

Suite Dreams

METRO STATE UNIVERSITY'S NEW HOTEL AND HOSPITALITY LEARNING CENTER

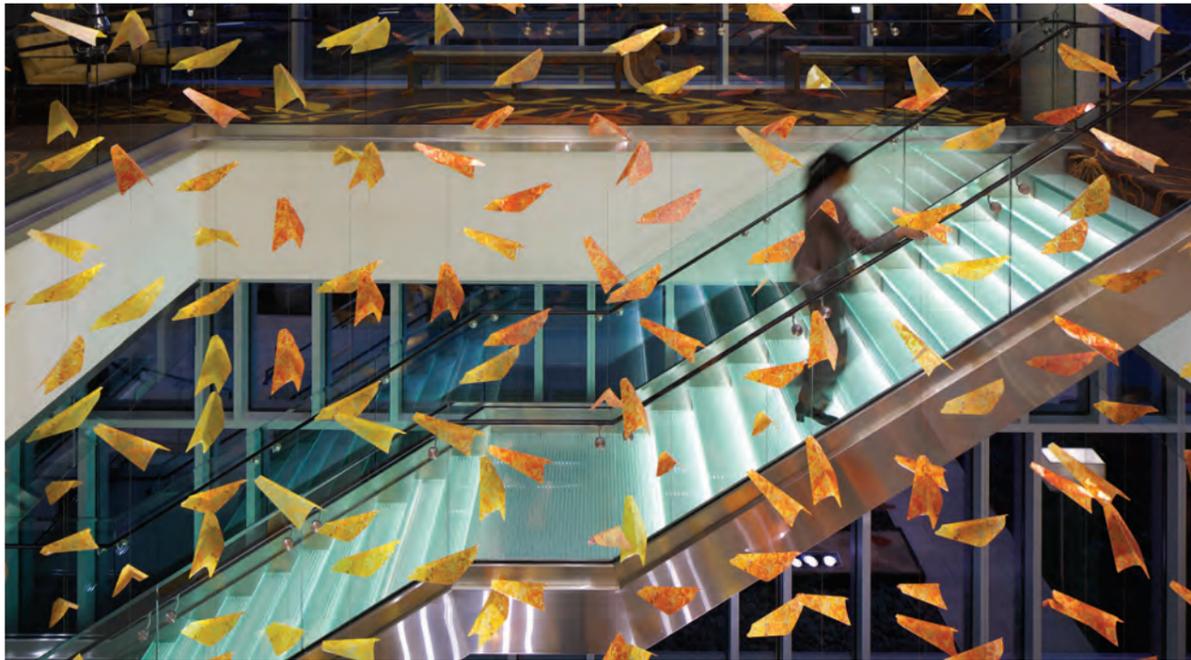
An innovative hybrid building on the Auraria Campus delivers Metro State University's vision of providing students with a state-of-the-art learning center along with a direct link to the real-world.

WORDS: SARAH GOLDBLATT, AIA • IMAGES: DAVID LAUER

PROJECT CREDIT LIST

Design Architect & Architect of Record: **RNL**
Associate Architect & Hotel Interiors Architect: **JG Johnson Architects**
General Contractor: **Mortenson Construction**
Mechanical Engineer: **MKK Engineering**
Civil Engineer: **Vision Land**
Electrical Engineer: **MKK Engineering**
Structural Engineer: **Jirsa Hedrick & Associates**
Interior Design: **RNL (hospitality school)**
JG Johnson Architects (hotel)
Lighting Design: **MKK Consulting Engineers Inc., Architectural Engineering Design Group Inc., LEI Companies, Inc.**
Landscape Design: **Studio Insite**
Acrylic panels and "flying object" sculpture: **Lynn Heffler/ Lynnel**
Art Consultant: **Nine Dots Art**





JG Johnson Architects designed dynamic interior spaces for hotel guests which mirror the natural beauty of Colorado. Like a rushing stream caught in a photographer's lens, the illuminated glass stairway has a kinetic quality. Its sense of "movement" is intensified by the adjacent "floating objects" sculpture created by Lynn Heitler.

B "Brilliant, balanced, lively, elegant, and executed with finesse." These are the words that emanate from Metro State University's (MSU) Sensory Analysis Lab where aspiring sommeliers are learning to distinguish the complex characteristics of wine. These same descriptors could easily apply to the design of the new Hotel and Hospitality Learning Center (HLC) on the Auraria Campus which houses the specialized wine-tasting lab and nine other hi-tech classrooms—along with a 150-room Marriott Hotel. The design of this hybrid building reflects the innovative thinking that typifies MSU's Department of Hospitality, Tourism and Events (HTE) and delivers a fresh entry into Auraria's quilt of modern structures.

This unique combination of hotel and higher-education classroom building—one of only ten in the country—opened its doors to students and guests in the fall of 2012. The school's goal of redefining the boundaries between academics and real world experience has propelled MSU's hospitality-related programs into the spotlight as it embarks on a new era of experiential learning. "We didn't really come out of the shadows until this building was built," acknowledges Sandra Haynes, MSU dean of the School

of Professional Studies. Student enrollment is soaring as the program realizes the original intent for the Auraria Higher Education Center (AHEC), established in 1976, to utilize the adjacent cityscape as a learning laboratory for their students.

In the case of the HLC, the city has arrived at the school's front door with Marriott's SpringHill Suites Hotel literally embracing the academic building and its programs. The proximity of the two facilities enables students to move seamlessly from their classrooms into direct on-the-job training. Currently 40 percent of the hotel staff is comprised of MSU students and program administrators hope that number will grow to 80 percent. The program has its eye on a global perspective as well, so all classrooms are wired for communication with hospitality experts world-wide. "We are hoping to take our students around the world, without necessarily leaving the classroom," says Haynes.

Developed with a series of collaborative public and private partnerships over the course of six years, the \$45 million Hotel and Hospitality Learning Center assumes a gateway position on the northeast corner of the Auraria Campus near the intersection of Speer Boulevard and Auraria Parkway. The building's form and



Upon arrival, hotel and conference guests are treated to a dose of "wow!" The architects enlisted Lynnel Art to Form to transform the arrival experience with an undulating acrylic structure that wraps up and over the reception desk. Artist Lynn Heitler used a photograph of a leaf that she had taken at the Denver Botanic Gardens as the basis for the design that was then extruded into an abstraction of the original form.



In her finish selections, JG Johnson project designer, Nicole Nathan, tried to embody the exuberance of the students working in the hospitality industry as well as the hotel's connection to the city and the Colorado landscape. To soften the hard lines of the architecture, Nathan chose floral patterned carpet and soft sheer drapes. Bright orange LZF Link Suspension pendants add to the hotel's organic feel. Beetle-kill furniture, locally crafted by Azure Furniture Company, is placed throughout the guest lounge and deepens the Colorado connection.

location signals a new direction in Auraria's development by reinforcing articulated "neighborhoods" for each of the three institutions that share the campus and by moving towards a planning model which more closely reflects the density of the surrounding urban fabric. "The original campus was conceived as individual buildings in a park-like setting...a very suburban approach to urban design," explains campus planner Chris Geddes with Studio InSite. "As the city has grown and student population has increased, there is a defined push to develop the edges of campus and embrace downtown. The HLC is a great first step towards creating a mix of uses on campus that will activate life and increase vitality between the campus and the adjacent communities."

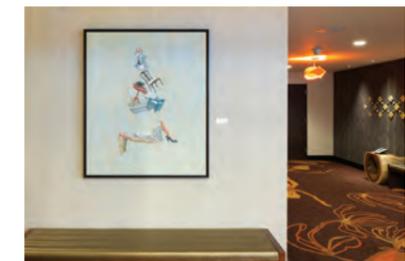
To launch the process, MSU, along with representatives from AHEC, selected the team of Mortenson Construction and Mortenson Development, Sage Hospitality, RNL, and JG Johnson Architects from a large contingent of developers, operators, and architects who responded to their request for a proposal for an integrated educational facility and hotel. The solution needed not only to facilitate the

students' career path, but also define the character of future development in that quadrant of campus and connect to the city. Marriott was a late entry to the team, but a willing participant in MSU's quest to find a hotel chain willing to break from their typical brand.

The distinguished architectural team approached the design as if the building was sited in a constrained urban setting and not surrounded on all sides by parking lots and ball fields. In fact, issues of access, site utilities and program adjacencies made for significant design challenges. "The biggest problem," explains RNL architect Ron Izzo, "was how to arrange all the programmatic elements that needed to have their own individual operation as well as interconnectivity." To balance the competing requirements, RNL located the six story hotel along the gentle curve of Auraria Parkway for maximum visibility and also to create a strong visual edge to the campus. The remaining programmatic pieces: conference center, academic building, and parking structure were arrayed around a serene courtyard where hotel guests arrive after passing under the glass-enclosed conference center and guest



JG Johnson had to adhere to Marriott's specific standards for the guest room layouts—especially the division between sleeping space and workspace. Yet they were able to create a "seamless" unity within the rooms and maintain a tailored, comfortable feel with warm woods and fabrics—complemented with breezy drapery that filters abundant natural light from the oversized windows.



It's rare that hotel guests take a second look at the artwork that adorns their room or the corridors, but this hotel art is far from the forgettable velvet landscapes that might come to mind. To celebrate and provide exposure for MSU's Department of Art, the walls of the HLC and the SpringHill Suites feature an eclectic mix of artwork by faculty, students and alumni.

THE COOL AND KINETIC DESIGN EVOKES A YOUTHFUL ENERGY—MIRRORING THE SPIRIT OF THE CITY—AND PERHAPS THE ASPIRATIONS OF THE STUDENTS OPTING FOR DIRECT IMMERSION IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY.



lounge. During the day, the glass envelope, which physically bridges the school and the hotel, acts as a revolving canvas for abstract reflections of clouds and neighboring historic structures. At night, the glass box glows—creating a welcoming beacon for the hotel and a spectacular vantage point to view the evening skyline.

The less-assuming two-story classroom structure wraps around the southern edge of the courtyard and relates back to the lower scale of older campus buildings. By stepping the building masses down from north to south, interior and exterior spaces within the hotel and classrooms remain light-infused throughout the day—one of the architect's primary strategies for optimizing daylighting and achieving LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Gold status.

Specialized classrooms like Mixology and Dining, Cellar Management (with a 3000+ bottle wine cellar), and the Sensory Analysis Lab were precisely designed with faculty and student input and represent state-of-the-art learning environments. A suite of faculty offices and student gathering spaces are strategically positioned to encourage collaboration while ensuring access to daylight and views. "This atmosphere is a complete and utter change for our students and faculty," effuses Chad Gruhl, chair and associate professor in the HTE Department who oversaw the project. "You can't help but be productive when you enjoy the physical environment in which you are in."



ABOVE: In a unique twist of inspiration, RNL used the rapid cutting techniques used in food preparation, Julienne and Brunoise, to inform the window design and patterns. "We abstracted the idea of the chef's blade or knife cutting into this glazing system to emulate that energy and movement in a very abstract way," explains RNL project designer, Ron Izzo.

LEFT: RNL design principal, Michael Brendle, describes the intersection of the glass box with the solid forms as "the place where the two programs stitch themselves together architecturally from both a functional and form-making standpoint." The striking break in form does double duty; it provides cover at the main HLC entry and also transforms into a glass-enclosed student lounge on the second floor.

Suite Dreams

The Hotel and Hospitality Learning Center buildings blend into Denver's skyline, in-step with the adjacent scale and form of Lower Downtown. The taller form of the hotel establishes a strong presence along Auraria Parkway while the two-story academic building links back to campus. Together, they wrap around a protected courtyard for students and hotel guests to use.



The building is cloaked in an iridescent gray brick skin on each of the outward facing facades and a blond-colored brick on the interior courtyard side. The resulting aesthetic is a marked departure from Auraria's standard palette of reddish-brown brick and dark tinted windows. Because AHEC charged the architects with establishing the context for future development in this quadrant of campus, they were allowed to break from the subdued vocabulary. Instead of solid, impenetrable wall planes typical of the campus's modern vernacular, the HLC features large expanses of glass curtain wall, with random grids, which interrupt the solid masonry walls. "We used brick to represent the permanence of higher-ed," says Izzo, "and mixed in the curtain wall to celebrate the uniqueness of the classroom spaces and allow a degree of permeability not found elsewhere on campus."

While the refined exterior palette of glass, brick, and concrete unify the building's varied scale and uses, seasoned business travelers and tourists will be pleasantly surprised when they are introduced to the cosmopolitan counterpart to this classic suburban hotel chain. Inside, JG Johnson Architects, the project's associate design firm and hotel interiors architect, artfully narrowed the gulf between the chain's brand and a more boutique approach by introducing a fanciful mélange of colors and textures throughout the public spaces.

Guests are welcomed with a dramatic display of botanic forms rolled into an undulating panel that wraps behind the reception desk onto the ceiling plane. A cascading glass staircase further amplifies the excitement as it gracefully links the lower level lobby to an elevated "living room" for guests. The lushly appointed space connects the inside to the outside, and the building to the city. The cool and kinetic design evokes a youthful energy—mirroring the spirit of the city—and perhaps the aspirations of the students opting for direct immersion in the hospitality industry.

The design of MSU's Hotel and Hospitality Learning Center not only takes a quantum leap towards realizing the idea of utilizing the city as a learning laboratory, but also creates an elegant gateway to the burgeoning campus.



The HLC boasts a state of the art Dining and Mixology lab that approximates an upscale restaurant/bar atmosphere. Eventually it will be a student-run restaurant, open to the public, with student brewed beer and house-made wine on tap.



The brightly illuminated Quantity food lab is set up for students to learn the skills and procedures involved in cooking and baking for large scale food service events like banquets.

TAKING OFFICE

Studio B and Hutton Architecture Studio design a refreshing new office and meeting space for the Colorado Component of the American Institute of Architects.

When architects are charged with designing spaces for themselves, it could go a couple of ways: either a liberating experience (no one to filter their ideas) or stress-inducing (because the design must meet their own ideals of perfection). Imagine the task of designing a meeting space for nearly 2,200 representative members of Colorado's architecture profession. Aspen based Studio B and Denver's Hutton Architecture Studio recently embraced that challenge—designing a new home for the Colorado Component of the American Institute of Architects (AIA Colorado)—and pleasing what some may consider a complex client.

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OPPOSITE: Two reproduction Eames Molded Plywood Chairs stand (sit) sentinel on the yet-to-be filled gallery space. An elegant Louis Poulsen Enigma 825 pendant light hovers above the chairs. **ABOVE:** The crisp, directional lines of the space and materials direct visitors to the reception area. The gallery space is planned to showcase the design work of Colorado architects.

ABOVE: The new AIA Colorado office, meeting and gallery space occupies a light-filled, ground floor location wedged inconspicuously between the Central Business District and Uptown, along 17th Avenue. The space, 150 percent larger than the professional organization's previous location, accommodates expanded meeting and event space. The reserved palette is softened with the introduction of cream-colored Colorado Beetle-kill wood cladding and abundant natural sunlight. A bright red Foscarini Big Bang suspension fixture from Studio Como provides a dash of color to the space.

With their lease expiring and meeting space in short supply, the AIA pulled up stakes after nearly 12 years in a central downtown Denver location. Not only had the organization outgrown its space, it was also beginning to feel a little worn around the edges. As John Carlen, a specialist in the integration of architectural technology with ESC Thul, noted, "for a profession that creates beautiful spaces, the home for the organization was far from that."

The AIA convened a small taskforce—comprised of architects and staff—to identify a new location that would meet the organization's long-term needs. The grand scheme included space to accommodate member services and events in conjunction with a Center for Architecture that would invite the public in for programming and exhibits. This ambitious vision was no match for the project's modest budget and the group resolved to find a space that could be configured to optimize flexibility for member events, staff offices, and gallery exhibitions. It also needed to speak to what architects do.

They had the difficult task of taking into consideration a wide range of member requests; close proximity to downtown, the State Capitol, and the University of Colorado-Denver College of Architecture and Planning, and easy access and parking for state-wide affiliates. To satisfy all that, the task force selected a 4,200 square foot, ground-floor space in a 1980s, RNL-designed office building, just east of the Central Business District.

TAKING OFFICE

Utilizing a Qualifications Based Selection process, one based on skills, experience, and capability and not solely on fee, the AIA selected Studio B's Scott Lindenau for "his experience being able to do exciting projects on lower budgets, and using economical materials in creative ways," explains AIA Colorado President, Ernest Joyner. Lindenau teamed with Hutton Architecture Studio for their expertise in sustainability as well as a number of past successful collaborations (including Aspen Middle School).

With a clear directive from AIA members and staff to create a well-organized space with a timeless quality on a minimal budget, the architects' first objective was to eliminate the rabbit-warren of walls, fluorescent lights, and tangle of venetian

blinds left by former tenants. The critical programmatic elements—private and open offices for staff, reception area, conference rooms, and exhibit space were then arranged along the perimeter to maximize natural light. Visitors to the space are now treated to a spacious, yet crisp composition of light, texture, and form.



ABOVE: A long feature wall divides the functions of the office space—defining the more public and private zones. Crimson-colored acrylic panels, etched with donor names, are attached to the wall and acknowledge the significant contributions to the project by AIA Colorado members, industry affiliates and vendors.

RIGHT: The wall is covered in a unique textural rubber bead material typically found in gun ranges and car bumpers. Here it provides both sound attenuation and visual appeal.



The central feature of the yet-to-be filled dual lobby/gallery space is a long wall of charcoal-colored, expanded plastic bead material, which provides both a tackable, self-healing surface and sound attenuation. The recyclable product, with its unusual textural quality used more typically in car bumpers and gun ranges regularly elicits a closer look. The dark wall is punctuated by a barn door clad in horizontal, tongue and groove Colorado beetle-kill (designed by AIA North Chapter members) which provides access to and privacy for the main conference room. The massive opening allows contiguous spaces to fuse into larger ones for functions and exhibits. Like many contributors to the project, Corbin Clay, founder of Azure Furniture, donated his labor costs to install the beetle-kill cladding throughout the office. He was particularly excited to showcase the local material in a modern application where it displays an unexpected depth of tone and finish.



ABOVE: A large sliding barn door, designed by AIA North Chapter members, opens to reveal a lively conference room, complemented with modern Joplin Mid-back chairs (from Team-mates). The space is illuminated with a sleek Lightplane 11 Suspended fixture (from Visual Interest) and natural "borrowed" light from the building's public corridor.

ABOVE RIGHT: The warm tones of Beetle-kill wood cladding, crafted and installed by Corbin Clay of Azure Furniture, provide a modern, mountain-industrial counterpoint to the adjacent tailored surfaces and serve to link visually the organization to its members across Colorado. **ABOVE LEFT:** From large plasma screens to iPad Savant Control Systems, ESC Thul donated audiovisual equipment to AIA Colorado to ensure that the professional organization had a state-of-the-art command center.

For an office project credit list:
moderninddenver.com/aiaoffice

In contrast to the AIA's old offices, which suffered from blinding afternoon sun, the new space has abundant soft light which filters through the large expanses of east facing windows, casting irregular shadows across the lobby floor and creating a kaleidoscope effect that varies with each hour of the day. The space also enjoys direct visual access to landscaping and street trees which serve to link it to its natural, albeit urban setting.

While the office doesn't have much of an exterior presence, passersby might catch a glimpse of the large plasma screen that delivers snapshots of award winning designs by Colorado architects. Much of the AIA's state-of-the-art audio visual equipment, including sleek, iPad control stations, was donated by ESC Thul in an effort to outfit the non-profit with advanced technology that would simplify and enhance the use of the space.

Thanks to the vision of the design team, AIA members agree that the solution is elegant, yet welcoming. It also conveys the ability of architects to achieve innovative results on limited budgets. The AIA staff feels that the new space fosters positive employee interaction and seamlessly accommodates volunteer committee member work and events. "It's a pleasure to come to work now," comments AIA Executive Director Sonia Riggs. "It just goes to show," she adds, "that there is a lot you can do with a really limited budget. And working with someone who knows what they are doing can produce really amazing results."