

# Architect Colorado

A publication of The American Institute of Architects Colorado Component

## Focus on Young Architects

Inscribed, Grounded and  
Floating: Two Architects  
Set an Ambitious Course

Making the Old New Again

Promoting Sustainable  
Urban Environments

A Client's Architect

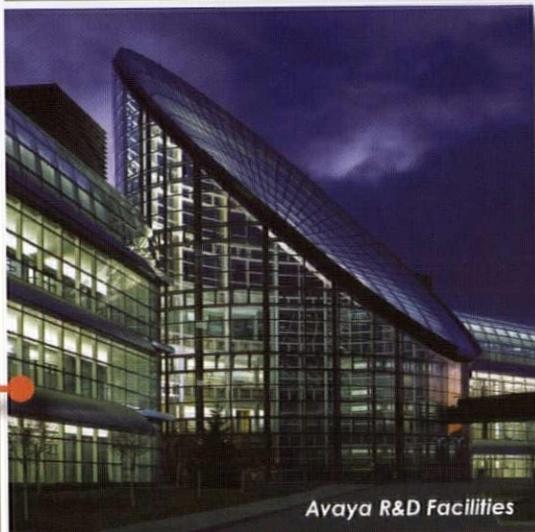
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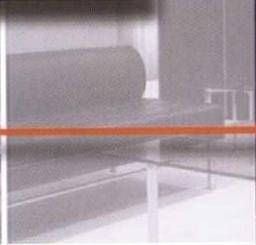
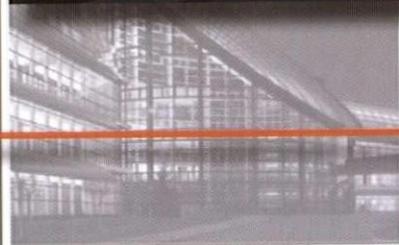


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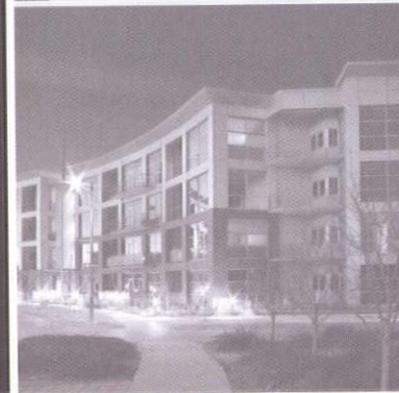
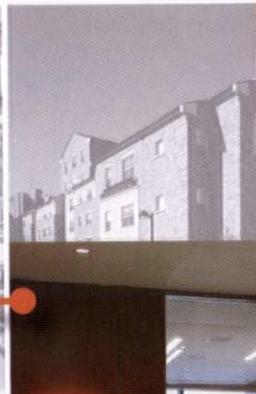
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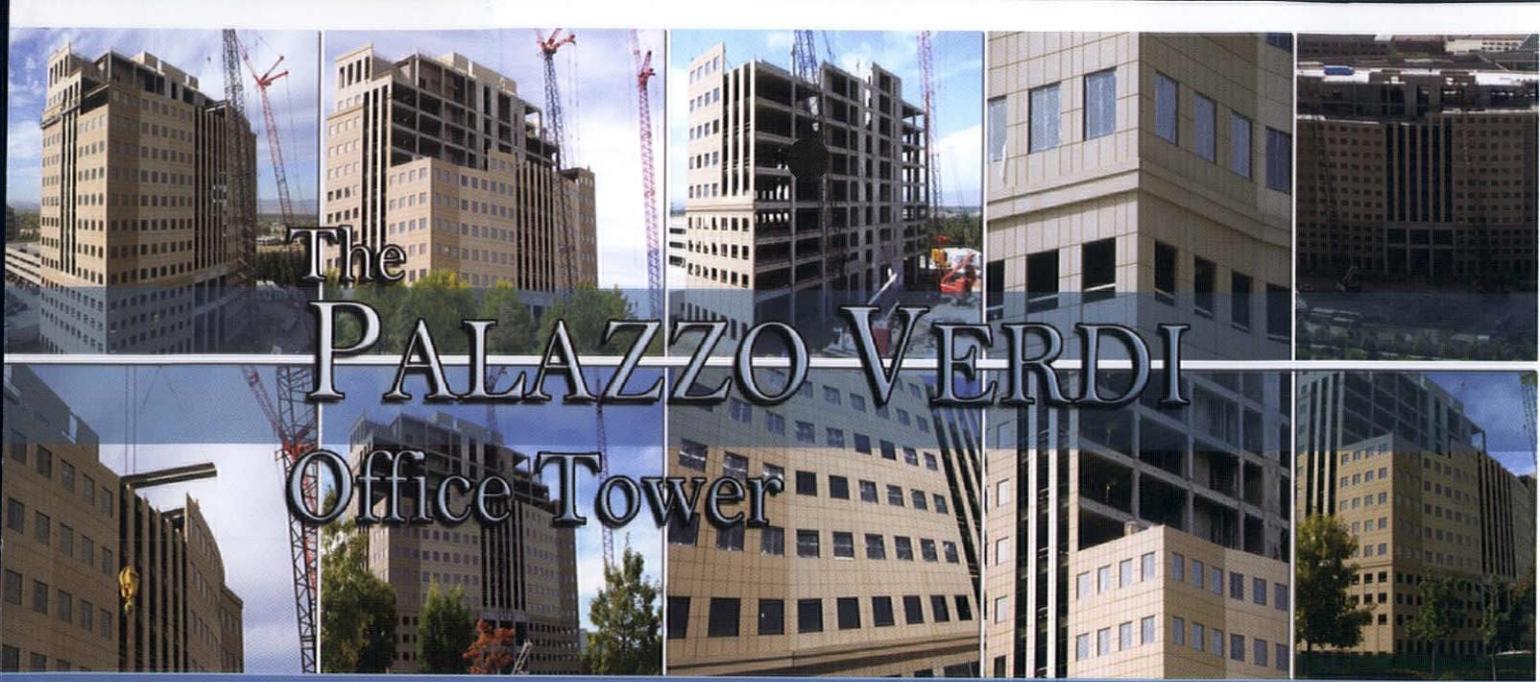


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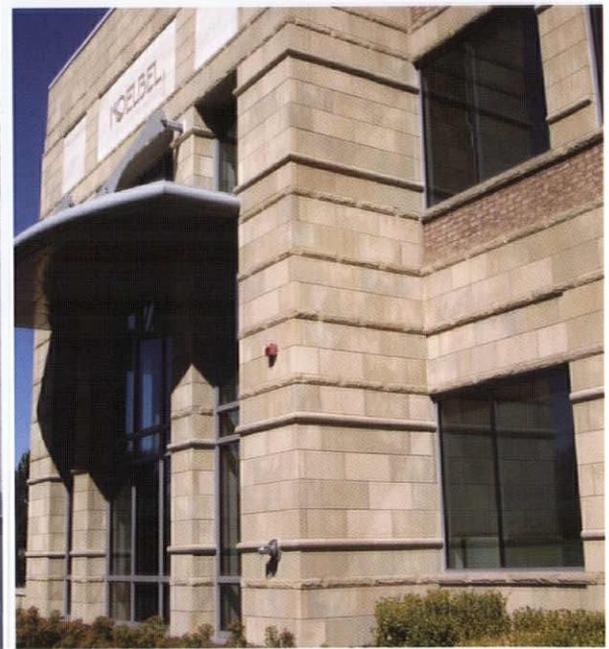
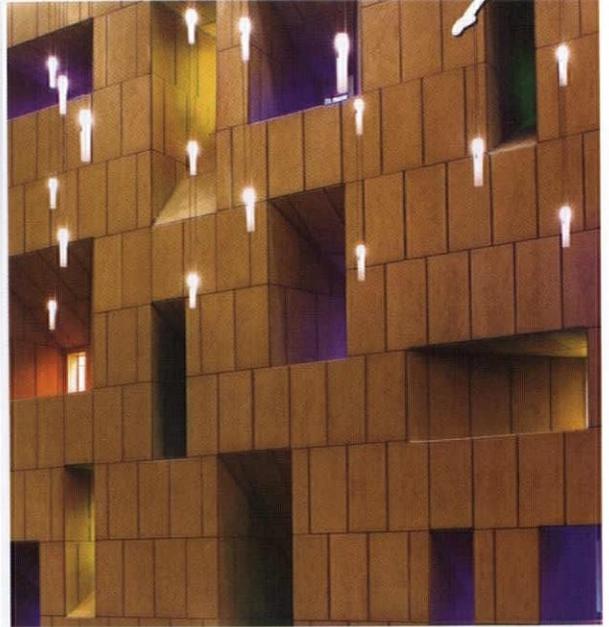
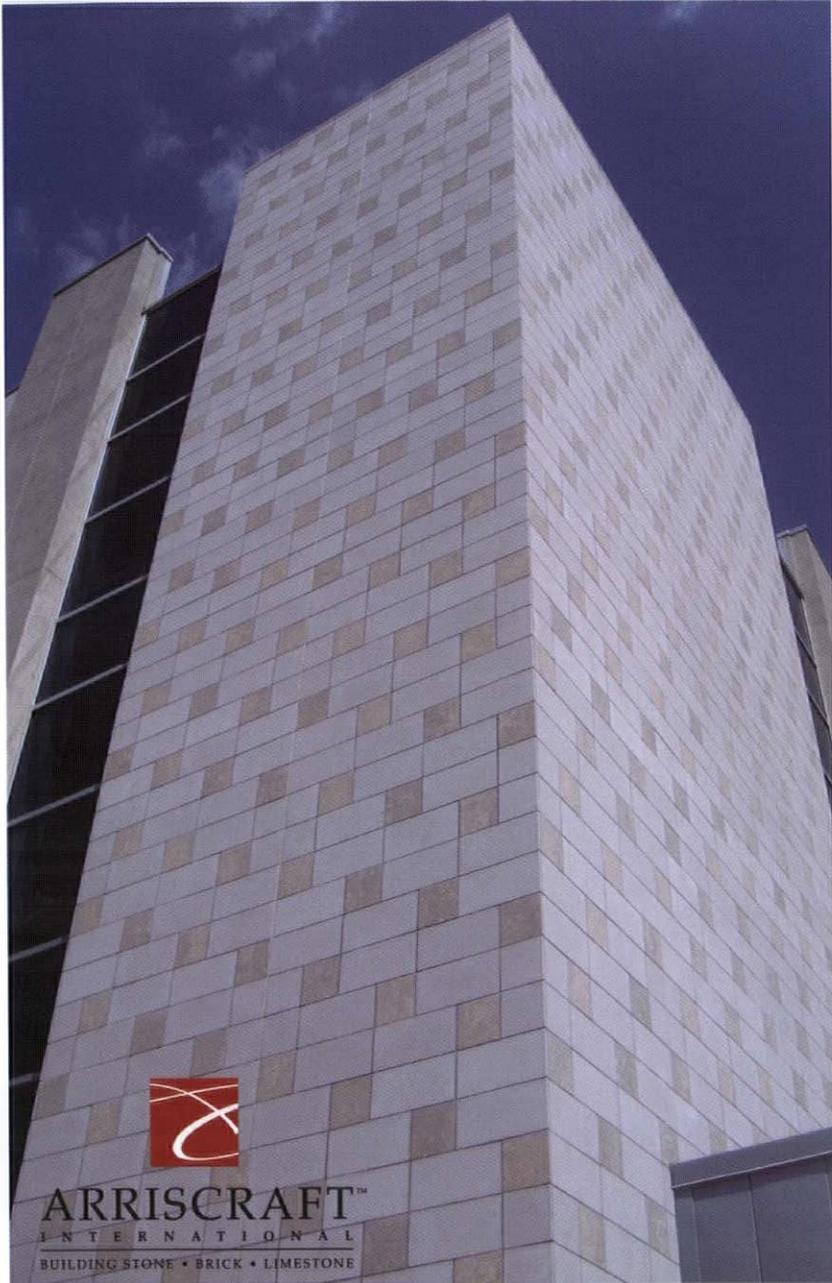
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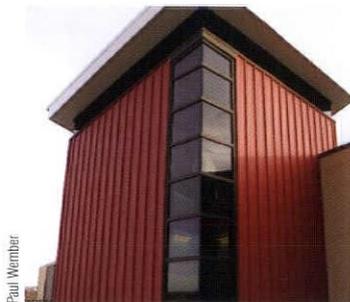
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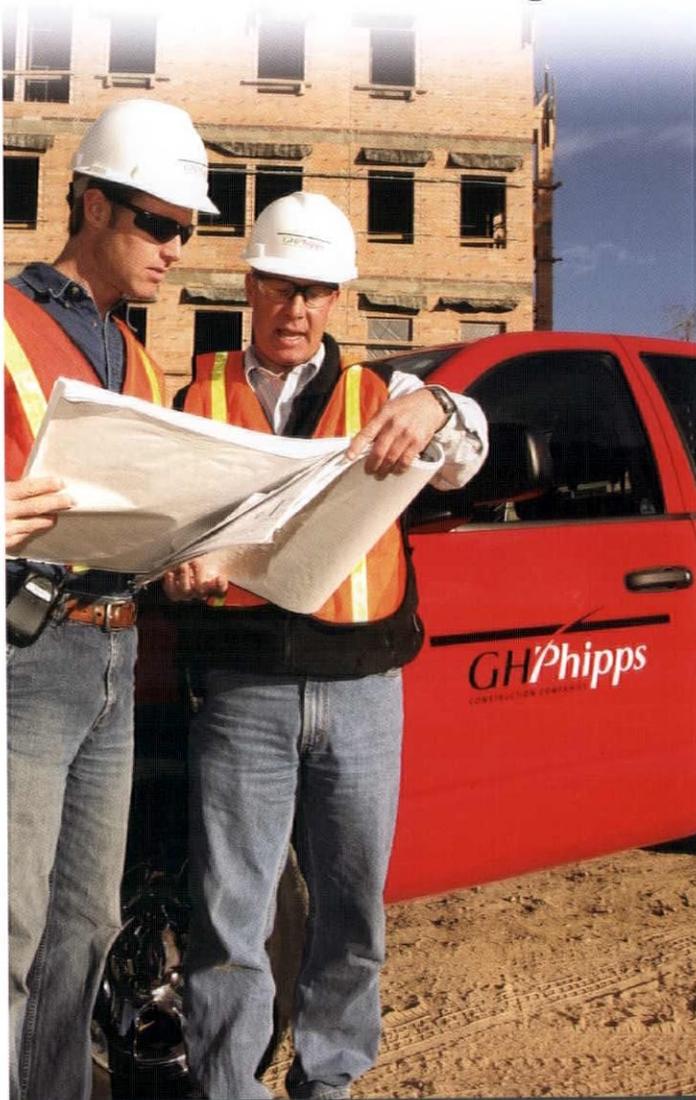


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**AIA Colorado**  
1515 Arapahoe St.  
Ste. 1-110  
Denver, CO 80202  
T 303.446.2266  
F 303.446.0066  
[www.aiacolorado.org](http://www.aiacolorado.org)

**Editorial Staff**

Managing Editor  
Tracey Edwards  
Art Director  
James Colgan  
Publisher  
Dawson Publications, Inc.  
Timonium, MD

**Staff**

Executive Director  
Sonia Riggs  
[sonia@aiacolorado.org](mailto:sonia@aiacolorado.org)  
ext. 117  
Director of Local Chapters  
Heidi Gordon  
[heidi@aiacolorado.org](mailto:heidi@aiacolorado.org)  
ext. 115  
Director of Membership & Development  
Greg Bell  
[greg@aiacolorado.org](mailto:greg@aiacolorado.org)  
ext. 113  
Programs Director  
Robin Hickey  
[robin@aiacolorado.org](mailto:robin@aiacolorado.org)  
ext. 111  
Communication Manager  
Tracey Edwards  
[tracey@aiacolorado.org](mailto:tracey@aiacolorado.org)  
ext. 112  
Administrative Assistant/  
Membership Coordinator  
Emily Ewing  
[emily@aiacolorado.org](mailto:emily@aiacolorado.org)  
ext. 110  
Part-time Administrative  
Assistant/Bookkeeper  
Carmen Jaeger  
[office@aiacolorado.org](mailto:office@aiacolorado.org)  
ext. 114  
Part-time Executive Assistant  
Naomi-Leah Tibaldo  
[naomi@aiacolorado.org](mailto:naomi@aiacolorado.org)

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### Recognitions:

AIA Colorado recognizes **Jennifer Kirshe** as the photographer responsible for the Young Architect Awards Gala photos, which were featured in the summer issue of Architect Colorado's Member News section.

AIA Colorado recognizes **klipp** as the architecture firm responsible for the project, Carbon Valley Regional Library. The project was discussed by Renee Azerbegi, president of Ambient Energy, in the article, The Green Scene, which was featured in the summer issue of Architect Colorado.

The primary mission of Architect Colorado is to inform AIA Colorado members about architectural news, trends and developments occurring throughout the state and about work being done in our region and beyond by our members. The publication also serves as an outreach tool to educate the community about the value of architectural excellence and the contributions of AIA Colorado architects.



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Traditionally, this magazine's commentary largely surrounds Colorado architects and their design issues. In fact, in this issue you will read about the exciting work of several young architects in the state. However, for the purposes of my commentary, I wish to break tradition, yet still remain within the mission statement of our magazine. This letter is to inform all members that the rules regarding licensure renewal in our profession have changed in Colorado.

Earlier this year, Gov. Bill Ritter signed into law Senate Bill 08-029, which established requirements for continuing education that an architect must complete in order to renew his or her license and practice architecture in Colorado. Colorado now joins 38 other states that require some form of continuing education for license renewal. The law now is officially in effect and charges the Colorado State Board of Licensure for Architects, Professional Engineers and Professional Land Surveyors (AES) with developing and adopting the rules by Dec. 31, 2008. These rules will define the appropriate educational programs and activities that will be accepted as continuing education. Fellow AIA Colorado members and I have been active participants at the decision-making table, assisting the representatives from the licensure board in drafting the new rules. Continuing education requirements will affect us all at the upcoming renewal cycle date of July 31, 2009. At that time and only for the first cycle, we will be required to have completed four hours of continuing education in health, safety and welfare (HSW) subjects. Future renewal cycles will require 16 HSW Professional Development Units (PDU), which is similar to the eight HSW PDUs per year requirement of AIA.

Be aware that although Colorado's rules and requirements were modeled closely with those of AIA, there is a difference. To summarize, the same classes and seminars that currently are accepted and meet AIA HSW requirements also will meet the state's requirements. The difference is that for those programs that do not include a quiz or test, the architect will need to complete a self-reflection report or form, which will be provided by the state licensing board. AIA Colorado is currently working with the state licensing board to determine what this form (or report) will incorporate and will make this process as simple as possible for our members.

These rule changes have a direct impact on our licensure requirements and the architectural profession; I encourage all members to visit the state Web site at [www.dora.state.co.us](http://www.dora.state.co.us) and review the newly adopted rules.

*Note: If you have received information from continuing education providers or from AIA National that contradicts this information and need clarification, please contact the AIA Colorado office at 303.446.2266.*

Sincerely,  
Chris Stumm, AIA  
AIA Colorado 2008 President

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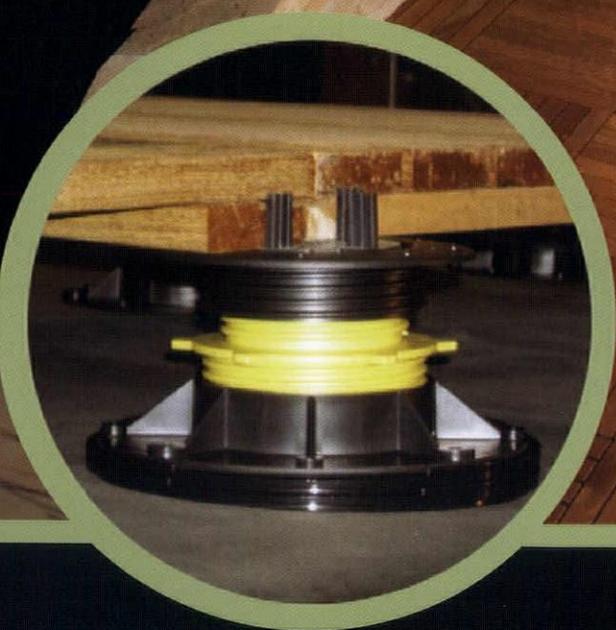
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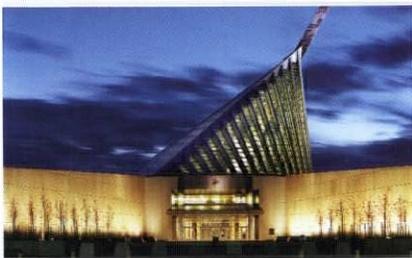
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From left to right: Ghantoot Development Master Plan, Lu'Luat Al Raha Master Plan, Al Ghadeer Master Plan and below, Shams Abu Dhabi

All renderings courtesy of RNL



Four major project developments planned and designed by **RNL** in the United Arab Emirates region were showcased at the Cityscape Abu Dhabi 2008 event at the ABU Dhabi National Exhibition Center (ADNEC) in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. RNL's showcased projects included the Ghantoot Development Master Plan, the Lu'Luat Al Raha Master Plan, Al Ghadeer Master Plan and Shams Abu Dhabi. RNL also received two awards at the 2008 International Interior Design Association's (IIDA) awards, Southwest Chapter design competition. The University Physicians Healthcare (UPH) project won in the Creativity on a Budget category and the East Valley Bus Operations and Maintenance Facility was recognized with a merit award in the Environmental Design category.



James P. Scholz

**Fentress Architects** was awarded two American Architecture Awards for the Colorado Convention Center Expansion and the National Museum of the Marine Corps. Established more than 10 years ago, the awards recognize "the most significant new contempo-



James P. Scholz

rary architecture, landscape architecture, interiors and urban planning" by the "most renowned American and international firms practicing in the United States." The awarding body is comprised of Chicago Athenaeum:

Museum of Architecture and Design, the European Centre for Architecture Art Design and Urban Studies in Dublin, and the Metropolitan Arts Press, Ltd.



Michael Spillers



Michael Spillers

The National Terrazzo & Mosaic Association (NTMA) honored the Kansas City International Airport – Consolidated Rental Car and Customer Service Building as Job of the Year at its 2008 Honor Awards, recognizing excellence in terrazzo installations. **Coover-Clark & Associates Inc.** led the architectural and interior design efforts on this facility, including the award-winning terrazzo floor design. The terrazzo incorporated traditional cement and marble chips along with recycled glass and a polished finish.

**Stephen K. Loos, AIA**, has been elected to a two-year term as secretary of AIA National, beginning in December 2008. Loos, a senior design architect for The Mulhern Group Ltd., was president of AIA Colorado in 2000 and AIA Colorado North in 1998. He served as secretary to the AIA Western Mountain Region Council (WMR) in 2004 and is a regional director of the AIA WMR.

**Gerhard J. Petri, AIA**, of **SLATER-PAULL Architects**, received a State Honor Award from Colorado Preservation Inc. The award honored Petri for making a significant contribution in preserving Colorado's built history.

**GE Johnson Construction Co., PA**, received a Business for the Arts Award in the category of Philanthropy for its contribution to the renovation of the Colorado Springs Fine Arts Center, which was designed by David Owen Tryba, FAIA, Tryba Architects.

**Alexander Thome, AIA**, senior associate and project manager with **Fentress Architects**, has been appointed as the southwest region chair of the AIA Committee on the Environment (COTE). He will coordinate the committee's efforts within the five-state area and be a liaison among the national, state and local chapters.



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# AIA Colorado Young Architect of the Year Joe Colistra, AIA, Empowers People through Architecture

By Karen Nitkin



Eric Bakken

Joe Colistra, AIA, co-founder of in situ DESIGN, was named the AIA Colorado 2008 Young Architect of the Year.

Joe Colistra, AIA, named the AIA Colorado 2008 Young Architect of the Year, is definitely a “Joe”, not a “Joseph.” Despite all his accomplishments, the more formal moniker just does not suit him.

“Joe is probably the nicest, most easy going guy that I could possibly imagine,” said David Carnicelli, AIA, who co-founded and runs in situ DESIGN with Colistra.

Colistra, 38, grew up in Harrisburg, Pa., and knew from an early age that he wanted to be an architect. He earned a Bachelor of Environmental Design from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, then traveled even further west to Denver, enrolling at the University of Colorado Denver (UCD) where he earned a Master of Architecture.

In 1992, when he arrived in Colorado to attend graduate school, he knew he had found his permanent home, falling in love with the spaces and light of Colorado. “The light in Denver is so amazing,” enthused Colistra. “It really changes throughout the day.” Colistra believed he could thrive both personally and professionally. “The East Coast seems so dense compared to the West, which has so much openness,” he said. “There seems to be more opportunity in the West to do urbanity in a smart way, whereas on the East Coast, so much is already developed.”

He worked at David Owen Tryba Architects (now Tryba Architects) from 1994 to 1995 and at Christopher Carvell Architects from 1995 to 2002. While at Christopher Carvell Architects, the Champa Terrace Townhomes project presented itself. The project, located in a historic Denver neighborhood, prompted Colistra and Carnicelli, who was also working at Christopher Carvell Architects in 2001, to leave their employer and set out on their own. They created in situ DESIGN in 2002.

“It’s a great story of neighborhood empowerment, where 23 neighbors all put their homes up for collateral to close on the construction loan,” Colistra explained.

Cathy Bellem, AIA, in situ DESIGN and wife of Carnicelli, said the idea for building the Champa Terrace Townhomes originally began when neighbors — including herself and her husband — learned of plans for a much denser project on the site, which sits in an older neighborhood of single-family homes. An apartment building with 16 units was planned, and it would have dominated the neighborhood, she said.

“We found out someone was looking to develop it and max it out,” she said of the small piece of property. “We gathered together a few neighbors and bought the land.” The stake-holders then worked to create a townhome

project in keeping with the scale and character of their established Denver neighborhood.

The Champa Terrace townhomes were the first example of that kind of community empowerment. The four units sold quickly, providing a nice financial return for the neighbors who had invested, Colistra said. In fact, they saw a 65 percent return on their investment, while also enjoying improved property values in their neighborhood.

In short order, the neighbors, now numbering 40, rolled their profits into a second project, called Merchants Row, Colistra explained.

That project, a row of attached town homes in the historic Curtis Park neighborhood in Denver, was more ambitious, with a price tag of \$2.5 million. The homes all have what the firm calls a “modern interpretation of an historic bay.” Their three-story curtain walls, made of both frosted and clear glass, let in the splendid Denver light and provide views down the Champa Street corridor and into downtown.

The townhomes, ranging in size from 1,700 square feet to 2,200 square feet, encourage a feeling of community and a connection with the outdoors thanks to raised stoops facing the street, perfect for sitting and chatting on warm nights, as well as large terraces and balconies.

“We knew that the market would demand something more contemporary,” Colistra said. But the key to both projects is that they empowered a community to take charge of its identity and set its own course.

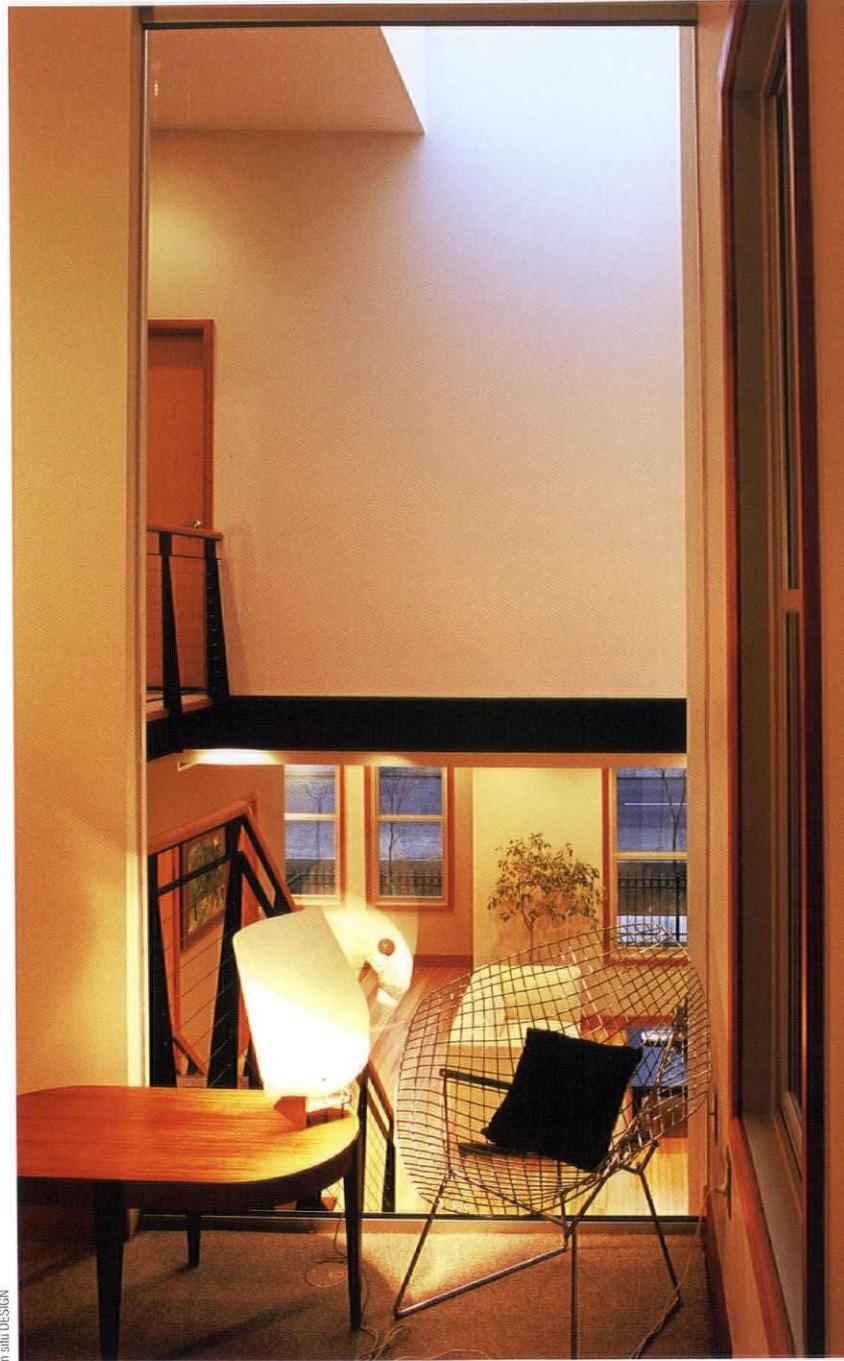
Though in situ DESIGN started with just the two partners, in the past few years it has grown to have nine architects. Yet as it has grown, the firm has worked to find a balance between higher-end works and more public-minded projects. The ties that bind them all are light and empowerment.

Colistra is not afraid to use design to create changes that actually provide opportunities for people.

“At its core, I think everyone here realizes that architecture can empower people,” said Colistra of the partners and employees in his firm. “Trying to think beyond the program is something we try to do really well. I’d say we try to do it with a certain amount of deliberateness.”

For one project, a gathering place for day laborers called El Centro Humanitario, “We’ve got what we’re calling a data card center,” he said, “where immigrants are able to transfer money back to Mexico.”

The firm also is involved in creating a school in a rural community outside of Johannesburg, South Africa. The project, in conjunction with UCD, is



in situ DESIGN

The four-townhome Champa Terrace Project, which empowered residents to buy shares in the project, was the catalyst for the creation of in situ DESIGN.



providing education for children who have lost one or both parents to AIDS, who have never driven a car and, in many cases, have never eaten meat, Colistra said.

A key element of the project is that it will have an entrepreneurial aspect literally built right in. "We're developing a micro-business center that will help them be self-sustaining," Colistra said. This includes a brick-manufacturing plant on the premises and a bakery where students can make cookies that are sold to local grocers and provide a source of income.

The idea for the project came from the Shaka Franklin Foundation, a nonprofit organization in Denver devoted to improving the lives of young people. "I think they found out about us because we do a lot of affordable housing," said Colistra. "It seemed to be right up our alley."

Colistra and his firm also are involved with renovating a homeless shelter for veterans. The renovated facility will provide transitional housing for 14 male veterans who have successfully completed a detoxification program. Elements include cubicles with wood shelving and translucent panels, designed to balance the client need for privacy with the center's ability to monitor residents in need of particular attention.

The firm also is currently working on two higher-end projects that display Colistra's love of Denver light and his ability to create structures that look to the future while still remaining rooted in the present and past. One is Komorebi, a mixed-use tower that will have underground parking, ground-floor

retail stores, a second-floor pool and spa area, and seven stories of condominiums above that. [See page 62 for more details]

Also in the works is Trellis, an 11-unit townhome project at the edge of the Curtis Park neighborhood. With this project, said Colistra, "we're exploring the notions of solidity."

The interior will contain frosted glass floors, "so it looks like you're walking on gray glass," Colistra said. And instead of windows, the market-rate housing development has a "really exciting cladding system" with glass-fiber-reinforced-concrete panels that will contain a computer-generated pattern that pays homage to hand-carving on many of the neighborhood's older structures.

The enormous bay windows on the Merchants Row townhomes are frosted and clear, to let in light while also affording privacy to residents.

Frank Ooms Photography



in situ DESIGN

Left: As with many of Colistra's designs, the 11-unit Trellis townhomes are very much about letting in as much Denver light as possible. The facade will be constructed of glass-fiber-reinforced-concrete panels that will contain a computer-generated pattern.

"It blends with the neighborhood and at the same time it is part of a new century, a new time," Colistra said.

In addition to his work with the firm, Colistra has been teaching at UCD's College of Architecture and Planning since 1999 and is currently a senior instructor.

Mark Gelernter, Assoc. AIA, dean of the College of Architecture and Planning, said Colistra is heavily involved with promoting a higher awareness of urban design in Denver, as the city undergoes rapid growth and change. "We still don't have a lot of people understanding what it means to be a city," he said.

Gelernter also praised Colistra for infusing his projects, both large and small, with social conscience. "It's of great value to our College of Architecture and Planning to have Joe teaching with us because he's a very talented designer, and he applies those talents to socially significant issues and that's one of the key values of this college."

"His core values are absolutely at the center of what this college is about, and we're just thrilled to have him teaching here on our faculty," continued Gelernter.

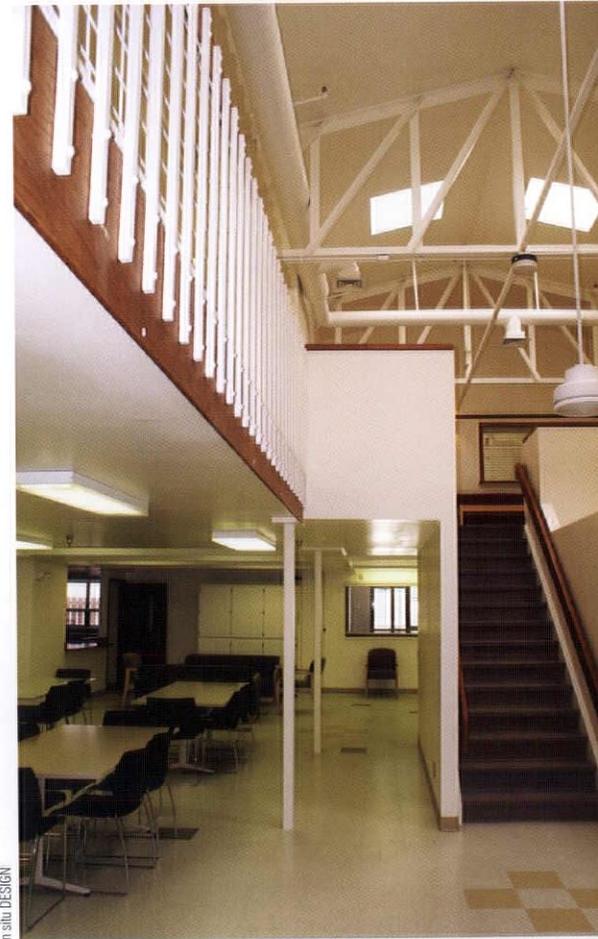
For Colistra, who was Instructor of the Year in 2005, teaching is an "incredibly rewarding" way to nurture the next generation of world-changing architects. "There is such an energy that comes from the students," he said.

He also likes that students come from all over the world. "Last year, I had a studio with students in one class from Argentina, Venezuela, China, Vietnam and Japan as well as from all over the United States," he said.

As he looks at his firm's progress, Colistra likes the way it balances past and the future, large projects and small ones, light and shadow, public service and private development.

Yet for all his ambition, Colistra to many people is still just "Joe." "Joe is great," said Bellem. "He is a really, really great guy. He's one of those easy-going, really easy to talk to, laid back friendly kind of people who immediately puts everyone at ease." ■

Below: Colistra's firm helped convert a vacant church in Denver into this Women's Safe Haven Project, a shelter large enough to house 25 women in separate bedrooms.



in situ DESIGN

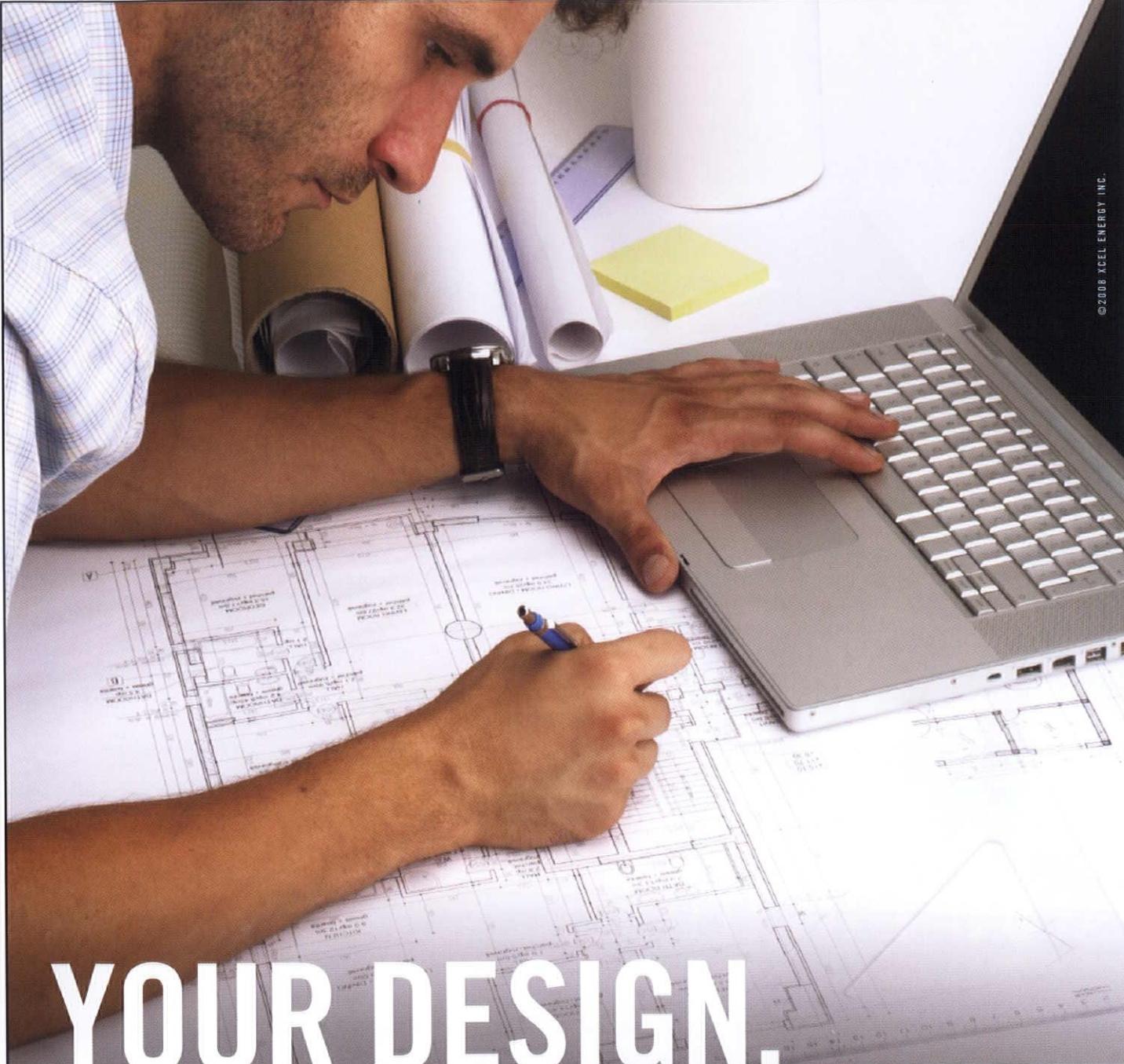
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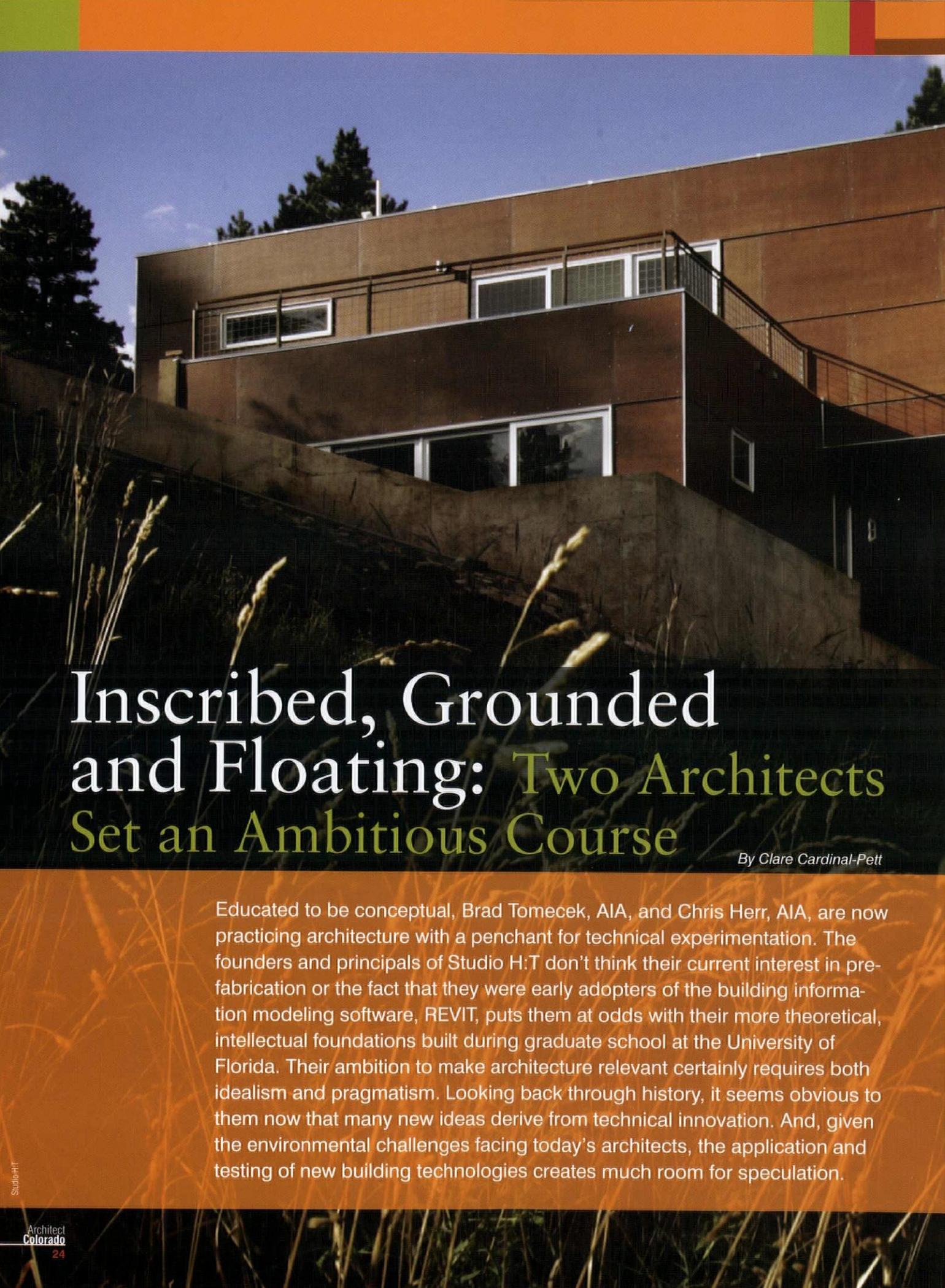
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# Inscribed, Grounded and Floating: Two Architects Set an Ambitious Course

*By Clare Cardinal-Pett*

Educated to be conceptual, Brad Tomecek, AIA, and Chris Herr, AIA, are now practicing architecture with a penchant for technical experimentation. The founders and principals of Studio H:T don't think their current interest in pre-fabrication or the fact that they were early adopters of the building information modeling software, REVIT, puts them at odds with their more theoretical, intellectual foundations built during graduate school at the University of Florida. Their ambition to make architecture relevant certainly requires both idealism and pragmatism. Looking back through history, it seems obvious to them now that many new ideas derive from technical innovation. And, given the environmental challenges facing today's architects, the application and testing of new building technologies creates much room for speculation.





Studio H:T



Studio H:T

Top: The 32nd Street House is an urban infill project.

Above: The 32nd Street House arrived in two prefabricated pieces.

The Colorado natives met each other in Florida and, after separate internship experiences at firms in Florida and Colorado, found themselves looking for new opportunities at the same time. They decided to join forces.

“We were always the last two people in school talking about architecture at the end of the day,” says Tomecek. “We were both very passionate about it. It’s still that way today; we can talk about it, the never-ending exploration of what if.”

“In school we had a design chemistry, and we would just talk about one another’s projects,” adds Herr. “We found that this translated into the studio environment as well, that we wind up in a good place faster when we work together. It’s an effect that happens where we just ping ideas off of each other and wind up someplace neither of us really expected, but it’s a place that seems to yield good stuff architecturally.”

They set up Studio H:T in Boulder, Colo., in 2002. The firm now has a staff of five and quite a number of completed projects. Their portfolio includes a range of building types, but residential projects constitute the bulk of their most innovative work.

It is common for young architects to use the houses of relatives as experimental vehicles. In this case, the two architects’ own houses served as

case studies for some of Studio H:T's notions about site, spatial composition and green building. They describe the two houses—Herr's built first in 2005 and then Tomecek's built in 2008—as research efforts. Indeed, design research seems critical to the studio's philosophical evolution.

Herr's house, an idea that had been discussed during graduate school, was Studio H:T's first major project. The steep site suggested the house's concept and its primary tectonic strategy. The two notions work together to inscribe, ground and float the dwelling free of its environmental challenges.

"The house becomes a dialog about grounding and floating. You have these very heavy pieces that take the shape of concrete stairs and the house being actually dug into the hill, which gives the sense of being grounded. Then the top of the box, the studio and the master up above, those are floating boxes," says Tomecek.

A ribbon of concrete defines and retains the domesticated landscape. Two layers of boxes built of structured insulated panels (SIPs) sit first within the leveled ground and then above it all to open views towards Denver from the master bedroom. The house is an idea about site and spatial composition. Its materialization offered the young firm a chance to experiment. Herr lives in the "laboratory" with his wife and daughter.

Brad Tomecek's house, recently completed on 32nd Street in Boulder, is the firm's next generation case study in prefabrication. This project was manufactured just outside Denver and delivered as whole boxes to its urban setting.

"We had always talked about modular construction, but when my wife and I bought a lot in Highland [Boulder] that was 25 feet by 125 feet, it became apparent, given how narrow the lot was and what we were trying to do there, that it would lend itself to modular construction. So it was something that we were always going to try, although I didn't realize it would be on my own house," says Tomecek.

The house on 32nd Street is the first LEED-certified prefabricated house in the United States and shares the Box House compositional approach, but this time the house construction literally mirrors its abstract diagram. This pair of experimental houses shows how quickly the firm's technical interests have evolved and also how flexible their basic compositional ideas are: Tomecek's house is clearly a "town" house, Herr's a country villa.

Studio H:T now is working on a house for a narrow site in Boulder's Flatirons area. The construction technology for this project is a prefabricated panelized system that will be shipped from its German manufacturer as completed wall segments that include windows, some with a scratch coat of stucco. The factory also will supply some other components such as the kitchen cabinets. While the firm's sophisticated computer skills allow them to work long distance with a certain degree of confidence that everyone, everywhere is on the same page, there have been a few trips to the factory in Germany.

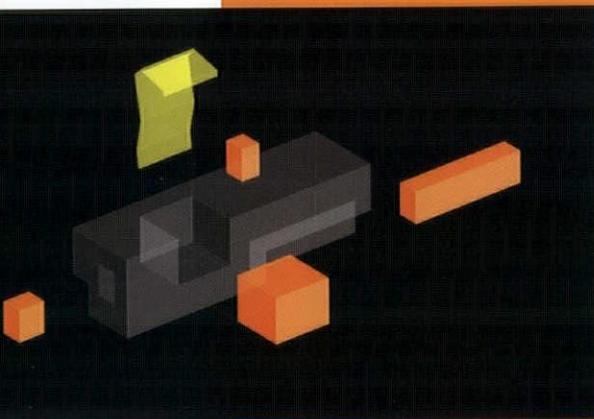
"The house becomes a dialog about grounding and floating. You have these very heavy pieces that take the shape of concrete stairs and the house being actually dug into the hill, which gives the sense of being grounded. Then the top of the box, the studio and the master up above, those are floating boxes." *Brad Tomecek, AIA*



The Inside-Outside House will be prefabricated in Germany.



Studio H:T



Studio H:T

Top: A study model for the Bonsai House explored possibilities for the house's folded-vertical-core wall.

Bottom: A diagram of the Bonsai House reveals its concept.

Tomecek and Herr believe strongly that building information modeling (BIM) software is an indispensable tool for contemporary architects. They learned to use REVIT when it first came on the market and think the firm's capacity to use the software's live-linked specifying and cost-estimating features, as well as its modeling and rendering tools, helped garner clients early on. Although they rely on consultants to do energy modeling and life-cycle cost estimating, they are looking forward to bringing some of those skills in-house with the next generation of BIM tools.

"BIM is just the way the computer should interact with architecture," says Herr. "I think we're just at the beginning of that whole unfolding. Right now BIM is solving a lot of the issues that existed in the whole two-dimensional drafting world, but it's by no means reached its full potential as far as integration with energy analysis and daylight analysis and acoustics analysis and specification generation. Those things are just starting to happen; they're in their infancy now, but that's probably the next step the whole BIM approach will take."

At the University of Florida, Tomecek and Herr learned to make good use of hand sketching and physical modeling. They cannot imagine a design process that excludes these tools. While they move a massing study quickly to REVIT, their projects always begin on sketch paper or rough foam models. They print out crude REVIT study models and draw over them and then return to the digital format for revisions. They also build large-scale study models for particular details and to explore lighting effects.

For example, they used large-scale study models to develop the innovative core for the award-winning Bonsai House. Built for a client who practices the art of bonsai as a hobby, this house demonstrates another case where Studio H:T used a compositional metaphor to create a platform for technical creativity. The "bon" is a tray into which the "sai" is rooted, from which the house grows. A slatted folded plane rises up from the ground and becomes the roof. The plane reacts to changes in function as it passes through the house core.

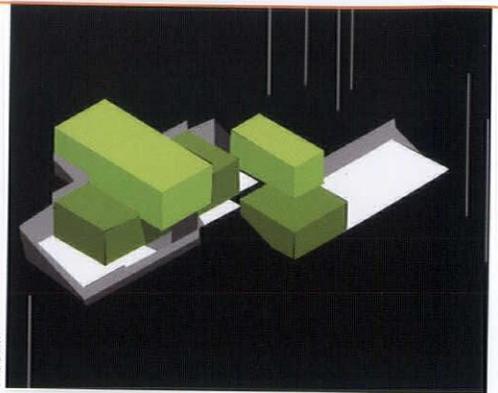
"I was so impressed with how they interviewed me before designing this house," says their client, John Brooks. "Much of the design came from who I am as a person and the things that I like. Growing bonsai is a passion for me. Bonsai means tree and tray, a strong foundation with nature coming out of it." He appreciates how that theme was carried out in the design, the way that the main structural supports and the steel beams interact with each level and the textures and materials the Studio H:T team suggested to highlight those differences.

"They designed the layout of the house as well as the main structural supports and steel beams and their interaction with each level of the house so that they're different, with the textures that they used and the materials they suggested."

Studio H:T approaches its nonresidential projects from a similar philosophical position and using similar design methodologies as they do their houses. Each site is considered unique, each client brings a special conceptual challenge to the table, and each spatial composition is first

grounded and then floats free somehow. Each project looks beyond itself for an opportunity to advance the firm's intellectual and technical capacity. Herr and Tomecek are especially interested in exploring new green technologies that minimize construction waste.

Recently, Studio H:T entered a competition sponsored by AIA Denver to generate designs for Denver recycling kiosks. As they investigated the bigger picture of urban waste management, they discovered that trucking waste from its source to the point of recycling consumes large quantities of petroleum. Their proposal, a citywide waste collection infrastructure, re-thinks the transportation system not the receptacle. The mechanism is a metaphor, an urban peristalsis machine. It remains just a concept, but given a bit of technical research, it might just fly. ■



Studio H:T

Above: A digital diagram explains the Box House spatial concept.

Below: A conceptual proposal for a technical solution to waste recycling in Denver.

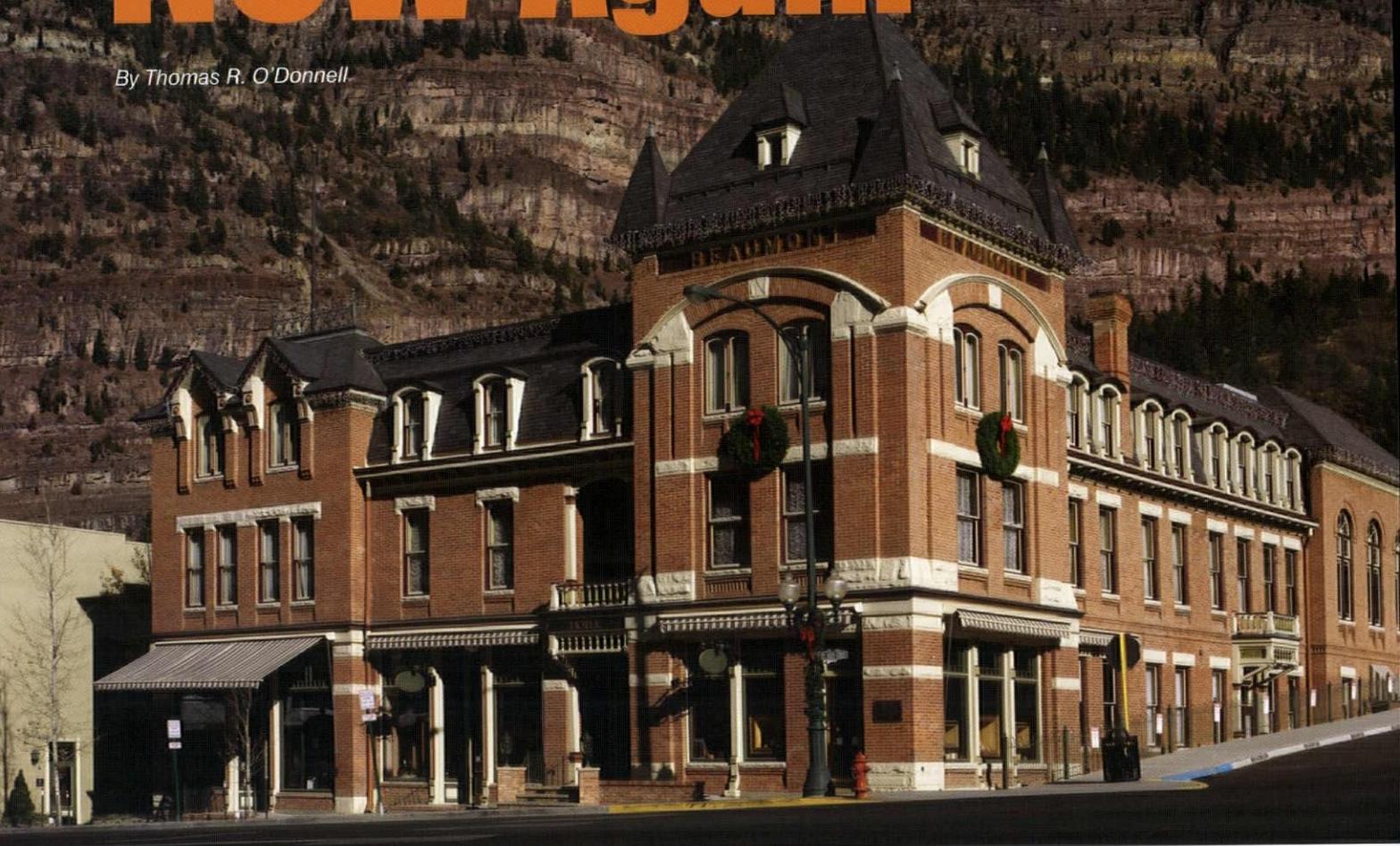


Studio H:T

# Making the Old New Again

Elizabeth Hallas, AIA,  
puts the preservation  
pieces together

By Thomas R. O'Donnell



Ed LaCasse

Above: The Beaumont Hotel had been vacant for decades before owners Mary and Dan King commissioned Andrews & Anderson to transform it into a boutique hotel. The Kings served as their own general contractor and worked out of an adjoining building they had rehabilitated earlier.

For Elizabeth Hallas, AIA, each commission to preserve and rehabilitate an old structure is part treasure hunt and part jigsaw puzzle.

Hallas, a senior associate with Andrews & Anderson Architects PC in Golden, Colo., has gained a reputation for her sensitive updating of Colorado structures dating back from decades from more than a century ago. Although she grew up amid the colonial buildings of Connecticut and spent time at a 1785-vintage New Hampshire farmhouse her father owned, her passion for preservation is rooted in environmental concerns.

“To me, working with an existing building, whether it’s historic, or newer and modern, is the first step in sustainability,” says Hallas, who joined the firm even before earning her Master of Architecture from the University of Colorado Denver (UCD) in 1998.

The first step in recycling a building often is walking through it with clients. That's the treasure hunt.

"When we go into a building with a client, we can point out things they may not have seen," she adds. There are the "ooh and aah" features, like detailed wood trim and millwork, beautifully crafted windows, doors and hardware or classic light fixtures.

"The challenge is weaving the modern needs within those possibilities and creating a building that works," Hallas says. "It's kind of a puzzle. That's what I like best. There are existing constraints, along with new information from whoever has the building." Her job is to fit the pieces together in a package that works financially and physically.

That makes it especially important to work closely with contractors and engineers, Hallas says. With the constraints of a preservation project, "the team needs to keep an open mind on what those are and how to work within those." Sometimes she must educate new contractors, driving home the message that new construction techniques and materials, while faster and less expensive, could harm a building's historical integrity.

Clients generally need less education, Hallas says. By the time they approach an architectural firm, they are usually familiar with the job.

That was the case when owners Mary and Dan King commissioned Hal-

**"We all poured our heart and soul into the building. I'd like to think it shows."**

*Elizabeth Hallas, AIA*

**Below: The Beaumont project included restoring this two-story dining room, complete with overlooking balconies. Hallas often tries to capture the feel of awe-inspiring features like this in her new construction designs.**



Right: To accommodate the needs of modern guests, Hallas combined many of the Beaumont's 40 rooms to add bathrooms and other features, ending with 12 rooms plus a spa and retail space. The design includes the addition of a loft and spiral staircase to this room in the hotel's tower.

“The challenge is weaving the modern needs within those possibilities and creating a building that works. It’s kind of a puzzle. That’s what I like best. There are existing constraints, along with new information from whoever has the building.”

*Elizabeth Hallas, AIA*



Ed LaCasse

las and Andrews & Anderson for the rehabilitation of Ouray’s Beaumont Hotel, which was built in 1886. “This was a legacy project,” Hallas says. “They were committed to doing things right so it would last.”

The building had been empty for 40 years before the Kings bought it in 1998. In a four-year project, the former 40-room hotel was converted to an inn with just 12 rooms, plus two restaurants, a spa and retail space.

The project has won many awards, Dan King says, including the inaugural Preserve America Presidential Award. “I give the firm and Nan [Anderson, AIA, one of the firm’s principals] and Liz a lot of credit for that.”

The awards are nice, Hallas says, but she really treasures the project’s impact on the community.

“We all poured our heart and soul into the building. I’d like to think it shows,” she adds. Even contractors, like the one installing a slate roof projected to last 50 years or more, seemed to have a stake in its long-term success. There were many times, Hallas says, when workers could have made easy patches to unexpected problems they discovered when installing the slates, but they took the time to repair them in a way that would last.

Such surprises often are part of a preservation project, Hallas says, and her firm advises clients to budget for contingencies. “You try to be open, be flexible and realize you’re working with an old building,” she adds.

But there are also good surprises. When workmen started removing the 1970s-vintage wall coverings in the Montrose Elks Club ballroom for conversion into new city council chambers, they found an arched niche. It was used to highlight the city logo.



Ed LaCasse

Above: The preservation project reopened the porch, rebuilt its tile roof and rebuilt the front staircase. A brick wall to the right of the stairs conceals a wheelchair lift.

Virgil Turner, Montrose administrative services director, says plans called for restoring only part of the original woodwork. However, when he and other city officials saw the beauty of the stripped and stained millwork, they agreed to restore woodwork throughout the building.

“Both Elizabeth and the firm brought a passion for historic preservation. They wanted it done right,” Turner says. “They wanted to make this building a showcase for our community. That’s really what we were looking for as well.”

The Elks building received an unusual number of preservation grants, Hallas says. It qualified for a Colorado State Historical Fund award, for a second state grant and for a Save America’s Treasures grant from the National Trust for Historic Preservation. As they have with many other preservation projects, Hallas and her firm helped Montrose officials find and qualify for those grants.



Ed LaCasse



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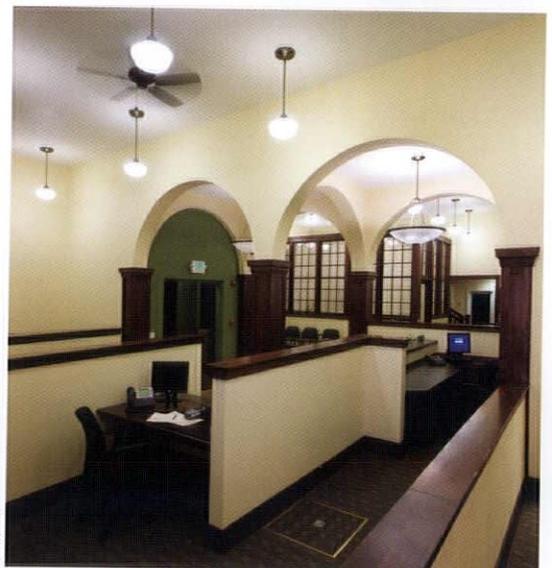
Ed LaCasse

Seeking preservation grants is part of a process that begins with analyzing or assessing the building’s integrity and characteristics. Hallas consults with mechanical, electrical and structural engineers and others to estimate cost.

Then, the client must decide: Is it worth the price to preserve the building? It is up to them, Hallas says, but she’d rather error on the side of trying because of the embodied energy, the materials, fuel, money and human effort that went into a building. When it is demolished, that energy is lost and must be replaced.

“My firm and I do 50 percent preservation and 50 percent new construction,” Hallas says. “We take what we learn in the preservation side — the tried and true methods — and apply it to new construction.” That includes practical things like designing for natural ventilation as well as stylistic details, like elaborate woodwork and high ceilings that make old buildings awe-inspiring. Hallas does not necessarily replicate those details in new designs, but tries to give occupants the same feeling of amazement.

While Hallas likes the balance of new construction and preservation work, she clearly loves preserving — really conserving — older structures. “It’s where sustainability is going,” she adds. “I’m glad a lot of people are getting on board. I’ve been on board my whole career.” ■



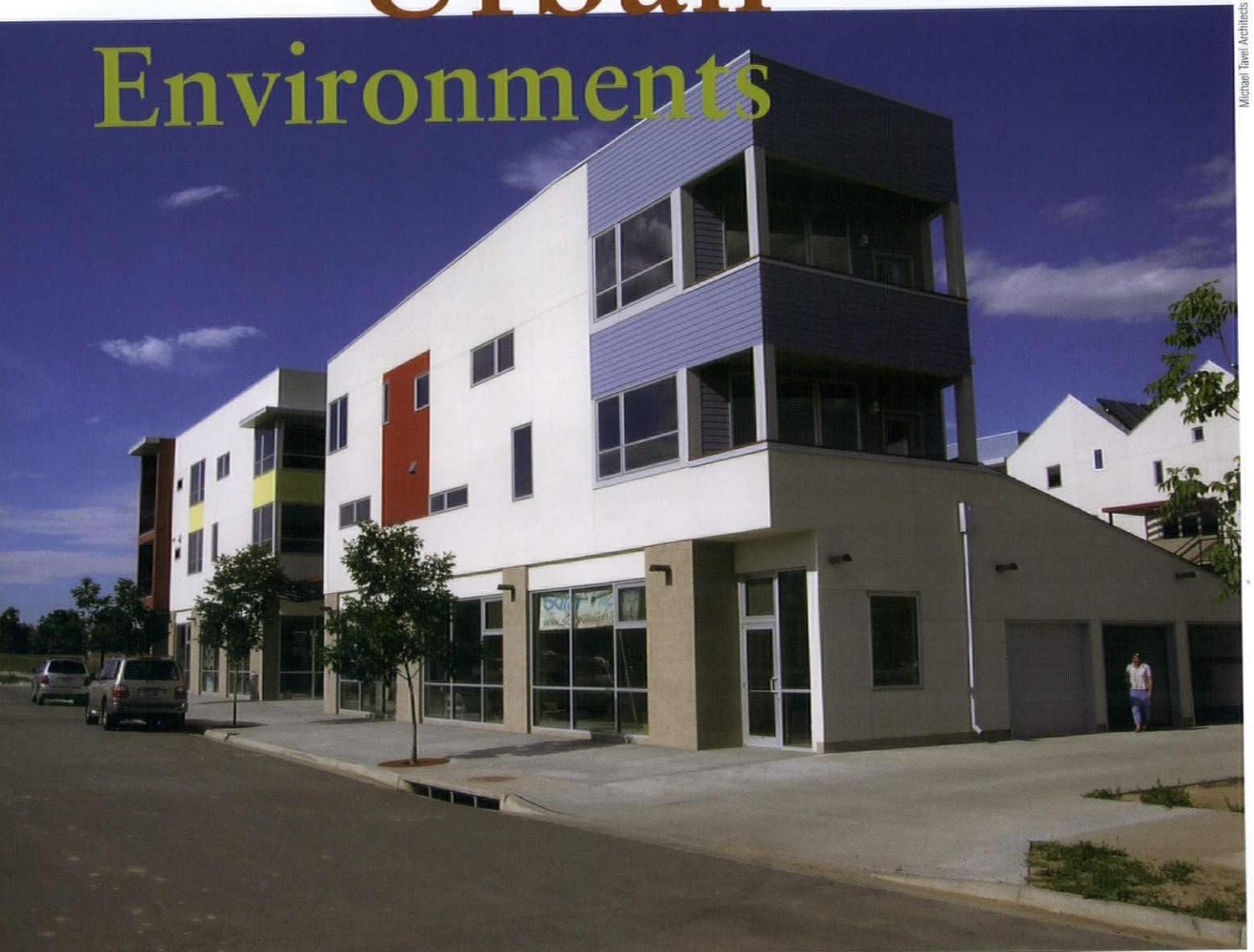
Ed LaCasse

Workers removing wall coverings dating from the 1970s discovered a plaster alcove in the former Montrose Elks Club ballroom. Hallas incorporated the new feature into the design by highlighting the city’s logo behind city council members’ desks. Workers also stripped and refinished woodwork.

# Promoting Sustainable Urban Environments

Green Design and New Urbanism Join Forces in the Work of Michael Tavel, AIA

By Mary Lou Jay



Michael Tavel Architects

Above: Solar Village Prospect is organized as a south-facing "U," to open the residences and courtyard to the winter sun.

The principles of sustainable urbanism infuse the work of Michael Tavel, AIA, of Michael Tavel Architects in Denver. His designs focus not only on the mixed-use streetscapes of new urbanism, but also on non-fossil fuel energy sources and land management concepts that minimize environmental impacts.

Tavel's path to this design philosophy began with an early interest in politics, geography, fine art and folk art. He completed two undergraduate degrees at the University of Toledo in Ohio, studying fine arts, structural engineering, philosophy and social sciences. After a year as an architectural intern in New York City, he studied at the University of California at Berkeley, where he earned a master's degree in architecture in 1989. He also won an architectural design prize that included a one-year traveling fellowship, which he used to visit cities in Europe, South America and the Middle East.

"I became fascinated with the layout of cities and how they relate to topography and drainage and the historical timelines of their development over time," Tavel says. He was traveling in Europe when the Berlin Wall fell and saw firsthand the problems the cities faced after 45 years behind the Iron Curtain. "It was fascinating, and on a humanitarian level, it just seemed like there was work to be done there on the urban environment and on planning issues. I wanted to get involved."

That opportunity came a few years later when he was teaching at the graduate school of the University of Colorado's (Denver) College of Architecture and Planning. With David Kahn, a landscape architect, Tavel began a summer study abroad in Prague, Czech Republic. Focused on town planning, the program enabled UCD and international students to tackle "grave and huge" challenges, Tavel says. "The students found it exhilarating that their work could be on so many different scales and be charged with so many politicized issues. They understood finally the great importance of their professional work."

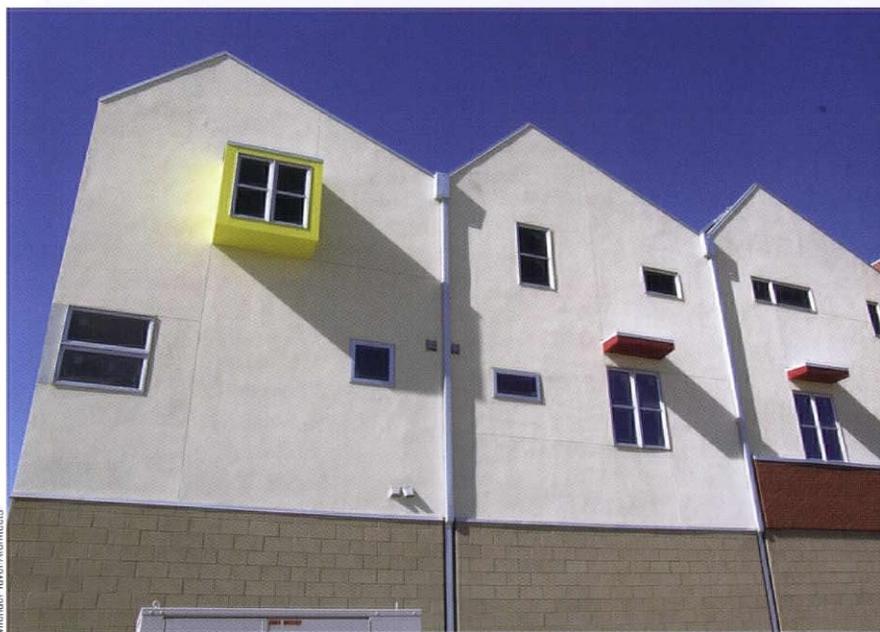
### International influences

Tavel understands first hand the importance of such experiences. During and after graduate school, he worked with three internationally renowned architects whose influence has helped shape his career. "Christopher Alexander introduced me to the pre-industrial, folk art approach to architecture, art and urbanism. His approach was to try to find a way to understand the pre-industrial sensibilities behind creating and designing things," Tavel says.

"Mark Mack taught me to love pre-World War II European modern architecture, which was at a scale of traditional cities rather than skyscrapers. He also taught me to appreciate casual idiosyncrasy in newly designed buildings," Tavel says. From Heinz Tesar, a Viennese architect, "I learned the perspective of being a poet and an artist. Tesar's approach is to make things that are mysterious and peculiar and hard to understand, and that really stimulate the curiosity and the imagination of the inhabitants of the city."



Michael Tavel Architects



Michael Tavel Architects

Top: Solar Village Prospect marks the entrance to Prospect New Town.

Above: Solar-thermal panels led to a serrated roofline at Solar Village Prospect.

From 1992 through 1999, Tavel continued to teach (full-and part-time) at UCD, then concentrated on building his professional portfolio. "At Hoover Berg Desmond, I worked for George Hoover, FAIA, on a project to design a passively cooled university complex in Tucson, Ariz. That introduced me to combining sustainable design typologies with a large urban complex," Tavel says. He later was employed at Wolff Lyon in Boulder, Colo., known for its urbanist projects.

### Building sustainable communities

Tavel opened his own firm in 2003, when former co-worker Alex Platt hired him to design Solar Village Prospect in Longmont, Colo. The building includes 16 residential units and four commercial units oriented around a courtyard. "The project married the mixed use of a building with an understanding of solar design and design for this climate," Tavel says. "It optimizes urban density with solar orientation. It has both a very serious,

slightly edgy urban facade that's rigorous and sober, yet on the other side, the project becomes more casual and idiosyncratic."

"We were trying to create a small village within the building itself. Michael was able to bring the details and the scaling that enabled it to be a very successful village by arranging the units so that they related to public spaces. This created opportunities for people to interact and created relationships between the residential and the commercial," says Platt.

The Solar Village project was completed in 2006. Around the same time,

Tavel began working on the Geos project in the city of Arvada, Colo. It is the largest net-zero energy, urban mixed-use neighborhood in the United States.

"David Kahn, whom I had known for several years, told me about the work that he and Michael Tavel did in the Czech Republic. So when I conceived the idea of building Geos, I felt it was a natural that we would bring in Michael Tavel. He is the kind of architect whom I needed, a forward-looking talent who encompasses all the facets of architecture from land-use planning and urban design to managing complex projects, and designing beautiful and sustainable urban buildings," says Norbert Klebl, the Geos developer.

As a community that sustains itself on the land without requiring outside fossil fuels, Geos was a new concept that required a shift of paradigms, Klebl says. His project team worked with city officials not only to convince them that the idea was viable, but also to create a new land-use code that would make it possible. Tavel assisted in writing that code and in helping to persuade city planners to become partners in the endeavor, Klebl adds.

Tavel and Kahn have worked closely together on every aspect of Geos. "The most exciting challenge was optimizing solar orientation with urban



Michael Tavel Architects

Above: Stormwater management is integrated in linear parks and in tree lawns throughout Geos. Here a green cuts through a city block.

density,” says Tavel. “That involved different creative ideas about how you conceive of building types so they add up to urban neighborhoods of a certain density with a pedestrian-friendly environment and also have optimal solar orientation.” The pair developed a checkerboard layout for one section of the community, offsetting buildings so that some homes are at the street line and others are at the alley.

“The second problem was integrating stormwater management into the entire layout of the neighborhood so that instead of just having a detention area, you’re using snow melt and runoff to water the landscape all over the neighborhood all the time, mimicking a natural system,” Tavel continues.

The Geos community will eventually encompass townhomes, condominiums, ground-level shops and live-work home offices. Although construction begins this fall, Tavel and the rest of the Geos project team have already garnered several awards for its design, including AIA Denver 2006 Honor and Sustainability Awards as well as AIA Colorado 2006 Citation Award.

Tavel, meanwhile, continues to advocate for sustainable urbanism through volunteer work on planning issues in his community. “I believe in influencing my fellow voters to look positively on urban change and density and transit-oriented development,” he says. “I think the U.S. is growing up and out of necessity needs to become more urban and more dense. That will also be the direction where more of the work of architecture is going.”

“Michael is very passionate about architecture,” Platt adds. “He’s very optimistic about humanity and architecture and the ability of architecture to affect communities.” ■



Michael Tavel Architects

Above: Live-work townhomes front on the main street of Geos. The homes are extra wide to improve passive solar orientation.

Below: Single-family homes at Geos are spaced in a checkerboard pattern with alley houses in between to permit passive solar access.



Michael Tavel Architects



Douglas Wilson Companies

# A Client's Architect

**Jesse Adkins, AIA, takes his professional honors in stride as he builds one good building after another.**

*By Kelly Roberson*

It's a professional pedigree that would make many architects proud: Master's degree at age 26. Principal and managing partner of his own firm by 33. AIA Colorado Young Architect of the Year by age 38. For Jesse Adkins, AIA, it is a heady list of accomplishments. Indeed, his work and the work of his firm, ShearsAdkins, are changing the urban fabric of metropolitan centers across the globe, from San Diego to Dubai of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

**A**dkins is quick to deflect praise, and that may be one of the reasons for his success. His design premise, client responsiveness and firm management style hews to some simple concepts: Center a firm on building great cities to live and interact in. Know when to lead and when to follow and have the judgment to know the difference. Don't get consumed by what others think or do, and build longevity through client relationships, which are key to good buildings. "I've never regretted any choice I've made," says Adkins.

## **In Search of the Net**

Adkins the architect is a happy accident; he went to school to design airplanes, not buildings. "I happened to fall into it, luckily, and it happens to mirror my strengths," he says.

After degrees at the University of Nebraska and the University of Michigan, Adkins literally threw a dart and ended up in Denver. That was in 1994, just as the economy was hitting low tide. Richard L. von Lührte, FAIA, and president of RNL, was one member of the architectural community who saw Adkins' promise. "I am an alumni of the University of Michigan, and another alumni recommended we interview him," says von Lührte. "It was clear that he was an excellent designer, and I liked his outspoken boldness."

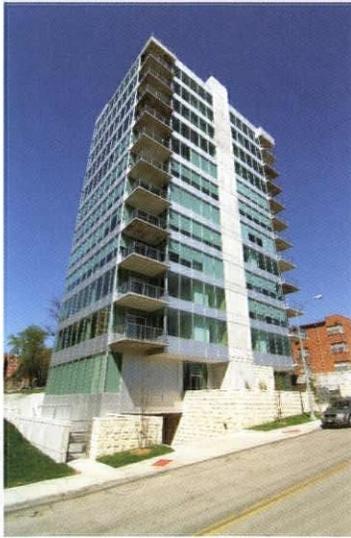
Adkins worked in several firms until 2001, when up came the opportunity to join Chris Shears, AIA, in a firm. He pondered it for six months, think-



KC Photos

Above: ShearsAdkins has completed two residential mixed-use projects near the ballpark in downtown San Diego.

Opposite page: The Mark is a mix-use-high-rise development in downtown San Diego.



The Weitz Company

ing through the implications for his family—his first son had just been born—and the economy—it was post 9/11. “I had to ask myself a simple question: If it had been something I always wanted to do, why be afraid of what you want to do?” he says. “I wasn’t going to worry about the success and failure as much as I was going to give it a shot.”

Adkins collects quotes and one that still resonates today—“Leap and the net will appear”—seems to run through the trajectory of his career, as business has ebbed and flowed with worldwide events and the global economy. Part of that is the uniqueness of his current collaboration. Shears is 20 years his senior, but the partnership is on very equal footing, with each one contributing what is his strong suit. “When my previous partner retired, I had two options. The first was become a partner in another firm, but I felt that would be too easy, too predictable, that I wouldn’t draw or build models,” says Shears.



Arnold Imaging

Top: 46 Broadway, a residential loft building in Kansas City, Mo.

Bottom: 46 Broadway intentionally distinguishes itself from the thematic character of the adjacent County Club District.

The other choice? Find someone younger and talented, who would hold the same design objectives and standards. Shears and Adkins had worked together before on projects. In the beginning, Shears focused on developing the work, and Adkins built the practice; together they design the buildings. “We complement each other more than either of us recognized when we started,” says Adkins. “We boil it down to a simple premise: We want to be architects, we don’t want to lose connection to the work.”



### Melding Process and Client

The two hit the ground running with an \$85-million high-rise in San Diego, a project that was big and complex and that thrust Adkins into a national presence immediately. The two partners methodically added to the firm, looking for key individuals that added expertise, experience and capability that were complements; today they number 13. “We, too, have a ‘we,’ not an ‘I,’ approach that allowed us to evolve naturally,” says Adkins. “We didn’t try to implement something that was a preconceived notion, but something instead to generate respect and trust and quality.”

The same could be said for how the firm, and Adkins, interacts with its clients: they pride themselves on solid relationships and a team structure. “It comes down to your people skills, being able to relate and understand what a client’s goals are. Ideally, those begin to align with your professional abilities and goals as an architect,” says Adkins. “Without that, I don’t think you can be successful. We really do strive to evolve the nature of architectural practice, where

Above: An unbuilt contemporary residential infill project at Third Avenue and Milwaukee Street in Cherry Creek.

Below: The Parking structure on 15th and Pearl Streets in Boulder was given a coveted Charter Award from the Congress for New Urbanism.



Edi LaCasse

Top: 1400 Wewatta St. occupies a challenging infill site in Lower Downtown Denver. The mixed-use building reinforces the edge of Cherry Creek and Speer Boulevard.

Bottom: 1400 Wewatta St. is a modern building with characteristics sensitive to Lower Downtown Denver.



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the client sees the architect as an asset versus a necessary evil, due to their capability, service and creativity.”

After Adkins left RNL, von Lührte continued to watch him develop. “His work today is stronger, richer and more complex,” he says. “He has always challenged the status quo, and that has been a real positive attribute of his accomplishments in his own practice, where he pushes the envelope in design and process.”

Besides collaboration and client relationships, Adkins finds process crucial, too, and the firm has tuned its process to its own particular skill sets and strengths. “Most firms follow a similar process of design from programming through construction, but the interesting thing is the way in which process is applied changes drastically from firm to firm and from individual to individual.”

For ShearsAdkins, that means solidifying that client union for a seamless operation that ensures the process allows the design to express its use. “It allows you as an architect to build relationships to facilitate that process, which depends on your people skills,” Adkins says. “Process and communication for me and, to a great extent, for our firm is crucial.”

### Bucking the System

That fights against much of what is ingrained about the profession and the educational process—the “star” architect system, the insular studio set-up. In a sense, though, the architect is dealt a hand that he or she plays. “We hear a theme that the architect is under-appreciated and clients don’t listen,” Adkins says. “That has less to do with what everybody else needs to

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do and more to do with architects as professionals. Our ethics, the principles that we believe in, the manner in which we hold ourselves in community—we believe affects that premise.”

It means, says Adkins, that the educational system under prepares young interns for the profession, particularly the idea of partnering and communication. “It’s not all about design and ideas and how well you can build models,” Adkins says. “There’s a piece to the practice of architecture that people spend very little time on, and that’s the social aspect. You have to deal with people, day in and day out.”

In fact, the firm and Adkins pride themselves on how much they talk to clients. “Jesse has a great way with people, and that’s important,” says Shears. “We get to know the clients, understand who they are so we can design good buildings for them. We talk to them all the time, and that’s the secret to doing good work.”

He also understands the particular nature of mixed-used projects—retail, office, residential that works as a whole. “His architecture is created around community consensus and testimony to his success in building that consensus is the fact that so much of his work gets built,” says von Lührte.

In addition, the critical difference in the ShearsAdkins set up is that the partners recognized that, instead of one of them acting as “star” designer, all members of the firm would need to assemble to develop and build great buildings. “We’re not after the cover of a magazine,” says Adkins. “We want to work on great buildings that build cities, that establish context and place.”

Even as the economy rises and falls, stresses on the profession multiply and technology pushes at the profession, Adkins relishes the challenges. “As architects, we have the opportunity to affect everyday life, and we lose sight of that,” Adkins says. “I always wanted to blaze my own path, and I have found out much more than I thought was possible in myself. I’ve made a lot of mistakes, but I’ve learned a lot during the process of getting to where I am.” ■



Century Development/Calcon

**Above: Broadway Plaza, an affordable housing project, was built under severe cost constraints yet exhibits the design substance and attractiveness associated with market-rate projects.**



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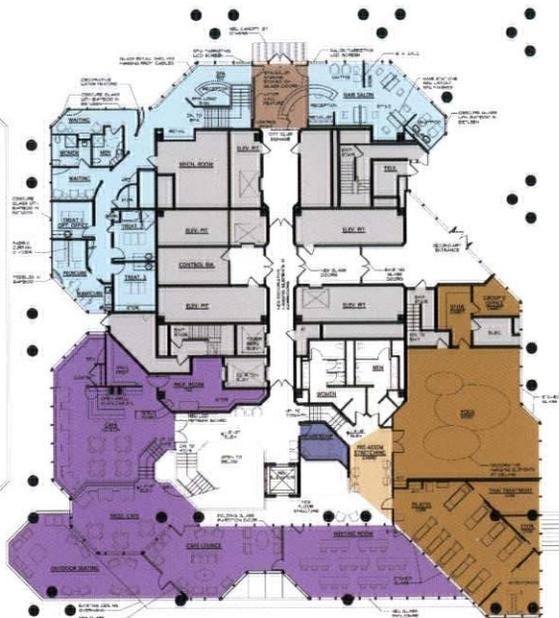
# Owning Your Own Business Brings Hard Work and Benefits

By Chryss Cada



Above: Sketch of the cafe for the City Club in Fort Worth, Texas.

Below: First-floor plan for the City Club in Fort Worth, Texas.



Crista Plaza of Essenza Architecture

Crista Plaza of Essenza Architecture

Most architects' dream building is one with their name on a sign out front.

“I think for most architects it's a matter of going to school, getting your degree, getting your license and then the next big goal is to have your own company,” said Christa Plaza, AIA, who founded Essenza Architecture (Boulder, Colo.) just over a year ago. “Most, if not all, of us have that dream of hanging up our own shingle.”

Architects like Plaza who are living the dream say that while having your own firm is not without challenges, the benefits are well worth the initial struggles.

## Taking the Leap

“The timing is critical,” said Plaza who met her business partner, Lisa Fletcher, AIA, while working at Olson Architecture in Niwot, Colo.

The two found they shared the goal of starting their own business.

“We both really wanted to make sure we had experience in all areas, from commercial to custom residential,” Plaza said. “It wasn't one thing or project in particular that made us feel like we had reached that level of experience, we just both looked at each other one day and said, 'It's time.'”

Sean O'Hara, AIA, wanted to make sure he had experience not just with different types of projects, but also with different sized firms before heading out on his own.

"It's easier to start your own firm if you've experienced all different sized offices," said O'Hara, who worked for one-, five-, 10- and 35-person firms before founding EVstudio with partner Dean Dalvit, AIA, in 2006. "It's important that you understand all the pieces. You might not have as well rounded a knowledge base at a big firm."

O'Hara suggests a partnership for those who, like himself, still want a sounding board.

"I think it's important to have someone to bounce ideas off of, that you don't have to hold anything back from," he said. "At some point your friends or spouse are going to get tired of hearing about it, so it's good to have someone who is as into it as you are."

In addition to having the right level of experience and the right people to work with, a specific skill set is required before heading off on your own.

"You have to be able to produce your own documents on day one," O'Hara said. "When it's just you, there's no time to get up to speed, you have to start there."

Sometimes finding the right time to start your own firm is a matter of opportunity.

"I always thought it took a particular type of courage to strike out on your own," said RJ Steer, AIA, of Centennial Collaborative (Colorado Springs, Colo.). "You should wait for the right opportunity for you rather than starting your own firm out of ego or vanity."

Steer was an architect with the same Colorado Springs company for 13 years when he was approached about stepping into ownership of a sole proprietorship company. Centennial Engineering and Research had always primarily been focused on materials testing and had a very small architectural division. The company's owner died suddenly without leaving a line of succession for ownership. A civil engineer familiar with him approached Steer about procuring the firm, expanding the architectural side of business and setting up a Colorado Springs office.

"The company had existing connections with national organizations that I could take advantage of without threatening my employer at the time," Steer said. "This opportunity allowed me to take a shot at heading out on my own."



Stephanie O'Hara



Stephanie O'Hara

Top: Sean O'Hara, AIA, is the Architect of Record on the De Bruin Duplex, an EVstudio project.

Above: Sean O'Hara, AIA, designed the Nola Ruth Master Plan, an EVstudio project.

Left: A rendering of the Hampton Inn & Suites in Littleton, Colo.

Right: A rendering of the Unser Boulevard retail project in Albuquerque, N.M.



RJ Steer of Centennial Collaborative



RJ Steer of Centennial Collaborative

Top: Rowland + Broughton's second development project DB3, is one in a series of three residential interiors they redesigned in Colorado's first condominium building. The firm is currently working on the exterior renovation of this midcentury building in Aspen.



Brent Moss



Brent Moss

Above: A custom millwork sleeping platform and sheer drapery create a sense of separation from the living space at Aspen Square 410. The awarded project renovates a 500-square-foot, individually owned guest suite within a larger condo hotel.

Right: At the Key Residence in Aspen, the living room is updated with all new finishes, lighting and furnishings. Custom floating credenza and shelves add functional storage and display space. Double doors to the patio and full-length windows allow plenty of diffused natural light to enter the room and allow for indoor-outdoor living.

Sarah Broughton, AIA, and John Rowland, AIA, found opportunity at an unexpected time. When the economy slowed down in 2003, the firms where they worked had cut them both down to working four days a week.

"It was a good opportunity for us to leave and start something on our own," Broughton said. "It's hard to leave projects—things were so slow then, we didn't have to leave anything."

The couple, now married nine years, was offered a remodeling job in Aspen, Colo. By designing and building the project in six months, they were able to get a quick start on Rowland + Broughton Architecture and Urban Design's (Denver and Aspen) portfolio.

"We got lucky that someone stepped up and gave us the opportunity to get started," Broughton said. "From there our business just grew by word of mouth."



Brent Moss

### Getting started

There's no getting around the long hours when starting a new firm.

"The first three years we were working until 1 a.m. every night," Rowland said. "And the stuff that was keeping us up that late had nothing to do with design or architecture."

The couple would spend their days working on plans and their nights on the business side of things. On Sundays they would go for a walk on Smuggler Mountain (Aspen) and discuss all the projects they were working on.

"At that point, there was no project that was too small," Broughton said. "We did a single step for one client."

When Steer was starting out he would have loved to have the opportunity to talk shop with a colleague.

"It was a very difficult transition to go from the gregarious environment of the bullpen to being all by myself," said Steer, who started a coffee group with fellow architects to break the isolation of working alone.

In addition to the isolation, Plaza was struck by the change in workload.

"The hardest part is doing all the work yourself," she said. "Something comes in and it's not a matter of 'Who is going to do this?' because you're going to do it. There's nobody to delegate the work to."

Plaza and her business partner are trying out contract work and "architect sharing" with other firms.

"We want to be careful not to grow too fast," she said. "Instead of hiring and firing according to how much we have, we're able to borrow people and then give them back when we don't need them."

O'Hara and his partner's EVstudio has been around long enough for them to hire help. They brought on their seventh staff member this summer. The partners are staffing two offices; O'Hara is based in Denver and Dalvit is in Evergreen, Colo.

"We have our own personal styles and work habits," O'Hara said. "And this way we are able to give people a better level of service throughout Colorado."

O'Hara expected the unexpected when starting his firm.

"We went in knowing we'd have a lot to figure out along the way," he said. "The most important thing to keep in mind is that the process is a marathon, not a sprint."

### Finding success

Growth is one of the measures of success for O'Hara.

"We have a lot of rolling goals that we usually tend to exceed," he said. "The first year we said it would be nice to hire one employee, and we hired two."

The firm has seen steady growth, with up to 20 active projects at one time.

"We want to grow to be able to take on the projects we're interested in," O'Hara said. "And we also want to be able to make a living while we're doing what we want to do."

Rowland + Broughton has 15 employees, a Denver office and about 30 projects going at any given time.

"Next, we would like to open an office in Hawaii or somewhere else tropical," Rowland said. "We'd like the challenge of designing in a different climate."

Steer's Centennial Collaborative is experiencing so much success so quickly that it's having some growing pains.

In a year-and-a-half, the firm went from a home office to subletting space from another architect to moving into its own space. In addition to Steer, the Colorado Springs branch has two senior project managers and two interns.

"We're actually curtailing our marketing to ensure sufficient follow through with our existing clients," Steer said. "Growing too fast can be the greatest threat to a new business."

Plaza's firm is experiencing its own brand of success.

"We want to build sustainable projects by partnering with our clients," she said. "Our companies are happy with us because we listen to them. We're building lasting relationships and they are referring us to others—to us that's success." ■



Brent Moss

Above: At Crave Kitchen in Basalt, Colo., Rowland + Broughton Architecture had the opportunity to take the space from its raw core and shell state to a completely finished, furnished, award-winning space. A custom bank of maple veneer millwork with fireplace and wine storage creates a strong focal point and screens the lounge from the dining room.

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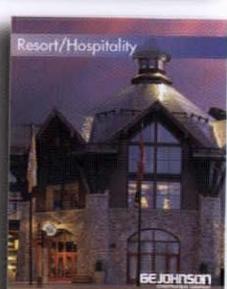
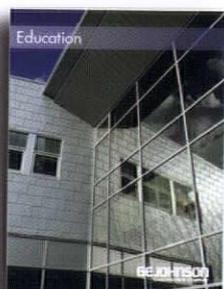
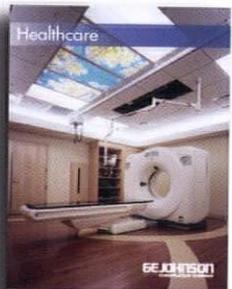
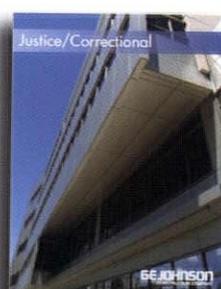
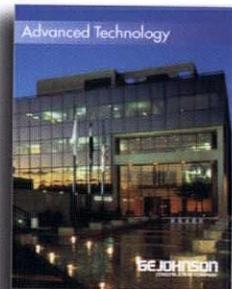
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# Big Fish in a Big Pond

From securing an internship to scoring a partnership, how to get noticed within a large firm

By *Brianne Sanchez*

Working in a large firm can mean dealing with big clients — and big egos. Three architects offer their tactics for staying competitive while remaining committed.

**W**hat's the secret to starting as an intern and ending up a principal and partner of one of Colorado's premier firms?

"It all begins with loving what you do," said Joey Carrasquillo, AIA, of Anderson Mason Dale Architects.

If what you do is architecture, the next step is finding a firm that fits. Small staffs suit some, but Carrasquillo flourishes within a larger company.

Carrasquillo's first tenure with Anderson Mason Dale started in 1995, when he was a fairly young intern five years out of school. He moved back to Colorado from Seattle to re-join the company in early 1999 and worked his way up to become an associate, senior associate and, in 2006, the newest partner in the second-generation firm.

"It wasn't easy," Carrasquillo said. "I'm still going through learning curves with relationship dynamics."

Moving up the ranks means he's passed some of his peers along the way. As he's taken on more responsibility, those relationships have changed.

"At it's very simplest, it's the idea that I am still friendly with the staff, but I can't always play the role of friend," he said. "[Being a principal and partner] requires a different perspective. There's certainly the business aspect of running an operation of this size. It's kind of like this multifaceted position now."

Carrasquillo still looks upon the other partners in the firm as mentors and emphasizes honesty about the nature of the work architects do as a way to keep a modest attitude while creating quality designs.

"It's not about us being able to squiggle on a piece of paper and come up with a great idea," he said. "It's a lot more than that. One of the things we try to foster in our work is this notion of trying to develop the generalist architect." For Carrasquillo and the staff at Anderson Mason Dale, that means an architect must embrace all of the responsibilities of designer, politician and good communicator.

"I think what we do as architects is very blue-collar work," Carrasquillo said. "It depends on a lot of hard work and sweat equity. When you maintain that perspective, it allows you to maintain that humility."

His advice for architects in the same position he was 13 years ago?

"There's a delicate balance between imparting your passion while still understanding you're at a learning point in your career."



Joey Carrasquillo, AIA



Adam Ambro, AIA

According to Adam Ambro, AIA, of Humphries Poli Architects, his success as an architect — moving from intern to associate in a matter of five years — comes in part from his attitude toward education.

Ambro first became a Certified Public Accountant after graduating from Notre Dame business school, but after several years in the field decided to pursue a graduate degree in architecture.

“Just having my master’s in architecture didn’t mean I was an architect,” Ambro said. “There’s lots to learn here. Your education starts over once you start your career.”

For Ambro, the decision to switch fields didn’t mean his time in the business sector was a waste. It was just another layer of education that helped him to be prepared for the challenges of a large firm, such as managing and coordinating many different personalities including, clients, consultants, contractors and staff.

“I feel like I came in the door knowing how to be a professional,” Ambro said. “My two years in the public accounting field, with a suit on everyday — I had expectations for myself.” He put himself on the fast track at Humphries Poli Architects by taking opportunities like one of his first projects, the Brownstones at River Front Park in Denver.

“I was building models—intern stuff—and by the end of it, I was the project manager,” Ambro said. “I got to see and learn and grow from start to finish.” This forward momentum is also due in part to the dedication the leadership at the firm has observed in him.

At review time, his supervisors appreciated his abilities to operate without constant supervision, while keeping those around me informed and seeking guidance when needed. “It’s overall commitment to the projects, to the clients and to the firm in general,” he said. “The reputation I’ve gotten in the firm is that I have shown that commitment and it shows through with how we treat our clients — not as a specific project, but as part of an ongoing relationship.”

For Ken Gregg, AIA, who made a lateral move to become a staff architect at the 25-person RTA Architects, the opportunity to work for a larger firm with a more diversified clientele was exciting.

Gregg works in a small team within the firm, but in order to not get lost among the other talent he’s sure to speak up. “Having a voice within the firm is important,” Gregg said. “You’ve got to have your own opinions, but you have to work within the framework of the firm.”

He liked the energy of RTA Architects (Colorado Springs, Colo.) and the idea of exploring new visions under its leadership, but the projects themselves are his emphasis.

“My focus is the clients,” Gregg said. “I try not to get too bogged down with who’s ahead in the firm.” Most of Gregg’s clients are schools. It’s a niche he started working in as an intern and continued at his previous firm as well as at RTA Architects.

“I’m working on the same challenges as I progress my career,” he said. The continuity has led to his mantra, “Never make the same mistake twice.”

Gregg thinks the specialty has helped his shopability among firms, but he also enjoys his work because he’s aware of the impact of a built environment on school children. (His wife teaches high school science.)

“If you’re affecting your clients in a positive way, you’re going to affect your firm in a positive way,” Gregg said.

In order to be successful navigating a large firm at any level, a desire to learn, a commitment to creating quality work and cultivating client-firm relationships, and a humble outlook are indispensable. Keep the focus on the projects and the people they’re affecting and you just might find yourself at the top of a major firm. ■

“[Being a principal and partner] requires a different perspective. There’s certainly the business aspect of running an operation of this size. It’s kind of like this multifaceted position now.”

*Joey Carrasquillo, AIA*

“The reputation I’ve gotten in the firm is that I have shown that commitment and it shows through with how we treat our clients — not as a specific project, but as part of an ongoing relationship.”

*Adam Ambro, AIA*

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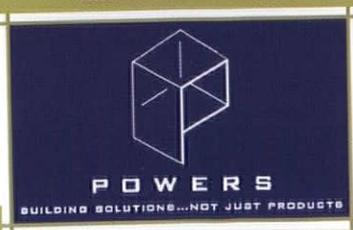
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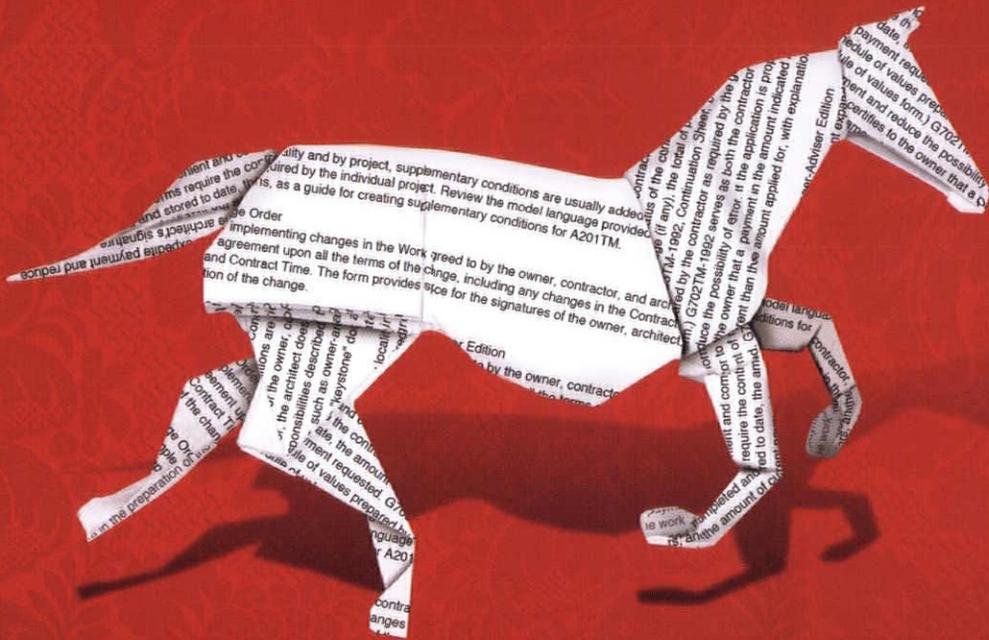


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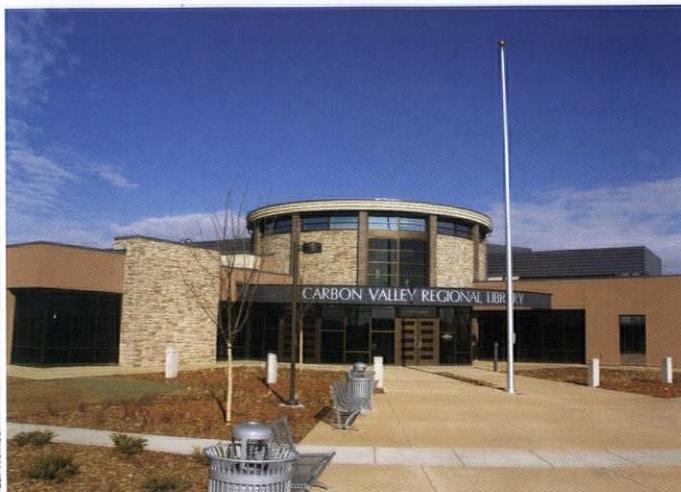
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# Architectural Skills Translate Well to Alternate Careers

By Chryss Cada



Paul Wember



Paul Wember

Paul Wember, AIA, had been drawing plans for about eight years when he decided he was ready to do something else with his architectural education and training—but he wasn't sure exactly what.

“I knew I wanted to start my own firm, but I had to do some soul-searching about what type of a firm it would be,” he said. “I didn't have the design talent to start my own firm, and my research proved general contracting was more risk than I wanted to take on. Owner's representation is perfect because it's the best of both architecture and construction.”

Wember is one of a growing number of architects applying the education and aesthetics of architecture to something other than designing new buildings.

## Owner Representation

An owner's representative assures that the owner's best interests are served throughout the design and development process. Experience in the field is critical to succeed in the role.

“Somebody couldn't do my job well right out of school,” he said. “Maybe if they studied construction management, but it would be a real challenge without the relevant experience.”

An owner's rep is with the project from the ground up, acting as a liaison among an owner or building tenant and the various project team members, consultants and contractors. Most provide their clients a complete package, including helping select contractors, overseeing the budget and even assisting with the move-in.

“An owner's rep can take a project from a napkin sketch, from what it looks like in the mind's eye, to what it means in the real world,” said Wember, who does some private work, but mostly designs civic projects. “I understand the deal from working with the attorneys on

the land deals to hiring general contractors and preparing the facilities for their purpose.”

Wember, who worked primarily on civic buildings during a five-year stint at Klipp, oversaw a library as his firm’s first project. Since starting Wember Inc. in 2004, he has served as the owner’s rep on the construction of a dozen libraries across the state.

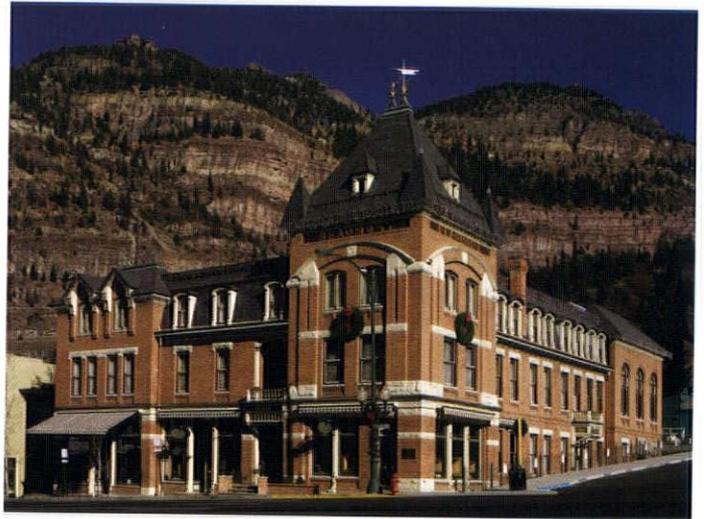
His background makes him a valuable player during the architectural firm selection process.

“We walk out of the presentation and often the owner isn’t clear on everything that was said so he turns to me,” Wember said. “They ultimately make the decision, but I’m their translator.”

Architects get a little nervous when they see Wember in the room during the selection process.

Opposite page top: Erie Community Library Childrens Reading room. This project was completed with Wember acting as the owner’s representative, architect Kin DuBois, FAIA, of Klipp.

Opposite page bottom: Carbon Valley Library Entry. This project was completed with Wember acting as the owner’s representative, architect Kin DuBois, FAIA, of Klipp.



Andrews & Anderson Architects, PC.

Ed LaCasse

“I’ve sat on the other side of the table and given the sales pitch, so I know what’s true,” he said. “And they know I’ll ask the tough questions about sustainability, business information modeling (BIM), etc. I know how to get through the transparency.”

Another option for architects wanting to look beyond the traditional career is specialization.

### Historic Preservation

“Historic preservation is the first step in sustainability,” said Elizabeth Hallas, AIA, of Andrew & Anderson Architects in Boulder, Colo. “Existing buildings are such a resource, it only makes sense to adeptly reuse them rather than tear them down.”

Many architectural basics apply to historic preservation.

“The complexities of building are the same,” Hallas said. “But the knowledge of preservation is specific. A lot of firms have dabbled, but only a few in Denver are specifically qualified to do preservation.”

Hallas has a bachelor’s of environmental design from the University of Colorado Boulder (CU) and a Master of Architecture from the College of Architecture and Planning at the University of Colorado Denver (UCD). The

Left: Built in 1886, the Beaumont Hotel in Ouray, Colo., had sat dormant for 40 years before being purchased in 1998. The building was designed by O. Bulow.

Right: Elizabeth Hallas, AIA, of Andrews & Anderson Architects, PC designed a complete rehabilitation for the hotel, which was completed in 2003.

Noticing that some of its architectural students were interested in aspects of architecture, but not a career in architecture, the University of Buffalo (NY) put out an "Alternatives to Architecture" brochure. It lists career tracks that retain attributes of the architecture major, but are different in approach or application. Suggested courses of study and careers include:

- Environmental studies.
- Art history.
- Art.
- Engineering and applied sciences.
- Theatre (set production).
- Geography.

projects she works on at Andrew & Anderson are equally split between historic preservation and new construction. The mix produces projects as different as the renovation of the 118-year-old Beaumont Hotel in Ouray and the thoroughly modern Littleton Museum.

Working with the old and the new has distinct advantages.

"Working with a building that's a 100 years old shows you what performs and what doesn't," she said. "What you learn from an old building can benefit new construction."

One thing the firm doesn't do is make new buildings that look old.

"We don't do replication architecture," she said. "Each project is a new project."

### Landscape Architecture

Pat Mundus takes a different approach to architecture by taking it outside. "Landscape architecture provides the perfect blend of creativity and science," said Mundus, ASLA, of Mundus Bishop Design Inc. Mundus earned his bachelor's degree in landscape architecture at Colorado State University (CSU).

"There's a lot of diversity within this subset of architecture," he said. "You can do everything from residential to urban planning to historic preservation to environmental planning. I think one of the greatest attractions to landscape architecture is that there are a lot of directions you can go."

What drew Mundus to the profession was the opportunity to have an influence on public space. His firm, which works primarily on public parks



Right: A view of the Quail Campus Xeriscape Garden in Longmont, Colo., designed by Patrick Mundus of Mundus Bishop Design Inc.

Mundus Bishop Design

around the metro area, did a preservation plan for Washington Park and a master plan for Denver's Civic Center Park.

Although his degree is in landscape architecture, he has seen general architecture skills translate to his profession.

"Last year we had a woman working for us who was an architect by degree making the transition to landscape architecture," Mundus said. "A lot of her problem solving skills translated because the process and the organization of running projects is the same."

Below: Generals Park in Aurora, Colo., was designed by Patrick Mundus of Mundus Bishop Design Inc.



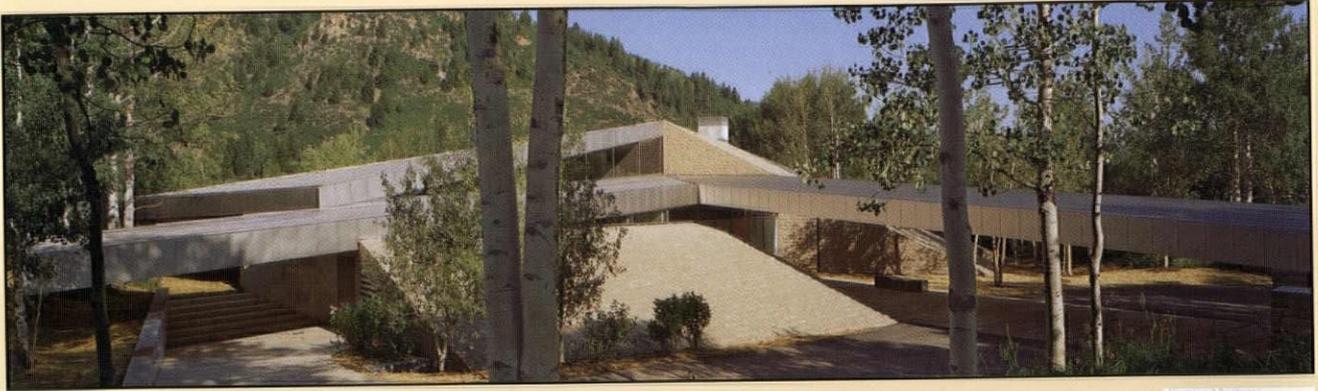
Mundus Bishop Design

Despite some perceptions otherwise, landscape design is not just arranging flower beds.

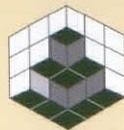
"We do a lot of grading, earth work, storm water management and site planning," Mundus explained. "Those aspects of the project are approached the same way as any architectural project."

Rather than a specific degree, Mundus looks for a skill set in the landscape architects he hires.

"I'm looking for creative problem solvers, even if they are from different professions," he said. "The basics can be taught or retaught. What's important is that the person is passionate about a profession in design." ■



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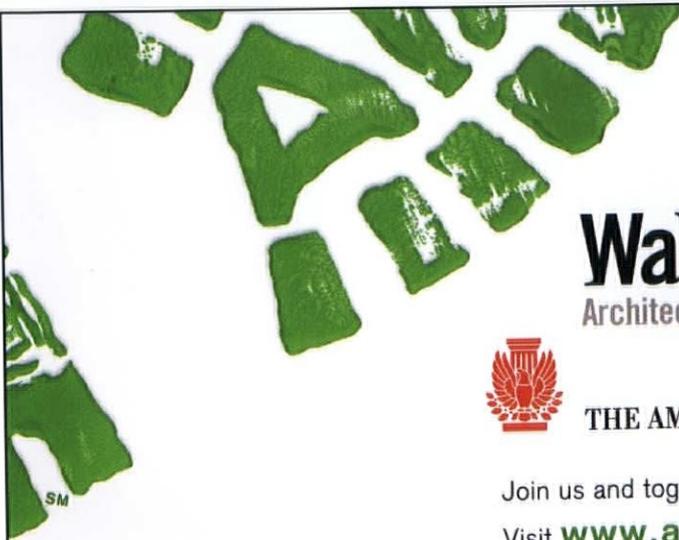
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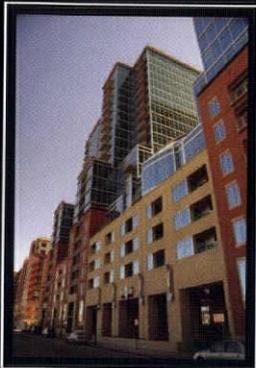
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# On the Boards

By Karen Nitkin

## Komorebi Mixed-Use Tower in situ DESIGN

**Location** Denver

**Client** Urban Market Development

**Construction Cost** \$40 million

**Scope** 238,000 square feet, including the parking

**Purpose** Seven-story condominium tower atop underground parking, ground-floor retail and a pool with spa on the ground floor.

**Completion** 2010

Visitors and tenants of the Komorebi Mixed-Use Tower planned for Denver will walk underneath a glass-bottomed swimming pool to get inside, passing through a plaza of dancing reflected light.

That light is important to Joe Colistra, AIA, a principal of in situ Design and the architect for the project. Komorebi is a Japanese word that describes the interplay of light shining through trees, and the entire structure is designed to make use of the “unique light we have here in Denver,” Colistra said.



Place also is important to Colistra.

The building will be across the street from the new Denver Museum of Contemporary Art, and the two structures will together create a cohesive look and a visual gateway to the mountains beyond.

Komorebi is designed to create connections between the community and the outdoors, and to become an essential and integrated part of a thriving part of town. The development will have a first-floor public courtyard that will be open to the public, particularly those visiting the nearby museum.

The concrete and glass building, slated for completion in 2010, will have a 43-unit, seven-story condominium tower that will sit above an underground parking garage, ground-floor retail stores and a second-floor pool with spa facility. The entrance plaza will be underneath the pool, and the shadows formed by light dancing on water will remain in play even at night, thanks to uplighting that will reflect through the pool and onto the building, Colistra said.

The residential units, all one story, will range from 900 to 7,100 square feet, with ceilings 12 to 13 feet high and lots of natural light.

A mullion-less structural glazing system, plus a combination of clear and fritted glass, will maximize light while creating a constantly shifting interplay of shadows.

“The light is going to dance across the façade,” Colistra said. “It’s going to be very animated.”

**Fluent I & II**  
Humphries Poli Architects

**Location** Denver

**Construction** Cost withheld at owner's request

**Client** Residential Niche, L.L.C.

**Scope** 47 residential units with a total of 81,000 square feet

**Purpose** Highly efficient residential units

**Completion** Third quarter 2009

Joe Poli, AIA, a principal of Humphries Poli Architects, thinks of the units in the Fluent I and II buildings as similar to iPods – spare, modern and very user friendly, while suburban mansions in excess of 4,000 square feet are more like bulky sound systems, weighed down with large speakers, a separate DVD player and other heavy accessories.

In his one-bedroom and two-bedroom units, which will all be well under 1,000 square feet, every space has multiple purposes and everything that is not necessary has been jettisoned. "We're just wringing everything out of each individual space," he said.

The kitchens will have islands that also will serve as dining room tables and as work and entertainment stations, much as telephones nowadays also serve as cameras and even Internet connections.

The units will incorporate pocket doors instead of swinging ones to create more room for furniture.



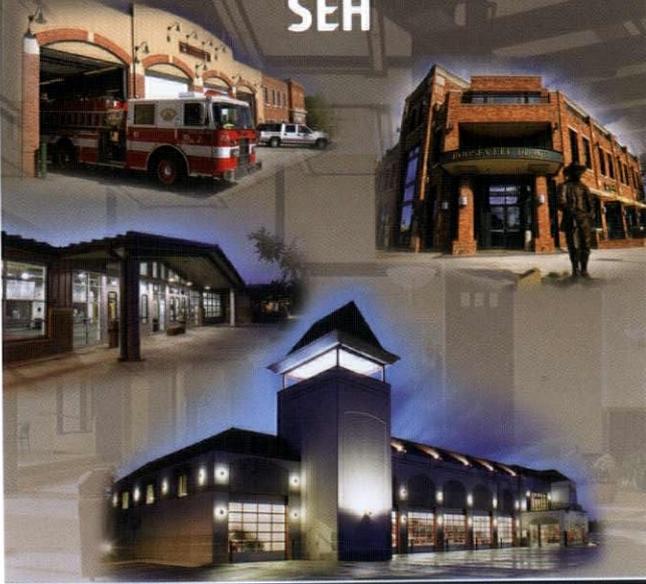
"I think the building is designed for the new economy," Poli said. "There's a whole new appreciation for efficiency in living, yet still the desire for community and the desire to be in the middle of the action."

Large windows and balconies will flood the units with light and also allow entertaining that easily flows from inside to out, he said.

Though the two buildings — one that will have 27 for-sale residential units and the other that will have 20 — are a block apart, Poli is working to "get these two buildings to have a dialogue with each other," he said. They wrap around a common space with a commons, lap pool and courtyard.

The development, which broke ground in spring 2008, is planned for an empty lot in Denver's uptown neighborhood, a walkable, dynamic part of town evolving from single-family Victorian homes and walk-up apartments to a mix of retail, restaurants, hospitals and businesses.

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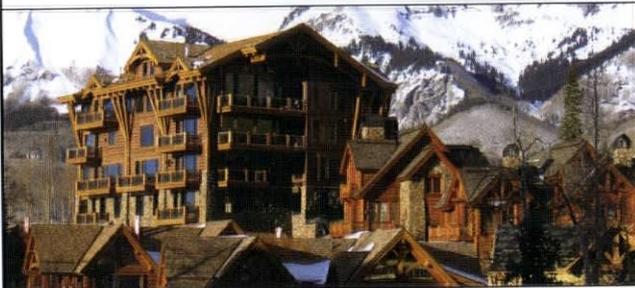
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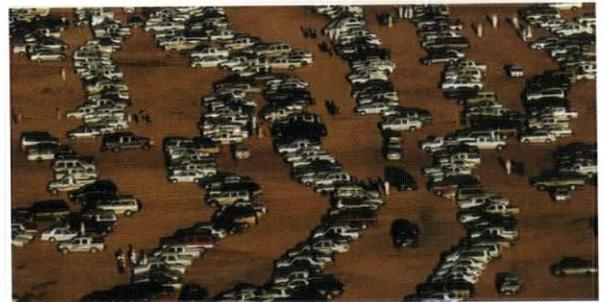


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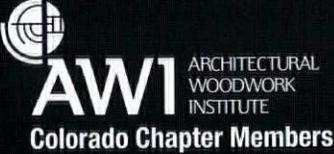
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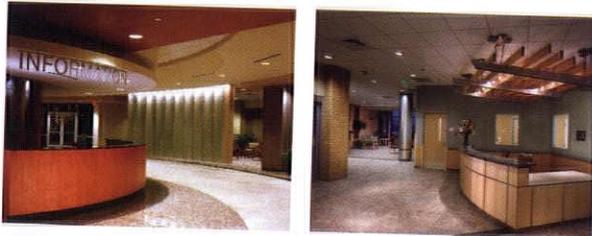
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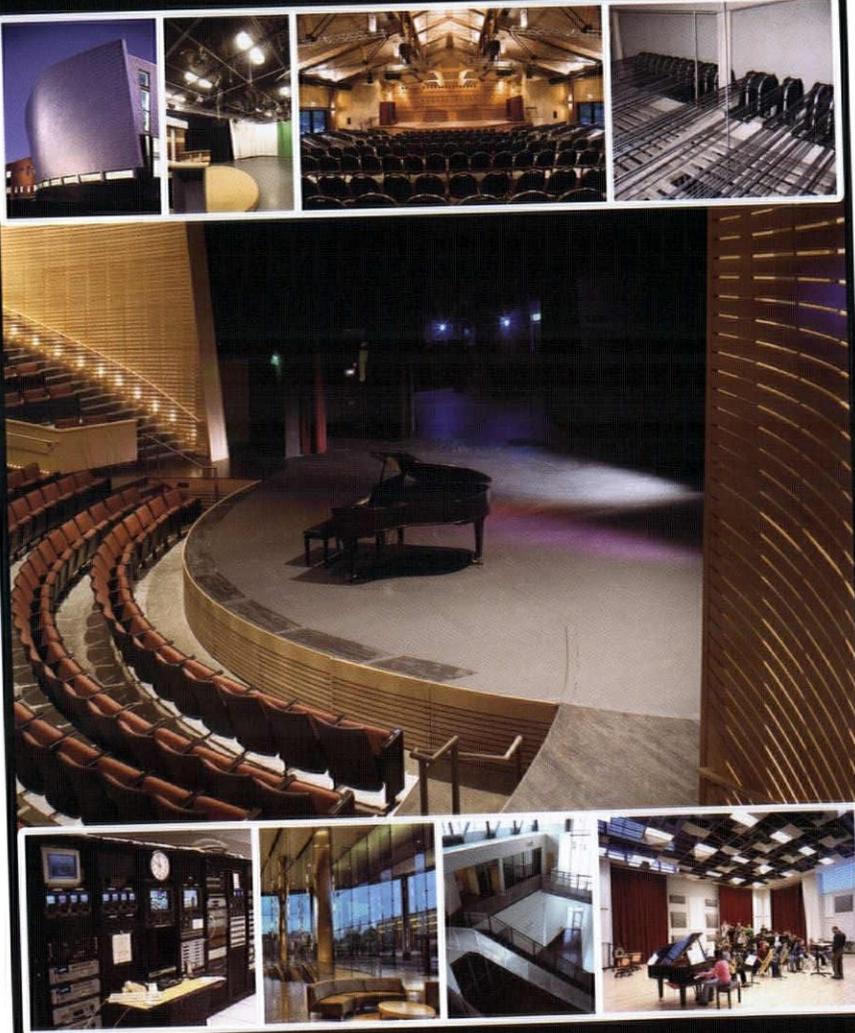
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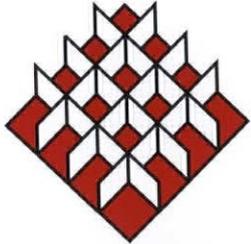
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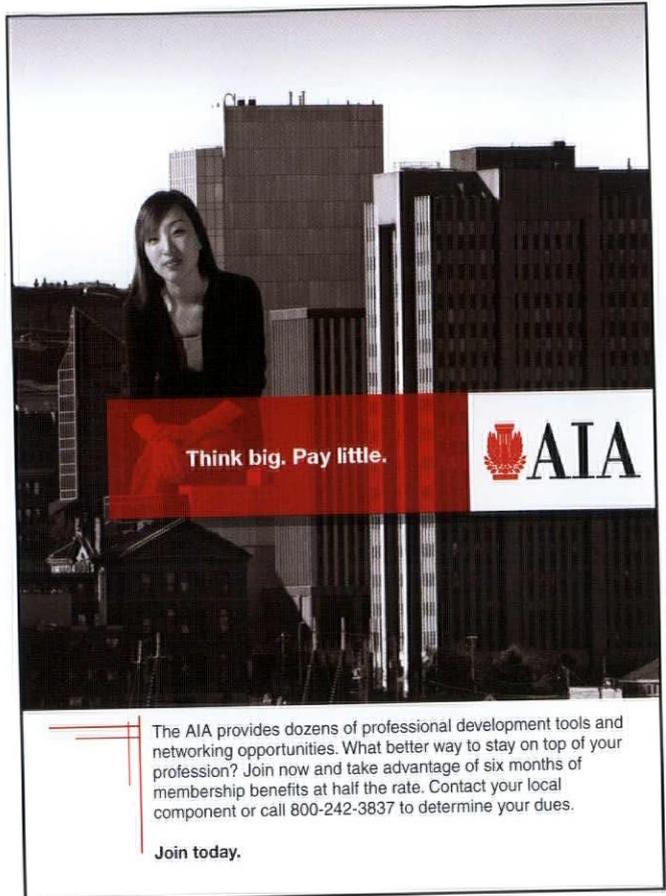
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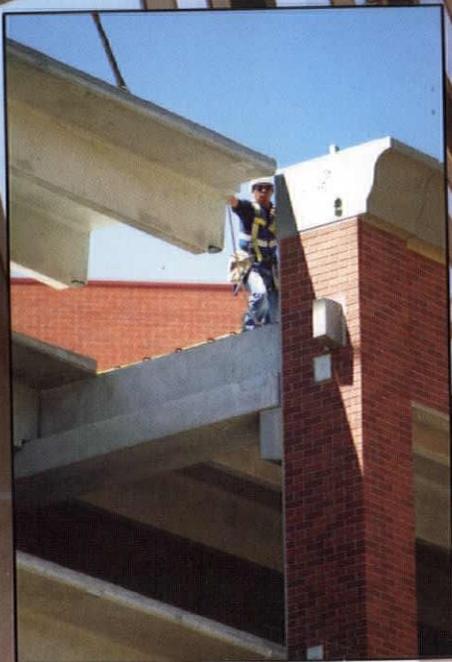
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