

# ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

## POINTS OF VIEW

### Museum of Arts and Design

> History haunts  
a non-landmark

### ALSO:

YALE ART AND  
ARCHITECTURE  
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OF CARTAGENA

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Museum of Arts  
Design, clad in  
scent terra-cotta  
(t), occupies a  
ninent site facing  
h, near the Hearst  
ding (in the back-  
nd, right).



# Allied Works Architecture's Brad Cloepfil bravely tackles the redo for New York City's MUSEUM OF ARTS AND DESIGN

By Fred A. Bernstein

**L**ighten up. That's my advice to the critics of New York City's Museum of Arts and Design (MAD). The renovation by Allied Works Architecture turned what had been a dreary, haunted house (Edward Durrell Stone's 1964 Gallery of Modern Art) into a lively amenity for the city. And—at risk of damning with faint praise—the best of the buildings fronting Columbus Circle.

On one of my visits, I was accompanied by my sons, who were delighted to see that the museum's entrance facade seems to spell "HI." I explained to them that the oversize letters were accidental—the principal of Allied Works, Brad Cloepfil, AIA, had called for three vertical bands of glass on the north and west facades. But after construction had begun, the museum insisted on the addition of a horizontal band on the north (entrance) facade, to improve the views from the planned ninth-floor restaurant. That addition turned two of the verticals into an "H," leaving the third an "I," and angered Cloepfil, who took the unusual step of telling journalists of his complaint about the client's intervention.

But my sons didn't understand why Cloepfil was upset. "Every building should say 'HI,'" they announced, as if proffering a manifesto. Metaphorically speaking, they're right: Every building, unless it's a bioweapons laboratory or a prison, ought to be inviting. Stone's original building for Huntington Hartford was about as welcoming as a mausoleum.

By contrast, Cloepfil's scheme—which required removing one of the building's famous lollipop columns—features an inviting entrance facing Columbus Circle. Inside, a handsome stairway draws visitors up to the second floor. From there, it is possible to continue on narrower, but still pleasant, flights, to each of the gallery levels. In creating such an effective circulation system in a confined space (the footprint, a tetragon with a gently concave front, measures 4,770 square feet), Cloepfil scored a major success. And the galleries those stairways lead to are surprisingly bright and open. Who knew that the building, which was scaleless behind Stone's fussy faux-Venetian facade, contained some 54,000 square feet over 12 levels? It seemed, at most, half that big.

For Cloepfil, previously known for Weiden + Kennedy's ad agency headquarters in Portland, Oregon (where he is based), and the Contemporary Art Museum (2003) in St. Louis, MAD was a chance at the big time. Cloepfil was chosen in 2002 over Toshiko Mori, FAIA, Zaha Hadid, and Smith-Miller Hawkinson. But preservationists were outraged by

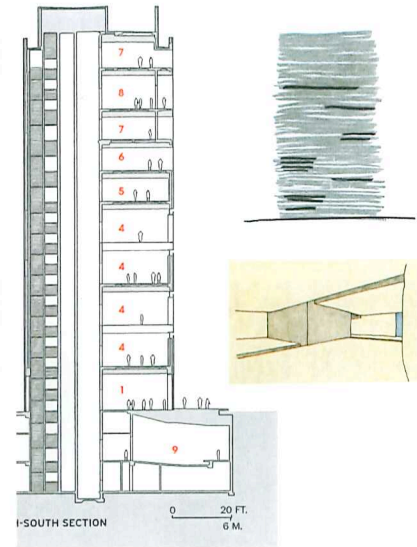


The \$90 million renovation kept the 10-story, 158-foot height because zoning would require punitive setbacks for a taller tower. The new steel-and-wood stair in the lobby (below) is framed by original columns.



Fred A. Bernstein writes on architecture for a number of publications, including *The New York Times*.

PHOTOGRAPHY: © HELENE BINET (OPPOSITE AND TOP RIGHT); ALAN KLEIN (BOTTOM RIGHT)



plans to alter Stone's exterior, and the project was delayed by lawsuits (including one in 2005 against MAD and its director, Holly Hotchner, for "conspiracy to obstruct and subvert the lawful functioning of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission"). Cloepfil says he knew there would be controversy, but, "I didn't think it would be as vicious as it was."

Still, he never considered keeping the Stone facade. Cloepfil had found the building "frightening" since his days at Pratt in the 1970s and later at Columbia's GSAPP. And it was an urbanistic wasteland—"a block that had been taken away from the city for so long," he says. Then, too, the cladding, according to engineers retained by MAD, was beyond repair. Cloepfil replaced Stone's white Vermont marble with glazed terra-cotta tile. "Its iridescence brings the body of the building alive," he says, though some observers see a strong resemblance to a 1960s white brick apartment building.

But recladding is one thing; the architect faced a bigger challenge working with the building's structure, consisting of concrete core and perimeter bearing walls (raised on those "lollipop" columns), and concrete slabs. Cloepfil decided to create a 2-foot-wide cut through the north facade facing Columbus Circle to bring light into the galleries. But that simple gesture devolved into a series of deep, dark horizontal gashes and shallow, glass-fritted vertical stripes that seem to draw on different architectural vocabularies. Cloepfil describes the cut as "a relatively minor intervention," yet it reads as a complex, and confusing, set of moves.

During construction, Cloepfil had said the cut through the facade would turn the bearing wall structure into a series of cantilevers. In reality, metal pins are needed to reduce deflection and they quite noticeably traverse the horizontal gaps; Cloepfil concedes the pins are bigger than he had expected. Inside, the clumsy way the glazed vertical slits meet their horizontal extensions near the gallery ceilings (which Cloepfil says is explained by the need to hide blackout shades in overhead soffits) has come in for heavy criticism. But Cloepfil is undeterred. "I have to say, it's an exquisitely detailed building," he says. "If there's one thing I know how to do, it's detail."

He was less gallant when it came to the new horizontal window, which he blamed on a museum donor who "suddenly became a designer." Cloepfil called the result "disconcerting and disruptive."

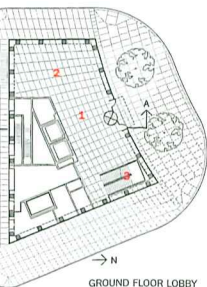
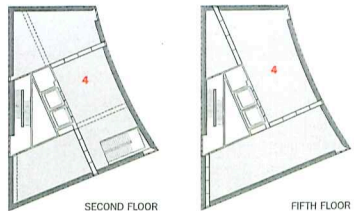
Cloepfil will have other chances to show what he can do as a museum designer: at the University of Michigan, where his 100,000-square-foot art museum will open this spring, and in Denver, where his Clyfford Still Museum is expected to break ground this summer. In those projects, where he is not treading on hallowed ground, his architecture will get a chance to succeed or fail on its own merits. As for the new MAD: Perhaps it's not a great building—but it is a building to be grateful for. ■

**Project:** Museum of Arts and Design (Jerome and Simona Chazen Building), New York City  
**Architect:** Allied Works Architecture—Brad Cloepfil, principal  
**Consultants:** Robert Silman (structural); Arup (m/e/p)

**SOURCES**  
**Masonry:** NBK Ceramic (Terrart)  
**Metal/glass curtain wall:** Seele  
**Glass:** Oldcastle Glass  
**Paints:** Benjamin Moore  
**Wall covering (auditorium):** Knoll Textiles  
**Office furniture:** Steelcase

Cloepfil's sketches for the skin and interior (above right two) indicate how he planned to dematerialize the exterior. Inside, he moved

stairs behind the existing elevator core and created a main stair to extend from the second floor to the auditorium level.



1. Lobby
2. Retail shop
3. Main stair
4. Gallery
5. Education
6. Mechanical space/event rooms
7. Offices
8. Restaurant
9. Auditorium



Cloepfil introduced daylight into the four 4,100-square-foot gallery levels through clerestory bands of clear glass connecting to fritted vertical glass slots. They are 24 inches wide and extend across the floor and ceiling (above). The typical galleries (right) are loftlike, with oak wood floors. Curved vitrines subdivide the jewelry gallery (left).



PHOTOGRAPHY: © RICHARD BARNES (OPPOSITE, TOP AND BOTTOM LEFT); COURTESY ALLIED WORKS (OPPOSITE, BOTTOM RIGHT)

# History haunts a (non)landmark

By Suzanne Stephens

When I was a kid (though not a mere child), I defended Edward Durell Stone's much maligned Gallery of Modern Art at 2 Columbus Circle when it opened in 1964. It had that recherché white marble cladding with an arcade and loggia outside, and rich walnut and macassar ebony paneling within. Thick, jungled-carpeted stairs took you up to intimate galleries at half-levels, where a soigné and surreal art collection, including Gustave Moreau's *Salome Dancing Before Herod* (1874–76), awaited. At the top of the museum was the Gauguin Room, with tapestries à la Gauguin, where you could dine on (then) rare Polynesian cuisine in a grasscloth-lined Modernesque setting overlooking Central Park. You would hardly notice the dreary Coliseum to the west, where the Time Warner Center looms today.

At the time, an older, wiser architect tried to explain the errors of my judgment: The monument to Huntington Hartford's hothouse nonabstract art collection just "didn't work." My point about the gallery being designed by the same architect as the venerated Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) didn't fly. In the years between MoMA (1939) and the Gallery of Modern Art, Ed Stone had gone over to the dark side. Proving I was ultra-naïve was Ada Louise Huxtable's pronouncement in *The New York Times* that it was a "die-cut Venetian palazzo on lollipops."

With a spunky prescience, I, in turn, pronounced: "Mark my words, in 50 years it will be revered as historic." Even though Stone's opus was not given the time of day by the New York City Landmark Preservation Commission (LPC) when the Museum of Arts and Design decided to totally overhaul it some

40 years later, I must say the kid in me felt somewhat vindicated by the five lawsuits over its future that started in 2003. But I wasn't on the front lines: Since Hartford had given the gallery up in 1969, it had lost its plush interiors, comfy Modern furnishings, and outré artwork. It needed the *gesamtkunstwerk* shtick to make it the quirky, kitsch period artifact it had been—but by then it was only a grotty concrete hulk plopped atop lollipop columns.

Even so, it is reprehensible that it never got a fair and full hearing at LPC, despite valiant efforts by Landmarks West, the Historic Districts Council, and the New York chapter of Docomomo. As expected: Mayor Bloomberg's interest in architecture begins and ends with big new developer buildings. By denying it even a hearing, LPC damaged its stature and integrity.

Surprisingly, architecture

critics took uncharacteristic stances: Ada Louise Huxtable, a longtime advocate of preservation, came out for Allied Works' radical renovation, excoriating preservationists for "nostalgia" and "trendy revisionism." The late Herbert Muschamp of *The New York Times*, who often poooh-pooed preservation causes, wanted to save this symbol of the "emerging value of queerness" in the New York of its day.

Clearly, this is a no-win case: The new scheme would have to be beyond fabulous to make opponents forget the bloodshed. Though Brad Cloepfil's concept of cutting through concrete bearing walls to dematerialize the opaque structure was ingenious, the facade still looks drab. Cloepfil hoped the ivory, glazed, terra-cotta rain screen would make it luminous. But while the north facade has a sheen, it lacks glitter and gleam, since it receives no direct rays of light. And on gray days, forget

## A GLASS CROSS BAR FORMING A GIANT "H" DOES RUIN CLOEPFIL'S COMPOSITION. BUT IT IS MEANT TO BE, NO?

it. This is all the more poignant because the museum plays a significant urbanistic role due to its prominent if eccentrically shaped site, seen from four sides. Moreover, with the concave entrance facade terminating the sweeping arc of the new Time Warner Center, it needs to provide proper punctuation. To do so it needs more ... well, pizzazz. Like the old days.

Keeping the lollipop columns intact was arguable structurally, but by Cloepfil's partially masking them with glass on the outside, they look like half-forgotten remnants of a tear-down. Inside, their Moorish profiles add a jarring note. To be sure, the gallery space benefits from the new loftlike, open plan, and makes a strong case for gutting the old innards. Now you can really see the works on display (which may or may not be a good thing, depending). But the memorable spaces are Stone's below-ground auditorium and its lobby, on which Cloepfil performed a sensitive interpretive restoration. He brilliantly reconstituted the billowing curves of the metal disk ceiling, kept the walnut walls, and restored the bronze doors to recreate the once-chic and shimmering ambience. On the ninth floor, where the restaurant is planned, Cloepfil filled in the loggia so that the restaurant gains about 4 feet in depth. And now, with the controversial crossbar of clear glass, a knock-out view of the park view can be taken in. I'm on the side of the crossbar: In New York, any view is far too rare for restaurants; to block out even a portion of the panoramic vista of Central Park framed by skyscrapers is loony—and bad business.

So now the crossbar forms a giant "H." It does indeed ruin the architect's composition. But it is meant to be, no? The "H" acts as a ghostly reminder of the museum's first client, Huntington Hartford, and while we're at it, the client of this incarnation, Holly Hotchner, MAD's indomitable director. And just wait: In 50 years, it will be declared a landmark. ■

The 24-inch-high clerestories turn into 12-inch-high horizontal slits on the outside to mitigate glare (right). Fritted glass fills the vertical channels inside on floors and

ceilings. The reconstitution of Stone's auditorium below ground (opposite, bottom), accessible by the main stair, is a glamorous reminder of the original building (opposite, top) in its heyday.

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