



Gwathmey Siegel Rewrites Library Rules
Morris Lapidus: Cool Again
How Firms Change to Beat Competitors

A Firm of Many Visions

Divergent projects can come from the same architectural office. Scogin Elam and Bray have designed two in Atlanta, a spa and an art gallery, with dramatically different results.

The architectural projects of Scogin Elam and Bray capture Atlanta's spirited duality: like the city, they are serious and at the same time exuberant; their buildings and interiors mark the landscape in a signatory way.

Mack Scogin, Merrill Elam, and Lloyd Bray, who founded a joint practice in 1984, seek additional meaning in each project by thoughtfully setting buildings in tune with place, client, and use. A freedom of invention and joy in exploration often marks their work, a kind of playfulness in the highest sense. "We are always looking for cues that set a project apart," says Elam. "We think that it is very difficult, that there are no formulas, that every place in every sense is unique."

Ordinary objects, reconsidered and redeployed, linger in the imagination from earlier projects—a satellite dish converted into a symbolic chandelier or full-height telephone poles used as sculptural anchors for a residential deck. Some gestures (mottled metal walls, curvilinear canopies) can seem zany at first blush; others, such as the High Museum at Georgia Pacific Center, eminently restrained. All explore the genius of materials—texture, heft, or shine.

While whole architectural projects dominate the firm's roster of works-in-progress, two recent interiors in Atlanta illustrate directions in their contemporary work. One, a commercial day spa, creates the illusion of amplitude in a confined place, enriching an otherwise banal space with an ambiguous quality. The second, a museum gallery, perches lightly within a Beaux-Arts Neoclassical hall, deferring to the existing architecture and a collection of African-American art. Both projects had extremely limited space and budgets.

The following renovations, while small-scale and divergent, demonstrate the transformative power of a second, hard look at interior space. *Robert Ivy*

An Architectural Plan That "Uplifts" the Art

A treasury of African-American art fills the gallery at Clark Atlanta University with color and life. The single, expansive space, originally designed by New York architect James Gamble Rogers in 1931 as a library reading room, has been pared down and spruced up. The architects' respect for the original space shows in the details: new double-glazed windows by a local craftsman replicate the originals; new hardwood floors shine underfoot. Large murals in an adjoining vestibule by artist Hale Woodruff have been restored.

Director Tina Dunkley worked for a decade in the hope of seeing a new gallery. She says the architectural work "uplifts the art we possess." A single intervention, an overscaled steel trellis, provides a framework for the collection. Walls and lighting tracks are flexible, able to shift for subsequent shows. The whole trellis, while grand as the space, steps off the walls, creating expansive vistas from one end of the space to the other. A gift shop inserted into the larger space intrudes only slightly and will be replaced in a subsequent phase.

Credits

*Clark Atlanta University Art Gallery
Atlanta, Georgia*

Architect: Scogin Elam and Bray Architects, Inc.—Mack Scogin, Merrill Elam and Lloyd Bray with Martha Henderson Bennett, Carlos Tardio, Elizabeth Morris, Denise Dumais, Jeff Atwood, and Kathy Wright

Engineers: Uzun & Case (structural); Newcomb and Boyd (mechanical/electrical); Ramon Luminance Design (lighting)

General Contractor: The Flagler Company



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