project: Pulse Electronics, Inc.

This 80,000-square-foot structure located along the Route 270 technology corridor near Germantown, Maryland, will be both Pulse Electronics' corporate headquarters and a light manufacturing center. Coated tilt-up concrete panels will be used on the exterior with 40-by-40-foot internal bays. 703-876-5600.



Architect: Odell Associates, Inc., Richmond
Project: Maryview Medical Center, Birthing Center

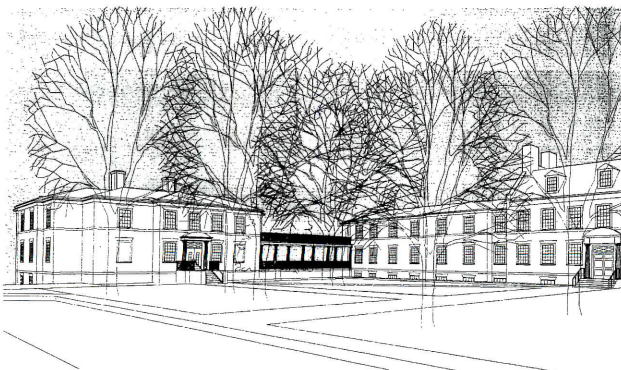
This 44,000-square-foot building in Newport News will house a second-floor birthing center connected by bridge to the existing hospital and including 5 LDR and 14 post-partum rooms. The first floor will be shell space, except for an atrium lobby. Completion is scheduled for Spring 1998. 804-644-5941.



Architect: Sherertz Franklin Crawford Shaffner, Inc., Roanoke
Project: Advanced Communications and Information Technology Center

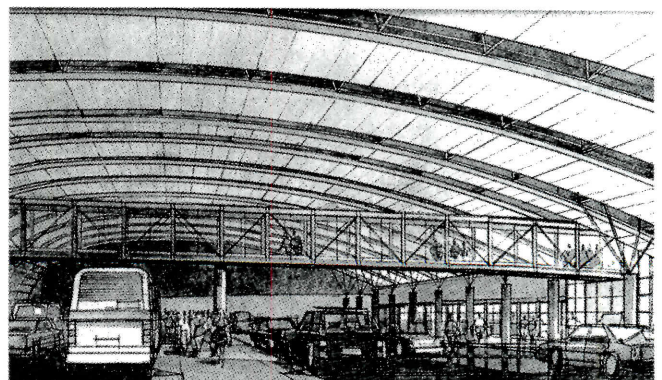
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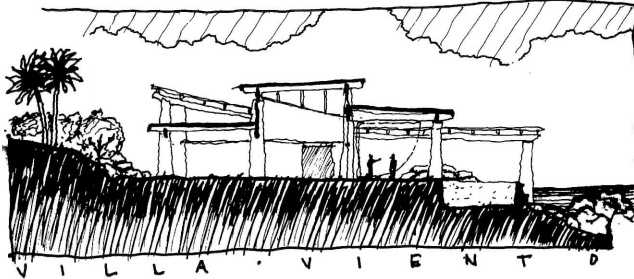
Architect: Marcellus Wright Cox & Smith Architects, P.C., Richmond
Project: St. Christopher's School Science Center

The new center, containing classrooms and labs, connects to the existing science building with a link containing restrooms, a stair, and an elevator that provide amenities for the disabled. The completed center will define the edge of a courtyard intended to function as the front entrance to campus. 804-780-9067.



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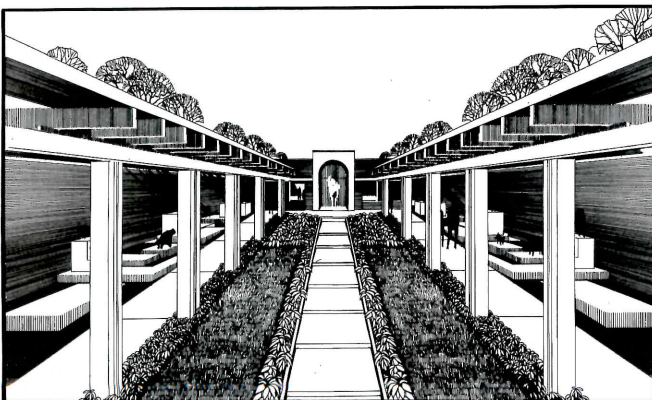
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Project: Multipurpose Stadium Study

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Project: Center for Applied Technology and Career Exploration

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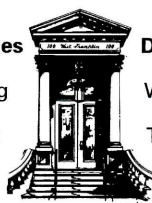
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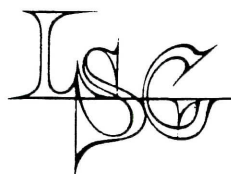
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From modest beginnings in 1720 as a frame home for a young family, the Matthew Jones House has become a sort of time capsule containing three centuries of building technology. Among the noteworthy aspects of the house, which is located at Fort Eustis near Newport News, is its rare “earthfast” structure,

Virginia’s only known surviving example of the technique. Earthfast buildings rest on posts that are sunk into the ground at corners and other critical locations, then connected with continuous top plates and discontinuous sill plates, similar to balloon-framing methods that later became popular. During the restoration, six original wood mem-

bers were found embedded in masonry walls that were added later.

Earthfast construction was commonplace in the 1700s because of its simplicity and speed of erection, says architect John Paul Hanbury, FAIA, of Hanbury Evans Newill Vlattas & Co. in Norfolk. Hanbury was charged with restoring the house to its most recent iteration, dating to 1893. Clearly visible, however, are indications of the original frame house and its alteration – first in 1730 and again in 1893. The changes were revealed to present-day visitors on purpose, Hanbury says, to illustrate the methods of construction. To make some elements even more visible, the floor of one of the upstairs rooms was not replaced, which leaves the original structural elements visible.

The exterior also tells a story. Although the massive brick chimneys date to the original structure, the architects determined that the relationship between the chimneys and frame structure indicated Matthew Jones’ intention of someday replacing the wood siding with brick. This was accomplished in 1730, shortly after Jones’ death. Another clue to the building’s history is seen in the brickwork. The roof of the original one-story structure was raised in 1893 to create a full second story. Although the brick used for the upper walls perfectly matched the rest of the building – having been taken from a demol-

A User-Friendly Lesson in Tectonics



Restoration included replication of window sashes, replacing oak shingles, and duplicating original paint colors (above). Before the work began (left).

ished outbuilding erected when the house was walled in brick – the mason changed to a seven-course running bond instead of following the pattern of the original Flemish bond. The restoration was commissioned by the Army Corps of Engineers, Fort Eustis, and the National Park Service, with additional support provided by Colonial Williamsburg and The College of William & Mary.

“Anybody who has an inquisitive mind would want to see it,” Hanbury said of the historic house, which is open for self-guided tours. “The scale of the house is so small that, with ease, anyone who toured it could understand the whole building process.” – *T. Duncan Abernathy, AIA*



Missing second floor reveals building frame.

Photos: Tamara Mischenko