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Tight Squeeze

Arts center is compact, but efficient and appealing.

PIP LEWIS, AIA, LEED AP

Located on a 16-acre private school campus in Chestnut Hill, a suburb of Boston, the primary challenge of the new Beaver Country Day School Visual and Performing Arts Center was a contextual insertion into a densely used community of buildings. The wooded site, located at the rear edge of the campus, offered little space for expansion and close proximity to neighboring houses.

The primary program elements support instruction, performance, and celebration of the visual and performing arts. Performance elements include a black box theater with flexible seating and theatrical lighting, plus a scene shop, costume storage, and workroom, lighting storage, control room, green room, drama instruction classroom, and dressing rooms. The music program includes classrooms for choral, jazz, dance, and a chamber ensemble, plus practice rooms and storage. In the visual arts department, students have a photo studio and darkroom, and studios for 2-D art, printmaking, and computer graphics.

The solution was to create a compact and efficient building footprint that connects and engages an existing academic building, built in the 1920's "fresh air" style. The new building is sited alongside the monolithic brick face of the existing building and linked by an entry bridge that spans the steep natural slope. Taking advantage of this grade change, the three-story, 30,000-sq.-ft. building creates a new public entrance

at mid-level. As visitors cross the bridge entry, they are welcomed into a central interior space, which serves as the lobby for the black box theater, a gallery for student art, and a multi-purpose public space for a variety of school functions.

Materials were carefully selected to reflect the predominant brick vocabulary on campus, with the fine detail of smaller-scale neighboring houses. To announce and separate the arrival sequence, the building's largest volume, the black box theater, is articulated as the primary building form. The 50-ft. cube is clad

in a lively brick-patterned form and is placed at an angle to engage both the bridge entry and traditionally designed classroom wing. Sustainable materials are used throughout, including interior slate flooring and exterior epee decking. Double-glazed, Low-E windows and skylights allow the majority of classrooms and public spaces to be primarily lit with natural light. A warm interior palette of bright colors is balanced with maple wood paneling, creating an

integrated suite of new spaces that foster exploration and learning connections.



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WITH OVER 20 YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AT HMFH ARCHITECTS IN CAMBRIDGE, MA, MR. PIP LEWIS, AIA, LEED AP HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN MANY NEW CONSTRUCTION AND RENOVATION PROJECTS, AS WELL AS MASTER PLANNING AND FEASIBILITY STUDIES FOR A VARIETY OF SCHOOLS.

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