



Isaac Campbell and Michelle LaFoe, husband-and-wife founders of the Portland-based firm Office 52 Architecture, take an immersive, artistic, and highly collaborative approach to their work.

DINA AVILA

POWER COUPLE

Rising above 16 other high-profile firms, Portland-based Office 52 Architecture lands the commission for Carnegie Mellon's new Scott Hall.

Written by **BRIAN LIBBY**

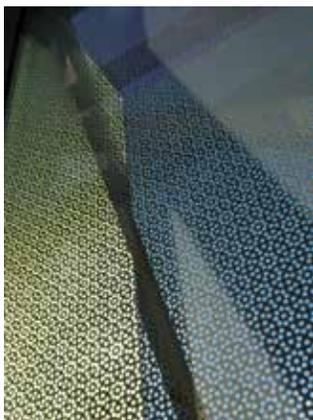
OFFICE 52'S PORTLAND OFFICE RESEMBLES AN ART STUDIO AS MUCH AS AN ARCHITECTURE FIRM. Study maquettes, oil pastel drawings, material samples, paintings, 3-D computer renderings, and stacks of sketchbooks line the shelves and worktables. The mixed media express just how deeply the firm dives into a new project, and its passion for leaving no conceptual stone unturned. "When we're designing, we use pencil, paint, fiberboard, wood clay, paper, and computer. We move seamlessly between analog and digital," says Michelle LaFoe, who founded the firm in 2010 with her husband, Isaac Campbell.

Currently anchoring the small office is a model of the project set to catapult Office 52 into the international spotlight: Carnegie Mellon University's Sherman and Joyce Bowie Scott Hall, a nano-bio-energy technologies building in Pittsburgh that's currently completing construction. The 109,000-square-foot campus building includes wet and dry laboratories, office and collaboration spaces, a café, and a cleanroom facility. The firm won the commission in a 2011 competition among 17 invited

firms—many larger and better known than Office 52—by presenting a design solution no one else had formulated.

The site was a challenge, to say the least—a steep, Z-shaped plot wedged amid four existing buildings. "But we saw those constraints as opportunities and advantages," says Campbell. Instead of one seven-story building, as a study commissioned by the university had suggested, Office 52 and its project partners, including Stantec and Arup, created two interlocking geometric forms, one perched on the hillside and the other placed beneath a green roof in an adjacent courtyard. The elegant resolution not only cut construction costs, but also improved interstitial connections with the nearby buildings.

Scott Hall's façade is a curtain wall coated with ceramic glass frit rendered in abstract geometric patterns based on the shape of photonic quasicrystals—a treatment dreamed up by LaFoe, who has studied visual art as well as architecture and often treats materials in unexpected ways. The glass reduces solar gain and glare into the building yet appears translucent from a distance. On the south and west sides, dichroic glass »



LEFT: Office 52's studio teems with architectural models, sketches, glass and material samples, and more—evidence of the design process shaping its new education and tech-research center commission, Sherman and Joyce Bowie Scott Hall at Carnegie Mellon University, which will be finished in spring 2017. **BELOW:** Scott Hall is set on a complicated, steep site, with an irregular footprint wedged among four existing buildings. The building's four-story north wing perches over a ravine atop a series of sculptural steel columns; the remaining third of the building is tucked under an adjacent courtyard.



sun shades, coated in thin layers of metal oxide, change color depending on the point from which they're viewed and the angle of the sun. The glass was created using nanotechnology—"bringing the science that's happening in the building onto the building as an architectural metaphor," says Campbell.

Campbell and LaFoe's outside-the-box thinking continues to win them new commissions, including a winery master plan, private residences, and, most recently, Tykeson Hall, an innovative, interdisciplinary new campus center for the University of Oregon's College of Arts and Sciences in Eugene. They've also recently launched O52 Lab, a studio-within-a-studio that takes on smaller-scale commissions, such as architectural installations and temporary spatial interventions.

Meanwhile, Scott Hall is beginning to buzz with activity as its classrooms and labs fill with students and researchers, and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive. "It's been enormously well received on campus," says Campbell. "It's full of people using the building exactly how we hoped they would—working collaboratively in groups, mixing hard work, social activity, and research. After all, it's in informal social activity that serendipity happens, when people suddenly realize they're coming at the same problem from different angles and they need to work together." ✨

"WHEN WE'RE DESIGNING, WE USE PENCIL, PAINT, FIBERBOARD, WOOD CLAY, PAPER, AND COMPUTER. WE MOVE SEAMLESSLY BETWEEN ANALOG AND DIGITAL."

—MICHELLE LAFOE, ARCHITECT

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