

# AIA Richmond Chapter 2006 Design Awards

## Merit Award Winner

### **Project: Garage Studio / Office of BCWH Architects**

Owner: Sauer Properties; Richmond, Virginia  
Architect: BCWH Architects, Richmond, VA  
Location: Richmond, VA  
Completion: April 2006  
Building Type: Conversion to office use

### **Jury Comments:**

- Renovation of a building with some historic value.
- Design activated the less desirable tenant space – economic criteria but also acknowledgement of best public use of streetscape.
- Organization of plan tight/efficient – although workstations appear as cubicles in plan, they offer a spatial richness.
- Interiors demonstrated a strong sensitivity to color and the relation between existing conditions and new interventions.
- Interiors build a value of materials in a humble and dignified manner.
- Workstations and enclosed offices (when needed) respect the original content of the space and add to the quality of the workplace.

### **Project Description;**

In January 2005, a Richmond-area architectural and interior design firm of 30 employees made the strategic decision to move from a multi-story office that had served it well for 15 years to a new single-story location that would facilitate and reinforce the firm's collaborative design approach. In addition to desiring "new and better" space, the timing of the move was motivated by the firm's existing lease that terminated in December of 2005.

After months of searching, the decision was made to lease a portion of the historic 1920's Nash car dealership located in the 1800 block of West Broad Street. The 18,000 square foot building had been vacant for many years and the landlord was embarking upon a significant rehabilitation effort.

Rather than leasing the two-story showroom space that fronted Broad Street, the firm opted for the 10,000 square feet in the less glamorous warehouse at the rear of the site that was originally used as a repair shop and garage for the new cars.

In order to take advantage of historic rehabilitation tax credits, the landlord, based upon recommendations from the Department of Historic Resources, established certain design guidelines:

New partitions should not extend full height in order to preserve the volume of the original open bay space

The original exterior brick walls and exposed roof framing should not be concealed.

The original 12" x 12" terra cotta tile wall along the south edge of the renovated office space was to remain.

The original sliding door in the terra cotta tile wall should be visible in the final design.

The original 8.5' wide x 10' high steel windows along the north and west facades were to be restored.

The 10 large skylights were to be restored.

While other potential office tenants might have found these criteria limiting, the firm seized the opportunity to design an energized and inspiring collaborative environment within a vast open space, rich in historic fabric and bathed with abundant natural light.

The design of the staff workstations was one of the most important considerations in the project. The studio spaces in the firm's previous location had been separated by different floors in different buildings. As this physical constraint created a disconnect between the various project teams, the firm strongly desired a single studio space conducive to its collaborative design approach.

The height of the partitions separating the workstations was carefully considered and articulated to maintain a sense of openness throughout the studio while simultaneously giving each designer an area within their space that offered the visually privacy needed by certain types of work. The end of the “peninsula” separating each pair of stations was designed to allow for informal meetings.

The three bays within the studio are separated by an undulating wall, mimicking the pitch of the roof, which offers opportunities for visual and verbal connections to the adjacent bay. The final result is a single studio that simultaneously offers personal privacy within a connected and unified space.

Several opportunities for formal and informal meetings were incorporated into the design. The “back porches” along the north end of the studio are not only used by the partners but are intended to provide small, spontaneous areas for individual project teams to meet.

A larger area known as the “front porch” was designed as a destination point along the main corridor. It is positioned along this circulation spline adjacent to the studio space in an effort to engage all staff in project critiques and presentations.

**Credits:**

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Owner: BCWH Architects

Photography: Chris Cunningham Photography



View of entrance from parking lot



View of reception area



View of new presentation area



View of typical work space