

# BUILDING DIALOGUE

## COLORADO REAL ESTATE JOURNAL

Development Construction Architecture Engineering Interior Design



Vectra Bank

*New headquarters shines at Bellevue Station* \ PAGE 54



*The Boettcher Building was thoughtfully restored and renovated by the Rowland+Broughton team.*

# Preservation: Looking to the Future While Honoring the Past

It started with the Aspen Idea. A thought that an individual's mind, body and spirit are tied to the environment in which they are immersed. Through dialogue, debate, exploration, an open mind and heart, and a little sense of adventure, one may cultivate a better self and a better society. Place these activities in the right environment and go about them with intention and real change can begin.

In 1949, Chicago-based industrialists Walter and Elizabeth Paepcke followed these lofty principles and founded what is today known as the Aspen Institute. Recruiting famed Bauhaus architect Herbert Bayer, they initiated the design of a campus in Aspen to host this new organization and cultivate an environment where the free exchange of ideas could flourish, the body could be restored, and the spirit could engage unhindered. Over the course of the next quarter century, Bayer and his collaborators designed and built one of the finest examples of Bauhaus planning and architecture in North America, culminating with the completion of the Boettcher Seminar Building in 1975, Bayer's final building in Aspen.

Originally located in a meadow of native sage, the Boettcher Building was designed to encourage the egalitarian sharing of ideas. Organized to allow seminar participants equal status within the space, three octagonal



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seminar rooms were arranged to create an open exterior octagonal courtyard, with a broad lobby and various support rooms arranged in an adjacent bar of space. Access to and from any of the seminar rooms was through this central courtyard, thus encouraging not only a physical exchange in the center of the building but also establishing it as the heart of the building, a place where ideas could be shared under the sun in the fresh mountain air during down time between seminar sessions. Additionally, two octagonal "pods" were constructed as offices accessible over a low bridge to further support the activities of the building.

Recently, the Aspen Institute engaged our firm to breathe new life into this important community resource. Conscious of Bayer's original intent, the design team decided to enclose the exterior courtyard under a central skylight, physically centered at the intersection of the surrounding seminar rooms. This new gathering space allows for year-round use, and it directly complements a new incubator space, the Creative Lab, located in the entry and support bar. Intended to facilitate the free flow of dialogue and the exploration of solutions to today's most pressing issues, this flexible space is equipped with state-of-the-art streaming and videoconferencing technology, expanding the reach of these powerful ideas beyond the physical walls.

As stewards of this important historic resource and in consideration of the environmental imperative, the design team sought to drastically increase the performance of the Boettcher Building through hidden, yet impactful interventions. Building thermal performance was increased



*The exterior courtyard was enclosed under a central skylight allowing for year-round use.*



*The octagonal seminar rooms encourage the sharing of ideas.*



*A new incubator space in the Boettcher Building, the Creative Lab*

over 300% above the existing conditions, while old, inefficient HVAC rooftop units were replaced with a high-efficiency heat pump system. The building was air sealed and indoor air quality improved through high-performance air filtration. Interior finishes are low-VOC and utilize recycled content, while all the LED lighting is controlled by a smart lighting control system utilizing daylight and occupancy sensors and zoning. Perhaps most importantly, the vast majority of the building envelope and structural components were left in place and rehabilitated, drastically reducing the embodied energy impact these components carry.

As the final building designed by Herbert Bayer in Aspen, it was important to the community to preserve not only the spirit of the design of the Boettcher Seminar Building but also the physical structure itself for generations to come. To this end, the design team and the Aspen Institute sought and received designation to the Aspen Modern Historic In-

ventory, effectively protecting the structure as the historic and community resource it is.

Forty-five years and countless sessions later, the Boettcher Seminar Building still embodies the Aspen Idea in its mission and use. It is further re-energized by the recently completed renovation, along with the companion new-construction neighbor, The Resnick Center for Herbert Bayer Studies, for which we had the privilege of acting as architect of record.

Together, these buildings form a new bridge to the greater Aspen community, reinvigorating an underutilized corner of the Aspen Institute's campus. In recognition of the incredible influence Herbert Bayer had on global thought, design and post-war Aspen, the Boettcher Seminar Building is a revitalized and energized structure at the intersection of mind, body and spirit – at the intersection of the Aspen Idea.\