



Gran Kriegel Associates designs 25,000 s/f Long Island City school; Through requirements of NYC SCA/West Queens Development Corp.

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Gran Kriegel Associates' new pre-K through 8th grade school in Long Island City stands out among its neighbors in the maturing Queens West development along the East River.

"We intentionally departed from the fairly uniform Queens West palette of glass and black brick," said David Kriegel, AIA, lead architect for the school. "We wanted something friendlier, that children would perceive as more familiar. As a nod to the Queens West context we wove some of the black brick into our polychromatic facade, but it doesn't dominate the scheme."

The new school at 46-08 5th St. was occupied in September by the students and administration of a nearby school, PS 78, which lacked amenities for the age group it housed.

The school's 25,000 s/f site shares a block with a 42-story apartment tower, and it was designed according to requirements of both the NYC School Construction Authority (SCA) and the Queens West Development Corp. To contain construction, maximize performance and minimize maintenance costs, the SCA prescribes brick facades with punched or ribbon aluminum-framed windows, rather than storefront or glass curtain wall systems.

The building's facade is a playful composition consisting of three colors of brick, cast stone, and metal panels. Black and cream bricks respond to the predominate colors of the Queens West development, and red brick is evocative of traditional school materials while forming a link to the surrounding 19th century industrial neighborhood. A swooping entry canopy angles upward to the street, forming a large, sheltered space and providing access to both the lobby and the outdoor play area.

Sitting amongst tall towers, the school needed to present a kid-friendly scale. Where a typical urban school might mass along the sidewalk with a schoolyard out back, in this case the schoolchildren might have been stationed against a sheer wall 42 stories high. Instead, the school orients south to a 3,400 s/f play yard facing a new park and open skies.

Although SCA guidelines standardize the size of school lobbies, the authority supported Gran Kriegel's concept of enlarging the lobby to improve flow through the school. Stretched along the front facade, it emerges as a gallery with seating and direct views to the playground. It is a unique feature providing an amiable place to meet, abundant wall area for display, and access to the cafeteria, auditorium and vertical circulation. Informal gathering areas were also created on each floor where program space was arranged to preserve a windowed open area off the elevator lobby and designed built-in seating.

Given that above-ground parking is typical throughout Queens West, the SCA's design management team and Gran Kriegel sought to enliven the street along the school's north facade which is fronted by a parking structure and adjacent to the residential tower's service entrance. Two uses, the

school's auditorium, with large, street-level windows and cafeteria, positioned on the corner of 5th St. and 46th Ave., are placed where windows connect students to the outdoors and their activity animates the street.

Aware of the vulnerability of site to flooding from the East River and cognizant of rising sea levels, Gran Kriegel intentionally raised the first floor of the school two feet above the base flood elevation, higher than required by code. This prevented damage to the school when Hurricane Sandy's 2012 storm surge drove river water across the site.

Design and construction followed Local Law 86 and the NYC Green Schools Guide, a LEED-equivalent system for building sustainability into new schools. PS/IS 78Q achieved the equivalent of a LEED silver rating.

Founded in 1965, Gran Kriegel Associates is a full service architecture and planning firm providing creative, effective solutions for a wide range of public, commercial, and residential clients. The firm has completed a diverse range of projects, from new housing, educational, commercial and retail facilities to complex renovations and restoration of historic buildings. Gran Kriegel Associates also specializes in urban design and planning, project programming and feasibility analysis.

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