



NYC SCA and MDSA open PS 340: A 95,000 s/f green school

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PS340, a public school developed by the NYC School Construction Authority (SCA) and designed by MDSzerbaty+Associates (MDSA), opened its doors in September in the Chelsea area. Located at the bustling corner of the Avenue of Americas and 17th St., the 95,000 s/f project involved converting the lower six floors and cellar of this 14-story building into a richly programmed Pre-K through grade 5 school that serves 518 students.

"This facility demonstrates how the SCA is meeting the demand for schools within New York's tight urban environment," said Michael Szerbaty, MDSA principal. "The challenge was to design a vibrant and protective learning environment for the students while still connecting with the light and energy of the city."

"We made the school entrance, which faces north to 17th St., open and inviting with an identifiable street presence. Passersby can look through a large glass surface to see the lobby's main element, a monumental stair that takes students to the floors above. We opened the back wall of the south-facing rear yard of the building to bring much needed natural light deep into the interior, something lacking in the original building. We introduced light and street level views at the entry, contrasting it with a differentiated light and view to the south. As the monumental stair continues to the upper levels, our design allows for a variety of visual experiences, creating an infusion of natural light and views of the city, while unifying the spaces of the school from top to bottom."

Animating the corridors and classroom interiors is a bright palette of interwoven colors, while the communicating stair core is a light colored hue that gathers and reflects the incoming daylight to the interiors. Commissioned via the Percent for Art Program, the artist Odili Donald Odila designed a colorful signature graphic at the main lobby wall visible from the street.

The Sixth Ave. Elementary School includes 21 new classrooms arranged along the quieter 17th St. side of the building. Specialized instructional areas for art, music, science and a multi-purpose room look over the Avenue of the Americas from the upper floors. A double-height library was carved out of the fourth and fifth floors. The lower level contains a lecture hall/auditorium available for community use, with a community room on the second floor adjacent to the double-height main lobby, on the same level as the administrative areas. A sunlit rooftop play area is located on the second floor at the inner court of the building.

The street façade was modified to incorporate a new entry vestibule. The original loading dock became the dance studio. In addition to the main entrance, the ground floor contains the cafeteria and dance studio which are enclosed with transparent glass partitions that visually connect the entire floor.

The project's complexity, with the inherent conditions of the existing multi-tenant building, its orientation, footprint, and a combination of code issues, required innovative solutions to create a school that is invigorating, inviting and open. The project is also a Green School following

SCA-adapted LEED Guidelines.

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