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FALL 2015

# ia architect

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# editor's letter



## Welcome!

An architect's work is never truly done. The best projects often take years of conversations before a single line is drawn, or nail is hammered. And the design process doesn't just stop with the design drawings either. Throughout construction things change and adjustments to the design are often necessary.

What separates truly great architecture from the rest is when the architect is able to distill the design idea down into a few important core elements and then implement them without noticeable compromise. In this issue of Iowa Architect we investigate the design process from beginning to end as we look at a few projects that were designed to completion.

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### Evan Shaw, AIA

Editor, Iowa Architect

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## iaarchitect

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## Top 10 Reasons Why You Should Choose Masonry

- 1 Fire Resistant** / Non-combustible materials.
- 2 Weather Resistant** / Exterior walls that will hold up to heavy storms, U.V. degradation, blistering heat, and sub-zero temperatures.
- 3 Termite Resistant** / Exterior walls made of masonry means there's no wood to eat.
- 4 Protection from Rotting, Mold & Fungus** / With no exterior wood on the walls, there's nothing to rot and masonry plays a large role in significantly reducing or eliminating the build-up of fungus and mildew between interior and exterior walls. Such problems have been known to contribute to health ailments including chronic fatigue, asthma and throat infections. Clearly, masonry structures are healthier for its inhabitants. Masonry structures are also nearly air-tight, making them allergy resistant as well.
- 5 Superior Sound Proofing** / Masonry blocks out noise better than traditional building materials, resulting in a quieter environment.
- 6 Virtually Maintenance Free** / When used in its natural form, masonry provides lasting beauty that requires considerably less maintenance than other building materials.
- 7 Lower Utility Bills** / Concrete block, combined with 'thermal mass' insulation systems, stores more energy, meaning it stays warmer in winter and cooler in summer, reducing electric consumption, therefore lower utility bills.
- 8 Lower Insurance Premiums** / Because masonry provides higher levels of security, fire and termite protection, and does a better job of weathering the storm, many insurance companies may offer discounts on policies.
- 9 Environmentally-Friendly "Green" Products** / Masonry products play a large role in ecologically responsible building methods and is recognized by government programs as a contributor to green building status. Masonry products are earth-friendly because they do not deplete precious natural and limited resources like timber.
- 10 Increased Resale Appeal** / There's a widely-held opinion, supported by studies, that masonry constructed buildings and homes offer a greater resale value than other forms of construction. Key reasons are the fact that masonry structures are high quality and low maintenance.

*"Working to build a better Iowa — with brick, block and stone."*

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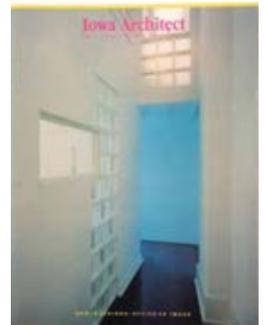
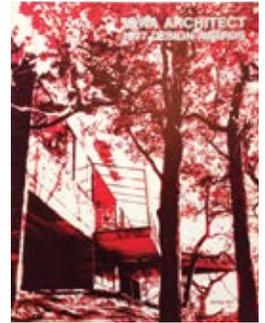
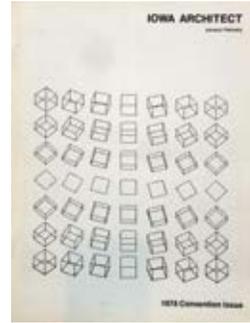
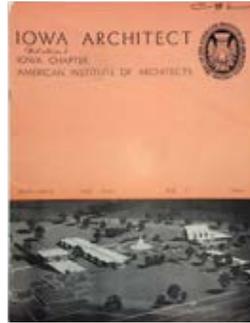


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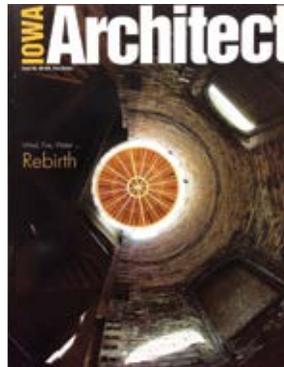
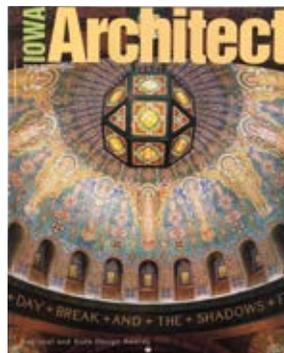
Cascade High School Addition, Western Dubuque Community School District

# collected

People  
Products  
Inspiration



## 60 YEARS OF *Iowa Architect*



Buried at the bottom of page six, an ad in the first-ever issue reads “Wanted: Original ideas for the name of Iowa chapter publication currently called *Iowa Architect*.” Though the name suggestions never piqued interest, the content of the publication captured the attention of readers across the state.

*Iowa Architect* has flourished over the past 60 years, growing from the first single-sided seven-page issue printed and stapled together in April 1954, to this glossy book of 44 beautifully designed pages of words and photographs you’re holding in your hands.

We’ve grown. We’ve evolved. We’ve struggled, and we’ve prevailed. Our issues have diversified, and today appeal to a readership of more than 15,000 industry insiders and design-aware individuals. *Iowa Architect* is proud to be the voice of and proponent for great architecture happening right here in our state.

This publication wouldn’t exist without the support from our readers and contributors. Our editorial board and staff of editors, writers, and designers have continued to push this publication to evolve, but one precept has remained unchanged in the 60 years since Oswal Thorson pushed the first issue out the door: “If you will help, if you will send in news and suggestions, this publication will grow and prosper.”

Cheers to another 60 years of *Iowa Architect*.

# I collected

# GREAT CLIENTS, GREAT DESIGN

Great design takes more than just a talented architect—it is born of a collaborative process that begins with the client.

**WORDS:** BRIANNE SANCHEZ

Client communication is as critical as creativity in the processes of creating great architecture, say panelists who participated in the Clients for Great Design session at the 2015 AIA Spring Conference. Moderated by Erin Olson-Douglas, AIA, urban designer for the City of Des Moines, the workshop featured the experiences of a

wide range of clients involved in award-winning projects.

Panelist Elizabeth Presutti, AICP, general manager for the Des Moines Area Regional Transit Authority (DART), shared lessons learned from working with Substance Architecture on the high-profile DART Central Station on Walnut Street. For Presutti, who served as the primary project contact for DART and the filter for public feedback, the success of the project involved the architects' willingness to collaborate in what she described as an "intensive engagement process" with local citizens.

One prime example: In an early design, the Central Station's sets of revolving doors were offset, considering air circulation and ventilation. But, as part of the public input process, the visually impaired raised concerns about navigation. For DART, accessibility trumped an HVAC issue.

"Having very specific goals was helpful for both DART and Substance," Presutti says. "We returned to these goals and principles that we established at the onset of the project whenever we made decisions about design, amenities, and function."

As a developer, panelist Marc Moen needs architects to communicate with him on practical matters that might impact cost or cause delays, and consult with him on

areas in which he has a high interest.

"On the other hand, the architects and contractor insulate me from many issues that they can work out without me, which keeps my stress level down," Moen says. "However, I have great interest in layout, finishes, use of glass. I am also responsible for marketing the finished product, so it is very important that I have a product I believe in. It is easy to sell what you love."

Designing functional solutions also plays a part in the relationship, says Pam Cooksey, city engineer for the City of Des Moines. Cooksey worked with Neumann Monson Architects on the Municipal Services Center and with Substance Architecture on the Court Avenue Pump Station. "Details matter—if clients can't replace light bulbs after construction, it doesn't matter how good it looks," she says. "Expect to be held accountable. Project function and components are the reason for the project."

Olson-Douglas, the moderator, says that common threads in the discussion were a passion on behalf of the clients for participating in the creation of the built environment and "unwavering commitment to quality in the places they are helping to create."

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WORDS: KELLY ROBERSON  
 IMAGE: COURTESY OF  
 OPN ARCHITECTS



# Mr. Piano

## COMES TO DES MOINES

Buildings mean different things to different people. For some, there is indifference to size, style, creation: four walls, a roof—disposability, unfortunately, marks far too many of our structures. But other people and companies carve out different goals—sometimes personal, sometimes public—for the edifices they construct.

Such is the case with plans for the new Kum & Go headquarters in downtown Des Moines. For starters, there's a renowned architectural firm—Renzo Piano Building Workshop, headquartered in Paris and architect of ethereal spaces such as the Kimbell Art Museum Expansion in Fort Worth, Texas, and the London Bridge Tower. Piano's firm was chosen after Kum & Go president and CEO Kyle Krause visited several different architects and invited them to Des Moines for an interview. "First and foremost, I wanted the building to be designed with associates in mind," says Krause. "The success of the project, in my mind, hinges on the space fostering collaboration and innovation among associates. The site, the design—both inside and out, as well as amenities all play a part. So it was important to find an architect who could deliver on those expectations. However, it was important that we complete a full RFP process and engage a number of architecture firms, to ensure we made

a choice that was fully complementary of our goals for this building. After all, it's not just about my tastes—this building is for our associates and also for the Des Moines community at large."

Krause's choice of Piano's firm seems both personal and public, particularly when related to the site, which sits across from the Pappajohn Sculpture Garden in downtown Des Moines. "They expressed a desire to have a building that in some way represented the legacy that the company wanted to leave to the city," says Giorgio G. Bianchi, partner with Renzo Piano Building Workshop.

The design for the structure, which will be located at 14th and Grand, very much meets that goal. Five stories tall, all light and air, the building will be about 160,000 square feet and achieve presence without dominance—a difficult goal, particularly given the site that resembles an elongated rectangle. "The site is kind of joined north to south, and we wanted to create a building that was done in such a way that you have a visual and a physical transparency," says Bianchi. "We didn't want to take over the site, but have a park around the building that represents an extension of the sculpture park, but with more trees and less grass—more of a kind of forest. The challenge is to play with the massive

buildings around the site, to give more life to this building and to be part of the life of the sculpture park."

There's excitement, of course, from the architectural community and residents—it isn't often that an architectural superstar makes a mark on a city. "We've been headquartered in the Des Moines metro area for more than 25 years, and want to further strengthen that connection and be a catalyst for growth and energy in downtown," says Krause. "The move to downtown is the right decision for our associates to encourage interactions and unplanned meetings with people outside Kum & Go to drive innovation for our business. As a citizen of the greater Des Moines area, I want Des Moines to prosper. If the neighborhood prospers, everyone benefits."

The excitement extends from client to firm and back again. "When a company is looking for an architect abroad and they decide to work together, there is a question of why do they want us? Maybe they believe we can deliver something that makes the building more interesting," says Bianchi. "That's the challenge we took. For us it was interesting and exciting to go far away. Des Moines has a very good history of great architecture."

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# on the boards

Projects  
In Progress



## Buchanan County Health Center Outpatient Expansion

Independence / INVISION Architecture

After completing a comprehensive master plan, INVISION was retained to design a new two-story outpatient clinic addition for a critical access hospital in Northeast Iowa. The new outpatient environments are oriented to maximize the view to the south and utilize natural daylighting strategies. The design employs a formally simple diagram as a counterpoint to the existing 1960s facility and looks to capitalize on the unique qualities of the campus by emphasizing wellness in every aspect of the design.

The specialty clinic features 12 new exam rooms and three procedure rooms while the primary care clinic includes 21 exam rooms and two procedure rooms. The team developed planning that relies less on signage and more on architectural visual cues to identify routes and pathways for patients, staff, and guests. The color and materials used for the exterior design are drawn into the interior and offer an enticing natural setting for patients and guests. The new front entry is framed by lpe cladding and zinc panels, accented by glass that emanates light and serves as a beacon for the hospital and the community.

## St. Paul's United Methodist Church

Cedar Rapids / Neumann Monson Architects, BVH Architects



St. Paul's United Methodist Church is well known for its historic architecture and strong community ties. In 1910, the congregation commissioned famed architect Louis Sullivan, who conceptualized a "modern church for a seven-day program." Over the following 100 years, the congregation expanded its facilities, which included an unsympathetic classroom addition in the 1960s. With this project, the church will increase its commitment to outreach programming and join the city-wide effort to revitalize the surrounding neighborhood. To achieve this, a large portion of the 1960s addition will be removed with a two-story welcome center built in its place. From the exterior, this component will provide a more defined and welcoming point of entry and allow for clear access to all levels.



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**IMAGES:** CHADD GOOSEMANN, AURORA PHOTOGRAPHY  
**ARCHITECT:** PLAN ARCHITECTURE





# Through the *thick* of it

We know that buildings are not merely conceptualized one day and materialize shortly thereafter. There are many components to the design, creation, execution, and finality of a structure. There are clients with wishes, constraints of a site, and the one thing no one has enough of: money. Designing a structure takes patience, teamwork, and trust. It is also a learning process for all parties involved, especially for the client, who relies on the architect and the design team. The team is able to show the client how all he or she wants or needs can be done on the site within the available budget. With time and budget parameters, the architect and his or her team begin the process of design.

In South Sioux City, Nebraska, the owners of Crystal Cove Park wanted a series of pavilions for observing wildlife in different habitats, including aquatics, waterfowl, woodlands, and wetlands. The woodland pavilion was to be elevated in a tree. The owner wanted an observation facility that had no visual impact and could be used to passively view the park. People could go into a structure and view the animals in their habitat.

The site is a 60-acre park with a lake and a 1.5-mile hiking and biking trail, nature trails, and fishing opportunities. The park is home to more than 200 species

of birds and other wildlife. The lake is stocked three times a year with fish for summer and winter fishing. The park has a naturally spring-fed ox-bow from the Missouri River. It is also a migratory path for waterfowl.

Given the budget of \$200,000, a clear process was needed between the owner and the architect. As one can imagine, a pavilion in a tree or under water becomes difficult when considering accessibility and cost. Thus, a design plan was developed that had two adjacent pavilions: one a screened outdoor pavilion and the other an indoor video observation pavilion. The latter used technology to combine viewing of multiple habitats into one structure.

Beyond budget and program, the form of the observatory structures looked to the park's vernacular structures, such as restroom facilities and shelters, which utilized a sort of park wisdom. For example, the concrete block restroom structure utilized an inverted roof to help manage water runoff, while rectangular openings at the bottom of the structure allowed for airflow.

Because of budget constraints, it became a requirement that the two pavilions needed to be adjacent to one another. After looking at the restroom facility, the design team decided to slope

the two roofs toward each other to better manage the water runoff prior to entering the lake.

The indoor observation pavilion was originally designed to be enclosed in a glass skin. The human observers would be in a glass box on display for the wildlife. As a part of further value-engineering, the glass skin was omitted from the design and a post-and-beam structure was developed based on the design of the existing park shelters. This new design would still provide a wrap for the video observation pavilion and an indoor/outdoor experience similar to the what the glass skin would have provided. As project architect Nathan Kalaher, AIA, says, “One of the great dichotomies of this facility is that humans have to go deep into their habitat to view wildlife deep in theirs.” The video feeds and the use of technology with underwater cameras also helped keep the project within the budget. This technology provides an opportunity for park visitors to view the aquatic habitats.

The outdoor observation pavilion faces the lake, allowing observers to watch waterfowl and other wildlife behind a slat-screen wall, similar to a duck blind, or through a panoramic opening at the lakeside. The base of this structure’s design includes the rectangular shapes that were used in the original restroom facility for airflow. Like the video observation pavilion, the outdoor pavilion has a reciprocal observation functionality—humans observing wildlife observing humans.

The older design elements of the existing structures were incorporated into

the design elements for the new pavilions, helping to preserve and respect the original buildings on the site.

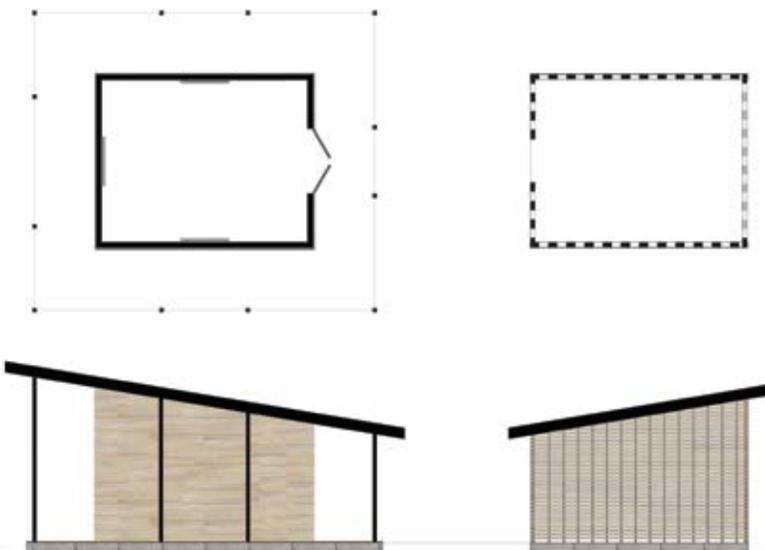
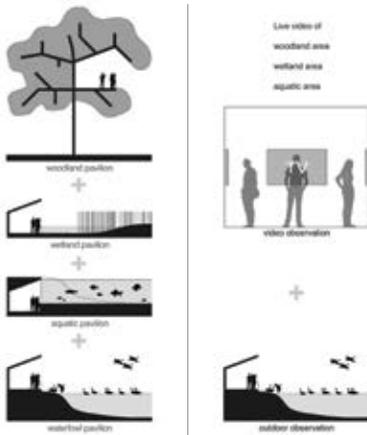
The pavilions leave a light environmental impact without compromising the ecosystem, while supporting the need to see, observe, and enjoy the wildlife from many different habitats—wetlands, woodlands, and aquatics—providing a view-within-a-view. Humans can view the wildlife undisturbed in natural habitats. The riders and walkers on the trail can view the wildlife or be observed themselves; wildlife also can view humans from a safe and undisturbed place. The evolution of this space was all about relationships: relationships among the humans, who make good and respectful use of the pavilions and the trail; and the wildlife living in the park, in addition to the owner, architect, and design team, who collaboratively created a delightful observation place.

The design decision for only two pavilions allows viewers to see different habitats without the need and cost of more pavilions. The video feeds can also be seen on the South Sioux City website, which then allows teachers to access them in the classroom; it is also a way for individuals who may be homebound to enjoy nature and wildlife via Internet access.

“The design process was engaged in efforts to simultaneously look at first, the impact that park structures can have on a site like this, as well as looking at the logics that have evolved in the development of existing structures on the site,” says Kalaher. “And second, was to look beyond more square footage or increased dollars to support a large programmatic use with a small budget. The result of this process is a facility with a small, ecologically sensitive footprint, with varied uses and which seems very much ‘of the space.’”

The design process for the Crystal Cove Park observatory pavilions was successful because the architect and his team developed trust with the client. They showed that with discussions and respect for each other’s needs, an excellent solution could be found that allowed the wishes of the client to be met, all within the constraints of a budget.

The result is the simplicity of beauty that fits the site and is good for all, wildlife and humans. To quote Gene Maffit, the South Sioux City parks and recreation director, “Anytime you bring people and wildlife together, it is a great thing.”





**Previous page:** The two adjacent pavilions with the sloped roof to better manage water runoff prior to entering the lake.

**Above:** A view of both pavilions from the lake, showing its sensitive footprint on the site.

**Right:** The slat-screen wall of the outdoor observation pavilion that faces the lake. It allows visitors to view the lake through a panoramic opening.



# Look who turns 60 in 2015:

Bill Gates

Jay Leno

Bill Murray

Cybil Shepard

Morgan Fairchild

Ed Harris

Stevie Wonder

Richard Branson

Tom Petty

Peter Gabriel

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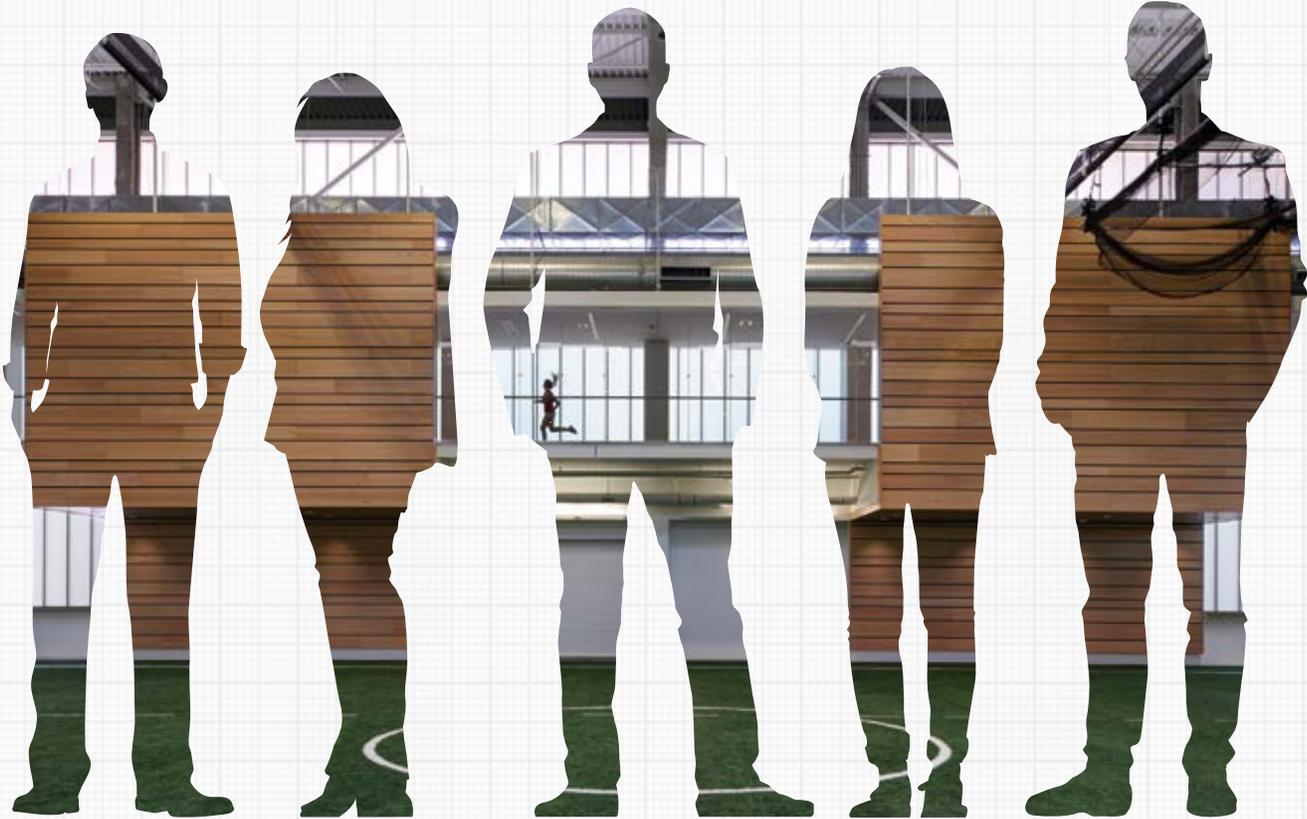
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# DELTA DENTAL OPENS UP



**WORDS:** DAN NAEGELE  
**IMAGES:** MAIN STREET PHOTOGRAPHY  
**ARCHITECT:** OPN ARCHITECTS





When Delta Dental of Iowa decided to enlarge its corporate offices in Johnston, Iowa, there was little need to repeat the exhaustive search that had gone into finding an architect five years earlier. At that time, a competitive selection process and a great deal of research resulted in OPN Architects being commissioned. Delta Dental, a national insurance company, was delighted with the building OPN designed and thoroughly enjoyed working with the regional architecture firm. This made obvious the selection of an architect for the addition: No one knew the clients, the situation, or the existing building better than OPN.

Cheryl Harding, Delta Dental’s chief operating officer, notes that when planning the initial building, Delta had considered downtown sites, but decided on the sprawling site along Interstate-80 for its spacious size allowing for an anticipated future horizontal expansion of the building. Its location was easily accessed by car, and both proximity and ease of access were important for recruitment. Additionally, the Interstate site offered the possibility of high visibility: Half a million eyes, moving at 70 miles per hour, would pass by the site each week.

The expansion, completed in May this year, doubled the facility’s square footage. Despite having designed the original building, OPN needed to work closely with Delta Dental stakeholders to “achieve consistency” between the new and original, Harding says. The final product needed to act, and appear, as one. The design team operated under three primary criteria for the addition: It was to be an exceptional house for the company’s employees, an environment that was open and encouraged interaction; it should be recognized as a sustainable building, designed to achieve LEED Silver certification; and it should employ its interstate-edge location and substantial size to give presence to the rapidly growing company.

“Delta Dental used a design-build process working with OPN and the Ryan Companies for our original building and expansion space,” said Jeff Russell, president and CEO of Delta Dental of Iowa. “This highly collaborative process helped the architects and builders understand the needs of our organization and stayed true to our original vision to create an open and transparent environment for our employees that fosters our core value of working as one team.”

OPN responded by designing an addition that is both planar and volumetric. Whereas the original single-story building is set a bit back from expressway traffic, OPN placed the two-story expansion up close to the Interstate. Of red terracotta, earthen yet sophisticated in its rainscreen assembly, this rear south elevation is expressed as a plane and carries the company’s name and logo. These modest raised-metal letters serve as a type of billboard advertising to the passersby on Interstate-80. Ground-to-sky glass windows offer views of the interior white-painted steel structure that supports the building, bringing depth to the planar statement and, at certain hours, permitting a glimpse of the illuminated interior space. This planar south elevation is the aesthetic essence of the building’s exterior. From it, the east and west sides

**Left to right:** An elegant terrazzo staircase is the focal point of the connection between the original building and expansion. A conference room looks out to the open, two-story high collaboration spaces that flank the open floor plan of the addition. The western staircase leads to an informal collaboration space. A sophisticated sun-shading system adds dimension to the east and west facades while minimizing glare and regulating temperature.



of the addition extend to the north. Both feature continuous two-story perforated planes suspended some 10 feet from the building’s glass walls to protect it from the harsh early morning and evening sunlight.

Delta Dental wanted an “open, transparent interior,” Harding says, an environment in which “100% of Delta’s employees have access to daylight.” The design created openness and light by manipulating the traditional box building form to provide openness and daylight simultaneously. The transverse placement of the addition created a defined landscaped exterior space, leading to the existing canopied entry. Taking cue from the revolutionary long-span, open-box architecture of the mid-1950s, the original building is a single-volume space that elegantly exposes its steel frame and environmental control system. Workspaces are not closed offices, but rather are freestanding stations defined by low partitions that provide a degree of privacy yet allow for collaboration. As a growing company, it was important for the interior design to be adaptable to changing demand, thus flexible and easily reconfigurable furniture was used.

These principles were carried over to the addition, but on a two-story scale. To mitigate the original building’s over-story ceiling height, two-story-high spaces line

the east and west glass walls of the first floor. Open collaboration seating along the exterior allows employees to interact in a comfortable, conversational space. These collaboration areas flank the single-story workspaces of the first floor. Mechanical spaces wrapped in wood and capped with back-painted glass panels bookend the north and south ends.

Light-steel stairs sit atop a terrazzo plinthe in the west stair lobby, which serves as the connection between the original building and the addition. Standing at the bottom of these stairs, one can view the length of the original building through an opening framed by the original terracotta exterior. Informal gathering spaces are strategically sprinkled throughout the workstations of the second floor.

Perforated metal screens float outside the building envelope, protecting it from the often-harsh low light of the rising and setting sun, while allowing views of the surrounding natural prairie. A paved courtyard is enveloped by the screens, and provides comfortable space for outdoor seating.

Remotely related to the Eames Case Study houses of 70 years earlier, the overall design is reminiscent of modern history, yet logical and technologically up-to-date. Technology is evident everywhere: In the

more efficient terracotta rainscreen system that decreased the construction schedule; in the flexibility of the work environment, which allows for reconfiguration and updates with ease; in the triple-pane glass that increases energy efficiency and diminishes the sounds of the nearby Interstate. In the hands of OPN, the building technology is not rendered harsh or relentless. Obvious but not insistent, it never roars—or even whispers loudly—but is silent, elegantly ordered, both foreground and background at one and the same time.

“Based on the success of the previous building, we already had a level of trust and a good relationship with Delta Dental,” says Isaac Bracher, AIA, project architect for both the original and addition. “The existing building provided guiding principles that we used in the design of the addition. We met weekly to review design elements, gather feedback, and collaborate with the owners.”

Apparent yet never overwhelming, sparse yet not cheap, sophisticated and orderly, OPN’s design solution is precisely what the client desired. Well-insulated, well-built, and intelligently placed, the expansion is a source of tremendous pride to Delta Dental.

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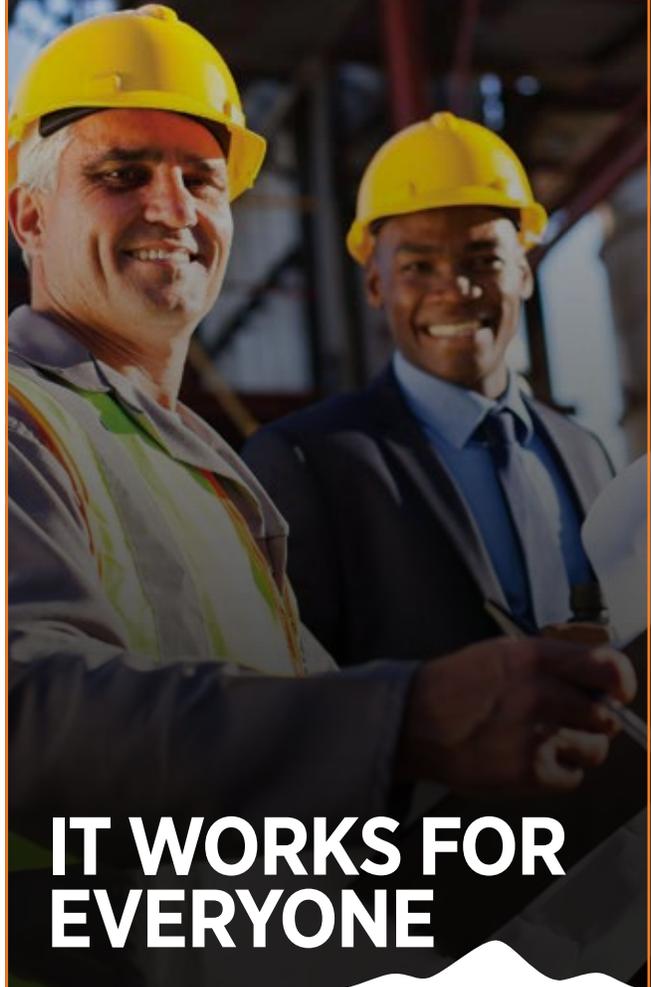
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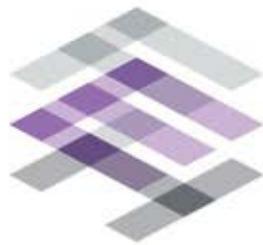


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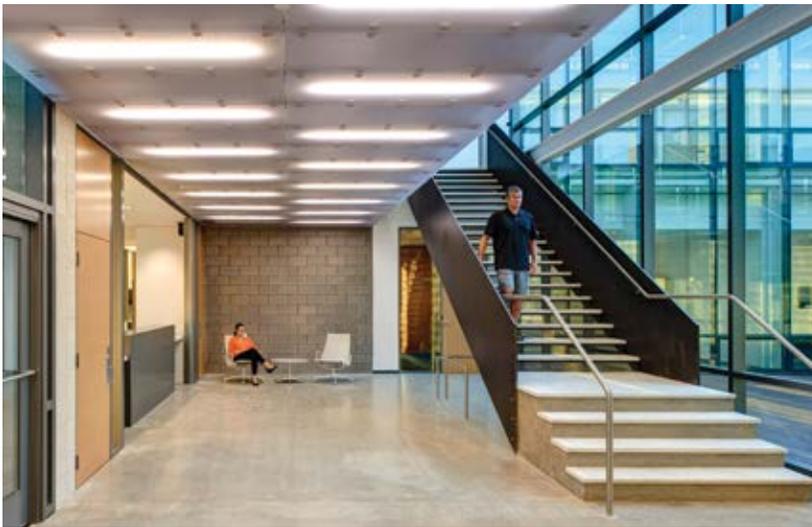
The new Richard A. Clark Municipal Services Building turns a forgotten brownfield site into a statement of commitment to growth, stewardship, and investment in quality design through a rigorous but inspired approach.

**WORDS:** THOMAS LESLIE, AIA  
**IMAGES:** CAMERON CAMPBELL, AIA  
**ARCHITECT:** NEUMANN MONSON



Des Moines has enjoyed an unprecedented decade of transformation. Thanks to private and public investment in new buildings, outdoor spaces, walking paths, and transportation, the city has built on its solid economic fundamentals to become one of the nation's true urban success stories. This transformation has not been accidental, and the city's design community has played a leading role in turning everyday projects into exceptional urban set pieces. Finding opportunities in the normal construction required of any city to maintain itself has been one of Des Moines' hallmarks, and no opportunity or crisis has been wasted over the last decade. When plans to extend the Martin Luther King Drive beltway around downtown were discussed in 2011, an existing city services building stood in the way. Another city building at 5th and Market streets occupied a site that developers and the city were interested in turning into the new Market Place District.

Many less progressive city governments might have moved these services out to cheap land at the edge of town, but Des Moines, in conjunction with Neumann Monson Architects,



developed a master plan that would keep the city workers in these facilities downtown, supporting efforts to revitalize the Southeast 14th Street commercial corridor. Channing Swanson, AIA, Neumann Monson's project architect, recalls that a nearby brownfield site suggested a consolidated project could be a mechanism for reclaiming wasteland. Also important, the city recognized that alongside the efficiencies that would come with bringing several different departments together, a concentrated effort to design and build an energy-efficient building would save taxpayers about \$2 million per year. From the project's inception, the city and Neumann Monson emphasized natural illumination, solar control, native landscapes, low-carbon materials, and energy-efficient systems in the design to further lock in savings.

These noble goals, however, had to be deployed on a site that offered significant challenges, and over a program that accommodated 10 different city agencies, along with their associated vehicles and equipment. Formerly an auto salvage yard, Swanson recalls that initial site tests revealed more than seven feet of unstable soil and decaying auto parts. Rather than remediate the entire site—an operation that would have required more than 18,000 dump truck movements to remove and refill—the team used stone column foundations to stabilize the surrounding soil while putting the building firmly on lower strata.

The building's diagram quickly evolved into two masses: One to the east for vehicle storage and maintenance, and one to the west for office and public spaces. The east portion included high-bay space for large vehicle storage and maintenance flanked by two "saddlebags" containing laboratory and testing spaces. These are clad in precast with narrow windows for illumination and a long-span steel roof. The volume to the west

concentrated offices and public spaces in shaded glass around an interior courtyard. Neumann Monson convinced the city to group similar functions throughout departments into shared spaces in the high-bay garage and in the administrative wing, and this simple division meant machine spaces and people spaces each developed according to lighting and mechanical needs, rather than along departmental lines. The simple split in program also meant offices and public spaces gained a formal elevation that faces downtown, providing a formal, urban approach and, once inside, brilliant views back toward the downtown skyline.

Neumann Monson’s design incorporates plenty of energy-efficient equipment, including dimmable LED lights on motion sensors, water reclamation, and solar panels. While this gadgetry effectively boosts the building’s performance—the building is expected to receive a LEED Silver rating—it pales next to the simple shading devices on the building’s main elevations. Not only do these elevations provide plentiful natural daylight to the offices within, but also give the building its architectural signature: an assertive horizontal grain across its east façade with deeply recessed bays announcing the entrances along the southern side, visible from the newly completed MLK Drive extension that curves around the building to the northwest.

Des Moines’ new Municipal Services Building joins a growing list of city buildings that have taken pragmatic programs and elevated them into efficient but captivating works of public architecture. Any city can turn a symphony hall or a museum into such a statement, but it’s a peculiarly Iowan ability to thoughtfully coax even the most prosaic function—a parking garage, a utilities office building, or a bus station, just to name a few—through a truly thoughtful process, and to emerge with

a building that elevates its purpose and surroundings. Swanson insists that this was never a stated intent on the part of the city or the design team, but rather part of a diligent process. “We just spent a lot of time trying to come up with the right systems,” says Swanson. “It had to be durable and attractive, it had to let light in, and it had to benefit operations.” The civic presence, in particular of its west façade, was more instinctive than deliberate. “We talked about all those things,” he says, “but mostly we just had to do what we could to get it right.”

**Opposite, top to bottom:** Office and meeting spaces are gathered around a central courtyard that provides daylight throughout the interior. Inside, the overall planning philosophy was one of integration. Instead of individual departments, offices and workspaces are organized according to scale and type, bringing workers from various branches together.

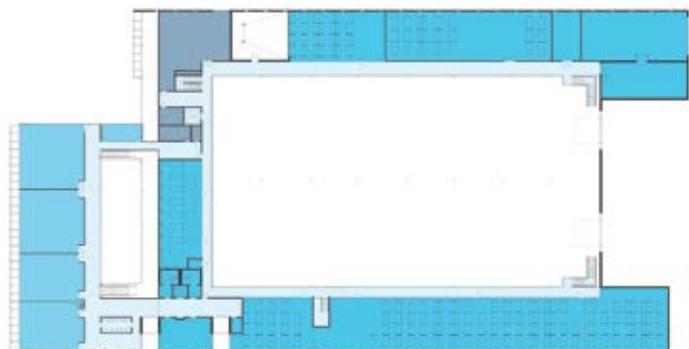
Efficient but generously proportioned spaces make the interior a far more social environment than typical municipal government buildings.

Throughout the building, Neumann Monson emphasized connections—circulatory and programmatic, that effectively tie together its various departments and architectural elements.

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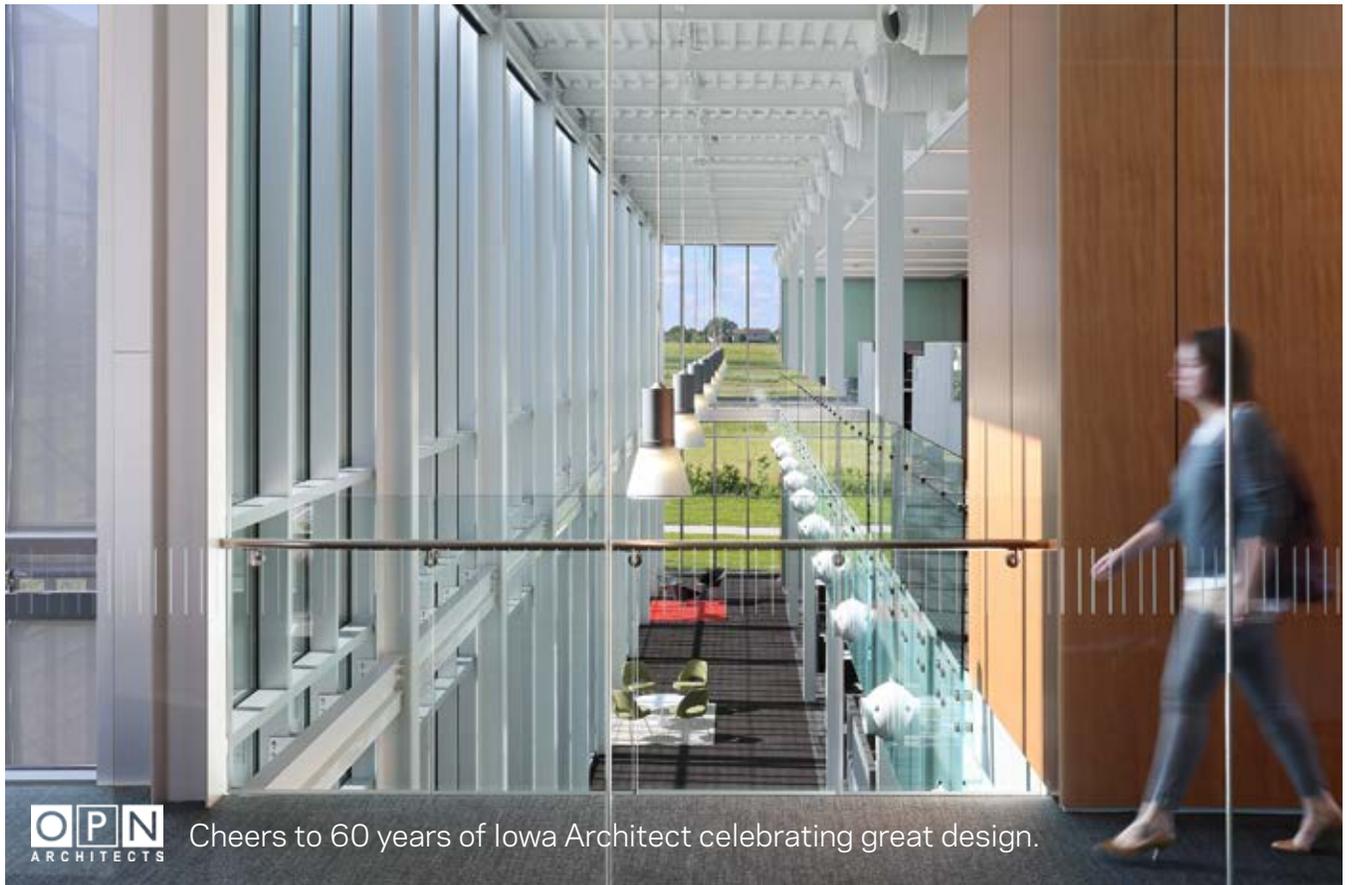
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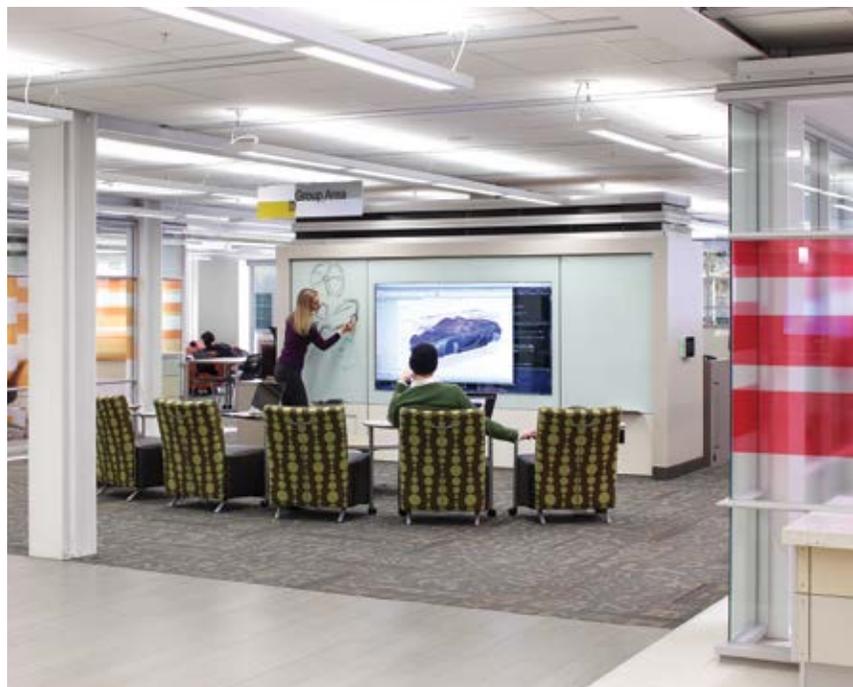
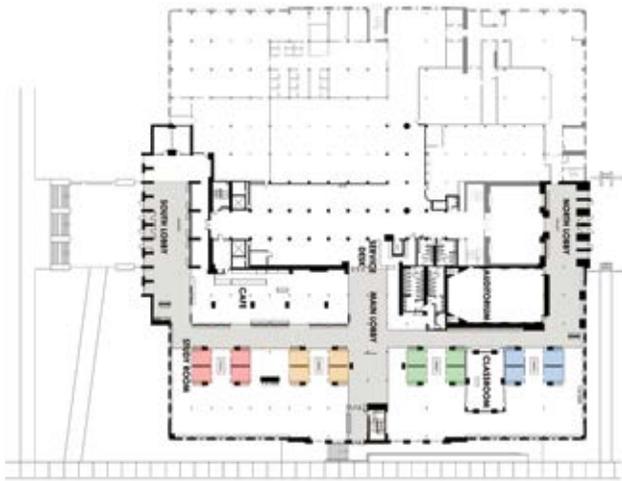


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**Clockwise from top left:** The learning rooms are color-identified with red and orange for southern rooms and green and blue for northern rooms, noting a subtle relationship to nature.

The liveliest and most public space is the coffee and bistro with colorful carpet and partition panels of shredded paper encased in acrylic sheets.

An expansive open space was the primary directive within the minimal floor heights of 9'6" with steel floor beams only 8'4" above the first floor. The space was enlarged with the removal of old panels to expose the steel structure and the ceilings appear to float above the beams.

A visually uplifting double height space was created by partial removal of the second floor and the deletion of six bays. The substantial exposed structural steel columns were painted bright white to unify with adjacent design elements.

# DEMOGRAPHIC ADAPTATION

**WORDS:** MARK E. BLUNCK, HON. AIA IOWA  
**IMAGES:** MAIN STREET PHOTOGRAPHY  
**ARCHITECT:** CMBA | SMITH METZGER

The Woodstock Generation, Pepsi Generation, Me Generation, and MTV Generation have all made a unique imprint on American society. Each one had distinct positive and negative attributes that liberated them from their predecessor. But there is a new sheriff in town: The Apple/Starbucks Generation has created a new identity with an influence on learning and retail environments across the nation. At the University of Iowa, a new type of learning commons has been designed on the main floor of the existing library where students meet, collaborate, and study in 40,000 square feet of transformed space. As Rob Smith, AIA, principal in charge at CMBA | Smith Metzger, states, “The design had to appeal to young students and not us oldsters.”

In order to determine an innovative and practical approach to the design program, a good old-fashioned field trip was taken by Smith and Chris Clark, director of learning spaces technology, acting as arbitrator and liaison between three university offices and the architecture team. “We visited three Chicago area universities to see what was in similar spaces, and encountered many interesting formal and informal designs,” says Clark. “We studied basic design patterns with group rooms, quiet study areas, and themes on how spaces were used.”

The building footprint is an enormous 300-foot square, which is nearly the size of two football fields side by side. A long end-to-end hallway created a discomfiting “shotgun” configuration that had to be remedied by any means necessary. The simple and effective solution was to intersect this tunnel vision with a C-shape casual area near the middle, forcing people to either go through or around this section and creating variation along the pathway in the same manner as a park or garden environment.

The learning commons space consists of 14-by-20-foot bays

with approximately 100 exposed structural steel columns that could be overwhelming to those not so taken with the industrial look. The design team came up with a brilliant concept to align new study rooms and classrooms within the structural grid, with 16 color-coded rooms partially enclosing 64 columns, thereby leaving just 30 freestanding steel sections. An interesting optical solution to minimize the visual impact of the remaining columns involved discreetly positioning components within the flanges, so that all mechanical and air distribution is vertical, with perforated metal ceiling panels to distribute airflow. In addition, electrical charging points, visual material, and electronic displays are attached to these columns, signifying an efficient use of available material. “Our generation had endless rows of dropped ceiling

panels and unpleasant fluorescent lighting everywhere we went,” notes Smith, “and we never saw any building structure, as those elements were always covered. Today’s students experience this new aesthetic sensibility everywhere they go, whether it’s a Starbucks, clothing retailer, workplace, or ultra-modern steel and glass Apple Store.”

The overall arrangement of the varied spaces is based on the layering concept. The bistro and coffee shop welcome lively conversation with a restaurant ambience, so this inner section is not conducive to serious learning. The study rooms are positioned away from this dynamic area, and from each other, with corridors acting as buffering spaces to muffle extraneous

noise. Even quieter individual study spaces are located away from these rooms, creating specific zones of activity and determined contemplation.

“This layering of spaces has worked very well, but some students are not quite used to this. The liveliness of the café is often a surprise,” says Amy Paulus, head of access services. “We have publicity tours for incoming students to show them how the spaces work and reinforce one another. They like the appropriate bright colors instead of the monochromatic palette.”

“This space is not about Corporate America. It’s about youthful exuberance,” says Smith.

|| This space is not about Corporate America. It's about youthful exuberance.

ROB SMITH, AIA ||

# ARCHITECTURAL & CREATIVITY EMPLOYEE & CREATIVITY



**WORDS:** JAMES SPILLER, ASSOC. AIA  
**IMAGES:** PAUL CROSBY  
**ARCHITECT:** SUBSTANCE ARCHITECTURE

For the countless travelers who hum along Interstate 80 through Iowa each day, the newly constructed Brownells Inc. building, designed by Substance Architecture, marks a distinct glimmer in the expanse

at the southern edge of Grinnell. The prominent building at mile marker 182 is easily seen from both directions along I-80 due to its generous size as the company's primary distribution center, headquarters, and new retail shop along one of the busiest national commercial corridors. The building rests on low-lying fields of prairie, extending along the interstate and anchored by a striking dark façade. At high speeds, the spacious deep-set windows

shimmer and a white-striped plenum pulsates from behind the airy office windows, recalling the ever-repeating passing lanes.

The interstate location was quite the change of scenery from the company's original offices in nearby Montezuma, Iowa. A third-generation family company, Brownells Inc. is "the world's largest supplier of firearm accessories, gun parts, and gunsmithing tools," a distant



evolution from its days as a hobbyist's catalog company. Even with the new location, the company faced the challenge of attracting a creative workforce to continue the company's growth and future success. The distribution industry is perceived as very traditional, but Brownells Inc. CEO Pete Brownell contends that "we're not about that. We're progressive, in that all ideas are welcome. We want to flatten the traditional company

hierarchy, which should be embedded in the architecture."

Such aspirations were clear to Substance Architecture, who sought to develop a building that would host a Google-like office culture, but retain the small-town principles the company has long known. Two terms kept surfacing in the early dialogue of the project: modern and rustic. "There were elements of abstraction relative to these

competing terms, and if ever the client felt uncomfortable, we would immediately reassess. In this way, it was a very adaptive process," says Matt Rodekamp, AIA, project architect. The project placed material identity at the heart of this tension. The materials at the core needed to be robust (limestone), at the workspaces soft and light (wood), and at the edges lasting, but open and contemporary (metal and concrete panel façade). The



“gunmetal” façade is no joke; it identifies a material palette of the industry the building serves, shines in a vast and changing visual landscape, and will last longer while requiring less maintenance.

As the project progressed, Substance Architecture persistently sought to “eliminate the inessential.” At the outset, Brownells Inc. requested a large peaked entry for the entire facility. The peaked roof increased the scale of the project, seemingly to unreasonable heights. Pete

Brownell recalls, “My dad and I looked at [the initial] renderings on a hunting trip with our iPad. It looked wrong. So we told [Substance] to do what they do and we went back to hunting.” In the end, all agreed to bring it down to the ground, to let it stretch along the prairie. Scrapping the peak, the design team proposed two sheds, the retail space gently leaning over the more elongated office block. At the overlap, a clerestory reveals a sliver south sky to the retail space. The overlapping

volumes also serve as the single entry for the entire facility, addressing security concerns for a building that distributes firearm parts.

There is a rigorous rhythm to the building. The strict structural layout defines a clear logic hosting the expansive windows, a spine of meeting rooms, and a grid of adjustable office furniture with regularly intervening open collaboration spaces. The control is paramount to a building whose primary responsibilities



are utilitarian. But the true touch of refinement is found at the overlap, where the intersections and edges of the office floor, executive suite, retail floor, and entry space subtly shift materials and culminate at the stair core, elegantly binding all of the components together as one.

The design process demanded leaps of faith, surprises, and constant communication, but since the facilities opened, Pete Brownell says the best outcome is that “employees get to discover

how they work best here. When they are creative, they are always looking out.” The balance of the traditional and contemporary seems to have been found. “The act of seeing a snippet of space beyond each function was inspired from the original facility in Montezuma,” clarifies Rodekamp. When employees need to collaborate, they head to the prairie or visit the open lounges, and along the way materials adjust, cuing faintly to the distant humming horizon.

**Opposite:** Second level of the office; primary office stair.

**Above:** Process renderings and plans for the Brownells building.

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### Delta Dental Opens Up 20

**Architect:** OPN Architects

**Location:** Johnston, Iowa

**Contractor:** Ryan Companies, Inc.

**Structural Engineer:**

Shuck-Britson, Inc.

**Mechanical Engineer:**

Baker Group

**Electrical Engineer:** Wolin

**Civil Engineer:** Bishop

**Photographer:** Main Street Photography

### At Your Service 26

**Architect:** Neumann Monson Architects

**Location:** Des Moines, Iowa

**Civil Engineer:**

Snyder & Associates

**Structural Engineer:**

Kueny Architects, LLC

**MEP:** Modus

**Landscape:** Genus Landscape Architects

Architects

**Photographer:** Cameron

Campbell, AIA

### Demographic Adaptation 32

**Architect:** CMBA | Smith Metzger

**Location:** Iowa City, Iowa

**Contractor:** City Construction Group

**Engineer:** Sebesta

**Photographer:** Main Street Photography

### Architectural Creativity & Employee Creativity 34

**Architect:** Substance Architecture

**Landscape Architect:**

Confluence

**Location:** Grinnell, Iowa

**Contractor:** Septagon Construction

**Photographer:** Paul Crosby

**Mechanical/Electrical:**

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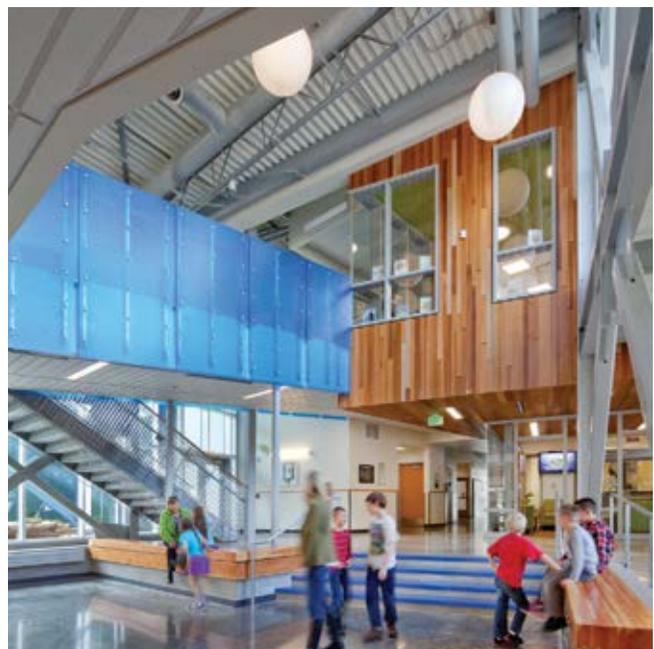


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