

Character and Context: *putting personality in its place*



Lawson.Commons: a forward-looking business finds its place in an historic neighborhood

an environment with its own distinct character, where a building has to fit and function. From the inside comes the spirit, image and vision an organization wants to project.

Just as we all know people whose character and circumstances align naturally—the outgoing politician, say, or the methodical engineer—there are buildings where all the cues point in the same direction, to a self-evident architectural personality. For others, context creates intriguing contradictions in character. The design challenge here is to balance these contradictions with imagination and integrity.

In architecture as with our fellow beings, we always appreciate intelligence, thoughtfulness and creativity. When that's the essence of character, a winning personality falls in place.

“It takes all types,” we say about people, and the same goes with buildings. Architectural character varies as much as human character, and as with people, a “good personality” is a matter of context. A star entertainer doesn’t make an equally stellar accountant, and

a design that fits a bank in St. Peter may fizzle for a theater in St. Paul.

Context in architecture comes both from outside and inside the building walls. Outside, the existing landscape and surrounding community form

Good neighbors

Designing within historic traditions poses unique architectural challenges, particularly when the new building requires a distinctly modern spirit.

For the new Lawson Software headquarters in St. Paul, the goal

was to adapt the cutting-edge sensibility of the high-tech company to the style of its historic downtown neighborhood. Combining the rich stone and red brick of neighboring buildings with glass and metal, and traditional detailing with such strikingly contemporary features as the span of transparent glass crowning the building, Lawson.Commons is rooted comfortably in its community, while presenting a unique face to the future.

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The ties between old and new fieldhouses at Hamline University are both visual and sentimental. Built in 1909, the Hutton athletic facility was a true community icon. So when growing demands necessitated a major addition, it was important to respect the character of the historic building. The new Lloyd W.D. Walker Fieldhouse links to the old facility with a large, arched window that quotes the original building's arched roofline. And by recessing it a full story below grade, the new fieldhouse is kept in scale—complementing, rather than overpowering, the old.



Phillip Prouse



Phillip Prouse

Stone, brick, glass, and metal combine to integrate Lawson.Commons into its downtown St. Paul setting



Phillip Prouse



Don F. Wong

Recently honored with a 2000 St. Paul Heritage Preservation Commission Award, the new fieldhouse bears a strong family resemblance to Hutton Arena.

THE PERSONALITY TOOLKIT

How do architects go about pinning down something as complex and intangible as character, and translating it into an office tower, or high school, or health clinic? While there's no magic formula, there is a bag of tricks, such as ...

SHUFFLE THE DECK: cards with images of building facades, interiors or even words, stimulate people to see new possibilities and focus their ideas.

SET THE SCENE: photography and storyboard techniques capture the flavor of a neighborhood, trigger possible design themes, and bring the context for a project alive.

TAKE THE SHOW ON THE ROAD: Go on site for inspiration. For instance, BWBR rented a truck, put a conference table with drawing materials inside, and backed it up in the lot where a new church would be built. Congregation members enjoyed the "tailgate picnic" design session, and, by the end of the day, the basic ideas for the new building were in place.

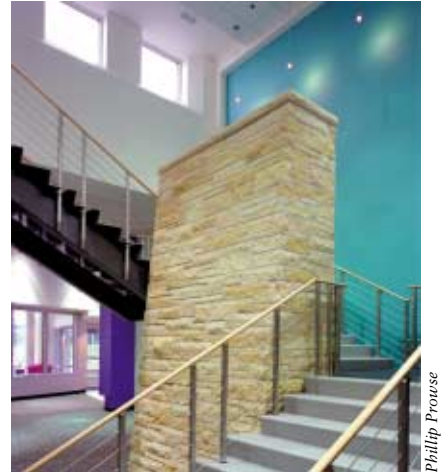
Split personality

“A bundle of contradictions” adds up to compelling character, in a 53,000 square foot addition to Silicon Graphics’ Riverside Systems manufacturing facility in Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin.



SGI: high tech on the prairie

Gentle curves of shimmering glass echoing the meandering Chippewa River, stone abutments reminiscent of the nearby Chippewa Dam, natural materials and native grasses anchor the plant to its prairie environment, while bright colors, circuit-board-like windows, and a precisely tooled metal staircase give it an unmistakably high-tech flavor. The result—a lively visual conversation—speaks both of the timelessness of what has always been, and the excitement of things to come.



North Memorial Residential Hospice: beauty, serenity, warmth

Coming home

Bathed in light from every side and surrounded by serene natural vistas, the North Memorial Residential Hospice radiates warmth, peace and comfort. Like a large, gracious house nestled in the woods on its lakefront lot, this residence is a place to come home to—the antithesis of a large, impersonal institution. Inside, built-in bookcases, vaulted ceilings and tapered wooden columns create a cozy, bungalow feeling, with a central fireplace dividing the large living room into more intimate areas. For people nearing the end of life, this is a place to live each day well.

Getting to the heart



Don F. Wong

*Heart Valves Division:
an invigorating environment*

With a reorganization of Medtronic's Corporate Center, the company's Heart Valves and Corporate Ventures divisions needed to relocate and remodel their offices. Rather than brace for a disruption, both businesses embraced the opportunity to re-energize their work and connect with their core values.

For the Heart Valves Division, bold patterns and vivid color—

a dramatic departure from the tranquil blue décor of the corporate campus—celebrate the division's unique identity.

The design team's inspiration for the Corporate Ventures Group, where three teams of technical and creative professionals complete a product's identity before it

goes to market, was the "brain, heart and courage" metaphor from *The Wizard of Oz*. The concept was so resonant for the group, they went beyond the original scheme, which simply borrowed colors and patterns from the movie, and added ruby slippers, a tin man, and other Oz artifacts to heighten the effect.



Don F. Wong

Corporate Ventures Group: the yellow brick road to marketplace success



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