



## **Alspector designs \$9 million phase 1 high school for Grace Church School; Has begun design of \$3 million phase 2 and \$5.1 million phase 3**

December 11, 2012 - Design / Build

The Grace Church School (GCS) has been opened in a space designed by Alspector Architecture. Occupying a site at Cooper Sq., this is the first phase of a three-phase project that will allow the school to offer a complete pre-college education.

The school is located in the former Hartz Mountain pet food factory and warehouse, made up of seven 19th century row houses that the company joined together in the 1960s. While Alspector's design keeps the four-story building's 1960s façade, the interior is being completely renovated to support the openness, community and flexibility required to meet the school's mission.

This \$9 million, 51,000 s/f phase includes the first and second floors and lower level and introduces a library and its support areas, a study commons and a cafeteria which offer a continuous flow of space on the ground and lower level floors. There are also administrative offices and classrooms for science, mathematics, and fine arts. "We wanted spaces that supported our mission and how students actually study, learn and socialize and Alspector Architecture's design does all that," said George Davison, head of the school.

Visitors entering the school immediately encounter the key design elements which support that mission, layered with references to the history of the building and its environs. That includes the generous use of glass in all of the interior spaces so that students and faculty can make visual contact throughout each floor. "Daylight helps people concentrate so we wanted its presence to be pervasive," said Davison. "Alspector Architecture took advantage of every opportunity to introduce skylights in the rear of the building."

Beginning with the unifying main staircase, there are extra wide circulation spaces throughout the facility to encourage communication and interaction. They include the areas next to student lockers and outside classrooms and faculty offices which accommodate bench seating, tables and stools and outlets for computers. "Our design responds to students' tendency to congregate in areas that reflect their interests and allows them to collaborate with informal meeting and study areas," said Jacob Alspector, AIA, principal of Alspector.

The use of color adds a layer of coherence and complexity to the student experience. "We wanted to honor the history of the original buildings and give students a way to orient themselves throughout the structure," said Alspector. "So we painted remnants of the brick-bearing walls of the original row houses in different shades of purple, blue and green and that same color scheme is repeated on every floor. The seating in shades of red and orange provides contrast. The ceilings of the perimeter classrooms and the raised circular light coves are all painted pale blue to expand the actual and psychological experience of the luminous sky."

The design picks up on the history in other ways. Diagonal floor-to-ceiling slots reflect the site's and

building design's geometry formed by the diagonal Bowery/Fourth Avenue cutting across Manhattan's rectilinear street grid. They also reveal the walls of the original buildings in their "as found" condition.

At the center of the school's educational program is the 21st century digital library immediately to the left of lobby. The two-level space consists of study and work areas furnished with tables and chairs as well as casual seating. The enlarged street windows which look onto the space bring extra light into the multi-level atrium area which connects the two levels and offers a variety of areas for congregating. Some of the bookshelves are movable allowing part of the library to be opened up for special events. The learning services surrounding the library include personnel devoted to assisting students in writing, IT, research and related functions in a variety of flexible spaces designed to support individual and group interactions. The below ground level of the library has a seamless connection with the cafeteria and commons area, providing a generous amount of space for students to gather, learn and socialize.

Outside, the façade has been completely cleaned and a new aluminum marquee marks the building entrance. In a few years visitors to the school will approach it through a new pedestrian open space, Grace Plaza, planned by New York City's Department of Transportation to control traffic flow from downtown and expand on the existing triangular park in front of Cooper Union. The plaza will follow the historic path taken by the Lenape Indian Tribes that had inhabited southern Manhattan Island. The school will then be part of a lively urban place defined on its three sides by contemporary and historic buildings devoted to collaborative education and progressive culture.

To accommodate the growing student body Alspector has begun design of phase 2 of the project. When the phase's construction is completed in 2014 the existing 17,000 s/f third floor will be transformed into classroom and office spaces at a cost of \$3 million. Phase 3 will transform and enlarge the existing 13,000 s/f fourth floor at a cost of \$5.1 million, providing additional classroom spaces and a new gymnasium. When fully completed in 2018 the school will occupy a showcase facility supporting 21st century students and progressive pedagogy.

#### About the High School Division of Grace Church School

The opening of the High School Division marks a new era in the history of Grace Church School. The founding faculty and the first ninth grade class bring the school's rich tradition and commitment to excellence in academics, arts, athletics, ethics, diversity, and community to the college preparatory, secondary school level. The core characteristics of the school-- a proven academic track record, the joy of focused learning, the warmth of a caring community, and engagement with the wider world -finds broader avenues for expression in the vibrant and dynamic academic environment of the High School Division.

It is committed to giving its students the skills, knowledge, and experience they need to live in the world they will inhabit. To that end, the curriculum emphasizes critical thinking, problem solving, oral and written expression, aesthetic appreciation, physical, social, and emotional health, and explores human culture across history and geography, so that students both understand the world they live in and are prepared to make a difference in it. The program supports experiential, community-based, and multi-sensory approaches to teaching and learning that challenges students by drawing on what they know and building their competence and confidence.

#### About Alspector Architecture

Jacob Alspector, AIA, founder of Alspector Architecture LLC, brings a personal history to the project because his architectural training was at The Cooper Union whose buildings are neighbors to the

high school. Alspector can remember when Hartz Mountain baked bird seed in the building's ovens and has memories of the color theory classes he took which influenced his use of color in the high school's interiors.

Alspector Architecture is a full service architectural and interior design firm devoted to collaboration with clients in the creation of vital and durable architecture. It focuses on creative and responsible problem solving based on the timeless principles of architecture: firmness, commodity and delight. Its goal is to provide the highest quality architectural services for discriminating clients, particularly educational, cultural and non-profit institutions. It strives to create durable, sustainable, functional and beautiful designs.

Professional expertise encompasses a wide range of public and private facilities for libraries, higher education, K-12 schools, museums, assembly and performance spaces in addition to the full gamut of commercial and residential buildings and interiors. Critical project design and management experience has included multi-phased design and construction around occupied facilities, landmarks and historically sensitive interventions, responsiveness to demanding budget and schedule situations, complex agency approvals, and integration of fundraising and donor criteria and realities. The firm's focused and dedicated core professional staff collectively represents over seventy-five years of responsive, informed and proven professional design experience.

Alspector Architecture's recent projects for academic and cultural institutions in New York City include general purpose classrooms for New York University and the phased renovation of its iconic Bobst Library, the new gymnasium for Grace Church School, the headquarters and training facility for the National Psychological Association for Psychoanalysis, and a feasibility study for expansion and renovation of The Town School. Outside of New York, the firm has designed the Digital Learning Center at Utah Valley University in Orem, UT, and the conceptual master plan and concept design for the Dana Library at Rutgers-Newark, Newark, N.J.

Attachement: two jpegs of interiors

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