

Lifestyle

Best of the Best

We asked three of New Jersey's top design professionals to help us compile a list of the state's most significant architectural projects in the past decade. Among many worthy contenders, here are the panel's top ten picks. (Photos by Thomas H. Kieren)

Posted March 24, 2010 by [Lauren Payne](#)

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Willow School, Gladstone
Farewell Mills Gatsch Architects, Princeton

Planned as three building phases that started nearly ten years ago, the Willow School fully integrates its educational buildings into a 34-acre site. The design and construction of the first phase, completed in 2003, exhibits environmental sensitivity and energy efficiency; it is LEED certified by the U.S. Green Buildings Council. Because each classroom opens directly onto the surrounding grounds—a combination of woodland and wetlands—recreation and field studies are integral parts of the daily routine. "The overall design integrates sustainability into the building and the curriculum," says Jason Kliwinski. "The kids have that backdrop as a learning tool."



Urban Insertion/Quarry Street Duplex, Princeton
Robert Hillier, FAIA
Princeton

On Quarry Street, a pleasant residential block in the heart of Princeton, one home stands out: a modern duplex made of glass and aluminum. Dubbed Urban Insertion for its location, the 2008 building houses two 2,500-square-foot units, each energy efficient and environmentally friendly. Floor-to-ceiling windows, high-velocity furnaces, sustainable bamboo flooring, and Energy Star-rated appliances are just a few of the green features. The duplex requires less energy to operate, and its location encourages inhabitants to conserve energy in another facet of their lives: driving. "This is a modern house on an eclectic street within walking distance to downtown," says Edward Rothe. "It could have been one bigger house, but it's two units in one, with a very efficient floor plan."



Morristown and Morris Township Public Library, Morristown
HMR Architects, Princeton

The 2006 addition and alterations to the public library achieved the goal of thinking beyond traditionally cramped institutional spaces and artificial light. The result is a bright, living room-like space that provides ample room to read, relax, study, or participate in the community. "A public building like this, connected to the downtown area, helps the community stay strong," says Kliwinski. Two light wells flood the building with natural light. Alternate exterior materials complement the original structure while supporting its character. "Additions are always hard to do, but this one is very respectful of the original design," says Rothe. "It's seamless, a continuation rather than one building linked to another."



Essex County Courthouse, Newark
Farewell Mills Gatsch Architects, Princeton

designed by renowned architect Cass Gilbert, the 1906 Essex County Courthouse is one of the most significant public buildings in the state. Unfortunately it had fallen into disrepair after years of neglect. The massive restoration project entailed bringing the building back to a condition worthy of its grand position in downtown Newark. The job, completed in 2004, was undertaken in multiple phases, including restoring historic courtrooms, murals, and finishes; cleaning and refinishing marble floors; and updating limestone walls, wood paneling, trim, doors, and light fixtures. Even historic furniture was restored and reused. "This is an excellent example of preserving our culture and heritage," says Kliwinski. "The restoration preserved a building that has quite a presence—it has cultural and historical relevance. This project demonstrates the sustainable side of restoration."



**Witherspoon house/Princeton Redevelopment Project, Princeton
Minno & Wasko Architects and Planners, Lambertville**

This space maximizes the meaning of the term mixed-use. It includes a 24-unit residential building, a parking garage, several retail shops, a restaurant, and a public plaza, and it is connected to a new public library. Dubbed the Princeton Redevelopment Project, it's also referred to as Witherspoon House for the building completed in 2005 that houses the apartments, shops, and restaurant, which sits adjacent to the library and conceals the parking garage. Located in the heart of downtown Princeton and within walking distance of the university and jitney service to the train station, the entire project is an attractive and lively gathering spot. "This used to be just a plain old surface parking lot," says Dianne Brake. "Now it's more than just the buildings, it's a vibrant public space, right downtown." Adds Rothe, "It's a wonderfully conceived, well-executed plan."



**University ACADEMY Charter HIGH School, Jersey City
KSS Architects, Princeton**

By transforming an abandoned industrial laundry building into a new charter school, New Jersey City University honored its urban roots. Designed as a school to help prepare underserved students for college, the building, completed in 2003, fosters a sense of openness and community. The layout places classrooms with large rolling doors along the building perimeter, and a community "living room" for students at its center. The central lobby is modeled after an urban street lined with mixed-use spaces.

The school's inviting environment allows students to focus on learning. "This is an important example of adaptive reuse of an old industrial building," says Rothe. "We're such a teardown society, but we're beginning to see more and more smart reuse."



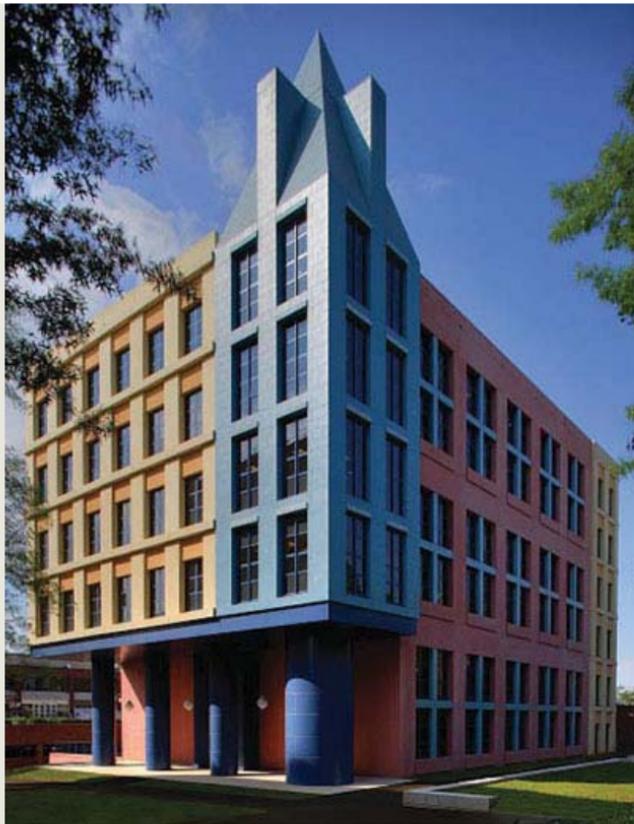
**Nissenblatt Residence, Loveladies, Long Beach Island
Midouhas Architecture, Brant Beach**

Designed as a year-round getaway for the owners, this 2009 beach residence mixes traditional form with mid-century modern design. Situated to take advantage of limited ocean views, the house is nestled in existing scrub pines. The interesting cantilevered form provides distinct living areas, both public and private. The elevated rear deck shelters the residents from the street and from the strong seasonal winds. The project was designed, built, and furnished by the architectural firm. "I'm very impressed with this," says Rothe. "We love the Jersey Shore and its architecture, but lots of Shore houses are very big and they scream, 'Look at me!' This one doesn't try to do too much. It's designed well."



**14 Maple Avenue, Morristown
Minno & Wasko Architects and Planners, Lambertville**

Developed jointly by the Morristown Parking Authority and the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, 14 Maple Avenue is on track to be a gold-certified LEED building. Completed in 2008, the four-story, approximately 40,000-square-foot multi-use project includes office space and a parking garage. LEED-recognized features include a green rooftop photovoltaic system (see inset) that provides almost 25 percent of the building's power; a water efficiency program that reduces water use by 30 percent; and a living wall, a bio-wall of plant life that is part of an experimental heating and ventilation system. "The Dodge Foundation has been supporting environmental concepts for years," says Brake, "so this building works along with that. It's a model for others."



Karnoutsos hall, New Jersey City University, Jersey City

Michael Graves & Associates, design

architects, Princeton, contracted to STV, architect-of-record, New York

The six-story Karnoutsos Arts and Sciences building, completed in 2006, features state-of-the-art classrooms, computer labs, and faculty offices. Pivotaly located on campus, the structure bridges old and new styles; its distinctive entrance tower creates a visual focal point opposite the historic Gothic Tower, the original building that gave the University its nickname: the Gothics. "It's a wonderful mix of colors and textures and postmodern architecture," says Rothe.

"I feel very strongly that one of our projects had to be a Michael Graves design," he continues. "His work is recognized around the world, but he hasn't done a lot in New Jersey, surprisingly. This building is signature Michael Graves."



Rutgers EcoComplex, Bordentown

NK Architects, Morristown

The Rutgers EcoComplex, completed in 2001, is the nation's first research and technology development center dedicated to enhancing the environment and agriculture through education, public outreach, and green business development. "This building used an environmental-design approach way before everyone was screaming about green and LEED," says Rothe. Green principles include passive solar heating, utilization of the adjacent landfill's methane gas for heat production, computer-controlled HVAC system, a heated floor system; low-E glass, a newly formulated interior paint that eliminates off-gassing, and dimmable fluorescent lighting. "All buildings should know where the light comes from and know how to use it," adds Rothe. "This one does."

Edward N. Rothe.

Dianne R. Brake, president, PlanSmart NJ, a statewide civic action group committed to improving the quality of community life through the advancement of sound land-use planning and regional cooperation.

Jason Kliwinski, AIA; LEED AP; AIA-NJ president 2010; director of sustainable design, Spieziele Architectural Group, Inc.

Edward N. Rothe, FAIA, past president; AIA-150, chairman, which produced AIA New Jersey Guidebook: 150 Best Buildings and Places; principal, Fletcher Thompson Architecture Engineering LLC.