

Even Delaware's
traditionally
conservative
architecture has
room for a few gems
of modern design.
by Shaun Gallagher

Architecture

Innovative





This page: Translucent wall paneling lets light shine through the Juniper complex. Residential furniture is a trendy and economic design element. Opposite page, clockwise from top right: Exposed ductwork and naked network lines run above an open corridor. The Juniper site, once an industrial warehouse, sits at an elbow point of the Christiana River. A fourth-floor office with an eyebrow window mixes contemporary office furniture with exposed brickwork and metal wall panels.

Industrial Revolution

Facility: Juniper Bank, Wilmington
Architect: Mitchell Associates

Clint Walker, working in the mid-'90s for First USA Bank, would rise before dawn several mornings a week, slap on some sneakers and drive to an abandoned warehouse along the Wilmington riverfront. He and a few buddies played 6:30 a.m. pick-up games on a makeshift basketball court in the center of the building.

Walker still spends plenty of time in the building, now as the chief administrative officer of Juniper Bank, an upstart credit-card services company located in

the redesigned facility.

After Bank One took over First USA in 1997, two of Walker's colleagues, Dick Vague and Jim Stewart, jumped ship to form Juniper, which they envisioned as a higher-tech banking company with a working environment that was more casual and creative than most financial companies.

When they started shopping for a headquarters, Walker's former hangout seemed like the perfect spot.

The warehouse, which had fallen into decades of disrepair by the time *(CONTINUED ON PAGE 54)*

From top: A corner conference room borrows natural light from the adjacent open lobby. Uniqema's front face is a bold four-story wall facing Route 295; the middle floors are paneled with reflective glass. Inside, the front lobby is awash with green Italian marble accents along the walls and on the surface of the reception desk.

Natural Selection

Facility: Uniqema Headquarters, New Castle

Architect: Tevebaugh Associates

The corporate logo for Uniqema, a specialty-chemicals manufacturer in New Castle, is a plump deciduous leaf — not exactly the first thing that comes to mind when you think “chemicals.”

Exactly, says Communications Manager Kathy Quinn, who sees the leaf as a symbol of freshness, vitality and warmth, instead of the drab image typically associated with the chemical industry.

The leaf sprouts up everywhere in the design of Uniqema's corporate headquarters: in its name, along its walls and even in the design of its carpet.

Its lobby area, perhaps the most innovative architectural element, looks much more like the lobby of an upscale hotel than the

entrance to an industrial headquarters. Green Italian marble accents run along the walls and on the surface of the reception desk. The ceiling rises four stories high; corridors on the second, third and fourth floors open up with balconies to view the lobby area. All the balconies are traced with blocks of potted plants, each with the same plump leaves as in the logo.

The exterior of the building is a slightly curved neutral-colored wall with an inlaid panel of reflective glass. The glass panels span two stories high and the entire width of the building. Four flagpoles stand at the entranceway, their colors reflecting off the building.

The second, third and fourth floors wrap around in a U-shaped layout, with the open lobby as the belly of the U. The building was designed to provide room for expansion and doubling of purposes. The wide, glass-encased conference rooms in the front corners of each floor can pinch-hit as offices, Quinn says, and even the ground-floor parking garage could be easily converted into an office if need be. The overall design, compact and efficient, but striking enough to raise the eyebrows of travelers along nearby Route 295, harmonizes well with the green, leafy trees that shade the building — a natural complement to the Uniqema logo. **■**



Right: The bright lobby rotunda connects the existing Hall of Records (to the left) with the new construction. Bottom: Squared-off columns rise in the middle of the rotunda, the luminous centerpiece of the Delaware Public Archives. Black ornamental grating encapsulates the wood of the reception desk; similar metal grating runs along the outside of the building to simulate windows.



takers couldn't risk the effects of sunlight on its sensitive and priceless collection. (Had there been windows, a separate vault would have had to have been created to house the documents.)

But a building with no windows would feel like a prison to the public, so the firm created a circular, many-windowed rotunda to serve as the entrance and lobby to the building, making up for the lack of sunlight in the administrative and archival areas. The lobby is thus bathed in natural light, reflecting off the terrazzo floor, and the off-white metal that braces the windows expands the space even more. Thick white columns rise to support a radial ceiling, with still more windows carved as spokes along the exterior of the roof. Black and white ornamental grating runs along the exterior of the building like angled metal vines to break up the background space and add texture.

The facility, christened in 2000, sits at the end of the Legislative Mall area. It was built adjacent (CONTINUED ON PAGE 57)

Window of Opportunity

Facility: Delaware Public Archives, Dover

Architect: Moekel-Carbonell

The architectural firm Moekel-Carbonell Associates received an intriguing assignment when it designed the Delaware Public Archives: Create an inviting, open building ... without windows.

Because the Public Archives houses centuries-old documents with precise temperature, humidity and light requirements, its care-

HOUSE OF

l i g h t

An oceanfront beach house mixes lavish furnishings with a breezy, laid-back design to bring contemporary style to the shore.
by Shaun Gallagher





If such a thing were possible, Joe Ruggiero's Bethany Village beach house would be made entirely out of glass. In reality, it's not practical, but to have a completely unobstructed view of the ocean from any point in the house would be a dream come true.

As it is, he's found a way to tantalize himself and his family with only slightly obstructed views of the water — no more obstructed than necessary, though.

From just about any point in their four-story beachfront home, at least a little peek of ocean is visible thanks to some creative shore-style feng shui. All the beds

in the house — and nearly all of the furniture — point toward the ocean, and unnecessary walls are dropped in favor of alternative room-dividers like the see-through fireplaces that split up each main sitting area.

And anywhere they could fit it, they put glass.

"We really wanted to have every view [of the ocean] we could possibly have," Joanne says. Standing in the master-bedroom suite facing the water feels like standing on the deck of a cruise ship. Glass spans the entire eastern wall and parts of the side

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This page: The fourth floor master suite gives the Ruggieros a panoramic ocean view. Shore-style feng shui points the bed and all the furniture toward the water. Opposite page, clockwise from top right: Wood Mode cabinetry and Ruba Tuba granite counter-tops make up the third-floor kitchen. In a view from the street, a three-panel stained-glass bathroom window fills the space above the garage. The triple-spiral staircase was the first design element the Ruggieros pinned down when the house was constructed.

House of Light

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walls of the suite, which comprises the entire fourth floor.

One would think all that glass would require a full-time window washer to maintain, but not so. “Glass is not a problem,” Joe says. “The elements — the wind, the water — take care of it.” In fact, in the three years since the Ruggieros built the home, they’ve had the windows professionally washed only once. In contrast, the higher-maintenance wood has had to be re-stained twice already, with another coat on its way in the fall.

A sweeping triple-spiral staircase unites the floors. It juts out slightly from the rest of the house, giving the southwestern corner the curve of a silo or a lighthouse. The stairs were the first design element the Ruggieros pinned down when they contracted the architectural firm Becker Morgan Group.

Joe, a real estate developer, has plenty of experience designing homes. But having built from scratch three previous



Every bedroom in the Ruggieros' Bethany Beach house has its own private deck area. Rooms that don't directly face the ocean still get ocean views, since the house is so close to the water.

beach houses in the Bethany area, he found it advantageous to work with an architectural firm from the beginning. “I said, ‘I’m all out of ideas. Give me some ideas.’ And they did.”

The Ruggieros do their primary entertaining on the third floor, which includes the sleek kitchen, dining area, a media room and a “vista room,” a small enclave closest to the ocean with seating for a small party of visitors.

The kitchen, with its Ruba Tuba granite countertops, Wood Mode cabi-

netry and porcelain-tile flooring, looks like it was plucked out of a Manhattan penthouse. Jutting up temperately around the room are ornamental columns, inspired by a trip to Italy. Originally, the design called for about 15 columns throughout the house, but the Ruggieros later had them scaled back. “In Italy, having a lot of columns looked great — but here, you can see how this is an open plan,” Joanne says. An alabaster chandelier hangs above the dining area, perched from the highest

point in the vaulted ceiling.

The perceived volume of the house was an important design consideration, and the vaulted ceilings and barrel roofs contribute. “When you’re trying to build volume, there are two ways: You can make the ceilings go up, or make steps that go down,” Joe says. In the main living areas of each floor, two or three steps help build downward space, and in the side rooms, raised ceilings build rising space. The result, he says, are rooms that feel slightly bigger than they actually are.

While the home is meant to reflect the typical laid-back beach style, it has none of the typical beach house kitsch. No white wicker chairs in the living room, no pastel color schemes in the bedrooms.

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Instead, the bedrooms — four on the second floor, plus the top-floor master suite — each have subtle themes and sophisticated palettes. Joanne describes one room with beige and earth-tones as a “Victorian Oriental” theme. Each bedroom has its own bathroom, but strangely, none of the bathrooms have doors. “At the beach, you live sort of open — real relaxed,” Joanne says. The open doorways between bedroom and bathroom are arch-shaped, to complement the exterior design.

The bathrooms are themselves plush with artful detail; a three-panel stained-glass window above the garage brings bright colored light into a guest bathroom. Joe’s private bath is tiled in stone. It’s a design that’s both beautiful and purposeful. “Whenever you go

Window of Opportunity

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 39)

to the existing Hall of Records building, which was renovated to align with the newer construction. "My assumption was that we'd get a nice old office building with a fresh coat of paint," says Director Tim Slavin. "Instead, we got a loving restoration." The Hall of Records area now serves as mostly museum space for a rotating collection of historic documents.

The most-used public area in the Archives building is the research room, where requested documents are catered to patrons. The design of this room has several security features built in to protect the integrity of the documents. The room is lit indirectly to prevent fading of the materials: The primary lighting hangs from chandeliers that face UV-

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free halon lights toward the ceiling. The room, large enough to host occasional galas and fundraisers, was designed so that every research table is aligned with the sight-lines of the staff at the reception desk, another security measure.

Throughout the building, creative accents like historical artwork and more ornamental grating give depth to the space in place of the typical shadows from outside light. Outside, near the entrance, a white block of concrete breaks out through the straight plane of the building's exterior. Functionally, it was built to make room for a stair tower. Aesthetically, it breaks up an otherwise plain exterior, distinguishing it from the surrounding legislative buildings. **DI**

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