

Notes from the Bureau

NEW DESIGN PROJECTS



Gardner
Mohr's Sixties
Solarium



Let the Sun Shine In

Gardner Mohr Architects knows how to take a lightless room and make it shine

Ever heard of a sunless sunroom? Architects Amy Gardner and Cheryl Mohr were tasked with upgrading one such solarium affixed to a Washington D.C. home.

The original house was built in 1929, and the blighted sunroom added on in 1969. The room was always too hot or too cold, and the homeowners wanted a space that welcomed the home's Rock Creek Park surroundings inside. So Gardner and Mohr opened up the tall, narrow space by lifting the solarium's roof up to meet the pitches of the 1929 roofline. Enormous windows of various shapes and sizes were then installed to maximize light flow and the fantastic park

"Translucent wall panels were used to create a wall that would glow naturally, or as a result of being lit from either side."

—AMY GARDNER, GARDNER MOHR

views. "Translucent wall panels create a wall that would glow from natural light, or as a result of being lit from either side,"

Berliner Construction worked on the 60s solarium by outfitting it with windows to fit the new roof. "The trapezoidal windows in the great room had to follow the slope of the existing ceiling precisely," says Charlie Berliner of Berliner Construction. He shimmed the existing ceiling framing to precisely match the original roofline, holding up each until the framing was complete. The extra time was worth it to Berliner. The precise window details "give the new rooms a delightful and ever-changing aspect [that] has created a sanctuary of light in an otherwise dark house," he says.

Gardner says. "We also installed operable skylights to capture views of the sky and the trees, and provide for passive ventilation." The architects then opted for Douglas Fir windows to warm up the space. Gardner admits that the solarium's brick pavers are an unusual choice for indoor flooring, but they really connect the home to the outdoors. "In their beautiful black design, the bricks look almost more like a woven rug than pavers and help connect the interior and exterior spaces," she says.

The revamped solarium details capture the home's original shape and maximize its exposure to southern, eastern, and western light. Now, the new sunroom is worthy of its bright moniker. ✨

BY MARGARET SUTHERLIN
PHOTOS BY JIM TETRO

Space Saving Design

U+B Architecture rework a small space into one of Minneapolis' hippest restaurants

U+B Architecture doesn't brush off small space potential. Their design for Spoonriver restaurant, located in Minneapolis' Guthrie Theater neighborhood, packs a high level of drama into a site measuring roughly 100 feet long and 11 feet wide.



U&B Architecture's Spoonriver restaurant at night

APROPOS STUDIO

At Spoonriver, sleekness runs over every design element, even up the plaster walls. Since plaster naturally has texture, this is no small feat. “Paul and Mark were very clear that they wanted the wall to be smooth with as little movement as possible,” says Jamie Reich, owner of Apropos Studios, the masters behind the plaster. A unique plaster finish gives the walls a “glowing effect” without overwhelming the tight dining area, augmenting Spoonriver’s polished cosmopolitan look.



Bloomer’s ornament on the 360 State Street building



Many architects scoffed at the Spoonriver project, thinking that the space would be too tight to squeeze in both diners and an efficient kitchen, but Paul Udris and Mark Burgess, U+B’s principals, didn’t see it this way. “We didn’t bemoan that the space was strange, but made it a central feature and took advantage of the rail car [shape] to make a cozy, sophisticated restaurant,” Udris says.

The two architects took every opportunity to open up the restaurant. “We wanted a space that people would pass by and want to come in and see what was happening,” Burgess says. “The warm glow from the poppy orange walls and the large windows that open out to the sidewalk really invite people into the space.”

Once inside, the bar’s dramatic stainless steel backdrop nods to the neighborhood’s industrial character, while the marbling in the Brazilian granite bar countertop reflects the movement of the nearby Mississippi. To maximize space, Udris and Burgess cantilevered the stools and chairs off the bar so that pushed-out chairs never block the walkway. A long banquette at the end of the restaurant further increases seating capacity. Even the plates save space: oval rather than round dinner plates better fit the proportion of the tables. “Every inch in every direction had to count,” Udris says. ♡

BY MARGARET SUTHERLIN
PHOTOS BY TRAVIS ANDERSON

Ornament at Work

With his keen understanding of ornamentation, sculptor Kent Bloomer makes a parking garage look anything but standard

Yale professor and sculptor Kent Bloomer has made a career out of transforming drab buildings into eye-catching architecture. Now in his 70’s, Bloomer has studied ornament nearly his entire life, which has helped him to develop a very refined decorative taste. “I lived in the time not long after the Chrysler building was built, [so] I grew up in the world of ornament,” he says. Bloomer traces his style to influential architect Frank Lloyd Wright and his mentor, Louis Sullivan, who helped give birth to modernism. He believes their work points a way forward for architectural ornament today.

Bloomer’s ornament work is on display at the 360 State Street parking garage in New Haven, Connecticut. “I was brought in and said, ‘Why don’t we take the parking garage and make it more like a main street building?’” Bloomer says, but quickly qualifies his design. “But not a Disneyland version. Decoration means good taste.”

The sculptor adapted Sullivan’s design process to create a geometric-yet-organic ornamental language. “Sullivan’s whole procedure is like the awakening of the pentagon: you get a square, then subdivide it into quadrants and diagonals, put curves

in and start pushing out through the outer edge,” Bloomer says. “You’re creating rhythms. All ornament starts with geometry and subdivides it into rhythms. It starts trying to bloom.” To make this ‘blooming’ happen, Bloomer sectioned the building’s façade by alternating stylized metal railings and trellises. He then chiseled a repeating

“[Louis] Sullivan’s whole procedure is like the awakening of the pentagon. You get a square, then subdivide...you’re creating rhythms.” —KENT BLOOMER

ring design with nature motifs above the garage’s street level bays. When viewed together, the decorative elements break down the parking deck’s overbearing proportion and help it to mesh with its traditional New Haven surroundings.

“When we walk down streets, we often love fairly ordinary buildings that are finely ornamented,” says the sculptor. “Ornament can make a big contribution to a building’s capacity to be linguistic.” ♡

BY BRIAN LIBBY
PHOTOS COURTESY OF KENT BLOOMER