



Montroy DeMarco Architecture designs Urban Dove Charter School three building renovation

November 14, 2023 - Front Section



Bronx, NY The Urban Dove Team II Charter School has opened its new transfer high school at 671 Prospect Ave. in the Woodstock neighborhood. Montroy DeMarco Architecture (MDA) designed the school building's renovation and expansion.

Urban Dove, established by founder and executive director Jai Nanda, also operates a high school in Brooklyn, located at 1256 East 21st St. The new school, named Urban Dove Team II Bronx, houses 300 students and 70 staff, who have relocated from a former location at 860 Forest Ave.

The Prospect Ave. property owner, Nivneh Capital Group/The Iconic Group, and MDA created the new campus for the charter school by combining, redeveloping, and expanding three adjacent commercial buildings within the Prospect Ave. site. Urban Dove rented the redeveloped property

through a long-term lease and named it the Evan Leif Educational Campus in honor of one of the donors supporting the organization.

“This 39,000 s/f project combined three structures into one cohesive building that both meets the programmatic needs of Urban Dove and positively impacts the neighborhood by renovating previously underutilized buildings,” said Daniel Montroy, AIA, MDA principal. “The three adjoining structures originally totaled 34,000 s/f, while the new fourth floor expansion added 5,000 s/f. A 1,900 s/f area on the street level is set aside for retail use.”

The renovation and expansion project team also included structural engineer KPFF Consulting Engineers Inc., MEP engineer A&D Engineering LLP, and general contractor NY Major Construction & Development.

The school site consists of three adjacent buildings on Prospect Ave., facing east between 152nd and 155th Sts. that have been combined into one lot. The site is within a walk of the Prospect Ave. and Jackson Ave. subway stations on the Number 2 and 5 lines and the Longwood Ave. station on the Number 6 line.

Nanda, a former teacher and basketball coach, recognized the positive impact team sports have on youth both inside and outside the classroom. He developed the Urban Dove program to utilize sports to teach at-risk teens the critical life skills needed to succeed. Two campuses are located in Brooklyn and in the Bronx.

“We have created a safe, supportive educational model that is successfully helping students get back on track to graduation,” said Nanda.

“Our incredible students deserve an incredible facility, and we are so excited about this brand new, first class building where our students can continue to grow and learn. Montroy DeMarco Architecture designed a beautiful new school that will serve our Bronx students and faculty for years to come.”

“The redevelopment included the gut rehabilitation of the adjoining three-story buildings and the addition of a fourth floor, to accommodate the needs of the growing school. We are very proud to include the Urban Dove Team Charter School among our tenants and to contribute to the improvement of the Woodstock neighborhood,” said Hillel Fischman, principal of The Iconic Group.

Each Urban Dove student enrolls in a three-year personalized instructional program that leads to a high school diploma, develops job skills, and provides a foundation for higher education. Students spend 2.5 hours per day participating in sports, nutrition, and fitness activities that develop teamwork, healthy competition, and self-confidence. Coaches use sports to help students focus, manage emotions, and become positive members of a community.

Constructed around 1915, the buildings have masonry facades, which have been revised and architecturally unified during the renovation. The center building is steel framed, while the flanking

building have timber structures. Prior to the redevelopment, the front façade of the southern building had been substantially concealed with both stucco and cultured stone, and original terra cotta ornamentation has been covered with paint. However, the front façades of the other two buildings were in relatively good condition, although the street levels had been modified in the past with the addition of retail storefronts and some brick has been painted.

Windows on the second and third floors are framed with monumental brick pilasters and triple rowlock arch surrounds with ornamental terra cotta and brick keystones, which have been retained during the renovation. The project team also preserved original decorative insets of dogtooth courses framed with rowlock brick borders that provide visual interest between the third-floor windows. A projected brick frieze runs below the roofline. The façade is capped with a terra cotta band and open brickwork cornice.

Prior to the conversion into the school, the buildings had been occupied by a variety of commercial and manufacturing uses, including most recently a billiards café and laundromat on the street level, and a church and dance hall on the upper floors.

It was essential for the new plan to include a high school regulation size basketball court, dance studio and weight room to address the athletics component of the curriculum as well as comfortable classrooms for academics. MDA has completely redesigned the buildings to meet these requirements.

Utilizing the features of the existing façade, the school's street level main entrance is now located at the center of the combined and unified structure, within an existing terra cotta surround. A new stairway and elevator provide vertical access to the other floors. Offices and five classrooms are located on the street level, and the layout has been configured to accommodate the retail component occupying the northeast corner. A large dance and yoga studio, a weight room, and a cafeteria occupy a majority of the cellar, which also houses a staff lounge, nurse's office, and support spaces.

Creating the basketball court required major renovation and structural redevelopment work. The court was built on the second floor in the northern portion of the building. In order to obtain enough floor space for the court, the demising wall between the central and north buildings was removed and a new partition wall was built to divide the court from the remainder of both floors. The third floor above the court has also been removed to provide the required 25-foot vertical clearance. KPFF designed wide span steel trusses above the court to carry the load of the new fourth floor and roof above.

"Development of the new layout proved to be the project's main design challenge," said MDA project manager Mark Vella. "Through redesigning the space surrounding the basketball court and by adding a fourth floor, we have successfully met the athletic and academic needs of Urban Dove's program."

The remainders of the second and third floors house a total of five classrooms and several offices.

Vision panels in the third-floor corridor provide a view into the court below. A new fourth floor addition features five additional classrooms, offices, and bullpens. The addition was constructed with light gauge framing and clad with EIFS (external insulation finishing system).

“The front façade has been modified to present a unified design. Portions of the existing parapet wall have been removed to permit integration of the new fourth floor façade, and the remainder of the exposed brick has been repaired and repointed,” said Vella. The southern, visually compromised portion of the façade has been replaced with a new brick veneer to match the existing adjacent areas. New aluminum frame windows have been installed throughout the building, and three new monumental window units have been installed within the existing masonry arches to provide light into the basketball court. Roofing is an EPDM (ethylene propylene diene terpolymer) membrane.

The basketball court features a hardwood floor installed over sleepers and shock absorbers to provide player comfort and sports performance properties. Lights are high efficiency LED fixtures.

In addition to serving students and faculty, the building has also become an asset to the community, as Urban Dove has made the basketball court available for community use outside of school hours. In addition, the renovated front façade will create a focal point that will enliven this portion of Prospect Ave.

New York Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540