



Building interest in architecture

New HQ will take profession public

By Paul Restuccia
Friday, March 18, 2011

The Boston Society of Architects is set "to demystify the architectural profession" for the public at the new Atlantic Wharf project on Congress Street.

"Our goal is to inspire people about design and engage them about what's going on," said Eric White, interim co-director of the BSA. "We want to bring a broad audience down here and make this a home base for architectural tours of the city."

The \$2.5 million project is a collaboration with Atlantic Wharf developer Boston Properties, which is providing 1,000-square-feet of free ground floor space as part of its obligation to subsidize a public use in the complex.

The BSA is leasing 14,000 square feet on the second floor, which will include offices and conference rooms for its staff and members, a large gallery space and shared multimedia space.

The ground-floor space will feature a concierge who will offer the public BSA-run architectural tours of the city by boats that will be docked at the Fort Point Channel. Tickets will also be available to nearby attractions such as the Children's Museum, the Institute of Contemporary Art and the soon-returning Tea Party Ship & Museum. From here, you'll also be able to arrange tours with Boston-by-Foot.

The Boston architectural firm Howeler + Yoon won the competition for the new BSA headquarters with an imaginative design.

"Our idea is to use the staircase as a billboard to draw the public from the ground floor up to the exhibit spaces on the second floor," said Eric Howeler, who is married to business partner Meejin Yoon. Their firm is also building a 50-story tower in China.

An LED strip will run information about happenings in the space and Howeler envisions giving the public electronic access to BSA publications as well as videos of workshops via smartphone apps.

Howeler also convinced the BSA to leave all the perimeter windows on three sides — which boast views of the Channel — open to the public. Staff offices will be in an open area in the rear of the space.

"We want people to interact with BSA members and staff," said Audrey O'Hagan, president of the BSA board. "It's designed to be open and inclusive."

Dan Perruzzi, the Hub architect who first floated locating the new headquarters at Atlantic Wharf, says the idea is "to demystify the architectural profession so the public better understands what we do."

The 5,000-member BSA will fund the project partly by the sale of its current 10,000-square-foot building on Broad Street along with fund raising and a small shop in their new space selling books and design items.

The new BSA will open on Nov. 1, and plans are to hold exhibitions on architects' work, furniture and industrial design objects.

"What the BSA is doing will be a perfect way to activate the public spaces," said Mike Cantalupa, vice president of development for Boston Properties.