

THE NEW PHILLIPS

KEEPING IT SMALL

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On the first floor of the Sant Building, a new gallery accommodates large-scale works of art.

For many visitors who flock to The Phillips Collection, the museum's cozy galleries and inviting, homelike atmosphere are part of its charm. Maintaining these intimate qualities while adding 30,000 square feet and countless amenities became a major building project under D.C.'s architectural firm Cox, Graae and Spack (CGS). As the Sant Building neared completion in April 2006, Principal Architect David Cox, FAIA, toured the new spaces and discussed the complex process behind their creation.

The primary goal, Cox said, was to improve the museum's public spaces in a manner that harmonized with its inherent values. "The Phillips Collection isn't the National Gallery; it's not the Corcoran," he explained. "This museum is the legacy of Duncan Phillips. We had to be consistent with that."

The Phillips first commissioned CGS in 1999 to analyze its options for expansion. After

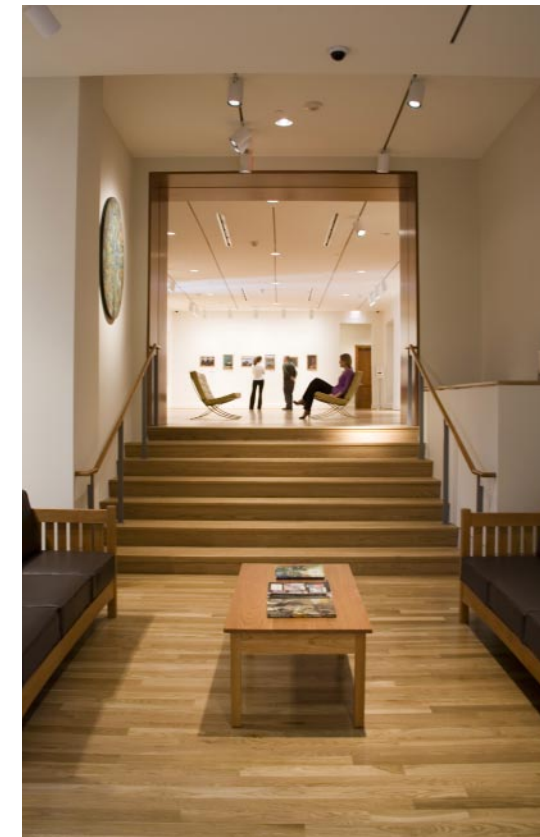
researching nearby properties, the firm learned that the empty apartment building next to the Goh Annex was available for purchase – a discovery Cox described as a "slam dunk." As ideal as the location was, melding that space with the Phillips held many challenges. The first snag came early: the building's 1895 façade, by noted Washington architect Waddy B. Wood, could not be torn down. What's more, the Dupont Circle neighborhood objected to the Phillips's plans to expand by building upward.

To preserve the residential streetscape, CGS instead decided to dig thirty-five feet below the Phillips's back alley, a course that didn't prove easy. As Cox recalled, after excavating fifteen feet the workers hit the next obstacles: a thick layer of rock and a citywide moratorium on the use of explosives. After using chemicals to crack the rock, the team dug down into

yet another surprise: a river flowing directly beneath the museum. To prevent water pressure from pushing the bottom of the building up, the base is now designed like a "gigantic bathtub," Cox said, anchored down into bedrock.

Once the technical problems were resolved, the architects could start constructing the Phillips's requested spaces. They began with the shop and café, sited side-by-side on the first floor of the Goh Annex. The doors of the café open onto the Hunter Courtyard, which in turn opens onto the refurbished carriage house, now providing office and activity space for The Phillips Collection Center for the Study of Modern Art. The café is convenient to the Phillips's new galleries, several of which are two stories high to accommodate the museum's expanding collection of large-scale postwar and contemporary art, and the Rothko Room, first created by Duncan Phillips in 1960, is located on the second floor.

The lower levels now house new educational spaces, an expanded library and archives, and a 180-seat auditorium in which to hold lectures, films, and more. Throughout the museum, CGS paid extensive attention to detail, evident from their use of Brazilian granite and American cherry trim, to the courtyard's bioretention planters and the auditorium's plush seats. With all its



advances in technology and luxury, the essence of the Phillips has been preserved. For example, the relocated library boasts a skylight much like the one in the original library, a feature that Cox described as the "heart and soul" of the room.

On the tour, Cox encountered Karen Schneider, the Phillips's librarian for twenty-five years. When he mentioned that his main goal was to make his client happy, Schneider commented on how pleased she was with her new surroundings. "You can replace happy with ecstatic," she said.



TOP:
Auditorium

LEFT:
View from the first floor of the Sant Building to the Goh Annex

RIGHT:
Library

BELOW:
One of the new galleries

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