

WHEN OLD MEETS NEW

BY MICHELE MEYER

To create *Haus im Haus* — a brand-new structure suspended inside the nearly 200-year-old Hamburg Chamber of Commerce building — Behnisch Architekten had to seamlessly merge the classical with the contemporary. It earned the 2008 IIDA Best of Competition award in the process.

PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED BY TAYLOR & COMPANY





If you've ever eyed a miniature ship frozen in a narrow-necked bottle, you've probably wondered: How did they do that?

Meet more wonder: *Haus im Haus* ("House Within a House"), which Stuttgart, Germany-based Behnisch Architekten created for Hamburg, Germany's Chamber of Commerce. The 15,000-square-foot, five-story steel and glass box – inserted inside the Neoclassical Chamber of Commerce building dating back to 1814 – serves as a meeting point for Hamburg's business world.

As they viewed slides of hundreds of entrants, the four judges in IIDA's 35th Annual Interior Design Competition were inspired by the innovative work. "When this project's photographs came on screen, there was sort of a gasp from the judges," says competition judge Mark Harbick, IIDA, AIA, Vice President/Director of Design at New York's Huntsman Architectural Group. "We repeated those slides several times. Everyone was enthralled."

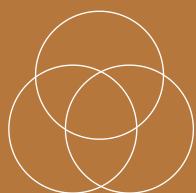
Using aluminum screens and LED lights, the simple design is highly versatile, and includes meeting areas, a social club, private dining suites, an exhibit space, a rooftop café and the world's oldest economics library. "Considering the Old World exterior, this could've been overwrought," Harbick says. "Yet even with so much going on, the [designers] distilled the final solution down to its essence."



The 15,000-square-foot, five-story steel and glass structure was constructed elsewhere, broken down and then reconstructed on-site. Stairs and a footbridge connect the new structure to the original building.



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He and his fellow judges awarded the design the IIDA 2008 Best of Competition, announced at IIDA's COOL 2008 gala held in June during NeoCon in Chicago.

A CONTRAST IN BEAUTY

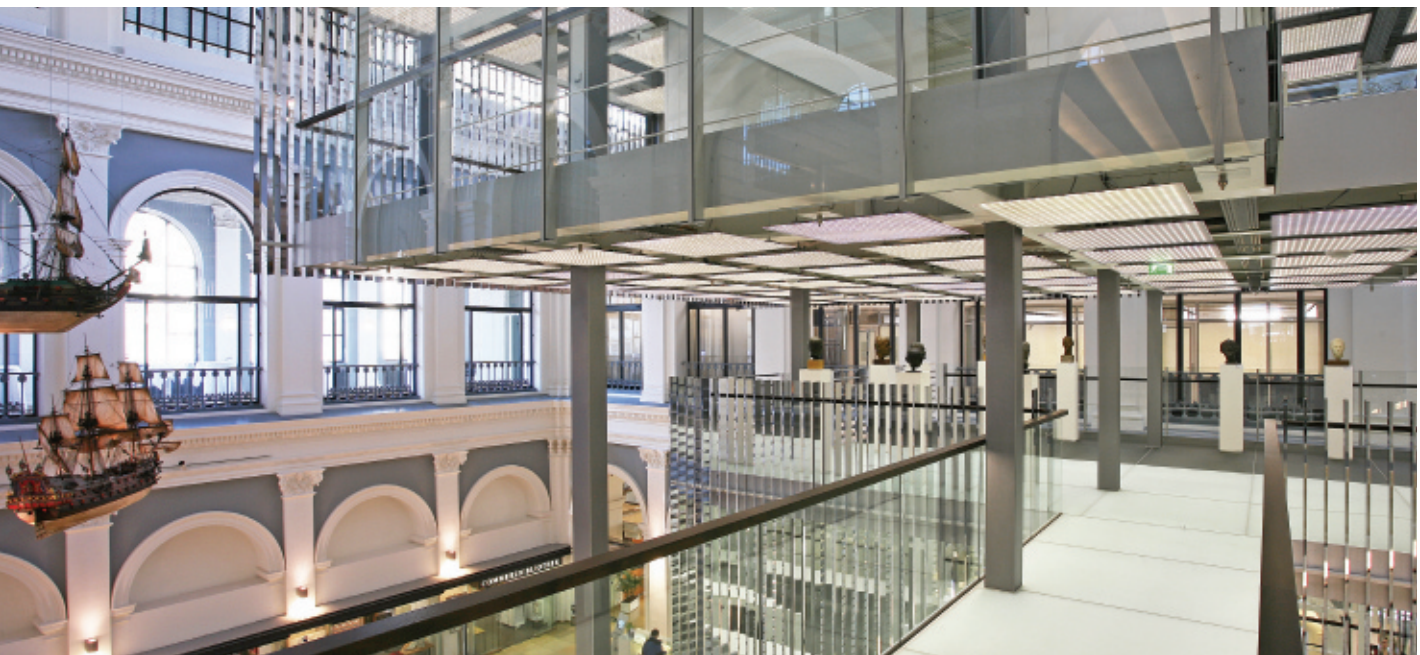
Inserting a new structure inside a centuries-old frame was no simple accomplishment. "We couldn't use any pieces or equipment that wouldn't fit through the double doors," says Stefan Behnisch, Founding Partner and Principal at Behnisch Architekten.

Adds competition judge Bill Grant, President and Creative Director for brand and product development firm Grant Design Collaborative in Canton, Ga., "There was no other project like it. It was an amazing engineering feat to construct this within a historic building. The process appeared to be fraught with complexities, yet the finished product has simple elegance. Design, engineering and sustainability came together flawlessly."

As crucial as protecting the chamber's history was, enabling it to remain open during three years of construction was just as important. Thus, Behnisch Architekten created their *Haus im Haus* elsewhere, broke it down, then reconstructed it on-site. "We also had to drive through the new pile foundation without touching the building," Behnisch says.

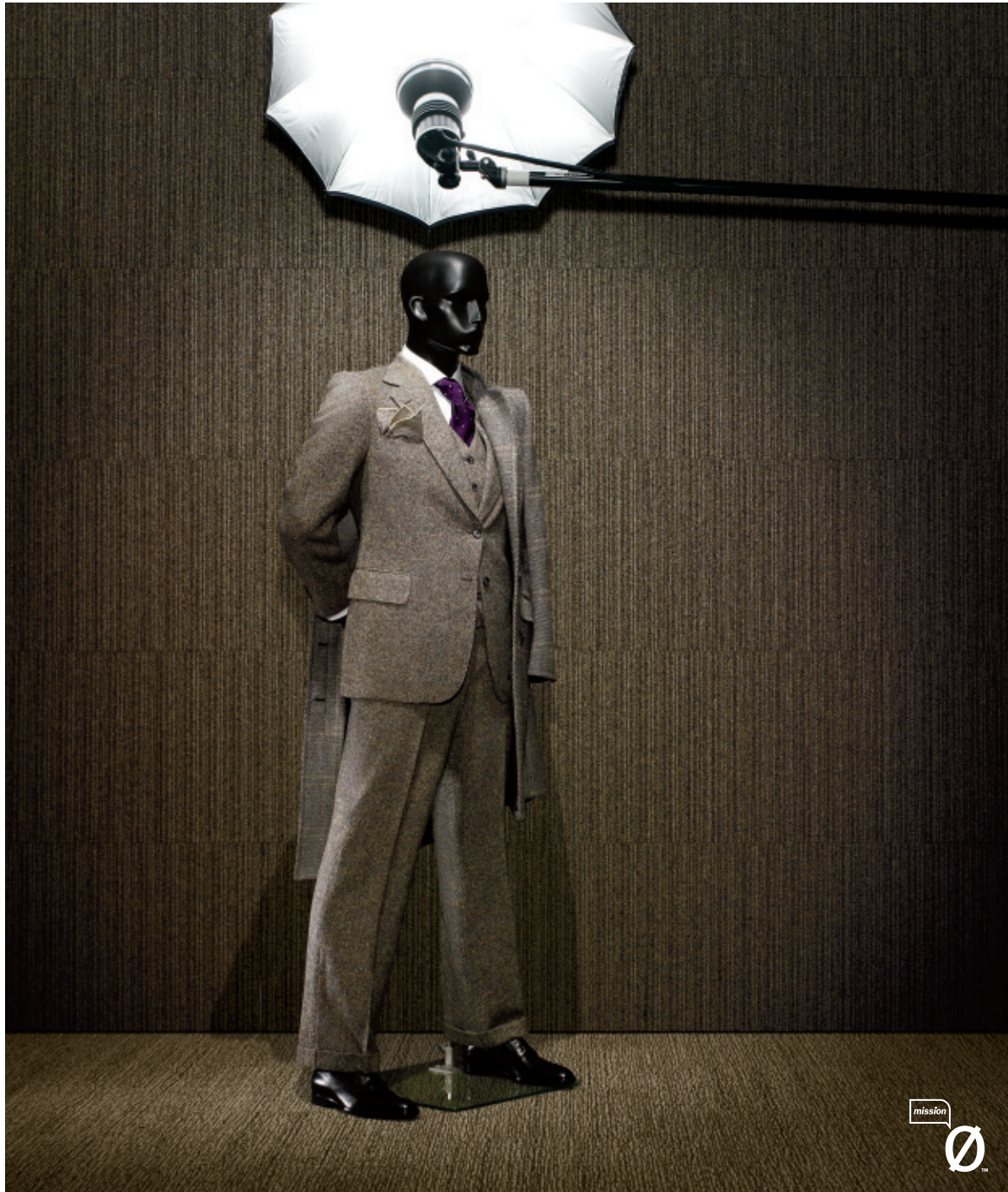
Through it all, the firm sought to contrast old and new. "The structures are totally different materials, languages," he says. "The original is stone and wood, while our materials – glass floors, louver walls, shimmering surfaces – seem to vanish. The lush Neoclassical hall remains visible."

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STANDING THE TEST OF TIME



PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED BY PKSB ARCHITECTS P.C.

When designing the Williamsburg Community Center, PKSB Architects created open areas with glass blocks, metal screens and translucent panels to show that “everybody participates in all activities.”



IIDA’s Interior Design Competition, from which the Best of Competition is named, is now in its 35th year. The awards program honors outstanding Interior Design in the corporate, education/institutional, healthcare, hospitality, government, residential and retail sectors. But how do former winning designs measure up years after the fact? For the 2003 Best of Competition winner — a community center adjacent to low-income housing in Brooklyn, New York’s now fashionable Williamsburg neighborhood — the short answer is, “Very well.”

The Williamsburg Community Center is “one of the best buildings we’ve done,” says Henry Stolzman, FAIA, Principal and Senior Partner at New York’s PKSB Architects, which designed the facility.

Like the most recent 2008 winner, the 2003 winning project emphasizes sustainability, visibility and versatility. Inspired by a nearby chainlink fence, PKSB used glass blocks, heavy-gauge metal screens and rice paper-like translucent panels to create open areas, including a gymnasium without walls. “Visually, we’re

saying everybody participates in all activities,” Stolzman says, noting the materials used establish separation and inclusion simultaneously.

Five years later, the design is just as functional and appropriate for the client and end-users of the space. “Its openness set a precedent that’s become more standard for community centers,” says Thomas Sneeringer, Senior Architect of Capital Projects, Office of Design at the NYC Housing Authority, owner of the community center. “The building holds up well.”

Today, it not only fits the neighborhood’s industrial style, but also serves as an anchor. The building’s transparency allows for minimal staff and maximum activities as diverse as gardening, volleyball, chess tournaments, computer training, health fairs, fashion shows, music recording and literacy classes.

That was the designer’s goal — and philosophy. “Education happens not only in classrooms, but also in corridors, in the whole building,” says Stolzman, whose firm also designs schools, luxury lofts and synagogues. “If I had my choice, I’d put chalkboards in all school hallways.”



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Behnisch painted the original building's walls and ceiling sky blue, and suspended in the air the separate, transparent edifice. He resisted filling the space, instead leaving vast airiness, making the new structure seem like a treehouse within a house. Stairs and a footbridge connect the new structure to the original building, while an open-air café on the fourth level is exposed to the original hall's ceiling. Panels of tiny LED lights create a sparkling sky.

And the lights twinkle eco-efficiently: 3-by-3 foot LED panels use 5 percent less energy than one incandescent bulb. Even more light comes through the glass grid that serves as flooring and the original building's arched windows.

True to the dance of classical and contemporary, furnishings are white yet bring Old World inside the new. "The luxurious interior speaks to a different time – old Fred Astaire movies," says competition judge Elva Rubio, Executive Vice President and Creative Director at Bruce Mau Design in Chicago. "It was playful, decorative and well-appointed, with white Chesterfield sofas, overstuffed chairs, textured wallpaper and beautiful chandeliers. The contradiction upon contradiction was delightful?"




IIDA 2008 BEST OF COMPETITION JUDGES

- **Peter Conant**, IIDA, AIA, LEED AP, Principal, Conant Architects, New York
- **Bill Grant**, President and Creative Director, Grant Design Collaborative, Canton, Ga.
- **Mark Harbick**, IIDA, AIA, Design Principal and Vice President, Huntsman Architectural Group, New York
- **Elva Rubio**, Executive Vice President and Creative Director, Bruce Mau Design, Chicago



An open-air café on the fourth level is exposed to the original hall's ceiling. Panels of tiny eco-efficient LED lights create a sparkling sky above.





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An International Showing

Along with Behnisch Architekten's *Haus im Haus* in Hamburg, Germany, named Best of Competition, the following IIDA 2008 Interior Design Competition winners span the globe:

Project: Lehrer office, Los Angeles

Firm: Lehrer Architects, Los Angeles

Project: C-42 Citroën Flagship Showroom, Paris

Firm: Manuelle Gautrand Architect, Paris

Project: Novelty Hill Januik Winery, Woodinville, Wash.

Firm: Mithun, Seattle

Project: MX Quarry Bay, Hong Kong, China

Firm: Steve Leung Designers Ltd., Hong Kong, China



The new space includes meeting areas, a social club, private dining suites, an exhibit space, a rooftop café and the world's oldest economics library.

OUTSIDE THE BOX

Best known throughout Europe, Behnisch Architekten works in public and private sectors, having built the Platinum LEED-certified Genzyme Center in Cambridge, Mass., the St. Benno grammar school in Dresden, Germany, Mill Street Lofts in Los Angeles and the Harvard Science Complex in Allston, Mass.

Credit the manner in which Behnisch Architekten seeks clients – mostly through competitions – for the

firm's inventive spirit. In fact, the firm won the \$8.2 million bid for the *Haus im Haus* project in 2003 as part of a competition with 600 other entries from Germany and The Netherlands. "You have to think outside the box and come up with surprises," Behnisch says. "If [clients] wanted obvious solutions, they'd do it themselves rather than host a competition."

Such architectural exercises spare Behnisch small talk he'd rather avoid. "I'm not a golfer or a country-club type. You're either good and win competitions, or you're wrong and lose them," he says.

Even though competitions hide the firm's name from judges, Behnisch is well connected. As the son of Günter Behnisch, who designed the 1972 Olympics stadium in Munich, Germany, "everybody expected me to become an architect, but I resisted," he says. Only after studying philosophy and economics in college did he reconsider at age 25. He opened his firm in 1989 under his father's wings, leaving the nest two years later. Today, he has a staff of more than 100 in Stuttgart, Los Angeles and Boston. "The advantages of my father's reputation exceeded any disadvantages," he says. "The name was established, and people trusted we could build a building."

So did the judges, who loved the final touch: model ships suspended from the original ceiling. "It was so apropos," Grant says, likening the project to a ship in a bottle. "It's a project that made us say, 'Wow, we wish we'd done that' – not that we could." 