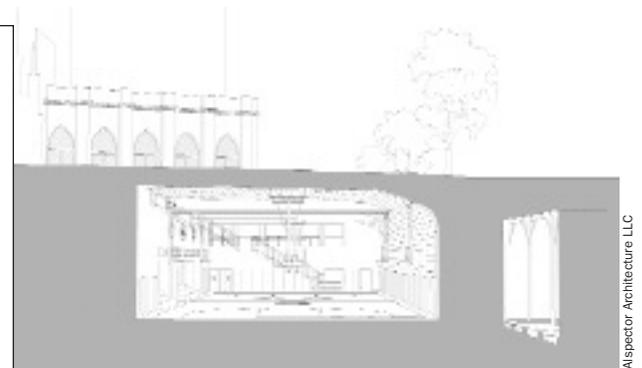


Jacob Alspector (AR'72)
Alspector Architecture LLC
Grace Church School Gymnasium



Alspector Architecture LLC



photos: Paul Warchol

Just two blocks north of Cooper Union, the excited voices of Grace Church School's students fill their new full-size gymnasium. Deciding to build beneath the corner garden of James Renwick Jr.'s landmark gothic revival complex at Broadway and 10th Street, the school entrusted the design to Jacob Alspector (AR'72) and his firm, Alspector Architecture LLC. The gym opened this past March and proved invisible—much to the relief of many who imagined the vast excavation would become another condo tower.

Dappled sunlight, entering through large exterior and interior glass windows, belies the fact that the gym is 30 feet below grade. Central to the design was the replication of a century old historic "gothic wall" made of faux stone plaster. Relocated 15 feet west of its original location, it created space for a light-filled lobby and staircase. The chantry portico, outdoor pulpit, garden, playground and street trees all rest on the new gym roof. A surgically precise excavation, extension under sidewalks and construction within yards of the Broadway subway necessitated timely approvals from Community Board 2, NYC Landmarks, Department of Transportation, MTA and the Parks Department.

Alspector is pleased to have integrated educational grace notes, such as a noon-mark aperture in the south face of the lobby. Sunbeams projecting through a single glass block mark the motion of the earth on the stair below. He was also gratified to learn that Dean Stephen Baker has arranged for Cooper Union to call the nearby gymnasium their home court. When he was a student, athletes had to trek to the old McBurney Y on 23rd Street.

Since beginning his own practice in 2002, Alspector taught fifth year Thesis at CCNY, renovated the lower half of NYU's Bobst Library and designed a new, competition-winning Digital Learning Center for Utah Valley State College due for completion this summer. He continues to be deeply grateful to Cooper Union for his excellent education and to his many fine professors, including John Hejduk, who stressed that architecture is an "old person's profession" and requires "perseverance and stick-to-it-iveness." Alspector Architecture's web site is www.alspectorarchitecture.com.

