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ON THE COVER: Renovated house in Kenwood, Maryland, by McInturff Architects
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THOUGHTS OF HOME

Bradley W. Johnson



Last month we were very pleased to award AIA | DC's first annual Sarah Booth Conroy Prize for Journalism and Architectural Criticism to Kriston Capps. As a staff writer for *CityLab*, the urbanism site for *The Atlantic*, Capps writes on architecture, housing, design, and other issues. His work has appeared in *Architect*, *Slate*, *New York*, and the *Washington Post*, and he is a longtime art critic for the *Washington City Paper*.

The jurors for the inaugural Conroy Prize, who reviewed entries by about 10 different journalists, found Capps to be a "good cage-rattler" who addresses both current local design issues and the longer-term implications of planning and design decisions being

made today. In selecting Capps for the award, the jury described his style as "muscular, rough-hewn, and provocative."

Those of us attending his lecture during AIA | DC's recent annual Architecture Week celebration got to see a little of that provocative side. In the course of his presentation, he argued that our city's strong emphasis on historic preservation is now contributing to our shortage of affordable housing. He argued that a residential building stock dominated by a single building type—the row house—can create challenges for neighborhoods that are seeking to provide affordable housing solutions for today's diverse array of households, including young families. Readers can decide whether they agree or disagree with his arguments. And that's just the point: This is precisely the kind of back-and-forth discussion on architecture, design, and planning issues that we hope to foster at the District Architecture Center (DAC) via the Conroy Prize and our other programming.

Welcome!

DAC is celebrating its fifth birthday this year, and we are marking that anniversary not only through our architecture programming, but in a less conventional way as well: Our kind landlords, the International Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF), have allowed us to install a beehive on the roof of the building in which DAC is located. It has been a goal of mine to have the bees on the roof since I saw a news story a few years ago on NHK World TV reporting that the Ginza part of Tokyo has rooftop beehives that serve restaurants in that area. Rooftop beekeeping is a growing phenomenon in the Washington area and other cities around the country, and for DAC in particular, it connects to concepts like sustainable design, green roofs, the locavore movement, and support for pollinators.

And of course, there's the honey to enjoy. Our beekeepers, Heritage Honey, will be managing the hives, and so far at least, it looks like the bees are doing well. Some of the plants they are visiting might even be on the Mall. We don't know whether we'll be able to produce enough honey to supply local restaurants, but we're looking into that. In the meantime, who could pass up the opportunity to buy a jar of "Odd Honey?" All proceeds from our honey sales will support our education efforts here at DAC.

We're proud to provide a home for the bees—and to announce their arrival in the annual residential issue of *ARCHITECTUREDC*, where we cover a variety of new residential projects. In addition to the coverage in these pages, AIA | DC is embarking on a research and lecture project that will bring together some of the best minds in the country to search for new ways to address the stubborn shortage of affordable housing. Keep an eye out for those events at aiadc.com.

Innovative thinking, changing the narrative, breaking the mold—that's what DAC is for. Come celebrate with us as we embark on our next five years. As always, we love to hear from you, so please send us your comments.

Mary Fitch, AICP, Hon. AIA
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Mary Jane Bolle ("River House") is a freelance writer whose passion is architecture.

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Denise Liebowitz ("Open Up!"), formerly with the National Capital Planning Commission, is a regular contributor to *ARCHITECTUREDC*.

G. Martin Moeller, Jr., Assoc. AIA ("Boldly Demure," "Senior Class," and "Living Laboratory") is an independent curator and writer, as well as senior curator at the National Building Museum. He is the editor of *ARCHITECTUREDC*.

Ronald O'Rourke ("Fourteenth, Amended") is a regular contributor to *ARCHITECTUREDC*. His father, Jack O'Rourke, was an architect in San Francisco for more than four decades.



Architect: www.gardnermohr.com **Photographer:** www.kenwyner.com

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DAC At the DAC

DAC Saturday Program Featured at USA Science and Engineering Festival

by Asya Snejnevski

Volunteers and staff from the Washington Architectural Foundation (WAF) joined the Girl Scouts Nation's Capital participants from our "Archi-Builder" program at the Washington Convention Center for the amazing USA Science and Engineering Festival at the end of April. Working over four months, teams of scouts created models of sustainable development for a site in East Potomac Park.

Over 365,000 visitors came to the festival. The WAF booth was in the thick of things with neighbors including NASA, Lockheed Martin, the Carnegie Institution for Science, and the Joint Quantum

Institute. Dedicated WAF volunteers Lam Vuong, Joanna Schmickel, and Gina Volpicelli—working with a host of others—led the charge for the Archi-Builder workshop series at the DAC this winter that engaged 32 Girl Scouts leading up to the festival.

The Science and Engineering Festival was featured on local TV news throughout the weekend and the WAF booth drew huge crowds with lots of interest in programs at the DAC. To learn more about DAC programs for kids (and adults) please visit aiadc.com. Please note: Our week-long summer camp is already filling up!

Welcome Honeybees!

by Asya Snejnevski

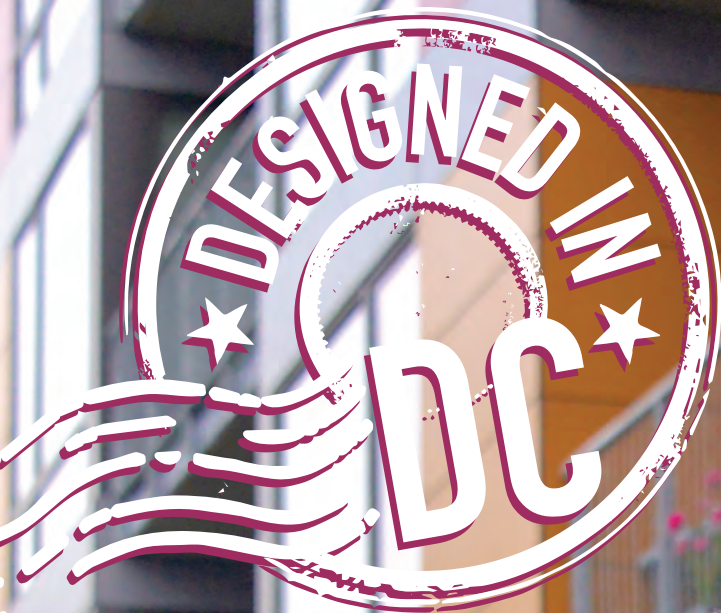
Just in time for Earth Day 2016, a beehive was installed on the roof of the District Architecture Center. Bees and other pollinators are crucial to our environment and our food supply. Contrary to what you may think, cities are actually among the safest places for honeybees! Bees are quite happy in DC in part because fewer chemicals, like pesticides and fungicides, are used on plants here in the city. Beekeeping was legalized in DC in 2012, and now the city is creating initiatives to encourage residents to help increase our pollinators by installing hives and planting pollinator gardens.

As our beekeeper, Heritage Honey, says: "DC is like an orchard." Our city has many different plants that produce flowers,

pollen, and nectar that attract bees. In contrast, most rural bees only have a limited number of flowers to forage for pollen, and sometimes are limited to a monoculture to which the hive is transported in order to pollinate. The lack of food diversity actually weakens the bees because they do not get enough nutrients. The honey that bees produce in DC, however, is rich and flavorful due to the great conditions afforded by our backyard gardens and parks.

The District Architecture Center is thrilled to welcome the bees to downtown DC as we help our local community by providing a home for pollinators. 🐝





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McInturff Architects | Photo © Julia Heine



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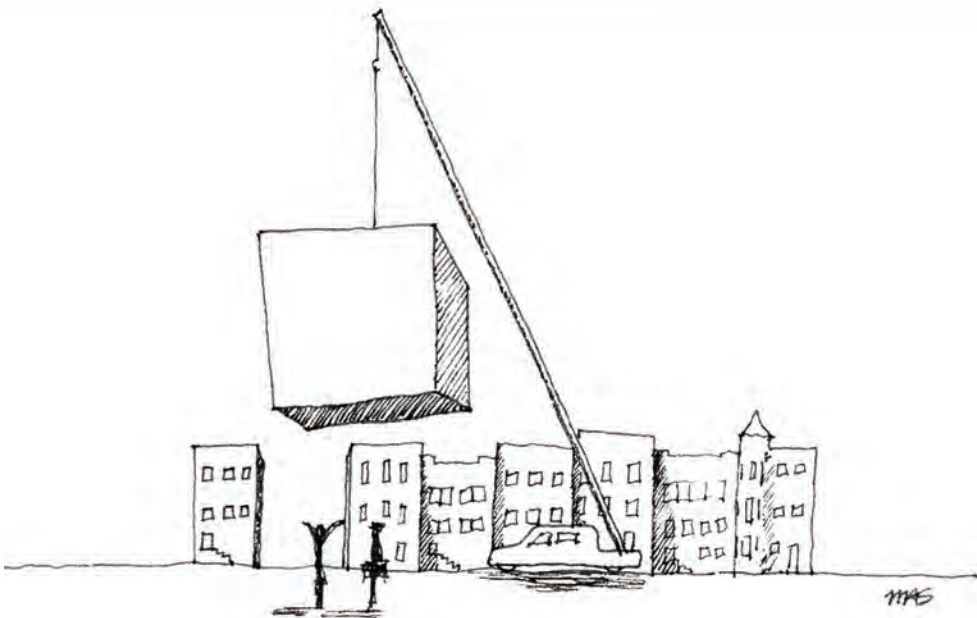




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Open Up!

Two Historic Row Houses Gain Breathing Room

by Denise Liebowitz

It's almost always true: behind every great design is a great client. Architects know that the more knowledgeable their clients are, the more likely they are to fully participate in the process and reap the benefits of a collaborative effort. Such is the case with the recent makeovers of two Washington row houses, one in Logan Circle, the other on Capitol Hill. In both cases, the homeowners had professional backgrounds in contemporary design, were firmly confident of their own personal style, and consciously sought an architect with whom they could collaborate. The two projects share certain characteristics—most notably, glassy rear walls that open up to create combined indoor/outdoor living spaces—but they reflect the distinct aesthetics and domestic needs of their clients.

Salt and Pepper House

"It was an extraordinary experience," recalled the homeowner of the relationship she and her husband developed with **Janet Bloomberg, AIA**, founder and principal of **KUBE Architecture**, while planning the total renovation of their Capitol Hill house. "All of us were bubbling over with ideas and feeding off each other. We were really playing together." She explained how years earlier—long before the current project was even on the horizon—she had seen a *Washington Post* article about a Bloomberg-designed house and thought, "If ever I need an architect, this is the one." When the client and her then-fiance were searching for a house they could together make their own, she remembered Bloomberg, arranged a meeting, and "It was love immediately; we never even interviewed anyone else."



The living area before renovation.

Courtesy of KUBE architecture



Living/dining/kitchen area of the Salt and Pepper House, with second floor sitting area above.

Photo © Greg Powers Photography



Master bathroom, with shower enclosure at right.

Photo © Greg Powers Photography



First floor media room, with main staircase at left.

Photo © Greg Powers Photography

Project: Salt and Pepper House,

Washington, DC

Architects: **KUBE Architecture**

Landscape Architects: **Campion Hruby Landscape Architects**

Structural Engineers: **JZ Structural Consulting**

Steel Fabricator: **Metal Specialties**

General Contractor: **Housecraft**

The client herself has serious design bona fides, having early in her career worked at New York's Museum of Modern Art alongside Arthur Drexler, the legendary director of the museum's Department of Architecture and Design.

Bloomberg confirms the special client-architect relationship that developed over the course of the project. She explained that her

clients are an older couple who were actually married in the house while it was under construction. "They are serious art collectors, know a ton of people, and love to cook and entertain. They wanted a house that suited their daily lifestyle, provided expansive indoor-outdoor space for entertaining, and was also designed for aging in place."

In previous remodelings, the interior proportions of the traditional row house had been lost and very few original details remained. The KUBE team stripped the row house down to its basic elements: brick walls, structural framing members, and outdoor space. The rear second floor bedroom was removed to create a two-story living/dining room facing the back garden, and steel structure was inserted to allow for a full wall of glass to the rear. Bloomberg organized the space with a freestanding central core

that contains an elevator and powder room on the first floor. Around the perimeter of the core, she created a seamless circulation path, great for party flow and wide enough to accommodate a wheelchair if necessary at some future time.

A sleek, U-shaped Pedini kitchen with white Corian counters faces the main living area and garden. “I don’t like big kitchens—too much walking,” said the homeowner. “Here I can pivot and the configuration allows me to be with my guests.”

On the second level, an expansive master suite includes a luxurious bath where a muted palette of white and gray tile is enlivened by an unexpectedly bold blue-lacquer custom vanity and mirror surround that frames dual sinks. The open shower is large enough for roll-in access and the whirlpool tub is fitted with custom stainless grab bars. The master suite also connects to a small sleeping nook that the homeowner explained is handy for an overnight visit from a grandchild or when either she or her husband has trouble sleeping. The remaining space on the upper level is a loft dramatically overlooking the living room and garden, with glass railings whose steel framing connects to the structural elements of the first level.

Because the owners wanted their art collection to take center stage, a subdued black-and-white color scheme was agreed upon early in the process. The building’s original brick walls were exposed and painted white, contrasting with the black steel framing that defines the interior and visually and structurally ties together the main floor and the upper level. In the main-level media room at the front of the house and throughout the second floor, the home’s original pine flooring was preserved where possible and replaced where not. Gray ceramic tile extends through the rest of the main level and out to the garden in a seamless indoor/outdoor sweep.

Contrasting with the clean black and white of interior walls and steel framing are bright jolts of exuberant color: lime green sliding doors in the loft, purple chairs in the living area and orange ones around the dining table, and a violet/blue powder room. “She has a great architectural palette, even in the way she dresses,” said Bloomberg, speaking of her stylish client who led the color choices.

“A garden was not in the original budget,” recalled the architect, “but once we got started, we all realized it was an essential part of the project.” When the homeowner started to consider a garden she immediately thought of Manhattan’s High Line. “It’s too hot to garden in Washington, so we needed something extremely low-maintenance and my husband wanted the sound of running water.” Bloomberg collaborated with Campion Hrubby Landscape Architects to achieve a Zen-like outdoor space that extends the white-washed brick walls and ceramic tile paving from the interior and accents it with a COR-TEN steel fountain and wall panels, black river rock, and perimeter plantings of sedges, grasses, and allium. For large dinner parties of twenty or more, guests are seated at two matching indoor/outdoor dining tables custom-fabricated for the space.

When asked about the biggest challenge of the project, Bloomberg noted that part of the house sits on a basement and part on a slab. “It was a typical old house with all the usual bumps and dips and we needed to insert the straight, precise edges of modern design.” The sleek Pedini kitchen was especially demanding and required considerable effort where its plumb and level edges abut the knobby old structure. Equally demanding



View from dining area toward the patio. Note the aligned indoor and outdoor tables, allowing large dinner parties during good weather.



Indoor dining area.



Photo © Greg Powers Photography

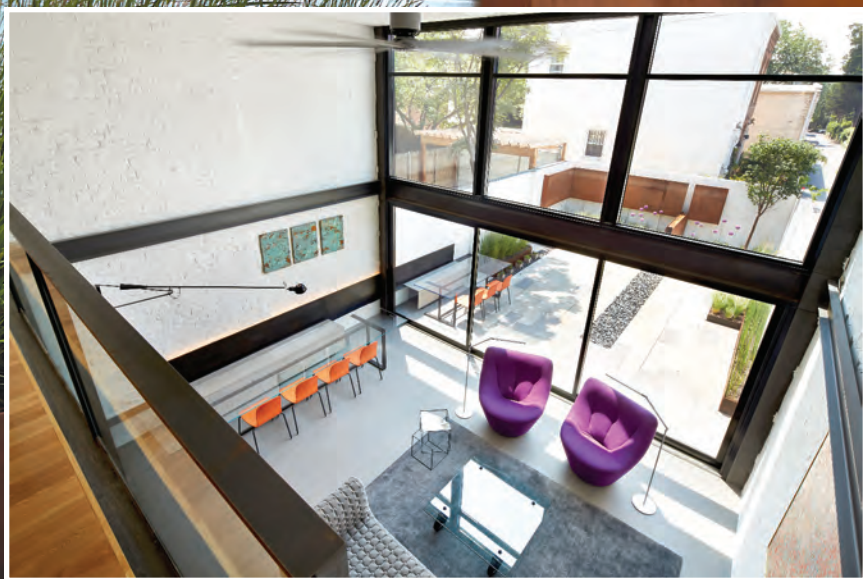


Photo © Greg Powers Photography



Second floor sitting area, overlooking the main living area.

Photo © Greg Powers Photography



View from the sitting area to the living and dining areas below.

Photo © Greg Powers Photography

was the KUBE-designed staircase fabricated of white steel treads and handrail and frosted glass panels and supported on black steel structure. On the landing where the stair splits with some steps leading to the third floor, the architect and her clients wanted to create some visual interest through transparency. The homeowner recalled having admired steel mesh steps in Zaha Hadid's MAXXI museum on a visit to Rome and all agreed it would be the right solution.

"Janet kept coming up with great solutions that didn't break the bank," reported the client. "It's so refreshing to work with someone who is able to keep to a budget." As for the design of her new home, she says it is "absolutely exhilarating."

Patio as seen from the living area.



Photo © Greg Powers Photography



Rear deck with folding glass doors shown closed.

Photo © Connie Gauthier with HomeVisit



View into kitchen of the Kingman Place house from the rear deck.

Kingman Place House

Like the homeowners on Capitol Hill, Adam Unger and James Nozar were knowledgeable about contemporary design and well equipped to take on the total renovation of a tired row house in the historic Logan Circle neighborhood. Nozar, a senior real estate development and design executive who was also then serving on the Building Committee of the Studio Theatre's Board of Directors, first met **Jon Hensley, AIA, LEED AP**, and admired the architect's work when he was designing two residential projects for the theater. Nozar and Unger soon signed up Hensley for their Logan Circle project. In addition, the homeowners brought into the team John Allen of Allen Built, Inc., a construction and design/build firm, who had worked with them on a previous home renovation in the city and who was also the contractor on the Studio Theatre projects. "Right from the start we knew we all shared the same aesthetic and were confident it would be a great team," recalled Unger.

The original renovation plan for this turn-of-the-century house was to add a deeply set-back third floor to accommodate an extra bedroom. While similar additions on houses in the immediate neighborhood had received historic preservation approval, Unger's

Project: Kingman Place House,
Washington, DC

Architects: **Jon Hensley Architects**

Interior Designers: **Cecconi Simone**

Structural Engineers: **Shemro Engineering**

Kitchen Designers: **Pedini**

General Contractor: **Allen Built Inc.**

and Nozar's project did not. Getting past the disappointment, they and their architect started looking for a Plan B and found it in the basement. Digging out the basement to achieve a full-height ceiling, underpinning the floor, and reinforcing the walls of the old structure turned into a significant undertaking, adding to the renovation budget and schedule. "You just move on," said a resigned Unger. In addition to the new basement space, Hensley's design extended the rear of the house 12 feet and filled in light courts, altogether increasing the size of the house by more than 40 percent to 2,862 square feet.

The demolition was total: interior walls, doors, stairs, floor structures, fireplace, flue—all gone. Behind the historic façade, the



Photo © Allen Russ/HD Photo



Kitchen looking toward rear deck.

Photo © Allen Russ/HD Photo



Courtesy of Jon Hensley Architects

Rear of the house before renovation.

Front of the renovated house (painted grey).

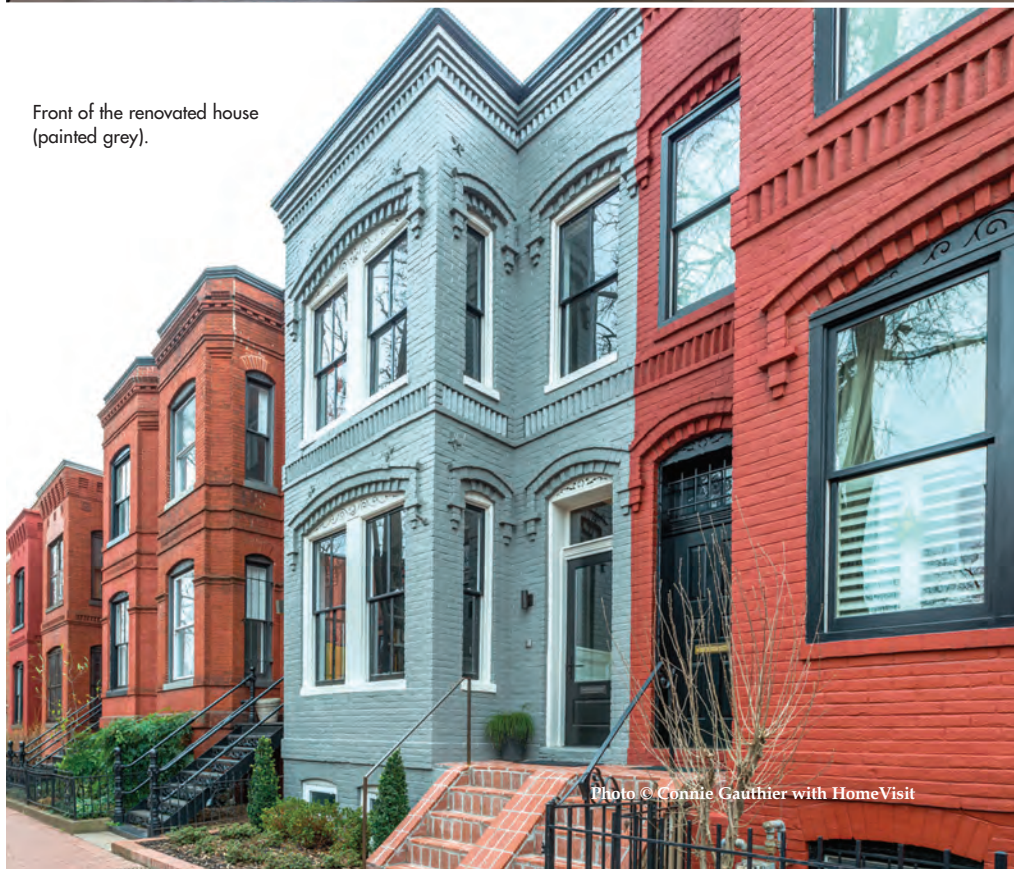


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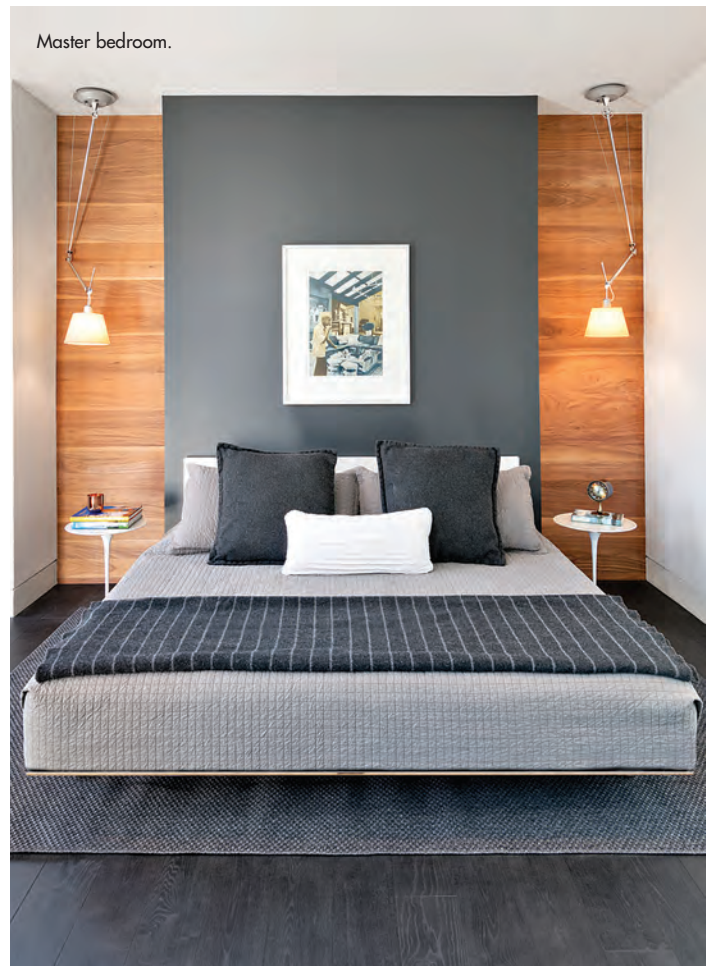


Photo © Allen Russ/HD Photo

team had a clean slate and began to build the space anew. They laid high-end European oak flooring in a gray matte finish with planks a whopping 16 feet long, installed a 16-foot-wide folding glass NanaWall system to completely open the rear of the house to the deck, and relocated the stairway. “We didn’t want the staircase to be the first thing you see on entering the house,” explained Unger. So a flight of stairs connecting to the lower level was centrally placed between the living room and the kitchen, and a second stair connecting to the upper level was located at the rear of the house.

In a respectful nod to the historic roots of the house, the brick façade and entry vestibule were restored and the clients opted for a traditional front room with generous moldings, grass cloth wall coverings, and classic Carrara marble fireplace. But moving deeper into the space, things quickly take a turn for the contemporary. “Jon really helped us to figure out how to transition from the traditional to modern space, like when to use flat interior doors and when to use paneled, or making a transom in the hall closet,” said Unger.

An informal seating area leads to the super-sleek Pedini kitchen where a mix of elm veneer and white lacquer cabinetry, Caesarstone counters, a waterfall island with an integrated sink, and high-end appliances all sweep expansively out to the glassy rear of the house and beyond to the deck. The clients entertain frequently and one of Unger’s favorite features of the house is the indoor/outdoor element. “You just open up the back, put on some music... so much light and air.”

Both clients were engrossed in all aspects of the project. They developed an 80-page spreadsheet detailing every phase of the

work, from demolition through construction, every fixture, every piece of furniture. One of the homeowners, while perusing Pinterest, noticed a simple but handsome wall treatment consisting of thin wood strips nailed together and painted. They quickly adapted this custom cladding and installed it along both stairways.

Upstairs are two bedrooms and two baths. The master suite includes a sky-lit Ikea closet and dressing area and a bathroom tiled in dark penny tile with dual sinks and a glassy oversize shower. The hard-won lower level, which includes a full bath, offers roomy quarters for the occasional overnight guest, but on most evenings serves as a comfortable TV room.

Hensley appreciated being part of a strong team. “We benefit by having clients like these who know the value of good design, understand the design and construction process, appreciate what architects provide, and often have their own great ideas to contribute.” He also gave a shout-out to Allen Built: “Working with older structures inevitably presents construction and permitting issues, and they were great at coming up with workarounds and managed to keep everybody—the clients, the neighbors, the city, me—friendly and on good terms.”

From start to finish, the gut renovation was a year in the making; the homeowners lived in the house for a scant five months before another job in another city called. Their house sold in five days. 🏡

Staircase lined in painted wood strips.



Photo © Allen Russ/HD Photo

Bottom of main staircase.

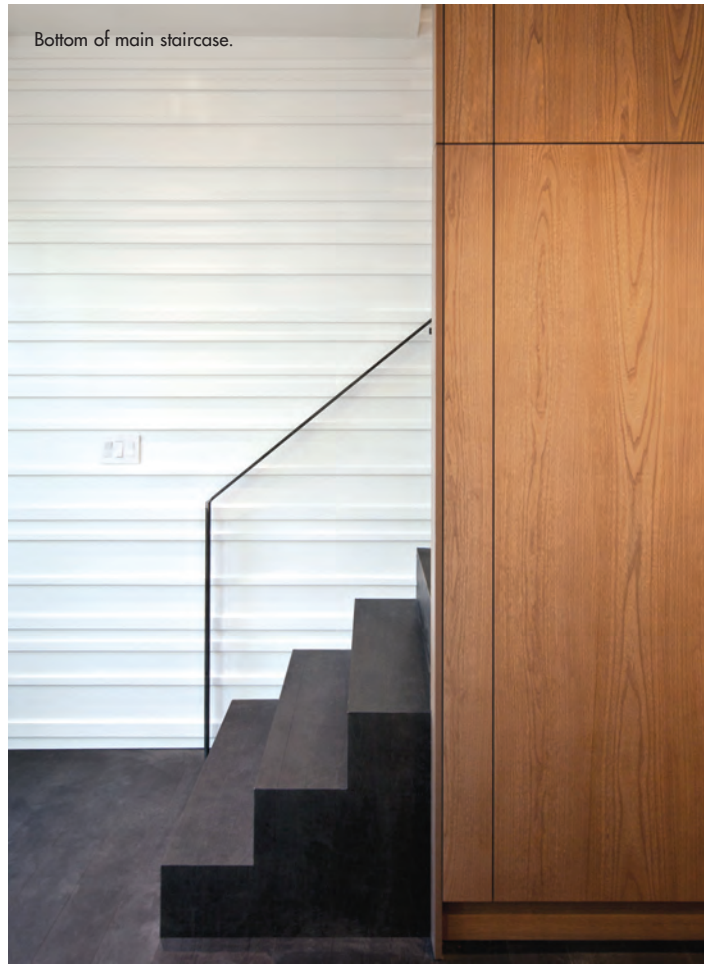


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Living room.



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Modernizing Modernism

McInturff Updates a House Previously Renovated by Jacobsen

by Steven K. Dickens, AIA, LEED AP

Rear of the house before
the latest renovation.



Renovated rear façade of the Kenwood House,
with porch below and master bedroom above.

“Updated” is a term that’s thrown out a lot today, thanks to the popularity of home-buying and home improvement shows on television. Most of the time, “updated” basically means “newly remodeled,” regardless of whether the new elements have any discernable relationship to the existing house or condominium. That’s fine for an ordinary house—“updated” is never a bad thing in the world of HGTV.

But updating must be approached differently when the pre-existing house is extraordinary. Architect **Mark McInturff, FAIA**, faced such a situation with this house, a center-hall colonial in Kenwood, Maryland, which had been renovated in the 1970s by Hugh Newell Jacobsen, FAIA, the dean of Washington residential architecture. Jacobsen’s style is distinctive: a blending of the minimalist school of Modernism with steeply pitched roofs and primal geometric forms such as squares and circles. Common *leitmotifs* of his work are simple gables with symmetrical windows, square-grid bookshelves, and large-blade plantation shutters—all painted white, like almost every other surface.

“I remember when the house was published, when it was newly done,” said McInturff. “I’m a very big fan of Jacobsen’s work.” McInturff had previously done second-round renovations on a Jacobsen house, as well as houses by other local Modernist pioneers such as Charles Goodman and the team of Brown & Wright. “Usually one starts by stripping away the accretions and band-aids, the inappropriate crown moldings or whatever, to get to the bones and learn the details,” McInturff noted. But that was not necessary in the Kenwood house. The owners bought it in the 1990s precisely because they like Jacobsen’s work, and they had been faithful stewards of the house ever since.

Nevertheless, by 2015, the house was in need of—that’s right—*updates*. Specifically, the owners felt that even a beautifully designed master suite from the 1970s just couldn’t compete with the elaborate retreats one sees nowadays. They approached McInturff, whom they had met through friends who live in another McInturff residence. They didn’t need or want an especially elaborate suite, but to accommodate their desires, an expansion was necessary.

Thanks to zoning constraints, the only reasonable option for providing extra space was a relatively narrow addition over an existing first-floor porch. To maximize space relative to the angled building restriction line along the side yard, the addition’s footprint bumps out twice—“a bay window on a bay window,” as McInturff put it. This also allowed multiple windows that admit daylight and provide views out to the verdant setting, while preserving a degree of privacy. (At the touch of a button, however, concealed blackout shades lower through minimal slots in the ceiling above each window, providing darkness and full privacy.)

Among the most award-winning residential architects in the DC area, McInturff stands out for his inventiveness and for the variety of forms he employs. “We have a broad range of interests,” he said. “We like every building [we do] to be different.” For a renovation like this, “You want to find the right line, for some of you to be present in it [the design], but still highly respectful of the original architect.”

The resultant master suite bears out this idea, inside and out. For those who know Jacobsen’s work, the deference and homage to the original architect are unmistakable. But for those who *really* know Jacobsen’s work, it’s equally clear that some different DNA

View through the sitting room and master bedroom toward the rear of the house.



Project: Kenwood Residence,

Chevy Chase, MD

Architects: **McInturff Architects**

Interior Designers: **Holt & Harrel**

Structural Engineers: **1200 Architectural Engineers**

General Contractor: **Alliance Builders**

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography



Sitting room.

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography



Master bedroom.

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography



Porch.

is also present. McInturff didn't merely copy Jacobson's motifs; he adapted them in subtle, intelligent, and stylish ways.

For example, to appear sufficiently strong and solid, the columns supporting the new room couldn't be too spindly. McInturff transformed Jacobson's white shutters to be the vertical supports. This gives the porch a very airy feel, with dappled sun and shade and free-flowing breezes. The same ladder-like shutters appear on some of the bedroom windows, casting interesting

shadows and filtering views. These elements are extremely *simpatico* with the originals, but they are variations on the theme.

Jacobson's signature grid bookcases also make an appearance, transitioning between two areas of the suite. The basic form is a precise homage, but in McInturff's redesign, the bookcases turn an outside corner—something that Jacobson's versions never did. "At least he never did in *this* house," mused McInturff. "All the original bookcases are inset between bounding walls or

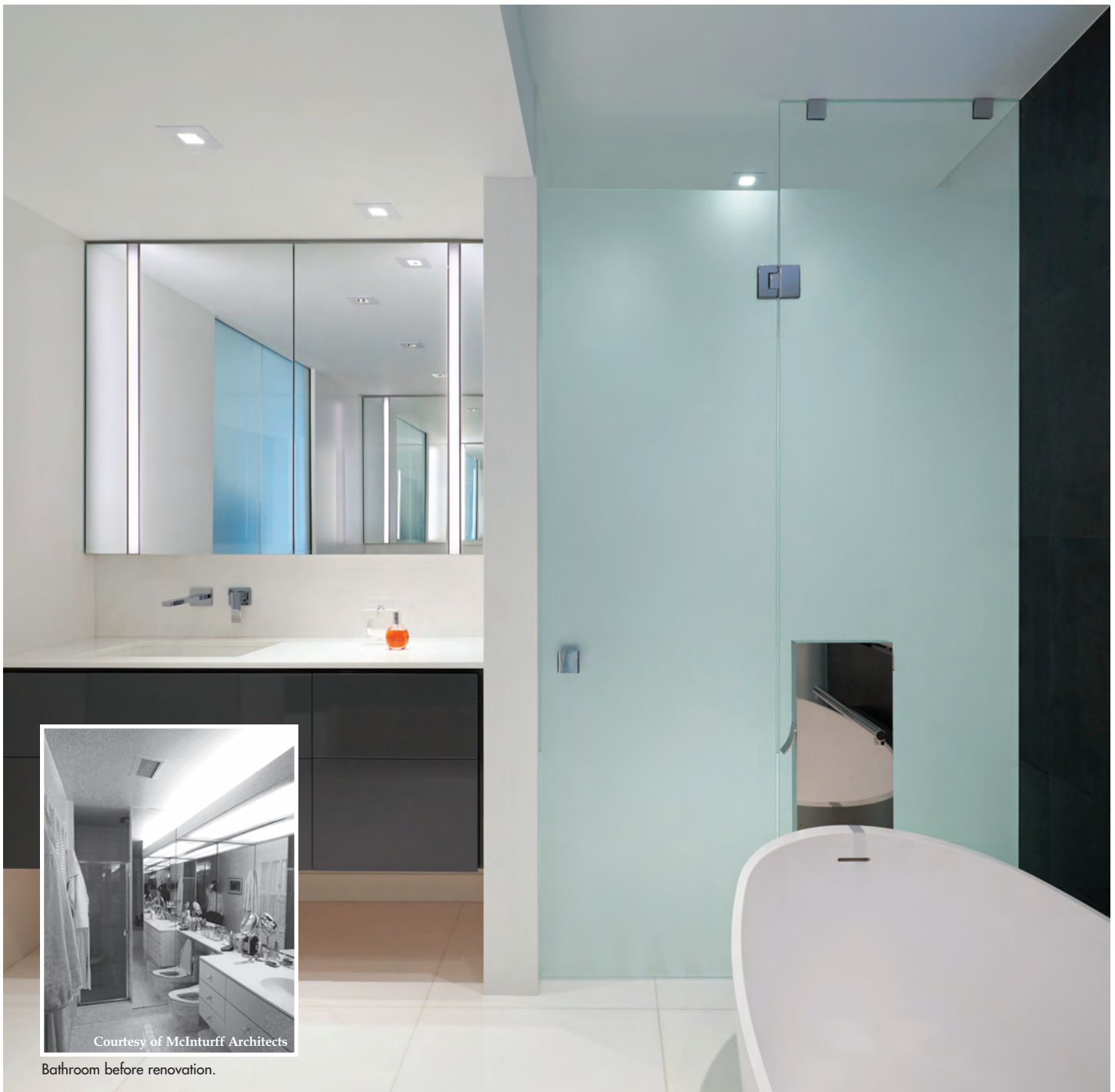


Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography

columns. Next time I see him, I'll have to ask whether that was always the case."

The exterior façade has the white-painted brick one might expect in a Jacobsen house, as well as the archetypal gable form and symmetrical windows. But, partly due to the double-bay plan, the massing and window arrangement are a touch more complex than one would expect in a Jacobsen work.

Since the 1970s there has been an explosion in both quantity and quality of options for virtually all building products, from carpet to light fixtures, from bathtubs to thermostats, and everything in between. Much of what Jacobsen worked hard to obtain—tiny, unobtrusive light fixtures, slickly minimal faucets, and so forth—is now readily available. At its best, this is what an *update* wants to be. "Jacobsen would have much rather used what we can get today," said McInturff.



Courtesy of McInturff Architects

Bathroom before renovation.

Master bathroom.

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography

This was particularly evident in the original master bathroom, where the best one could squeeze out of 1970s products bears little resemblance to the chic elegance achievable today. The clients were very particular about all aspects of the design. They worked closely with McInturff and his team, led by **Colleen Healey**, not only for visible elements like the tile and faucets, but also the underlayments and supports. The bed and side tables are custom designs, too, reflecting considerable thought, given that the client couple's heights vary by a foot and a half. "It's very intimate in all dimensions," said McInturff. Selection and placement of art pieces had their own joyful complications.

This project was actually two renovations, back-to-back. First, a guest suite was renovated. The owners used it while the master suite was expanded and remodeled. Additionally, McInturff did more modest renovations on rooms that had not been greatly altered in the original 1970s renovation. The Kenwood house is now, officially, *updated*—but the updates are mostly in quality and consistency of execution. The distinct character of a Jacobsen house remains, but with whiffs of McInturff's cheerful spirit. 🌿



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Lyon Park House before renovation.

Courtesy of Robert M. Gurney, FAIA, Architect

Project: Lyon Park House, Arlington, VA

Architects: **Robert M. Gurney, FAIA, Architect**

Structural Engineers: **D. Anthony Beale LLC**

General Contractor: **Arta Construction**

Boldly Demure

Sleek Renovation Fits Comfortably in Historic Neighborhood

by G. Martin Moeller, Jr., Assoc. AIA

Lyon Park is a leafy residential “village” situated just to the west of Arlington National Cemetery. Designated a National Historic District in 2003, the neighborhood is known for its stock of modestly sized houses—including bungalows, Cape Cods, and a significant number of pre-fabricated kit houses—built primarily between 1891 and 1953. Most prominent, however, are the many Colonial Revival-style houses dating from the 1920s and ’30s.



Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography

Front of the Lyon Park House,
with stairwell addition at left.

After seven years in one of those Colonial Revival houses, a young family of four needed more—and more suitable—space. The house was a warren of small rooms with a staircase in the middle preventing easy reorganization, and the interior was largely disconnected from the sloping, beautifully landscaped rear yard. Nonetheless, the owners liked the location and the coziness of the existing house. They opted for a renovation that would



Stairwell, with Kalwall panels at left to allow filtered light into the space while preserving privacy.

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography



Living room, with new stairwell in the background. The stone-clad wall was previously an exterior wall.

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography

open up those crowded rooms, create a stronger connection to the landscape, add another full bathroom, and double the number of bedrooms from two to four. While they hoped to preserve the homey quality they had long enjoyed, the owners did not want the end result to mimic the historical style of the existing house or any of its neighbors, and they were committed to making the house environmentally responsible. All of that needed to be accomplished on a relatively moderate budget.

Under the circumstances, architect **Robert M. Gurney, FAIA**, knew that wholesale demolition and substantial additions were out of the question. Instead, he devised a design that allowed a complete reconfiguration of interior spaces while retaining a large percentage of the existing structure. Most of the first floor bearing walls and the second floor structure were retained, for instance, meaning that the owners would have to live with the original eight-foot ceilings on the first floor. The budget did allow, however, the removal of the second floor exterior walls and sloping roof, giving Gurney and project architect **Claire L. Andreas** the flexibility to add the two bedrooms and one bathroom that the clients had requested. The upper level now has much higher ceilings than before, but thanks to the flat roof and low parapet, the tallest points of the house are actually lower than the peak of the original pitched roof.

Potential additions were limited not just by the tight budget, but also by zoning restrictions. Gurney judiciously introduced a series of three compact additions, totaling just 250 square feet at grade level, that went a long way

toward relieving some of the pressure on the interior spaces. The most significant addition runs almost the full depth of the house along one side, but is just wide enough to accommodate a repositioned staircase, thus freeing up the center of the plan for an open living space on the main floor. A smaller, projecting bay off the living room includes a picture window with a view of the rear yard, and an even smaller projection on the front façade provides space for a coat closet. On the upper level, where ground-level building restrictions did not apply, cantilevered volumes provided much-needed additional space for those new bedrooms.

Constrained by the need to retain much of the original structure, Gurney introduced more natural light to the interior by adding floor-to-ceiling windows in the living room, dining area, and kitchen on the main level. In addition, the new staircase has floor-to-ceiling glass at the front and back, as well as a section of Kalwall—a translucent fiberglass panel system—in the side wall by the stair landings, to bring even more light into the adjacent spaces without allowing views in from the house next door. On the second floor, distinctive, L-shaped windows, positioned so that their sills are just above the height of a typical desk or dresser, mark two of the bedrooms.

The exterior of the house is articulated as a series of discrete blocks, making the structure appear even smaller than it is. The opaque surfaces of these blocks are covered in horizontal mahogany boards, whose rich, warm color blends in with the surrounding trees. The mahogany-clad



Rear façade of the house.

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography

volumes are separated by slivers of charcoal-grey, integrally-colored fiber-cement panels. The side wall of the new stairwell is covered in light grey stucco, which serves to reduce the visual impact of that addition. Mahogany reappears on interior cabinets, while the wall between the living room and the stairwell is sheathed in grey stone—a subtle reminder that it was once an exterior wall. Such material choices add warmth to the interior spaces, which, though not especially large, are now consistently bright and airy.

Environment-conscious features of the house include the use of FSC-certified wood throughout and low-emissivity coatings on the windows to reduce solar heat gain. The roof is pre-wired for the possible future installation of photovoltaic panels. The house also includes high-grade insulation.

The renovation, including refinishing of the basement and re-grading of the yard to improve the connection between indoors and out, yielded an essentially new house measuring roughly 3,000 square feet—an increase of 700 square feet over the original structure—at a substantially lower cost than a typical custom-built house of similar size. Despite the radical change in the house's appearance and its considerable expansion, it retains the warmth and intimacy that the clients desired, and still fits comfortably amid the majestic trees and modest neighboring houses that give Lyon Park its distinct character. 🏡



Front of the house, with dining area visible at lower right.

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/
Hoachlander Davis Photography



Kitchen.

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/
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Robert M Gurney, FAIA Architect



Robert M Gurney, FAIA Architect



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River-facing façade.

River House

All photos © Chris Ambridge

Tradition and Modernity Mix on the Banks of the Potomac

by Mary Jane Bolle

Among the four natural elements identified by the ancient Greeks—air, earth, water and fire—water has a unique power to trigger intense emotions, particularly among novelists and poets. Mark Twain, for example, in *Life on the Mississippi*, declared “the river” to be like a “wonderful book . . . delivering its most cherished secrets as clearly as if it uttered them with a voice.”

The owners of River House, on land once occupied by Native Americans and later owned by George Washington, share a similar passion for the Potomac and the creatures it sustains. The husband, who grew up waterskiing on Lake Erie, vacationed at the ocean, and later built a huge log cabin on Lake Anna in Virginia, explained: “After I sold the lake house, there was no water. I work all the time. We don’t vacation at all. I need water, here.”

In 2008, **Joanna Schmickel, AIA, LEED AP**, a principal of **cox graae + spack architects**, was working on an addition to the house the couple owned at the time, when the wife announced that she

had just rung her sleeping husband in Japan to tell him she had found their next property. It was an Arts-and-Crafts bungalow on the Potomac. The site was ideal, but the house left a good deal to be desired. Ultimately, the potential cost of raising the roof and floors and adding more windows made it clear that a full renovation would be prohibitive, so the clients and architect decided to build an entirely new house on the bungalow’s footprint.

The couple gave Schmickel, soon joined by **Jennifer Kirwan, AIA**, their must-have list for the house. They wanted to have a stone exterior; to feel like they were always on vacation; to bring the outside inside; and to have a master suite that occupied the whole top floor. About the collaborative process that ensued, the wife said, “It was really fun working with the architects. They were both so creative and so bright, and seemed to just reach into my brain and pull out ideas that I felt, but could not describe.”

Project: River House, Alexandria, VA

Architects: **cox graae + spack architects**

Landscape Architects: **Jordan Honeyman Landscape Architecture LLC**

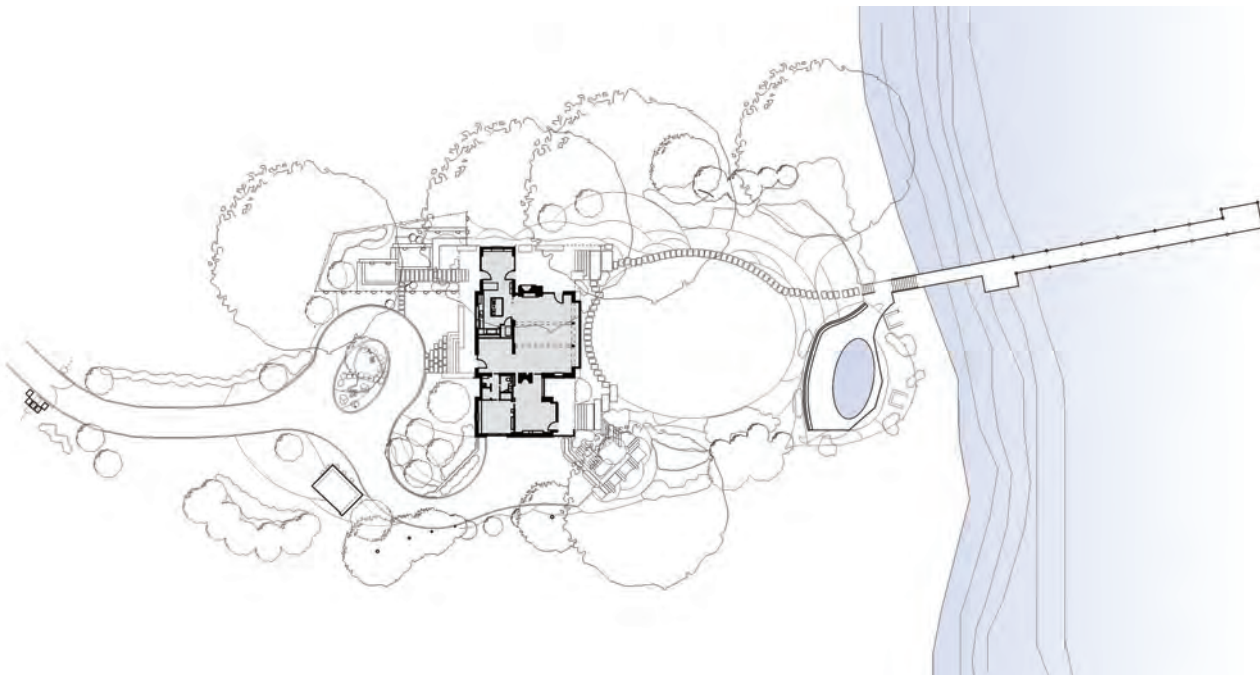
Structural Engineers: **Silman**

Kitchen Consultants: **St. Charles of New York Inc.**

General Contractor: **Horizon Builders**



Kitchen, with custom stove/island and living room in right background.



Site plan, showing oval driveway, lawn, and pool.



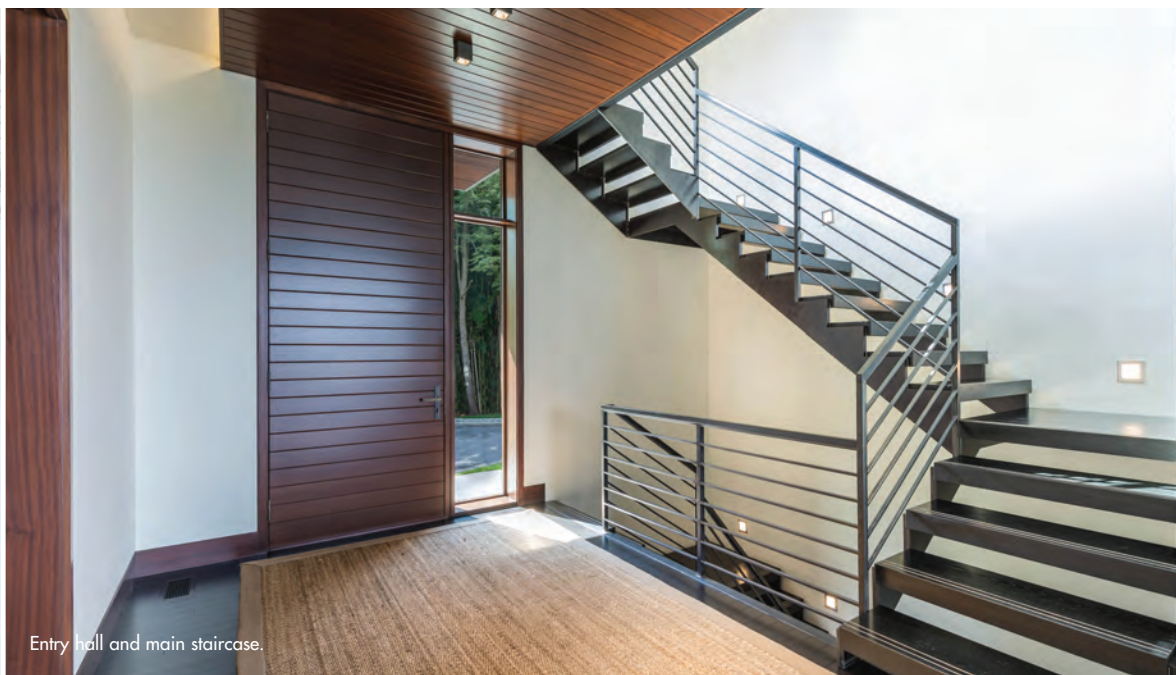
First floor sitting room and library.

The resulting 5,000-square-foot house, completed in 2014, is composed of two pitched-roof, stone-clad, farmhouse-like pavilions—one large and one small—alternating with two subordinate flat-roofed, mahogany-and-glass elements. The larger stone pavilion contains the master suite on the upper level and the kitchen and living/dining room on the ground level. The smaller pavilion, which serves as the guest suite, contains a bedroom and sitting room on the ground level and another bedroom on the lower level. The mahogany connector between it and the large house is an intimate library just large enough to gather two wing chairs around the wood-burning fireplace. The mahogany wing on the opposite end of the house is a small, transparent, breakfast-room affording breathtaking views.

The wife called River House the “inside-out, outside-in house,” because house and nature are seamlessly interconnected, thanks in part to seven outdoor terraces. Three, located on the

ground floor, are bordered by low stone walls that define room-like spaces and anchor them to the landscape. But the house itself is also see-through. Views from the back yard extend through the house to the river; and from almost anywhere inside, you can see out in at least three directions. The “secret spot” for viewing is at the back of the guesthouse sitting room. At first it seems like the room has only one window view—the river view—directly east. If you turn around, however, you can also see through the tall, narrow internal window behind you, toward the south and west. Then, if you pivot again, you can see north by looking across the inside of the house and through an exterior window whose mahogany frame is perfectly centered on the trunk of a grand old maple tree.

That tree and the old oak tree next to it were saved through the joint efforts of the architects, a tree preservationist, and the structural engineer, who designed a series of micro-piers, or stilts, to support the terrace off the living room and keep it above the



Entry hall and main staircase.



Living room.

trees' roots. "It has really paid off," noted the husband. "We have a pair of eagles in the oak tree!"

Those trees and others were incorporated into the overall property design by Holt Jordan, partner at Jordan Honeyman Landscape Architecture. The plan consists of three ovals that contrast with and soften the geometric lines of the house. The pre-existing oval swimming pool by the river set the theme, and the oval driveway out back was designed to blend in. The third oval is a sensuous mound fashioned from excavated dirt, situated between the house and pool. It is tilted at the perfect angle to invite residents and guests to play, picnic, and relax on its soft green, grass belly overlooking the river.

Throughout the house, muted colors, ranging from black and mahogany to beige, form the unified color

scheme to let nature star. The colorful exception is the wife's kitchen-island-sized stove, by the French company La Cornue. Its custom-colored dusty-aqua enamel was pulled from the river palette on a cloudy day. The couple entertains frequently. When the wife is not cooking gourmet meals, professional caterers may substitute, with the lower-level catering kitchen, pantry, and separate walk-in refrigerator and freezer playing a supportive role. Menu items may be garnished with strawberries, tomatoes, or other delicacies from the wife's gardens growing in pots on the rooftop terraces and in the backyard. There, in the "hoop garden," large, sturdy, metal arches are covered by screens in the summer to keep hungry critters at bay, and by plastic in the winter to keep hardy leaf and root crops from freezing.



Entry façade.

Food for social events is generally served on the custom-crafted mahogany table, designed as a “triptych.” Most of the time, two of the three sections are displayed as one in the dining-living room, and the third serves as a desk for the husband’s office in the guest suite’s sitting room. When needed, all three sections can be separated or combined to seat 24 or more people.

The couple was intent on having the house be structurally sound, low maintenance, and energy efficient. For energy efficiency, the architects designed a “super-insulated” envelope and a geothermal heating and cooling system. In the future, photovoltaic film on the standing-seam metal roof could potentially shift all or most of the house off the electrical grid and onto solar power produced on the property.

Meanwhile, husband and wife delight in the nature that surrounds them. Through the bedroom telescope, they watch the ospreys fish, and sometimes see eagles swoop in and snatch those fish for their own dinners. Last year, they also watched osprey eggs hatch, and nestlings grow. The wife watched from the bedroom, and the husband watched from Europe, on his cell phone, through the home’s security cameras. This year, so far, the male osprey brings in nesting twigs for the female to build a new nest, but she comes by later and scatters them. “Is this a commentary on humans, I wonder?” mused the husband.

The couple’s joy is in being actors with nature, as well as observers. In the summer, the husband bicycles to work on a near-by trail, and undertakes his own triathlon, of sorts. He begins with



Master bedroom.

the bike ride home, then kayaks on the river. Finally, he climbs a few yards to the swimming pool to cool off. The next morning he awakens, grabs his cell phone, and, lying in bed, shoots photos of the sun emerging over the water. Swiping through some of his favorite sunrises, he commented, “It’s like being on vacation all the time. We love it here. This is our last house. We will retire here, if I retire at all. With the elevator, we can live here when we are invalids, and die here happy.”

“This house,” his wife added, “is a slice of heaven.” 🌿

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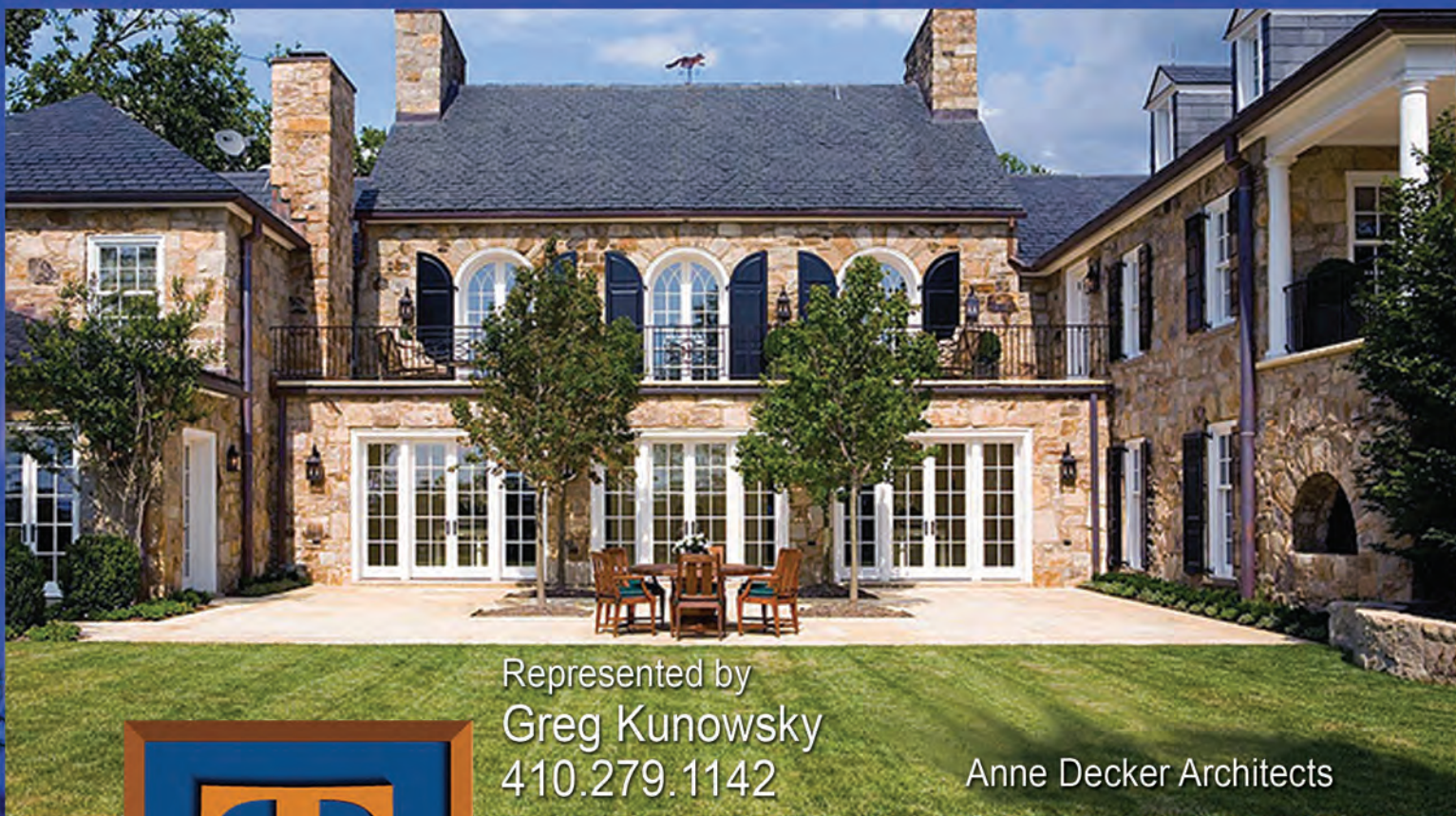
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Fourteenth, Amended

Two New Apartment Buildings Add to a Lively Corridor

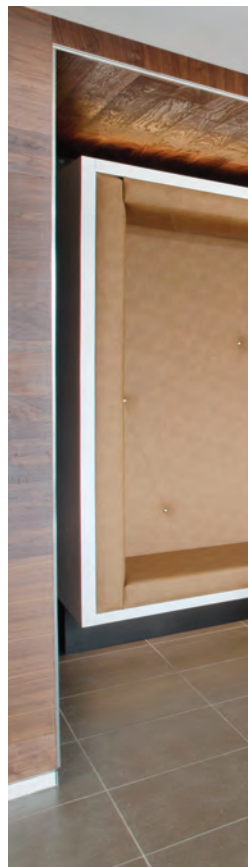
by Ronald O'Rourke

For sidewalk supervisors who enjoy tracking construction projects, the 14th Street, NW, corridor is the gift that keeps on giving. While certain other parts of the city, such as NoMA and the Anacostia waterfront, have experienced bursts of development that have transformed entire areas seemingly overnight, the redevelopment of 14th Street has in contrast involved a steady stream of projects over a period of several years. As a result, the corridor's architecture has been amended in a more incremental and cumulative fashion, one or two buildings at a time, while preserving the street's historic building stock.

Some of the recent projects on 14th Street, like the Northern Exchange building (see the Summer 2015 issue of *ARCHITECTUREDC*), are renovations of historic structures. Others, like 1525 14th Street (see the Summer 2016 issue), combine historic buildings with newly-built additions. And still others, like the two projects reviewed here, are new or mostly new buildings. With developers building

commercial, multi-family residential, and mixed-use projects of varying sizes on 14th Street sites that feature differing combinations of surrounding historical structures, architects are enjoying a rich array of design challenges.

The two projects covered here—the Louis, on 14th Street between T and U streets, designed by **Eric Colbert & Associates (ECA)**, and the Corcoran, a few blocks south at the corner of 14th and Corcoran streets, designed by **Hickok Cole Architects (HCA)**—are similar in certain respects: Both are mixed-use buildings with commercial space on the ground level and a combination of studios and one- and two-bedroom apartments above; both are modernist structures; and both incorporate sustainable design features. But in terms of scale, exterior massing and materials, and how they fit into their surrounding contexts, the two projects offer contrasting case studies in the design of new buildings for the 14th Street corridor.



The Louis as seen from across 14th Street.



Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography

One of the amenity spaces at the Louis.



Photo © William Taylor of Taylor Photo

Project: The Louis, 1920 14th Street, NW, Washington, DC

Architects: **Eric Colbert & Associates, PC**

Interior Designers: **Cecconi Simone**

Structural Engineers: **SK&A**

MEP Engineers: **Summit Engineering**

Civil Engineers/Landscape Architects: **Bowman Consulting**

LEED Consultant: **Sustainable Design Consulting**

General Contractor: **Balfour Beatty**

The Louis as seen from U Street, with preserved commercial row house buildings in foreground.



Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography

The Louis

The Louis is a big building that is hiding in plain sight. With 39,000 square feet of commercial space at street level and 266 apartments plus shared amenity spaces on eight floors above, the client's program easily could have led to a massive-looking structure with an overbearing presence along its stretch of 14th. But thanks to a deft design by ECA, the building presents a much gentler profile.

Key design features that reduce the project's apparent scale and visual weight include upper-floor setbacks, the division of the apartment floor plates into various wings, the subdivision of some of those wings into distinct window bays, and the use of flush, inset balconies rather than protruding ones. The building's apparent mass is further broken up by changes in exterior cladding involving two primary shades of brick (lighter and darker) and two shades of metal panels (grey and black). As a final touch, the building's apparent height is reduced through the use of grey metal paneling for the penthouse level. Thanks to the setbacks, pedestrians walking by the building's commercial storefronts may be barely aware of the residential floors above. Meanwhile, when seen from across the street, the wings and the changes in exterior materials yield a collage-like but coordinated architectural form rather than a single, undifferentiated mass.

"The massing and façade treatments were carefully designed to enable this structure to complement the adjacent buildings and the neighborhood as a whole," said **Eric Colbert, AIA**, principal at ECA. "Although it

Roof deck of the Louis, looking toward downtown Washington.



Photo © William Taylor of Taylor Photo

clearly reads as one project, smaller building façade elements were incorporated into the south side of the 14th Street façade to help reinforce the feeling of hierarchy. The suggestion of smaller building sections was achieved through changes in brick color and variations in the window mullions. The higher-density portion of the design faces the more highly trafficked U Street. The design then steps down as you move south, reflecting the existing neighborhood massing around our site."

On the building's south end, he continued, "we created a setback above the historic façade to give that existing architectural element some breathing space and to accentuate it. To create balance, we incorporated a similar setback on the north end facing 14th Street. The U Street façade is consistently set back from the historic structures that extend across the U Street frontage. The wings were a natural outcome of our studies to determine which configurations worked best with apartment building design. A double-loaded apartment building [i.e., with living units on either side of a central corridor] cannot be much thicker than 70 feet without creating internal rooms that are dark."

The project's overall color scheme, brick selection, and use of painted steel channels, Colbert said, "are intended to evoke an industrial feel reminiscent of structures that were present in past times throughout this neighborhood," while the external color palette "was a reflection of a desire to incorporate warm colors that are similar to other nearby historic apartment buildings. We wanted to use color to distinguish different façade forms and worked carefully with available brick colors to create a palette that was varied while at the same time being harmonious."

The building's residential entrance is located on 14th Street, amidst the commercial spaces—a placement that required some

clever design. "To encourage as much retail as possible, our client asked us to minimize the footprint of the ground floor lobby," Colbert said. To achieve that while still providing an impressive entry suitable for a building with more than 250 residential units, the lobby was designed as a lofted space with a grand staircase leading up to the second floor, where the building's leasing and office spaces are located.

The project was originally designed with 225 units, but the program was subsequently changed to reduce the average unit size and include an additional 40 or so units. "This 18 percent increase in the number of dwellings created certain challenges," Colbert said. "The outside of the building, including window locations, had been set at this point. An important part of the solution involved creating unit types which included interior bedrooms."

The biggest challenge presented by the site, Colbert said, involved retaining the existing historic buildings facing U Street. "We explored numerous structural options that would assure maximum protection for these structures, which were built with wood floor joists. Since our new construction was required to be all non-combustible, we were required to provide special [fire-resistant] separations between the new construction and the existing row buildings. Circulation between the new and existing construction types had to be carefully detailed to isolate the wood from the concrete floors."

"We also had to adjust the existing buildings' HVAC, plumbing, and electrical systems to satisfy modern tenant requirements," he added. "Drainage from the existing roofs had to be accommodated, and cooking exhaust for planned restaurants had to be carefully routed in order to avoid the introduction of cooking fumes into dwelling units."

Entry lobby of the Louis, which was designed with a minimal street frontage in order to maximize the space available for retail.



Photo © William Taylor of Taylor Photo

Much of the commercial space wound up being leased to the grocery firm Trader Joe's, requiring some additional design changes. "Normally our garage floors slope," Colbert said. "We had to redesign the parking to incorporate flat floors due to the presence of shopping carts. Another change required adding two large glass elevators from the Trader Joe's retail space down into their parking level."

New market-rate residential projects in redeveloping areas can create concerns about displacement of longtime area residents. In the case of the Louis, Colbert said, "the site was mostly a parking lot. Zero residents were displaced as a result of this project—no residential buildings were present on the site." The design team, he added, "worked extensively with various community groups, attending 25 meetings in a yearlong entitlement process." The one structure that was demolished was a 1980s-era building originally occupied by the Masons.

The building's name, Colbert said, is a play on words. "It's a combination of the French king Louis XIV, since the project is on 14th Street, and Louis Armstrong, who played in jazz clubs on the U Street corridor."

Colbert especially likes the building's roof deck, which includes a swimming pool, a bar, and outdoor grilling stations. "Due to its careful placement and the adjacent historic districts and zoning, the roof deck will always have commanding views on three sides," he said. But his favorite aspect of the project, he said, "is the breakdown in scale that was achieved, especially considering the size of the development. I believe that it fits comfortably into its context and is considerate of adjacent buildings and the broader neighborhood."

The Corcoran

The Corcoran, with 4,000 square feet of ground-floor commercial space and 35 apartments on six floors above, is a considerably smaller building than the Louis, with only about one-seventh as much total space. Finding ways to reduce the building's apparent size consequently was not as much of a concern for the Corcoran as it was for the Louis.

To the contrary, the Corcoran's compact but somewhat prominent plot at the northeast corner of 14th and Corcoran Streets presented an opportunity to create a building that would call a bit of attention to itself. HCA responded with a design that acknowledges the surrounding historical context while incorporating features that set the building apart from its neighbors and celebrate the project's location in the 14th Street arts overlay zoning district.

Nearby buildings include historic structures on 14th Street clad in buff-colored limestone, a beautiful line of historic brick row houses on Corcoran Street, and the John Wesley A.M.E. Zion Church across Corcoran Street—a formidably handsome 1894 red brick structure built in a transitional Romanesque-Gothic style.

Working within this context, HCA chose brick as a primary exterior material for the Corcoran, but selected a

The Corcoran, as seen from Corcoran Street, with the main building entrance at right center.



dark, plum-colored shade. Against the dark brick background, the architects added contrasting white metal window frames on the lower floors, and two additional levels of white-clad living space on top. Some of the white elements are twisted away from the orthogonal, enlivening the façade with windows that point in various directions and creating a series of irregularly shaped terraces on the building's top floors. As one more departure from the conventional approach for a mostly residential building, the building's glass is slightly reflective and has a blue tint.

"Brick is a common material associated with residential buildings, but we chose an unusual color and texture to make the Corcoran stand out along the street," said **Yolanda Cole, FAIA, IIDA, LEED AP**, a principal at HCA and the principal in charge for the project. "It gives the Corcoran a sophisticated feel, which is lightened up with the white windows and the glass." The tinted glass, she added, "reflects the sky and gives the building a cheery appearance. Most clear glass, in contrast, reads as dark grey during the daytime."

"The building's massing and the window openings facing 14th Street are of the scale of other historic buildings on the block," said **Guilherme Almeida, Assoc. AIA**,





Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography



Dusk view of the Corcoran.

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography



Close-up of the Corcoran's facade. Note the projecting bricks that frame the individual windows, adding depth to the facade.

Project: The Corcoran, 1350 Corcoran Street, NW, Washington, DC

Architects/Interior Designers: **Hickok Cole Architects**

Structural Engineers: **Structura**

MEP Engineers: **Capital Engineering Group**

Civil Engineers: **AMT**

Logo/Signage Designers: **Hickok Cole Creative**

General Contractor: **SIGAL**

General Contractor: **Balfour Beatty**

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography



A corner apartment at the Corcoran.

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography



LEED GA, HCA's project designer for the Corcoran. "The design then steps down [in height], with smaller-scale window openings on the Corcoran Street side, to relate to the smaller townhouses there. The glassy building top and the corner window bay [facing 14th Street] create a jazzy, angular geometry in contrast to the regularity of the brick block. By designing the building in a way that respects the palette, proportions, and attention to detail of the surrounding historic properties, we were able to step outside of the box and introduce a contemporary, sculptural language that speaks to the character and vibrancy of the arts overlay district."

"Our approach to the project was to embrace the intent of the 14th Street arts overlay [zoning] and capture the current vitality and energy of 14th Street," added **Laurence Caudle**, HCA's director of housing. "The top of the building really celebrates the arts aspect of the overlay. We did the right things contextually, but the details, including the windows and color palette, are creative and unexpected."

The building's residential entrance was placed on Corcoran Street, close to the historic row houses, providing a quieter entry zone for building residents and allowing more commercial space along 14th Street. "There was clearly a need, as there always is with developer-driven projects, to maximize leasable commercial space," Almeida said. "The placement of the residential entrance on Corcoran Street allowed us to create a more intimate, almost jewel-like entry pavilion, while maximizing setbacks to the adjacent row of residential townhomes to the east."

This particular block of Corcoran Street is about as picturesque as it gets, and is a huge differentiator between this property and other new rental properties along 14th street."

The location of the entry pavilion and the resulting setback on the building's east façade, facing the row houses, meant that this side of the building would be clearly on view to passersby. "This corner of the building benefits from as much, if not more, visual interest than the façades visible from 14th Street," Almeida said. Consequently, "the east façade was given the same design consideration as the two street-facing façades. We used the same masonry and window systems, and employed the same details at the masonry punched openings and curtain wall. We enhanced the east-facing balconies and terraces by employing a perforated metal panel guardrail. The tree canopy of Corcoran Street served as inspiration for the graphic frit [a ceramic applique] that occurs at all punched window openings, as well as in a larger format, along the lobby entrance vestibule curtain wall."

The project site was a decommissioned gas station that had had been turned into a parking lot used by the car-sharing firm Zipcar, which provided nearby residents with convenient access to cars when needed. "This made our request for a reduction in the required number of parking spaces challenging," Almeida said. "We overcame this challenge by providing the Corcoran with an unusually high number of bicycle parking spaces—about one per unit—as well as by highlighting the site's excellent access to public transport."



Lobby of the Corcoran, looking toward the entrance.

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography

Given the project's compact site, HCA worked to make the best use of available interior space. "A small footprint is always a challenge in making an efficient building," Cole said. "We were able to design a stair that kept the core of the building as small as possible. We were also limited in the amount of amenity space we could provide, so we put the clubroom at the building's prime corner, where it could spill out onto a terrace."

"To maximize the use of the compact footprint of the units," Almeida said, "we located all mechanical units within the ceiling plenum. We also employed sliding glass and pocket doors in lieu of swing doors at several locations, and carefully positioned doors connecting living and bedroom areas in order to maximize views out to the city and minimize views of potential clutter within units."

Summing up the design, Cole noted that she lives only one block from the building. As a result, "the team was keenly aware that I would see it nearly every day. I was involved throughout the design process and challenged the team to do something that would set it apart from the other new buildings on the street." The result, she said, "is a very handsome and well-crafted building, with some fun elements that give it some pizzazz. We get compliments all the time from people in the neighborhood." 🏡



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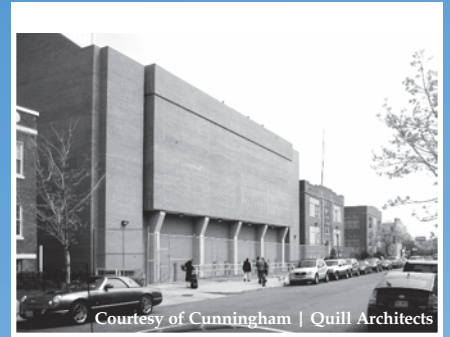
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The House of Lebanon.



Courtesy of Cunningham | Quill Architects

Similar view of the complex before renovation, with the 1971 gymnasium addition in the foreground.

Senior Class

Historic School Repurposed as Affordable Housing

by G. Martin Moeller, Jr., Assoc. AIA

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography

The House of Lebanon, with the original O Street Vocational School building at center, 1938 addition at right, and rebuilt 1971 wing at left.



Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography

Oblique view showing how the composition of the red panels on the newer wing relates to the scale of the earlier brick wings.



Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography

Project: House of Lebanon, 27 O Street, NW,
Washington, DC

Architects: **Cunningham | Quill Architects PLLC**
Architectural Historians: **EHT Traceries**
Structural Engineers: **Ehlert/Bryan, Inc.**
MEP Engineers: **Capital Engineering Group**
Civil Engineers: **AMT Engineering**
Project Manager: **JDC Construction**
General Contractor: **Hamel Builders**

The history of the building that is now the House of Lebanon Senior Apartments, in DC's Shaw neighborhood, reflects the booming development, subsequent decline, and recent resurgence of American cities over the past century or so. Completed in 1912, the earliest part of the building was originally the O Street Vocational School, established to provide "manual training for boys and domestic science and art for girls." It was designed by Snowden Ashford, municipal architect for the District of Columbia, in a subdued but elegant scholastic style. Its red brick façades are punctuated by large windows with stone trim, and accented by a gently arched entry, diamond-shaped inlays just below the parapet, and simple horizontal bands that girdle the building, all in matching stone. It is exemplary of the fine civic architecture that Washington and other major cities built in the early 1900s.

The school was renamed in 1926 for Margaret Murray Washington, the late widow of Booker T. Washington and longtime "lady principal" of the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (now Tuskegee University). The new name was apt, since both Booker and Margaret Washington had worked untiringly to promote vocational education for African Americans throughout the country. The school was expanded in 1928 and again in 1938 as the city and neighborhood continued to grow. These additions

were architecturally compatible with the original block, and resulted in a symmetrical, U-shaped building in plan. The school offered courses in nursing during World War II, then adopted a general, co-educational curriculum after the war.

By the next time the school was expanded, in 1971, the character of the city had changed dramatically. Washington, like most American inner cities, was rapidly losing population, contributing to a cycle of disinvestment, crime, and deteriorating infrastructure. When the M.M. Washington School needed a new gym and additional classroom space, it was built in a boxy, monumental style that, while popular at the time for civic and institutional projects, also reflected a certain pessimism about the future of the city. Its blank, foreboding façades stood in stark contrast to the relatively open, lively architecture of the original building and earlier additions. Over the ensuing several decades, the condition of the entire facility gradually declined, and around 2008, the school was closed and abandoned.

Since then, of course, DC has enjoyed a renaissance, which, on the one hand, has facilitated numerous improvements to the city's services and infrastructure, but on the other, has led to a severe shortage of affordable housing, particularly for senior citizens.

Several years ago, the DC government issued a request for proposals for reuse of surplus public school properties. A development team consisting of Mission First Housing Group, UrbanMatters Development Partners, and the Mt. Lebanon Baptist Church Community Development Corporation submitted the winning bid to redevelop the M.M. Washington School. Their proposal called for the transformation of the derelict school into affordable housing for seniors. The name of the project, House of Lebanon, derived from that of the church, located a few blocks away.



Renovated courtyard, which now serves as the main entrance to the building.

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography

Cunningham | Quill Architects oversaw the renovation. The architects determined that the earlier portions of the complex, while heavily damaged during the period of abandonment, were still structurally sound and, with their ample windows and double-loaded corridors, well suited to conversion into apartments. Although the site was not in a historic district, the team decided to submit the earlier sections of the building for local landmark designation. The application was successful, enabling the project to qualify for historic tax credits—a great boon to the tight budget for an affordable housing project.

By contrast, the 1971 wing was not only an eyesore, but also impossible to adapt to residential use because of its depth and width. This led the architects to their key design decision: to strip the newer wing to its structural frame, remove a substantial section of the structure adjacent to the historic building, and then build out the remaining portion anew. The demolition of part of the newer section not only resulted in a narrower wing suitable for modern apartment layouts, but also made room for a slim courtyard that balanced the existing one inside the

U formed by the earlier wings while also allowing the original structure to be viewed in the round.

The architects clad the lower two floors of the newer wing in red fiber-cement panels with punched windows reminiscent of those in the earlier parts of the structure. The third floor is set back slightly and rendered in white, so that it recedes visually. As a result, when glimpsed from a distance, the newer wing appears as a red block that clearly relates to the original building in both color and scale. A few remnants of the brown brick of the 1971 addition remain.

The architects' second most important design decision was to convert the existing courtyard—previously an asphalt parking lot—into a landscaped forecourt leading to a new main entrance to the complex. In addition to providing outdoor space for residents and visitors, the forecourt serves a practical purpose: it creates a universally accessible entrance, unlike the previous entry, which led to a landing in a staircase midway between the lower two levels.



Communal space within the House of Lebanon.

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography

The historic landmark designation required that original interior finishes be maintained wherever possible. The architects directed the restoration and, where necessary, infill of terrazzo flooring, ceramic tile, and brick in the interior corridors and other spaces. They even managed to preserve the hallway lockers that are so characteristic of school buildings. Original windows were restored, though interior storm windows were added—one of many moves intended to enhance energy efficiency and make the building as environmentally friendly as feasible.

The completed project includes 82 units in a mix of studios, one-bedrooms, and two-bedroom apartments, along with communal spaces for residents and outside groups. The unit layouts in this case were particularly challenging because of the historic constraints of the earlier wings. “There were many iterations of the plan layout,” said **Scott Matties, AIA, LEED AP**, principal-in-charge of the project, “to allow us to retain the window groupings while still ending up with units that made sense.” The architects’ success in this regard may be measured by the fact that the apartment layouts feel unforced, and the window patterns are preserved.

Although the building has been converted from academic to residential use, in many ways it has come full circle. “When we went back to do a photo shoot after the building opened,” said Matties, “we met a couple of residents who had gone to school there or who had a brother or sister who did.” The House of Lebanon is thus not only a symbol of the city’s changing socioeconomic fortunes, but also a landmark to communal continuity. 🏠

The proposed design for the House of Lebanon was featured in an article about upcoming affordable housing projects that appeared in the Summer 2012 issue of ARCHITECTUREDC.



Renovated corridor in the historic portion of the building, with restored tile wainscoting.

Photo © Anice Hoachlander/Hoachlander Davis Photography

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Living Laboratory

New Housing Adds Life to Medical Research Campus

by G. Martin Moeller, Jr., Assoc. AIA





Apartment Building B at the Janelia Research Campus of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute. Note the bridge connecting the building to the raised green space at left.

Project: Howard Hughes Medical Institute, Janelia Research Campus, Apartment Building B, 19700 Helix Drive, Ashburn, VA

Architects: **WDG Architecture, PLLC**
Landscape Architects: **LSG Landscape Architecture, Inc.**
Structural Engineers: **TCE & Associates, Inc.**
MEP Engineers: **AHA Consulting Engineers**
Civil Engineers: **J2 Engineers**
Geotechnical Engineers: **ECS Mid-Atlantic, LLC**
Lighting Designers: **C.M. Kling and Associates**
General Contractor: **Skanska**

Not long after 19-year-old Howard Hughes inherited the majority of the already-successful Hughes Tool Company in 1924, the young industrialist wrote a will calling for the creation of an independent institution “devoted to the search for and development of the highest scientific methods for the prevention and treatment of diseases.” That dream was finally realized in 1953 with the establishment of the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI), initially headquartered in Miami. Hughes transferred all of his stock in his eponymous aircraft company to the new institute, leading to accusations that the entire enterprise was merely a tax dodge. Nonetheless, the organization soon began funding medical research fellowships across the country.

Hughes was the sole trustee of the institute when he died without a valid will in 1976, leading to years of legal wrangling over his estate. In 1985, the court-appointed “charter trustees” of HHMI decided to sell the organization’s single asset, the Hughes Aircraft Company, yielding a vast endowment that suddenly thrust the institute into the upper echelons of American philanthropies. Today, with assets of about \$19 billion, it is the second wealthiest charitable foundation in the country (after the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), providing critical funding for biomedical research and scientific education.

HHMI moved its offices to Bethesda, Maryland, in 1976, the year of Hughes’s death, and is now headquartered in Chevy Chase. By the early 2000s, the organization’s leaders were eager to create a new, freestanding facility where experts from various disciplines could come together to pursue dedicated research in state-of-the-art laboratories. The result was the Janelia Research Campus in Ashburn, Virginia, built on the site of a former farm.

The campus’s primary research facility, known as the Landscape Building because it blends into the site, was designed by the New York firm of Rafael Viñoly Architects and opened to nationwide critical acclaim in 2006. Initially, most researchers working at the Janelia facility lived in the various nearby communities of Northern Virginia. HHMI leaders realized, however, that there would be great advantages to creating a true campus where researchers could both live and work. After building a small number of modest townhouse units on site, they decided to conduct a design-build competition for a larger apartment building that would make an architectural statement. The competition was won by the team led by **WDG Architecture**. The resulting building received an



Upper-level, two-bedroom unit, with outdoor terrace in the background.

Photo © Maxwell MacKenzie Architectural Photographer



Typical one-bedroom unit. Note the partial-height divider with bedroom in the background.

Photo © Maxwell MacKenzie Architectural Photographer



Bathroom in one of the two-bedroom units.

Photo © Maxwell MacKenzie Architectural Photographer

AIA | DC Washingtonian Residential Design Award and was featured in the Summer 2012 issue of **ARCHITECTUREDC**.

HHMI leaders originally planned to pursue a second phase of apartments in about 15 years or so, but demand was so great that they accelerated the process. This time, they hired WDG outright, based on the firm's successful work on the earlier project. While the first phase was geared primarily toward tenants who were couples or had small children, the second phase targets young professionals, offering smaller units, most of them with one semi-separate bedroom. The first project was certified as LEED Platinum, and while HHMI did not pursue LEED certification for the second project, it was built to the same high standard of sustainable design.

When completed, the first WDG project was a free-standing building on a relatively open site. In designing the second phase, the firm took advantage of the opportunity to begin creating a coherent residential enclave. Not only do the two buildings complement each other aesthetically and spatially, but they also define a shared outdoor space perfect for recreational activities. The buildings are sited so that their unenclosed parking garages at ground level are virtually invisible from the central green space, which is significantly higher. Concrete bridges connect the open space to the building lobbies above the parking levels. Internal communal spaces encourage random encounters among residents and the sharing of ideas.

The overall site plan, based on the master plan by LSG Landscape Architecture, was carefully conceived so as to recognize and preserve view corridors from the apartment buildings toward the landscape, which includes a wooded area to the east. "We spent a lot of time on site," said **Eric Liebmann, AIA, LEED AP**, WDG's managing principal and director of design, "figuring out views and orientation—how close to the woods, relationship to the existing building, and so on. We did some preliminary planning and siting, but during the design process, all of that changed quite a bit."

The new building shares a basic exterior material palette with its predecessor. The primary wall planes are finished in beige fiber-cement panels, with an orderly array of floor-to-ceiling windows punctuated by balconies with mesh sunscreens. Contrasting with these relatively neutral planes are large, projecting bays clad in vertically ribbed steel panels. The ribs follow an irregular pattern that was initially inspired by the Fibonacci Sequence (a series of numbers in which each number is the sum of the two before it). The pattern is also vaguely suggestive of genetic sequencing, and thus a nod to the biomedical work done at the facility. The window patterns on these projecting bays are partially randomized, introducing a more dynamic element to the composition. The interplay of materials and fenestration patterns was quite deliberate. "I find that a lot of times, when people do randomized patterns, they make *everything* random," said **Matt Lam**, senior design architect at WDG. "It's good to have some order to offset the irregularity."



Apartment Building B with green space in the foreground.

Photo © Maxwell MacKenzie Architectural Photographer

Although units in the new building are rented at market rates, the combination of a forward-looking institutional client and an open site with few building constraints allowed WDG to create relatively spacious apartments with distinctive layouts. Before construction began, the architects built full-scale, fully wired (but not plumbed) mock-ups of individual units in a vacant office building on the Janelia campus. In addition to tweaking dimensions and finalizing the lighting design, the architects used the mock-ups to test specific materials and finishes, including two different versions of custom kitchen cabinets—one with the grain running vertically, and the other horizontally.

The one-bedroom apartments are generally about 24 feet deep from the exterior wall—much shallower than typical units in most modern apartment buildings, which may run to 30 or even 40 feet or more. Thanks to their shallow footprints, these units have an unusually high ratio of exterior wall (and, by extension, windows) to living area. The apartments are thus free of the “dark dens” or “inboard bedrooms” that have become commonplace in commercially developed residential buildings.

Rather than fully enclosing the bedrooms, WDG decided to separate them from the living areas with partial-

height cabinets, allowing light and air to pass freely between the spaces. These cabinets were custom-designed by WDG and built in HHMI’s own carpentry shop. Adding to the sense of spaciousness are ten-foot ceilings throughout most interior spaces. “We even went to the trouble to make the structural floor-to-ceiling height 10 feet, 1-1/2 inches,” said Lam, “so that when the wood floors were installed, the remaining height was still a full ten feet.”

The top floor includes a smaller number of two-bedroom apartments intended for senior laboratory staff. In addition to spectacular views, these units offer larger terraces lined with wood veneer panels that add visual warmth to the muted palette. Like the smaller units, these apartments use energy-efficient LED lighting in all spaces except the bathrooms, where the architects specified lighting with warmer color rendition.

The pair of apartment buildings designed by WDG continues the tradition of architectural excellence at the Janelia Research Campus begun by Viñoly’s Landscape Building. They also set precedents for future development of the site. Urbane yet deferential to the landscape, they help to create a true community within a rarified academic environment. 🌿





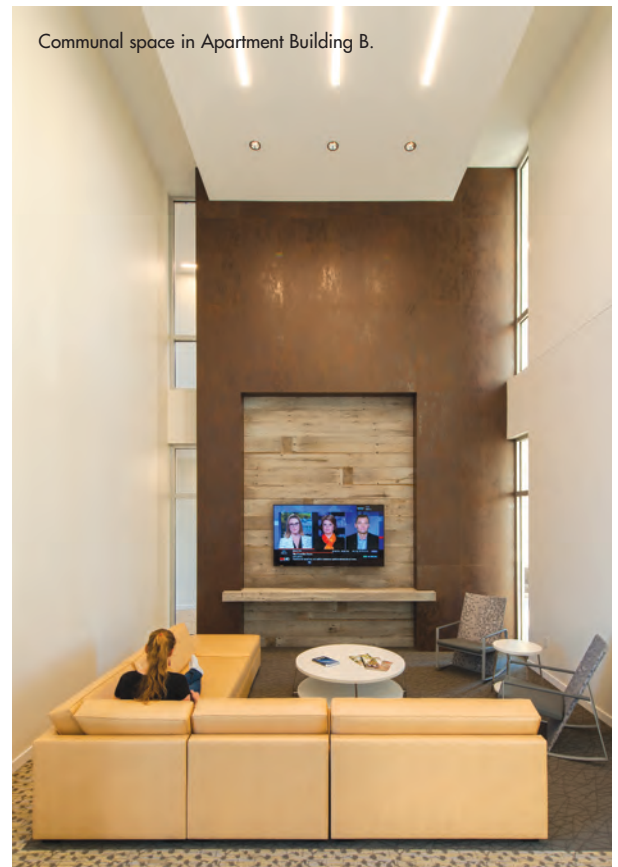
Apartment Building B, with its predecessor visible at left.

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Site plan, showing the Landscape Building at center left, and Apartment Buildings A (top) and B (bottom) in red.

Courtesy of LSG Landscape Architecture



Communal space in Apartment Building B.

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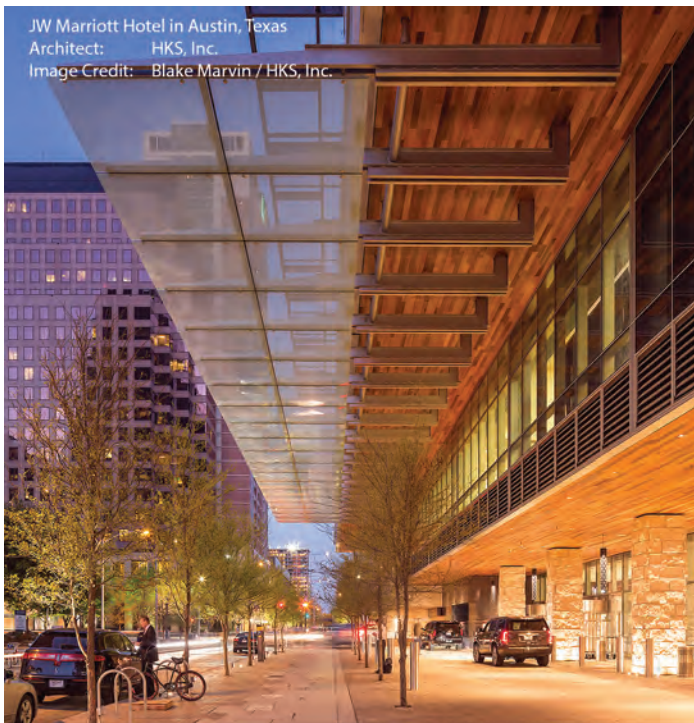
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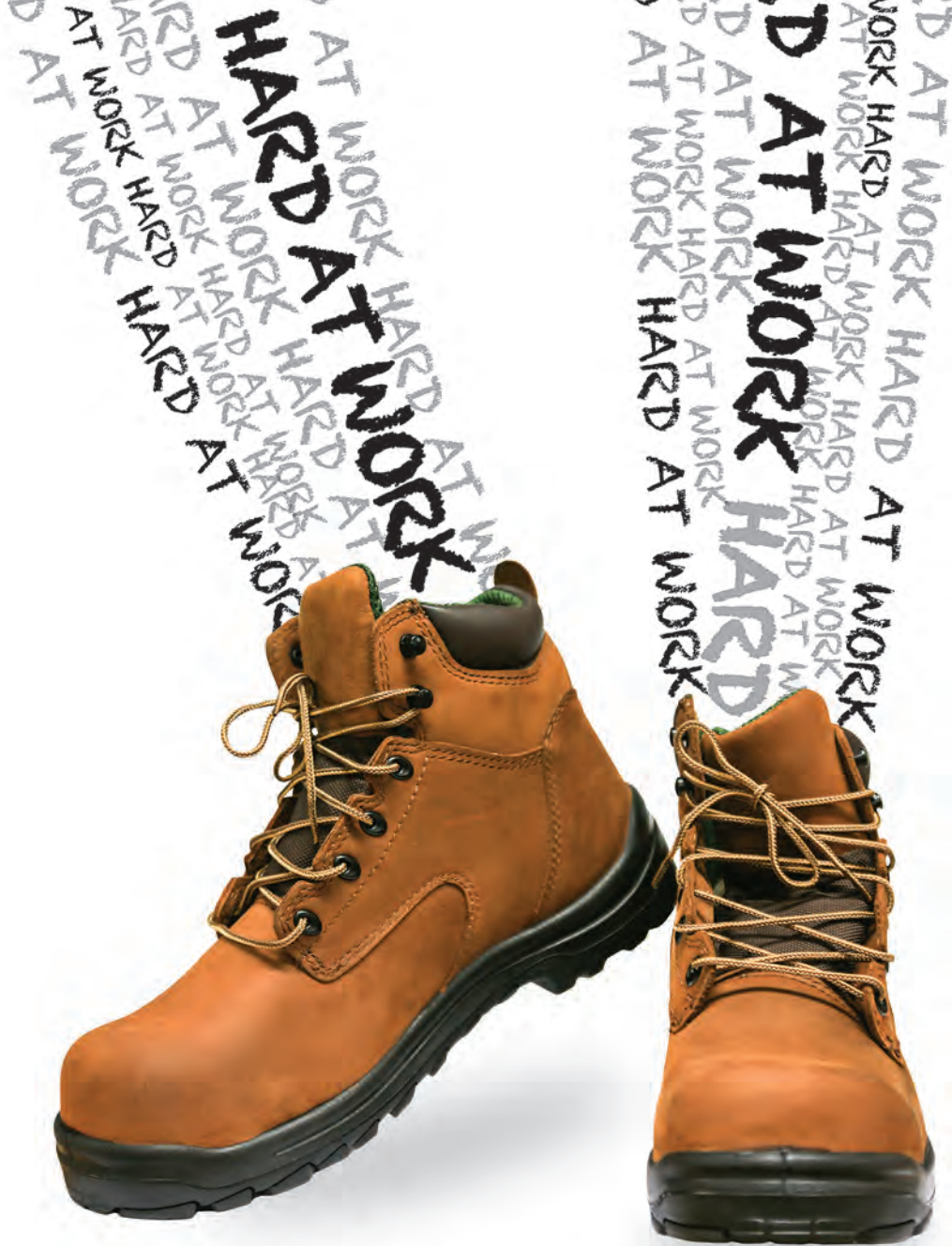


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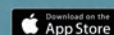
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