BGSU

The purpose of the project was to convert a 31,000 sf circa 1960 warehouse into a state of the art learning environment for the School of Architecture that facilitates collaboration, projects a strong identity for the program, and enhances recruitment/retention while allowing for changes as the program evolves.

The school of Architecture was in the midst of the NAAB accreditation process as the planning for the new school unfolded. As a result, a significant amount of time was spent exploring the question “what is a school of architecture and what should/must it contain?” This was followed by extended conversations with faculty, staff and students defining their pedagogical approach, pragmatic requirements, and environmental concerns**.**

Perhaps more than in any other academic program, the environment for a school of architecture serves as a teacher, in this case providing tangible demonstrations of building systems, structure, innovative spatial definition, creative detailing, tactile engagement and the power of paint to define space. It elevates the primary activity – interactive crit-based instruction – to a position of prominence, allowing the academic efforts of the inhabitants to take center stage. From the continuous 300’ long crit-wall on the east to the dynamic presentation space of the pivot-walls to the ubiquitous pin-up surfaces that adorn virtually every vertical surface, the project serves to highlight the work of the students, facilitating feed-back and peer-learning.

The most influential factors in the design of this project, aside from the goals and aspirations outlined above were budget and schedule. We quickly realized that we needed to emulate Dr. Seuss and create the built equivalent of “Green Eggs and Ham”, a book containing only 50 words. We identified a limited pallet of materials (drywall, homasote, limited areas of storefront, salvaged chalk-board slates) that would fit the budgetary constraints and looked for a design strategy that squeezed the maximum impact from a minimum of moves. A desire for easy and connected communication between faculty and students led to the creation of a free-standing “office-block” which, along with a similar “Lecture/Library-block”, became the primary means by which to define the spaces within the expanse of the warehouse. A line of pivot-walls which separate the studio spaces with the more public presentation/circulation spaces can be used to either create a continuous edge or modulated to define multiple spaces of various (and varying) sizes depending on the needs of the moment.

The School averages over 200 prospective student visits a year and the facilities typically rank among the most important factors in choosing a school. It was critical that the building project an air of professionalism and significance. The clean details, clear spatial definition, intuitive way-finding all contribute to establishing this unique character but the most important element is the way that the building serves as a back-drop to the students and their work, putting learning on display and elevating the resulting work to a place of prominence and honor as the primary decoration and focus.