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# street smart

Architect Michael Haverland jump-starts an urban renewal project in New Haven, Conn., by creating a home for a nomadic arts organization in the heart of an emerging residential district

By Jean Nayar

Photography by Paul Warchol

Since opening its doors in 2000, the New York-based firm of architect Michael Haverland has been busy making its mark on the state, renovating or designing townhouses, apartment duplexes, office spaces, and a showroom in Manhattan, as well as creating a number of residences in the Hamptons. Haverland also does a significant portion of his work in New Haven, Conn., home to his alma mater Yale University, where he has been teaching since he graduated from its School of Architecture in 1994. Actively involved in the New Haven community, Haverland has done considerable urban planning work for the city—an extension of which includes his designs for the recently completed addition to the Dwight School and the New Haven Charter School. Another of his recent New Haven projects is the adaptive reuse of a warehouse structure for ArtSpace, a grass roots community arts organization dedicated to promoting regional artists and revitalizing urban areas through its programs.

“The ArtSpace project was extremely low-budget, just \$30 per sq. ft., which came through grant money and matching state funds,” says Haverland. “But because it was to be the first real anchor at the most important intersection of the Ninth Square district, we knew we needed to use the minimal resources as effectively as possible to benefit not just ArtSpace but also the larger community.”

Completed in 2004, ArtSpace’s 5,000-sq.-ft. gallery and office space is nestled on the ground floor of an affordable housing complex developed as part of New Haven’s overall plan to revitalize the eight-square-block district, which until recently, consisted of a collection of deteriorated warehouse, retail, and other commercial buildings that had fallen into disrepair during the 1970s and ’80s. Part of a multi-phase urban renewal project funded by the State of Connecticut Housing Finance Authority, money from the federal government, and additional money from Yale, the housing portion of the project was completed in 1994. Although tenants quickly filled the units, the ground-floor commercial and retail spaces below them remained mostly vacant until the city encouraged ArtSpace to develop and occupy a space on the ground floor of a turn-of-the-last century building in the Ninth Square to help attract retailers and restaurants to the area.

“We had been a nomadic organization, homeless, in a manner of speaking, and we had basically squatted in this space until the city of New Haven approached us and said, ‘Why don’t you stay permanently?’” says Helen Kauder, the executive director of ArtSpace, who notes that the gallery had been briefly occupied by a brewery and a comedy club before both those businesses went belly up.

To unify the mix of brick and wood columns inside Art Space (opposite), the architect covered them with painted Sheetrock. A low-cost, gray-painted plywood floor contrasts with the white floating walls.









Thanks in part to his involvement in planning the area, Haverland won the commission to design the ArtSpace gallery. He then enlisted local artists, craftsmen, and Yale University to donate labor or salvageable materials and furnishings to pull the project off. "Everyone pitched in to make it work," he says. To establish a strong identity for ArtSpace from the street, Haverland used a resourceful mix of low-cost materials, standard stadium seating, and high-impact graphics to expand the organization's presence onto the five-story building façade and into the sidewalk beyond its storefront windows. "The main idea was to get as much mileage as possible from what little we had to work with, and engage people on the street with the energy of the art and activity within," says Haverland.

Since the outside of the building had already been repaired and repainted in the housing phase of the building renovation, little more than paint and the donated time and energy of local artists was needed to create a dynamic image for ArtSpace on the exterior. The artists painted a massive version of the organization's logo in signature baby blue and orange across

A ramp leading into the gallery (below) makes the space universally accessible and serves as a kind of promenade into the flowing large and small gallery spaces beyond.

the building's block-long façade. Stadium benches just outside the building encourage people gathered for events and exhibitions to spill out onto the street, and off-the-shelf circular bike racks set into the sidewalk encourage more street-front activity, provide another low-cost design accent, and underscore one aspect of Art Space's political agenda: promoting environmentally conscious modes of transportation.

Tying into the color scheme of the façade, metal strips painted in the orange and baby blue hues of Art Space's logo (as well as deep maroon, a color that links the historic building to its past) accent the benches and aluminum-framed storefront windows. The windows also engage street audiences by showcasing art or elements that illuminate various aspects of ArtSpace's essential programs, including its role as the central hub for several satellite exhibits and open studio locations, a working artists laboratory, a video and multimedia exhibition venue, and a source of urban renewal efforts. Inside, crisp white floating walls top a gray-painted plywood floor and define a series of large and small spaces that let the art take center stage and encourage visitors





to flow through the space. Off-the-shelf light fixtures fitted with adjustable tracks provide a mix of indirect and direct illumination. Donated table tops and bases, customized with the same painted metal strips that appear as accents outside, unify the design and provide flexible work, display, or serving surfaces during exhibitions or events.

Since the space was completed in 2004, the community has asked ArtSpace to remain open at night to support the activity of new retailers and restaurants moving into the area. "There's delight and relief from the community that we're here after a number of fitful starts," says Kauder. "New restaurants are opening in the area and a world-class recording studio just opened in an old firehouse nearby that had been closed since the early '60s. The recording studio also has a performance space, and there's a new bar and nightclub on the same block. The city's vision of Ninth Square as an arts and entertainment district is being realized, and the artists are thrilled to have a space in an urban center that's well located and highly visible. It's a great platform for them." ☐

Yale donated the bases of the flexible work/display tables in the window (below) and a local mill worker, Breakfast Woodworks, donated the apple plywood tops. Circular stainless-steel bicycle racks (right) add graphic punch and support Art Space's pro-environmental stance.



#### who

*Project:* ArtSpace Community Art Gallery. *Client:* ArtSpace. *Architect/interior designer:* Michael Haverland Architect. *Structural engineer:* Edward Stanley Engineers. *General contractor:* Michael Barbaro, Omni Construction. *Lighting designer:* Paul Whitaker. *Photographer:* Paul Warchol.

#### what

*Paint:* Benjamin Moore. *Drywall:* Georgia Pacific. *Flooring:* Plywood. *Ceiling:* Exposed structure. *Lighting:* Juno, Home Depot. *Window projector:* Opti Go Bo Pro. *Screen:* Raven Screens. *Stadium benches:* Bleachers International. *Administrative desks:* Donated from Yale University. *Other tables:* Breakfast Woodworks. *Architectural woodworking:* Breakfast Woodworks. *Cabinetmaking:* Ikea. *Signage:* Sign-lite. *Bicycle racks:* Creative Pipe. *Painted letters:* Bill Ianello. *Security:* Tyco Grinnel.

#### where

*Location:* New Haven, CT. *Total floor area:* 5,500 sq. ft. *No. of floors:* 1. *Capacity crowd:* 200. *Cost/sq. ft.:* \$30.

