



Gran Kriegel Associates wins arch. award for conversion project

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The Boston Society of Architects, in conjunction with the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, have recognized Gran Kriegel Associates as part of the 2009 K-12 Educational Facilities Design Awards Program.

Gran Kriegel was presented with an award for design excellence for a project to convert a former court house located at 283 Adams St. in downtown Brooklyn into two 500-seat high schools. The project was carried out on behalf of the New York City School Construction Authority.

A major challenge of the project was to make a lively learning environment within a building designed for a very different purpose more than 50 years ago. The awards jury "loved the reuse of buildings in a challenging urban environment" and saw the lack of natural light along interior corridors as "compensated by color." Jurists applauded solutions that were creative, "the gym on the roof," and "very cost effective for the work done."

The original court building, dating back to 1951, contains 140,000 s/f built around a central core. The interior was completely gutted and reconfigured to accommodate the new schools, the Urban Assembly School for Law and Justice, and Urban Assembly School of Math and Science for Young Women.

Gran Kriegel established two primary goals in the design process for the project: to respect the surrounding character of Brooklyn's Civic Center and create a distinct identity for the schools while visually linking the new with the old.

The design solutions that were implemented to accomplish this include a new double-height glass building entry to express the identity of the school at street level.

"We removed a small part of the second floor, creating a two-story space within the existing red granite frame," said Warren Gran, a principal at Gran Kriegel Associates. "The scale communicated to the outside is more in keeping with the size and sense of entry for 1,000 students. The lobby announces the new life given to the old Brooklyn Family Court."

The lobby features re-installed bas-relief stone panels salvaged from the original courthouse. The building was re-clad with lightweight limestone panels to aesthetically complement the institutional character of the Civic Center.

"Color is used as an important tool in linking the new with the old," Gran notes. "The bright blue of the window frames and the red columns and yellow accents bring new life to the existing façade. The addition's façade is organized symmetrically and the metal panels, while shiny, are sympathetic to the limestone color."

Constraints of the existing building and limitations on increasing the overall floor area resulted in the consolidation of the gymnasium and auditorium into a flexible, double-height multi-purpose room that will replace the existing penthouse. The space, by use of a movable partition, can function as a

competition gym, flexible performance space, or simultaneously accommodate two activities. Seating will be on both retractable bleachers and movable chairs. The steel framed, long-span joist structure was separated from the existing roof by an interstitial space which allows for efficient MEP distribution and optimum noise isolation.

All mechanical, electrical, plumbing and fire-protection systems throughout the building were replaced. Elevator shafts were combined to accommodate larger, ADA-compliant cars. Coordination of the new systems within the existing structural system required creative solutions to achieve the necessary ceiling heights.

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