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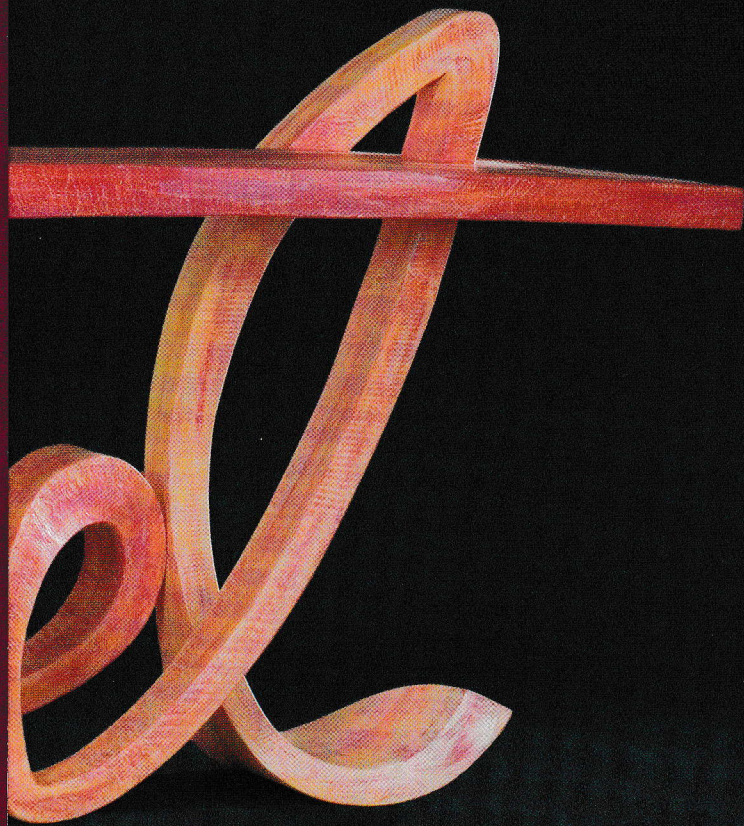
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# Making the New MADhouse

STORY BY  
Shonquis Moreno

What you see is what you get. The choice to commission Allied Works Architecture to gut renovate the controversial and elegantly odd Huntington Hartford building at 2 Columbus Circle in Manhattan reflected the Museum of Arts & Design's long-standing criteria for selecting all of its artists and designers: Allied was chosen, in part, because they were emerging, not yet made men. The façade the firm designed is as much a work of craftsmanship as many of the objects in the museum's permanent collection, of which the building's design will finally allow permanent display after half a century in storage. In fact, a number of architectural elements echo the values and goals of the museum, which centers on three-dimensional objects handmade through an alliance of art and industry. The architect's choice to pay close attention to material and process—in effect, creating a building that is a vast crafted object—suited MAD perfectly.

“The design relates to the museum's program through the use of clay, tiles, glaze, concrete and light,” says Allied Principal Brad Cloepfil. “It's inspired by a culture of making, a commitment to craft that is the essence of the curatorial mission of the museum. By addressing the materials and construction in a direct way, we were able to amplify the visceral and experiential qualities of the building.”

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*“The design is inspired by a culture of making, a commitment to craft that is the essence of the curatorial spirit of the museum.”—Brad Cloepfil*

This mission will be extravagantly on display in the museum's inaugural exhibition in late September, curated by Lowry Sims and David McFadden and titled "Second Lives: Remixing the Ordinary." Forty artists from 17 countries have used ordinary, discarded objects as their raw materials, for example, making a cocktail gown from dishwashing gloves (Susie MacMurray), a necklace from gun triggers (Boris Bally), a chandelier from hypodermic needles (Andy Diaz Hope and Laurel Roth), tapestries from liquor bottle foil (El Anatsui) and a portrait from black plastic combs (Sonya Clark).

The architects, meanwhile, essentially had their own discarded object with which to explore this materials and process fetish. The building, originally designed by Edward Durrell Stone in 1964 for A&P scion Huntington Hartford to house his art collection, had for various reasons sat vacant on and off for much of its existence after Hartford made a gift of it to Fairleigh Dickinson University in 1969. Originally called the Gallery of Modern Art, the building featured a convention-flouting white façade cut into vast Italianate lollipop shapes and was closely associated with Hartford's notoriously decadent lifestyle. Cutting through the existing concrete shell to selectively expose the building's structure and open it up to natural light and views that had been hidden since the structure's beginnings, Allied's vertical incisions thread like ribbons from the elevator well on each story, over the floor and then up and across the wall, forming sliver-like, carefully edited vignettes of the city. Visitors to the sixth-floor education areas, for example, will come eye-to-eye with Christopher Columbus atop Columbus Circle's central fountain. Upon reaching the ninth-floor restaurant, the building finally shares its remarkable take on Central Park with sweeping views rarely seen in any public building in the city.

The architects also created their own remarkable materials and finishes, giving the ribbons of glass a dense translucent ceramic frit and wrapping the main stair in a veil of quarter-inch stainless steel cables—a jewelry-like element that will lead to a second-floor space hosting the country's first dedicated contemporary jewelry gallery.

Most striking, however, was the choice to create a terra-cotta cladding glazed with

a custom color, the face of which transforms ambient city light, drawing it onto the building like paint to a canvas, and then reflecting it back onto the street. One of the few freestanding buildings in New York, 2 Columbus Circle offered the designers a rare opportunity to work with a city building that receives light on every side. Deliberately seeking a material in character with the museum and the nature of craft, the architects realized a clay tile would allow them to apply a glaze that would affect the viewer's perception of the building.

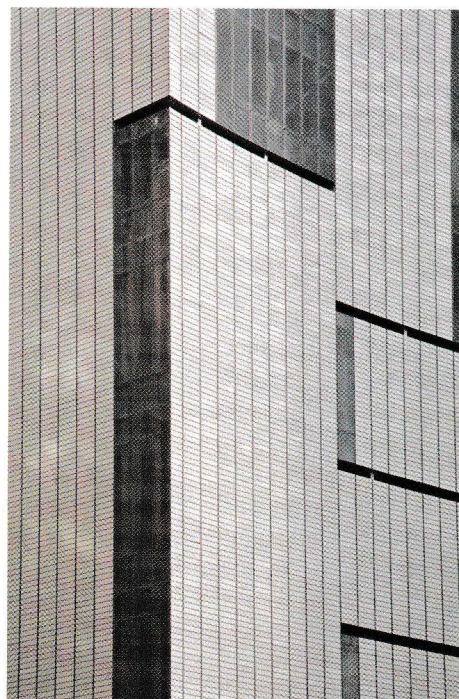
"On the façade, we wanted to create a relatively unified body that would be somewhat calm in its presence but capable of changing with movement, time of day and time of year," says Allied partner and project lead Kyle Lommen. "We were interested in the opalescent, iridescent, nacreous qualities of the glaze, which is neutral but in certain light comes alive with incredible color, with pinks and oranges." Over a year, the team worked with artist Christine Jetten in the Netherlands to produce hundreds of recipes for the glaze, from white to dark browns and golds, testing each on three-by-three-inch chips. The recipe they chose, however, proved extremely volatile. While firing the glaze, they had to carefully control the temperature of the kilns. In kilns normally used to fire roof tiles, the Dutch ceramics company Royal Tichelaar Makkum built a matrix of cells so that each thirty-by-six-inch tile had its own microenvironment inside the kiln. Each was bathed in glaze on a conveyor belt and then placed by hand into its cell. In the end, 22,000 tiles were produced and hung from a frame on the building's face while over 2,000 replacements were put into storage to await their tours of duty.

"In bright sunlight only parts of the building light up," explains Lommen. "Some of the most shimmering qualities of the façade appear on an overcast day when the light bounces all around." Indeed, at different times and from different vantage points, the building looks buttery, armored in pewter or fulgent as an oil slick. Now, 2 Columbus Circle may just be a dark city's silver lining, the best reason for New Yorkers to wish for rain. ♦

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Above: MAD's new design allows the look of the building to change with the weather. "On overcast days the whole building shimmers," says Kyle Lommen.

Below: Among works by 40 artists in MAD's inaugural exhibition is Susie MacMurray's *A Mixture of Frailties*, 2004, made from latex dishwashing gloves.

Opposite: The new home of the Museum of Arts & Design at 2 Columbus Circle is one of the few freestanding buildings in New York. This unique characteristic offered the architects the rare New York opportunity to work on a building that receives light on every side.

