

Inside the New Building: Bright, Bold, Invigorating/September 2012



Architect Stefan Behnisch and UB President Robert Bogomolny worked with the law center's design team to create a palette of vivid colors that promise to be a highlight of the new building.

By **Maryjane King**

An extraordinary structure demands extraordinary finishes. As members of the UB community first step into the new John and Frances Angelos Law Center, they may note that all aspects of the building's design—lighting, layout, structure—work together to enliven the building and to create an invigorating learning environment. From the palette to the amount of light the finishes reflect, students and faculty alike are likely to be awed by the design. The creators of UB's new center took great care in composing materials for the facility, bringing terms like “bold” and “synergistic” into campus vernacular.

The grand entrance of the center opens into a massive atrium that carries natural lighting throughout the multistory space. The atrium reaches down below street level, where it faces out to a sunken garden and seating area. This level of the center houses the moot courtroom, where law students will practice court proceedings. The atrium expands from here to the full height of the building as the driving force of its design. Its exposed concrete soars overhead in a mix of columns, shear walls and bridges to convey a sense of lightness to a material that traditionally appears weighty.

The interior of the center is a bright and transcending space, where both color and material selections emerged as a result of the *parti*, or conceptual floor plan. Moving up through the building, blocks of offices and classrooms compose the majority of the floors on the west side of the structure, while the library and clinics make up the east. Glazed partitions demarcate these suites and classrooms from the larger, expansive atrium, nestled into these programmatic areas.

“The materials of the atrium were selected to be a direct expression of the spatial intentions,” explains **Matt Noblett**, a partner at Behnisch Architekten, the building's design architect. “Concrete floor and wall slabs exist where they are needed, and they are not covered or hidden by other materials, allowing these elements to be their minimal dimensions. Glass is used as extensively as possible for two purposes: to transmit daylight as far as possible within the building, and to enhance visual connectivity between the various spaces.”

Noblett led the design team in upholding Behnisch's high aesthetic standards and in simultaneously employing cutting-edge green building techniques. The Genzyme Center, in Cambridge, Mass., illustrates the Behnisch team's ability to integrate sustainable building strategies into a high-caliber design. That building won numerous awards and also achieved LEED Platinum status—the highest sustainability rating issued by the U.S. Green Building Counsel—making it a natural precedent for UB's new law center, which also is slated to earn the [platinum designation](#).

For the UB law center, the design team chose materials that would be durable and would have a minimum impact on the environment. The basic finishes in the interior are light in color: maple millwork, gray concrete, white facade panels. These form a neutral canvas for the introduction of brighter textiles and surface coverings, the colors for which emerged from the building's signage strategy.

As Noblett describes, “When people enter the atrium, we expect that they will instinctively look up into the atrium through the overlapping fragments of concrete slab at many different levels, and that these surfaces will define and animate that space, many of which are painted with bright colors.”

Early in the design process, color played a central role in connecting and giving unique identities to the building's different spaces. Based on the complex geometry of the building, the signage is not limited to the hard directories and office placards; it also highlights different programmatic areas using large swaths of color in the atrium. Here the matte gray of the concrete is contrasted with the brightly painted oranges and greens applied to enliven the space.

“The painted colors in the atrium are intended to catch daylight in a way that enhances the feeling of brightness in areas that do not receive as much sun, to complement materials and fibers found elsewhere in the building and to reinforce the overall wayfinding concept,” Noblett says.

The philosophy behind the interior color scheme involved using the context of the building's design to determine the palette. These colors differentiate the student lounge from the classrooms and the clinics from the offices. The Behnisch team worked closely with Ockert und Partner, a German graphic design office, to select colors that influence the building's overall color palette. It is manifested in the carpeting of the suites and library, which boasts a uniform yet invigorating pattern, reflecting the themed colors. The designers take a different approach in the classrooms, covering the floors and tiered risers in monochromatic, brightly colored [linoleum](#).

The selected colors and finishes are especially important in the center's lowest level, which houses the moot courtroom and its ancillary spaces. Parts of this level are completely below ground; reflective surfaces and lighting on the walls were chosen based on their potential to establish a subtle glow in the hallways and classrooms that receive a limited amount of natural light. These spaces are unique both in finish and in function, reinforcing the design team's approach.

The center's strong visual connectivity reinforces the need for a cohesive approach to coloration and materials. For each component of the building, the design team made decisions that harmonize with the surrounding structure and give meaning to the overall building scheme. As the first students enter the building next September, the building's breathtaking design should invite and invigorate them as they prepare for exciting legal careers.

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