



MBB designs 14,000 s/f rooftop expansion for Grace Church School; Contractor was Archstone Builders

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Manhattan, NY In Greenwich Village, a new rooftop expansion and athletic center for the Grace Church School shows how urban institutions can make every inch count. Designed by Murphy Burnham & Buttrick Architect (MBB) to accommodate growth at the independent preparatory high school's campus, this 14,000 s/f, double-height addition delivers highly flexible spaces full of sunlight for varied physical activities, academic uses, and events. Centered on a large, multipurpose gymnasium and new gathering areas, the expansion also adds offices, classrooms, locker rooms and storage facilities, as well as a new fitness center and golf simulator room. The new facility opened to students in October 2018. Other project team members include:

- Owner's rep: Seamus Henchy & Associates.
- Contractor: Archstone Builders LLC.
- MEP engineer: Altieri Sebor Wieber Consulting Engineers.
- Structural engineer: A Degree of Freedom.
- Lighting consultant: Melanie Freundlich Lighting Design.
- Acoustic consultant: Lally Acoustical Consulting.
- AV consultant: Harvey Marshall Berling Associates.

Capped by an arched steel roof, MBB's design solution is thoughtfully integrated with Grace Church School's original footprint and harmonizes with its surrounding neighborhood and Cooper Sq. Students in grades 7-12 ascend an extended stairwell approaching a large skylight that brings light deep into the core of the building. At the top of the stair, a new student "commons" leads into the main gym space and provides an area for informal gatherings. The gym's soaring ceiling includes skylights with anti-glare Solera panels. The regulation-sized gymnasium can be divided into two spaces and is designed for use as a gym, performance and gathering space.

The new expansion includes an elegant, curved-steel structure and an acoustically isolating concrete slab set on floor jacks that reduce vibration and sound transmission to classrooms below. The resulting spaces are highly functional and efficient as well as warm and inviting.

“Urban schools built on constrained or compact sites face limitations on growth, yet Grace Church School has turned its limitations into assets, fostering a strong learning community through creative placemaking and facility design,” says MBB partner Sara Grant, AIA. “Capturing a rooftop or activating below-ground spaces can offer flexibility and new ways to bring students and faculty together to support diverse education needs.”

Grace Church School is the latest example of MBB’s innovative school designs and vertical learning communities. Other recent projects by MBB have included an expansion and renovation of P.S. 19 Marino P. Jeantet School in Queens, and St. Hilda’s & St. Hugh’s School and the Park Avenue Synagogue’s Eli M. Black Lifelong Learning Center, both in Manhattan.

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