

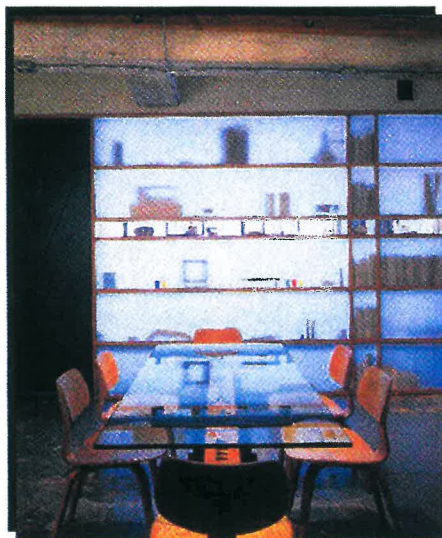
HOME TURF

For many architects, the studio is a canvas on which to announce the philosophy and personality of one's firm.

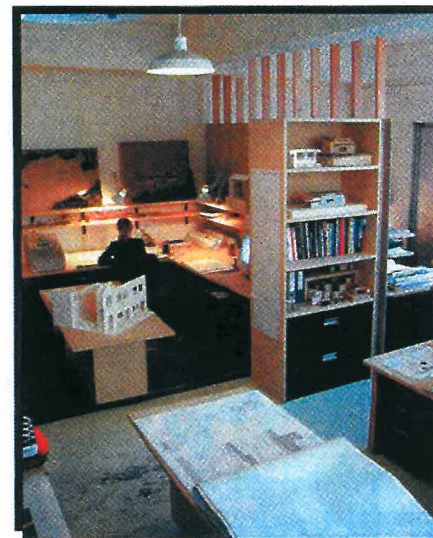
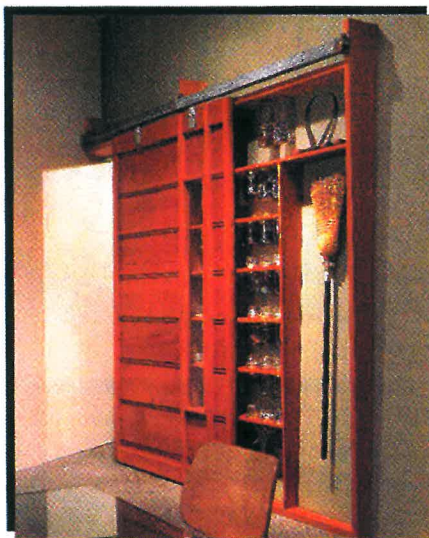
BY EMILIE W. SOMMERHOFF



Della Valle + Bernheimer, Brooklyn, New York



Aidlin Darling Design, San Francisco



DELLA VALLE + BERNHEIMER

Della Valle + Bernheimer's first project upon moving into its new space in Brooklyn, New York, was to design and build the office. With an open 2,400 square feet of sparse detail and a view of Manhattan, the straightforward space directs attention to a **chalkboard-enclosed box**, the inside of which contains a shop; the outside is used for drawing and as a focal point for group meetings. "It's a tool to do our work," says Jared Della Valle, who founded the studio with partner Andrew Bernheimer in 1996. "It fits our philosophy. We try to solve the problem by solving the problem; there's never an esoteric meaning behind things. We needed something we could work on, a way to communicate ideas to each other, and a shop—those things ended up being the same thing."

The list of suppliers is equally uncomplicated. Besides a **Saarin chair** and an **Eames table**, "if you want a spec, it's

Benjamin Moore **Chalkboard Paint**," says Della Valle. And besides the shop, there are no enclosed spaces. "Andy and I don't hide our offices. This is not a hierarchical space." While indicative of the kind of firm the principals want it to be, the partition-free space also follows on Della Valle's belief that architecture firms require more "community-based workspace" than other professions.

AIDLIN DARLING DESIGN

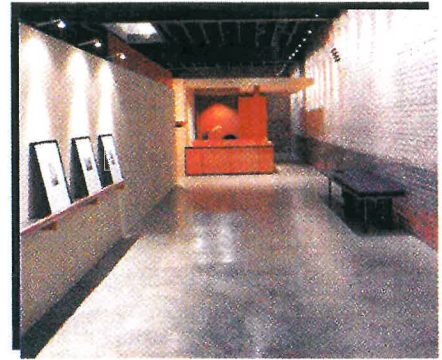
"Organized chaos" is how Joshua Aidlin, of Aidlin Darling Design in San Francisco, describes the culture and space of the design firm he owns with architect David Darling. Within its 1,900 square feet of space in a former sewing factory, the firm has incorporated design studios, a gallery, a conference room, and a wood shop. Though a trained architect, Aidlin began as a furniture designer and fabricator, hence the shop; when Darling joined in 1998, the team

established an architecture firm. While they no longer fabricate actual furniture, they do design and build models. "In solely using the computer, you become too distant from the materiality of how you build. Our shop allows us to create the real thing in real scale. There's immediacy to what you're building."

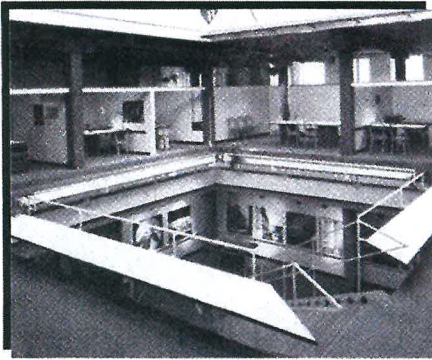
Everything in the space is "home-grown." The firm designed and built the studio with friend and architect Christian Dauer of CR Dauer Architects, much of it with wood recycled from projects in demolition. The **sliding closet door** was recovered from a den, the shelves from stair treads; both are **Douglas fir**. The chairs came from an old church. New elements are also economical by nature: **Mylar sheets** form the translucent backdrop behind the shelving, and the floors are **painted plywood**.

Originating with half the current space, the firm has slowly expanded, "moving walls as we went," says Aidlin. A central spine

process



Watson Tate Savory Architects, Columbia, South Carolina



Ross Barney + Jankowski, Chicago

bisects the office, bringing visitors straight into the studio. There is no reception area. "It speaks to the informality of our office," he says. "It's all handmade and very intimate; it grew out of the way we work with people."

WATSON TATE SAVORY ARCHITECTS

Many architects think of their studios as a chance to create a living example of the solutions they are trying to sell to their clients. Like other industrial neighborhoods, the Congaree Vista section of Columbia, South Carolina, is quickly becoming a new commercial district. Watson Tate Savory's own adaptive reuse of a warehouse in the area provides a case in point for the firm, which has recently found itself doing several renovations in the neighborhood. "We were trying to show that simple geometries and materials could delicately offset a utilitarian warehouse box in a way that made it aesthetically rich," says firm principal Thomas Savory. "Historic preservation is often best served by contemporary intervention."

The architecture firm left the structure's brick walls virtually untouched, grime and all: "We started cleaning the walls in the gallery," recalls Savory, "The brick was painted a semigloss white; we liked the

soot better." **Clerestory windows** with a **corrugated metal roof** replaced the building's dirt-stained wire-glass skylights. Ductwork and conduit were left exposed. The simple 3/4-inch **birch-veneer plywood workstations**, custom designed by Watson Tate Savory, were purposefully held away from existing surfaces—"to let the new and old systems articulate themselves."

In designing their own offices, architects face a special challenge, believes Savory. "When you are your own client, the spectrum is wide open; it requires that you understand your shared language and sensibility in a way that you want to express to others. You have no excuse for it not to be clear."

ROSS BARNEY + JANKOWSKI

While the offices of Ross Barney + Jankowski (RBJ) were also once a warehouse, the firm was not challenged to start from raw concrete and brick; the space had belonged to Chicago architect Harry Weese since the 1960s. Many of his enhancements—a three-story skylighted atrium and an angled stair connecting the third and fourth floors—were retained. "We loved a lot of it," says Carol Ross Barney. "Harry built this wonderful little room for a diazo machine; we kept

stuff like that as historical relic."

However, like any other firm, RBJ believed its office should express its own philosophy of collaboration and its ideas about workspace productivity. Structurally, RBJ did very little: A new stair was installed to connect the fourth and fifth floors, pulling visitors from the reception area on the fifth floor down into the studio. **Grating treads** on the stair maximize daylight penetration. Office partitions were demolished, both to make way for more group-oriented workspace and to help bring natural light into the interior.

Collaboration and productivity are further explored with four spaces that can be used as either traditional conference rooms or project workrooms. "A project can move in and stay there for a period of time, with its history and artifacts," says Ross Barney. "It's like giving the project a desk." Each room has an overhead projector and a computer connected to the server. The largest can be divided up with four **translucent-fiberglass sliding doors**. Currently RBJ is experimenting with different furniture solutions for these rooms. "We want to see what types of spaces work particularly well. It might be that different spaces work at different times." ■