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Oregon's Building Connections

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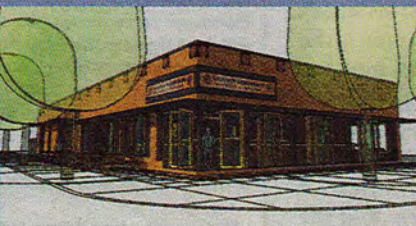
A YOUNG FIRM AT THE HEAD OF THE CLASS

Five years ago, Office 52 Architecture's creative solution for a university prevailed over stiff competition



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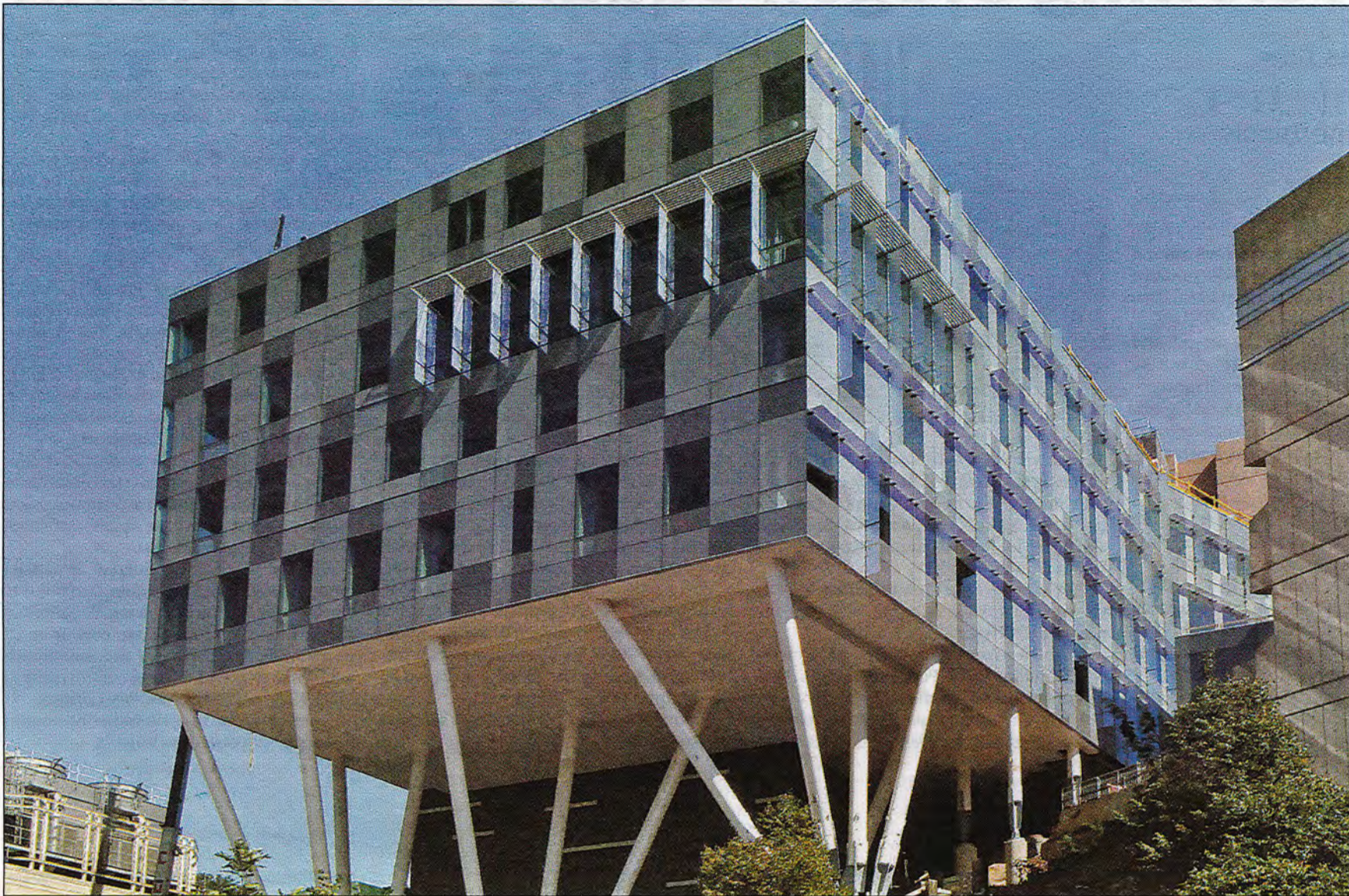
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COVER STORY



Courtesy of Office 52 Architecture
The north wing of Sherman and Joyce Bowie Scott Hall, designed by Portland-based Office 52 Architecture, is built on a hillside and supported by structural steel columns.

A LOOK INSIDE AN OUTSIDE-THE-BOX DESIGN

Portland firm's innovative competition entry impressed Carnegie Mellon University officials

BY BEVERLY CORBELL
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If Office 52 Architecture had followed the rules, it might not have won a huge design competition. But the Portland firm, in its first year of existence, devised an outside-the-box plan for a new engineering building at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh.

The \$75 million Sherman and Joyce Bowie Scott Hall opened April 30. Office 52 became involved five years ago, presenting a design that trumped those proposed by four much larger firms, including ZGF Architects.

Most architecture firms are chosen for higher education projects because of their experience and prior relationships, Office 52 founding principal Isaac Campbell said. But CMU opened the door to Office 52 by offering the design competition. First, before even entering, the firm assembled the finest team it could find, including international firms Arup and Jacobs.

Greg Owen, manager of mechanical and clean room technology at Jacobs, was part of the team from the beginning and praised Office 52's efforts.

"Isaac had a very heavy part in winning

the project and they did some excellent models they took to Pittsburgh for presentation," Owen said.

Building multiple models, and testing and retesting design was part of Office 52's design competition strategy, founding principal Michelle LaFoe said. The final model, which takes up about six square feet, is held together with magnets, and can be disassembled easily.

The models were impressive, but it was Office 52's innovative thinking that won the competition, according to Romaine Botti, associate dean of CMU's College of Engineering.

Office 52 was among 15 firms invited to participate in the competition, Botti said. Office 52 likely was invited, she added, because it had partnered with international firm Stantec as architect of record. Plus, Botti was familiar with Campbell's earlier work designing the Stanford University Science and Engineering Quad when he worked for Bora Architects.

"There were four firms in that final round (for Scott Hall), and of those four designs, Office 52 was the only firm that embraced the complexity of the site and incorporated it into their design," Botti said.

The complexity of the site was evident in the competition that called for the design of a new seven-story building on a steep slope to house engineering research labs and offices. But the site posed challenges not only because of the slope, but also because it is adjacent to railroad tracks, where vibrations could affect sensitive testing in the proposed nano-testing lab. Plus, a major underground power supply bisected the lot.

So instead of a seven-story building, LaFoe and Campbell took a radical approach and didn't follow the design guidelines. Instead they designed a four-story building that would be supported by stilt-like columns, eliminating the need to move the power supply or dig underground. That still left out the critically important nano-testing lab, but they found a solution.

The site's steep slope is at one corner of the engineering school campus, with other buildings grouped in a quadrangle around a sunken service yard. The team proposed putting the nano-testing lab in the service yard, 20 feet down, and then putting a green roof on top.

The top of the green roof then became a 35,000-square-foot grassy courtyard with walking paths to connect all the buildings at grade. The location also protects the lab from vibrations caused by passing trains.

"So the John Bertucci Nanotechnology Laboratory is nestled into the old courtyard space between the buildings and has this green roof on it, so it is literally the ground you walk on and it's almost invisible," Campbell said. "But through that infill it connects to all those neighboring buildings."

Connecting different engineering disciplines is vital to communication and creativity at the university, Campbell said. The biomedical engineering department had been moved off campus but now is in Scott Hall.

"It was a real challenge (for biomedical engineering staffers) to not be colocated with all their colleagues," he said.

To help promote that collegiate connectivity, one glassed-in corner of Scott Hall, opening to the green roof/courtyard, includes a two-story café and lounge area. There, in the Collaboratory, faculty and students can relax and exchange ideas.

The Collaboratory now connects to all the buildings on several different floor levels, Campbell said.

"So we are really creating in this singular building a new nexus, a new center," he said. "They didn't have space like this with a café and this kind of breakout social space anywhere on campus."

That was a clincher for Botti.

"They provided additional connectivity (to the campus) and the first time I saw the design, it was breathtaking," she said.

Entering competitions is part of Office 52's business strategy because it pro-

Sherman and Joyce Bowie Scott Hall

Location: Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh

Cost: \$75 million

Construction start date: fall 2013

Construction completion date: March 2016

Owner/developer: Carnegie Mellon University

Design architect: Office 52 Architecture

Architect of record: Stantec

Engineering (structural, mechanical, electrical): Arup

Engineering (clean room planning and design): Jacobs

General contractor: Jendoco Construction Corp.

motes creative thinking, said Campbell, who founded the firm with LaFoe, his wife, in 2011.

"We try to do at least one competition a year," LaFoe said. "It allows you to think outside the realm of a particular project ... It's more fast-paced and you have to be on your toes to do that."

The CMU design competition has boosted business for Office 52, Campbell said. The firm has gained many new clients and this month won a design competition for the new Tykeson Hall College and Careers Building for the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Oregon in Eugene.

Although the competition for Carnegie Mellon was done on spec and was financially risky, it paid off, Campbell said.

"We figured out the only way we would win it was if we had an idea that turned everybody's head at the interview," he said. "It's fun to build a better mouse-trap."

ON THE COVER



Sam Tenney/DJC

Michelle LaFoe, left, and Isaac Campbell are founding principals of Office 52 Architecture, which won a design competition for a new engineering building at Carnegie Mellon University.