

contract

inspiring commercial design solutions february 2008



Anchor Center by Davis Partnership Architects
Design for Education

WGBH by Polshek Partnership Architects
GREENGUARD Children & Schools Certification Program
Stacking Chairs



artful makeover

The Shashi Caan Collective transforms a state-of-the-art eco-conscious commercial office building into a flexible teaching workspace for the Edinburgh College of Art

By Jean Nayar
Photography by Alan McAteer



A double-height atrium at the entrance was transformed into an animated display space by projecting ever-changing images of student work onto a massive wall, which can be seen from the street through the glass façade (opposite). A slim glass vitrine containing bands of red balloons was designed to showcase rotating displays of student work in the breakout area next to the principal's office (above).

Admitting just one out of every 10 students who apply each year from all over the world, the Edinburgh College of Art in Edinburgh, Scotland, is one of the most prestigious and cosmopolitan art educational institutions in the United Kingdom. Known as the Trustees Drawing Academy when it opened its doors as a drawing school in 1760, it slowly expanded and was renamed the Edinburgh College of Art in 1907, when King George V, the grandfather of Prince Charles of Wales, laid the cornerstone for the primary Beaux Arts building at the heart of campus. Since then, the college, which is affiliated with Edinburgh University, has grown to become a centerpiece in the capital of Scotland, turning out some of the UK's most notable architects, artists, and designers—including the architect Sir Basil Spence, who designed Canterbury Cathedral; Eduardo Paolozzi, the father of Pop Art; Sir Nicholas Grimshaw, the president of the Royal Academy in London; and Stewart Parvin, Queen Elizabeth II's current dressmaker, who designed the wardrobe for Her Majesty's recent visit to the United States.

Little more than a year ago, after it made the decision to substantially invest in its design subjects, the ECA found itself in need of a new building to house the teaching facilities for three of its design departments, its Ph.D. research department, its main library, and the offices of its central administrative staff, all of which had been dispersed among several loca-

tions on campus. As luck would have it, a virtually made-to-order new building was sitting empty in the middle of its grounds. So the college bought the building and commissioned one of its alumni, architect and interior designer Shashi Caan, principal of the New York-based Shashi Caan Collective, to refashion its interiors to specifically meet its own needs.

Known as Evolution House and originally constructed by a developer as a speculative multi-tenant corporate office space, the six-story, 44,000-sq.-ft. building, which incorporates high-end finishes and environmentally friendly materials, technology, and building techniques, was built four years ago to lease to a variety of commercial tenants. Though wonderfully detailed and located on prime real estate in the city's historic district adjacent to Edinburgh Castle, the building was constructed ahead of its time, and the rents were too high to attract tenants. But it proved to be just what the college needed in the right place and at the right time. "Instead of starting from scratch and coping with the agony of the price of steel and other construction concerns, it made more sense to simply take over this 'off-the-shelf' building," says Michael Wood, the college's secretary/chief operating officer. "It was situated on land we owned and we had watched its construction, so we knew just what we were getting," he says.





Glass partition walls and easy-to-move contemporary furnishings promote a spirit of transparency and flexibility between the office of the CFO and the college's secretary (left). Smatterings of art and sculpture from the school's archives, including the cupid atop the file cabinets, link the space to its classical roots. The large boardroom (above) contains a flexible folding Wilkahn Confair table surrounded by Eames Softpad chairs; the adjacent roof deck is used for a variety of functions and offers views to the North Sea and the surrounding historic cityscape. An elevator core and public corridor (opposite) is accented with an immersion of colored light.



Neutral carpet tiles cover the raised floor in the CFO's office (above), and HVAC systems are built into the floor around the perimeter. The use of color is very subtle here. The historic Edinburgh Castle sits on top of the escarpment outside the window. Covered with a bright Herman Miller fabric, a partial-height wall adds a jolt of color outside the vice president's office and conceals file cabinets (opposite top). Similar boldly patterned fabric clads a modesty panel in front of an administrator's desk (opposite bottom), enlivening the neutral backdrop on a design studio floor.

While the glass-clad building offered the benefits of technologically sophisticated, energy-efficient, light-filled interior spaces with travertine floors and wood-paneled walls, it also presented some challenges, according to Caan. "With its very high-end finishes and beautiful details, everyone was loath to deconstruct it," says Caan. "But it was designed for multi-tenant use by large and small companies, so its footprint was composed of two uneven parts—one large and one small—divided by a central core. Now that it would be housing a single tenant, we needed to create a way to fluidly communicate across this divide," she explains. "Another challenge," she says, "was that the spaces looked corporate, and there was a concern that for a college known for its inventive, creative, open culture, the inspired thinking and wild, wonderful ideas of art students might be thwarted by the environment."

The designers met these challenges by carefully dividing the spaces into logical components—placing the reception lobby, café, and library on the lower levels, converting a fire stair in the core into a vertical connection between the library and the Ph.D. research level above it, situating the three visual arts lecture spaces, studios, and labs on the central floors, and placing central administration and management offices on top. The designers also shaped all of the spaces on every floor to be extremely flexible—and they unified and enlivened the neutral interiors throughout with light, moveable, modern furnishings and conscientious shots of color.

The identity transformation starts at the entrance, where the designers introduced a double-height wall along one side of the atrium and mounted projectors above the revolving doors on the other. Together, these elements present an ever-changing display of student work—from photography and film to graphic design and illustration—which can be seen like an animated billboard through the glass façade from the street. "It provides a way to expose to the outside world what takes place within and showcases the transparent nature of the college and the creativity of its students," says Caan.

The open floor plates lent themselves surprisingly well to many of the activities taking place on the floors dedicated to the three design departments—and they also supported interdisciplinary interaction, which the college sought to encourage. Since the disciplines of these departments—including interior design, product design, and graphic design and illustration—focus on what Wood calls "clean subjects," as opposed to the messy arts of painting and sculpture, the high level of interior finishes did not conflict with the activities or output of the students. In fact, the open floor plates quite readily supported the development, critiques, and exhibitions of their projects. To make these spaces even more student friendly, the designers injected swaths of color and pattern with vivid, graphically patterned fabrics stretched like painted canvases over panels that hide desks, conceal file cabinets, or wall off the side edges of computer tables, and serve as pin-up boards for student work. The open floor plates also were



ideal for the administrative office spaces, which the designers defined with interior glass walls that enable the flow of light and enhance the culture of transparency the college seeks to promote. Designed to serve multiple purposes, the office spaces, even those of the principal and senior management, include an array of furniture settings—from circular tables and chairs to sofas and coffee tables—for different kinds of activities between all types of people, including students and guests who regularly visit.

Since the building opened last May, when the college celebrated its centennial anniversary and the new facility was inaugurated by Prince Charles, it has played host to film crews, who appreciate its roof terrace with views of the North Sea on one side and the Edinburgh Castle and other historic structures on the others; the BBC, which has conducted interviews there; and the CEO of the Royal Bank of Scotland, who used the setting to deliver his message for the new year. “Right next to the old Beaux Arts building, we have a new building for a new century as we celebrate our centennial year,” says Wood, who adds that the furnishings and flexibility of the spaces are working even better than expected. “It’s a good symbol for the future.”

For a list of who, what, where, please see page 92.

 Give us your feedback on this story at www.contractmagazine.com/contact.

Project: WGBH Headquarters (p. 64)

who Client: WGBH. *Architect, interior designer:* Polshek Partnership Architects (New York; 212.807.7171; www.polshek.com); Richard M. Olcott, FAIA, design partner; Timothy P. Hartung, FAIA, management partner; Tomas J. Rossant, AIA, senior designer; Molly S.K. McGowan, AIA, project manager; Patrick Golden, AIA, project architect; Katharine A. Huber, AIA, Kate Mann, AIA, and Charmian C. Place, project team. *Broadcast architect:* Janson Design Group. *Structural engineer:* LeMessurier Consultants. *Mechanical/electrical engineer:* R.G. Vanderweil Engineers. *General contractor:* Turner Construction. *Lighting designer:* Brandston Partnership. *Acoustician:* Janson Design Group. *Furniture dealer:* Peabody Office Furniture, Creative Office Pavilion. *Landscape:* Hargreaves Associates. *Systems Integration:* The Systems Group. *Sustainable design:* Steven Winter Associates, Veridian Energy & Environmental. *Civil/permitting:* Vanasse Hangen Brustlin. *Geotechnical:* Haley & Aldrich. *Environmental:* GZA Engineering. *Specifications:* Construction Specifications Inc. *Food services:* Next Step Design. *Pre-construction services:* George B.H. Macomber Company. *Photographer:* Jeff Goldberg/ESTO (Mamaroneck, NY; 914.698.4060; www.esto.com), Chris Pullman/WGBH (Boston; 617.300.2505; www.wgbh.org). *what Wallcoverings:* KnollTextiles. *Paint:* Pittsburgh, Maritin Senour. *Laminate:* Nevamar. *Flooring:* Terrazzo by De Paoli Mosaic Company, ECOsurfaces. *Carpet/carpet tile:* J & J Invision. *Carpet fiber:* Solutia Ultron Renew Nylon 6.6. *Ceiling:* Ceilings Plus metal

ceilings, Rulon Wood Ceilings, USG. *Glass:* Bendheim, Old Castle. *Window frames/wall systems:* Hollow Metal. *Window treatments:* MechoShade. *Workstations:* Herman Miller. *Lounge Seating:* Keilhauer. *Cafeteria, dining, auditorium Seating:* Irwin Seating Auditorium, Kusch. *Other Seating:* Vitra, Herman Miller. *Upholstery:* Knoll, Momentum. *Conference table:* Bernhardt Itinerary, Herman Miller Eames Conference Table. *Cafeteria, dining, training tables:* Harter, Bretford. *Shelving:* Rakks System. *Architectural woodworking, cabinetmaking:* Legere Woodworking. *Signage:* 2x4, Poulin + Morris. *Elevators:* Iros Elevator Services. *Fire safety:* Hughes Associates. *Security:* Ducibella Venter & Santore.

where Location: Brighton, Mass. *Total floor area:* 310,000 sq. ft. *No. of floors:* seven in existing building, two in connector. *Average floor size:* 35000-65000 sq. ft. *floor plates. Total staff size:* 1,000+.

Project: EF Shanghai Headquarters (p. 72)

who Client: EF Education Limited. *Interior designer:* CL3 Architects Limited (Shanghai, China; 86.21.6246.4156; cl3.com). *Structural/mechanical/electrical engineer, general contractor:* Jifu Décorate Ltd. *Lighting consultant:* Zodiac Lighting. *Furniture consultant:* Posh Office Systems. *Photographer:* Hu Wen Kit.

where Location: Shanghai, China. *Total floor area:* 5,100 sq. m. *No. of floors:* 4. *Average floor size:* 2,100 sq. m. *Student capacity:* approximately 1,130.

Project: Edinburgh Collage of Art (p. 78)

who Client: Edinburgh College of Art; Professor Ian Howard, college principal; Michael Wood, college secretary (CFO). *Interior architecture/design:* Shashi Caan Collective (New York; 212.769.0142; www.sccollective.com); Shashi Caan, principal; Theodore Prudon, principal; Flora Chou, project coordinator; Greg Frenzel, designer. *Project manager, quantity surveyor:* Rydens LLP. *Base building architect and planning:* Reiach and Hall. *Contractor:* Souness & Boyne. *Structural engineer:* SKM. *Mechanical/electrical Engineer:* Arthur MacKay. *Lighting engineer:* KJ Tait. *Graphic design:* Coda Design. *Furniture dealer:* Axis. *Photographer:* Alan McAteer (Glasgow, Scotland; 0141.418.2929; www.mcateerphotograph.com).

what Systems Furniture, meeting tables/chairs, branded screens: Herman Miller. *General desk seating:* Connection. *Tables:* Wilkhahn, Casamania, Geiger. *Seating:* Vitra, Moroso, Phoenix seating, Allermuir, Jean Prouve, Design Within Reach. *Custom furniture:* CFI. *Artifact units, boardroom credenza:* Storage Fabric Carcasses. *Metal storage/shelving:* Infotrieve. *Accent Lighting:* Cotterill Lighting, Bobby table lamp. *Carpet:* Lees Carpets.

where Location: Edinburgh, Scotland, UK.

Relax in Parc.

Looking for an atmosphere with a polished, grown-up style? Be part of the sophisticated scene in Parc.



Make mine Express.

On the move? Express is the perfect place to take five along the way. Stylish, fun, and comfy, it's ready to roll anytime you are.



Worden

1 800.748.0561
199 East 17th Street
Holland, Michigan 49423
www.wordencompany.com