

capital improvements



More than a gateway, a lobby is a calling card. To instantly announce the arrival of the Columbia Center—making the 415,000-square-foot office building stand out from what Hickok Cole Architects principal Michael E. Hickok calls the “dreary canyon” of precast-concrete structures near McPherson Square in Washington, D.C.—his design embraces the light. He says he envisioned the four-story, 4,220-square-foot atrium as a “glowing glass cube.”

Dominating the lobby’s focal wall is a row of giant vertical strips of backlit laminated glass, predominantly blue but punctuated by horizontal bands of yellow. “It’s a conceptual waterfall,” Hickok explains. The glass panels are fastened together with shiny stainless-steel fittings and placed at 3-foot intervals—gaps reveal the honey-tone anigre veneer of the paneling behind. Directly opposite the focal wall, a cluster of internally lit polycarbonate rods is planted, like a stand of bamboo. The rods not only cast a gentle white glow but also throw long, slender shadows across the gleaming beige and dark gray marble flooring and a series of benches made from slabs of schist. Thanks to the lobby’s corner location and two glass sides, these subtle interplays are visible for blocks. How’s that for political transparency?

—Mark McMenamin

1. Hickok Cole Architects principal Michael E. Hickok.
2. Stainless-steel Planar fittings from Pilkington. 44-1744-28882; pilkington.com.
3. The quarter-sawn edge of Jefferson Millwork & Design’s custom wall panel veneered in book-matched anigre. 703-260-3370; jeffersonmillwork.com.
4. Custom laminated-glass panels from Pulp Studio. 310-815-4999; pulpstudio.com.
5. The panels forming a 36-foot-high incandescent-backlit installation in the atrium lobby of the Columbia Center in Washington, D.C. ➤



1. Ensinger’s custom polycarbonate rods lit by fiber optics. 724-746-6050; shopforplastics.com.
2. The plywood substrate of Jefferson Millwork & Design’s panel.
3. The 1/4-inch thickness of Pulp Studio’s glass.
4. One of the Ensinger rods’ stainless-steel bases.
5. Corinthian beige marble flooring from Rugo Stone. 571-642-2672; rugostone.com.
6. The corner of the 12-story building.
7. Stone Source’s Galaxy schist for the benches. 212-979-6400; stonesource.com.

