

Spring 2004

Oculus

A PUBLICATION OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS NEW YORK CHAPTER VOLUME 66 ISSUE 1 \$10



YOUNG FIRMS SURVEY RESULTS AND YEARBOOK FEAR OF MARKETING LIFE AFTER FOUNTAINHEAD 22 YEARS OF EMERGING VOICES

New York Next: Faces of the Future

Building Cred

In 1978, I came to New York City to attend Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture. As soon as I arrived, I was immediately drawn to New York's intense urbanism and the energy and diversity of its people. I knew that I had found the place where I wanted to live and pursue my career in architecture

I worked for three large firms before establishing my own practice. I was a designer for The Gruzen Partnership and later I.M. Pei, where I was involved primarily with the design of commercial and institutional buildings. Subsequently, during eight years with Gwathmey Siegel and Associates, I was responsible for the headquarters of Sony Music

Entertainment, Morgan Stanley's Executive Headquarters, and a Theatre, Arts and Student Center for City University of New York, as well as other commercial, educational, and residential projects. My responsibilities there also included major portions of the expansion and renovation of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum.

In 1995, I established my own firm, Stephen Yablon Architect, to fulfill my desire to develop my own architectural ideas and become involved in all aspects of running an architectural practice. More pragmatically, self-employment seemed to offer more flexibility while raising a family. After leaving Gwathmey Siegel, I worked out of my home for several months, focusing on developing my portfolio and firm identity, and establishing a referral network. After securing some initial work, I subleased five desks from another firm in Manhattan and hired my first staff. We remained in that space until we moved into our current loft space on 38th Street in the Garment District six years ago. Two of our first projects, office interiors for Sony and The Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, were published and I was subsequently invited to give a lecture at Parsons School of Design on new directions in the workplace. At the same time, we began to do master plans for small to mid-sized non-profit institutions.

With no experience in marketing, and no work of my own to show, I had to do a great deal of research on prospective clients and base my presentations on an in-depth understanding of their needs. I learned that it is critically important to articulate a design approach at



Betances Community Center: adaptive reuse in the South Bronx

the outset to ensure the right fit with a prospective client. Other challenges included learning how to set fees, maintaining a constant marketing effort, and establishing a balanced client base that produces stable revenue. None of my prior training had prepared me for dealing with those issues.

However, my experience at larger firms was a tremendous asset in the formation of my office. Particularly as a newcomer to New York City, the corporate, institutional, and real estate connections that I established while at those firms resulted in some of our first projects and served as the springboard for further networking. In addition, my experience designing larger commercial and institutional projects and coordinating large teams of consultants gave me credentials with prospective clients.

We are now a 10-person office and have assembled a strong group of designers who work well together in a collaborative atmosphere. The practice has established a broad range of corporate, public, non-profit, and residential clients, including Sony Music, Columbia University, the New York City Housing Authority, and several financial services companies. For most of these clients we are providing a full range of services including programming, site analysis, planning, architectural design, interior design, and furniture selection and design.

A growing segment of our firm's practice is in community centers, performing arts and athletic facilities, and university work. Two of our

Stephen Yablon Architect

essentials:

Stephen Yablon Architect (1995)

By Stephen Yablon, AIA

community center projects are about to go into construction. Betances Community Center, in a NYCHA housing complex in the South Bronx, is an adaptive reuse and re-cladding of two existing buildings that will be linked to house a community center and gymnasium for an award-winning youth boxing program. The gut renovation

...learning how to set fees, maintaining a constant marketing effort, and establishing a balanced client base that produces stable revenue. None of my prior training had prepared me for dealing with those issues.

tion and additions to the Hudson Guild, a 108-year-old settlement house that has been located in an elderly housing tower complex in Chelsea since the 1960s, is also about to begin construction. For Columbia University, we are involved with a number of projects, including an adaptive reuse of a neo-Gothic building, a dormitory renovation, and administrative office interiors.

Our office has just completed the new offices for Angelo Gordon, LLP, an investment management firm. The company wanted a refined but spirited environment for their offices on Park Avenue. The project included 10,000 square feet of new space, selectively renovating their adjacent existing space, incorporating a significant contemporary art collection, and tying the entire office together through the use of custom wood and glass office fronts, a neutral color palette with strong accents, and classic modern furniture.



Angelo Gordon conference room, New York City

We also recently finished additions and renovations to a 1940s modern house in New Jersey that was designed by a Bell Labs engineer while he was in the Pacific during World War II. We designed a new second floor master suite addition, renovated most of the existing interior spaces, and enlarged part of the first floor. The exterior was completely re-clad in white stucco to unify the house and create a more compelling composition of volumes and planes. The rear of the house was given a much-needed garden orientation through the use of trellises, balconies, large amounts of glass, and a patio.

The last two years of my practice have been particularly exciting. After the initial years of setting up the practice, we have developed a network of clients that are generating diverse, larger, and more complex projects. We want to continue to design projects that vary in scale while developing new relationships. To achieve these goals, we recently completed a strategic plan and made substantial new investments in enhanced marketing and project management. I am also evaluating my own role in the firm and determining how to organize the practice to enable me to spend more time developing the design direction and cultivating client relationships.

One of my primary architectural interests is creating buildings and spaces that convey a strong sense of place and organizational or community identity. I look forward to building on the firm's past growth and developing even more innovative design solutions that enable people to feel proud of their surroundings. www.syarch.com



Brad Forster



Allen Residence, New Jersey; renovation/expansion of 1940s house

Albert Novakowski/ESPO

