

## The Design Issue

Tracing Kirksey's Path: From Upstart to Industry Leader

Discovering an Effective Design Process

Pushing the Envelope of Office Building Design

Profiling a Few of Kirksey's Top Projects

Leading the Green Movement with basicGREEN

Fostering Growth in Young Architects

# 2013 VOL1 substance

## Kirksey Architecture

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## To The Reader

Welcome to **substance** magazine, volume 1.

Viewed by many as the greatest profession in the world, architecture is the perfect blend of art and science — of creativity and technical execution. I often meet young people who emphatically say, “I want to be an architect when I grow up.” For those of us who are, the responsibility is tremendous, and the reward is even greater. Winston Churchill’s quote, “We shape our buildings; thereafter, they shape us,” couldn’t be more true.

For the past four decades, Kirksey has designed and managed thousands of projects that shape the places you work, live, learn, play, worship, shop, dine and receive care. We have done so in a way that is thoughtful and deliberate, placing you, the user, at the center of our design process. The result is a lifetime of impactful projects that consistently elevate the experience of the user and enhance surrounding communities.

How do we do it? Inside, you will learn about our history (“The Road to Excellence: Kirksey Architecture’s Path from Upstart to Industry Leader”), our design process (“The Deep Dive: Discovering an Effective Design Process”) and our culture. We hope to provide you insight into what it takes to create and nurture a prosperous company — the **substance** behind the success.

Enjoy!



John Kirksey, FAIA  
President



Wes Good, AIA  
Managing Principal



## IN THIS ISSUE

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More than four decades ago, John Kirksey founded an architectural firm built upon his drive and entrepreneurial spirit. Today, Kirksey — the firm bearing our founder's name — has become a leader in high-performing, sustainable architecture.

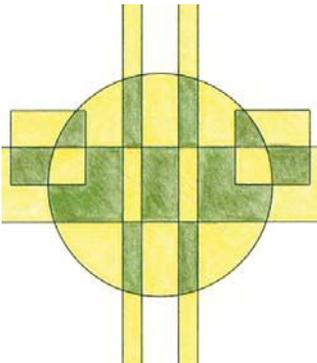


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Balancing the need for a residential atmosphere with safety considerations while providing the pinnacle of healthcare at The Menninger Clinic's new Houston facility was quite a challenge. Fortunately, Kirksey was up for that challenge.

Dear Mr. Kirksey:

My name is Madison and I am in fifth grade and my teacher is Mrs. Waugh. I am writing because I have an assignment to write a business letter. I want to tell you that your architecture is beautiful and I have some questions on how you design the buildings that I would like answered.

I want to be an architect when I grow up. Since I want to be an architect, is it possible to be one when you are ten? Do you just design places whenever you want, or do workers or someone ask you to? Would I have to have another job instead of an architect too? Do you get paid enough for just designing buildings?

I have a few questions for you about how you do your job. Do you draw what you want made or do you use computers? Do you design the inside and outside of the buildings? Do you send your drawings to a whole other company to build it?

This paragraph is all compliments. I really love the buildings you designed especially the pool, because I am a competitive swimmer. Do you design other stuff besides buildings and pools, like houses? If you do, I bet they look great!

Thank you for reading my letter and listening to my thoughts and questions. I hope you write back soon.

Sincerely,

Madison

"I really love the buildings you designed, especially the pool, because I am a competitive swimmer."

- Madison

## Madison's Letter

### FOCUS ON FEEDBACK

Answering the Tough Questions from a Possible Future Kirksey Architect

Architects are used to answering questions from owners, general contractors, subcontractors and more about what exactly they're bringing to the table on the most challenging projects. But Kirksey Architecture founder and President John Kirksey recently had the chance to address questions of a different sort from Madison, a fifth-grade student who wanted to get to the heart of what it means to be an architect.

Madison's letter, as well as John's response, are reproduced here. Who knows? We might be seeing a future employee of Kirksey Architecture getting her foot in the door!

Dear Madison,

Thank you very much for your letter and your kind words complimenting the work of our architectural firm. In your letter you asked several questions and I will do my best to answer each of them. First, to be an architect, you have to get a college degree in architecture, then you have to work for an architectural firm for about three years, take an exam and, finally, you are an architect. While I have never heard of a 10 year old architect, the quality of your letter suggests you will certainly meet these requirements quickly. Second, we can design buildings for fun, but most of our work is done based on clients (other people) hiring us to design a building for them. They tell us what kind of building they want, and our design architects go to work designing the floor plans for the building, followed by the design of the outside of the building, so that the inside and outside fit together. Once we and our client are both happy with the design, then another group of architects in our office goes to work, mostly on computers, putting together the plans for how to build the building. This part is very complicated and we have other people helping us with the structure, the plumbing, the electrical, and the other parts of the buildings that require training that we do not have as architects. Once we finish this set of plans, we send them to a contractor and the contractor can let us and our clients know how much this building will cost. When we are comfortable with the costs, the contractor begins to build the building and we meet with the contractor regularly during that building period to make sure that they are building the project the correct way. The good news is that we do get paid enough to do this work such that we don't have to have other jobs, we can be just architects. Also, most of us really love what we do so we get an extra bonus in coming to work each day. Some days we even get an extra, EXTRA, bonus when someone like Madison Desroches writes us a letter telling us that she thinks our buildings are beautiful!!

Thank you for your compliments on the pool. Our clients are very happy with that pool as are all of the students in that school that are swimming there daily. We have won some awards for that project so you have a good eye for quality architecture! Maybe someday you will be competing in the Olympic trials against someone who trained in that pool!

I hope you will give a copy of this letter to Mrs. Waugh as I shared your letter with over 100 people here in our office and we all feel you should get an A+. Plus, we are enclosing some more information on our company for you to review and, we hope you will drop by and see us if you are ever in Houston. Finally, when you are almost finished getting that college degree in Architecture, we hope you will send us a letter, with a copy of this letter, and remind us that we promised you an interview for a job as an architect at Kirksey Architecture.

Thanks again for your great compliments on our work.

Sincerely,

*John Kirksey*

John M. Kirksey, FAIA  
President



# THE ROAD TO EXCELLENCE

KIRKSEY ARCHITECTURE'S PATH FROM  
UPSTART TO INDUSTRY LEADER

by Michael Adkins



It was June 1971. *The Ed Sullivan Show* was wrapping up its 23-year run on CBS. John Lennon and Yoko Ono were recording tracks for Lennon's third post-Beatles album, *Some Time in New York City*. The first Hard Rock Café opened in London. *The New York Times* began publishing the Pentagon Papers.

And a young architectural intern named John Kirksey, just one year out of college, with a single project and an entrepreneurial spirit, set out to create the firm now known as Kirksey Architecture — a leader in the architectural field in Texas.

### THE BEGINNING

After graduating from the University of Texas in 1970, Kirksey began working as an apprentice at a large Houston architecture firm and was soon offered his first independent commission. At first, Kirksey managed this opportunity by putting in a full day at his employer's firm, then coming home to work on his independent project in the makeshift studio he set up in his attic. "In January, it was okay, but by March, things got a little dicey," Kirksey recalls. He recruited a couple of friends to help, but the situation came to a head when one of his friends became ill from the attic studio's high temperatures. "The summer heat drove me out of the attic and into starting my own firm," Kirksey jokes.





Entrepreneurship and hard work were nothing new to Kirksey. He started a surfboard rental business while playing in a rock band in high school, and he worked throughout his college years. This, however, was a totally different venture — and it would have to be done in a completely different way.

First, Kirksey hired a registered architect to work under him at the fledgling firm, allowing Kirksey to complete his apprenticeship and achieve his architectural registration. Next, he focused on growing the firm. Because the architects who joined the business were, for the most part, older and more experienced than the company's founder, traditional notions of growth and hierarchy were impractical. "From '71 to the late '70s, it became clear to me that I needed to surround myself with solid architects so I could work on building the company," Kirksey says. He focused his efforts on forming relationships and finding work for the firm. These efforts paid off, Kirksey points out, because his new hires' experience "led to establishing a solid base." That base would prove invaluable during the economic slump of the 1980s, during which much of the Houston architectural industry languished. While not seeing a tremendous amount of growth in that period, the firm was becoming established in the Houston market, and, with a committed team of solid young professionals, Kirksey accumulated a growing body of diversified projects.



## CREATING A SHARED VISION

With his firm growing, John Kirksey saw the need for team members who weren't just good designers but who could also work well in a team setting with clients and coworkers. Those rising to fill this need included current-day Executive Vice Presidents Scott Wilkinson, leader of Kirksey's Commercial Team; Integrated Design Director Randall Walker; Director of Design Bob Inaba; and Renovation Team Leader Terry Greiner.

Rather than growing in a traditional, hierarchy-driven way, the company grew organically throughout the 1980s and 1990s. As staff members pursued their talents and interests, a structure of teams emerged, each focused on a particular market sector. "The whole history of the company has been organic and evolutionary," Kirksey points out. "Our shared vision has so much more power than a singular vision."



Everyone works together in an open office environment that the firm has called home since August 2000.

Adopting a team-specialty concept revolutionized the way Kirksey Architecture did business. "It took us from a firm of generalists to a multi-specialized practice," says Wes Good, Kirksey Architecture's managing principal and Collegiate Team leader. "Today, we're one of the best in all of our specialty areas. [The team concept] has made us the firm we are today."



There are 12 teams in place at Kirksey Architecture, each with its own specific focus:

- Commercial
- Country Club & Spa
- Community/Religious
- Education: Collegiate
- Education: preK-12
- EcoServices
- Government
- Healthcare
- Hospitality/Residential
- Interior Architecture
- Renovation
- Science & Technology



## A CULTURE OF PERSONALITY

Another important aspect of Kirksey Architecture's development is the creation of an enjoyable work environment. "Our philosophy is this: The work we do here is hard enough, and there's no need to add a challenging office environment on top of that," Good says.

Kirksey Architecture fosters a work environment with flexible hours and a fun, creative atmosphere for its 110-plus employees. The driving force behind this concept comes from the company's founder. "John only worked for a traditional architectural firm for a few months before he founded Kirksey," Good explains. "We always tell people that he never learned how 'normal' architecture firms work!"

Kirksey Architecture's managers and vice presidents aren't off in the corner office or the boardroom away from their employees. Everyone works together in an open office environment that the firm has called home since August 2000. That doesn't mean that people punch the clock and wait for 5 p.m. to roll around. As part of their responsibilities, each Kirksey team is encouraged and expected to do various team-building events on a regular basis. "Sometimes we'll do things like take a break to go see a movie during the day and come back afterward. We're very supportive of maintaining a healthy work/life balance," Good states.

Kirksey Architecture also holds events in which the firm as a whole participates. "We'll do our annual Oktoberfest,





Chili Cook-Off, March Madness competition and our Young Professionals Happy Hour, for example," Good says. "Sometimes we'll do a surprise lunch for everyone. Just

recently, we had the Monster PBJ truck come to our office and make everyone gourmet peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. We've had surprise visits to the office by an ice-cream truck. We also sponsor softball teams and bowling teams to foster our community environment. We feel we get more out of people by maintaining this kind of environment. They're much more passionate about their work and much more driven to get it done."

Kirksey Architecture works with employees to encourage them in the work they feel most passionate about. Good cites Brian Malarkey, executive vice president and Interiors Team leader, as an example. "Brian's been here about 22 years," Good explains. "He started out as a designer. About midway through his career, he found a real desire to push the idea of sustainable architecture. We supported him and his ideas, and he's helped create the sustainable focus that our firm has today. We probably wouldn't be where we are today otherwise. We want people to do what they do best." (Editor's note: Please see "It's Easy Being Green" on page 32 for more on Kirksey Architecture's basicGREEN program.)

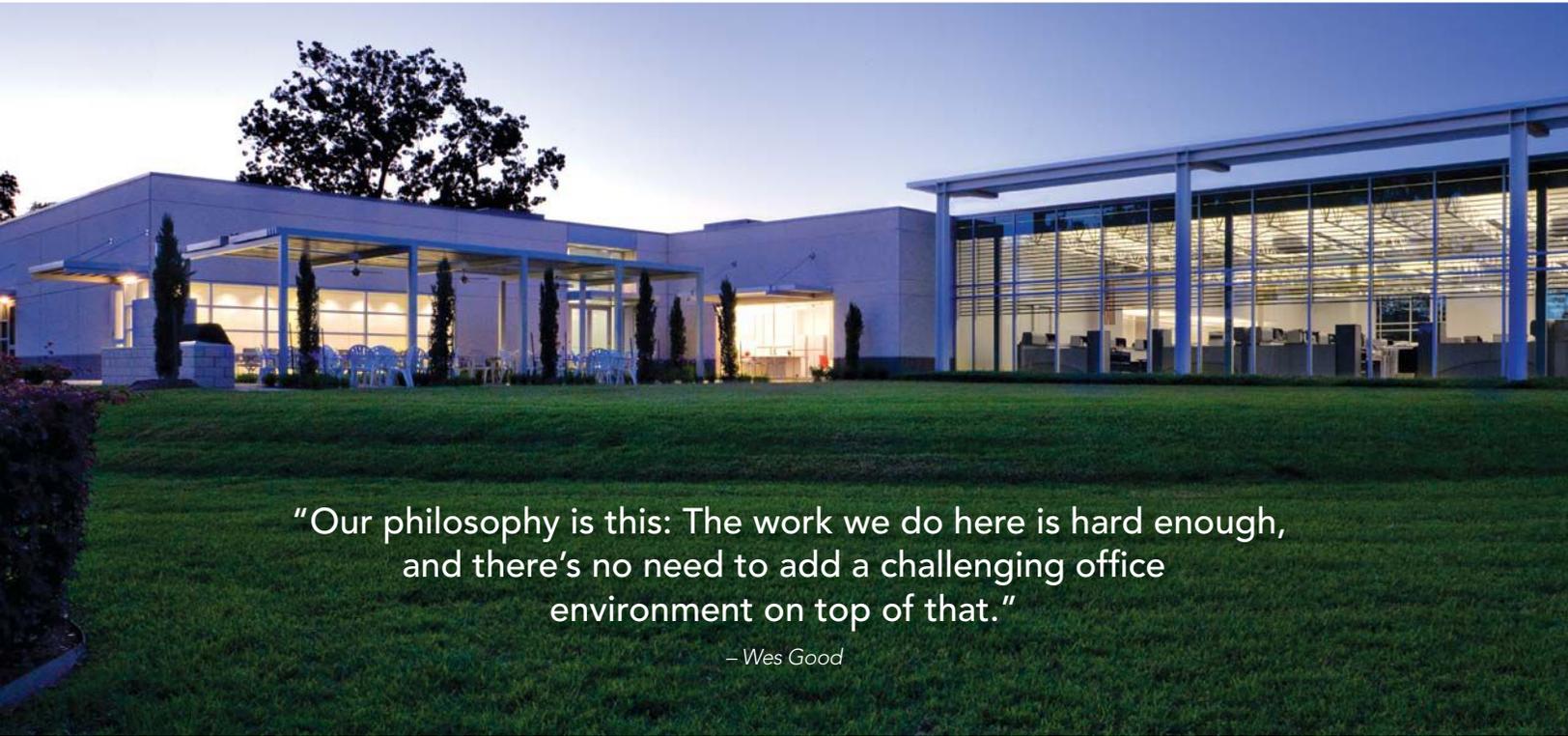


### KIRKSEY IN THE COMMUNITY

In addition to its creativity-stimulating atmosphere, Kirksey Architecture is well known for its philanthropic involvement throughout the Houston area. The firm's history of community service dates back to the early '80s, when the city was in the throes of a recession and when John Kirksey began working with area nonprofits, charities and other professional organizations. "Our attitude, in terms of giving, is that we try to focus our philanthropic efforts on areas we can impact," Kirksey says, adding, "The main focus is to find causes we are passionate about and direct positive energy toward those causes we can help improve."

"We are all inspired by John," Good says. "As long as I've known him, he's always been involved in the community. And, because we're a Houston-based company, we feel it is important to give back and stay intimately involved in key professional and not-for-profit organizations."





"Our philosophy is this: The work we do here is hard enough, and there's no need to add a challenging office environment on top of that."

— Wes Good



**“The leadership transition has been successful, and our younger leaders are experienced and excited by the challenge of taking the firm to the next level.”**

– John Kirksey



Kirksey Architecture’s emerging leaders, its natural growth, its reputation for excellence and its commitment to sustainability were just some of the factors that went into its selection as the Texas Society of Architects’ 2012 Firm of the Year. “It’s very rewarding to have received this prestigious honor,” says Scott Wilkinson. “A number of people have worked very hard for a long time with the goal of creating a unique architectural firm, and this award is tangible proof that we have succeeded in our efforts. In a state with so many great firms, it is an honor to be labeled the Firm of the Year.”

From the firm’s humble beginnings in a sweltering attic to its current status as one of the leaders in Texas’ architectural industry, Kirksey Architecture has come a long way in 41 years — but the journey is far from over. “Having gone from dirt and gravel roads, we are now on an open highway,” Kirksey reflects. “Our company is in a great position, and the sky is the limit.”

Kirksey Architecture encourages all of its employees to be involved with a minimum of one professional association and one community association. Just a few of the beneficiaries of this philanthropic spirit include the Memorial Hermann Healthcare System, the Houston Parks Board, Scenic Houston, Trees for Houston, the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, the American Institute of Architects, the U.S. Green Building Council and local families whom the firm “adopts” during the holiday season.

The firm’s unique focus on philanthropy and sustainability comes together in another endeavor, Kirksey’s annual tree-planting program, which involves the company planting trees in honor of its clients during the holidays. To date, Kirksey Architecture has planted a total of 8,530 trees in the 26 years it has maintained the program, according to Good. Kirksey says a tree is a much more lasting tribute than gifts or cards could ever be. “A tree is an investment in our future,” he states.

### **WHAT THE FUTURE HOLDS FOR KIRKSEY ARCHITECTURE**

Much like the trees that are planted each year, Kirksey Architecture has a strong investment in the future in the form of the company’s next generation of leaders — leaders with strong roots and a capacity for growth. “The leadership transition has been successful, and our younger leaders are experienced and excited by the challenge of taking the firm to the next level,” Kirksey says.



**“Having gone from dirt and gravel roads, we are now on an open highway. Our company is in a great position, and the sky is the limit.”**

– John Kirksey

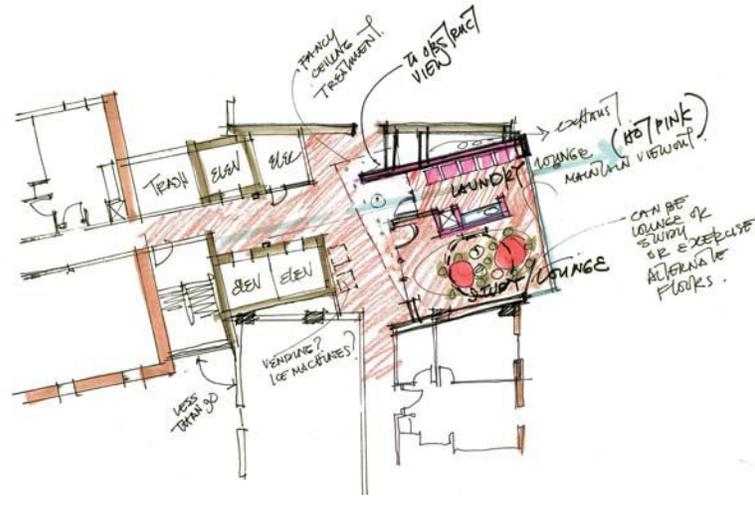
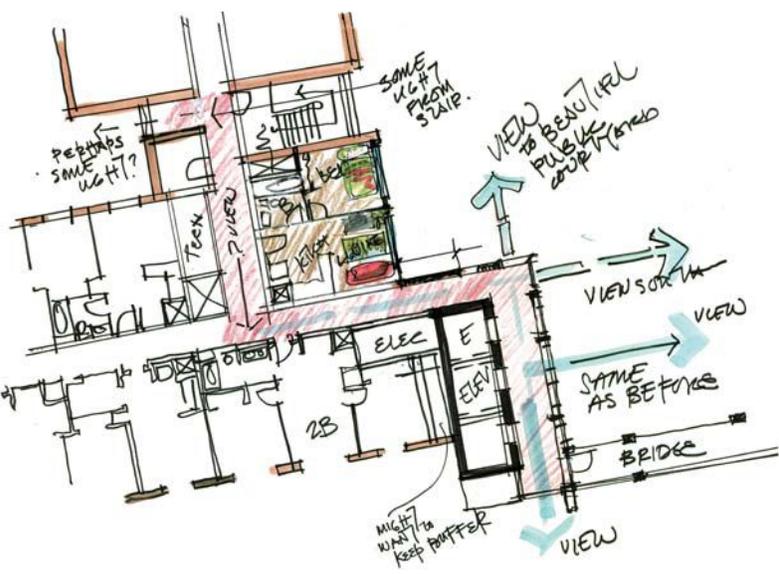


# THE DEEP DIVE

## Discovering an Effective Design Process

by Sarah Goldblatt, AIA

The history of architecture is filled with stories of the solitary genius — the eccentric designer who works in isolation and arrives at a singular groundbreaking vision. The legendary Frank Lloyd Wright. Fictional architect-hero Howard Roark. The lone genius perched on a mountain with a laptop.



**B**ut the architects at Kirksey don't buy it. In their experience, clients are best served through a collaborative, iterative process. Kirksey's team-based approach brings together clients, designers, consultants and contractors as early in the process as possible. The collective input of this integrated project team and the exercise of working through multiple design solutions are essential to creating an optimal final product.

The work yielded by this design process is the main reason Kirksey was recently named the Texas Society of Architecture's 2012 Firm of the Year. However, instead of resting on its laurels, the 110-person firm is in the process of developing a

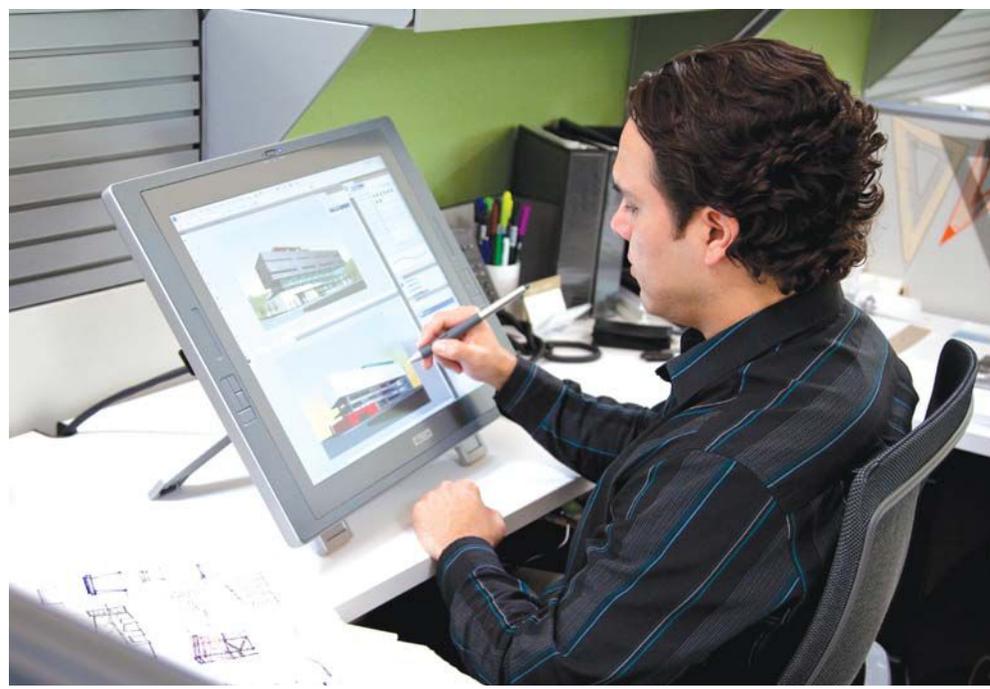
2020 Roadmap to guide its architectural practice into the future.

As part of this planning process, one of Kirksey's top priorities has been articulating its unique approach to design. As Kirksey's building-type portfolio has become more diverse — expanding from office buildings to educational, hospitality, religious and healthcare facilities, among others — the firm has become acutely aware that each project and client is unique. Kirksey's process of research, discovery and collaboration is a direct result of what it has learned over the course of the firm's 42-year history, and it tailors each project to a client's specific mission, site and context.

### KIRKSEY'S DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

Kirksey architects frequently credit a client's vision as their biggest inspiration for a project, but good design also requires common values with respect to strategy, documentation and building performance. As a part of its 2020 strategic planning, the firm went through a process of identifying its values, and six principles emerged as the foundation of Kirksey's approach to design. These principles are:

- Sustainability
- Collaboration
- Discovery
- Research
- Innovation
- Regard for the talent of each Kirksey designer



## THE DESIGN PROCESS

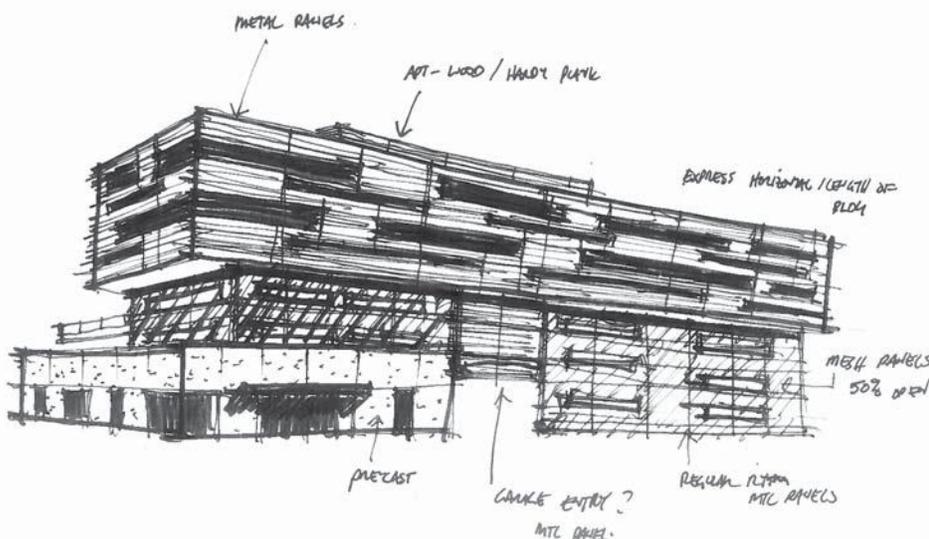


For each project, these principles converge to achieve the firm's goal of "exceptional design through an exceptional process."

### SUSTAINABLE VALUES

Most people equate sustainability with environmental impact reduction. Kirksey embraces this concept but goes beyond it by viewing each project through a quality-of-life lens. Architects ask: "How do we provide our clients with facilities that cost less to operate and maintain while providing a healthy environment in which to live, work and play?" Kirksey developed the following 10 questions to measure a project's alignment with the firm's core value of sustainability:

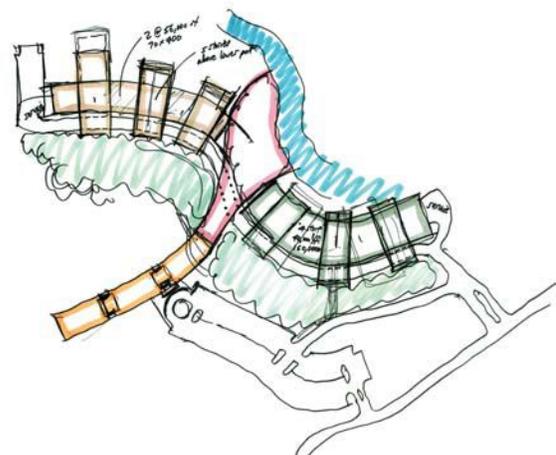
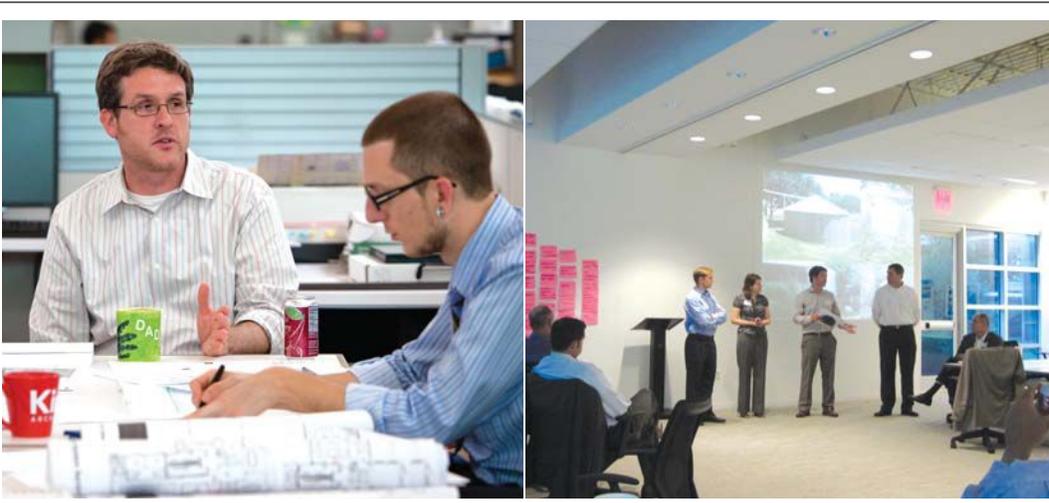
- What is special about my client?
- What is special about the site?
- Does it sip energy or give energy back?
- Does the design reflect the community?
- Have I provided daylight and views to all?



- Does it collect, filter, and conserve water?
- Is it effortlessly functional and beautiful?
- Is it innovative?
- Is it healthy?
- Is it a good neighbor?

### FRAMEWORK

Throughout the firm's history, Kirksey has emphasized an integrated design approach that solicits input from all entities involved in a project. This approach engages the client, the end-user, the contractor and the engineering team early in the design process and helps facilitate a clear understanding of



a client's broader mission and goals. To ensure maximum collaboration and an efficient process, Kirksey developed a tangible three-part framework for tracking design success. The system enables the project team to organize information in a way that creates a concise picture of the entire design process and helps the client realize an enhanced building solution via a more efficient process. The goal is to utilize innovative design strategies within the framework of traditional design phases. The following three key elements comprise Kirksey's design process:

**Design Roadmap**

The Design Roadmap is a graphic representation, similar to a flowchart, of the entire design process from programming through construction and post-occupancy. It outlines the roles and responsibilities of each team member and establishes milestones, deliverables, client reviews and coordination elements that occur in tandem with each design phase, including building information modeling (BIM) and energy-related investigations.

Unique to Kirksey's Design Roadmap is the inclusion of Design Dives and Design Guides. A Design Dive is a collaborative

event where the entire team, including the client, end-users, consultants and the contractor, dive into the discovery process. Gary Machicek, senior project designer with Kirksey, described this approach as an opportunity to "develop a story for the project and to get clients and owners thinking beyond the practical aspects of their building and more about how they envision people experiencing the space."

Kirksey has developed various Dive methods to engage participants, including PlayTheory: a card game with images and expressions. Clients are

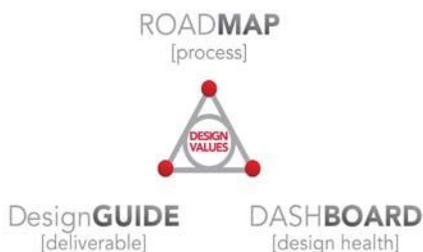
asked to pair meaningful images with words in response to questions about their buildings. This generates ideas for the project that otherwise might not surface if a client's role is strictly reactive. During a Discovery Dive for Texas Tech University's new Petroleum Engineering Research Building, the Dean's vision for integrated learning opportunities quickly evolved into a diagram about the relationship of labs, student areas and computer spaces to one another. "We used the process to create a concise story about how the building would operate and the experience of the people using it. Texas Tech could imagine the building

**Kirksey Architecture Goes to the Dogs (Literally)**



Kirksey Architecture provided the design pictured to the left for the Fourth Annual Barkitecture Houston 2012, hosted at Houston Pavilions. The event, which brings together Houston's best architects, designers, builders and artists, benefits Pup Squad, an animal-rescue group that saves orphaned animals from the streets and places

them in loving adoptive homes. Kirksey's Barkitecture submission, Fido's Foldable Fortress, is a portable structure that grows with your canine companion, is easy to assemble and is constructed to last.



**Fido's Foldable Fortress**  
 PICK UP YOUR PUP AND GO

**Step 1 - Drop**  
 Pick up your pup and go.

**Step 2 - Deploy**  
 Deploy the structure by pulling the top edge of the structure outwards. The structure will pop up and lock into place.

**Step 3 - Assemble**  
 Attach the top edge of the structure to the top edge of the structure. The structure will be fully assembled.

**Step 4 - Happy Pups**  
 Sit back and enjoy the view from the top of the structure.

Kirksey



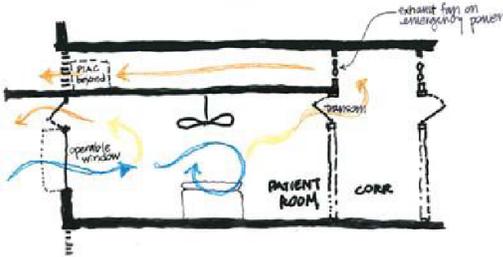
truly functioning before it was even built,” Machicek explained.

### Design Guide

The big ideas generated during Dives are synthesized into a narrative that expresses a project’s design intent and the narrative becomes a part of a shared document called the Design Guide. The narrative provides a set of guiding principles that allow the design team and the client to track and measure how well the project goals are being met. The design team at Kirksey utilizes the Design Guide to record the big ideas along with essential project information, including square footage, budget, site plan, program elements and sustainable features. The document may also contain concept



diagrams and building plans, elevation studies, consultant narratives, LEED requirements, energy models (pictured one page 19), and preferred images and material selections. The Design Guide was an invaluable marketing tool for one



## Bob Inaba – Soft-Spoken Powerhouse



Bob Inaba is Kirksey’s director of design, and his influence is reflected in most of the firm’s award-winning buildings. We spoke with him to learn more about his creative process.

### Do you think design can change people’s lives?

*Of course! If you change a person’s attitude toward their environment, it can change their attitude toward life. Particularly with workplace design, since people spend so much of their time at work.*

*We really thought about that in the recent design for Energy Center Three. We wanted to ensure that building users had a variety of environments to choose: large and small, dramatic and understated, indoors and out. I like to include big contrasts that will surprise and delight people, really get their hearts pumping, as they move through the space.*

### What do you think is the key to a successful project?

*A truly successful project goes beyond what the user or client was expecting. It’s not enough to just solve program requirements — we need to get beyond that to imagine how people will use the space and how they will feel about it. That’s what I think about ... besides the normal stuff like functionality and budgets.*

### What is the number-one thing you try to impart to young designers?

*I tell them they shouldn’t just solve the problem. They must think creatively to provide something even better. They have to consider influences like how a person approaches the project, where it can be viewed from, who can see it, how you travel through it. I encourage them to keep thinking to see if there is a better way; they shouldn’t settle for the first solution that comes to mind. The style of the project will emerge through this process. It isn’t something we have predetermined before we start.*

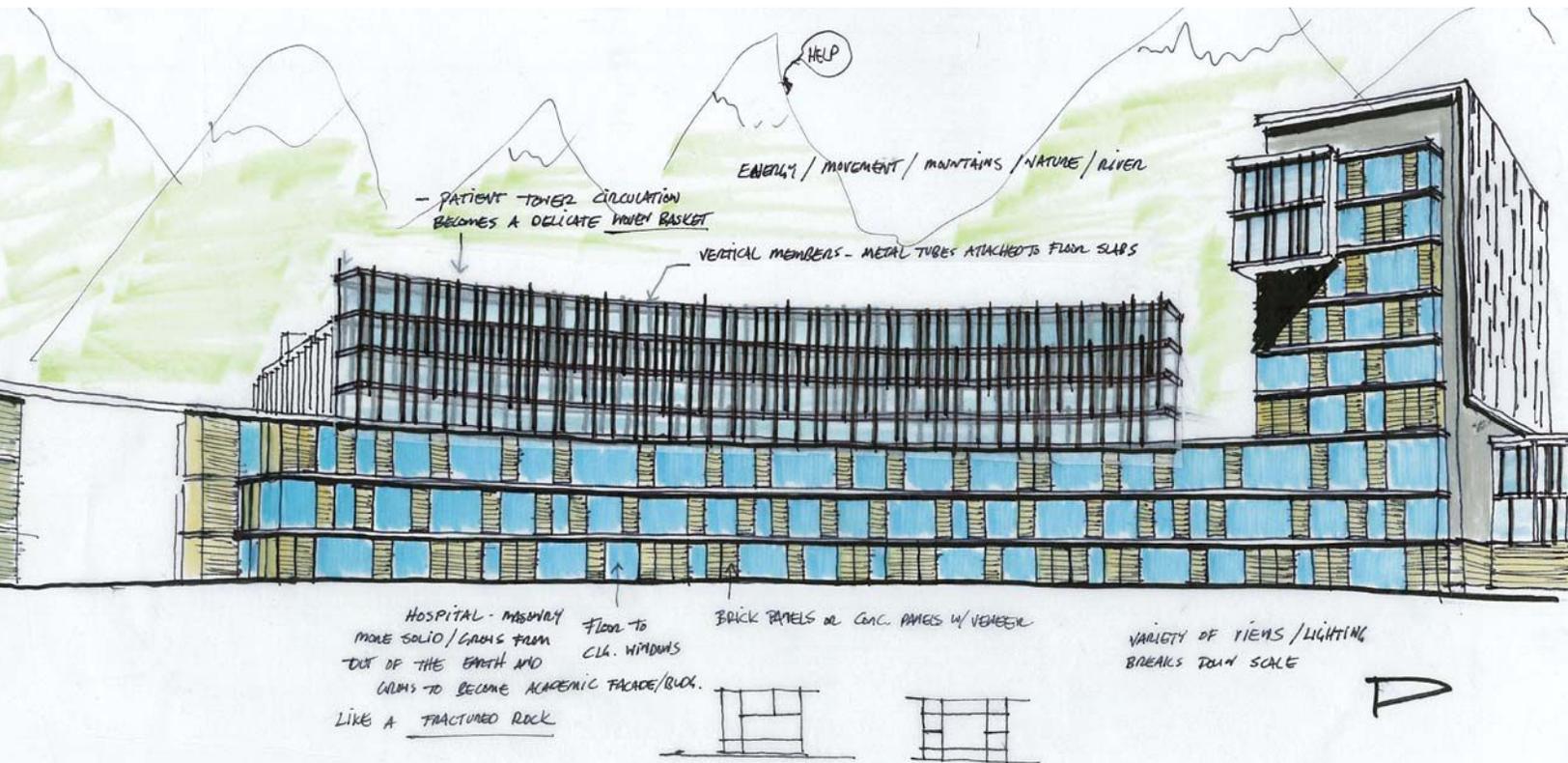
### Is there a particular design solution you’ve always wanted to try but never gotten the chance to execute?

*I’ve always wanted to design a skyscraper. We do a lot of mid-rise buildings, but few buildings over 20 stories. I have this vision of a multi-faceted tower like a jewel that glints in the sun.*

### What actor will play you in the movie about your life?

*Dustin Hoffman. He’s got this great soft-spoken, low-key, funny demeanor — like me — but he means business, and he gets your attention.*





Kirksey client soliciting potential tenants for his new commercial office space, as it conveyed the character and details of the building before construction even began. For other clients, the Design Guide serves as a way to build support from prospective donors for capital campaigns.

Additional Dives occur as a project advances through the traditional design phases. New information is incorporated into the Design Guide to document a project's progression and the decisions made along the way. While some clients may view this process as added time and cost, in fact, it enables the design team to be more efficient, actively reflecting on project goals and decisions, staying on schedule, and logically planning for the success of a Kirksey-designed building.



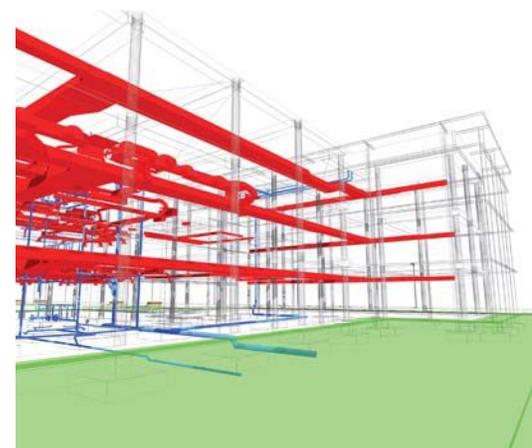
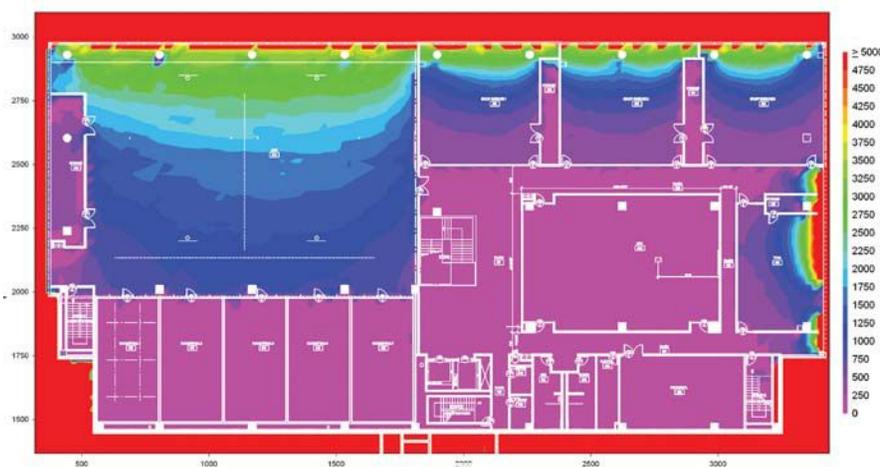
### Design Dashboard

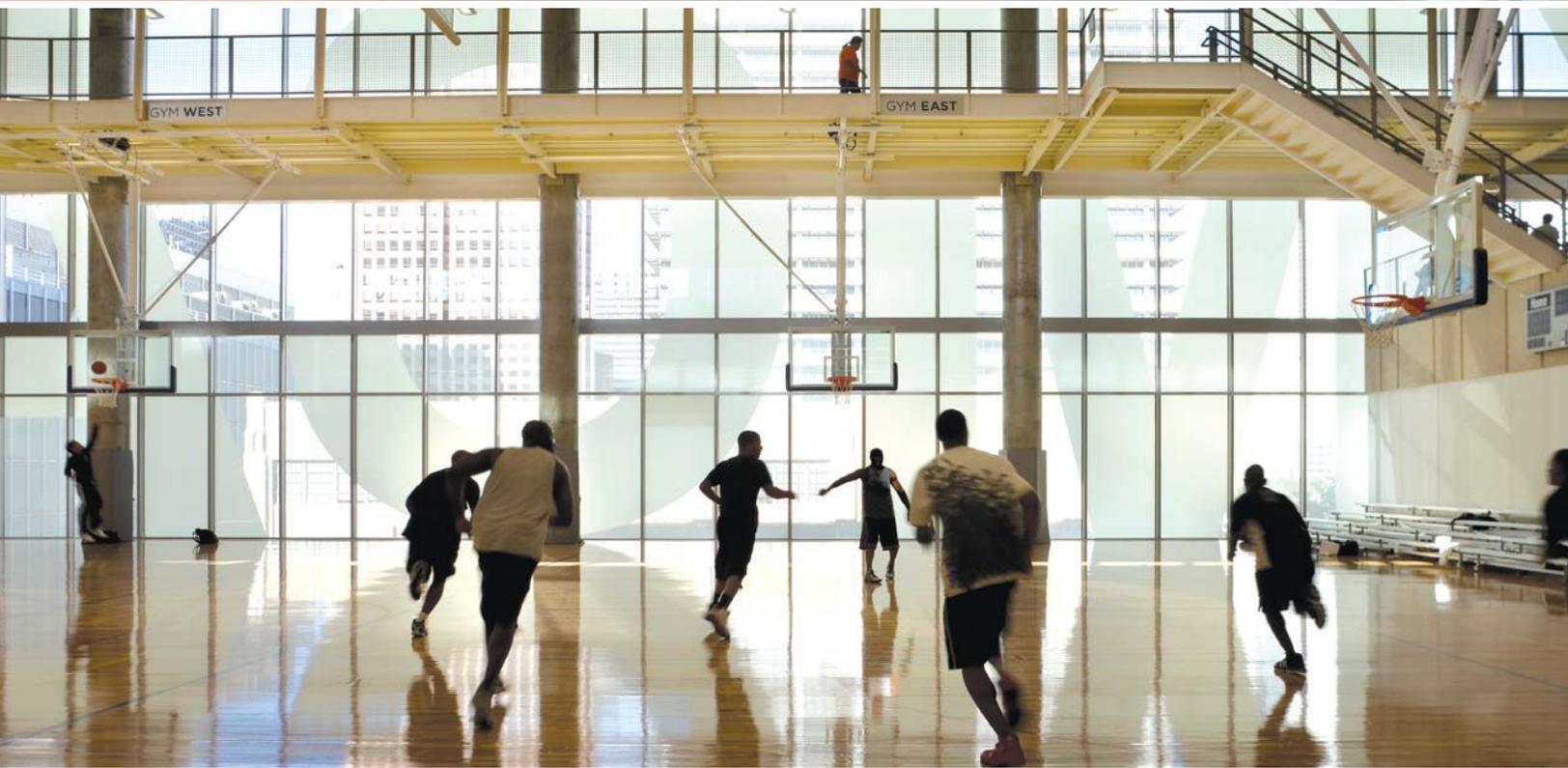
The Design Dashboard is the accountability component of the design process that ensures all requirements of the Roadmap and the Design Guide are met. This in-house tracking tool lists all active projects in spreadsheet format

and provides a chronological checklist of milestones and events that need to be accomplished during the design process. Once an objective is met, team members record the event. The Design Dashboard allows the team to gauge a project's progress and monitor and maintain its goals and objectives.

### DIVE IN

Kirksey Architecture brings highly specialized knowledge to each project. As clients will discover, the firm's advanced approach to the design process and user interface goes beyond traditional practices and methods to achieve design excellence and unparalleled buildings.

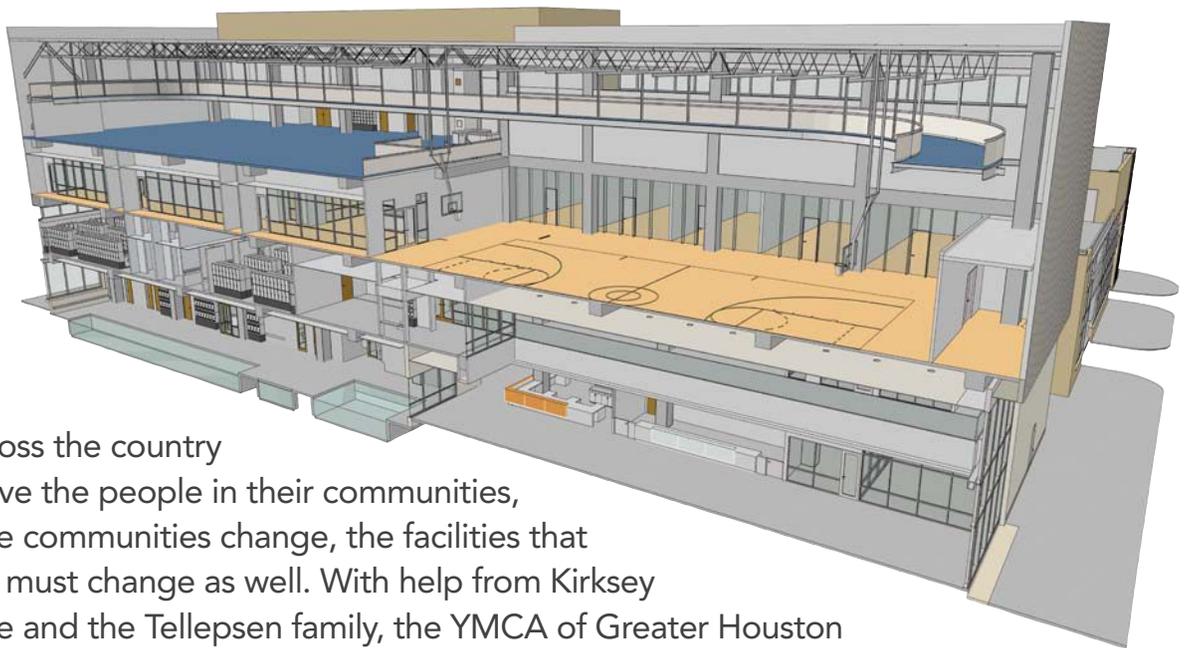




# SERVING A CHANGING COMMUNITY

NEW DOWNTOWN YMCA BUILT FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

by Erin Pinkerton

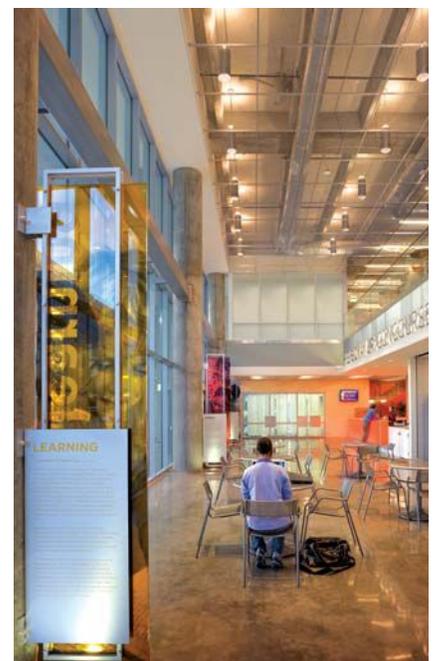


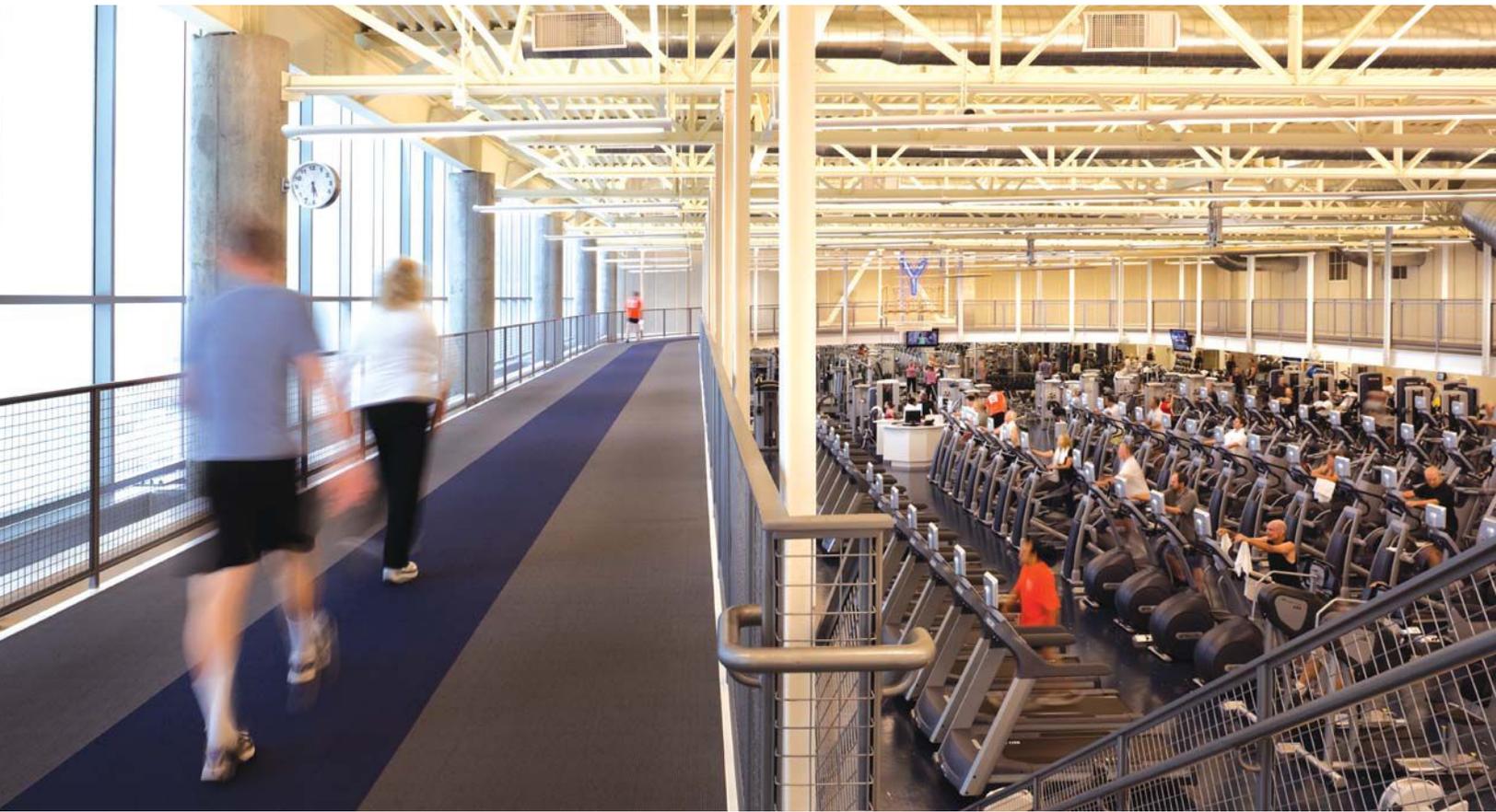
YMCAs across the country work to serve the people in their communities, but as those communities change, the facilities that serve them must change as well. With help from Kirksey Architecture and the Tellepsen family, the YMCA of Greater Houston built a new flagship center to serve downtown Houston.

**T**he original downtown YMCA, built in 1941, could not accommodate its 21st-century members. A new downtown YMCA was planned because renovating the old building would have been too costly. "It

had been in continuous use, not closed for a day in its history," said Ken Harris, vice president of corporate services for the YMCA of Greater Houston. "It was 70 years old. It was worn out, it was older, it was expensive to operate, and we needed a new downtown Y."

The project's original \$50 million budget provided a challenge because the YMCA did not feel like it could raise that much in the current economy, explained Tadd Tellepsen, president of Tellepsen Corporation. "The team led by Kirksey needed to design this building on the fly to meet a trimmed budget of \$35 million," he added. And they did. "Kirksey respected the opinion of the builder, Tellepsen, and they often asked for advice and suggestions on constructability of the building,"



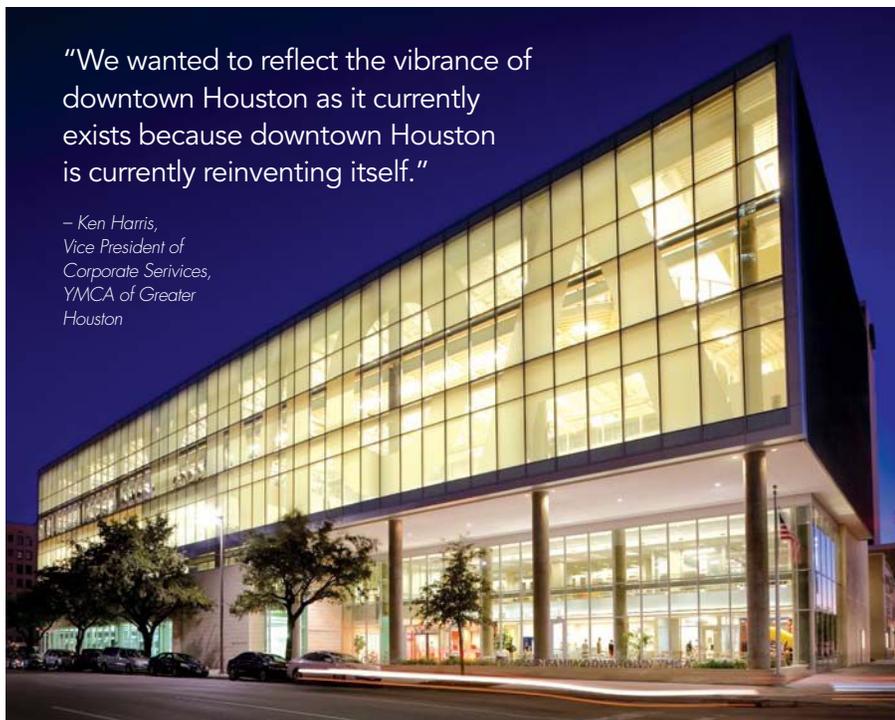


Tellepsen said. Together, Kirksey Architecture and Tellepsen Builders completed the project under budget and two months ahead of schedule.

The Tellepsen Family Downtown YMCA, only one block from the former athletic center, opened in fall 2010. The center was named after the Tellepsen family

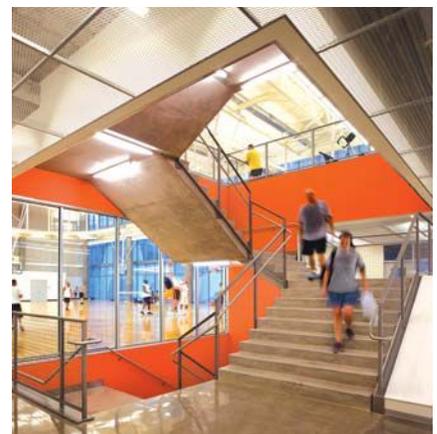
for its four-generation contribution to the YMCA. In 1909, Tadd's great-grandfather, Tom Tellepsen, started the company that would become the Tellepsen Corporation after taking architectural drafting classes at the YMCA. But, as Tadd said about the new center, "The YMCA is not your grandfather's YMCA anymore."

Built on a full city block, the YMCA stands five stories tall and measures 115,000 square feet, making it one of the largest downtown YMCAs in the nation. The facility has a connected parking garage, a large covered porch supported with pillars and a 40-foot glass curtainwall. "The whole north façade is all curtain-wall so that people who are outside can see the function inside, and when you are inside working out, you have great views of the downtown streetscape," Milton Pyron, project architect at Kirksey, explained. Large letters that are the full height of the curtainwall spell out YMCA. The letters, made of ceramic fritted glass, reduce glare and give the center a downtown presence.

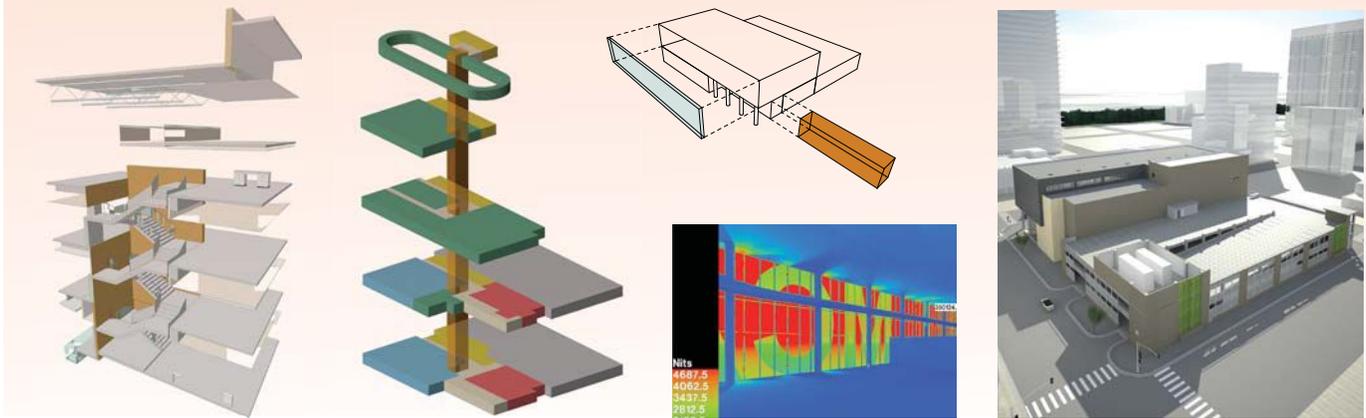


"We wanted to reflect the vibrance of downtown Houston as it currently exists because downtown Houston is currently reinventing itself."

— Ken Harris,  
Vice President of  
Corporate Services,  
YMCA of Greater  
Houston



## MODELING A MASTERPIECE



The central staircase is a prominent feature that connects the programming on different floors and helps orient the user. "In some urban YMCAs you go into, you get disoriented, but this one is very simple," Pyron said. "When you go in, it has a central monumental stair and it is all open ... it has very good transparency."

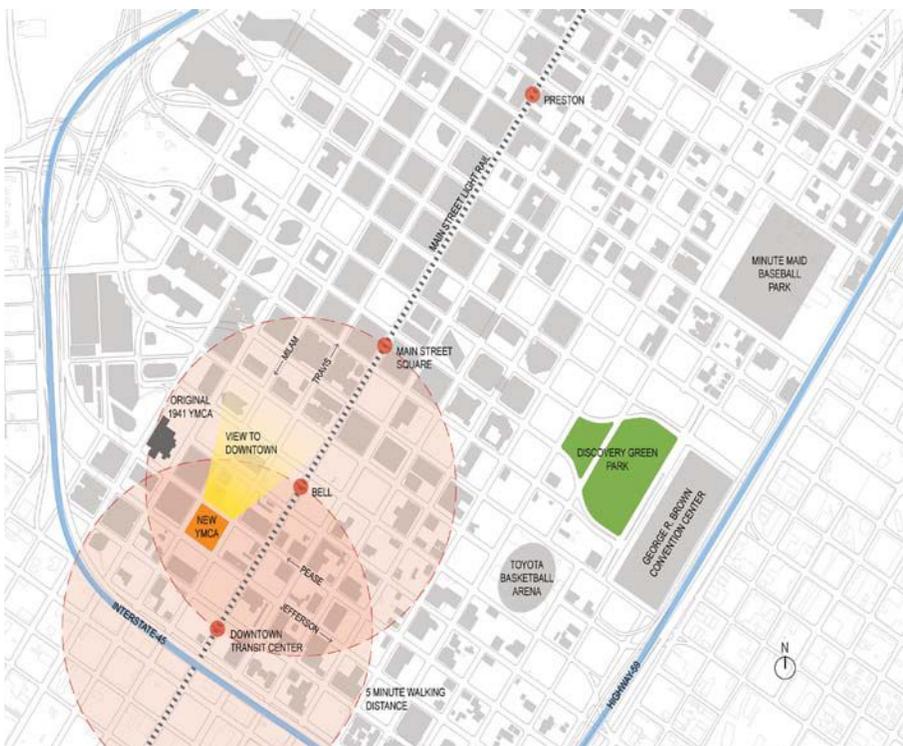
Some relics from the former downtown center remind members and visitors of its history. The new YMCA houses the former center's cornerstone, its light sconces, the building plaque from its 1941 dedication and the neon sign that sat on its rooftop. The otherwise modern YMCA has contributed significantly to the revitalization of downtown Houston. "We wanted to reflect the vibrance of

downtown Houston as it currently exists because downtown Houston is currently reinventing itself," Harris said. Tellepsen agreed, saying, "The Y and Kirksey's design, so open and crisp and fresh, really add to elevating the stature of the south end of downtown."

According to Harris, the Tellepsen Family Downtown YMCA has won 12 different awards. Project accolades include the AIA Houston Design Award for Architecture Greater Than 50,000 Square Feet (2011) and the Texas Construction Award of Excellence for Green Building (2010), among others. Of course, the goal of the center is ultimately to serve the community. Harris said, "We want this YMCA to serve downtown for the next 70 years."

## AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

1. *Texas Architect* magazine, featured project, 2012
2. *Texas Architect* magazine, Texas Society of Architects (TSA) Award-Winning Projects, 2012
3. Texas Society of Architects (TSA) Design Award, Institutional, 2012
4. AMCH Golden Trowel Award, 2012
5. AIA Houston Design Award: Architecture – Greater Than 50,000 Square Feet, 2011
6. *ENR Texas & Louisiana* Award of Merit, 2011
7. *Athletic Business*, Facility of Merit, 2011
8. *Houston Business Journal* Landmark Award: Public Assemblies, 2011
9. *Athletic Business*, Architectural Showcase: Health & Wellness Facilities, 2011
10. *Recreation Management* Innovative Architecture & Design Award, 2011
11. *Texas Construction*, Best of '10, Award of Excellence: Green Building, 2010





# not another day at the office

by Michael Adkins



## Kirksey Architecture Pushes the Envelope of Office Building Design

During the last two years, a growing demand for new office space has come with a diverse set of requirements based on the project types and user groups. From corporate offices to medical office buildings, there is a wide range of design criteria, and the design team at Kirksey has developed expertise in recognizing, understanding and responding to these issues.

### A HISTORY IN THE MARKETPLACE

Commercial office buildings have been a mainstay of the Kirksey Architecture practice since the founding of the company in 1971. Under the direction of Commercial Team Leader Scott Wilkinson and incorporating the vision of Design Director Bob Inaba, Kirksey has consistently been at the forefront of commercial office design and construction.

Ongoing demand from a large group of repeat clients has given the firm the advantage of constantly testing new concepts and incorporating a wealth of feedback regarding the success of these concepts. "Our understanding of the driving forces behind the design of office projects is due in large part to the intimate and long-standing relationships we have with our commercial developer and corporate clients," Wilkinson commented. "We understand how office buildings support our clients' business. When our clients are successful, we are successful."

"There is no substitute for experience," Inaba stated, "and our depth of knowledge in this market allows us to get quickly past a base understanding of the client's needs and devote more of our time to the true value-added aspect of the design." Wilkinson noted that the current increase in activity in this market type has

accelerated the pace of innovation in office design, resulting in an exciting level of sophistication and value from a design perspective.

## RECESSION AND RESURGENCE

The recent recession was a challenging period for the commercial office sector, according to Inaba. "The years leading up to 2007 were a busy time for office building design and construction," he recalled. "Then things started to slow down in 2008 for design, while construction companies were still busy constructing the buildings that were designed in 2007. But from 2008 until the beginning of 2012 was a slow period all around for office buildings."

However, in 2012, a relative boom in the office-building industry began as a result of growth in the energy sector. "Energy companies and energy-service companies are leading the charge in Houston," Wilkinson said. "Most of them have been very successful over the past couple of years, and they have money to spend on new facilities."

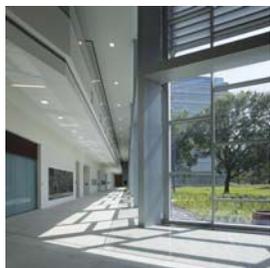


## THE BUILDINGS CLIENTS NEED WITH THE FEATURES THEY WANT

Working with a long list of corporate and commercial clients, the Kirksey team sees several features

consistently requested by its clients. "Employee amenities have become more important in office buildings," Wilkinson stated. "Conference facilities, fitness facilities, dining and break areas, and outdoor amenity spaces are now part of most office building projects."

Inaba added that clients are requesting lots of glass in their office buildings to facilitate natural light and views for employees, as well as building configurations with more corners for their offices, common areas, and conference rooms. Terraces and outdoor meeting areas are additional features that Kirksey includes in many of its office building designs.

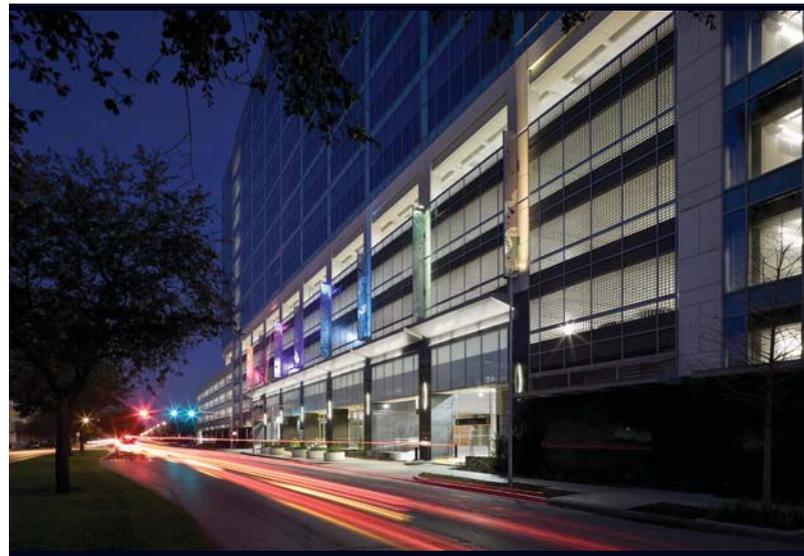


Increasingly, clients are requesting that their projects accommodate all of these features and be environmentally friendly as well. Kirksey's experience with green architecture helps accomplish this. "The majority of office buildings are LEED-certified — mostly LEED Silver and Gold," Inaba said. "Many tenants are requesting

LEED certification, as they realize that it's more than saving energy. Healthy buildings save the companies much more through employee recruiting, retention, less sick time and increased productivity." (Editor's note: Please see "It's Easy Being Green" on page 32 for more information about Kirksey's environmentally friendly design practices.)

## THE PROOF IS IN THE PROJECTS

Having a design that works on paper is important, but having a building that works in concrete and steel is essential for clients



— and many Houston-area office buildings stand as testaments to Kirksey's expertise in this area of architecture.

Wilkinson cited One BriarLake Plaza as an example. This 20-story, 500,000-square-foot structure was completed in 2000 for Tishman Speyer Properties and is now owned by Behringer Harvard, an investment firm based out of Addison, Texas. "It has stood the test of time," Wilkinson said. "We continue to hear that many people consider it the best suburban office building in the Houston area, and it still commands the highest rental rates in the suburban market. ... We are proud of its design and success in the marketplace." Wilkinson added that Kirksey has designed Two BriarLake Plaza for Behringer Harvard to complement the original project, and construction has begun.

The Friedkin Companies Campus in Houston is another highly successful corporate campus, Wilkinson pointed out, calling it "a great example of a corporate headquarters that provides a wonderful place to work for the employees of a successful corporate client." The campus totals 430,000 square feet and consists of a 10-story tower, a five-story tower, a two-story connecting building, a separated two-story training center and a 900-car parking garage.

Inaba noted another large-scale Houston project as a good example of Kirksey's proficiency in designing office buildings: the Memorial Hermann Medical Plaza, located at the northern boundary of the

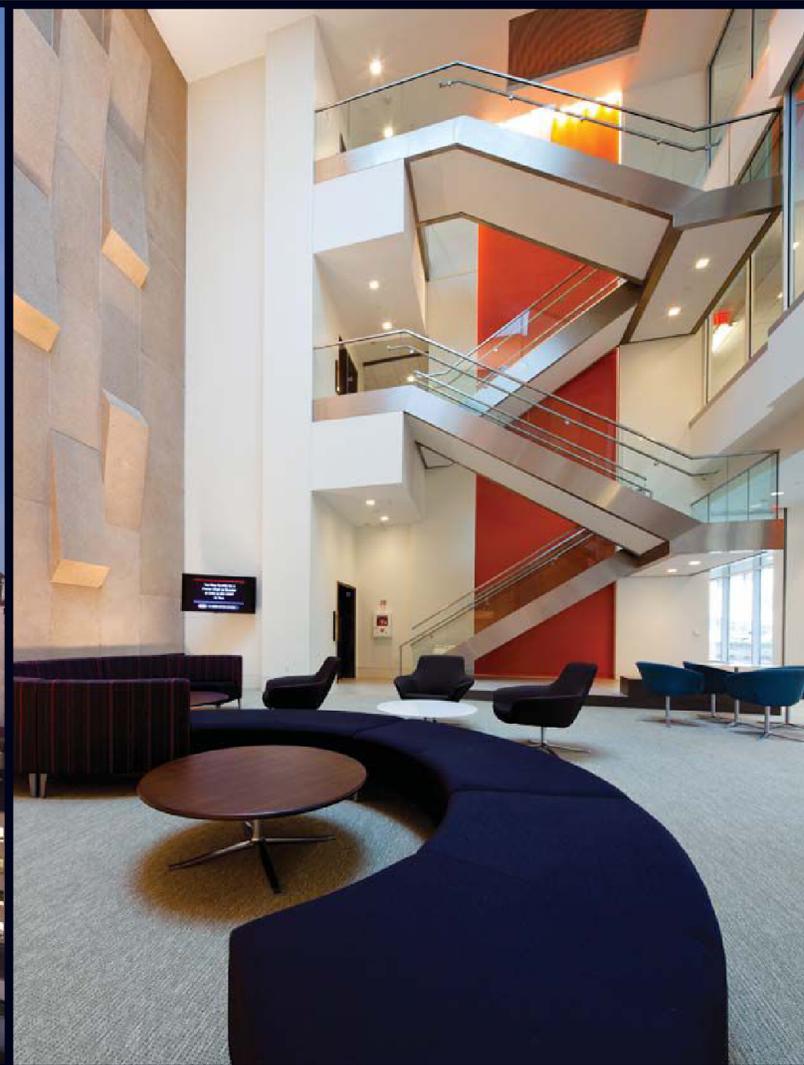
Texas Medical Center campus. This 30-story, 511,381-square-foot undertaking included some very specific deliverables, Inaba pointed out. "It had to have an impact on the skyline and relate to the Memorial Hermann hospital across the street and the Houston Metro light rail stop," he said. "In addition, the project had very complex pedestrian, vehicular and emergency-vehicle movements in a very congested area. The program included office space, retail, an ambulatory surgery center and a 2,500-car parking structure. The program was vertically stacked with a prominent illuminated roof feature at the top, which is visible from many angles for miles around."

Soon to join these denizens of the Houston skyline is Energy Center Three, a 20-story, 546,000-square-foot Class-AA speculative office building. Kirksey recently completed the building's design, and the project broke ground in late 2012, with completion expected in 2014. "Our client, the Trammell Crow Company, selected Kirksey to design a new standard of quality for a suburban Houston office building, and they have expected and demanded that outcome," Wilkinson said. "I believe that we have assembled



"The current trends emphasizing employee workplace satisfaction will continue to expand and be refined. ... Quality will continue to be more important as everyone realizes the value a great design can bring to a project."

— Bob Inaba



a great Kirksey team of designers, managers and technical experts that have worked very hard to meet and, hopefully, exceed our client's desires."

### DESIGNING TOMORROW'S OFFICES TODAY

By its very nature, architecture requires a careful analysis of what the future holds for clients and how their projects can accommodate what is to come five, 10, 20 or more years down the road. Kirksey's design professionals see changes and growth coming for office buildings in the Houston area.

"The near future will demand new office buildings to take care of the growth in all kinds of businesses," Wilkinson said. "The long-term future will be very interesting because the way people work is changing at an increasingly rapid rate. Buildings will have to be designed to best house this changing workplace."



"The current trends emphasizing employee workplace satisfaction will continue to expand and be refined," Inaba said. "People in general are more interested now in quality-of-life issues. These will be reflected in the design of office buildings as well as other project types. Quality will continue to be more important as everyone realizes the value a great design can bring to a project."

And Kirksey is a leader in bringing great design to its clients, using a team-focused mentality. "Our design process allows for collaboration and real contribution from everyone involved," Inaba said. "We understand the economics of the deal and what developers, tenants and leasing professionals want and desire in their projects."

"Kirksey has earned a reputation for being a team player that works well with the entire development team of users, real estate developers, brokers, property managers, facility managers, contractors, subcontractors and engineering consultants," Wilkinson said. "Our 'can-do' attitude, combined with talent and expertise in office buildings, gives Kirksey an edge over our competition."



## Facts and Figures on Office Buildings' Construction Costs



Knowing what an office building will cost to build can be extremely valuable to clients who are considering upcoming large-scale projects. As a service to its clients, Kirksey compiles data relating to these costs annually and provides it in the firm's *Construction Cost Update*. The data in this year's edition includes the following:

- One-story flex office buildings: \$65 to \$70 per square foot – shell buildings designed with tilt-up concrete skins and punched openings
- Low-rise office buildings: \$77 to \$84 per square foot – two- to three-story shell buildings designed with speculative building features and concrete skins
- Mid-rise office buildings: \$87 to \$97 per square foot – four- to six-story structures with speculative building features, precast concrete and glass skins
- High-rise office buildings: \$98 to \$135 per square foot – seven- to 25-story shell buildings with cast-in-place concrete structures and articulated precast and curtainwall glass skins
- Parking Structures: \$25 to \$35 per square foot – urban downtown and medical-center sites with limitations may have higher costs

Data originally published in Kirksey's Construction Cost Update 2013. Cost information reflects market conditions in and around the Houston area.

A NEW LOOK FOR

# energy

NRG AND KIRKSEY BRING AN  
INNOVATIVE STYLE TO HOUSTON

by Deanna Strange





Thinking of downtown evokes images of bright skylines and lots of energy — whether that energy is people or the power that fuels the city, there is plenty of it. Most people don't stop to consider where that power comes from, but when its source is in the middle of downtown, it's hard to miss.

For Houston, that source is NRG Energy. As one of the nation's leading providers of energy and owner of the second-largest generation fleet in Texas as well as the Houston-based retail electric provider, Reliant NRG is based out of Princeton, New Jersey, and its business goes beyond providing electricity to homes and businesses. Its ever-evolving offerings include high-efficiency natural gas, wind and solar energy, as well as emission-free nuclear power. As a leader in the energy industry, NRG actively looks for ways to reduce the industry's carbon footprint. This stance on sustainability made NRG and Kirksey a natural team.

### NRG MEETS HOUSTON

The city of Houston strives to be a sustainable city and to educate its citizens about being green. NRG sought for its Houston office a central and memorable location to take advantage of the best Houston has to offer. That location is in the Houston Pavilions in downtown Houston — an

open-air retail, entertainment, dining and office center. "It was an opportunity to brand themselves to the public in a way they could never do in a typical office building," said Kirksey's Brian Malarkey, executive vice president and Interiors Team leader.

Driving down Fannin Street, beneath the NRG office space, drivers have a view of the space lit by multicolored and changing LED lights. "The whole idea is: Light is energy," Malarkey explained. In addition to this space, NRG occupies an 11-floor tower in the Pavilions, and the total space covers three blocks. Kirksey utilized a variety of graphic patterns in the window glass, colors and artwork that can be viewed from outside. The emphasis on community carries through NRG companywide, and it can be recognized especially in NRG's workspace style.

### ON THE BENCH

NRG is a forward-thinking company, seeking the best ways to be sustainable and finding the best way to operate as an employer. After merging with Reliant, it was essential that the two companies were able to join forces seamlessly. "There was a whole corporate culture NRG was trying to address and bring to Houston," Malarkey said. "One of the hallmarks was the way that they work and the way that the space they



work in is designed." NRG uses open office space planning as a way to unite its employees and foster collaboration.

Although open office planning is not a new concept, the possibilities offered by it have become more apparent in recent years as technology has exploded, changing the way everyone communicates. With the convenience of high-speed Internet, e-mail and smartphones, people aren't connecting with one

another over the phone or in person as much as they once were. Open-plan work areas with low panel heights, also called "benching," creates an environment where interaction is guaranteed. "It maximizes collaboration," stated Kirksey's Director of EcoServices Julie Hendricks. "One hundred



percent of the employees sit in these spaces. They provide views for nearly everyone. The president even sits in an open workspace in the middle."

Putting theory into practice, this work style is one that Kirksey utilizes in its own office. Kirksey's Randall Walker, executive vice president, commented, "We work in that environment, and it is very easy to communicate with each other. There's a faster knowledge transfer when everyone is working together and can make eye contact." Kirksey provided an infrastructure to make benching work for NRG by including filing areas, huddle rooms, couches and chairs, and conference rooms in the work areas. "The key is providing those places to be able to pop in and have a private conversation," Malarkey pointed out, adding that appropriate spacing between work surfaces was important in limiting noise. "The objective is not cramming a bunch of people into a space but getting the collaboration," he said.

### GOING GREEN

Being a progressive energy company, it seemed natural that NRG would be looking for a LEED-certified space for its offices. "In preparing for our meeting [with NRG], we

## ELECTRIC CARS IN HOUSTON

The city of Houston has made countless efforts to become a more sustainable and environmentally responsible city. One such effort is the push for electric cars. This movement starts with city vehicles and extends to the residents, but in order for electric cars to thrive, the city needed to make the means more feasible. The city partnered with NRG, the dominant energy provider in Houston, and its subsidiary, eVgo.

Electric cars have existed as long as gas-powered vehicles but still pose the



challenge of how to easily keep them charged — preventing the far more sustainable vehicle from gaining popularity. In the past year, NRG and Kirksey teamed to design the electric-car-charging station

that will ultimately become a 50-site network of fast chargers around the city of Houston in hopes of boosting the movement. Drivers can sign up for the eVgo subscription service to recharge at these stations. Randall Walker, AIA, LEED AP, pointed out one of the issues electric-car drivers suffer: "They charge the cars at home at night, but if they're out driving a lot on the freeway, it may not be enough." The convenience of these stations should leave Houston seeing more electric cars out on the roads and assisting the city in its goal to be emission-free.



looked at their annual report and found that they're very interested in reducing global warming and are committed to the environment," Walker said. "But they didn't originally specify LEED certification, so we suggested it to them, and they were instantly interested. They ultimately achieved LEED Gold certification."

Hendricks relayed some of the elements NRG used to build a sustainable facility, including light-colored

interior spaces to better reflect daylight, water-efficient plumbing fixtures, recycled content in materials and having more than 90 percent of office equipment ENERGY STAR-rated. One of the most important factors from a sustainability standpoint is the location: "It's in an urban area, so the employees have access to more than 650 public transit rides per day," she said. "The location also allows employees a lot of options for places to walk to during lunch." These are factors that significantly reduce the amount of vehicle emissions produced by NRG employees. *(Editor's note: For more information on smart transportation in Houston, see the sidebar on page 30 for NRG's effort with electric-car use in Houston.)*

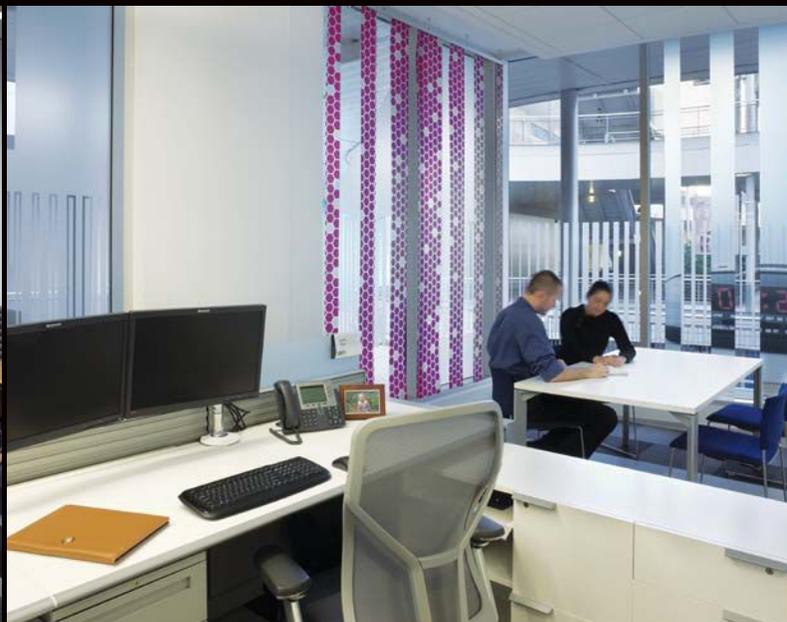
### COMMITTED TO THE FUTURE

Companies like NRG and projects like this one are unique, and Kirksey takes pride in the mutual accomplishment and ongoing relationship. "It really is a beautiful project that sets the standard in every respect," Hendricks said. "They were really committed to the open-floor concept, we had a client who believed in the sustainable vision that we were trying to achieve, and they were going to stand behind us and help make it a reality."



### GREEN STATS FOR NRG

- Recycled content in materials: 32 percent
- Indoor water savings: 28 percent
- Lighting power savings: 17 percent
- Construction waste recycled: 90 percent
- Occupants with views to the exterior: 91 percent
- Renewable power purchased: 100 percent

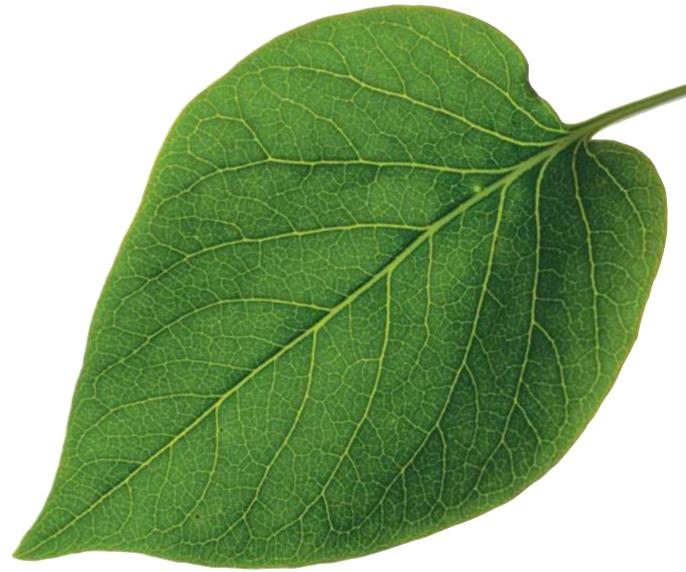


# It's easy being green



## *Kirksey Makes Sustainable Design Its Responsibility*

In a time of increased environmental awareness, wherein sustainable measures have become the standard for new buildings and energy codes are growing increasingly strict, green building is everyone's business. Recognizing this reality as an opportunity to follow through on a passion for environmentally friendly design, Kirksey implemented its basicGREEN program, which has made sustainability an integral part of the firm's design process.



**“We wanted to practice what we preach.  
We wanted to be green through and through.”**

– Julie Hendricks

“We wanted to practice what we preach. We wanted to be green through and through,” explained Julie Hendricks, director of Kirksey’s EcoServices Team. “We have people here at our firm who believe it is fundamentally important to do this. We in the building industry have a responsibility to make choices that consider both financial and environmental prosperity,” Hendricks said.

Kirksey leads Texas in Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) projects, but not all projects are suited for LEED certification. The basicGREEN program emerged as a means to guide clients and peers down the path toward more

sustainable building and operating practices, whether or not they would be able to meet LEED requirements.

“In this day and age, whether clients are looking for LEED certification or not, they recognize that their buildings impact the environment,” Kirksey’s Jeff Chapman said. “This is just us taking initiative. We’ve set our company standards at a higher bar than most companies. When you hire Kirksey, this is just what we do.”

### **What Is basicGREEN?**

The last five years have seen major changes to what it means to be green and what is required to earn LEED certification, yet the basicGREEN program remains a way for Kirksey’s



clients to be environmentally conscious without big spending.

In order to provide each client the opportunity for a greener building, Kirksey takes what a client is looking for and then determines how it can be achieved through sustainable, yet economical, means. Some of these considerations are the orientation of the building, the percentage of windows to walls, the efficiency of HVAC systems and plumbing fixtures, responsible material selections, and disposal of construction waste.

“We are looking for what strategies are the most impactful and how to simplify as much as possible,” Hendricks said.





**“It’s our mission to make environmentally friendly buildings. Most clients have at least a few sustainable features they always seem to want, so we include them in the basic package. This is for all of the projects, not just LEED.”**

– Jeff Chapman

“The way we crafted this, it should add a minimal cost to any project. Unless they specify not to, we use basicGREEN on every project. They all have a good payback over time, so there is no reason not to do it.”

“BasicGREEN allows our clients to know that their buildings are a little better than just going to another architect that does business as usual,” Chapman said. “It’s

our mission to make environmentally friendly buildings. Most clients have at least a few sustainable features they always seem to want, so we include them in the basic package. This is for all of the projects, not just LEED.”

According to Kirksey’s *Guide to a Green Facility*, originally published in 2006 and set for its third edition in 2013, making a building green doesn’t have to be costly, complicated or disruptive to the owner — it just takes a commitment to creating a more efficient facility. Focusing on a few areas can make any building more sustainable. Kirksey’s Guide includes categories like energy use, daylight and views, site and landscape, water, transportation, and green housekeeping.

### Leading the Green Movement

Architects hold a position of leadership in creating a sustainable future, and at Kirksey, that leadership begins at the top. “The reason our team exists is because John [Kirksey] had a vision,” Hendricks said. “It was worth having us do research about sustainability even if the cost was overhead; it was the right thing to do.”

Most architecture firms have utilized green building strategies in their designs at some point, but making the extra effort to integrate them into the day-to-day design process can be a challenge. “Energy literacy is so fundamental, there shouldn’t be an architect walking around that doesn’t understand the energy of their buildings,” Hendricks said. Kirksey spends a significant amount of time and resources making sure its employees

#### ENERGY USE

- Use energy-efficient bulbs
- Use lighting controls for unoccupied space
- Turn off computers at the end of day

#### DAYLIGHT AND VIEWS

- Bring in light at highest window level possible
- Use color to reflect light
- Avoid direct sunlight shining on employees

#### SITE AND LANDSCAPING

- Plant native species
- Minimize stormwater runoff
- Reduce the heat-island effect

#### WATER

- Identify and repair leaks
- Retrofit older plumbing fixtures to reduce water use
- Install low-flow and sensor-activated fixtures

#### PEST MANAGEMENT

- Inspect for pests frequently
- Keep the interior of the building clean and dry
- Use the least-toxic pesticides possible

#### TRANSPORTATION

- Make it easier for employees to walk, bicycle or jog to work
- Develop an incentive program for employees to use transportation alternatives
- Maintain vehicles adequately

#### HOUSEKEEPING

- Use non-toxic cleaning fluids
- Start a recycling program
- Use recycled-content products

#### KITCHENS

- Purchase ENERGY STAR-rated equipment and appliances
- Ensure that the dishwasher is both energy- and water-efficient
- Start a composting program

and anyone else interested understands the basicGREEN program and how other firms can use it. "We were hoping this would even create a friendly competition of who can create the most energy-efficient building," Hendricks said.

Kirksey is proud of its role in helping Houston move toward becoming one of America's greenest cities. "Houston is more green than most people think," Hendricks said. In fact, the city has completed a number of Green City Projects, including converting brownfields, partnering with Reliant Energy for electric-car-charging stations and launching the Energy Efficiency Incentive Program. *(Editor's note: For more information about Houston's green movement, visit [www.greenhouston.tx.gov](http://www.greenhouston.tx.gov).)*

Kirksey is also one of the signatories of the American Institute of Architects 2030 Commitment, which challenges architecture firms across the country to reduce the environmental impact of firm operations and develop long-term goals to design only carbon-neutral buildings by the year 2030. Kirksey has been tracking and reporting its progress. "We keep moving up our percentages, and we're on track to meet our goals," Hendricks said. "I feel really proud to be part of an industry that is focused on reducing its carbon footprint on the planet."



"We were hoping this would even create a friendly competition of who can create the most energy-efficient building."

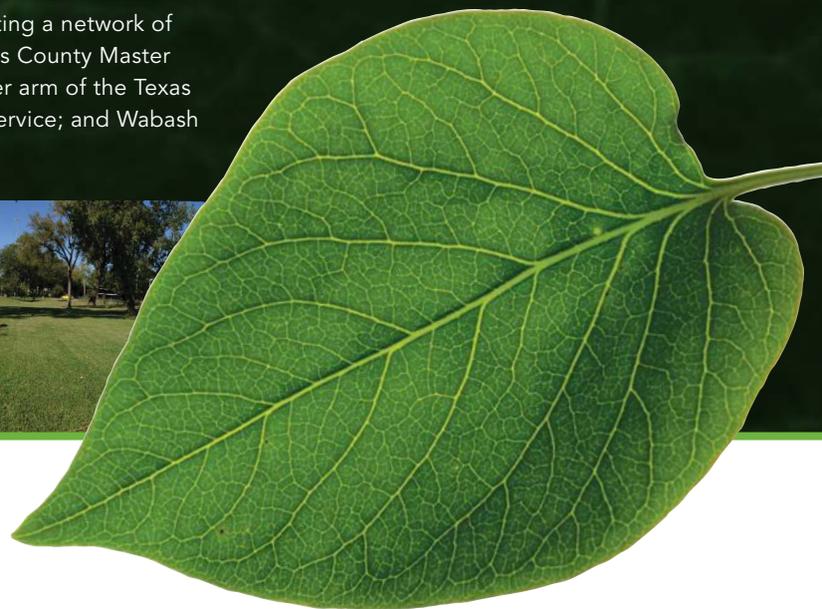
— Julie Hendricks

## Green Thumbs, Great Harvest

Growth at Kirksey Architecture isn't limited to the number of projects designed or how many employees the company has. Kirksey recently started an on-campus garden, with crops cultivated and maintained by Kirksey employees. The harvested fruits and

vegetables will be used at happy-hour events featuring quarterly lectures from Urban Harvest, a local charitable organization supporting a network of urban gardens; Harris County Master Gardeners, a volunteer arm of the Texas AgriLife Extension Service; and Wabash

Antiques & Feed Store, Houston's organic gardening headquarters.





# Animating Agri



## Texas A&M's Agriculture and Life Sciences Complex Connects the College

Before his death in 2009, Texas A&M Professor Dr. Norman Borlaug was credited with feeding the most people worldwide of any human being in history. This was accomplished through his research in plant pathology and genetics, which dramatically increased wheat yields in many countries, including Mexico, India and Pakistan. Borlaug — a recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize, the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the Congressional Gold Medal — set the standard for agricultural research, and his legacy lives on at Texas A&M, one of the most prestigious agricultural universities in the country.

Despite its distinguished reputation, for years, the individual departments of Texas A&M's College of Agriculture and Life Science, including the outreach institute that bears Dr. Borlaug's name, were spread across several campuses and multiple buildings. This prevented valuable opportunities for collaboration between students, faculty members and staff members. To solve this problem, Texas A&M worked with Kirksey Architecture to create a flagship facility that unites the university's agriculture program and honors the connection between agriculture, the life sciences and the environment.



The scope of work included office facilities to house academic departments, multiple classrooms and a visitor center to "showcase

agriculture's past, present [and] future," according to Ralph Davila, agriculture facilities manager at Texas A&M. Initial thoughts were to establish a single building to serve these multiple functions, but Kirksey's design process presented another solution. The final design spans 6.5 acres with three buildings totaling 262,000 square feet.

"We started designing it and realized, instead of one building, it would be more beneficial to create a complex of buildings with vibrant outdoor space for interacting," said Wes Good, managing principal of Kirksey. The complex offers visitors a chance to gather and see

# culture



## and Educates Through Architecture

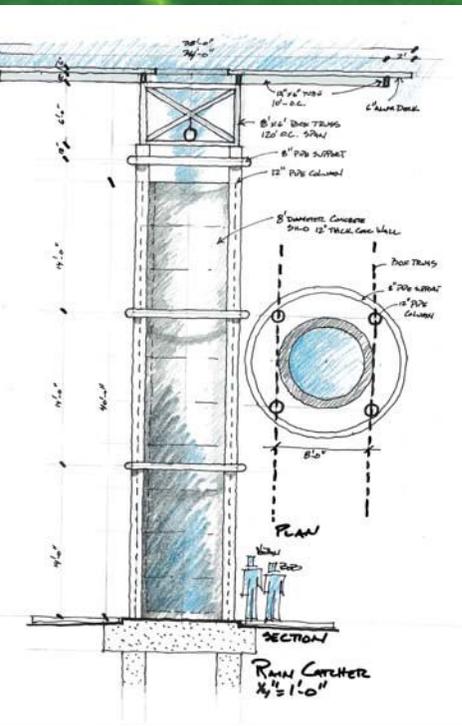
elements of agriculture at work. Connecting the buildings is a two-story rain-harvesting canopy whose supports incorporate four 9,000-gallon water cisterns. Rainwater collected in the cisterns flows into a 40,000-gallon underground tank, which is used to irrigate the complex's landscaping. The rain-harvesting canopy, inspired by the forms of grain elevators and conveyors found on farms, displays to visitors Texas A&M's dedication to the environment, and it also creates a place for impromptu gatherings and socialization. "It has a back-porch feel to it," Good said. "We felt this would be a great way to celebrate rainwater and its importance to agriculture."



Good articulated the value of educating the public about agriculture and its importance through the building's design. "Most people think of agriculture as cows,



crops and barns; at Texas A&M, it's about the science." He recalled speaking with Borlaug's staff during the design phase about his engineering of wheat that requires less water, yielding more successful crops in countries prone to draught. "We had the opportunity to talk with them and learn the significance of agriculture. Most people take for granted the food that we eat and its availability — they



Reinforcing the connection between agriculture and the environment, Kirksey incorporated multiple sustainable elements in the final design. In addition to the rain-harvesting canopy and cisterns, Kirksey created a bioswale adjacent to the parking lot that filters stormwater runoff and prevents the spread of contaminants into local receiving waters like adjacent White Creek.



don't realize that only recently has agricultural research increased crop yields to the point where the world's population can be fed. Texas A&M is one of the best in the country for agriculture education."



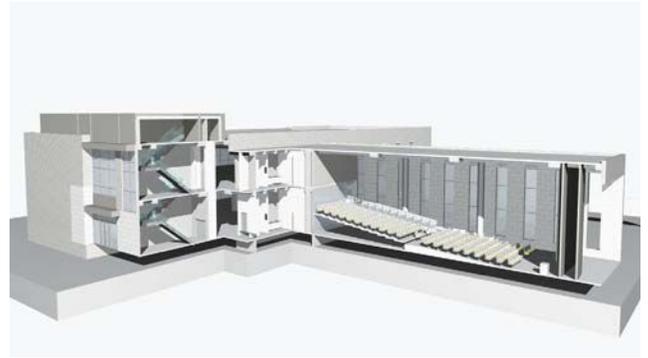
Another element designed to educate visitors is the AgriLife Visitor Center. This dramatic multipurpose space offers Texas A&M the flexibility to rotate agriculture exhibits, conduct lectures and meetings, and display student and faculty work. The Visitor Center is enclosed by patterned glass featuring

 **"We've had so many lectures and dinners in the AgriLife Center, and it has really provided a gathering space that we've never had before."**

— Cady Auckerman

agricultural elements such as wheat stalks, intended to create the illusion of being outdoors while learning about agriculture. "We've had so many lectures and dinners in the AgriLife Center, and it has really provided a gathering space that we've never had before," said Cady Auckerman, chief of staff in the Office of the Vice Chancellor and dean for agriculture and life sciences at Texas A&M. "That was something that we wanted, and it exceeded our expectations."

Reinforcing the connection between agriculture and the environment, Kirksey incorporated multiple sustainable elements in the final design. In addition to the rain-harvesting canopy and cisterns, Kirksey created a bioswale adjacent to



the parking lot that filters stormwater runoff and prevents the spread of contaminants into local receiving waters like adjacent White Creek. The complex will also use 42 percent less water indoors compared to other new buildings. Kirksey designed the buildings with high-performance lighting to reduce lighting power use by as much as 25 percent compared to standard lighting. Kirksey is currently pursuing LEED certification for the complex.

Kirksey paid great attention to detail throughout the project, including elements such as local brick and limestone on the façade and granite floors and conference tables inside. "People have actually come in and analyzed the granite and the wheat on the glass in the Visitor's Center because they're agriculture people," said Darrell Whatley, a project manager with Kirksey. "It has been great to see them interact with the building and have fun with it." These details allow users to enjoy the space on a deeper level. "That was something Kirksey did a great job of — capturing the agricultural elements," Auckerman added. "A lot of the touches are reminiscent of barn wood, natural stone and captured light, and it speaks to what we do in agriculture."

While the finished product offers a seamless, integrated agriculture complex, one of the greatest challenges for Kirksey was determining how to satisfy the needs of all the departments involved. "The 14 different departments of agriculture that were spread across the campus all had different opinions," Good pointed out. "We listened and showed them how they could work more efficiently together in one facility. We worked hard to provide them a variety of spaces that more people shared."

Consolidating has made department collaboration easier, according to Auckerman. "It used to mean a half-hour drive across town, and now, it's a two-minute walk. Kirksey did a great job of listening to all of our many users and assembling that into these sets of buildings to make sure it met the different needs of our faculty and staff."

The success of the project was the result of a strong collaboration between the University and Kirksey, according to Good. "They're very happy with the facility and were great to work with," he said. "Great projects are usually an indication of great clients."

The College of Agriculture and Life Sciences is happy to see the success this project has become for students, faculty, and staff, as well as the relationships it has fostered with the Texas A&M community. "Basically, we brought together [14] locations from across two different cities into one complex of buildings," Auckerman said. "We're a family, and it has provided us a home on one campus."

# AIA Ben Brewer Young Architect Award Winners

by Deanna Strange



NICOLA SPRINGER

BRIAN MALARKEY

WES GOOD

JULIE HENDRICKS

## Kirksey Leads Houston with Four Dynamic Professionals

In the professional world, those who win awards and honors tend to be more seasoned, with many years of experience doing what they do. However, young professionals, particularly architects, are emerging as the future leaders of this country, and Kirksey has the honor of being home to four of these up-and-comers. Wes Good, Brian Malarkey, Nicola Springer and Julie Hendricks have all received the AIA Ben Brewer Young Architect Award in the past 12 years and have gone on to great achievements at Kirksey and in the community.

### FOSTERING GROWTH

While the Young Architect Award is given to individuals, it also highlights companies that employ these ambitious young leaders. It's not incidental that Kirksey boasts four Young Architect Award winners. The company encourages and supports community and organizational involvement and allows employees to passionately explore new ideas. Older, more-experienced architects mentor and guide young up-and-coming talent, and the exchange of ideas and visions flows freely.

Malarkey esteemed Kirksey for its willingness to push its employees and encourages his younger peers to begin documenting their accomplishments so they can have this opportunity. "The fact that we have four [Young Architect Award winners] really speaks to the idea that Kirksey nurtures employees," he stated. "We allow people to spread their wings and explore their interests above and beyond what they do every day."



## Wes Good, Managing Principal | 2001 Winner

As the first recipient from Kirksey of this prestigious award, Wes Good paved the way for his colleagues. "I would say I'm the least impressive," he joked. In fact, Good participated in various outside organizations; started the Collegiate Education Team at Kirksey, which he still leads; served as a Kirksey vice president at a young age; and worked on several award-winning design projects.

Good commended the Young Architect Award for the opportunities it creates for young people, especially those at Kirksey. "[Springer, Malarkey and Hendricks] have all gone on to be rock stars in the office and the community," he said.

"The award is paramount to giving people something to achieve at a young age. It's really focused on the young people, and I think it's valuable and important to do that. Those awards have garnered so much recognition for our firm — that's really the award."



## Brian Malarkey, Executive Vice President | 2004 Winner

The last few years in Houston have seen a massive growth in the green movement, and Brian Malarkey has been a leader in the movement since his term as the AIA Houston Chapter president. Prior to winning the Young Architect Award, Malarkey chaired AIA committees, influenced several green initiatives in Houston, designed the first LEED-certified building in Houston and won various individual and design awards with Kirksey.

"Receiving the Young Architect award was a steppingstone professionally that influenced my nomination for AIA Houston president, my pursuit of the AIA National Young Architect Award and my fellowship." Malarkey's influential leadership

in the national green building community and his forward-thinking methodology continues to have a significant positive impact within the architecture industry. "It's an honor to be selected and called out as a leader," he said.



## Nicola Springer, Vice President | 2009 Winner

While design ability is important to an architect, the Young Architect Award requires that and more. Nicola Springer has been involved in the AIA for many years, she offered the consistency of her position at Kirksey and numerous praises from clients, and she has a talent for architecture that goes beyond design. "My particular portfolio had a lot of hand drawings in it, as well as construction drawings; I showed that I was adapted to various levels of the profession," Springer said.

This award has been a complement to her résumé and a boost to Kirksey. "Since I've become a Young Architect, I became a team leader and a vice president," she pointed out. "The most important thing is I have Kirksey to thank for

being able to win an award like this. They had the confidence in me to get me out there in front of clients and consultants. It wasn't just an award for me but for Kirksey as well."



## Julie Hendricks, Director of EcoServices | 2012 Winner

Before Julie Hendricks received her nomination for the Young Architect Award, Malarkey played a role in pushing her toward it. "I told Julie she needed to be thinking about this because she's such a phenomenal employee and person, a passionate advocate for sustainability and a serial volunteer," he said. "It just seemed inevitable that she would receive the award."

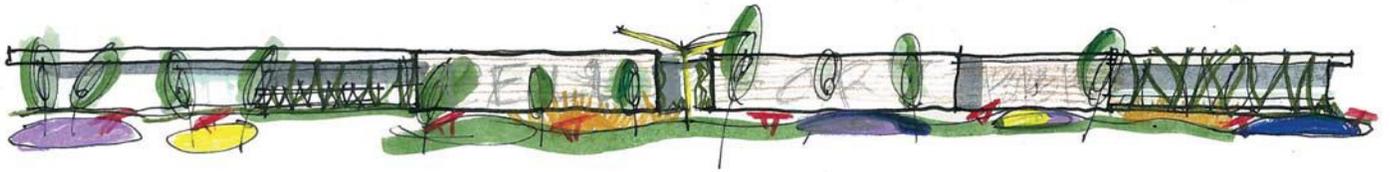
Hendricks laughed, "Brian Malarkey made me do it." She also credited her Kirksey graphics team for creating a beautiful portfolio. Hendricks' portfolio and accomplishments speak for themselves. She said, "My portfolio is filled with

sustainability information, but I did include one project that wasn't. The judges said, 'Thank goodness. We didn't know you could do other architectural projects.'"

She sets the standard for future Young Architect Award winners through her efforts in her community and profession, volunteering for multiple organizations, serving the local and state board of the USGBC, writing educational articles and publications on sustainability, and advocating for legislative issues. Like her predecessors, Julie Hendricks is a name to remember. In terms of receiving the award, she said, "There is just no way it can't be a good thing."

# Creating an Oasis of Learning

by Michael Adkins



## Houston Independent School District's Bellfort Early Childhood Center



As the largest school district in Texas and the seventh-largest in the United States, the Houston Independent School District recognizes how meaningful the years of early childhood are in the development of its students. For the 2004 HISD Bond, Kirksey helped develop the design and standards for its early childhood centers. In 2007, pre-kindergarten classrooms were incorporated into 20 new elementary schools. Due to space constraints in the design of its new elementary school, Bellfort Early Childhood Center became a renovation project. Kirksey Architecture was entrusted with the task of transforming a 50-year-old former medical office building on Bellfort Street in Houston into an environment where pre-kindergarten and kindergarten students could thrive.



AIA Houston  
2012 DESIGN AWARDS  
**WINNER**  
Renovation/Restoration

Nicola Springer served as project manager for the endeavor. Work on the project's design began in the summer of 2009, and members of the school's faculty and staff began moving into the completed BECC in September 2011.

The original 44,000-square foot structure was in rough shape, as Springer recalled. One of the goals for the project was to make the building a warmer, more welcoming place for children. "We wanted to take away the institutional feeling of the site and make it more like a place for kids — but we didn't want to oversimplify that concept," Springer noted. "A lot of times, architects designing places for little kids just use bright colors and call it done. We wanted to do more."

One teacher's comments at a visioning session hosted by Kirksey — referring to the school as an "oasis" of learning — helped shape the final design of BECC, along with the school's

status as home of the Bumble Bees. BECC also takes inspiration from the German word *kindergarten* — literally, "children's garden" — with each garden, or classroom, serving as a place where the little Bumble Bees can feel safe and learn to work together with their classmates. "The school's color scheme reflects the change in the day from dawn until dusk," Springer mused. "Subtle blues give way to warm yellows and oranges as you transition from east to west. Also, a different color is assigned to each corridor, and each corridor is assigned its own shape." This color- and shape-based structure assists the students with wayfinding.

There was an emphasis on creating areas of interest at a height of 4 feet, making things accessible to the small children. The hallways incorporate graphics, textures, mirrors, whiteboards and magnetic boards with which students can interact.

**"A lot of times, architects designing places for little kids just use bright colors and call it done. We wanted to do more."**

— Nicola Springer

The building's exterior porches were re-imagined as outdoor classrooms featuring decorative screens. Property-line chain-link fencing was removed to give more green space back to the site, where more than 30 trees were planted. The team added exterior windows to improve daylighting and provide the students with views of the outdoors. Finally, the alleyway between the two sections of the school was converted to an urban courtyard.

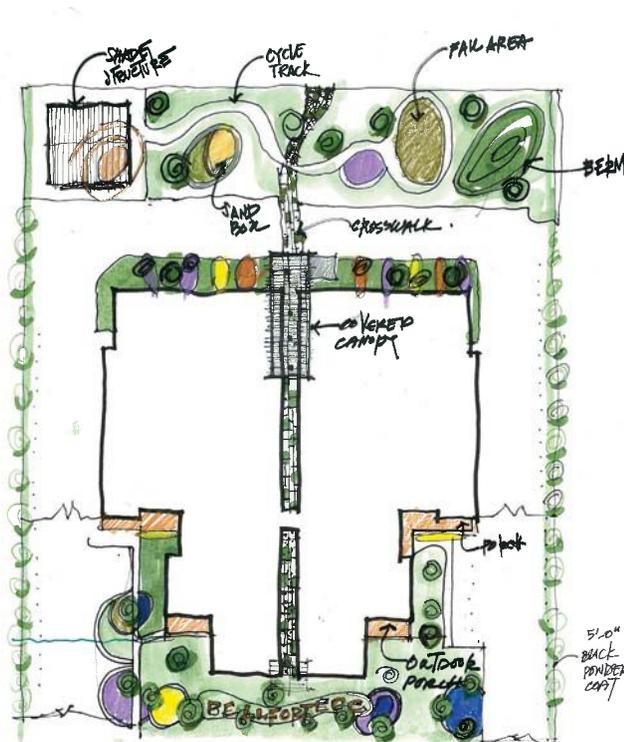
“Where many architects would have only seen a languishing site with an aging structure, Kirksey’s design team saw possibilities for what BECC could — and has since — become.”

– Nicola Springer

Springer cited the courtyard as one of her favorite parts of the school’s transformation. “Taking that blighted space and turning it into such an integral part of the school really stands out in my mind,” she said.

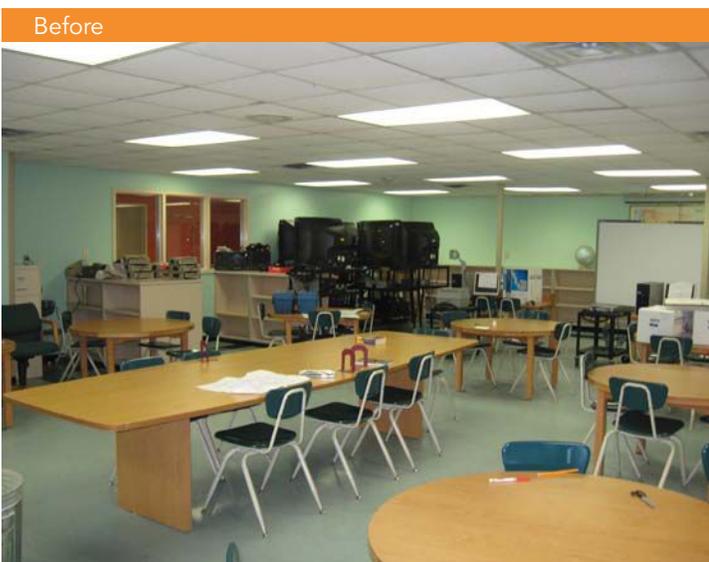
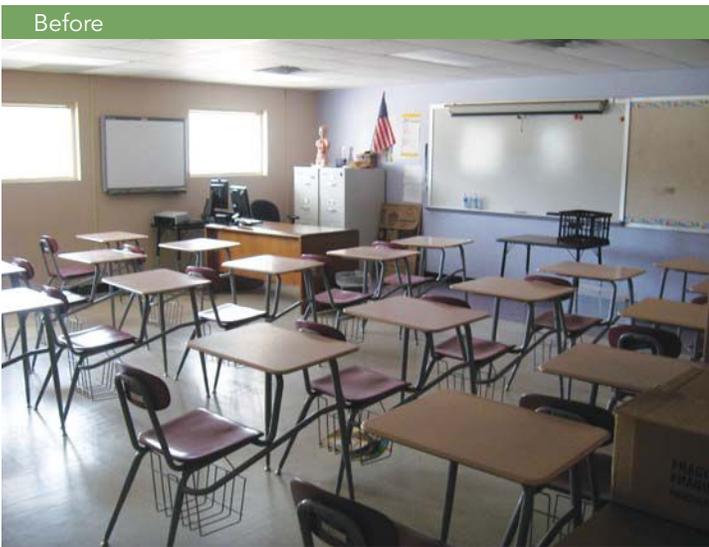
BECC stands out in others’ minds as well — which is part of the reason the project won an American Institute of Architects Houston Design Award for Renovation in March 2012. The judges praised the Kirksey team for “creating a child-friendly and energized space that was sophisticated and not cartoony.” Springer stated, “We worked hard to do that, and for them to observe that was much appreciated.

“Where many architects would have only seen a languishing site with an aging structure, Kirksey’s design team saw possibilities for what BECC could — and has since — become,” Springer said. “We thought of it as a challenge that we wanted to make the most of. That’s what we do at Kirksey. We’re not just going to do the simplest thing. We think of the long-term outcomes of our projects. We’re always looking for innovative, long-term solutions for the benefit of our end-users.”



“We thought of it as a challenge that we wanted to make the most of. That’s what we do at Kirksey. We’re not just going to do the simplest thing.”

– Nicola Springer



# A HOME AWAY FROM



Before



After

# HOME

by Erin Pinkerton

## BALANCING HOSPITALITY AND SAFETY IN A MENTAL HEALTH HOSPITAL

Mental illness affects one in five people but, despite its frequency, still carries a social stigma. The Menninger Clinic – a mental health hospital in Houston, Texas, that treats patients with severe mood, personality, anxiety and addictive disorders – works to erase that stigma by educating the community and helping its patients in a residential facility.

In 2003, The Menninger Clinic moved to Houston after 78 years in Topeka, Kansas. The clinic could not find a desirable location right away, so it leased a hospital built in the 1980s. A few years later, the clinic decided to build a new facility that would include research and community education buildings, and Kirksey Architecture was there to help.

### Creating a Residential Feel

The clinic wanted to build a facility that felt like home, not a sterile medical facility. The first phase of the campus development included the Commons Building for both administrative staff and patient use and three patient buildings to provide patients a home away from home. Creating a residential feel was important to the clinic's goals and consistent with its treatment methods.

"We incorporate the campus into the treatment," said Ian Aitken, president and CEO of The Menninger Clinic. "It is important that there is a natural setting that is restorative and healing for people who come here." Creating a residential feel is also important because patients stay at the Menninger Clinic for six to eight weeks while most other mental health facilities house patients for only a few days.

David McLemore, executive vice president and Healthcare Team leader at Kirksey, said, "They felt so strongly about maintaining that at-home, residential feel that they decided to utilize a lot more land to keep the patient buildings at one story." Single-story buildings distinguish the clinic from other mental health facilities set in multi-story buildings surrounded by large health care complexes. "We wanted a hospital that felt like it was person-sized," Aitken explained. "We did not want some monolithic structure that was going to intimidate people when they got out of the car to come in for admission."

### Site and Budget Challenges

"One of the first challenges was the site itself," said Larry Denoyer, vice president of facilities and property management at The Menninger Clinic. "It is a 47-and-a-half-acre site. It was flat. There was not a tree onsite that was usable." The site had never been developed, according to Avian Caruso, senior associate and project manager at Kirksey, who looked through 50 years of aerial photographs of the site. The site had been used as an excess soil repository during the renovation of U.S. 90.



After creating a large detention pond, hauling dirt from the site and creating a 15-foot hill to buffer the campus from the noise of the neighboring shopping center, The Menninger Clinic used the rest of its extensive landscaping budget to plant more than 1,000 trees and add walkways with canopies, gathering places and park benches. "The interesting thing about the site is that it was essentially dead level, and when we finished the project, we had berms and beautiful rolling hills," Caruso said. "It was quite a change in the natural landscape."

### Wrightian Architecture with a Twist

The design for the clinic needed to fit within a budget, be consistent and make the campus feel like home. To achieve this goal, Kirksey and The Menninger Clinic adapted Frank Lloyd Wright's prairie-style architecture. McLemore explained, "The idea was not to just copycat some particular building or campus but to look at certain recognizable elements of classic Wrightian design, especially residential architecture."



Like Wright's residential architecture, the clinic's design made use of horizontal lines. "Strong horizontal lines break down the scale, as opposed to strong vertical lines that make the buildings feel taller and more imposing," McLemore stated. The clinic also used earth tones in its interior design to give the campus a natural and restorative feel.

Also, like Wright's residential architecture, The Menninger Clinic uses a unique iconography throughout the campus. Wright used the wheat stalk in his prairie-style architecture,

and McLemore designed iconography for the clinic based on the five founding members of the Menninger family. "I researched the whole 70-plus-year history of The Menninger Clinic and looked closely at the Menninger family involvement. ... From that, I studied a module based upon a series of geometric shapes, and I came up with what I refer to as the Founder's Icon," McLemore explained. Different variations of the iconography were used in stained-glass detailing, custom light fixtures, rugs, brick detailing and door designs to honor the Menninger family's contribution and legacy.



A photograph of a modern interior space, likely a waiting area or a small auditorium. The room features a high ceiling with a wood-paneled design and recessed lighting. The walls are also wood-paneled, and there are large windows on the right side that offer a view of a building and a green lawn. In the foreground, there is a wooden podium. In the background, a row of chairs is arranged. A colorful abstract painting is visible on the wall to the left.

“They listened. They really listened. The key to working with an architect is to get someone who is going to listen, and they did.”

— Ian Aitken,  
President and CEO,  
The Menninger Clinic



## Balancing Hospitality and Safety

Although the clinic's administrators wanted to make patients feel as comfortable as possible, The Menninger Clinic is still a mental health hospital that requires safety precautions for patients who might attempt to harm themselves. "If the patient experience was one of the first drivers, the second driver was safety," Caruso said. "There is probably not a knob, door, seal or corner that had not been considered."

The property is fenced. The clinic is secured. Most places on the property with patient access are within the clinical staff's direct line of sight. But the primary safety features are in the hardware, according to Aitken. The goal of the clinic was to eliminate

ligature points and avoid lever-style hardware. The door handles are angled so nothing can be wrapped around them. Bathroom faucets and showerheads are equipped with motion sensors, and curtains are attached with tear-away fasteners and will release under minimal weight. However, the safety features do not draw attention to themselves. Caruso explained that patient rooms include a large wardrobe with doors that will fall off under too much weight, but the wardrobe is a beautiful piece of furniture that most people would enjoy having in their homes. "We took great pains to make [the safety features] feel like they were just part of the space and not stick out and make you feel like you were sequestered," Caruso explained. "They are meant to blend into the architecture."



## Listening and Leaving Fingerprints

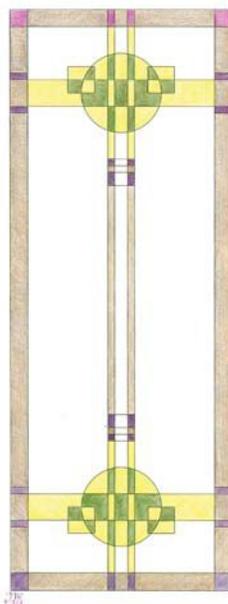
Kirksey's design professionals were able to balance comfort and safety because they listened to the clinic's administrators, staff and patients. "They came out and spent time in our hospital watching patients," Aitken said. "They spent an inordinate amount of time talking to the staff." Denoyer agreed, saying, "They listened. They really listened. The key to working with an architect is to get someone who is going to listen, and they did."

Of course, Kirksey also added its own creativity and expertise to the project. The collaborative effort made this project a success. "What made Kirksey a great partner for us was



that they had the vision. We had a vision together about what could this hospital look like, what should this hospital look like," Aitken said. "It's not every day that you can agree on using 100-year-old architecture." The clinic's twist on Wrightian architecture, with its unique designs and original iconography, will remind patients and visitors of The Menninger Clinic's past and future, along with the clinic's partnership with Kirksey. Denoyer said of Kirksey's contribution, "Their fingerprints are all over this place."

*In its early design stage, a custom door featuring the Founder's Icon, designed by David McLemore, AIA, Kirksey's Healthcare Team leader*





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