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From the Editor

The Spirit of Giving

About this time each year, our collective awareness is focused to take into account the needs of others. Whether we volunteer for the local Food Bank, sponsor a needy child's Christmas, or toss a few coins in the Salvation Army kettle, the spirit of giving seems to swell in all but the most curmudgeonly of us.

But, for many architects, generosity is more than a seasonal tradition. Some take to heart the notion that their talent is a resource that can be tapped often for the good of others. On an ongoing basis, they choose to dedicate those talents to the aid of the less fortunate or their community at large.

One of the most admirable examples of this is the work of a robust 57-year-old named Sam Mockbee. Guided by his sincere concern for the black underclass of the rural South, Mockbee has forged a new model for the architectural profession that blends design aspirations with a strong social consciousness. Sambo, as he is called by friends and admirers, is known far and wide as head of the Rural Studio, an Auburn University satellite program that builds modest houses and community structures in small towns and along the dirt roads of Hale County, Alabama, deep in the heart of the poverty stricken Black Belt region. The latest census recorded more than 1,700 substandard dwellings there.

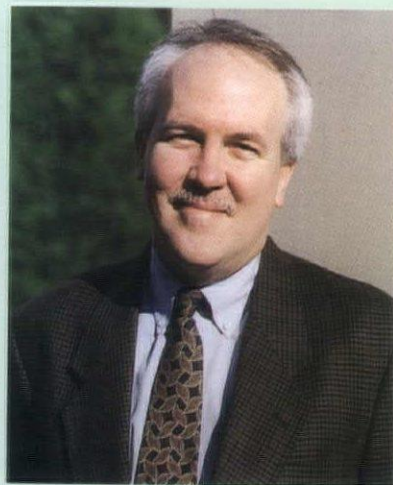
A good human being with a giant heart, Mockbee demonstrates every day that it is possible to create architecture in a way that has design merit while also improving a community's quality of life. He makes architecture available to people who usually do not benefit from the talents of architects. As the spiritual guru of the Rural Studio, Mockbee helps his young charges design and build structures that are resolutely functional and oddly attractive. The buildings they produce incorporate old bottles in the walls, siding made of surplus license plates, or walls insulated with hay bales. Their resourcefulness is unmatched.

But the professor and students are not simply playing with form for form's sake. A foundation of values informs the work, because Mockbee sees architecture as a social art. "Great architects address cultural issues of their time and place," he told me, "so I look for a moral sense, that's all I can call it. For me, the needs we're dealing with here are the social injustices of families that have been left behind, left over really from the Civil War. For generations, they continued to stay invisible and underserved and underprivileged. These are the poor blacks of the Deep South. But the problems of poverty and homelessness are not specific to the South."

So, what does Sam Mockbee's quiet campaign in dirt-poor Alabama have to do with architects in our region? Well, everything. Starting in small ways – a modest house here, a shelter for women there – Mockbee is planting seeds that will keep growing as the years pass. His well-meaning work has a direct influence on Alabama communities by satisfying the fundamental need for shelter while, in a respectful way, restoring dignity to the families who benefit. Why couldn't the same thing be done in Virginia, Washington, Maryland, or North Carolina?

Granted, not everyone can make Mockbee's level of commitment. But in the absence of his kind of day-to-day involvement, there's an opportunity for leadership that shouldn't be overlooked. If architects are going to inspire a community – if they are to challenge decision-makers to forge responsible environmental and social changes – then they must assume responsibility for shaping the environment, reversing social complacency, and challenging the status quo. Mockbee isn't taking gratuitous potshots when he says architects have to be more than house pets to the rich. In his own way – with candor, sincerity, and arresting language – he is issuing a challenge to his peers to better their world. Mustering the spirit to share some of the rare skill that architects cultivate over time is one way to make that change, and an honorable one at that.

– Vernon Mays



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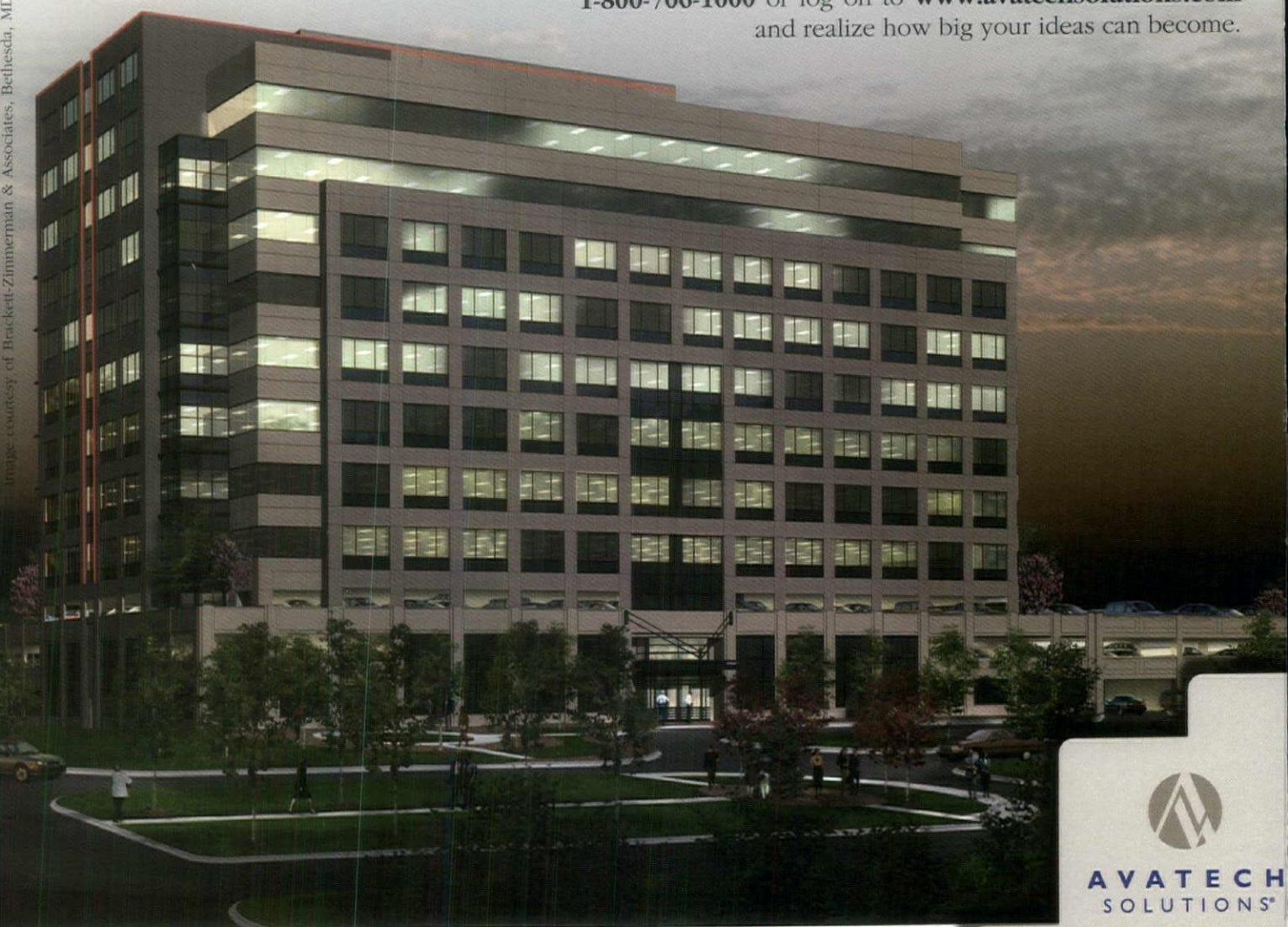
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volume twelve number four

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Applied Modernism

Leo A. Daly's \$65 million Pope John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington, D.C., is a kit of smoothly functioning parts. But the deftly articulated pieces of this Modern building add up to something less than a coherent work of architecture. *By Allen Freeman*

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Retooling the Dance Factory

BCWH sets a new standard for postindustrial architecture with the renovated Richmond Ballet studios, an airy dance center with sculptural and mechanical elements that flow together like deft choreography. *By Edwin J. Slipek, Jr.*

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A Home for Hamlet

Staunton's historic downtown gets a jolt from the past, compliments of Tom McLaughlin, AIA. While the Blackfriars Playhouse exterior blends with the town's architecture, a step inside transports visitors back to Shakespeare's day. *By Lisa Goff*

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Inside the Candy Store

A candy-colored wing sweeping across the front façade and playful glass towers on the rooftop highlight the dramatic transformation of a dull brick box into the vastly expanded new home of the Children's Museum of Richmond. *By Vernon Mays*

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The Lyric Theatre: All for the Cause

When a chance conversation sparked a local architect to help save the old theater in downtown Blacksburg, an odyssey began. The grass roots campaign yielded results that nurture the cultural life of a town – and preserve an institution. *By Michael Hedgepeth, AIA*



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Design Lines

new developments in design



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House & Home

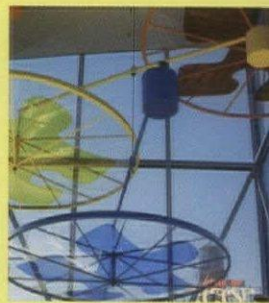
the modest addition: when less is more



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Taking Note

doing the small thing well



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On the cover: Pope John Paul II Cultural Center.

Photo by Max MacKenzie.

In our next issue:
Schools

Major
Announcements
Highlighted at

Visions for Architecture

The more than 300 guests at the *Visions for Architecture* celebration in November were treated to more than fine food and elegant surroundings. During the gala, the Virginia Foundation for Architecture announced its intentions to purchase the historic Branch House on Monument Avenue in Richmond and transform the Tudor Revival landmark into the new home of the Virginia Center for Architecture. The move to a larger, more significant headquarters will allow the Foundation to develop more elaborate public programs, including a museum of architecture for the enrichment of citizens of the Commonwealth.

Another highlight of the evening was the announcement that the Elmwood Fund, Inc., a Richmond-based grant maker that supports education and the arts, had bestowed a \$1-million matching grant to support the project. The Elmwood governing board consists largely of descendants of John Kerr and Beulah Gould Branch, who commissioned the 27,000-square-foot residence in 1918 from architect John Russell Pope. Elmwood Fund board members Edmund A. Rennolds, Jr., the Branches' grandson, and Bucci Rennolds Zeugner, the Branches' great-granddaughter, were present at *Visions* for the announcement of their gift.

Prior to the grant announcement, trustees of the VFA already had pledged \$500,000 toward the purchase of the Branch House, expressing their intentions to place the Foundation in a position to engage the public and become a more visible and influential entity in Richmond's cultural landscape. The organization's leaders called this step crucial in the development of the



VFA announced its plans to purchase the Branch House (left), soon to be the first architecture museum in Virginia.

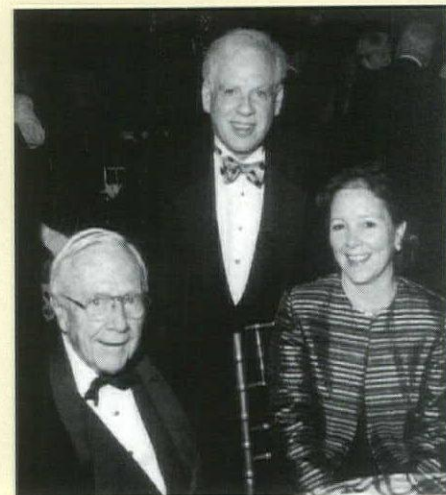
Tom Kojsich

Virginia Foundation for Architecture, which in its new venue will be able to pursue a scope of outreach activities that are limited by its current home, the Barret House.

Because of its close proximity to museum row on Richmond's Boulevard, the Branch House is an ideal venue for an architectural museum, containing ample space for both gallery and office use. Unique and imposing, the Branch House is the only property on Monument Avenue listed on the National Register of Historic Places and awarded landmark status by the Commonwealth of Virginia and the City of Richmond. Commissioned by the Branches to serve double duty as both a home and a fitting showcase for their renowned collection of art and antiques, the house is a lavish English Tudor mansion designed by Pope, who also was the architect for the nearby Broad Street Station, now the Science Museum of Virginia. Best known as architect of the Thomas Jefferson Memorial, the National Archives, and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., Pope is among the most illustrious architects to have worked in Richmond.

The Branch House also boasts a legacy of serving the public good. In 1954, Mrs. E. Addison Rennolds, daughter of the Branches, donated the house to the United Givers Fund, a precursor of the United Way. Not only has it served as office space for corporate and nonprofit groups, the house has also been used by community

groups for receptions and meetings. With the pending purchase by the Virginia Foundation for Architecture, the stage is set for yet another phase in the life of the Branch House: its development as a cultural hub devoted to architecture and the building arts, offering the public a place for the study and discussion of architecture and related topics through exhibitions, forums, meetings, and other events. As such it will constitute Virginia's first and only architectural museum. In its new Branch House location, the Virginia Center for Architecture will accommodate the offices of both the Virginia Foundation for Architecture and the Virginia Society AIA, including the operations of *Inform* magazine.



Elmwood Fund directors Edmund Rennolds, Jr. and Bucci Zeugner (seated) at *Visions* with John Braymer, VFA president.

Steger Honored With William C. Noland Medal

During the *Visions for Architecture* awards ceremony, Virginia Tech President Charles W. Steger, FAIA, was named the 2001 recipient of the William C. Noland Medal. Steger, who served as dean of the College of Architecture and Urban Studies at Virginia Tech for twelve years, assumed the university's top administrative post two years ago and has proved the quintessential model of service embodied by the Noland Medal, the highest honor given to a member by the Virginia Society AIA.

Steger is an ambassador for the architecture profession who has shared the university's resources nationally and internationally. He fostered the creation of Tech's Washington-Alexandria Architecture Center, which was begun eighteen years ago to provide an opportunity for students to live and work in an urban setting. The center now operates as an international consortium with participation by seven universi-



Steger (at right) receives award from VSAIA President Will Scribner.

Taylor Dabney

Robins Named Architecture Medalist



Architecture Medalist Lora Robins.

Richmond philanthropist Lora Robins was named the winner of the Architecture Medal for Virginia Service in recognition of her advocacy and support of the state's educational and cultural institutions. The medal, which is the highest honor offered by the Virginia Society AIA to a non-architect, recognizes Robins's support of major institutions such as the University of Richmond, the American Red Cross, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, and the Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, all of which, thanks to her, have been able to extend their offerings.

Robins's belief in helping others and her appreciation for places and buildings have compelled her to assist these institutions with projects designed to educate citizens, preserve Virginia's heritage, and celebrate the Commonwealth's cultural and natural resources. A lover of gardens, Robins has long been a supporter and board member of Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, and currently chairs its Founders Council. She was instrumental in the early development of plans for the garden's expansion, contributing time and effort in the review of concepts for a new master plan. She has contributed significant resources to the building of several gardens, the Robins Tea House, the E. Claiborne Robins Visitors Center, and the library and education complex.

Robins and her late husband, E. Claiborne Robins, have also made major gifts to the University of Richmond to preserve and enhance the qualities of the campus. Their stipulation that the university continue its Collegiate Gothic style has created a powerful sense of place that aids in attracting top students. Among the many projects they supported is the Lora Robins Gallery of Design from Nature, which showcases her personal collecting efforts.

Taylor Dabney

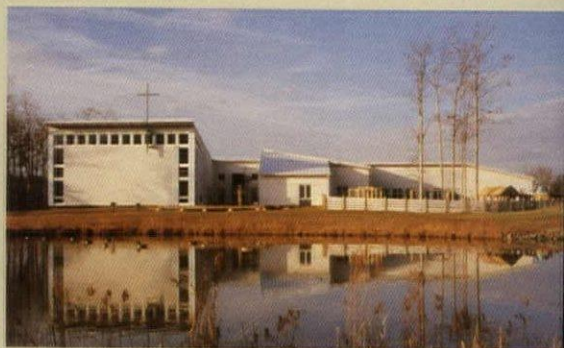


Kerns Group staff gathered to celebrate their award at Visions gala.

Kerns Group Architects Receives Firm Award

The T. David Fitz-Gibbon Architecture Firm Award was presented to Kerns Group Architects of Arlington, which has earned an enviable reputation for design excellence during its twenty-seven years. The award celebrates a Virginia firm that demonstrates a long-term commitment to excellence. Renowned for its ecclesiastical work, Kerns Group boasts a portfolio with considerable depth, containing projects as diverse as schools, commercial offices, residences, and historic restorations. Garnering fifty design awards in half as many years, including nine from the Virginia Society AIA, the firm designs with sensitivity, creating projects that inspire by harnessing light, shaping space, and respecting the beauty of simplicity.

Its egalitarian approach has marked Kerns Group as an incubator for innovative new firms. Thanks to the vision of founder Thomas Kerns, FAIA, the firm "developed a kind of design sensibility in which there was no attempt to forge an office style, but rather to sharpen the emerging skills of enthusiastic young architects," says Greg Uekman, AIA, a former staffer who endorsed Kerns's nomination. The resulting buildings, while dissimilar in form, function, and style, all seek "to make architecture that surprises, pleases, and contributes to its community in as many ways as possible," noted *Washington Post* architecture critic Benjamin Forgey in his assessment of the firm.



Kerns Group's Lakeside United Methodist Church (above) typifies the firm's serene buildings.

Is the Skyscraper Doomed?

Symposium at National Building Museum Explores the Question



What is the future of the skyscraper? In light of the attack on the World Trade Center, a panel of industry experts met Nov. 9 at the National Building Museum to discuss that very point. Led by moderator Robert Campbell, Pulitzer Prize-winning architecture critic of The Boston Globe, the group also included structural engineer Leslie Robertson, who worked on the twin towers; author Witold Rybczynski, professor of architecture and urbanism at the University of Pennsylvania; and architect Paul Katz, principal of Kohn Pedersen Fox in New York. Following are excerpted comments from each of these participants.

Robert Campbell: Was the skyscraper a good idea? Is it still a good idea? Christopher Alexander, the savant of architecture who wrote *A Pattern Language*, says there is abundant evidence that tall buildings make people crazy. Architect Leon Krier said "tall buildings are vicious and immoral." So, some people have never been entirely comfortable with tall buildings.

Was the skyscraper an ego trip? Are New York's skyscrapers just a recapitulation of the towers of the medieval village of San Gimignano, Italy, where all the powerful families in town built towers? I think the highest one was about 170 feet and, for the technology of the time, just about as difficult to build as the World Trade Center.

Has the United States already moved to the sidelines in the competition for skyscrapers? The race for the tallest is somewhere else. Of the twenty tallest buildings in the world today, none were built in the United States after 1974, when the Sears Tower was completed. They are all in East Asia or the Middle East. And why are *they* building tall towers? Are they going glove-to-glove with America to show they can build taller buildings?

What are the practical advantages of skyscrapers? The obvious one is density. You can get a lot of people in a small place to interact, within walkable distance of each other, and that leads to a creative exchange of ideas. That's what cities have

always been about. Can that kind of density be achieved by other means? There are no high-rise buildings in Washington, D.C. – do you feel deprived of creative exchange as a result? The most densely built city in the Western world is Paris. It has four times as many people as Boston in the same area, yet it has almost no high-rises. It's simply built rather solidly to eight, ten, twelve, fourteen stories. High density, mixed-use, mid-rise makes for a very active street life in Paris.

Leslie Robertson: I want to show you something about where the World Trade Center came from and what happened to it. A lot of innovative things were done at the World Trade Center. One is wind engineering. We did a lot of model studies, work that had never been done before in construction. We built motion simulators to study how people would react to the motion of a tall building. And we used prefabrication to an extent that had never been used in structural steel.

In the recent attack, on the North Tower alone, two-thirds of the columns on one face of the building were removed by the passage of the aircraft through it. In addition to that, a petrochemical fire for which the project was never designed took place inside. We designed the building to withstand the impact of a Boeing 707 flying slowly, looking for a landing place. What hit it was a 767, a little heavier, but flying a whole lot faster. So the energy the buildings absorbed was far more than that for which they were designed.

Also, the buildings were not designed for the fuel load of the 707 or the 767, and the bad news is the explosive power of these planes is far exceeded by the fuel carried on a 747 or the yet-to-be-produced Airbus 380. The event that took place in the World Trade Center is a tiny fraction of what is possible. So you begin to realize that architects and engineers are not going to design buildings – high-rise or low-rise – for the impact from these airplanes. It's not practical.

Many people have asked, "Why didn't the Trade Center have better fire-proofing systems? To the best of my knowledge, there's no fire-proofing system today that will resist that kind of a fire. Some of the steel that was taken out of the tower had reached a temperature of 2000 degrees, which meant that it basically melted.

Witold Rybczynski: Skyscrapers are America's unique contribution to architecture. What makes them so American is their character. They're novel, of course, and this is a country of newness, of trying new things. They're also commercial. We like skyscrapers because they're big and boastful. And they're self-confident, which is perhaps the most terrible thing about Sept. 11. Our self-confidence has been rocked.

Tall buildings have had a huge effect on the American city and created another uniquely American part of the city, the downtown. When you build enough buildings that tall, you get huge concentrations of people. Skyscrapers created this unique American notion of downtowns as very intensely concentrated places of work, but also places where people live. American cities don't have plazas and they don't have boulevards and great palaces, but what we do have is skyscrapers. So when people say we should stop building them, we need to think very hard about that, because it means we stop building cities the way we've been doing it for 100 years.

The challenge of thinking about skyscrapers is not about height. *The tallest building in the world* is a completely obsolete idea, which is why obscure cities in Asia are building them. Today the challenge is how to integrate skyscrapers into cities. To learn about that, we can go back to the skyscrapers of the '30s, which had stores on the ground floor, which came down to the sidewalk, which didn't create plazas, and which were much more integrated into the city than modern skyscrapers.

Paul Katz: The United States is no longer the dominant force in high rise buildings.



Other countries have been thinking differently about their cities, partly because they have no choice. A hundred years ago, the only country in the world that had a majority of its population in cities was Britain. By the end of this decade, the majority of the world's population will be urbanized.

Maybe in this country it doesn't matter so much. But other countries can't urbanize the way we have, because of limited resources such as land and energy. The U.S. uses one quarter of the world's energy. When China urbanizes, I hate to think what the consequences will be. So the Asian cities, where most of the rapid urbanization is happening, are where we've seen a lot of high-rise construction.

In Asia, they depend primarily on public transportation to get into the city. That has enabled them to achieve the density. In cases such as Hong Kong and, to some degree, London, they are paying for the infrastructure with high-rise construction. In Tokyo, they have a different problem. There they face the certainty of a major earthquake in our lifetime. So, over the past ten years, they have been building more tall buildings, because tall buildings will be more capable of resisting earthquakes than low buildings.

Preparing for bad events is not necessarily a signal that there's no future for cities. In England they've been living with the threat of terrorism for many years. The British have transformed London into a capital of commerce, and they've done that through sensible planning and sensible codes. If you go to Canary Wharf, there are many cameras that photograph people and they don't disturb anybody's freedom, although they record who comes and goes from the building. In fact, Canary Wharf is well-defended.

I believe the quality of life in some of these cities is quite acceptable. So one of the things we've learned from working overseas is that the building type of the 21st-century is the tall building. We need to understand that.

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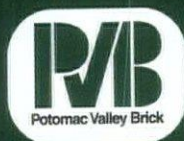
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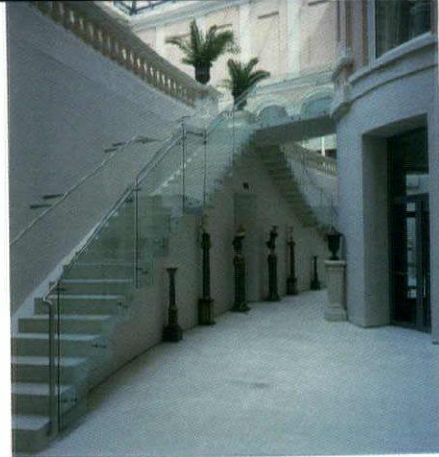
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Dulwich Picture Gallery interior.

Virginia Museum Selects London Architect

After months of holding back the news, the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts announced in November that London-based architect Rick Mather has been selected from an international field of competitors to plan and design a major expansion and renovation of the 65-year-old art museum. Working in collaboration with Richmond-based SMBW Architects, Mather will reconfigure the existing building, add 100,000 square feet of new space, and create a master plan for the 13-acre site.

The project will add a three-acre sculpture garden enabled by a gift from Lora Robins of Richmond, while at the same time scrapping a 1975 North Wing addition and its accompanying sculpture garden, which was designed by renowned landscape architect Lawrence Halprin. "We aim to create a brilliantly designed home for our collection of art from around the globe within an integrated arts complex," said museum director Michael Brand.

Mather, principal of Rick Mather Architects, is known for his pioneering work with structural glass, his innovative and intelligent reinterpretations of existing buildings, and his expertise in sustainable design. In his buildings, Mather has created a visual extension from inside to outside by employing "vanishing" glass walls and circular skylights to align buildings with their physical surroundings.

Mather noted that a key part of this assignment will be to stimulate greater activity around the museum by opening it up to the street. His award-winning projects include the Dulwich Picture Gallery in London, the Wallace Collection Centenary Project in London, and the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich.

The \$79 million transformation of the Virginia Museum, which is planned for completion in 2007, will be its most extensive reconfiguration.



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Modest Moves



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Though the greenhouse, entryway, and garage are small components of this residence, they make a vivid impression with exposed post-and-beam details, large glass panels, and a splash of bright red.

By Rebecca E. Ivey

Judy Wilson and Stephen Glazier, the owners of a California Contemporary house constructed in the 1970s, began with the simple goal of making some minor repairs to their home. With this in mind, they contacted BMK, architecture firm in Alexandria. After discussing their needs with architect Skip Maginniss, AIA, the owners redefined the project as a full-fledged renovation that would transform a deck into an enclosed greenhouse, a carport into an understated garage, and a nondescript stoop and front door into an entryway with pizzazz.

Wilson and Glazier adored the original house, and insisted that the

renovations complement, rather than overwhelm, the older building, which was characterized by simple post-and-beam construction. Sited gracefully on a steeply sloping lot, surrounded by lush greenery, the house blended comfortably with the landscape of the 1950s-vintage neighborhood. Maginniss and his clients decided to create a more palpable connection between the interior and exterior, allowing the natural world to penetrate the house through the greenhouse addition. Equally as important was the need to change the entrance to the house, which lacked its own distinct character, in Wilson and Glazier's eyes. Enclosing the carport was a largely practical task, but it did require that the new

enclosure gel with the original house and – in contrast to the entryway – not draw excessive attention to itself.

The largest alteration by BMK was replacing the existing deck with the new greenhouse. To create a harmonious connection with the rest of the house, Maginniss decided upon a simple structure that emphasized and exposed the post-and-beam structure. While the existing house is painted white, the greenhouse remains natural, creating a transition from the older, manmade structure into the abundant foliage. A series of rafters floats above, while open panels of glass allow light from the southern exposure to filter in. Steel columns also express the post-and-beam

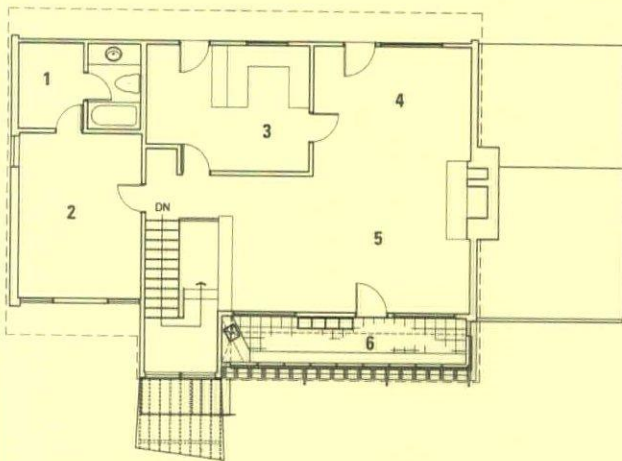


The greenhouse interior employs muted earth tones and large windows opening to the surrounding garden to draw the natural world inside.

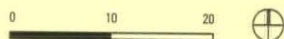
structure, but are light and thin, avoiding an industrial feel, and painted a deep rust in order to blend with their woody surroundings. The angle of these columns, while dictated by practical considerations, creates an interesting contrast with the rectilinear shape of the original house – the lines recall the slope of a tree branch or a trailing vine.

The greenhouse interior continues to use this transitional language. The simply designed space consists mostly of functional elements. A long planting bench, a small sink, and a narrow wall of blue shelves provide ample space to care for plants. However, the earth tones of the tiled floor reinforce the natural theme, while the large, square panels of glass expose views of the luxurious foliage, and glimpses of the unpainted wood rafters above. Glass doors and windows extend the sightlines through to the living area, allowing the natural world to extend far into the house.

While the entrance posed a different problem, the solution was executed in similar style. To create a more distinc-



Upper Floor Plan



- | | |
|------------------|---------------|
| 1 Walk-in Closet | 4 Dining Room |
| 2 Bedroom | 5 Living Room |
| 3 Kitchen | 6 Garden Room |

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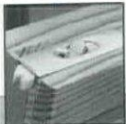
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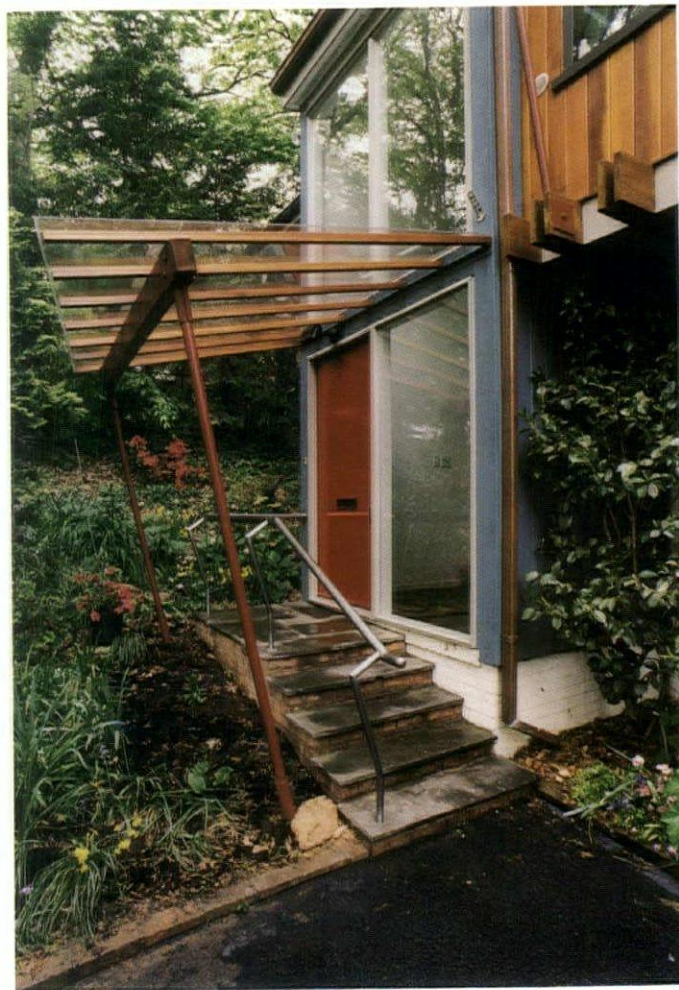
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Formerly understated, with no shelter overhead and a small concrete stoop, the new entry is more welcoming and more distinguished.

tive visual impression, the door was painted a vivid red and the stoop was rebuilt as a more inviting, transitional structure, with slate rather than the original concrete. Maginniss added a railing and canopy for shelter and support, mimicking the materials and angles of the greenhouse addition. The glass panel sheltering the entrance not only protects visitors from the elements, it also provides a light, transparent cover that references the expansive glass windows of the greenhouse. In the early design phase, the railings were drawn straight, but Maginniss didn't like the way that looked. He decided instead to place the posts at the same angle as the steel columns supporting the greenhouse, bending them back at a corresponding angle to join the handrail.

The final, and perhaps least dramatic, element of the renovation was enclosing the carport and creating a garage with a unique door. To make the garage inconspicuous, Maginniss built it with the same white-painted brick as the original house, using rows of glass block beside the door to allow light to penetrate. The garage door references both the dusky blue accents on the original house and the square floor tiles in the greenhouse.

Though the design for these renovations was exercised on a small scale, its precision, interconnectedness, and respect for the original building are remarkable. "We tried to honor the owners' love of their house by not abusing it with a lot of extraneous stuff, not trying to make it into something different from the original," says Maginniss. BMK succeeded in doing just that by using the language of the original, expressing a transition from interior to exterior, and creating practical spaces that harmonize with the original design.

**"Technology influences
our efficient use of time,
or, stated differently, the
extent to which we use
our time efficiently."**

Velocity

Virginia Design Forum V

March 22-23, 2002

Masonic Temple, Alexandria, Virginia

The theme for the event is "Velocity," a focus for discussions which seek to explore the impact that technology, construction techniques, and cultural influences have on the speed with which design ideas are developed, refined and implemented.

Registrations are being accepted now for a two-day program

that will feature Neil Denari, AIA, director of

SCI-ARC in Los Angeles. Joining him will be

design talent from around the world, including

Tod Williams, of Tod Williams Billie Tsien & Associates in New

York; Ben van Berkel of UN Studio in Amsterdam; William

Morrish, theorist and urban designer from the University of

Virginia; and Adam Yarinsky, principal of the Architecture

Research Office in New York.



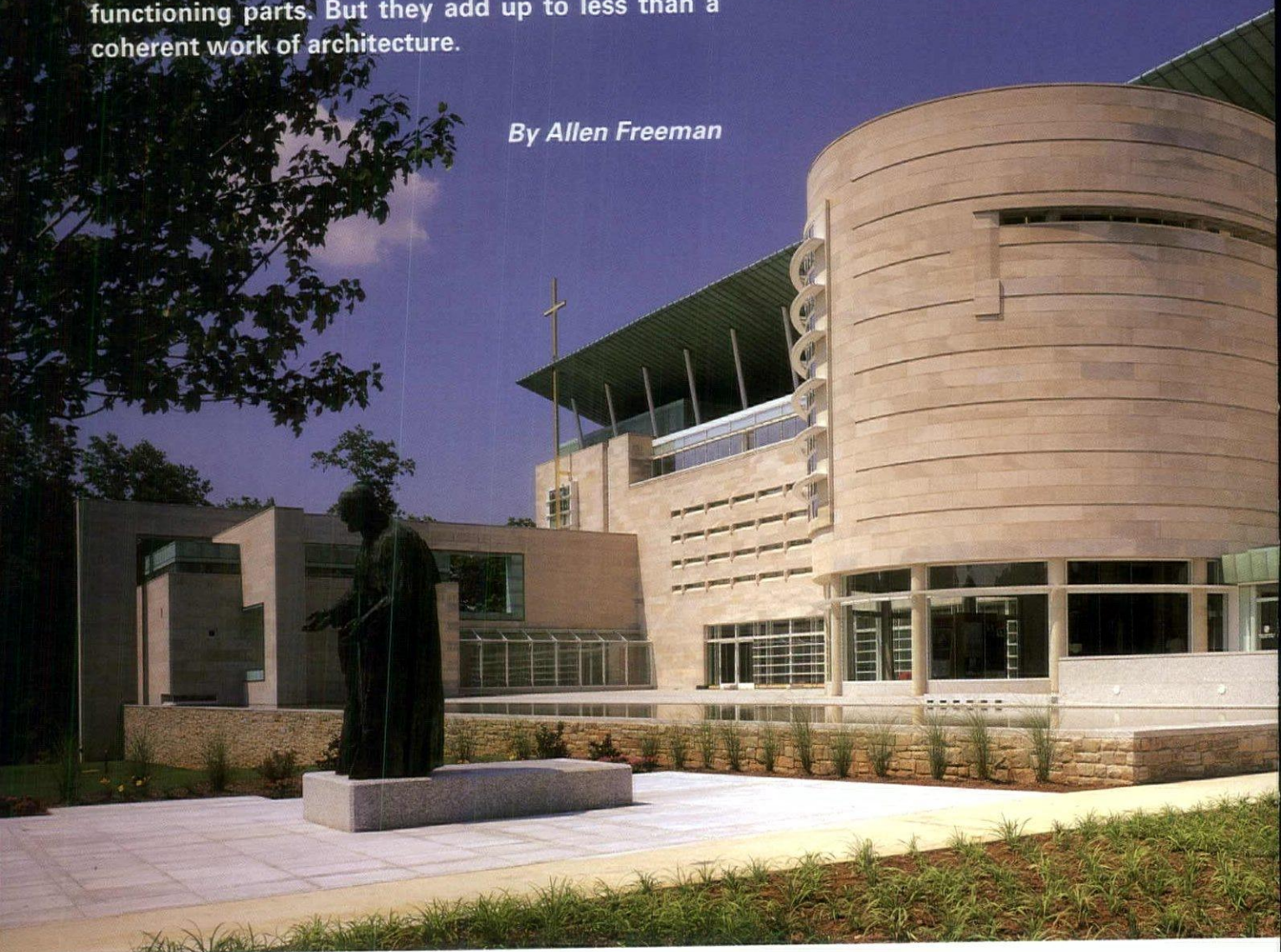
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Applied Modernism

Leo A. Daly's \$65 million Pope John Paul II Cultural Center in Washington, D.C., is a kit of smoothly functioning parts. But they add up to less than a coherent work of architecture.

By Allen Freeman



The Pope John Paul II Cultural Center opened in March as home to an institution dedicated to the Pope's teachings. Located in northeast Washington, D.C., near the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, the \$65 million center was designed by the local office of Leo A. Daly to accommodate busloads of Catholics, casual tourists, and visiting scholars. As a collection of parts, the center functions reasonably well. But as a coherent work of design or as memorable architecture – the terms on which the

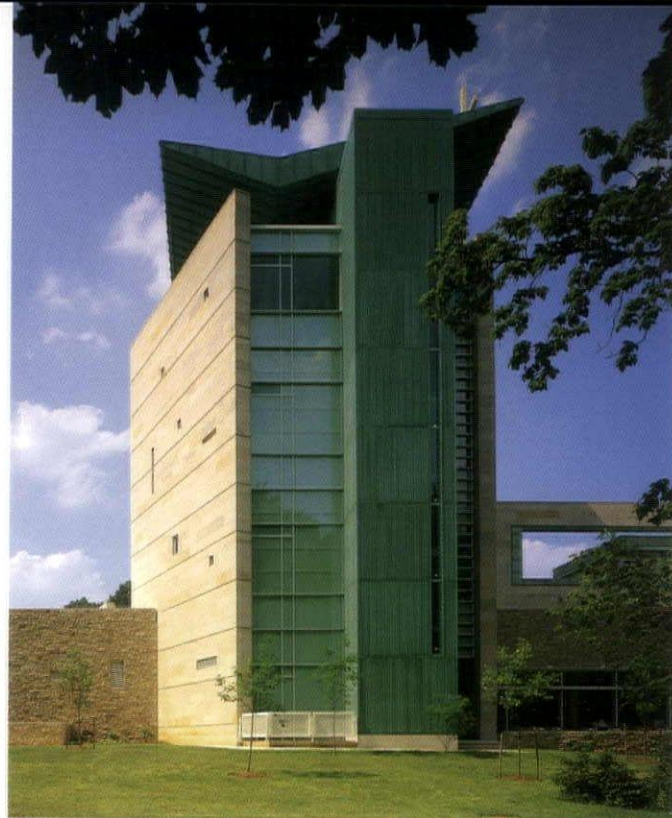
building begs to be judged – it falls short.

Admittedly, my expectations were mixed. An expensive project inspired by the work of a charismatic world leader raises hopes. But presidential libraries, the center's closest counterpart as a building type, haven't worn well with time. As architecture, they strive too hard for greatness and end up seeming pompous and blandly institutional, their exhibits often tending toward kitsch. So the challenge here was great.

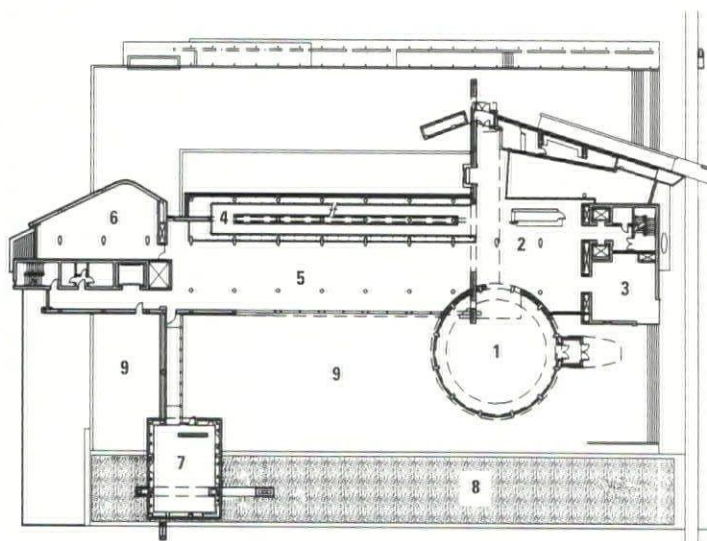
This particular building was the late-1980s brainchild of Adam Maida, then a Polish-American bishop from Michigan, now a cardinal and archbishop of Detroit. The costs of establishing the



Photos: Maxwell MacKenzie



The narrow south façade (above) reads as a mechanical sandwich set on edge. The connection to the chapel extends to the right.



First Floor Plan



- | | | |
|--------------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| 1 Rotunda Entrance | 4 Ramps | 7 Chapel |
| 2 Lobby/Ticketing | 5 Gallery | 8 Reflecting Pool |
| 3 Gift Shop | 6 Papal Gallery | 9 Terrace |

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Pope John Paul II Cultural Foundation and constructing the building were met through private sources; more than 56,000 individuals, including many Polish-Americans, are said to have contributed. When the budget was insufficient to meet the vision, Cardinal Maida simply raised more funds.

The Pope himself helped shape the center's mission of providing an environment where visitors can explore the role of faith in modern times, and selected Washington as its site. (Rome, Krakow, New York, and South Bend, Ind., also were considered.) The clients wanted "a monumental building in the best tradition of Washington and church architecture," says senior

designer Lori Arrasmith, AIA. That left a lot of wiggle room for the architects, who apparently had no trouble convincing the clients that a building in a style of the Modern era would be the most relevant expression of the center's mission.

The project was in drawings for three years, says Arrasmith. As the architects translated indefinite ideas into a program and schematic design, function sometimes followed form, adds Al O'Konski, AIA, who was in charge of the project. Groundbreaking was in September 1997. When the center opened last spring, the visiting public found interactive exhibits, galleries for permanent and traveling art, a children's gallery, a theater showing a movie



POPE JOHN PAUL II CULTURAL CENTER

Welcome



What You Can See and Do Here

Mass Gatherings
The Center's large, open spaces are ideal for mass gatherings, including the Pope's visit to the United States in 1985. The Center's architecture is designed to accommodate large crowds of visitors.

Pope John Paul II's Visit
The Center's architecture is designed to accommodate large crowds of visitors. The Center's architecture is designed to accommodate large crowds of visitors.

Exhibitions
The Center's architecture is designed to accommodate large crowds of visitors. The Center's architecture is designed to accommodate large crowds of visitors.

A building planned to accommodate busloads of visitors needs lots of room up front where people can escape the elements, and the center's two-story entry rotunda fills the bill.

about the life of John Paul II, a chapel, a reference library, a gift shop, and a café. Visiting scholars, who stay from two weeks up to six months, have separate offices on the third floor.

On a brilliant day in October, the sun cast shadows across the center's wide front, a studied composition in limestone accented with granite and copper. It perches on a fieldstone plinth, sitting back from the street on a carpet of grass. From a distance, the building composes itself into a rectangular frame rearing up behind two projecting elements – a cylinder and a cube (more or less) – with a mildly swooping, mostly freestanding copper roof supported on thin columns. The façade suggests an IBM card, with punched slit windows and little bumps that resemble hanging chads. It functions as a cryptic billboard for the building's parts; a tall gold cross rises over the cube. The scale is elusive when the building is viewed from afar. The team at Leo Daly considered this as a clean-slate site, somehow devoid of context.

Visitors enter through the drum into a soaring foyer that, along with the cube, is one of only two public rooms in the center that are readily identifiable by shape. Circulation planning is one of the strong points of the project, but the many amorphous spaces tend to confound one's directional intuition, and the tasteful signs don't help much.

Scissor ramps against a window wall that faces west provide an invitation to explore. People proceed up one floor to galleries and the library or down a floor to orientation theaters, interactive exhibits, the movie theater, and the café and gift shop. The plinth spreads over an area more than twice that of each of the three floors above. The elevator lobby and atrium at the foot of the ramp comprise a generous but confusing area, one so full of inchoate design ideas and surface materials that you might want to catch your breath, take a seat, and count them. And yet the principal thing this space is supposed to do well, guide visitors toward the exhibits, it does poorly. I asked for directions.

The walk back up the ramp could be exhilarating, but it isn't. The underside of the incline seems to bear down; views into the exhibit areas are obstructed by the back of exhibit panels; and vistas into a narrow courtyard, with its pleasant row of ginkgoes, are blocked by opaque glass. A good idea – bring natural light into the building core – unsatisfactorily executed. Robbed of the opportunity to look into the garden, the visitor instead focuses on the balusters, railings, glass skirts, and attaching hardware along the edges of the ramps. The busy design begins to call undo attention to itself.

A glass-enclosed walkway on the first floor extends to the cube, which houses the chapel. The room is serene, but it lacks mystery. The visible structural elements, a beam stretching across the ceiling and two supporting piers along opposing sides, are over-scaled. And the fenestration seems more arbitrary than artful: Punched-out windows – long slits and small squares – make the walls read as thick screens. And why wasn't the ceiling more simply detailed at the periphery so as to sit gracefully on the stubby posts between the clerestories?

All in all, the cultural center's scholars get the best deal. They're on the top floor, home to the building's best lighted, least cluttered, and most airy spaces. Small offices, which offer terraces, line a double-loaded corridor walled in opaque and transparent glass. Also on the third floor is a round conference room, occupying the space over the cylindrical foyer. Floor-to-ceiling glass encircles the room; an outer cylinder, part solid with a horizontal slit and



Ramps (top right)
provide well-lighted
circulation between
floors and efficiently
move large crowds.
**Plaster walls in the
chapel (bottom right)**
glow with sprinkles
of gold dust.



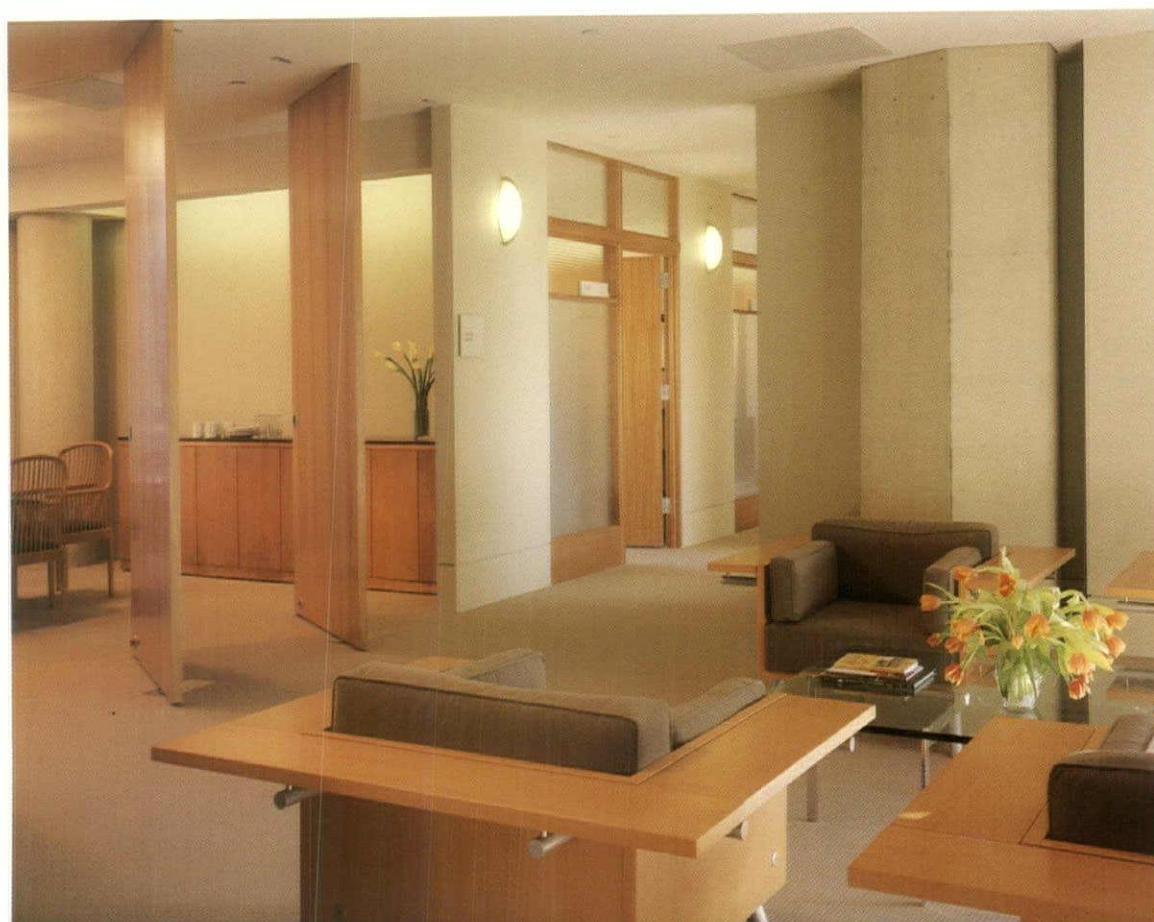


part glass with alternating colored and clear panes, orchestrates the views out. Nearby, the dome of the Shrine rises above the tree line.

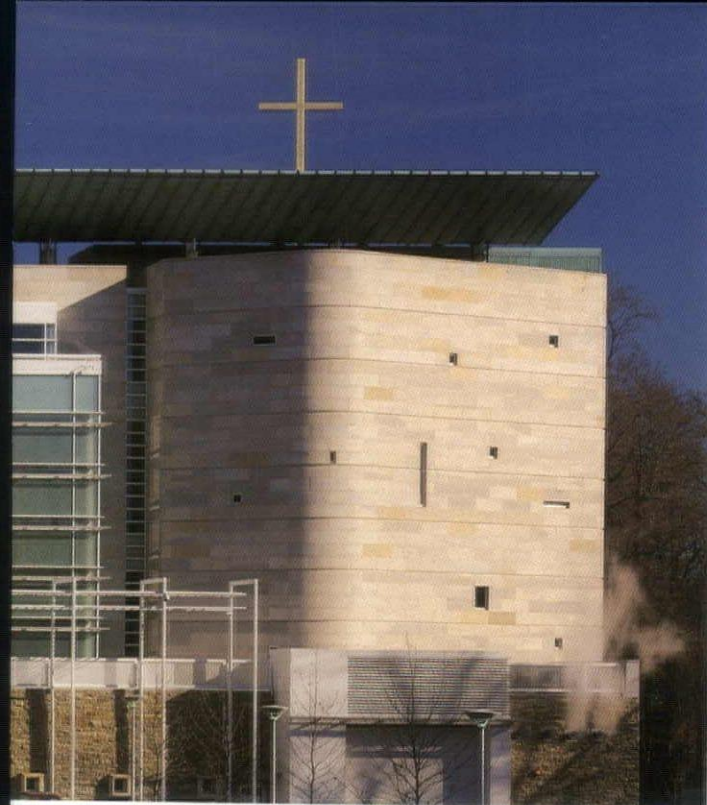
I concluded my visit to the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center with the thought that the designers had crammed more design devices into their 100,000-square-foot building than it can comfortably handle. At the same time, they failed to translate an ambitious program into a convincing expression of Modern architecture. They borrowed too heavily from the present and recent past, blending bits of Richard Meier with pieces of Le Corbusier and Marcel Breuer, but not fully assimilating those great

architects' ideas nor coming up with a building that is more than the sum of its parts.

I also came away questioning what would make Modern architecture appropriate to the center's mission. A style that expresses machinery more eloquently than humanity, a style springing from intellectual precepts instead of evolving from a culture, a style tied to threadbare notions of "progress," a style that today is surely as historical as the Baroque or the Classical Revival: Why is *that* the best choice for a cultural center, even one exploring the role of faith in modern times? Isn't every current age modern?



Visiting scholars share a well-appointed suite (left), which includes a dining room, sitting area, and sunny offices.



Photos: Maxwell MacKenzie

The rear façade (left) is dominated by a curtain wall that faces west.



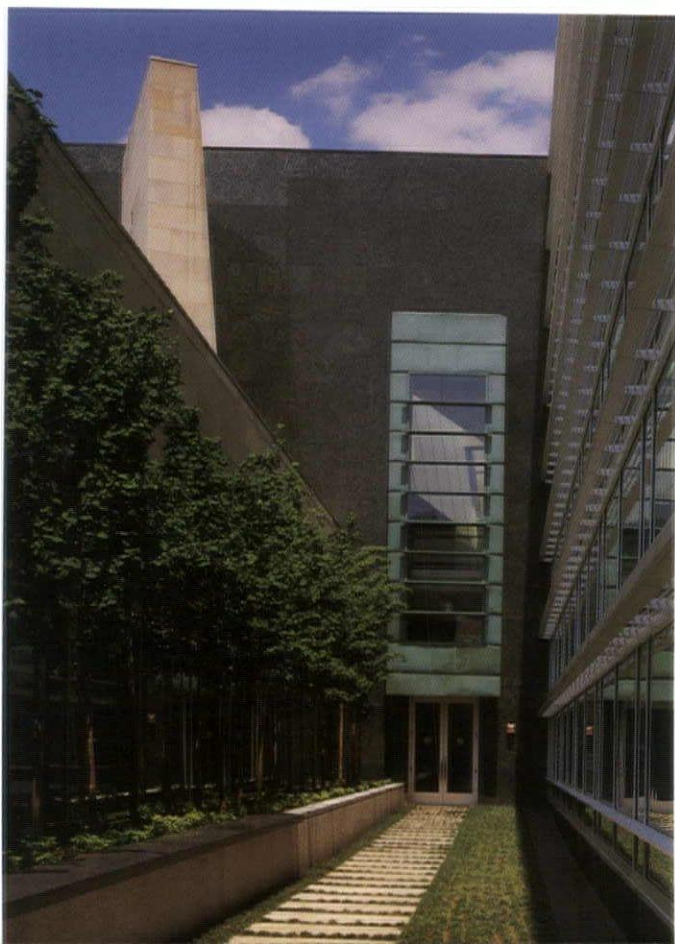
In failing to create a great Modern ecclesiastical building, the architects at Leo A. Daly are in good company. With a few exceptions – such as Eliel Saarinen’s First Congregational Church in Columbus, Ind., Le Corbusier’s chapel at Ronchamps in France, Breuer’s St. John’s University Church in Collegeville, Minn., and Louis Kahn’s First Unitarian Church in Rochester, N.Y. – the Modern movement produced few great religious buildings and many that were odd and dull. Even Frank Lloyd Wright, whose simple 1907 Unity Temple in Oak Park, Ill., was a Modern precursor, much later in his career designed a synagogue in sub-

urban Philadelphia that parodied Modernism.

For now, the Pope John Paul II Cultural Center feels a little raw and uncomfortable, like a gangly teenager in a new suit. But as the center’s foundation finds its voice and acclimates itself to its fancy digs, as the courtyard ginkgoes grow taller, the limestone façades mellow, and the copper accents take on more patina, the building’s design hyperbole and derivative associations may recede.

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Allen Freeman is a senior editor at Preservation magazine.



Project: The Pope John Paul II Cultural Center

Architect: Leo A. Daly, Washington, D.C. (Leo A. Daly, Lori Arrasmith, Darren Barboza, Richard Clarke, Kelan Dyer, Timothy Grandy, Kelly Hogg, Al O’Konski, Tom McMinneman, Robert Osborne, Adriana Radulescu, Salim Rafik, Cooper Schilling, Ellis Whitby, Scott Whitehead, Michael Winstanley, Craig White, project team)

General Contractor: James G. Davis Construction Corp.

Consultants: Michael Vergason Landscape Architect (landscape architecture); H.M. Brandston & Partners (lighting design); Eileen Ritter & Associates (retail design); Ed Schlossberg, Inc. (exhibit design)

Client: The Pope John Paul II Cultural Center

The narrow courtyard (left) contains a queue of ginkgoes that add to the contemplative spirit of this quiet retreat.



Retooling The Dance Factory

By Edwin J. Slipek, Jr.

The holiday season brings yet another year of “The Nutcracker” to Richmond’s Carpenter Center, but the Richmond Ballet’s biggest attraction these days is just down the hill five blocks away. After operating since 1978 out of the former Pleasants Hardware building, the company has new digs downtown where a transformation has occurred that’s as breathtaking as any pirouette likely to spin on the stage. The Richmond architecture firm of BCWH retooled a 1925 factory building and created a sparkingly handsome dance center for 250 students, the professional dance troupe, and a broad range of operations from box office to costume shop.

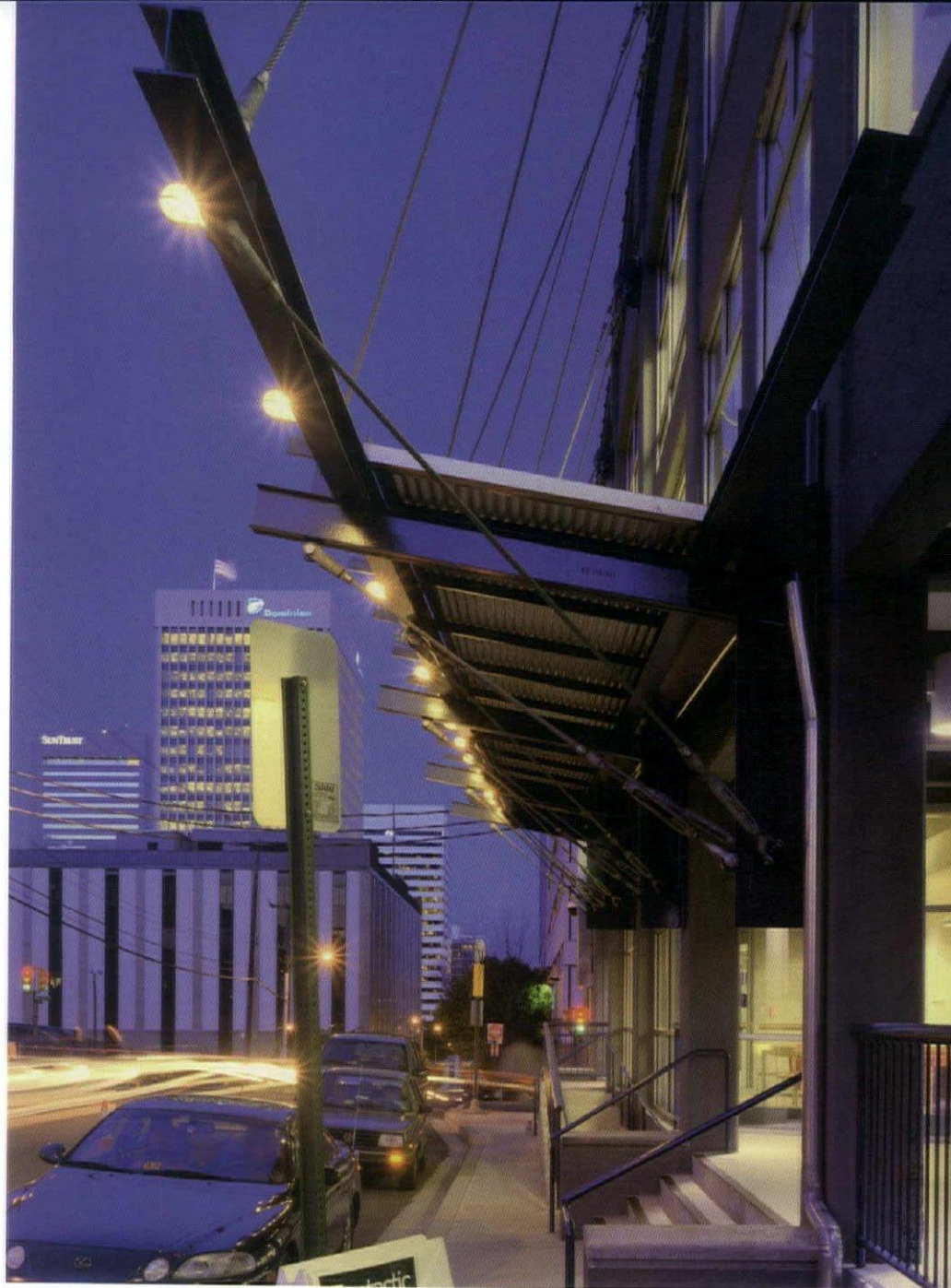
Principal-in-charge Sanford Bond, AIA, obviously paid attention to the stalwart reinforced concrete pile with three stories and six broad bays of windows facing Canal Street. The building suggested it wanted to remain a factory, but this time

around the plant would churn out dancers. In doing so, the building celebrates, rather than conceals, its industrial roots.

Some observers reacted skeptically to the treatment. They argued that since dance, particularly ballet, is often gravity-defying and makes the physically difficult appear effortless, an industrial architectural approach was heavy-handed. However, while the building does appear overly anxious to provide a stylish, industrial aesthetic, it’s a reflection of the times. As we speed into a digital and wireless age, there’s a romantic movement afield that embraces America’s industrial past. Ironically, the ballet’s new headquarters is more industrial in spirit now than when the building housed its original tenant, Consolidated Paper and Box Co. This is most prominent in the new steel-and-aluminum canopies on the front and rear of the building, where elegant cable supports engage the new steel framework on the exterior.

BCWH raised the roof on the upper level to create space for dance studios (left). The dramatic canopy along Canal Street (right) dresses up an otherwise plain box.

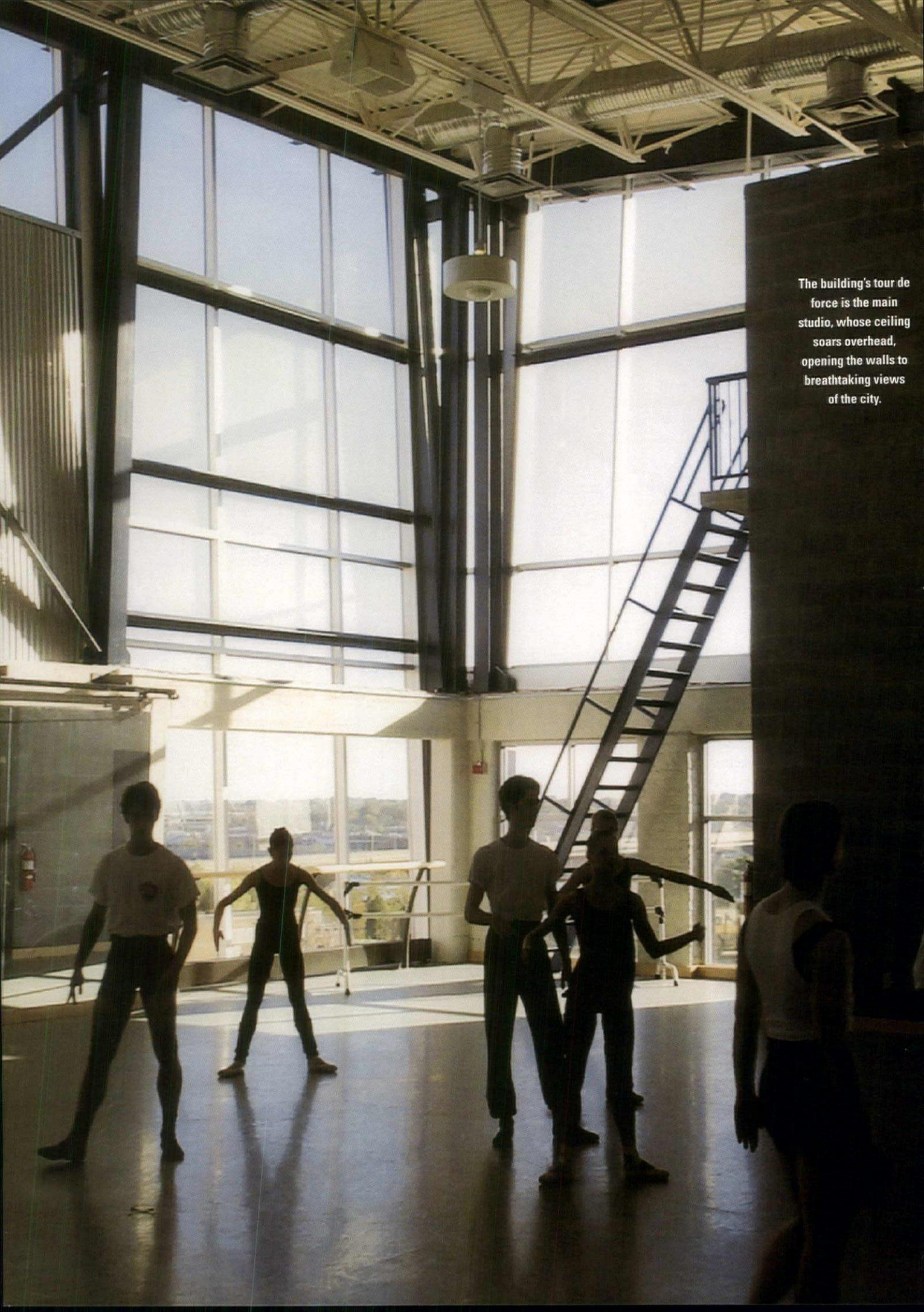
Photos: James West



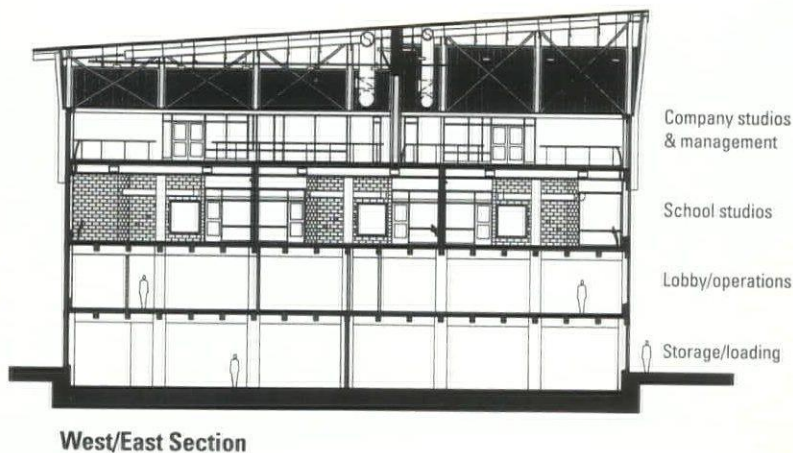
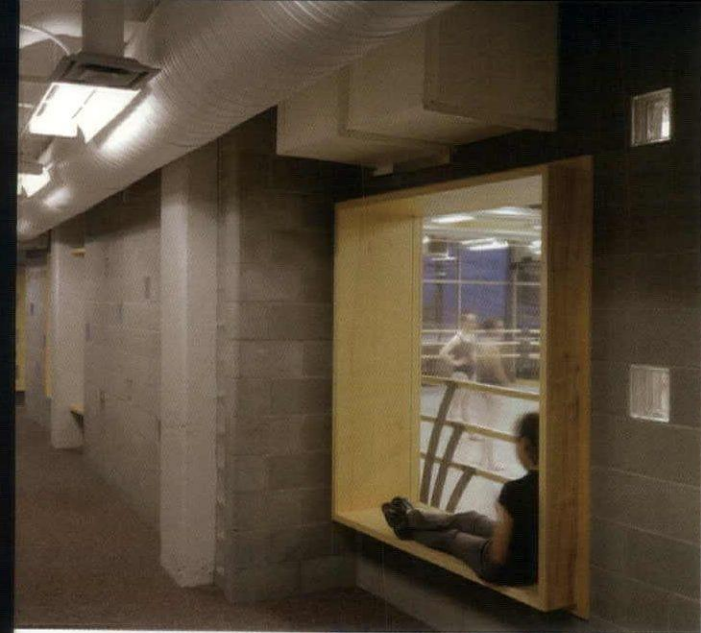
Details are elaborated where they matter most, such as the cable connections on the front canopy (left).

Reynolds Metals Company purchased the building from Consolidated in 1970 and used it as a research center. Reynolds' major change was replacing the window glass with unattractive fiberglass panels that looked as flimsy as the building appeared strong. Later, in the '70s, when the Downtown Expressway was constructed, the building sat perched on a precipice overlooking the highway and James River beyond. When Reynolds donated the 53,000-square-foot building to the ballet, the recipients found themselves with a great opportunity – but a difficult design challenge. Columns had to be moved and ceilings raised. But to step inside the building today is nothing short of a celebration. The challenges have been met – and then some.

The interior is complex – at once airy, rational, and full of surprises. And at one point, in the third-floor dance studio, the space equals the interior architectural excitement that one asso-



The building's tour de force is the main studio, whose ceiling soars overhead, opening the walls to breathtaking views of the city.



West/East Section

The corridor design includes large bay windows (above) that allow visitors to look into the studios. Cross-section of the building (above right) shows vertical organization of functions.

ciates with Thomas Jefferson's Capitol Rotunda or Elijah Myers' soaring Old City Hall stair atrium.

When entering from the sidewalk, new front steps and a ramp lead to the light-filled lobby, which buffers access to offices and costume and wardrobe areas beyond. On the second floor, a U-shaped hallway organizes the space. There are three major dance studios on this level, all equipped with custom cushioned flooring, sound systems, and soundproofing. The dance barres that encircle the studios provide sculptural interest, their design exemplifying the keen attention to detail found throughout the building.

Two large studios face the river on the back of the building. Here, columns were removed and ceilings raised some 18 inches to achieve necessary heights for dancers' lifts and jumps. These structural changes were not cosmetic, but programmatic necessities and budgetary drains. Interior windows along the corridors allow visitors to view the activity in the studios.

The third level houses artistic staff offices and the building's crowning design moment: a huge studio with a 32-foot-high ceiling. At the southeast corner a floor-to-ceiling window affords spectacular views of the cityscape. To accentuate the room's height, the architects tilted the roof at a distinct angle. From the outside, the sloped roof dramatically breaks the strong horizontals and verticals that mark Richmond's skyline. From the inside, it's exhilarating – a rectilinear, concrete box of a building has become a performance itself.

Ultimately, the renovation represents a compelling start to the 21st century and provides more than a few lessons in how downtown Richmond can reinvent itself in a postindustrial age. The Richmond Ballet has raised the bar for architectural excellence and daring, not only for Richmond's performing arts groups, but for other organizations and businesses as well.



The heavy-industrial feeling of the building is softened by thoughtful details, such as shelving (above), that introduce warm materials into the space.

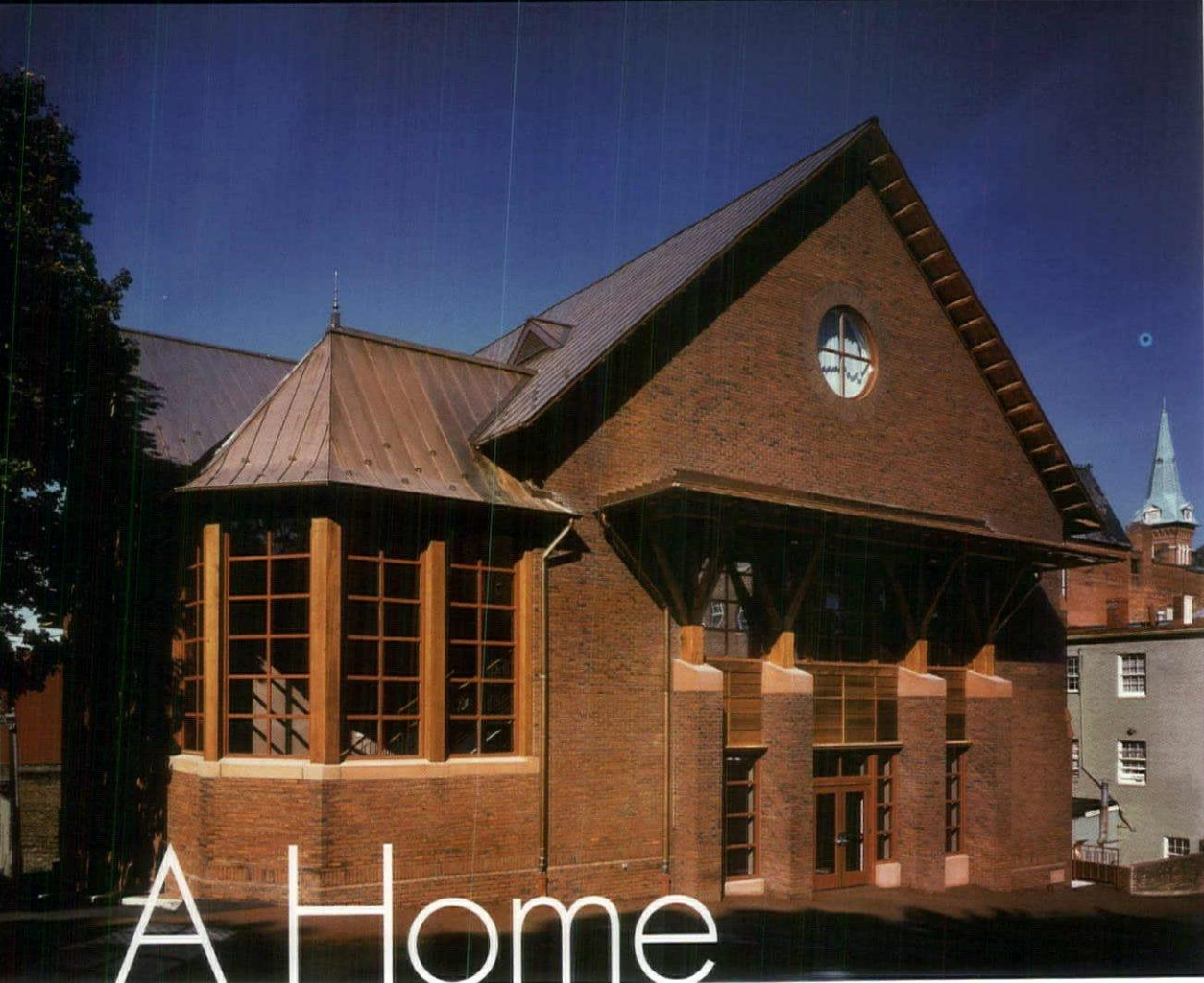
Project: The Richmond Ballet

Architect: BCWH, formerly Bond Comet Westmoreland + Hiner (Sanford Bond, AIA, principal-in-charge; Charles Piper, AIA, project manager; Todd Dykshorn, AIA, project architect; Jim Pociluyko, AIA; Alan Davis, project team)

General Contractor: Beers/Heyward and Lee

Consultants: Dunbar Milby Williams Pittman & Vaughan (structural); Simmons, Rockecharlie & Prince (mechanical, electrical, and plumbing)

Client: The Richmond Ballet



The theater's vernacular form and details (left) fit comfortably into the fabric of downtown Staunton.

A Home for Hamlet

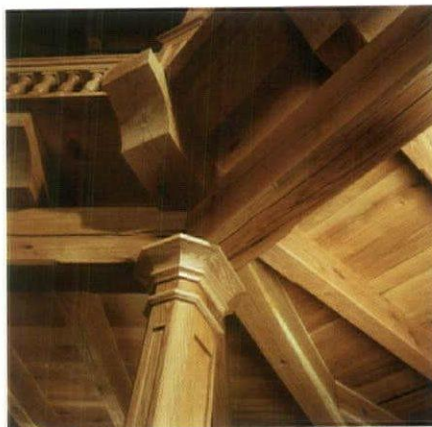
By Lisa Goff

The Shenandoah Shakespeare troupe has long promoted its spirited performance style with the slogan, "We Do It with the Lights On," a bawdy reference to the historical authenticity of their productions. Now they're doing it with the chandeliers on in their first permanent home: the new Blackfriars Playhouse in downtown Staunton, an authentic Shakespearean venue based on the original London theater of 1596.

While the Globe Theater has been copied several times, this is the first reincarnation of the Blackfriars, the Thames-side indoor theater built by Richard Burbage and destroyed in London's Great Fire of 1666. No plans, drawings, or first-person descriptions survive. "The most daunting challenge was the lack of tangible evidence of what the playhouse looked like and how it was built," says Richmond architect Tom McLaughlin, AIA.

Working with scholars, historians, and specialists in the architecture of

Renaissance England, McLaughlin researched every aspect of the original Blackfriars, from timber framing to trap doors. Visits to surviving Jacobean houses and Tudor structures such as Middle Temple and Grey's Inn – two of Shakespeare's favorite venues – provided clues to the materials, textures, scale, and details of Elizabethan construction. Deeds, leases,



Members of the white oak frame are joined with traditional mortise-and-tenon joints.

court records, and archaeological excavations of the Blackfriars neighborhood yielded clues about the size, orientation, and internal organization of the original structure. McLaughlin says surviving plans by Simon Basil, Inigo Jones, and John Webb for theaters influenced by the Blackfriars were especially helpful, as were the stage directions in the plays themselves.

The second challenge was building on a small downtown site in a historic district, says McLaughlin. "It was imperative that the new Blackfriars be designed as a good architectural neighbor," he points out. McLaughlin designed the building's exterior and public spaces in a contemporary style, in contrast to the historical playhouse within – a mirror image of the original Blackfriars, in which a 16th-century interior was carved out of a 14th-century shell. He confined the exterior to a limited range of straightforward forms and architectural details whose expression is intentionally astylistic, almost vernacular in origin. The primary form is



In the new playhouse, McLaughlin sought clues on the interior of the historic original by consulting old documents.

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a large, plain gable with overhanging, bracketed eaves reminiscent of many old structures in Staunton. This basic form is articulated by an entrance canopy, buttresses along the north wall, and three stair towers anchoring the corners. The building profile echoes the dormered and turreted roofscape of downtown.

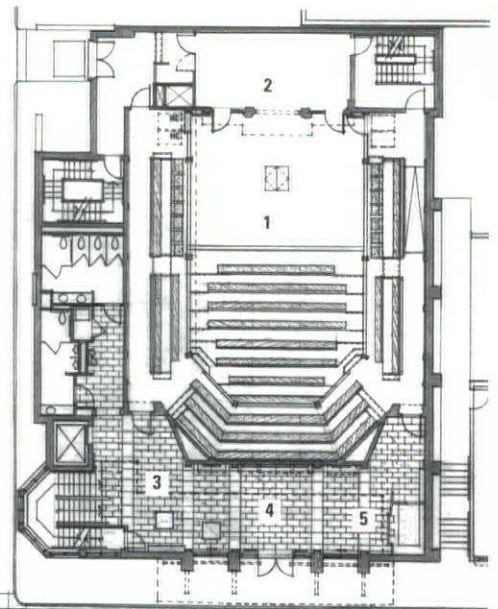
The exterior's abstract appearance is reinforced by a limited palette of natural materials, including wood-molded brick with weathered mortar joints, slate flooring, copper roofing, and cedar soffits and trim supported by white oak timber framing with a natural finish. Windows are concentrated at the entrance, public lobbies, and lobby stairway. Illuminated at night, the playhouse glows with activity.

Inside, the challenge was to use, to the greatest degree possible, traditional materials and construction methods while satisfying 21st-century building codes and technology requirements. Many decorative elements, including the gallery balusters, are hand-turned or hand-carved. Local

blacksmith Fred Crist of Metalsmiths in Waynesboro crafted the chandeliers and sconces. Members of the white oak frame, some of which weigh up to 900 pounds, were joined with traditional mortise-and-tenon joints and pegged with tapered oak pegs. As much as possible, heating, lighting, and sprinkler systems were hidden or disguised. "In spite of these accommodations, I feel we have designed a new Blackfriars that is as close as possible to the original as we can know 335 years later," asserts McLaughlin.

The 14,500-square-foot structure features the same bench-type seating that Shakespeare's audiences encountered, with a capacity of 300 people. Now eager theatergoers enjoy Shakespeare plays much in the way the Bard intended, and downtown Staunton has a new building that honors its Shenandoah Valley environment without eschewing the very Elizabethan goings-on inside.

Lisa Goff is a Charlottesville freelance writer.



- 1 Stage
- 2 Backstage
- 3 Retail
- 4 Lobby
- 5 Tickets

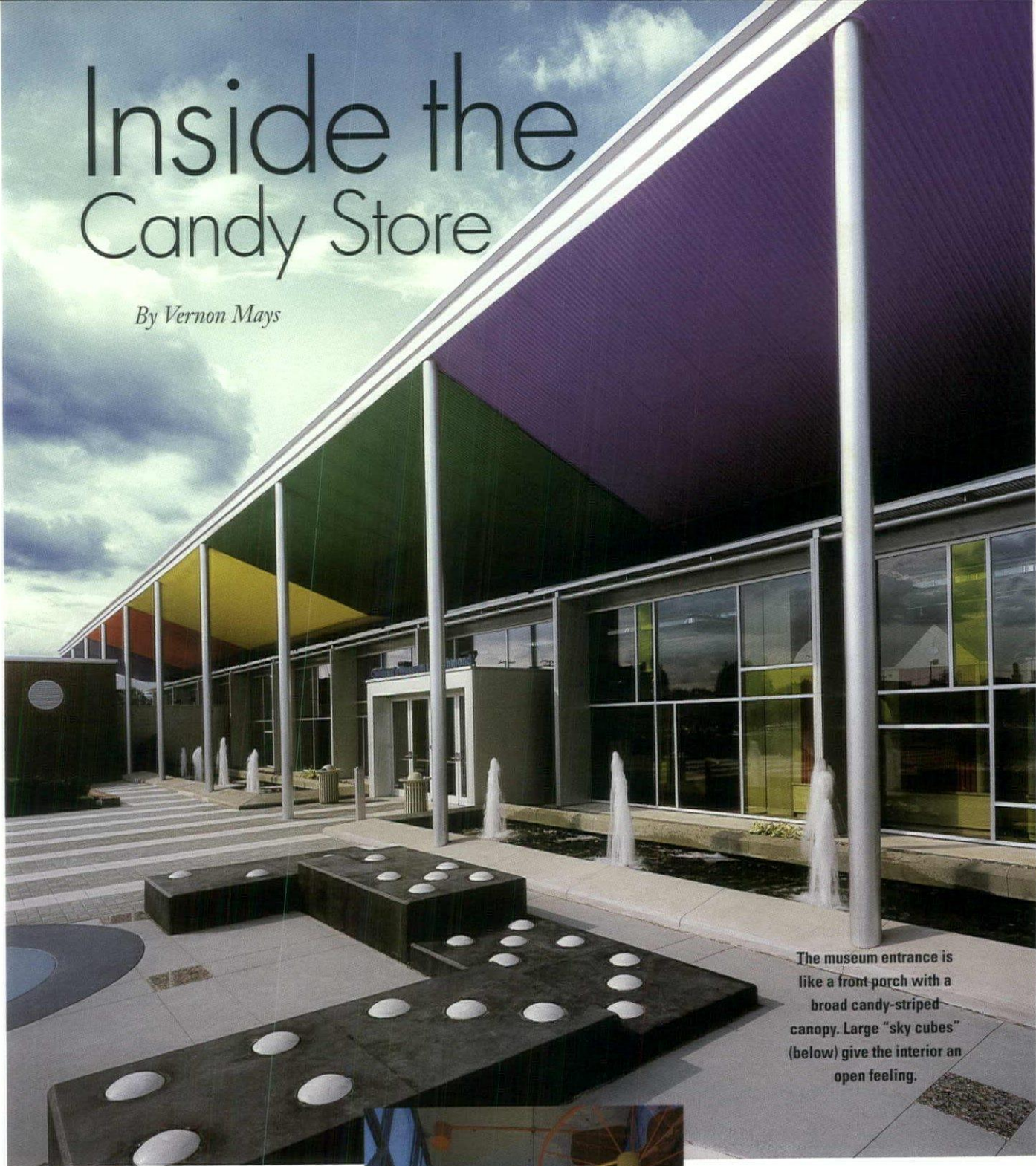
First Floor Plan



Inside the Candy Store

By Vernon Mays

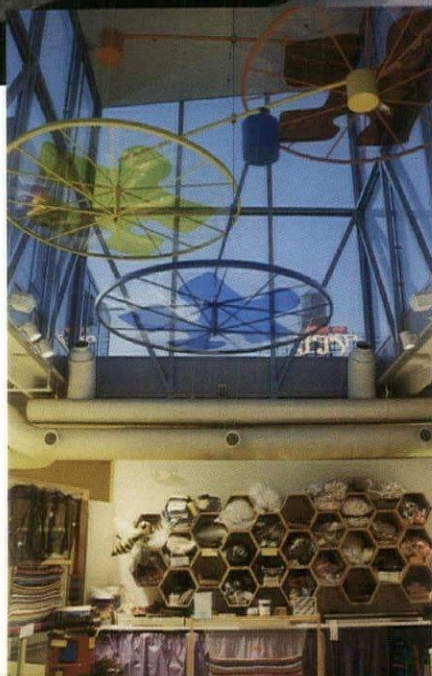
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The museum entrance is like a front porch with a broad candy-striped canopy. Large "sky cubes" (below) give the interior an open feeling.

Some organizations might have turned up their noses at the prospect of owning the dull brick box that the Children's Museum of Richmond was offered as its new home. But, in examining the former tax records warehouse and the space it contained, the museum board recognized the great potential for an institution that was bursting at the seams in a tiny 8,000-square-foot building. They jumped at the chance – and never looked back.

Located next to the Science Museum of Virginia and in close proximity to other Richmond museums, the raw container for



the new children's museum was strategically located to serve the city's youth. But how to make it a place worth visiting? The national search for an architect resulted in the selection of Vincent James Associates of Minneapolis, a small design firm with a growing reputation. James, who at the time was earning recognition for his Minnesota Children's Museum, teamed with the Richmond office of Dewberry & Davis, with Richard Ford, AIA, as the project architect.

During the preliminary design phase, James quickly looked for strategies to heighten the visibility of the low-slung



This night view (above) shows the dramatic transformation of a prosaic brick box into a place that engages the senses. New lobby space for a ticket counter and gift shop was created by extending the building forward and enclosing the space with a colorful glass curtain wall (below).

building, which sat so far back from busy Broad Street that it was easy to overlook. His studies resulted in two significant design moves: the construction of a candy-striped aluminum canopy sweeping across the front façade and the addition of five glass towers on the rooftop to bring daylight into the building and enhance its presence when viewed from the street.

The canopy, which shelters the main entrance, reinterprets the form of a front porch and sets the tone for a paved forecourt that includes interactive sculpture, benches resembling giant dominoes, and a linear fountain along the transparent glass front of the building. Projecting from the front of the museum is a box-like addition called the Children's Pavilion. This multipurpose space is a setting for meetings, exhibitions, and performances – with a large operable door that allows the option of orienting the stage outside to audiences in the plaza.

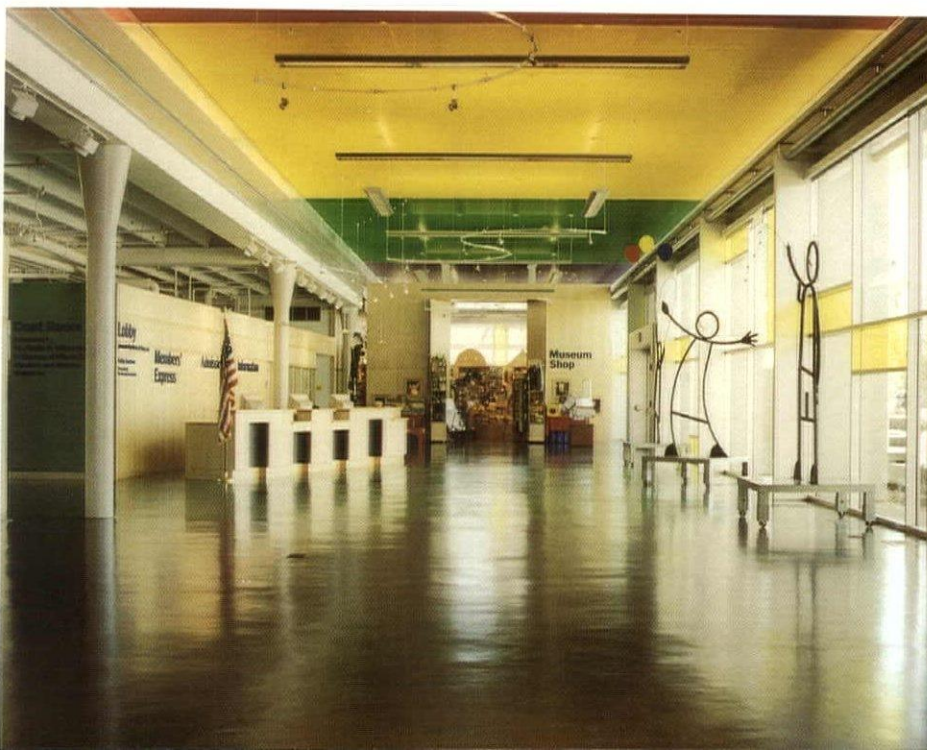
By extending the south façade of the building forward toward Broad Street, the architects captured additional space for a lobby, ticket counter, gift shop, and meeting room. These additions to the front of the building increased the total size of the museum to 42,000 square feet, which seems enormous in comparison to the cramped quarters that had housed the operation since 1977.

The original building's 20-by-40-foot structural layout of concrete columns

accommodated the museum's space needs without major modifications. Several of the reinforced concrete double-T roof members were removed for the installation of towering glass skylights – which came to be dubbed "sky cubes" as the project progressed. The structural demands of the new steel framework for the cubes were significant, with the largest of the cubes rising four stories high and sheathed in 28,000 pounds of tempered glass.

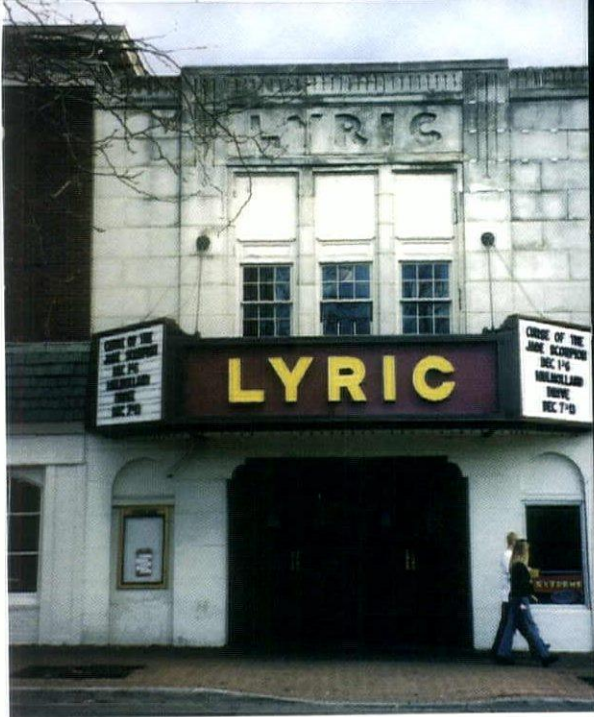
The newly created openings in the roof, in combination with the sizable dis-

tances between columns, allowed for a generous amount of flexible space inside for a free-floating arrangement of exhibits. From the inventor's lab to richly simulated habitats to the playful Tour de Tummy, the rush of color and sensory stimulation contained in the museum's seven learning environments must seem to children as though they've been set free in a candy store to sample whatever they please. For the museum staff, the outcome is more than could have been imagined in any child's dream.



The Lyric Theatre: All for the Cause

By Michael Hedgepeth, ALA



It happened one night in downtown Blacksburg in 1994. A chance conversation with childhood friends outside the Lyric Theatre brought a feeling of urgency into focus: *Somebody ought to do something*. We were talking of a non-event that has been repeated in many towns across America – our old downtown movie theater had closed down, with no plans for its future. On this evening our lament was partly nostalgic, since we had attended countless movies at the theater, and partly worried, since the vacant building meant less downtown activity, less downtown business, and therefore, less downtown life. *Somebody ought to do something*.

Our concern was for the old Lyric, designed in 1928 by Louis Phillipe Smithey, architect and future partner in the Roanoke firm Smithey and Boynton. Smithey's client obviously wanted a sound building, as well as a sound plan, to make a return on his investment. He designed a "triple-A fireproof" structure in a stark, Spanish Colonial style. It opened in April of 1930, located directly across from the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in the middle of a block at the heart of Blacksburg's downtown.

The theater included a stage that could support vaudeville-like productions and a small orchestra pit with an organ to accompany silent movies. Advertisements from the Lyric's early years boasted that it was one of only three fireproof theaters in Virginia designed for the "talkies." Other important features included a decorative vaulted lobby ceiling and an inventive version of air-conditioning. Several retail

shops fronted the auditorium portion of the building, with offices above. Paying for the arts was a concern even then, and the formula for the mixed uses was repeated often around the country. For downtown Blacksburg, the Lyric was a noteworthy addition to the business district.

In business until the late 1980s, the Lyric was renovated at least once, in the mid-sixties, when enhanced sound systems became available. However, the appearance of shopping mall movie complexes in the early 1980s created a no-win situation for family-owned movie theaters nationwide. Unable to compete with the studio-owned multiplexes that monopolized first-run movies, these independent theaters began to close. Historic American movie theaters now occupy a space on the National Register of Historic Places' 2001 list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places, and fewer than 300 still operate today. Following this trend, the Lyric was shuttered for a short period, and then rented temporarily by Virginia Tech while the student center was renovated. When the center reopened, the Lyric closed without apparent future prospects. By 1994, rumors that the Lyric was to be converted into a nightclub or a series of small shops proliferated. Downtown merchants grew uneasy and people like me who grew up in Blacksburg did not want to see the theater disappear.

As a lifelong resident of the town, I felt compelled to get involved. I had nostalgic feelings for the Lyric, having enjoyed some of the first encounters of my social life there. Together the youth of Blacksburg saw films there that became important to us. We had our first dates there. We con-

nected to each other through the movies we saw. Sometimes the audiences were spotty – I remember a night when two dateless teenage boys endured a three-hour, black-and-white, Russian-language film version (with no subtitles) of Shakespeare's "King Lear." Other times the audience was enormous, such as when Stanley Kubrick's "2001: A Space Odyssey" showed. The Lyric was there for all of us.

The Lyric provided more than just the movies shown on its screen. Downtown shops, including jewelers, men's and women's clothiers, restaurants, record stores, and gift shops stayed open in the evenings to catch crowds before and after the shows. The Lyric is an integral part of what Blacksburg came to be – a place that is unique and unlike any other. While millions of people may have seen "2001" in theaters all over the world, a handful of them saw it in the Lyric. It is experiences like going to the Lyric that shape the memories and characteristics of Blacksburgers – that knit together the fabric of our community. A downtown theater can bring that sense of uniqueness, of community – a mall theater, by contrast, offers only homogeneity. With these things in mind, it was impossible for me *not* to do something to keep the Lyric alive.

The next five years were an adventure – a labor of love characterized by fun, hard work, disappointment, and exhilaration. As an architect, I was stirred by my nature to engage all of the issues I believed good design could rectify: rehabilitating the historic building, rejuvenating a deteriorating downtown, and providing a catalytic stimulus for blossoming arts programs in Blacksburg. In short, I was

A grassroots effort
kept the Lyric Theatre
alive as a vital asset
in downtown
Blacksburg.

hooked. I was justly rewarded for my excitement and began attending meetings to discuss future prospects for the Lyric. I became a founding member of the Board of Directors and served as Chair of the Building Committee of the Lyric Council, Inc., a private, non-profit, tax-exempt corporation run by Blacksburg citizens.

This grassroots citizens' group was dedicated, applying more than its share of elbow grease and showing steadfast allegiance to their purpose. The collective spirit was a determination that the old theater could be renewed. In fact, we believed the Lyric would become the symbol of an arts renaissance in downtown Blacksburg. As it turned out, spirit and energy were about all we had. Notably, we lacked a lucid vision of exactly what the reborn theater would be, what it would do, and how it would look. And so we began, uncertain of how we would reach the end of our journey, but no less determined.

During the next four years the Lyric Council, Inc. accomplished a great deal, including negotiating a rent-free, potential 30-year lease with the building owners, developing an action plan to renovate the theater, procuring professional services (ultimately donated) of an architect and interior design team, contracting with a seat refurbisher, securing support from the town, staging fundraising events, soliciting private donations, launching a seating sponsorship campaign, acquiring bank-backed financing, rehabilitating existing movie projection equipment, hiring an executive director and staff, securing donations of goods and services, and renovating the theater itself with the pro bono services of a local contractor and developer.

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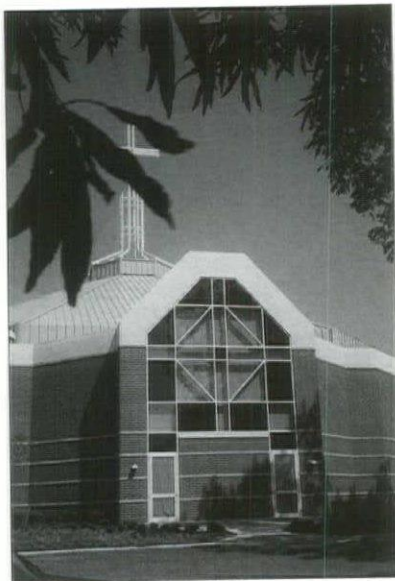
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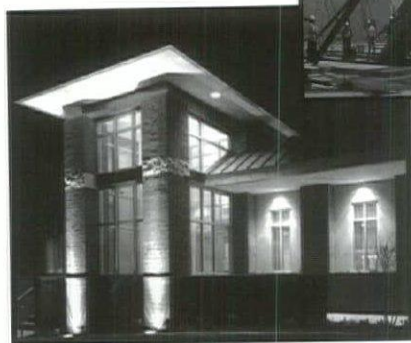
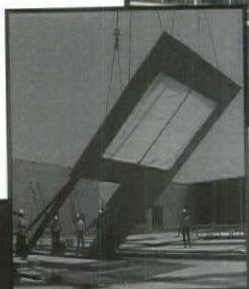
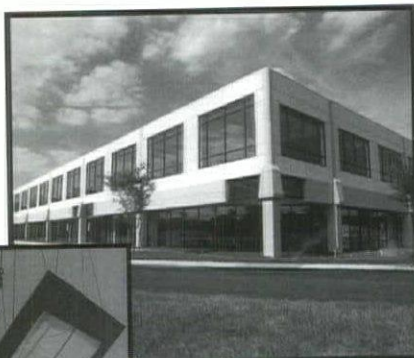
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Delegate Jim Shuler shepherded a state grant through the General Assembly, the receipt of which marked a watershed moment – our dreamy euphoria was doused in reality.

The Lyric reopened in October 1998, practically a new place. It has continued to operate seven days a week, offering classic films as well as independent and international films. The regular fare also includes a wide range of concerts, dance and theater productions, and children's programs. Audiences consist of young people and old, college students, long-time town residents, families, and visitors. Just as our original group of concerned citizens imagined, the Lyric is now providing downtown with something familiar and something new. Life in Blacksburg has improved.

It's been about three years since the Lyric reopened. It has been nearly that long since I was involved with the Lyric Council, Inc., and almost seven years since I began working on the project. The whole thing probably took too long and cost far more than we ultimately spent, thanks to all of the people who donated their time and talent. Furthermore, the Lyric renovation did not win any design awards. And it is still too early to tell if its reopening will spark an arts renaissance downtown.

Still, I know that Blacksburg is a better place because of the Lyric Theatre. Ultimately, I got involved with the Lyric because it was part of Blacksburg's history, and part of my history. I got involved because that history was about to be disguised – or lost altogether.

As architects, we sometimes fuss over the product of our labors, resulting in discussions about the appearance of buildings, innovations in planning and materials, or the hottest new design trends. The instance of the Lyric Theatre, however, is marked by a simple renovation of an old theater in a small downtown. I am glad that I was part of that renovation. The value of this project cannot be measured with awards, dollar bills, or critical acclaim; instead, I pride myself on being part of a group that saw the possibility for a renewed Lyric Theatre and transformed that dream into a reality. We embarked on a journey that, over the eons, has connected places built and destroyed, renewed and divided, visited and revisited. That journey is what I think of as culture. And that's what this endeavor was all about.

Michael Hedgepeth, AIA, a campus planning architect in the Office of the University Architect at Virginia Tech, has called Blacksburg home since 1958.



Photo: Dawn Thompson

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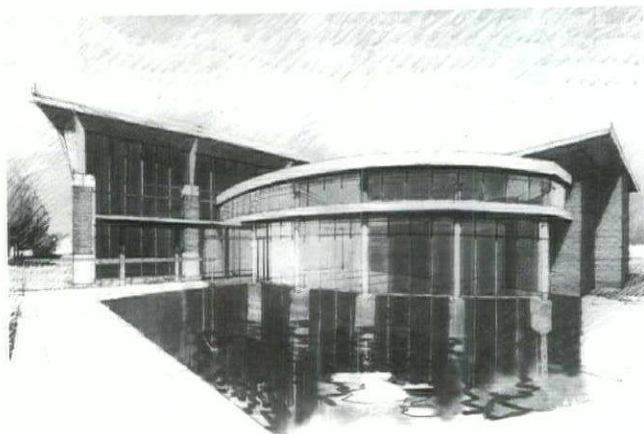
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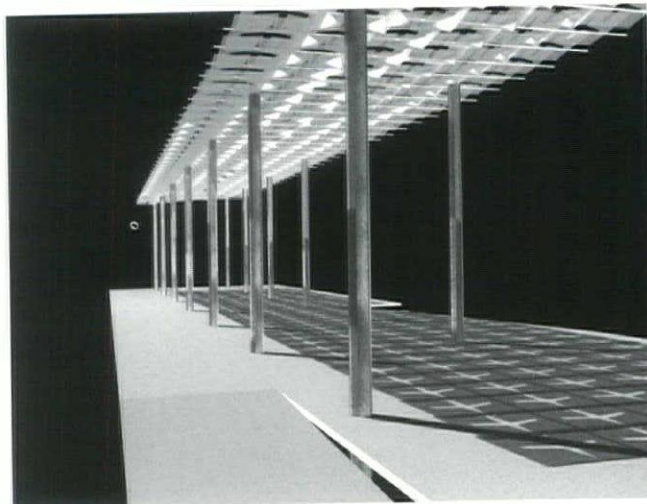
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Architect: DMJM H+N, Arlington, with John A. Ammon, Baltimore, Md.
Project: Aquaculture & Restoration Ecology Laboratory (AREL)

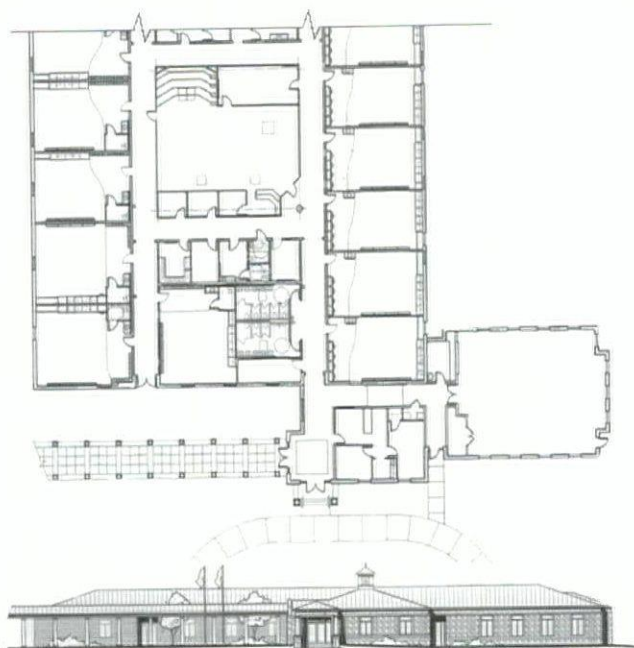
This 63,000 s.f. aquaculture laboratory for the University of Maryland CES will support research for sustainable development and effective restoration of the Chesapeake Bay. Research buildings are connected by glass links exposing views of the Choptank River and wetland area. Tel: 703-807-2500



Architect: BCWH, Lynchburg
Project: Lynchburg Regional Airport Observation Deck

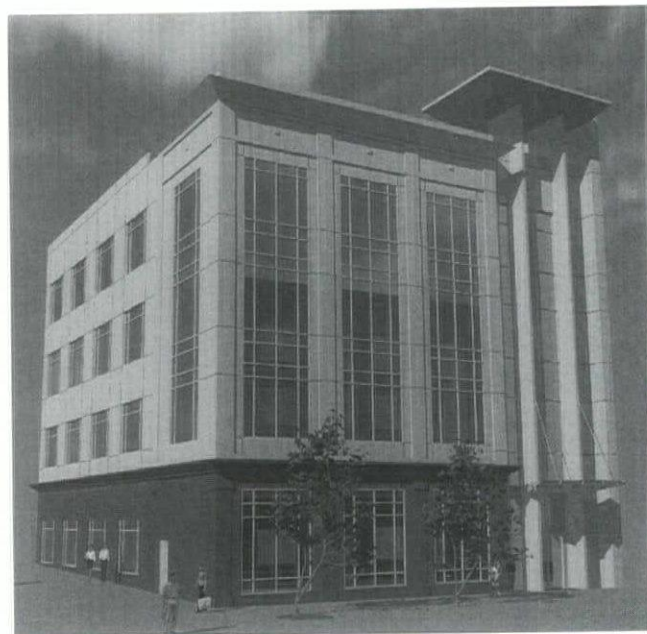
This unique project at the Lynchburg Regional Airport will contain a deck of Trex material and a steel-frame pergola. Plastic panels with etchings of airplanes will fill out the pergola. As sunlight flows through the panels, it will create shadows in the shape of planes on the deck floor. Tel: 434-385-0495

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Architects: Marcellus Wright Cox & Smith, Richmond
Project: The Steward School

Extensive renovation of an existing building at this private K-12 school includes additions of classrooms, a dining facility, and administrative offices. The stone exterior, sloped metal roof, and new colonnade integrate the 25,800 s.f. building into the rest of the campus. Tel: 804-780-9067



Architect: Baskervill & Son, Richmond
Project: Media General

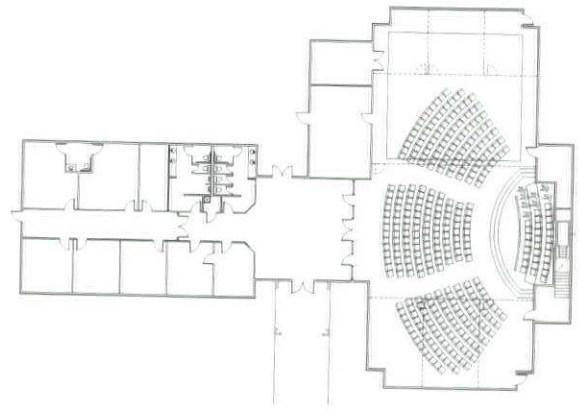
Media General's Broadcast and Interactive Divisions will work from this renovated 39,000 s.f. building, which will be the latest addition to the company's growing presence in downtown Richmond. Tel: 804-343-1010



Architect: Gresham Smith & Partners, Richmond

Project: Williamsburg Community Hospital Ambulatory Care Center

A 95,000 s.f., state-of-the-art, 4-story ambulatory care/surgery center will be the first phase in the relocation of Williamsburg Community Hospital to a new medical campus situated on an 84-acre site. Tel: 804-270-0710 / www.gspnet.com



Architect: Huff-Morris Architects, P.C., Richmond

Project: Beaverdam Baptist Church

Beaverdam Baptist Church in Hanover County is expanding its ministry with this 11,000 s.f. unit, which captures the context of its rural surroundings while providing a worship center seating 350 and spaces for fellowship, education, and an Awana's program. Tel: 804-343-1505 / huffmorris@aol.com

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Architect: Hughes Group Architects, Sterling

Project: Mount Lebanon Public Safety Center

Hughes Group Architects has completed the design of the new Public Safety Center for Mt. Lebanon, Penn. The facility will house the Town's Police and Fire Departments as well as Magistrate's courtroom. The project is currently under construction. Tel: 703-437-6600

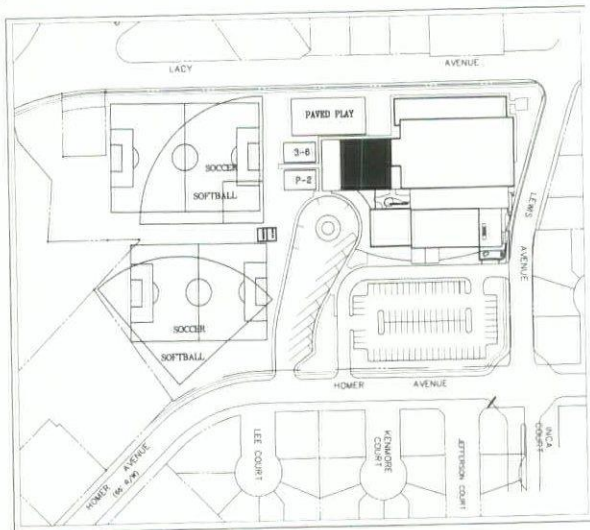


Architect: Mitchell/Matthews Architects and Urban Planners, Charlottesville

Project: Jefferson Ridge Luxury Apartments

Mitchell/Matthews Architects has recently completed construction documents for Jefferson Ridge Luxury Apartments in Charlottesville. The first phase of this Arts & Crafts-inspired design includes 110 two- and three-bedroom units and a 6,000 s.f. clubhouse, pool, and spa. Tel: 434-979-7550

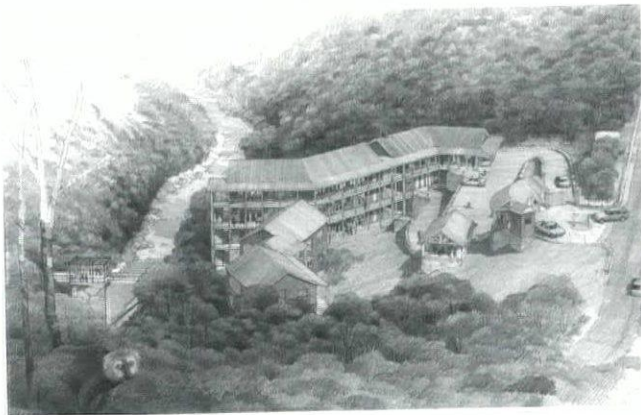
On the Boards



Architect: Murray & Associates Architects, Glen Echo, Md.

Project: Homer Avenue Elementary School

This \$13 million project includes reuse of an existing 10,000 s.f. addition and 65,000 s.f. of new construction to house 790 students. The firm will develop adjacent properties, expanding the site from 4 to 8 acres. Tel: 301-320-6305

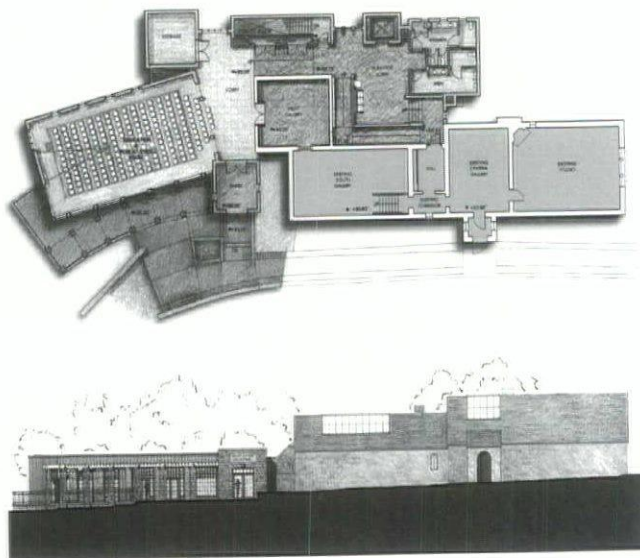


Architect: Peter Ozolins Architect, P.C., Blacksburg

Project: International Biodiversity Training and Research Center

Sponsored by SUNY-Stony Brook, the first phase includes the development of a steep site at the edge of a Madagascar rain-forest and construction of offices, dining facilities, and classrooms. The second phase – research laboratories and support facilities – is being planned. Tel: 540-552-1700

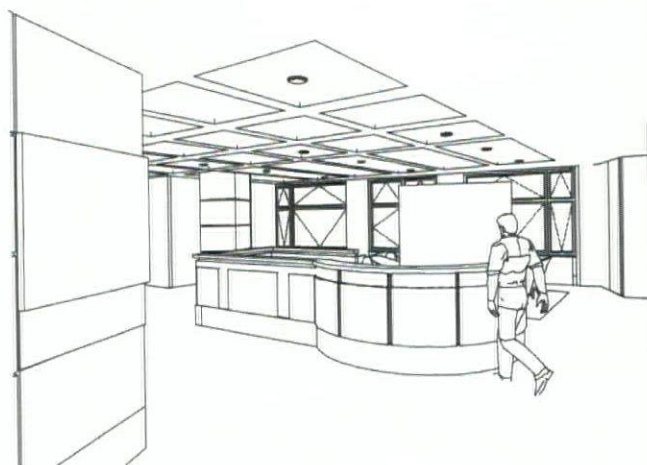
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Architect: Quinn Evans Architects, Washington, D.C.

Project: Belmont Studio Expansion

This 8,800 s.f. expansion will house educational and reception programs and art conservation facilities of the 1920s studio building at Belmont, Gari Melcher's Estate & Memorial Gallery in Falmouth. The sensitive use of natural materials will minimize the impact on the historic estate. Tel: 202-298-6700



Architect: Specter Knapp & Baughman, Washington, D.C.

Project: Oblon Spivak

Combining historical themes with 21st-century modernism, Specter, Knapp & Baughman has designed 200,000 s.f. of new office space for Oblon Spivak, a law firm that specializes in patents and intellectual property, located in Alexandria. Tel: 202-332-2434



Architect: Wiley & Wilson, Lynchburg
Project: King William County Courthouse

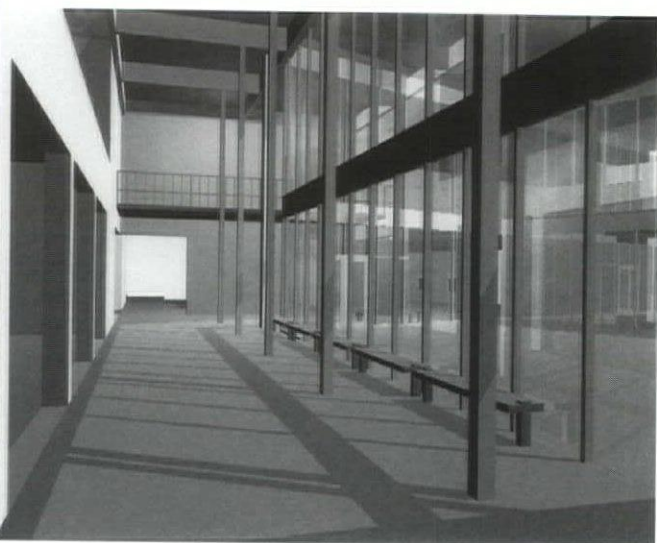
The historic 1725 King William County Courthouse is the oldest courthouse in continuous use in the country. The firm's space needs study and concept development endeavor to create a modern, secure judicial facility that complements the original. Construction begins in Spring 2002. Tel: 434-947-1901



Architects: Marcellus Wright Cox & Smith, Richmond
Project: St. Mary's Catholic Church sanctuary

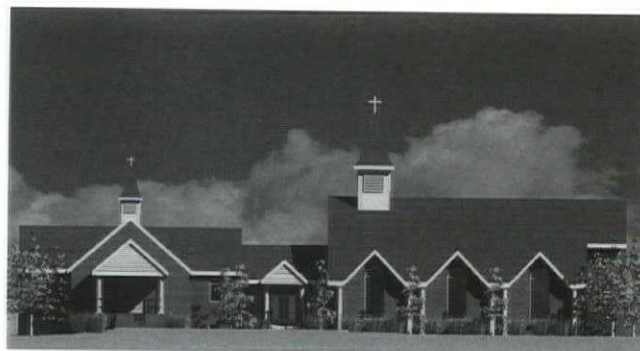
A new sanctuary seating 1,000 people will be added to this suburban church. The 44,500 s.f. project includes a daily mass chapel seating 100, sacristy, reconciliation room, blessed sacrament chapel, and classrooms for daycare, preschool, and kindergarten. Tel: 804-780-9067

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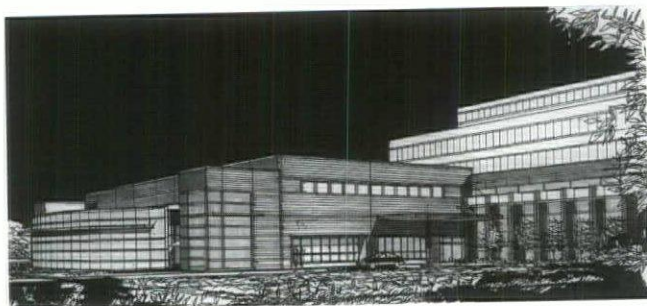
Architect: BCWH, Lynchburg
Project: Fluvanna County High School Additions

This two-story classroom addition connects two of the campus's buildings and creates separate student and visitor entries. A new student commons and courtyard, adjacent to the existing cafeteria and media center, becomes the center of circulation for the school. Tel: 434-385-0495



Architect: Architecturra Design Group, Inc., Newport News
Project: Prince George Christian Church

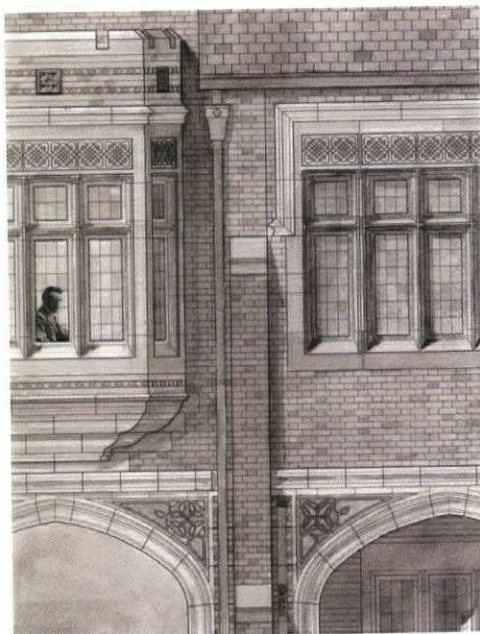
The Prince George congregation needed a larger space to worship. The firm's goal was to replicate what parishioners had come to feel was their foundation of spiritual solidarity. The new sanctuary will seat 350 people and features an exposed interior truss system and additional fenestration. Tel: 757-873-9644



Architect: Odell Associates, Inc., Richmond

Project: Albemarle Hospital

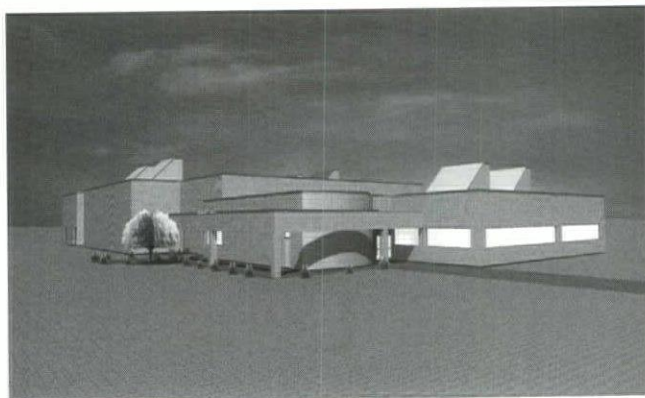
Improvements to this hospital include a 60,000 s.f. addition, which will house an expanded food service component and state-of-the-art operating room suite. A two-story atrium will connect the addition to the main entry. The firm will renovate 40,000 s.f. of the existing building. Tel: 804-644-5941



Architect: SMBW Architects, Richmond

Project: Weinstein Hall, University of Richmond

Consolidating four related departments in one central location on the campus, and further defining the garden spaces of Stern Quadrangle, Weinstein Hall will have carefully researched and proportioned elements designed to integrate seamlessly with the university's rich fabric. Tel: 804-782-2115



Architect: HSMM, Inc., Roanoke

Project: Weapons Evaluation and Test Lab, Sandia National Laboratories

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! Taking Note

Creating a stimulating interior with limited space and means is no easy task. Despite those restrictions, architect Jim Rounsevell, AIA, has whipped up Higher Grounds, an espresso bar with a visual punch.

This tiny shop on Charlottesville's downtown mall began with the idea of a trendy atmosphere that relies on a machine aesthetic. Rounsevell, of Studio 109 in Charlottesville, thought it important to give the design meaning by connecting it with the purpose

of the space. Using the "traveling of the bean" – the growing, processing, and distribution of coffee beans – as inspiration, Rounsevell fashioned a unified concept that informed the interior design.

The organic colors are inspired by nature, as is the lighting scheme, designed by Mark Schuyler of Charlottesville. Blue neon light is thrown upon a dark ceiling interrupted by recessed points of light in the configuration of Orion and Canis Major. A happy accident occurred when Rounsevell was playing with treatments to disguise a concrete block wall. Watching stucco being applied to the wall, he took note of rakes used to prepare the surface. He recalled that coffee beans are raked into rows while drying – and inspiration had struck. The lighting dramatizes the furrows in the stucco.

The shop's sun wall also resulted from a problem: how to draw patrons to the back of the shop while disguising an unattractive window into an adjacent space. The angular wall was constructed with the help of Jack Kavana, Fred Hean, and Fred Dodson of the McGuffey Art Center, all of whom were responsible for cabinetry design.

The focal point, though, is the barrista pulpit, the counter behind which employees prepare coffee. This industrial artifact is a pivot point around which other elements flow. Not only does it represent the final mechanized stages of the bean's journey, it also reads as a distinctive element against the celestial ceiling and sun wall – delivering a jolt every bit as potent as a triple latté.

—Rebecca E. Ivey

Serving Coffee in High Style



The small shop achieves a compelling atmosphere with its mixture of organic and industrial elements (above). The process of drying coffee beans inspired the textured wall treatment (inset, left).



Rounsevell intended the barrista pulpit to both look and serve as the mechanical center around which other elements revolve (left).

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inside and out."*



"OK."

*"Oh, and I want it to
be really secure."*



"OK."

*"Maybe some
sidelights."*



"OK."

*"You know,
a different
design for the
panes might
be better."*



"OK."

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