2006 *Inform* Award Winners

The fifteenth annual Inform Awards showcased 18 outstanding projects in the categories of interiors, exteriors, and landscapes, chosen from a field of 151 entries. The seven honor awards and eleven merit awards represent an eclectic mix of work that includes a sensitive addition to a building originally designed by Richard Neutra, an ecologically grounded landscape design for a forlorn site on the University of Virginia campus, two challenging studio projects by students from The Catholic University of America, and an edgy headquarters for a downtown Washington, D.C., association. Projects were selected by a jury consisting of Robert A. Ivy, FAIA, Editor-in-Chief of Architectural Record; Margaret Helfand, FAIA, principal of Helfand Architecture of New York; and Marc Tsurumaki, principal of Lewis.Tsurumaki.Lewis of New York.

The DogHouse
Laughing Dog Studio Architecture
Merit Award
This joint headquarters for a technology company and a design firm in Charlotte, N.C., takes the notion of fluidity to a new level. Charged with creating distinct yet open spaces in a 6,500-square-foot warehouse, Laughing Dog Studio designed three, 22-foot diameter rings hung with linen curtains that can be adjusted in innumerable ways for privacy and light. To reflect its urban environment, the space also includes a roll-up, garage-style door and a chain-link cage that houses a bank of computers. Sustainable design was another consideration. Desktops are made of recycled rubber flooring, and recycled or remnant carpet pieces underlie the entry space and work stations.

Open Air Classroom
Frank Harmon Architect
Merit Award
This pavilion at a Raleigh, N.C., natural history center is a school for the senses. As a first step, architect Frank Harmon conducted field observations that determined six ecological zones on the 38-acre site--including meadow, forest, and bottomland. This process enabled the firm to situate the structure so that it captures views of all six zones. Lightening its impact on the site, the building is elevated above the land like a large bird blind. The team also extended the classroom's environmental program to the building fabric, choosing sustainably harvested wood for the siding, and framing lumber that was milled in state. The building, which was recently certified under the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED system, also features a cistern to collect rainwater for reuse on site.

The Dell at the University of Virginia
Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects
Honor Award
On the University of Virginia campus, a forgotten stream valley is quietly coming back to life. Over the years, the 11-acre waterway, known as the Dell, had been piped and channeled to accommodate development, with picturesque green spaces becoming an overgrown mess of invasive plants and weeds. Today, the Dell is being restored, thanks to a multifaceted landscape plan by Nelson Byrd Woltz Landscape Architects. In addition to creating a stormwater management pond to mitigate the impact of downstream development, the team is naturalizing a 1,200-linear-foot section of piped stream, replanting a native botanical garden, and creating a meandering network of walks and sitting areas that offer a welcome respite from the bustle of college life.

Corvasce/Goldstein Residence
Robert M. Gurney, FAIA
Merit Award
Although this residence in Washington, D.C., was designed by local architect Clothiel Woodard

Smith, the 1950s house has much in common with adjacent houses designed by famed modernist Walter Gropius. Architect Robert Gurney was charged with a comprehensive renovation that would both expand the space and enhance its relationship to the site and surrounding neighborhood. To do this, Gurney replaced a low sloping ceiling in the living room with a high ceiling and glass walls, which open onto a new large deck and bluestone terrace. In the front, a new glass volume highlights the formerly hidden entryway and makes a much stronger visual statement.

Environmental Defense
Envision Design
Merit Award
Years ago, environmental groups might feel lucky to work in a run-down office or basement. Today, established environmental organizations are more likely to operate out of chic, top-of-the-line offices. Envision Design's plan for Environmental Defense's new headquarters, for example, emphasized elegance and efficiency, while ensuring that the space was as sustainably built as possible. To this end, most building and furnishing materials are high in recycled content, including the rubber flooring, ceiling panels, ceramic tile, and carpeting. Desks and tables are made of sustainably harvested wood, wheat board, or bio-composite board, and two thirds of the office seating were salvaged or reused.

Eastern Market Rowhouse Renovation
David Jameson Architect
Honor Award
Eastern Market, a large public market that dates to 1873, acts as a funky town center for Washington, D.C.'s Capitol Hill neighborhood, in which an eclectic range of farmers, artisans, antique dealers, and others peddle their wares. Against this backdrop, architect David Jameson's Asian-influenced renovation of a nearby rowhouse makes perfect sense. Evoking the form of an illuminated Japanese lantern, the house has been transformed in glass and steel, in which acid-etched panels are inserted into a self-supporting steel frame that cantilevers out of the masonry. The glass walls are intercut with vertical partitions with transparent glass to allow views of the surrounding trees. The frame also extends inside to serve as an innovative shelving solution.

978 Florida Ave. NW
Kool'Haus Studio
Merit Award
At less than 12 feet wide, this two-story rowhouse in Washington, D.C., was anything but expansive. The challenge for Kool'Haus Studio was to open up the space and add a third story without compromising the scale and historic context of the urban streetscape. To resolve this, the architects set back the addition so that the original cornice remains continuous with adjacent houses, while opening up the rear façade with a 30-foot glass wall. Resplendent in natural light, the house now offers a dramatic view of the Washington Monument from both the master bedroom and a new rooftop deck. Inside, the minimalist, open floorplan and neutral color scheme provide a serene sense of spaciousness in an otherwise dense part of town.

Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company
McInturff Architects
Honor Award
The Woolly Mammoth Theatre Company has been a Washington, D.C., institution--albeit an edgy one--for 25 years. Known for its daring and often controversial productions, Woolly Mammoth's program demanded no ordinary theatre space. Yet the company's budget meant that the theatre was embedded deep within a residential/commercial building, its developer leaving only a rough concrete shell for McInturff Architects to work with. Instead of covering up its crudeness, however, the architects opted to capitalize on this fittingly edgy environment with a series of open stairs and walkways.

Brock Commons
Ayers Saint Gross
Merit Award
Historically, the campus of Longwood University in Farmville was bisected by Pine Street, a busy road with more parking spots than pedestrians. To give the campus a central, ceremonial gathering place, Ayers Saint Gross converted the street into an all-pedestrian mall linking a series of open plazas and lawns. The elongated space is lined by two parallel paths and formal allées, which are punctuated by flowering trees, seating areas, and a reflecting pool. The greatest challenge facing the designers, however, was the nine-acre site's rolling topography. In response, the mall is gently terraced to include pedestrian spaces at grade, with new parking and utilities underground.

Mellon Hall/Key Auditorium Renovations
Ziger/Snead LLP
Honor Award
In designing Mellon Hall at St John's College in Annapolis, modernist architect Richard Neutra effected a dramatic and yet seamless synergy between building and landscape. The horizontal U-shaped building enclosed a central courtyard, which architects Ziger/Snead call an "agora-like meeting place" that served as counterpoint to the temple-like buildings found elsewhere on campus. Later additions, however, closed off the courtyard and shut out light and views. In their renovation of Mellon Hall, the architects paid homage to Neutra's vision by restoring the buildingâ€™s exterior and brightening the space with modernized facilities and a red tile floor.

Mechanical Hall Renovation
Ziger//Snead LLP
Honor Award
In its renovation of the historic Mechanical Hall at the University of Delaware, Ziger/Snead has crafted a modern gallery space while staying true to the 1898 building's original brick and heavy-timber construction. Designed to house a large African-American art collection, the program included three galleries, a study area with flat files, storage, and a conservation room. The architects responded by stripping the building down to its essential structure and revealing its timber framework. Plaster and paint were removed to expose the original brick, and new materials were limited to a restrained palette including oak floors, doors, and casework. Updated mechanical systems were concealed behind display walls, which appear to float in front of the original brick. The effect is a dynamic and appropriately artistic interplay between old and new.

Tidewater Farm
Graham Landscape Architecture
Merit Award
Graham Landscape Architecture's comprehensive plan for this 400-acre farm in tidewater Virginia comprises a series of formal and informal outdoor spaces. A tree-lined allÃ©e frames the entrance to the farm, whose 19th-century farmhouse opens onto a parterre kitchen garden. A new circular drive fronts the house, providing a visual connection between the more formal gardens and the wider landscape farther away. There, naturalized ponds, forests, fields, and meadows allow for a range of agricultural activities while enhancing habitat for migratory and ground-nesting birds. Although the emphasis is on marrying beauty and wildness, the plan also calls for reforestation, erosion control, and other environmental mitigation strategies.

Student Commons
Geier Brown Renfrow Architects
Merit Award
Located in a gritty older section of Washington, D.C., Gonzaga College High School has little room to grow. In 2002, the historic Catholic school embarked on a multi-year master planning process, which resulted in a new quadrangle that organizes what had become a haphazard collection of buildings. For the second phase, Geier Brown Renfro were tasked with building a

student commons area in "found space" on campus--an oddly shaped inner courtyard. The new infill structure coordinates with the fabric of surrounding buildings, with an arcaded entrance extending across the face of an adjacent athletic center. Yet the building also offers a visual counterpoint to the heavy masonry construction that prevails on campus, with its open structural frame, exposed ductwork, and other modern details.

Cherry Street House
Moore Architects, PC
Honor Award
At first glance, this 1920s Cherry Street bungalow in Falls Church retains many markings of its Arts and Crafts origins, including a low profile, clean lines, and divided-pane windows. Yet Moore Architects has tripled the space in a way that thoroughly modernizes and expands the living areas without sacrificing its original character. The architects maintained most of the first-floor plan, while adding an entirely new second floor. Additions were placed to the rear and side of the house, allowing the front to present a more traditional façade. To keep down the house's overall profile, the team punched dormers through the new roof. Most dramatically, a small third-floor studio now perches above the rooftop, accessed by a contemporary steel staircase that juxtaposes its modern sensibility with the traditional forms found below.

House on Shiner's Hill
Reader & Swartz Architects
Merit Award
Like so many others like it, the 1960s tract house in Winchester was pleasant and adequate for living, but also boxy and nondescript. Today, Reader & Swartz's renovation has transformed the house with two distinct light-filled spaces. In the existing house, the architects gutted the second floor and dramatically raised the gabled roof to create a large library loft. The house's old roofline is expressed through exposed wood trusses and a bank of high windows on the gable end. Original wall studs were retooled as a framework for an open shelving system that can hold hundreds of books. The firm also designed a modern addition that resembles a minimalist tree house, with an exposed steel frame, windows on three sides, and an inverted shed roof that maximize views of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Greater Washington Society of Association Executives
VOA Associates, Inc.
Honor Award
When the Greater Washington Society of Association Executives hired VOA Associates to design its new Washington, D.C., headquarters, the firm faced several challenges. Located below grade in the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center, the chosen site had no perimeter windows and suffered from varying floor levels. In response, VOA employed reflective and colorful wall materials and multidirectional lighting sources to compensate for the lack of natural light. The architects also designed a flexible series of conference areas that encourage an easy flow of people and ideas. For a space called the Learning Forum, a wall of oversized translucent pivot doors opens to a common area. An executive conference room, whimsically known as the "un-boardroom," features curving walls and an edgy, irregularly shaped meeting table aimed at keeping workers engaged.

Thinking as Doing
The Catholic University of America
Merit Award
This design/build project by a team of 12 undergraduates working under the guidance of assistant professor Luis Boza sought to explore the changing relationship between design and fabrication by creating a full-scale installation in the main corridor of Catholic University's School of Architecture and Planning. The process began with an analysis of site conditions, ranging from existing circulation patterns to the movement of light and shadows. In the end, the modulation of the form is a direct response

to wear patterns in the wood floor below. The installation's primary structure is a two-way frame cut from 1/4-inch aluminum plate. Sectional members acting as girders, beams, and joists were extracted through the use of parametric modeling software. Texture is provided by 384 infill panels cut from acrylic sheet on a three-axis computer numeric controlled (CNC) milling machine. The entire piece is suspended from roof trusses using steel rods that attach to unique "swivel sleeve" connections.

Digital Craft
The Catholic University of America
Merit Award
Displacement of offices for student organizations â€“ caused by construction of a new elevator in the School of Architecture and Planning â€“ prompted 16 graduate students to design and build new office space and a student lounge on a little-used mezzanine overlooking a semicircular exhibition space. Working closely with assistant professor Luis Boza, the studio produced a sinuous screen made of 108 uniquely curved birch plywood panels. Detailed computer modeling aided the production of each panel, with a matrix of perforations cut by a CNC milling machine. The students also developed a series of structural ribs cut from titanium and plywood sheets, a system of splice connections, and a credenza and conference table for the office space. Jurors praised the quality of the presentation and noted the spatial quality of the design.