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# ARCHITECTURE **DC**

## Outstanding: The 2008 Awards Issue



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**Merit Award in Interior Architecture**

**DC Navigators**

Washington, DC

**RTKL Associates Inc.**

**Contractor:** Hitt Contracting, Inc.

Photos © Paul Warchol Photography.

# Office Spice:

## A New Generation of Workplaces

By Steven K. Dickens, AIA

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Left and inset: Interior views of the DC Navigators office.

Opposite top: Atrium at the offices of DLA Piper US LLP.

Opposite bottom: Main entrance to the Harman Center for the Arts.

Washington remains the quintessential office town, so it's no surprise that an office project won in every awards category except Historic Preservation. While all of the office buildings and interiors that received awards this year are fundamentally modern, they reflect a range of tastes, ideas, and strategies for making pleasant and productive workplaces.

## Inside Stories

Among the winners in the Interior Architecture category were the offices of **DC Navigators**, a consultancy located on one floor of the former Marlo furniture showroom building in the Gallery Place/Chinatown area. Architects **RTKL Associates** took full advantage of the raw space's high ceilings, huge windows, wood floors, exposed brick, and cast iron columns and plumbing stacks to lend texture and character to the finished project. These existing elements helped determine the floor plan configuration, and their earthy character contrasts with new drywall, glass, and metal interventions. Timbers from a former mezzanine space (removed as part of the work) reappear as the main wall of the conference room. While the workstations, doors, ceilings, and most of the walls maintain a loft-chic white, black, and silver metallic color palette, a "limited but strong use of color" in other elements was cited by the jury as a positive distinguishing feature. Simply put, the jurors felt that the project represented a "very nice juxtaposition of old and new."

According to the Interior Architecture jurors, offices constituted the majority of entries in that category, and overall, those submissions were generally of high quality. "Everyone had great furniture!" enthused Ronnette Riley, noting that the jury's principal task was to determine "of all those great white modern interiors, what elements are distinguishing?"

With that in mind, the jurors agreed that the offices of the law firm **DLA Piper**, designed by **Lehman Smith McLeish**, were exceptional. One of the client's primary goals for the project was to enhance interaction among the firm's staff, a broad directive that led the architects to undertake dramatic design gestures, including a complete reorganization of the building's circulation, an extension of the existing atrium, and the liberal use of translucent and transparent materials. "This [submission] was highly successful at telling the story of what they did, what their design intent was, and how it was articulated," said juror Audrey O'Hagan, speaking to the size and complexity of the project. Riley called DLA Piper "the most architectural interior that we saw," noting the substantial modifications to the base building, as well as the seamless integration of *architecture* and furnishings. DLA Piper was the subject of a feature article in the fall 2008 issue of *ArchitectureDC*.

## Two Buildings in One

Bearing a long name that reflects a mix of completely distinct uses, the **International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers Building/Sidney Harman Hall** was designed by **SmithGroup** of Washington with **Diamond + Schmitt Architects** of Toronto. The building is best known as the site of the new auditorium for Washington's esteemed Shakespeare Theatre Company, and as a result, many visitors may not even realize that it also incorporates substantial commercial office space. While the jurors praised the design of the performance hall, their focus was on the *tout ensemble*—the totality of the building—calling it a "smart execution of a complex program."



Photo by Mario Carrieri.

### Award for Excellence in Interior Architecture

**DLA Piper US LLP**  
Washington, DC

### Lehman Smith McLeish

**Contractor:** Hitt Contracting, Inc.  
**Base Building Architect:** Hartman-Cox Architects  
**Base Building Contractor:** Clark Construction Group, LLC



Photo by Tom Arban.

### Award for Excellence in Architecture

**International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftworkers and The Harman Center for the Arts/Shakespeare Theatre**  
Washington, DC

### SmithGroup/Diamond + Schmitt Architects

**Contractor:** The Clark Construction Group  
Fisher Daschs Associates



Lobby at 1110 Vermont.

Photo © Alan Karchmer.

## Catalyst Award

### 1110 Vermont Avenue

Washington, DC

## STUDIOS Architecture

**Artwork:** Höweler + Yoon Architecture/MY Studio

**Contractor:** Hiitt Contracting, Inc.



Columbia Center.

Photo © Prakash Patel.

## Merit Award in Architecture

### Columbia Center

Washington, DC

## Hickok Cole Architects, Inc.

**Contractor:** James G. Davis Construction Corporation

The building completes an architecturally rich block and has numerous design moves that help it simultaneously fit in and stand out. Projections whose height and scale relate obviously and appropriately to the historic OBA building on the corner are found at both F Street (the crystalline theater lobby) and 6th Street. In the middle of the block is a “Winter Garden,” which serves as a forecourt to the union’s office lobby and completes a master plan connection to adjacent buildings. The building’s raised crown at the top of the F Street façade directly echoes a similar element in the office building to the west (which in turn is an abstraction of the massive terracotta cornice of the old Hecht Company building at the west end of the block). The combined office and theater building was profiled in the Spring 2008 issue of *ArchitectureDC*.

## Best Impressions

Two of this year’s award winners, Columbia Center and 1110 Vermont Avenue, NW, are located a few blocks apart in a largely built-out, relatively dreary and lifeless part of the central business district. Both sought to “increase the value of a single building by expanding its sphere of influence to the entire neighborhood,” as STUDIOS Architecture stated in the competition entry for 1110 Vermont. Both are quite successful in that regard, using transparency and innovative lighting to reduce the barriers between inside and out, thereby animating the streetscape.

In 2004, **1110 Vermont Avenue** was a 1970s-era, utilitarian, mid-block building with failing retail tenants. **STUDIOS Architecture** was commissioned by a new owner to upgrade the building, but the budget precluded wholesale change to the exterior. So the architects focused on the streetscape, providing a largely transparent façade (of ultra-clear, non-reflective glass) at the first and second floors, capped by a large sunshade element that provides a sense of shelter and stops the eye from wandering further upward. Four LED light panels were installed, one outside, two in the lobby, and one at the elevator lobby, which project abstractions of real-time pedestrian traffic. Also in the sidewalk area is a grove of touch-sensitive light poles, which illuminate and emit chimes upon activation.

The new owners also attracted two upscale restaurants—one with a sidewalk dining area—and a coffeehouse as retail tenants. The end result is synergistic: the more animated streetscape attracts better office tenants, whose employees in turn further animate the streetscape. The stage is set for other buildings on the block to undergo similarly urbane transformations, which of course is precisely why this project was recognized with the Catalyst Award.

**Columbia Center**, a new speculative office building on 15th Street, NW, by **Hickok Cole Architects Inc.**, eschews the heavy, rigid Modernism of its neighbors, breaking down the relatively narrow street front into multiple, asymmetrically arranged elements. The tautly glazed curtain walls introduce a welcome lightness to the block and, in this case, the angled upper floors’ departure from the street wall plane provides needed visual relief. The show-stopper, however, is the multistory, transparent lobby, positioned at the southeast corner with the intention that it serve as a glowing beacon, an object (not just an entrance space) visible from MacPherson Square two blocks south. The jury delighted in the lobby’s architectural forest of columns—including large, structural columns and small, lighted poles inside and stainless steel bollards outside—calling them “sculptural follies which draw users in.”

The jury was also fascinated by the fact that the architecture firm had held a *charrette* in the early days of the project, in which



New entrance pavilion at the Richard B. Russell Federal Building.

Photo © Prakash Patel.

## Merit Award in Architecture

### Richard B. Russell Federal Building

Atlanta, Georgia

### Gensler

Contractor: Holder Construction



Middle and bottom: Views of the main entrance and roof deck of the building housing the American Legacy Foundation.

Photo © Prakash Patel.

## Presidential Citation for Sustainable Design

### American Legacy Foundation

Washington, DC

### OTJ Architects

Contractor: Hiit Contracting, Inc.

all employees offered ideas for the design. These ideas were then distilled by the project team. The jury felt that this process was central to the generation of the “vibrant, exciting final design.”

For the renovation of the **Richard B. Russell Federal Office Building and Courthouse** in Atlanta, **Gensler** took the lobby-as-object idea a step further. The existing building is International Style, “derivative of Mies van der Rohe buildings,” according to the architects. In their review of Mies’ buildings, they noted that one often finds large sculptures in the entrance forecourts. This became the inspiration for the new lobby/security pavilion—essentially a large work of architectural sculpture. The jury commented that “the power of the simple idea holds its own against the preexisting tower.”

The new entrance is part of a larger “hardening” for security purposes. Normally, restriction of entrances and introduction of bollards and other hardening devices are not viewed as architectural positives. But in this case, a concrete plaza was transformed into a park-like courthouse square, and the new, consolidated entry (replacing eight previous entry points) not only provides compositional focus and a stronger public image, but also improves the clarity of circulation.

## Clearing the Air

The mission of the **American Legacy Foundation** is to build a world in which young people reject tobacco and anyone can quit smoking. This goal overlaps quite neatly with one of the principles in the LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) building certification system: “Environmental Tobacco Smoke Control” is a requirement within LEED’s Indoor Environmental Quality category. For this project, the client and architects, **OTJ Architects**, decided not only to seek LEED certification, but also to take a big step beyond that.

Notwithstanding that the project is the renovation of a 1981 building, they strove for LEED Gold status—a higher standard than basic certification—and decided to do so under the requirements of LEED for New Construction (LEED-NC) rather than LEED for Existing Buildings (LEED-EB). LEED-EB focuses on the criteria most readily achievable within the limitations of a renovation, whereas LEED-NC entails a broader set of standards. Moreover, LEED-EB generally requires a certain level of improvement relative to the preexisting condition, whereas LEED-NC has requirements fixed at a very high base level. In short, the choice to apply for certification under LEED-NC reflects the client’s commitment to sustainability in its headquarters, and made the job much more challenging for the architects.

LEED Gold certification cannot be achieved without earning points in almost every category, so it is not surprising that this project entails a smorgasbord of sustainable design moves: motion detectors for automatic control of lights, bicycle racks and parking spaces reserved for carpoolers and hybrid vehicles, FSC (Forest Stewardship Council)-certified wood, a green roof, low-flow plumbing fixtures, high-efficiency HVAC equipment, and so forth. Appropriately, there is a particular focus on air quality-related points: no-VOC paints; no urea-formaldehyde in millwork, carbon dioxide sensors, drywall without paper lining (to reduce the possibility of mold or mildew), and fresh air flow in excess of the LEED-required standard. Thanks to all these efforts, the American Legacy Foundation’s offices are literally a breath of fresh air—and that’s good for their occupants and good for the planet. 🌱