

inform

Architecture+Design
in the Mid-Atlantic

2010: number two

six dollars

*Inside:
Green
Products
Directory*

Debating an Architecture of Necessity ■ Assessing Risk ■ A Visit to the Scanning Bed ■ The End of Things ■ Controlling Potomac Traffic

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Photos: Len Allington, Cedar Springs, MI



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If you could design your dream window,
what would it be?

This is a dream window with a very real purpose. I have a picture window in my family room which can't be opened.

This forces me either to turn on the air conditioning before it's needed in the rest of the house, or to roast. Usually the air conditioning wins out.

Square apertures to be sized to fit 4" x 4" glass bevels to create spectrum light patterns when the sun strikes them.

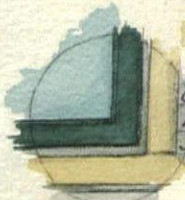


Muntins to be 1 1/8" simulated divided lites (SDL) throughout window design.

*Glass to have low emissivity coating & to be filled with argon between panes for a U value of .30
Designation - Low E3-366 w/argon*

Natural cherry frame, sash, & muntins on interior of window to match color of existing trim.

Venting picture unit to replace existing fixed picture window.



*Exterior colors for exterior:
Frame - pebble gray
Sash - evergreen*

The window I envision is composed of two archetypal forms - a circle that frames the view held within a surrounding square. It's simple yet elegant, & best of all it's energy efficient and capable of providing natural ventilation when desired. A truly 'not so big' solution!

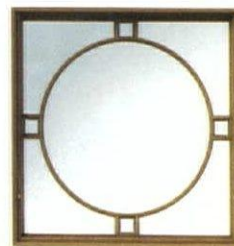


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Inform (ISSN 1047-8353) is published five times a year by the Virginia Society of the American Institute of Architects.

Subscription rate: \$22 for one year, \$6 for single copies of quarterly issues. POSTMASTER: Please send address changes to **Inform**, The Virginia Center for Architecture, 2501 Monument Ave., Richmond, VA 23220. Telephone: 804-644-3041. Note to subscribers: When changing address, please send address label from a recent issue and your new address. Periodicals postage paid at Richmond, Virginia, and additional mailing offices. Editorial offices: 2501 Monument Ave., Richmond, VA 23220. Phone: 804-644-3041. Copyright 2010 by **Inform**.

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FROM THE EDITOR

Starting the Conversation

Recall your last conversation about sustainability and it probably included the observation that “global” and “local” forces are connected. Infrastructure, natural resources, digital networks, foreign aid, land use, or even recycling—the topic doesn’t matter. What matters is that the global/local way of thinking is evidence that we have become a much less provincial society over the last 25 years.

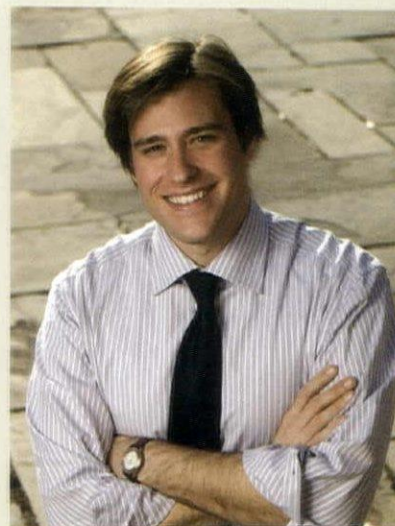
Witness how the term “glocal” has gained purchase in that time. Besides being a tidy *portmanteau*, why is it such a useful term? Precisely because it describes the implausible act of working (and thinking) here and everywhere, simultaneously. Sustainability describes an aptitude for glocal awareness and action at multiple scales—the legacy of pluralism.

Unsurprisingly, one of the current debates between ecology and geographic information systems (GIS) is how to define “sustainability.” As a management tool, GIS maps data onto location to create an integrated way of looking at the landscape. The connection? GIS borrows the principles of natural integration that ecology represents: organisms, like data points, interact in a multi-dimensional environment not unlike the one that GIS demonstrates. Sustainability, here, is about taking that kind of environment—layered, interdependent—for granted. Integration is the rule, not just a way of framing the conversation.

GIS and ecology have two other important connections that help define sustainability. Taken together, they identify particular cultural values that attach themselves to the term. Values, by the way, that mean something and nothing at the same time. Take “green,” for instance—it has saturated the marketplace, the classroom, and the home. But, how can a building and a household cleaner both qualify as green? Who is in charge of designating what’s green, anyway? And, if something is considered green once, when does it become less green?

Taken together, GIS and ecology also define sustainability in terms of what they can reveal about us. We have been mapping the landscape for centuries, but we still have trouble connecting our individual dots to the larger world. While we can only perceive the horizon with our naked eyes, sustainability offers us a way to map glocal systems beyond. Thinking in systems, rather than in NIMBYisms, is about activism and, for lack of a better term, *glocality*—a state of practice predicated on environmental, social, and architectural causality.

To borrow the theme of the ninth annual Virginia Design Forum, **an architecture of necessity** describes the degree to which design can reflect the immutable fact of sustainable life: integration is the rule, not an interpretation. But, an architecture of necessity is also concerned with the paradox of modern social life: both integrated *and* separated. Again, the topic doesn’t matter: social media, the distances created by sprawl, Special Economic Zones, historic districts versus your garden variety neighborhood, and so on. What matters is that we have a language to talk about the implausible: glocality, itself. In that sense, “sustainability” started a conversation that continues to evolve. —William Richards



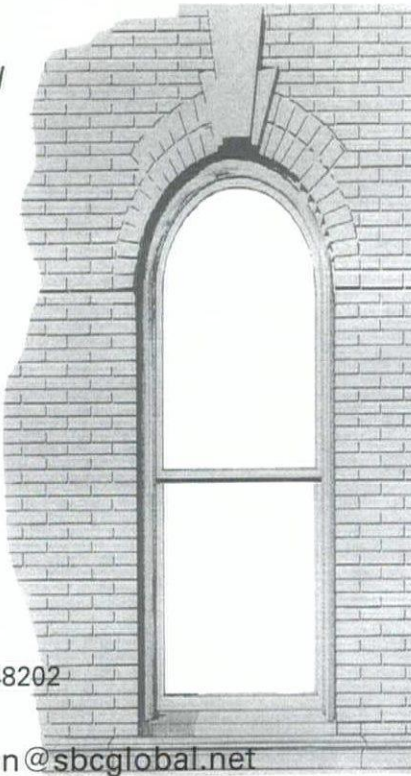
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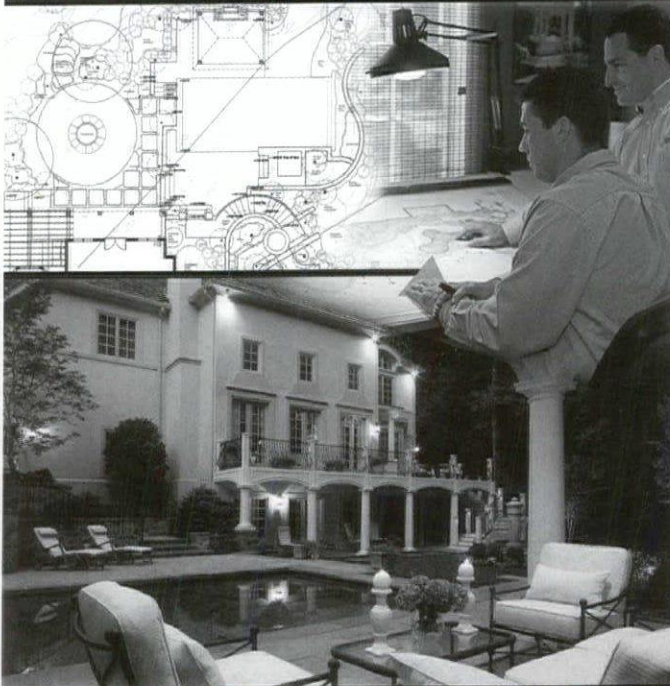


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Three friends provide stewardship of a mountainside parcel outside Blacksburg and make it their home.

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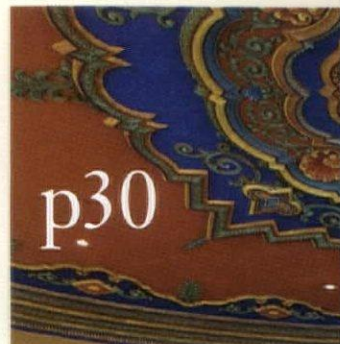


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Richmond CenterStage and Carpenter Theatre

Photo by Robert Benson

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Cast Away

The art of un-art at Charlottesville's Center for the Study of the End of Things

What is the nature of an abandoned artifact or building? Has it been displaced forever? Can it ever have an authentic context, again? Modern artists have always investigated undervalued or marginalized artifacts and buildings for inspiration. Gordon Matta-Clark's idea of "anarchitecture" included houses sawed in half, punched-through, or literally deconstructed. The Surrealists before him plumbed the psyche for a new kind of personal art-making. Sculptors from Claes Oldenburg to Jeff Koons to Andy Warhol reclaimed the debased world of commercial aesthetics. And, since the 1980s, artists have even begun theorizing excretory functions as a site for transgressive art, like Mike Kelly or Andres Serrano.

Charlottesville's nascent Center for the Study of the End of Things (CSET) addressed impermanence, entropy, and rebirth in its first exhibition, which opened on February 5 and closed a week later on February 12. Appropriately, the venue was the former Under the Roof storefront, whose impending demolition offered a rare opportunity to say something urgent about displacement in the shadow of the wrecking ball. Co-curators Wes Milholen and Ashley Williams employed a range of artists and objects that, together, held out the possibility for the outmoded, outcast, or overshadowed side of life to be a productive realm for art.

As you might expect, cast-off detritus made an appearance from CSET's own "Impermanent Archives." Box

springs and airplane parts reappeared as wall sculptures. "Objects from the Tomb of Joseph Beuys" offered a set of abstract tools, hand-carved out of the bones of various animals by University of Virginia professor Dean Dass. "Point of Sales," documented everything that Cambridge-based artist Carson Poe purchased over the course of a year using receipts.

But, it was not only about found objects; the show clearly took its art history seriously. Ashley Williams' own painting on mylar, "Beast No. 2217-6A," resembled a cross between Yves Tanguy's Surrealist amoeba-like creatures and Francis Bacon's nightmarishly-toothed monsters. Kristen Smith's "Stalactites" installation evoked a 1938 exhibition of European Surrealist work that used

Found objects or art objects? Impermanence, entropy, and rebirth were on display at the inaugural exhibition by the Center for the Study of the End of Things.



way of making art, but of allowing art to make itself. Milholen notes that “natural processes create artifacts that are often more beautiful than what people are capable of making.” What resulted were hybrids—things created by machines, finished by nature, and then designated as “art.”

In an exhibition dedicated to impermanence, there was of course, live performance. Charlottesville poet Stephen Margulies read an elegy to the Romanian art historian and artist Lydia Gasman by shouting over the inimitable sound of electrified snow (provided by members of Hz Collective, who promptly shredded

the P.A. system). The exhibition space, itself, provided another opportunity to talk about reclaiming a cast-off building, if only for a moment. Site-specific works, like Elizabeth Stehl’s wall painting “Nest” was razed along with the rest of the building.

But, before the bulldozers, the opening (and closing) of CSET’s debut coincided with one of Charlottesville’s biggest snowstorms. The city’s own closure due to the weather seemed to be a fittingly “un-authored” context for the show. Nature, it seems, had come back to sign her creations.

—Mike Maizels

7

Courtesy Wes Milholen

ceiling-mounted cloth to give viewers the impression that they were underground.

In one of my favorite pieces, Atlanta-based artist Tom Zarrilli turned Duchamp’s famous assault on institutional art back on the Old Master. “Gutenberg’s Garden” featured an art history textbook, open to Duchamp’s iconic “Nude Descending a Staircase No. 2,” with plants growing through holes drilled in the decomposing volume.

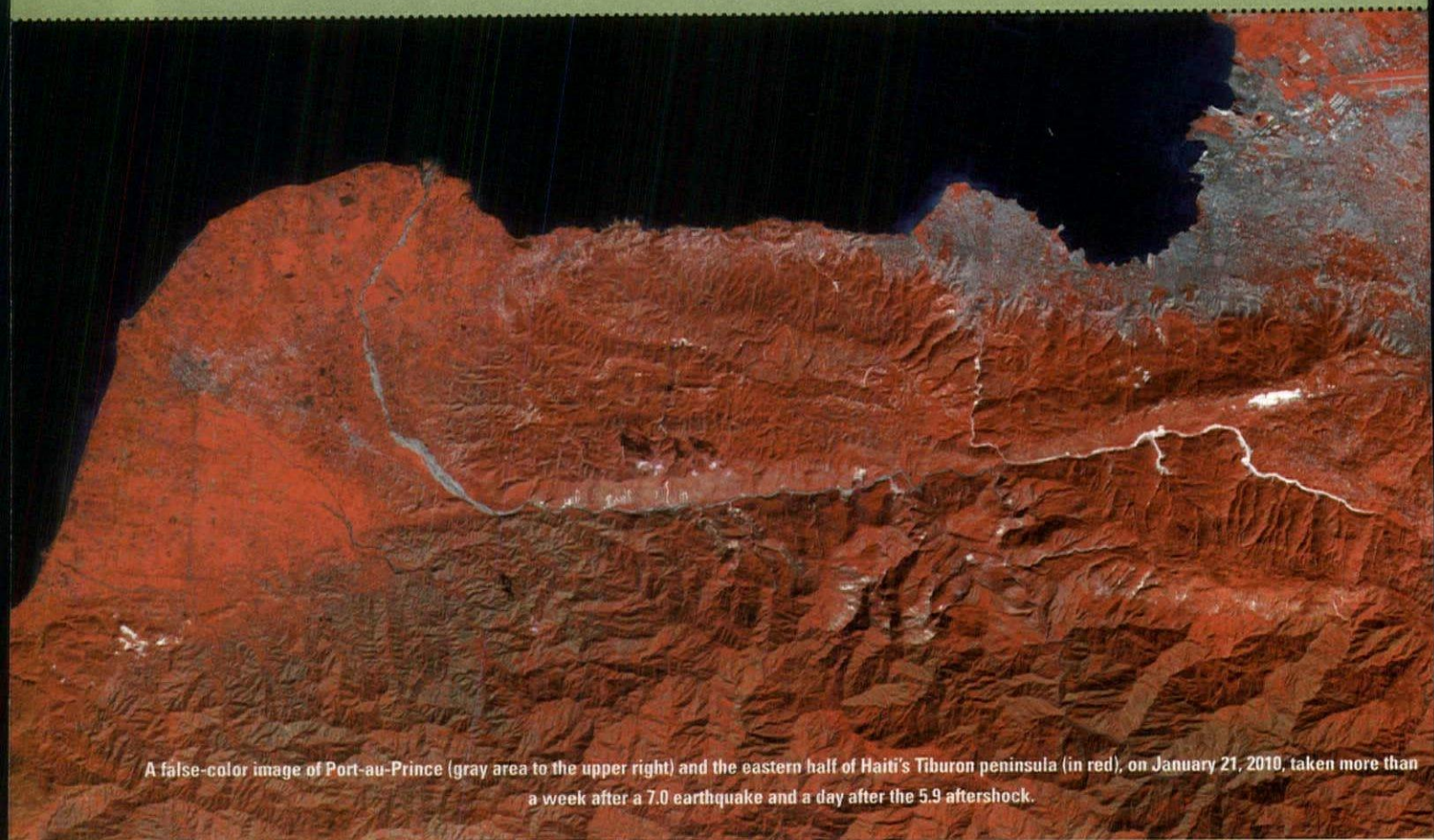
CSET’s use of discarded artifacts (art historical or actual) is not exactly new in this register, but co-curators Milholen and Williams were careful to ground the show in ideas about the everyday, rather than everyday objects in-and-of themselves. To investigate abandonment or decay is not to find a new



Open, closed, demolished—the exhibition space, itself, became a study in things and their end.

Design Dialogue

Debating an Architecture of Necessity



A false-color image of Port-au-Prince (gray area to the upper right) and the eastern half of Haiti's Tiburon peninsula (in red), on January 21, 2010, taken more than a week after a 7.0 earthquake and a day after the 5.9 aftershock.

Haiti's leveling killed more than two percent of its population, as reported by its beleaguered Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive. At least half a million people have been injured, tens of thousands of businesses have been destroyed, and it is believed that over a quarter of a million homes were razed by the 7.0 quake. The construction of so-called "transitional shelters" is under way, but many wonder how permanent they may turn out to be as Haiti recovers from an economic hole far deeper than its "poorest country" status might have meant only months ago.

More recently, the 8.8 magnitude quake that occurred off the coast of Chile has rendered the country inoperable for some time. Its human toll has reached nearly 1,000 citizens according to recent estimates. Fairly stringent building codes have kept the damage under control, but 1.5 million homes still remain affected.

On American soil, there have been 561 declared disasters in the past decade, according to FEMA. Most of them have been severe storm flooding and damage across all fifty states. Some events have stood out for their scale and utter impact, like Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Some states have stood out for their susceptibility. Texas, California, and Florida, which lead the pack, together account for 40 percent of all disaster areas in the country. They are also three of the four most populated states that represent a quarter of the total U.S. population, according to 2009 census estimates.

When Bernard Rudofsky wrote in *Streets for People* that "cities correspond closely to the ideas and ideals of their inhabitants," he did not have complete urban entropy in mind as the starting point for that kind of correspondence to take place. The goals for rebuilding Port-au-Prince, Jacmel, and Concepción will have to be more modest.

What is needed in these places, though? How will short term goals be balanced with long term ones? What are the social implications of building or rebuilding?

In the responses that follow, two area architects and educators find a language to talk about what has been called "an architecture of necessity"—Charlottesville-based architect **Allison Ewing, AIA**, of the award winning Hays+Ewing Design Studio and eco-MOD director **John Quale** of the University of Virginia who will be a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Tokyo this coming fall.

" Architects have very specific responsibilities to their clients. Yet, buildings typically last longer than the initial client and are often repurposed within a short period of time."

Does the practice of architecture represent a general social commitment, or does it represent specific challenges like sustainability, equality, or social justice?

Allison Ewing: I would suggest there is a difference between the practice of architecture and "good" design. The conventional practice encompasses a range of goals (shelter, program development, site design, budget) but sustainability, equity or social justice, as I see it, are not within the purview of a typical firm and I applaud those firms that embrace a broader view.

If I could use the analogy of the practice of architecture as solving a Rubik's Cube: a typical firm might be solving the 3x3 cube, while a firm that practices "good" design would be solving the 5x5 cube—and a perfect alignment of all the colors (solving all the conventional goals as well as those of sustainability, equity or social justice) arrives at a design that is beautiful, functional and just.

John Quale: In its highest form, architecture is a synthesis of art, science and social responsibility. Truly compelling and important architecture must address all three of these issues in a thoughtful way. Any building that carefully addresses only one is something less. I realize this is a controversial statement because it marginalizes so much of what passes for important architecture today. I also recognize that not all projects can have a compelling strategy when it comes to social responsibility (notably private residential commissions).

Increasingly, designers are thinking carefully about materials and local skilled labor as they make decisions—and social justice can be an important lens for looking at that process.

In theorizing architecture's task—generally or in specific situations—what does an "architecture of necessity" mean to you?

A.E.: Local impacts can have global effects. Climate change impacts water and food supplies around the globe and increases the number of conflicts between countries seeking control over dwindling resources. Natural disasters, some a result of climate change, leave multitudes homeless and in need of transitional and permanent shelter. Social biases that leave girls without schools in far-flung nations and poverty that leads to homelessness. Economic shifts that expose fault lines in a society

are cause for a reevaluation of needs and priorities. These examples expose the intersection of sustainability with social equity. And by social equity, we include all species, present and future—to paraphrase William McDonough.

With buildings contributing over 50% to carbon emissions, architects own a responsibility to recognize and tackle these concerns, but within a collaborative and community-based approach.

J.Q.: Architects have very specific responsibilities to their clients. Yet, buildings typically last longer than the initial client, and are often repurposed within a short period of time. By necessity, architects (and engineers, landscape architects, and others) must consider the larger ramifications of their built work—on all future occupants, on our ecosystems, on our society, on our culture. These impacts, and the relative permanence of what we do, means we need to take special care with projects that will impact those that can't afford to hire us.

The economic divide between high-income and low-income Americans has grown considerably in the last thirty years, to the point that the top 1% control almost 35% of all private wealth—which is more than the total combined wealth for the population in the "bottom" 90%. We need to become creative about how to deliver projects that positively impact people towards the bottom of the income ladder. As a discipline, we should strive for humility as we listen to the actual needs of these individuals (and not just our perceptions of these needs), and strive for the creativity to design solutions that truly work—even if they are not always what is expected.

" We earn our living from designing buildings. Most of us crave that plum commission, that museum, that visibility, those fees! And yet, do we need another museum, another large house, another massive convention center?"

"While it is easy to look down on 'checklist architecture' and credits for bike racks, LEED has made sustainable design relevant and important for clients that had never heard the term before this century."

Can starting with this idea of "necessity" be complimentary to existing practice? Or, does it demand that existing practice change?

A.E.: Our process is to listen—to understand, but lead. We already have the skills and understand the process, it is the expansion of goals to go beyond providing shelter, solving of functional requirements—the traditional concerns of the profession—that is required. To address these concerns, however, some change in our process is necessary: increased collaboration with stakeholders and the technical team—and from the start. One example: an "energy analysis" can help the designer develop massing and window placement that is intelligent with regard to passive solar design.

J.Q.: Practice has changed radically in the twenty or thirty years, and will continue to change. However, to address sustainability with any degree of rigor, and to incorporate social equity in a meaningful way, architectural practice must change in more radical ways. These responsibilities—even when not brought to the forefront by clients—should be addressed by architects *by necessity*. Many practices in Virginia—and throughout the nation and the world—are already moving in this direction.

I think there is every reason to be optimistic. Designers all over the world are discussing this issue. I just hope it is not a passing fad.

Have ratings like the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED system guided or misguided architecture over the past 5 years?

A.E.: Both. LEED has provided a cookbook (I like my analogies, as you see), for understanding what sustainable design entails. The rating system identifies all the ingredients required as well as metrics by which to judge whether the design is accountable. A platinum rating (to stretch the analogy further), is equivalent to a Michelin three star rating. There are flaws to the system however. The USGBC is aware of these and tackling them, as best they can. Originally, for instance, LEED was climate neutral. They are now incorporating "Regional Priority" points.

And yet, apart from these problems, I see a larger dilemma. I believe the profession's relevance is in question and its existence in crisis.

We earn our living from designing buildings. Most of us crave that plum commission, that museum, that visibility, those fees! And yet, do we need another museum, another large house, another massive convention center? I struggle with these questions in my own work. Do we take a project, knowing we can make it more sustainable than a competing firm. Someone's going to get the commission, after all. Or, do we turn down a project because we think the site selection, or program requirements, are fundamentally flawed.

J.Q.: It is so easy to criticize LEED from so many different points of view. I would agree that LEED is imperfect—inherently so. But, frankly, I can't conceive of a better overall method for establishing guidelines than the volunteer, open, peer-reviewed process of the LEED technical committees.

People from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences participate in this process. They pour over the material, and methodically analyze all relevant information. The guidelines can be a little slow to change, but these committees are constantly considering new metrics for assessing buildings and landscapes. They are trying to keep up with our society's evolving definition of sustainability.

The U.S. Green Building Council's LEED certification program has impacted the way buildings are procured in ways that were unimaginable just ten years ago. So while it is easy to look down on "checklist architecture" and credits for bike racks, LEED has made sustainable design relevant and important for clients that had never heard the term before this century.

I'm hopeful that two somewhat recent announcements will push LEED even further in the direction I feel strongly it needs to go: 1) they are in the process of integrating life cycle assessments (LCA) into the system in a meaningful way and 2) the USGBC announced that social equity is now one of its guiding principles, and the social equity task force is already working on ways to rigorously integrate this into LEED.

You Scan

By Will Rourke

What does it take to rapidly get a building, monument or even a landscape into your computer? Scanning large objects usually involves laser scanning technology in what's called a "time-of-flight scanner." It works by flashing a stripe of laser light on a surface and then measuring the time it takes for the light pulse to bounce back to the laser source. The light pulse is identified with the point on the surface of the object it scans, translating it into a 3D point created digitally via computer software. All of the digital points captured by the scanner are stitched together to form a 3D mesh model that can be manipulated in any 3D or CAD program.

Large scale scanning is more often utilized in the construction and engineering industries as a means of creating "as-built" schematics for projects involving highways, bridges and tunnels. Landforms can also be scanned, usually from an airplane, to generate landscape models for analysis and planning.

Notably, laser scanning has been applied with great success in cultural heritage and archaeology projects. Academic researchers have been able to capture 3D data from historical sites and monuments for analysis and critical exploration. University of Virginia research scientist David Koller is internationally known for his work in 3D laser scanning, particularly as the scanning engineer responsible for capturing monuments from the Digital Michelangelo project.

In 1999, Koller was part of a team of faculty and students from Stanford University and the University of Washington that traveled to Italy to make high resolution scans of the Renaissance master's sculptures and architecture. For one, the team captured the 17-foot tall David at 1/4-millimeter resolution. At this level, even the artist's chisel marks could be detected on the 3D model.

Although many of Koller's scanning projects have taken place in Europe, he has recently been involved in historic preservation efforts here in Virginia. This includes a major digital preservation effort undertaken by a joint collaboration between Colonial Williamsburg's Digital History Center and U.Va.'s Institute for Advanced Technology in the Humanities (IATH) for "digital conservation" of buildings in Colonial Williamsburg.

Known as the "Virtual Williamsburg Project," this effort seeks to re-create the city of Williamsburg as researchers believe it had originally existed during the American Revolution. Part of Koller's work has been to scan existing structural ruins and foundations of some of these historic buildings as well as existing buildings to better understand the composition of the old city. Some of Koller's tools of his trade include the FARO LS880, the Leica ScanStation and the Leica HDS6000 for capturing exterior building surface data and the DeltaSphere 3000 for interior room scans. As a researcher he has worked in conjunction with scanner distributors

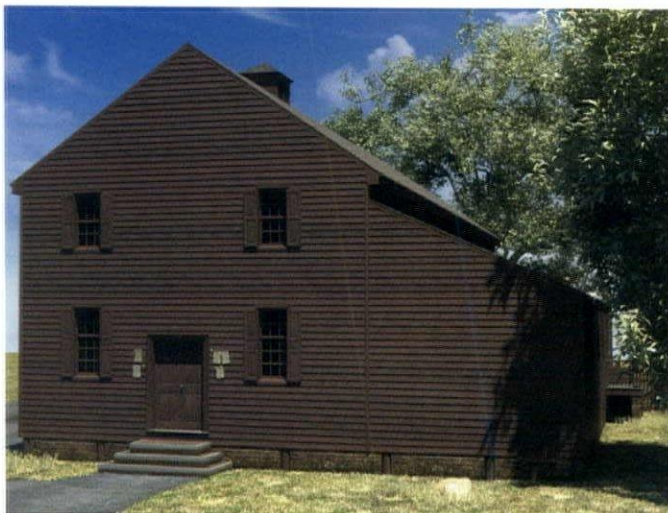


The Virtual Williamsburg Project is recreating the old capitol piece by piece including the Douglass Theatre (1760-1780).

such as Charlotte-based FARO and Leica Geosystems in Richmond to test the latest equipment for accuracy in data resolution and acquisition. He's also collaborated on scanning technologies with Baltimore-based Direct Dimensions, who has been responsible for major scanning projects on the East Coast including the 3D laser scan of the Liberty Bell.

A seasoned expert in large scale laser scanning, Koller sees active scanning technologies moving away from the use of laser light for data capture to a "passive capture" technique using photographic images.

A "structured light" scanning technique can be found on YouTube, which demonstrates how to make rough 3D point cloud models with just a web-cam. With higher resolution digital cameras becoming more affordable, 3D passive scanning may be a reality for high-resolution models in the future. For now, laser light surface scans are providing the best results for accurate capturing of real life objects to be easily transformed into computer models for your favorite 3D and CAD software.



Building surface data can be captured in such detail that renderings of the building (here, the Douglass Theatre, c. 1770) can easily be confused for photographs.

Risky Business

By Nicholas E. Vlattas, AIA, and Deborah Marquardt

It's hard to admit mistakes. But, it would be foolish not to learn from them. As our firm has grown from a regional entity to one national and now international in scope, the learning curve has been steep at times, particularly with regard to managing large projects in faraway places.

Today's economic climate is creating optimum conditions for increased litigation. "Claims for errors and omissions are on the rise for design professionals," says Kathy Blanchard, vice president, CIC, RPLU, BB&T Insurance Services, Professional Liability Division.

Unrealistic expectations from clients, tighter scrutiny from insurance carriers, increased pressures on schedule and budget all have the potential to create uncomfortable circumstances. Much of this can be controlled and/or reversed with clear communication at all levels: owner, design team, contractor, consultants.

Issues of scope, time/schedule, construction costs and quality are expectations that need to be understood. This communication begins with contracts and the setting of expectations, roles and responsibilities. "The simple advice I can share with architects is to make sure they do their homework *before* the project begins," says Blanchard. "This includes reviewing the written contract to clearly define all scope and time-of-performance issues, and understanding the difficult 'business risks' the firm may be assuming that will not be covered by the firm's professional liability insurance policy."

The Design Professionals Risk Control Group of XL Insurance suggests several ways to help avoid frivolous lawsuits. We've added a few thoughts of our own.

- Choose clients carefully, avoiding those with a long history of litigation.
- Use well-crafted written contracts that clearly define issues like scope, schedule and costs. A good contract will acknowledge that all parties have roles and responsibilities, including the owner. And contracts with consultants should carry forward the requirements of the prime contract.
- Know the law, particularly if you work in states outside your own. It might be wise to hire local counsel to advise you firm's attorney on jurisdictional issues.
- Maintain thorough project records. This may seem elementary, but many firms fall short. The DPRCG says, "Poor or nonexistent documentation is the single greatest challenge insurance claims consultants have in extricating an architectural firm from a claim." New software tools, such as

Newforma ProjectCenter, certainly have aided us in this endeavor, particularly with regard to managing complex teams on large project. Newforma helps our firm manage project communication and other documentation, including sending automated reminders about scheduled actions. This keeps everyone informed about decisions, deadlines and changes to help achieve project goals. And there's a record!

- Keep your ear to the ground, and don't ignore rumors of an unhappy client or end user. "We need to realize that close to 80 percent of all demands/allegations against architects come directly from the firm's client, so managing client's expectations is vital in coordinating a successful project," says Blanchard.
- Do a great job and check your work. Blanchard adds, "Maintaining solid business practices throughout the project sounds basic, but in today's environment, it can't be overlooked. The firms that have figured this out are having good success in this economy and are protecting their businesses from unnecessary risk and liability."

It will be interesting to see how Integrated Project Delivery changes the contract landscape. IPD is emerging as an alternate contracting method and as an opportunity to improve collaboration in the delivery of projects. A three-way contract among owner, builder and designer keeps everyone on the same page for the betterment of the project. Some key principles of IPD from the AIA task force include mutual respect, trust, benefit and reward; collaboration and innovation; early involvement of key participants and early goal definition.

Still, there is the human factor. We learned some painful contract lessons on a large, fast-paced project that encountered many of the issues mentioned above: changing and inflated scope, cost escalations driven by market prices on steel, supersized expectations and lack of funding on the part of the client; a contractor who didn't deliver a guaranteed maximum price as required by the contract; improper communication protocols, and consultant contracts that did not reflect the requirements of the prime contract. Through mediation, with everyone accepting some share of the blame, we were able to avoid litigation.

As a result of these lessons learned we have implemented improved procedures for contract review and execution. Our future vision is improved, however, still not quite as good as our 20/20 hindsight.

Hatch: The New Architectural Generation

Kieran Long, editor
London: Laurence King Publishing
2008, 352 pages, \$35.00

What defines a generation? Its output? A single voice shared by a critical mass? A touchstone event that shapes public consciousness?

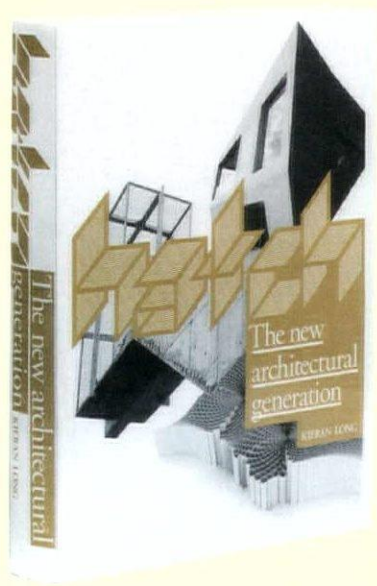
Despite the title, Russell Lyon's 1954 farce *The Tastemakers* answers these questions as a function of culture's invisible hand. It's not until that hand has made its sweep that we can really talk about a "generation" in hindsight. Members of a generation don't point to themselves, after all. They're too busy.

So, too, are the architects, industrial designers, and interior architects in *Hatch*. Most of them have hatched already, as this retrospective reaches back to work begun in the late-1990s. Collectively, they represent a largely unrepresented group of designers—you will not have heard of half of them, but pay attention. Firms like Xefirotarch (Argentina by way of Los Angeles talking about Boston), Elena Manferdini (exploring skin versus structure), or FNP Architekten (preservation from the inside out) are worth the price of the book alone.

But, one wonders if the book should have sampled a smaller group of this generation? For many of these projects, two or three pages are simply not enough. Tom de Paor, the photographer Michael Collins, or the Paris-based firm Bureau des Mésarchitectures could have easily filled half the book, to say nothing of the other 111 firms profiled.

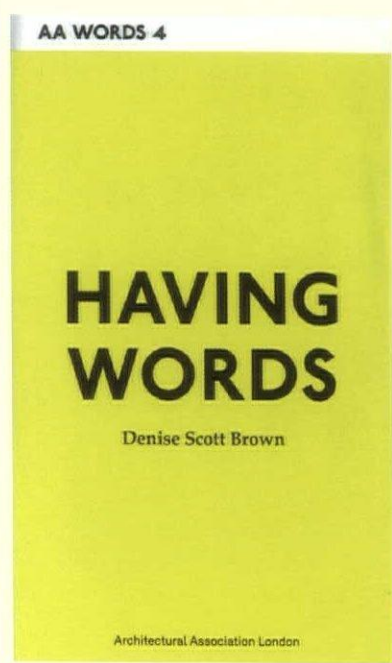
And, the editor? Kieran Long is, in the grand British tradition, a public tastemaker. As a frequent contributor to the *Guardian*, *Independent*, and *Wallpaper* and a recent editor at *The Architects Journal*, Long is in a good position to observe and report. And, his taste is rather catholic in its scope. What is *Hatch* missing? That depends on how you define your own generation.

—William Richards



Having Words

By Denise Scott Brown
London: AA Publications
2010, 160 pages, \$16.00



Scott Brown opens this essay collection with an admission that she has become a grandmother figure in architecture. Spanning 40 years, these pieces draw similarly eloquent and poignant conclusions about urbanism and design.

The title points to Scott Brown's acute awareness of language that, we learn, stems from being raised and educated in South Africa under apartheid. Through her fascination with dichotomies, she dissects and then reassembles the language of things. Having words is a way of having architecture.

It is a book about an evolving design philosophy comprised of a series of critiques. In "Planning the Powder Room" (1967), Scott Brown aims to "combine the delicacy of the lady with the directness of a confirmed and unrecalcitrant functionalist type of the 1930s," in a tone reminiscent of Amy Vanderbilt's sharp retorts concerning etiquette. But, she also responds to more urgent matters in, "What Should New Orleans Do?" (2005), bolstering her argument with observations of historic patterns about disaster.

The architecture of the book is just as important as the text. Although a single thematic thread does not connect the essays, there is a particular logic at play. Together in one volume and blanketed by mere "words," the essays should be read as one reads a collage. "Moving from words to buildings is one of the greatest challenges in architecture," she says. And, yet, Scott Brown demonstrates that she can move seamlessly from buildings to words.

And although Scott Brown and Robert Venturi's seminal work *Learning from Las Vegas* dealt with vast space and big text, this book is designed specifically to fit in your back pocket. How intimate is that? Along with the other authors in this series—Koolhaas, Eisenman, Kuma, Turovsky—it's enough to bring cargo pants back into style.

—Tyler King



A Modest **Proposal**

Three friends provide stewardship of a mountainside parcel outside Blacksburg and make it their home.


By Mark Orling, AIA



Ellen Braaten often traveled to Blacksburg toward Roanoke on an old/pastoral Virginia Byway. Braaten, an alumna and emerita faculty of Virginia Tech's School of Architecture and Design, cherished this valley and had often discussed the possible purchase of land here with her close friend Robert Turner. On one particular day in the fall of 1986, she noticed a small "For Sale" sign fronting on an alluring field. Her next visit, not long after, was with a realtor.

Braaten trekked to the top of the rise and, with much of the 70-acre property in view, made her decision. At the time, Turner was in London and, after little convincing, they agreed to form a partnership at Paris Mountain along with his classmate, Robert Reuter. There were no immediate plans for the property other than future possibilities that were ultimately guided by a carefully framed set of principles and a process of shared architectural purpose.

The guiding principal was a deep appreciation for the qualities and beauty of this particular piece of earth. It is a layered geography. Starting at its north-western edge, one of Virginia's scenic byways meanders through the rolling valley floor, creating a roadside "shelf." The land then rises to a ridge, mostly barren and exposed that reveal magnificent views up and down the valley. The ridge then drops to a relatively broad bottomland with a crystal clear

A photograph of the Reuter Residence, a modern house with a dark grey metal roof and light grey vertical siding. The house is situated on a grassy hillside with a dense forest of trees in autumn colors in the background. A paved patio area with outdoor furniture is visible to the right of the house.

Situated on a south facing hillside with views to a pristine valley and woodland mountain, the Reuter Residence is built to give people the opportunity to know where they are.



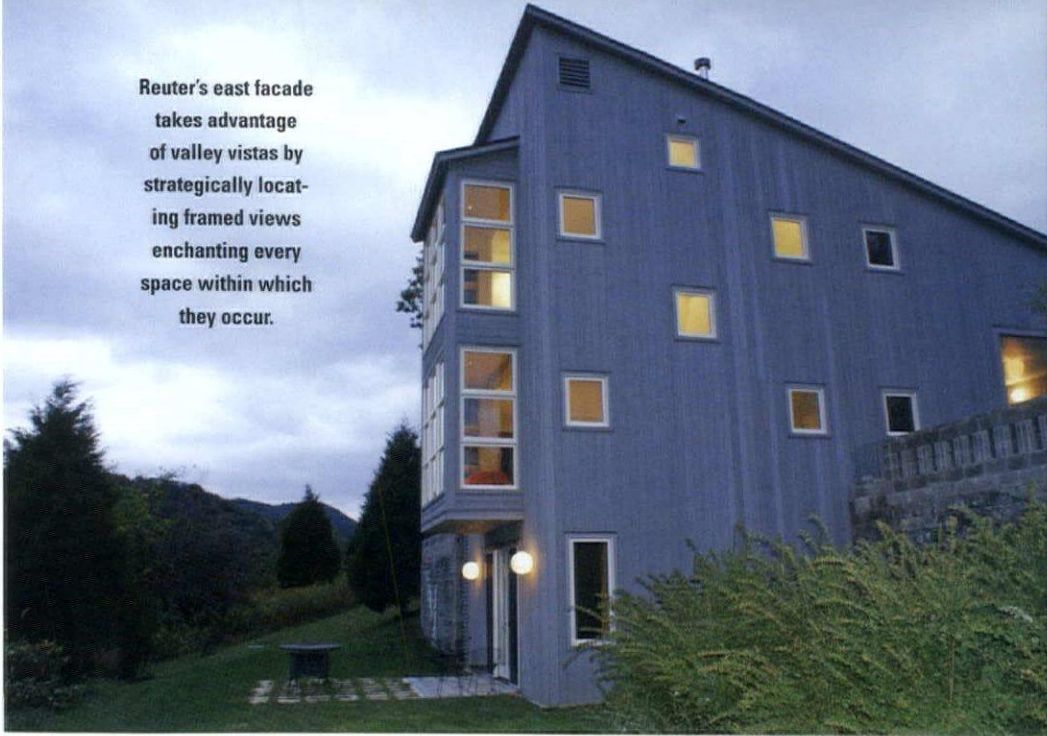
meandering stream with wooded banks. Across the stream is the final dominion: the heavily wooded, deciduous mountain hillside ascending above the valley floor.

In every way, reverence for the land took precedence in positing a set of rules for stewardship of this layered topography. First, the majority of the property was defined as a “scenic outlot,” and the partners kept open the possibility of placing it into a protected easement. Second, Braaten, Turner, and Reuter’s lots were located along a well-worn deer trail on the mountain side of the central ridge. This afforded the best views and kept the building sites secluded from the main roadway. Finally, a “gatekeeper’s” lot was subdivided at the roadway as a sellable property to aid in the cost of property development.

These simple agreements, along with typical covenants, were not only enough to assure the preservation of the sites major qualities, but were also lauded by the Montgomery County Planning Department as an ideal for sensitive cluster development of rural lands. The first to build was Turner. An architecture graduate of Virginia Tech, his first job out of school was an assistantship to the eminent architectural photographer Ezra Stoller. Turner then moved to Chicago where he joined Skidmore Owings and Merrill and eventually ran the firm’s London Office.

But in 1997, at age 50, Turner decided that he wanted to refocus his career. “My first 25 years were for learning and my second were for working,” he reported, “and the next 25 years will be for thinking.” With that, Turner retired from SOM and became a one-man practice in Paris, France. With six months of the year in Paris, the homestead at Paris Mountain was to become his American base. Working closely with Jim Lawrence of Goforth Construction—who ultimately built all four homes on the site—Turner felt assured that his commitments in England would not compromise the quality of his Virginia home.

Turner selected the lot farthest from the road. His vision was a typical Virginia farm house with a group of simple dependencies. He acknowledged that the traditional farm house idea had great power, but mostly in its possibility to bolster invention. The main house is a taut, gabled volume containing a kitchen,



Reuter’s east facade takes advantage of valley vistas by strategically locating framed views enchanting every space within which they occur.

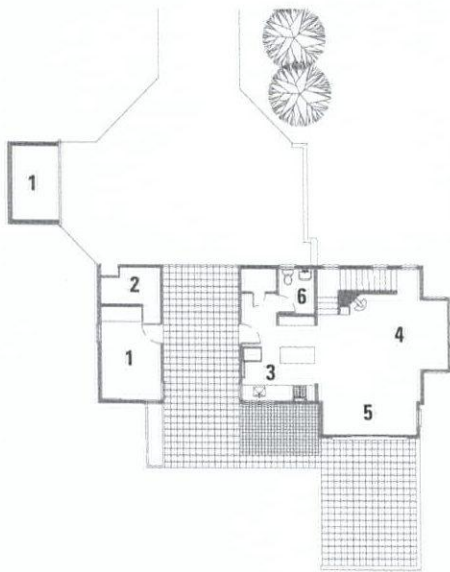
a casual study, one bedroom with bath and a large living/dining space. With the exception of the bath, all spaces are open to each other without doors.

The notion for the living space was inspired by the layered floor plans of Sir John Soane’s home in London and, like Soane, Turner was looking for a way to house his collection of books and artworks. By creating niches at the north

and south sides of the space, turning the shelving units perpendicular to the space, and placing large double doors on the exterior walls at these niches, the large main living space feels porch-like, especially with all doors opened to the breeze. The well proportioned 12-foot ceilings, the clean, simple traditional system of trimming (a “patch system”) and the symmetrical arrangement of the parts all contribute to an elegant formality that is, inhabited quite casually.

In time, Turner continued work on the site with a second utility structure and wine closet,, followed by a separate guest house. Even though the site plan is quite rational (based on a 16-foot grid defining the building locations, outdoor spaces with formal indigenous landscaping), it is this paradigm of multiple structures that are attuned to many other century old settlements up and down this valley.

Shortly after the completion of Robert Turner’s guest house, Robert Reuter began designing his own house.



Ground Level Plan



- 1 Utility Room
- 2 Equipment Room
- 3 Kitchen
- 4 Living Room
- 5 Dining Room
- 6 Powder Room



Turner's rational scheme for indigenous plantings animates the extended outdoor living areas as transitional space between man-made and natural.

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After working for noted furniture designer Andrew Morrison, Reuter went on to co-design office systems for Knoll Furniture that are still in use today and have won numerous awards. While his base of operation is Long Island, New York, he has served as an adjunct faculty member in Industrial Design at Virginia Tech. Reuter chose the first site from the road, arguably the most difficult for its steep topography. In addition to dazzling valley, stream and mountain views, this site has a 300 year-old specimen oak that deserved prominence and every possible

means of preservation.

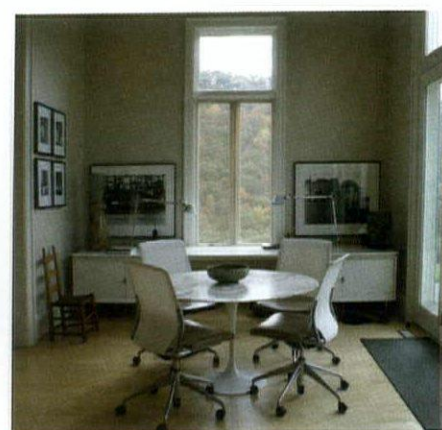
While the topography is form giving, the tree is focal. Similar to Turner's approach, Reuter's ideas about building concepts were driven by local tradition. Reuter chose the uncomplicated shed form (which he equates to the coal mining tippie) of so many of the rural vernacular dependencies found up and down the valley. The house shed roof slopes gracefully skyward as the hillside falls, providing the maximum amount of living space in section on the view side. Upon arrival, the walls of the mass are

punctured opening on axis to the specimen oak, separating the machine spaces from the living spaces, and creating a multi-functional covered exterior living space or carport.

The interior spaces are casual and flowing, but always with a strong connection to the

exterior. The living space has a large focal bay window that connects to the mountain and the dining space has large glass doors that connect to the outdoor terrace. The kitchen has a corner window that connects to the oak tree, beyond, and sprinkled among the large windows are a series of smaller ones that frame selected vistas across the valley. Where Turner's house is on one level, Reuter uses the topography to spread out to three, living at grade level, sleeping on the upper level and guest quarters at the lowest level (also at grade). Reuter's interior detailing is also dedicated to simplicity and the use of a limited palette of materials.

John Muir said that "In every walk with nature, one receives far more than one seeks." At Paris Mountain, this is true even when standing still. It is an idyllic community that has been designed with intentions of stewardship and efficiency. It was purchased for a modest sum and developed with modest means. Here, three close friends came to an intelligent general agreement about what would make a good community, and successfully completed a cherished ambition.



As the hub for activity, Turner's den functions as the office, an informal dining adjunct to the kitchen, and even as the primary "foyer."



With simple details and well-proportioned spaces, the Turner Residence comfortably accommodates his eclectic collection of contemporary, Asian, and family heirloom art and furniture.

Project: Reuter Residence

Architect: Robert Reuter

Contractor: Goforth Construction
(Jim Lawrence)

Owner: Robert Reuter and Katherine Downs

Landscape Architecture: Robert Reuter with
Alex Niemiera

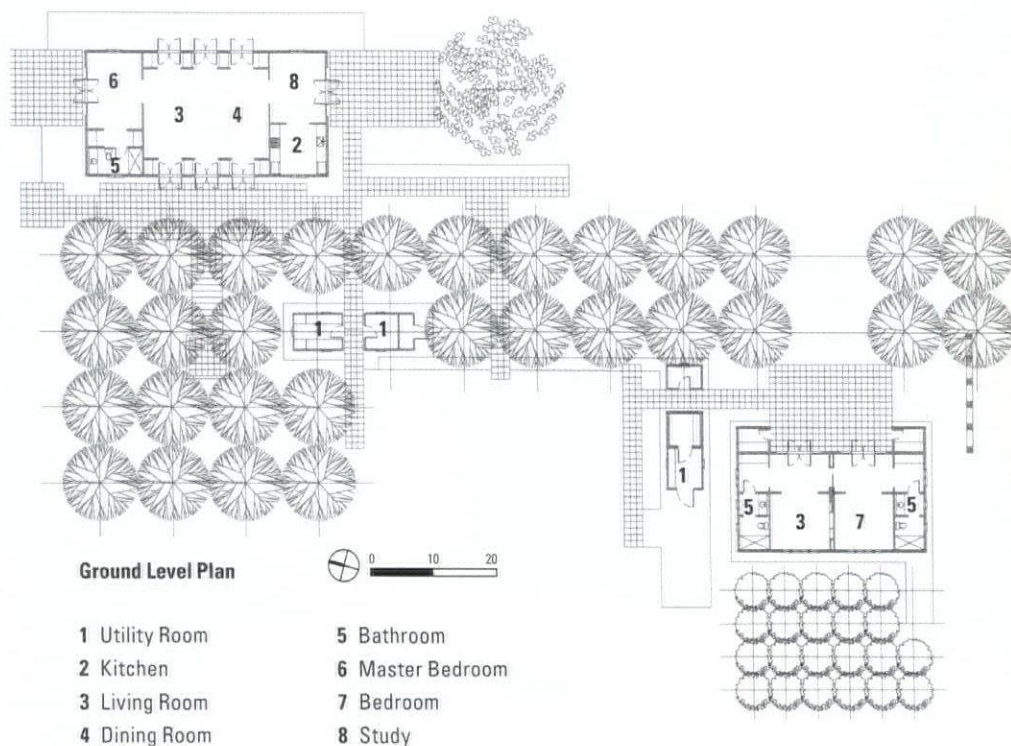
Project: Turner Residence

Architect: Robert Turner

Contractor: Goforth Construction
(Jim Lawrence)

Owner: Robert Turner

Landscape Consultant: Robert Turner with
Alex Niemiera





Buzzer Beater

Campbell University's new arena by Little scores big just under the wire.
By Mike Welton

You might say the new John W. Pope Convocation Center/Gilbert Craig Gore Arena at Campbell University in Buies Creek, N.C. took a page from J. Winston Pearce's 1985 history of the school.

His two-volume set is called "Big Miracle at Little Buies Creek."

The 109,000 square foot center by Little Diversified Architectural Consulting of Durham was the culmination of a four-year fundraising and building drive. It opened in late 2008, just as the nation's economy slipped off its rails into the most difficult environment since the 1930s. Today the center's used for classes, concerts, fitness workouts, graduations and athletic events. Though it carried a \$32 million price tag, it's completely paid for.

It's got history. For at least three decades, administrators, staff and students had longed for a new athletic facility on cam-

pus. The student body of 4,000 had outgrown the 978 seats inside Carter Gym, built in the 1950s when the school was a junior college. "It was the most antiquated gym in the conference," said Robert Bishop, AIA, president of Little's Durham office.

At least three times in 25 years, the administration had called in architects for feasibility studies. "We could never get it going," lamented Dr. Jerry Wallace, university president, who's spent his entire professional career at Campbell.

In 2004, the school contacted Little for brainstorming and fundraising assistance, bringing in HOK of Kansas City for a joint effort on programming. Little led the administration through exercises aimed at helping visualize what they wanted—and delivered fundraising tools like three-dimensional animation, still images, brochures and a model.

"When we were finished, they told us they'd probably put the project on hold for a couple of years of fundraising," Bishop

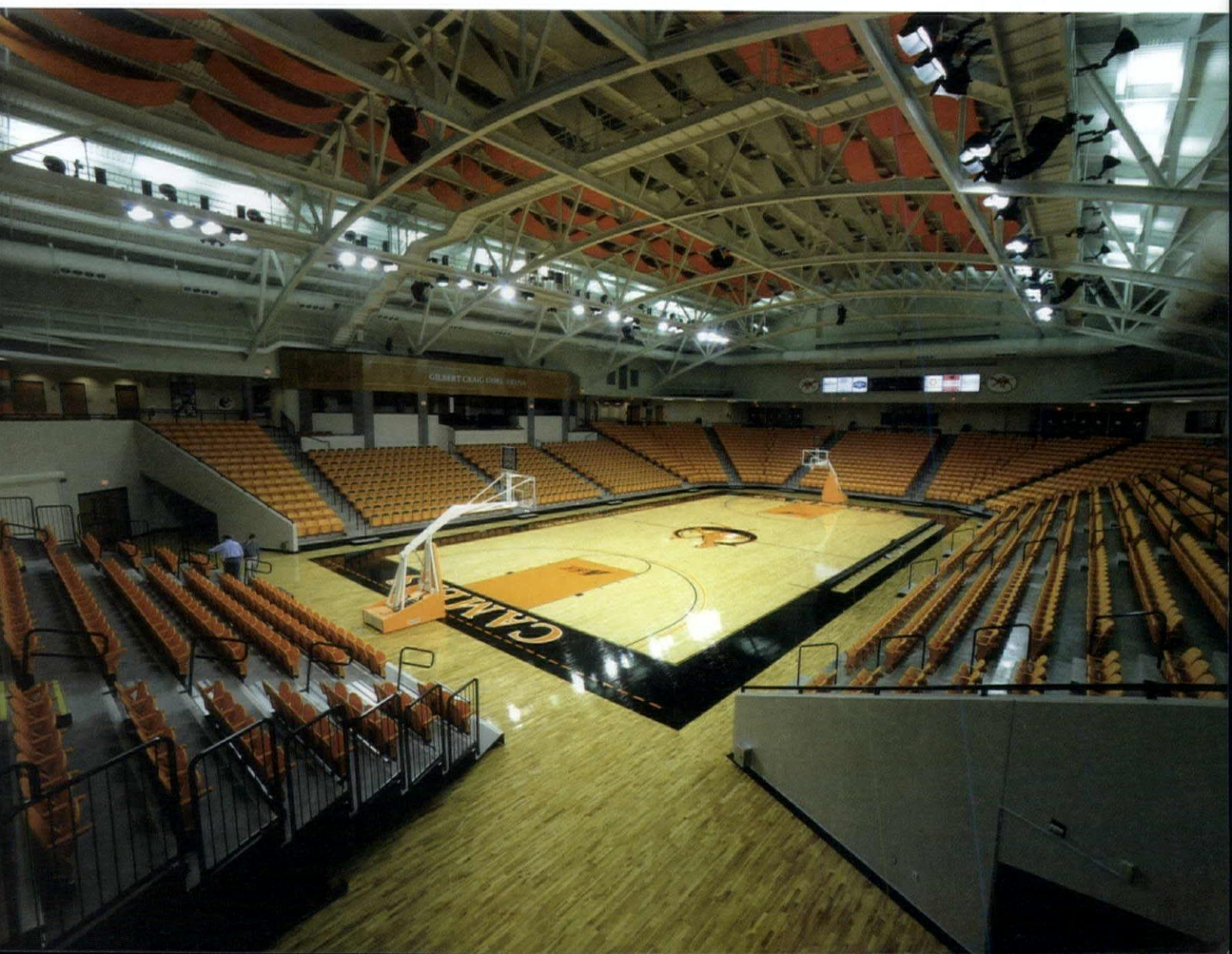


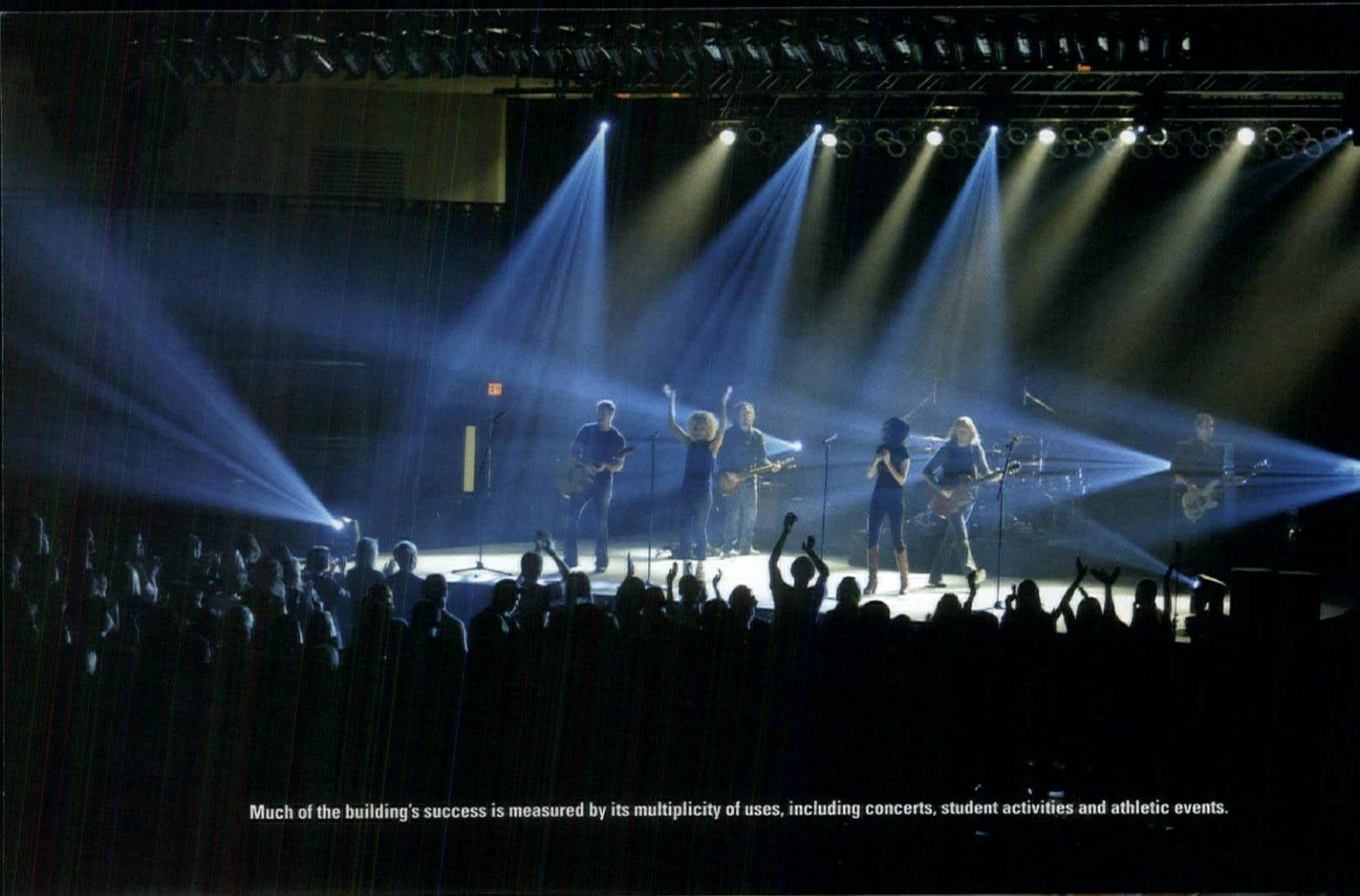
Courtesy Masked Bandits, LLC

At 109,000 square feet, the new convocation center/arena at Campbell University in Buies Creek, N.C. is the largest building on campus. Its exterior (at left and right) draws on Georgian influences from the school's academic center, with interior seating for 3,095 people (below).



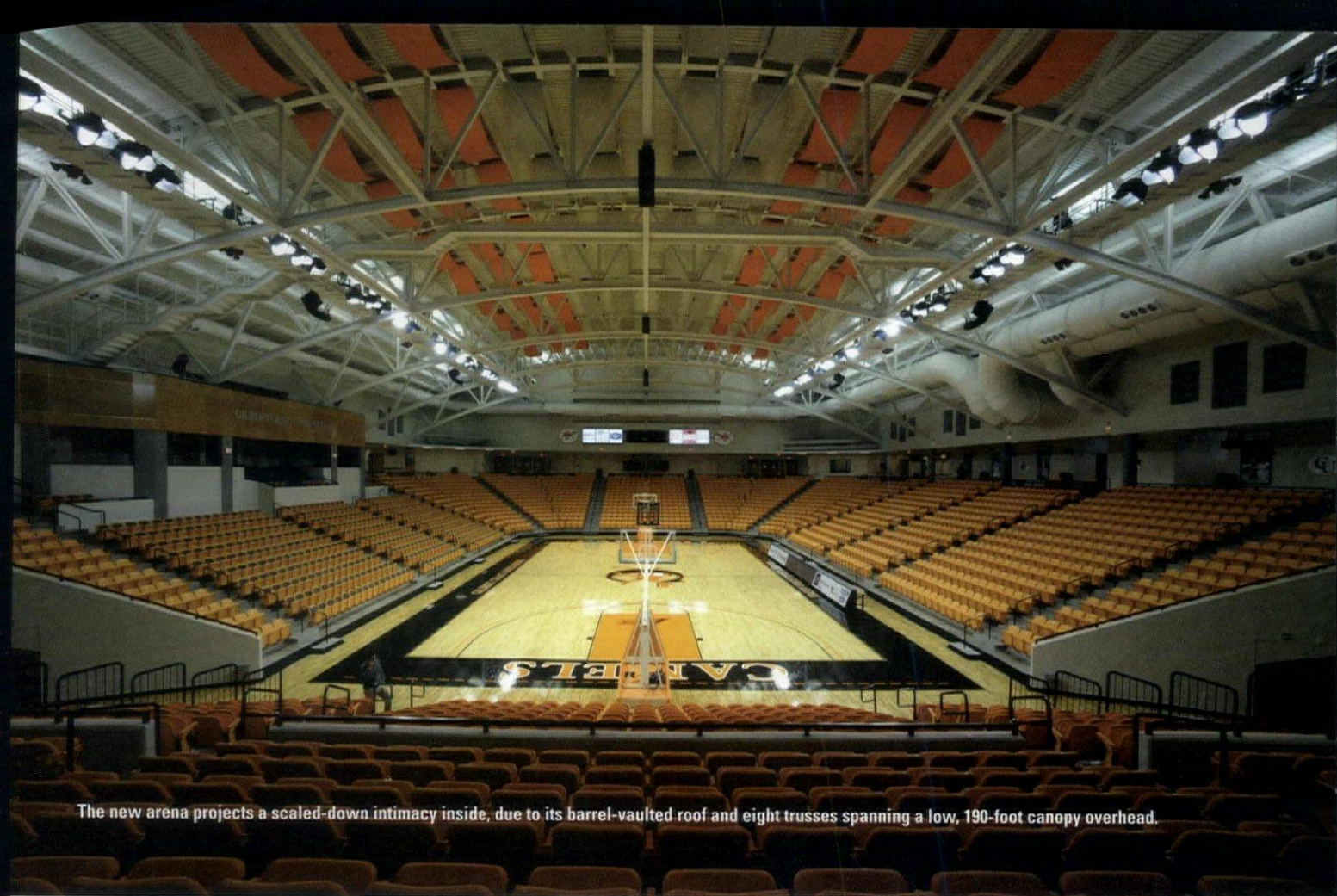
Courtesy Little Diversified Architectural Consulting





Much of the building's success is measured by its multiplicity of uses, including concerts, student activities and athletic events.





The new arena projects a scaled-down intimacy inside, due to its barrel-vaulted roof and eight trusses spanning a low, 190-foot canopy overhead.

23

said. "But six months later, they called us up."

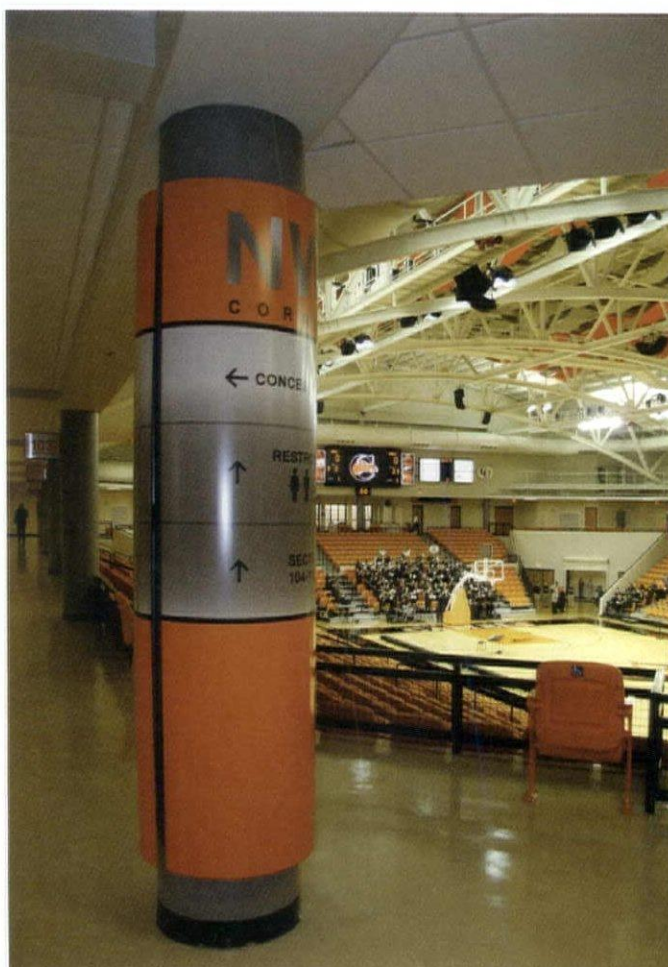
That May, just one year after Wallace had been named president, the school received a major gift from the John William Pope Foundation, named for a 1975 graduate. A second gift rolled in from Ed Gore, a 1952 graduate. Combined, they totaled about \$10 million.

"That attracted more," Wallace said. "Some were two million, some were one million, some were a half million and smaller. Harnett County (where the school is located) contributed one million."

Before long, the school had amassed what it needed to build, and broke ground in 2006. The center was dedicated in October 2008 and hosted its first basketball game a month later. "It's not as big as some, but it's as nice as many," Wallace said of his 3,095-seat building. "We couldn't be what we wanted without this facility."

Wallace described his school as a once-struggling rural college that's now a prominent university. And what it wanted, he said, was a large multifunctional space with an intimate environ-

Retractable bleachers (at left) enable an expansion for graduation ceremonies to 4,000 seats and the concourse around the arena (at right) allows visitors to step down into the bleachers.



Courtesy Little Diversified Architectural Consulting



The main entrance lobby and hall of fame offer clear and clean access to stairways leading up to the arena concourse.



Porcelain tiles for floors, along with grout-based concrete block and maple millwork for walls, give the lobby an enduring and economical look.

ment inside. "We wanted a demonstration of the new Campbell University," he said.

Bishop and his design team looked back toward the scaled-down Carter Gym, because they sought a new facility that felt smaller than its 3,000 seats. "We studied the sight lines and the angles and the heights pretty closely," he said. "The distance from the court to the concourse was important. It helped dictate the angle."

The number of seats drove the shape and form of the building. It led to a barrel vaulted roof, its eight major trusses spanning a 190-foot canopy overhead. Because of it, fans step *down* from an interior concourse, lowering the building's scale. "We tried to keep the ceiling height down to reinforce the intimacy of the space," said Charles Todd, project manager at Little.

Perhaps its most pleasing interior lies at the main lobby entrance, where the school's hall of fame is also located. Circulation is clear and clean, with stairway locations in easy sight. The architects used relatively inexpensive porcelain tiles on floors, complemented by grout-based concrete block on walls, along with an abundance of maple inlays, to achieve an enduring look without breaking the bank.

The largest building on the Campbell campus, it works well within context, its two-story brick façade with arches and pediments matching Georgian facades on the academic quad.

It's not directly within the main academic heart of the campus, but anchored at a pivotal point on its perimeter, prominently greeting visitors to the school. It's easily accessible, within a ten-minute walk for any student. In addition to the main entrance for the arena, it offers separate ingress/egress for a 24-hour fitness center, classrooms in exercise science, practice gymnasium and athletic offices.

To be sure, its sheer size and dominant location insist on more than a second look from the casual observer. It *is* big, but it's intimate too, as required by the program. And though it may appear to shout loudly, it's actually very quiet inside.

Almost miraculously at Buies Creek, the architects squeezed every bit of functionality—and possibly more—out of its space, just as the school did from its budget. And though it might certainly be built for less today, the availability of funds remains a major question.

"We came in just under the wire," Wallace said.

Project: John W. Pope Convocation Center/Gilbert Craig Gore Arena

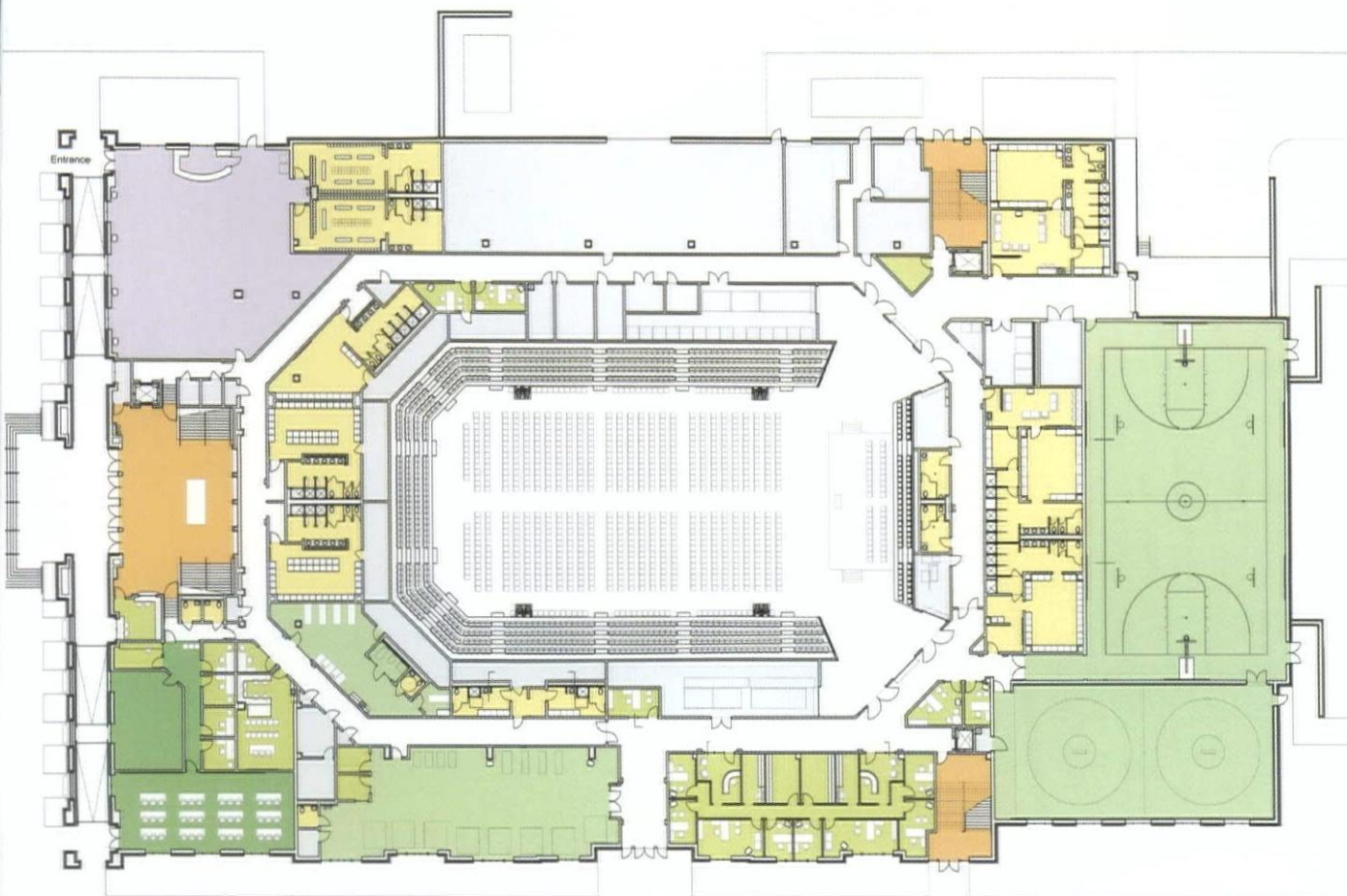
Architect: Little Diversified Architectural Consulting, Durham (Charles Todd, AIA, Principal-in-Charge; Bryan Payne, AIA, staff architect)

Contractor: TA Loving Construction Company (Wilburn Rutledge, President; Dale McCoy, Project Superintendent)

Owner: Campbell University

RESOURCES

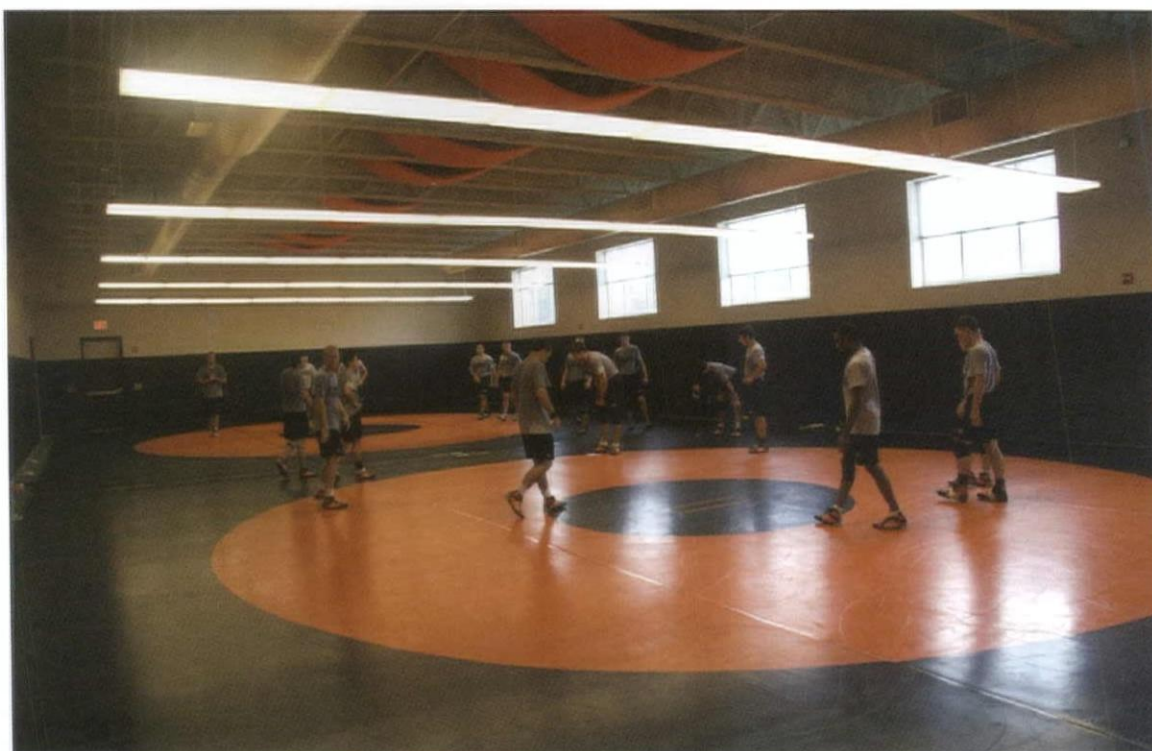
METAL FRAMING: American Drywall (see ad., p. 35); **RESILIENT FLOORING & TILE:** Southeastern Interiors (see ad., back cover); **CIVIL ENGINEERING:** Duane Stewart Associates; **MECHANICAL, PLUMBING, & ELECTRICAL ENGINEERS:** RMF Engineering; **MASONRY & PRE-CAST STONE:** Carolina Masonry; **SYSTEMS:** Comfort Engineers; **STRUCTURAL STEEL, JOISTS, DECK, & STAIRS:** Sanford Steel; **PLUMBING:** Acme Plumbing



Court Level Floor Plan



- | | |
|---|---|
| Stairs and Lobby | Educational |
| Practice Rooms | Lockers and Bathrooms |
| Student Fitness | Support |
| Administrative | |

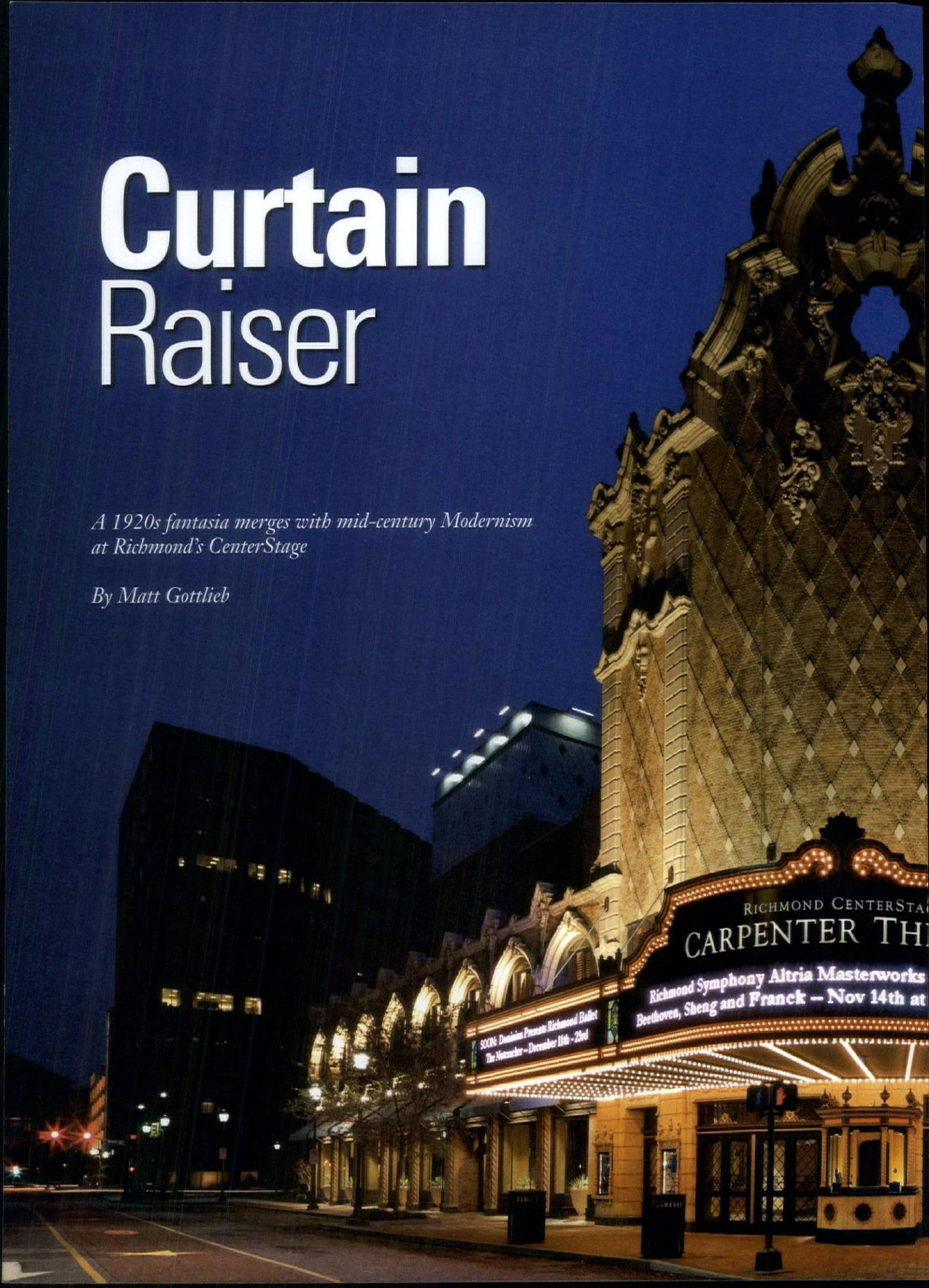


A separate practice gym means that the building can handle two events simultaneously.

Curtain Raiser

*A 1920s fantasia merges with mid-century Modernism
at Richmond's CenterStage*

By Matt Gottlieb



Richmond's old Carpenter Theatre, a 1928 vaudeville house-turned-cinema-turned-performing arts venue remains a monument to whimsy. Originally designed as the Loew's Theater by "atmospheric theatre" legend John Eberson, Jazz Age excess reveals itself from the elaborate plasterwork to faux-aged walls. The main hall's elaborate proscenium, dusk-blue ceiling with twinkling stars, ornate statuary and riot of restored color meets the walls of a Spanish castle garden at sunset. To speak about the gaieties of theater in these spaces is to understate how vivid this *mise-en-scène* really is. Scratch below the surface and CenterStage is a serious boon for Richmond's downtown.

How could the project's team combine the Carpenter Theatre with its modernist neighbor, a 1939 addition to the Thalhimers department store, into one structure? Could a coalition of 14 resident companies—ranging from the Richmond Symphony to the smaller African American Repertory Theatre and Richmond Shakespeare—all find satisfaction? The endeavor needed to retain the quirks of both buildings, a must in a history-mad Richmond, but modernize for ADA compliance, invent larger public spaces, and remake the block as a welcomed sight for passers-by.

Originally Loew's Theatre, the iconic Carpenter Theater façade and its new marquee welcomes Richmonders to the recently completed CenterStage.

Theatre
th at 3 PM

SOON: Dominion Presents Richmond Ballet
The Nutcracker - December 11th - 23rd



Then, there were the programmatic challenges of expanding the main stage to one worthy of travelling companies, creating offices and educational facilities, upgrading technology and building the 200-seat Gottwald Playhouse and two multipurpose venues for smaller events. Initially, two Richmond firms BAM Architects and Glavé & Holmes Associates had a hand in transforming the Thalhimers side of the block, while Wilson Butler Architects of Boston attended to the Carpenter side. In 2006, Wilson Butler took on the entire project.

Aesthetics and the complexities of collaboration aside, even the basics in the Carpenter Theater presented a riddle about restoration, contemporary needs, and multiple histories on the site. "It was a classic set of problems: not enough restrooms, the bars had been added on and they were in this space and people would line up [and] they would clog up the circulation space," lead architect Bruce Herrmann, AIA says while standing where once largely vacant retail stores struggled, the walls dividing them from

the Carpenter Theater lobby replaced by open arches.

Even taking out rows for greater legroom in the hall became a knotty exercise, since it involved rearranging the aisle and seat (about 1,800) configuration. "This scheme gets us *this* many seats. This scheme gets us *that* many seats," Hermann says, recalling the spreadsheets that analyzed the new layout. "It's geometry and psychology that you're blending together." Reworking the air-return "mushrooms" also maximized the hall's acoustics and, importantly, created quality sight lines.

Herrmann and Wilson Butler served the project well. The firm specializes in theatres and has completed arts centers for cities, universities, and Royal Caribbean Cruise Lines. The company even restored another Eberson structure, the Akron Civic Theatre, one of Ohio's mainstays for over 75 years.

If the tasks appeared daunting, the solutions proved to be elegantly simple. Fiber-optics twinkling in the ceiling replaced the original incandescent lights

and acoustical "cloud" panels took the shape of decorative clouds that blended with Eberson's motif. The layers of paint were stripped, and the original colors were recreated.

Linking the fanciful Carpenter wing with the Thalhimers side presented its own challenges. First, the two buildings were not aligned, which created the need for an awkward set of stairs and an elevator with enough stops to service both structures. The schematic transition from the almost Baroque theatre to the more restrained, Modernist side was accomplished by repeating the vivid, parrot-themed carpeting. Metallic elements shifted from bronze to a silver color to help the transition, as well. Wood-louvered doors also retain a sense of warmth as you pass from one side to the other.

Richmonders will remember the zodiac limestone panels from the building's exterior, which have been preserved rather elegantly on bare brick walls. Nearby, the two-story, experimental Gottwald Playhouse creates a "donut" through the third floor, around which



both the Richmond Symphony and Richmond Ballet maintain their offices. Above the donut, on the fourth floor, lies the symphony's music library.

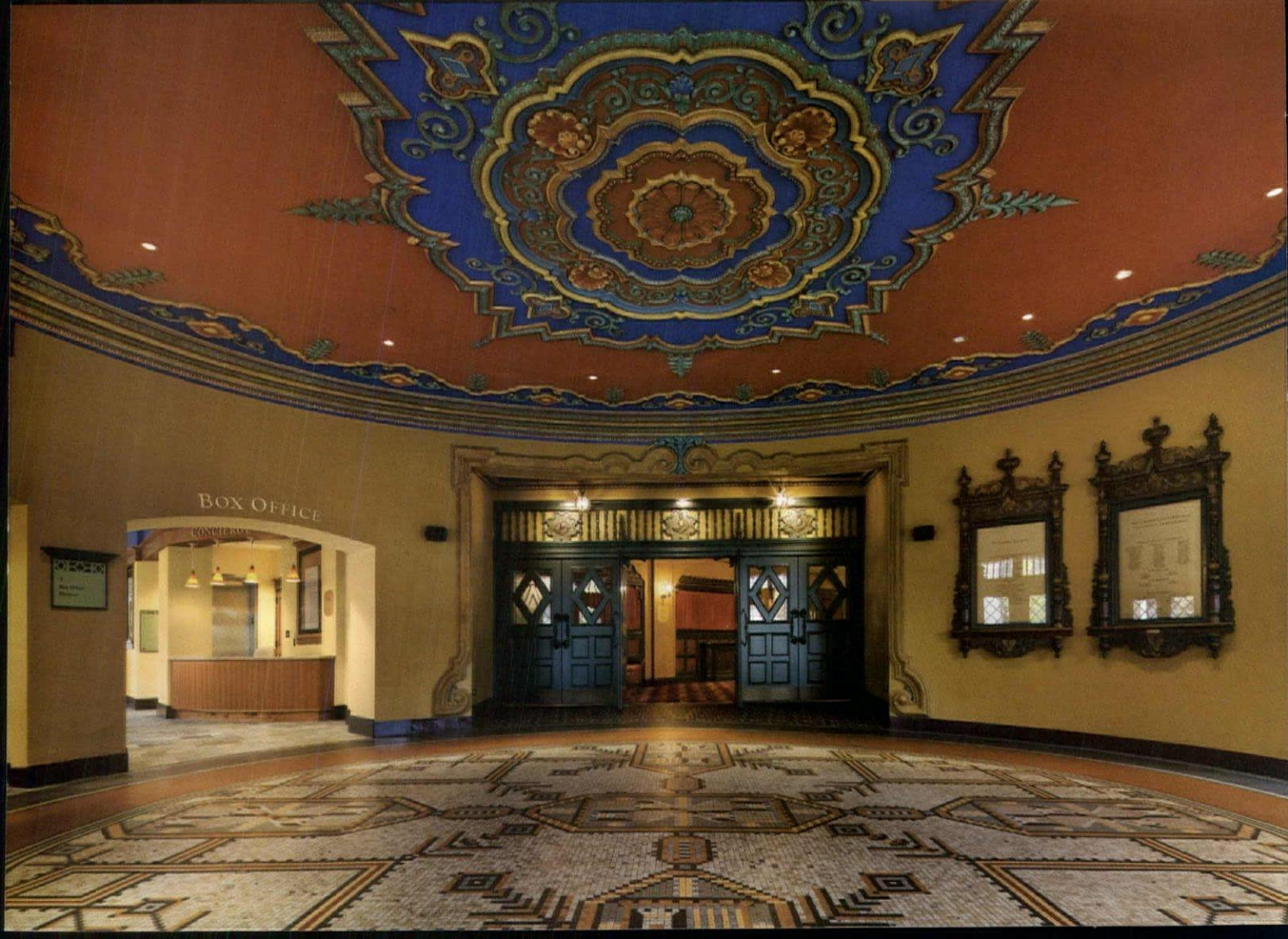
"They're each their own contribution to Richmond's urban architecture," says Andrew Moore, AIA, Director of Urban Architecture at Glavé & Holmes.

But did it work?

"The biggest improvement," notes Anne Durkin, co-founder and principal at BAM Architects, "is that you can really feel the activity from the building by being a passerby on the street. From an urban design perspective, that whole block has a better relationship with the city."

Windows bring views of the cityscape for people inside the Thalhimers wing (above). The two halves of the building along Grace Street demonstrate a subtle dialogue between romanticism and Modernism.







Few are inclined to disagree and a public open house last September drew an enormous crowd, activating Grace Streets between 6th and 7th in a way that had been lost for some time.

An hour after surveying the Carpenter Theatre from the balcony, Hermann stood on the stage, and mused about the quadrupled in size, reconfigured lighting, and updated sound equipment. Today's customers hold different expectations about a theater than before.

"Whether it is rock 'n' roll or classical music, put on headphones and it's been mixed," laments Hermann. Surveying Richmond's newest performance space, the opportunity to hear live sound seemed all the more important.

The 200-seat Gottwald Playhouse (top left) serves smaller performances and events. The John Eberson design elements for the main theater (above) are carried through to the box office lobby (bottom left).

Project: Richmond CenterStage

Architect: Wilson Butler Architects (Bruce Hermann, AIA, Principal-in-Charge)

Contractor: Gilbane Building Company (John Taylor); Bilbane Christman Co. (Ron Staley)

Owner: Richmond CenterStage Foundation

RESOURCES

GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Gilbane Building Company (see ad., p.2); **PHOTOGRAPHY:** Robert Benson Photography (see ad., p. 33); **STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING:** Dunbar, Milby Williams, Pittman & Vaughan (see ad., p. 39); **CIVIL ENGINEERING:** Draper Aden Associates (see ad., p. 34); **GENERAL EXCAVATION & SITE UTILITIES:** Branscome Richmond (see ad., p. 35); **MECHANICAL & PLUMBING:** Atlantic Constructors (see ad., p. 4); **ENVIRONMENTAL GRAPHIC DESIGN:** Arrowstreet Graphic Design & Cajolet Design (see ad., p. 39); **STOREFRONT RESTORATION:** Turner Restoration (see ad., p. 4); **DEMOLITION:** S.B. Cox, Inc. (see ad., p. 4); **ROOFING:** Roof Systems of VA, Inc. (see ad., p. 33); **SEATING RESTORATION:** Red Hill Distributors (see ad., inside-front cover); **SCAFFOLDING:** James. C. Pemberton Corporation (see ad., p. 39).

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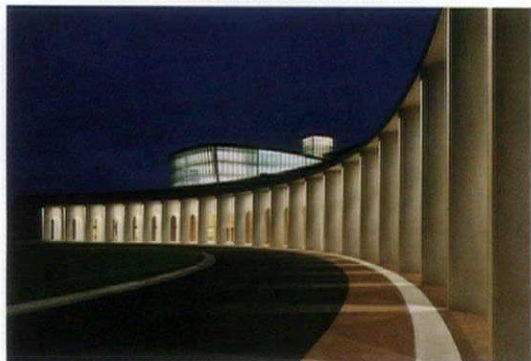
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Mike Welton writes on architecture and design for regional and national publications, and at www.architectsandartisans.com.

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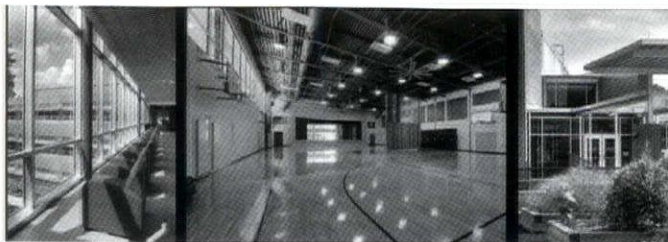
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Questions? Call (804) 237-1777 or email jwalker@aiava.org

Virginia Society **AIA**



Architect: AECOM, National Capital Office

Project: National Capital Region Relocation Administrative Facility (NCRRAF), Andrews Air Force Base (AAFB)

Located on a gateway site, this new 380,000 s.f. facility also houses the U.S. Air Force appellate court. It will be AAFB's signature building and first component of its "town center" development. Tel: 703-682-4900 / www.aecom.com

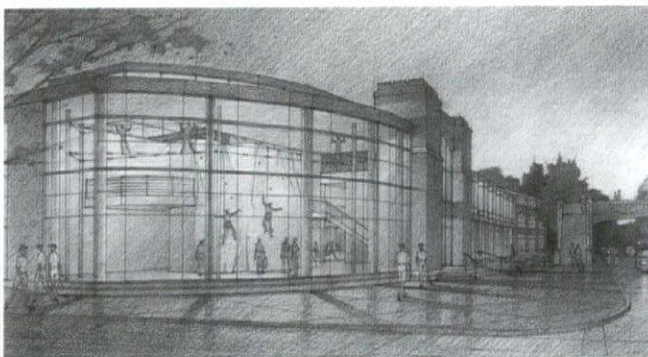


Architect: Baskervill, Richmond

Project: Hopewell Human Services Building, Hopewell

Hopewell's new one story 21,200 s.f. Human Services facility will allow Richmond to consolidate and provide improved service delivery to its citizens. Tel: (804) 343-1010 / www.baskervill.com

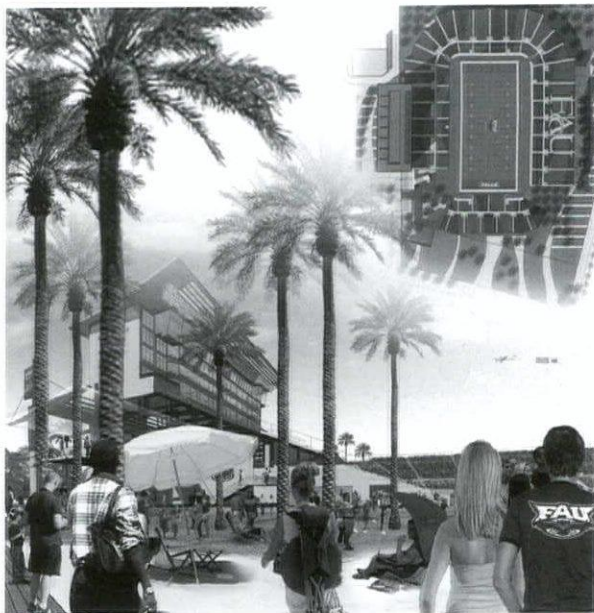
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Architect: Clark Nexsen, Roanoke

Project: VMI Indoor Physical Fitness Training Facility, Lexington

Featuring indoor obstacle courses, a climbing wall, and running track, this 156,000 s.f. project will bring VMI's training facilities on par with America's top service academies. Tel: 540-982-0800 / www.clarknexsen.com



Architect: HKS Architects (Design) with Schenkel Shultz (Architect of Record)

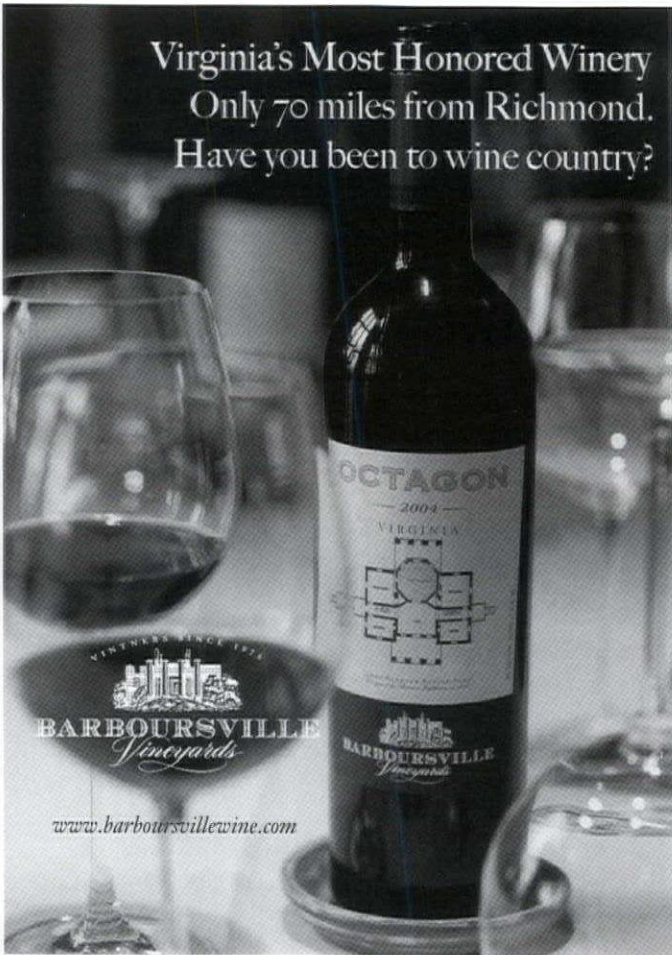
Project: Florida Atlantic University Football Stadium, Boca Raton, Florida

The design of the new 30,000 seat stadium promotes the university's brand of "football in paradise," bringing new traditions and the beach to the campus. Tel: 804-644-8400 / www.hksinc.com



Architect: Moseley Architects, Virginia Beach
Project: Blue Ridge Community College Student Recreation Center, Weyers Cave

This new 40,000 s.f. building will feature locker rooms, fitness and training rooms, a game room, storage, and service areas. It is registered for LEED certification. Tel: 757-368-2800 / www.moseleyarchitects.com



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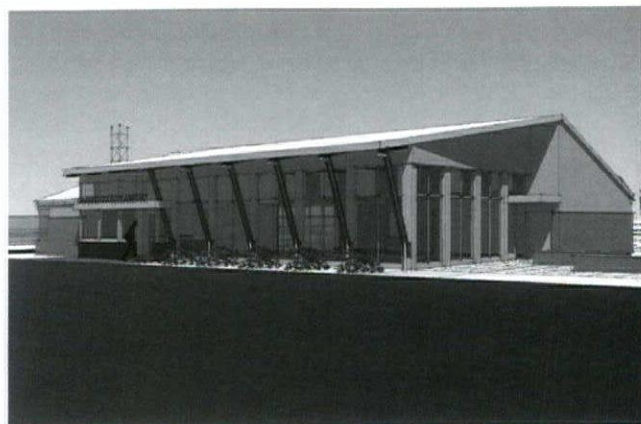
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Architect: Odell Associates, Richmond

Project: Bon Secours Laburnum Avenue Medical Office Building, Richmond

This 55,000 s.f. multi-tenant building will redefine the ambulatory medical experience both spatially and visually. This project will seek LEED certification. Tel: 804-287-8200 / www.odell.com

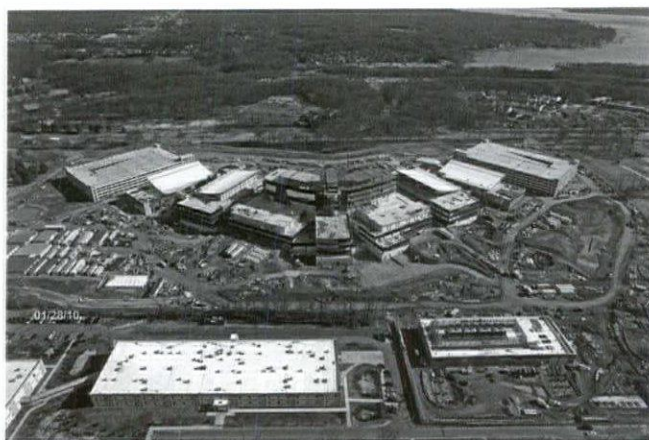


Architect: Price Studios, Richmond

Project: Orange County Regional Airport Terminal

Currently under construction, a new 5,800 s.f. general aviation terminal building will provide space for the public and airport administration. Tel: 804-521-2266 / www.pricestudios.com

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Architect: PSA-Dewberry, Inc., Fairfax

Project: Fort Belvoir Community Hospital Complex, Fort Belvoir

The Fort Belvoir Community Hospital is a state-of-the-art health care facility. PSA-Dewberry designed the parking garages, ambulance shelter, central utility plant, and the connector tunnel. Tel: 703-698-9050 / www.psa-dewberry.com



Architect: Wiley|Wilson, Lynchburg

Project: Central Virginia Federal Credit Union, Forest Branch, Forest

This new facility uses a curved clerestory to provide natural light to the lobby and to define the building entrance. Tel: 434.947.1901 / www.wileywilson.com

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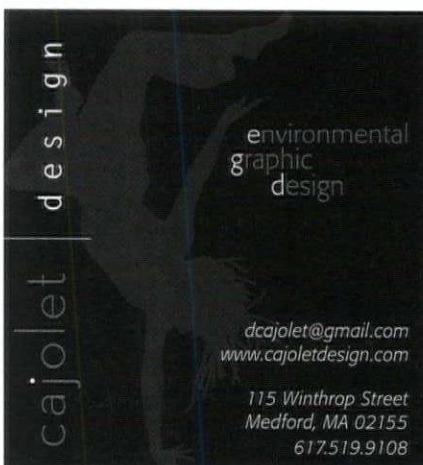
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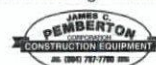
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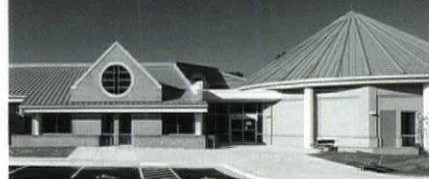
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The interior of the tower control room offers a 360-degree view of the bridge, the Potomac, and the Virginia and Maryland riverbanks.

! Taking Note

40

One of the best views of Washington is from the Wilson Bridge Control Tower, a streamlined steel and glass fin that rises above the western end of the span, from which engineers oversee the raising and lowering of a massive drawbridge. But it is also a view rarely seen, because the tower is only staffed when the drawbridge is in operation—barely two dozen times a year since its opening in 2007. That’s down dramatically from the 260 times a year it was raised before the bridge was replaced with a much higher span, a project that took the better part of the last decade to complete.

“There haven’t been nearly as many openings as we thought there would be,” says Don Gregory, associate principal and project manager for Cox Graae Spack, the Georgetown firm that designed the tower.

“It was supposed to be staffed by an engineer twenty-four hours a day, but now there’s just a security guard on site.”

But, if the tower, designed to accommodate four staff at a time and complete with a kitchenette and bathroom, is rarely seen from the inside, it has become a new landmark for driv-

Driver’s Delight

ers along the southern expanse of the Capital Beltway. Nestled in the 11-foot space between the inner and outer spans of the highway, the tower reminds many of an Art Deco cruise ship smokestack, with dashing lines and a bespoke stainless steel shell.

“The design aesthetic was to create motion, inspired by automobile and nautical design,” says Gregory.

The \$1.5 million project was unique one for Cox Graae Spack, which is well known for its work on educational and cultural facilities in the D.C. area but rarely ventures into infrastructure. Nevertheless, says Gregory, the bridge authority “challenged us to create a work of art on the bridge, to make something more than a utilitarian structure. We leapt at the opportunity.”

The tower’s drama isn’t purely aesthetic, although its looks have garnered awards from the Northern Virginia and D.C. AIA chapters. The sweeping shape is dictated by the need for the engineer to see in front of the raised drawbridge leaves, while the stainless steel shell envelopes not just the tower but a catwalk.

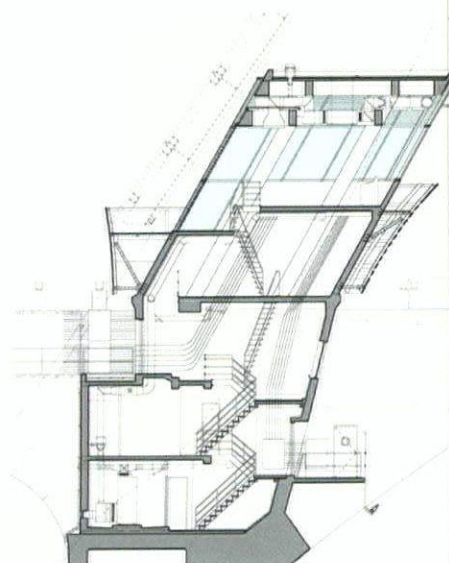
“There were a lot of restrictions on us that helped form the project’s design,” says Gregory. “We came after the design

of the bridge was done.”

The interior of the tower control room, ensconced behind 1,500 square-feet of glass, offers a 360-degree view of the bridge, the Potomac, and the Virginia and Maryland riverbanks. The fourteen curved and flat glass panels are bullet-resistant and low-E, and thick enough to block out all but the loudest of highway noise.

“It’s not that loud,” Gregory says. “There’s just a low kind of hum.”

—Clay Risen



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