

# This Week

## Architect Creates a Phoenix from a Fire-Ravaged Shell *Pratt Architecture School becomes a living laboratory*



by Stephanie Stubbs, Assoc. AIA

The 132-year-old Higgins Hall, home of the Pratt Institute's School of Architecture in Brooklyn, N.Y., has had more than its share of triumphs and travails: two major fires, three major restorations, and four major additions. Rogers Marvel Architects PLLC, per-

formed its latest salvation: a restoration, completed in 1999, on the heels of a four-alarm fire in 1996 that destroyed the building's central wing and severely damaged its north wing.

The fire left the brick shell without a roof, and at the same time revealed new evidence of the building's many layers of construction history, including arched openings, timber lintels, and curved masonry. In viewing the "ruin," Rogers Marvel found a serendipitous solution for rebuilding the north wing, in which they strategically applied and peeled away surfaces to "reveal the buildings history and construction methods" and formed a working laboratory for architecture students.

"The design intent was to reveal the poetic within the ruin



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and make a workplace for architecture: Simple new surfaces are minimal and are layered onto the existing infrastructure; new ceilings and walls are strategically located to expose the past," according to the architects. "Methods to mediate varied and irregular conditions were developed and applied."

Ehrenkrantz & Eckstut Architects served as the preservation consultant for the project.

This crafting of old and new work—in addition to creating a highly textured and stimulating environment for learning about architecture—earned Rogers Marvel and Ehrenkrantz & Eckstut an *Interiors* Award 2000 as "Educational Facility of the Year." This year, the project received a 2001 AIA Honors Awards for Interiors, for which the architects and client will be honored at the AIA national convention May 17-19 in Denver.

Rogers Marvel, in conjunction with Steven Holl Architects, currently is working on design development of a new central wing for Higgins Hall. ■