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SCHOOLS OF THE 21ST CENTURY

STUDIO GANG'S CHICAGO BOATHOUSE
H3'S BROOKLYN THEATER
ROJKIND'S MEXICO CITY CINETECA



Baltimore Design School | Baltimore | Ziger/Snead Architects

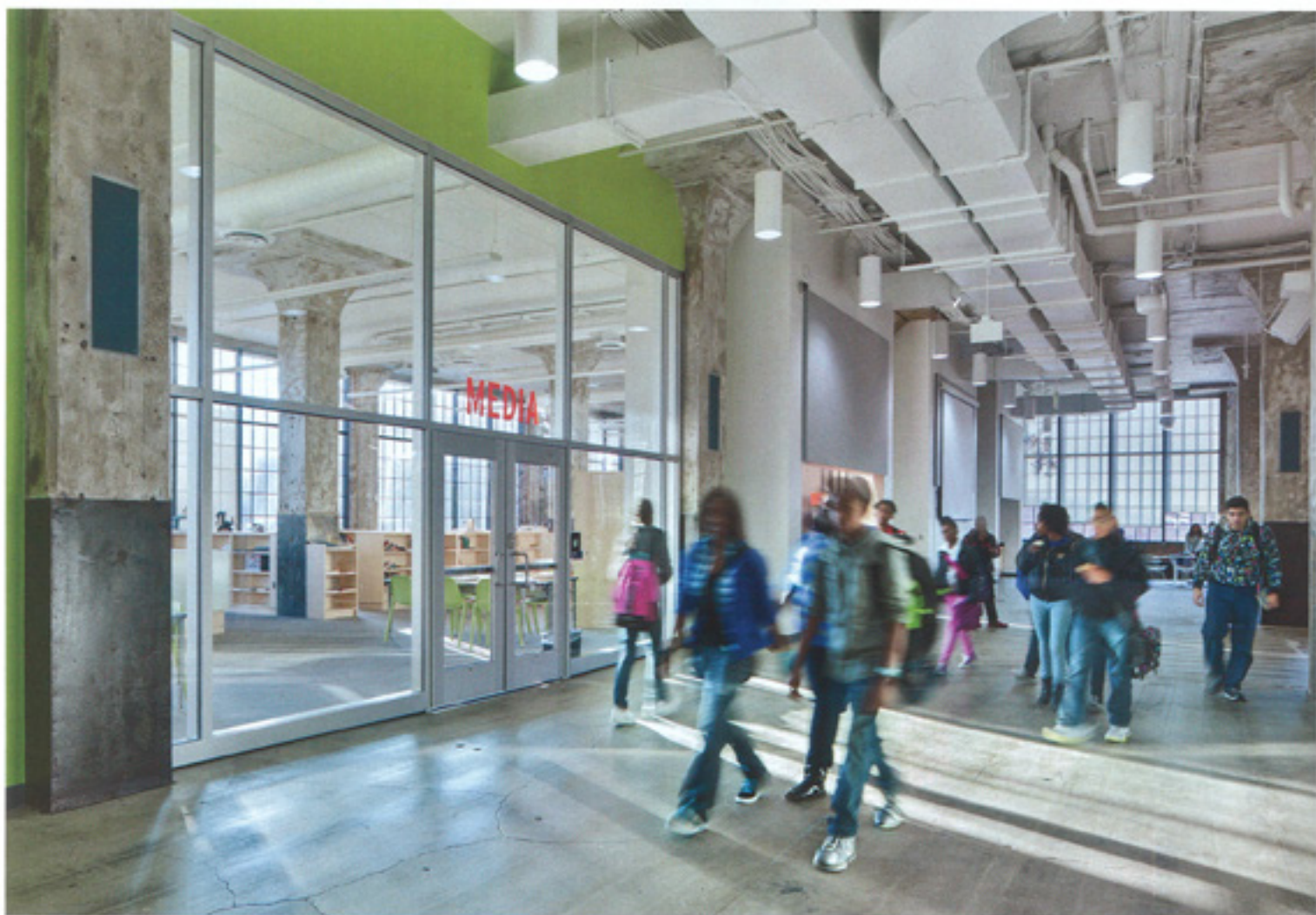
LEARNING BY DESIGN

An early-20th-century industrial building sets the scene for a dynamic public school model in the midst of a growing arts community.

BY SHARON MCHUGH

CLEAR VISION A repurposed historic community school, residents, and professionals turned this former factory into a cutting-edge public design school for middle and high school students.

PHOTOGRAPHY © KATHY CORNELL



BUILT IN 1914, the four-story industrial building at 1500 Barclay Street in Baltimore's North Central Historic District was innovative for its time, with expanses of glass and a unique ventilation system designed by the architect, Otto G. Simonson, to improve working conditions. Nearly 100 years later, the masonry structure is again breaking new ground. Originally home of the Cork Crown & Seal Company, a bottle-cap manufacturer, and later occupied by the Lebow Brothers Clothing Company, a maker of men's suits, the building has been transformed into the dynamic Baltimore Design School (BDS) by the Baltimore-based architect Ziger/Snead.

The existing 115,000-square-foot building had a leaky roof, spalling concrete, and thick vegetation growing out of its walls. It needed structural repairs, new windows, and a complete systems overhaul. "It was in such bad shape that it was used as a set for the popular TV crime drama *The Wire*," says design principal Steve Ziger. There were still coat racks, sewing machines, and barrels of buttons from 1985 when the building was shuttered due to a labor dispute.

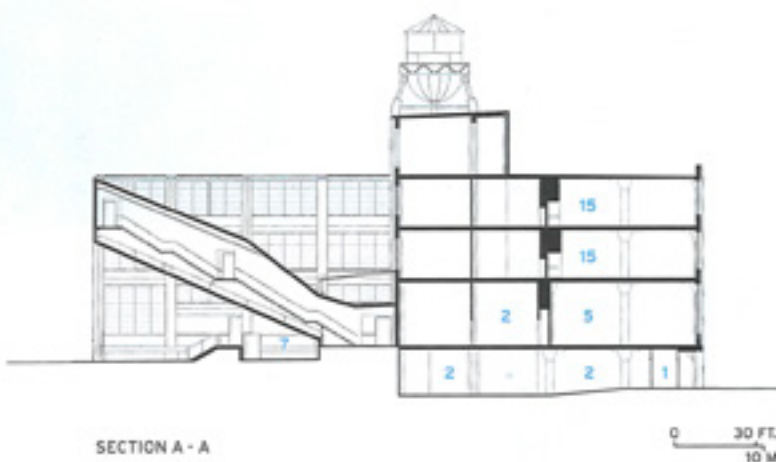
A gritty, formerly working-class neighborhood dotted with factories is not the first place you would think of locating a school for kids. Yet the founders of the BDS, a public school offering concentrations in fashion design, architecture, and graphic design to middle and high school students, knew it





LAYERS OF TIME

The architects balanced new and old by maintaining as much of the existing structure as possible and exposing its rough elements so students could experience the power of design every day. Transparent sunlit studios and a media room (opposite, top) line the spacious corridors, surfaced with polished-concrete floors and dotted with newly installed galleries (above). A vibrant turquoise packs a punch (left), within one of two external corrugated-aluminum stairwells the architects installed along facing walls in the courtyard (opposite, bottom).



- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| 1 ENTRY | 9 FABRICATION LAB |
| 2 GALLERY | 10 ARCHITECTURE LAB |
| 3 OFFICES | 11 CLASSROOM |
| 4 GYMNASIUM | 12 BREAKOUT/STUDY AREA |
| 5 MEDIA CENTER | 13 LOUNGE |
| 6 CAFETERIA/MULTIPURPOSE | 14 METAL/WOOD SHOP |
| 7 OUTDOOR STAGE | 15 STUDIO |
| 8 FASHION LAB | 16 CRIT SPACE |

credits

ARCHITECT: Ziger/Snead Architects – Steve Ziger, design partner; Hugh McCormick, managing partner; Katherine LePage, Matthew Rouse, Sukanya Walsh, Jonas Risén, Mihar Morimoto, project team

ENGINEERS: Henry Adams (m/e/p/lp); Gower Thompson (civil); Columbia Engineering (structural)

CONSULTANTS: Ashton Design (graphics); Lazarus Design Associates (landscape)

GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Southway Builders

CLIENT: Baltimore Design School/ Seawall Development Company

SIZE: 115,000 gross square feet

COST: \$26.9 million

COMPLETION DATE: June 2013

SOURCES

CURTAIN WALL: Kawneer; EFCO

ALUMINUM WINDOWS: Seal Craft

GLAZING: Cardinal Glass

DOORS: Assa Abloy

CEILINGS: USG Interiors

PAINT: Sherwin-Williams

STAINLESS-STEEL STAIR NET: Jakob





WOW EFFECTS

The interior fit-out and furnishings of the BDS are not your standard school-grade fare. The finely crafted, concrete restroom sinks (opposite) were designed and donated by the Baltimore-based Luke Works, while the orange Groovy chairs by Beaufurn that enliven the cafeteria (above) were purchased by the design team for only \$70 apiece.

was right. Located near the city's Pennsylvania Station, the Station North Arts and Entertainment District is a gentrifying neighborhood containing artist live-work lofts, theaters, galleries, row houses, and businesses, anchored by the nearby Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA). Adapting a historically significant abandoned building here, a district listed on the National Park Service's National Register, would qualify BDS for community-investment and historic-preservation tax credits.

The school, which opened in 2011 at a temporary location, was the vision of State Senator Catherine Pugh, who pushed to provide the students with a new, state-of-the-art facility. In this endeavor, Pugh was assisted by a team of community leaders and professionals, including Ziger, MICA President Fred Lazarus (both on the school's Board of Directors), and Dr. Andrés Alonso, former CEO of the Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS). The \$26.9 million project is the result of a unique public-private partnership financed by public and

developer funding, tax credits, private bonds, and fund-raising. A local developer was tapped by the BDS board to arrange and manage financing, design, and construction.

"The guiding architectural idea was to have a dialogue between the historic structure and the new work," explains Ziger. "We wanted the intervention to be clear and simple. And we wanted to keep those ideas throughout." To do this, Ziger/Snead maintained as much of the existing structure as possible. The architects gutted the building, cleaned the brick, and installed energy-efficient windows with profiles replicating the original ones. They created a series of loftlike spaces, configuring them to encourage collaboration, adding modular pods between the classrooms and the hallway to facilitate point-of-use storage and mechanical needs. Each of these discrete 5-by-16-foot units houses such elements as lockers, computer stations, and teachers' cabinets, as well Variable Air Volume boxes, air supply, and acoustic panels. "The pods were conceived as a way of organizing a variety





of program elements in a clearly new component," says Ziger. While standardized, the pods vary to suit programmatic needs.

One of the biggest challenges was to design code-compliant stairs within a tight budget. Taking their cues from Diller Scofidio + Renfro's High Line in New York, the architects filled the core of an existing interior stairwell with woven stainless-steel netting that stretches the full-height of the building. Outside, they suspended two corrugated-aluminum-wrapped stairways diagonally along facing walls of the courtyard, now used as a place to gather or watch fashion shows staged on the former loading dock.

Construction costs totaled \$19 million, or \$164 per square foot, which is lower than the \$225 per square foot the BCPS typically budgets for this type of work. Dollars were further stretched through a number of pro-bono services and professional relationships. Adobe Foundation's Youth Voices Program sponsors a creative lab staffed by an Adobe instructor and equipped with computers loaded with the company's Creative Suite. Luke Works, a local designer of concrete surfaces and furnishings, gave sinks. Ziger/Snead, Gensler, and Ayers St. Gross donated interior-design services. Ashton Design pitched in with environmental graphics. Much of the furniture outside of classrooms was donated, and the bright-orange cafeteria chairs, discovered at NeoCon East, were purchased for under \$70 apiece.

The raw look of the building, that of a "work in progress," is intended to inspire the students. "If you engage design thinking early enough in a kid's life, he or she can apply those skills to solving life's problems," says Ziger.

A fresh approach to school design—and community development—the Baltimore Design School's new home is exciting, open, and transparent, crafted largely through a thoughtful design process and goodwill. "To know that these kids can have a voice and make a difference is huge," says Ziger. "It's a message filled with hope." ■

Architect and writer Sharon McHugh, based in Princeton, New Jersey, and New York, is a correspondent for Abitare and World Architecture News.

RISEING STARS Presently populated by 350 sixth-through ninth-grade students, the Baltimore Design School will eventually serve 670 students through 12th grade. To create an environment in which they would thrive, Ziger/Snead installed historically accurate energy-efficient replacement windows that filter copious amounts of daylight into the classrooms (opposite, top); they filled the core of an existing stairwell with stainless-steel netting (left) for both its safety and its sculptural qualities; and they created open, communal areas in the corridors, such as crit spaces (opposite, bottom), lounges, and galleries.