BEST OF 2007 AWARDS

Monroe College Culinary Arts Center

PROJECT OF THE YEAR: Small Project

The winner in the Small Projects category indeed occupies very little space – at 2,000 sq ft, the Monroe College Culinary Arts Center in New Rochelle, NY, is on par with some of the luxury apartments rising high into the clouds as part of the city's recent residential boom. What it means for the college's students, however, is immense.

Occupying a former auto repair shop, the new center will serve 250 full-time culinary students and some of the 300 hospitality majors that take culinary classes. The open-area layout foregoes traditional classroom design in order to take advantage of all available space and create a more open environment. Susan Doban Architect of Brooklyn, NY, has designed the space in collaboration with the culinary faculty, themselves experienced chefs. As a result, the center mimics actual working kitchens similar to those found in hotels and large restaurants. Four new kitchens include two a la carte, one banquet, and one baking and pastry kitchen. Jade commercial ranges, induction cook tops, and combination oven-steamers allow several operations at once: steaming, poaching, roasting, broiling, and baking.

Holt Construction of Pearl River, N.Y., the general contractor on the $1.65 million project, was hired immediately in June 2006 in order to coordinate a five-month start-to-finish schedule. Fortunately, according to Doban, the team did not have to environmentally remediate the building because it came completely gutted.

The design, however, required an extensive reconstruction of the existing building because it added something most kitchens don't have – natural light. A large window replaced one of the walls to open the culinary center to a courtyard, one of the campus's only open spaces which sees lively traffic between the college's many buildings. The new curtain wall was sheathed in aluminum shades to add a dramatic flourish to the exterior, as well as reduce heat gain and the building's cooling demands.

The expensive equipment presented another logistical challenge: to meet the college's budget and long procurement lead times, equipment was bid on competitively at the start of construction. The brisk schedule demanded regular on-site coordination to ensure that the brand new HVAC system and the sophisticated gas and water needs of the new equipment worked in concert.

For the students using the facility, the little details probably make as much of a difference as the overall building. The stainless steel state-of-the-art equipment is complemented by a recycled rubber floor and easy-to-clean subway tile walls, but bright colors offset the feel of a professional kitchen to make for a more conducive work environment. Meanwhile standard fluorescent lamps were replaced with specially designed lighting that helps students better envision how the diners see their creations outside the working kitchen. <<

Key Players

Owner/Developer: Monroe College, New Rochelle NY 10801

Architect: Susan Doban Architect, Brooklyn, NY

General Contractor: Holt Construction, Pearl River, NY

MEP Engineers: Energy Concepts Engineering, Rochester, NY

Structural Engineer: Gilsanz Murray Steficek, New York, NY

Food Service Consultant: Clevenger Frable Lavallee, White Plains, NY