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Award-winning designs of 1999 by Alabama architects

BY BETH CREIGHTON

Each year the Alabama chapter of the American Institute of Architects conducts a juried awards competition to recognize the outstanding achievements of its members during the year. Selected for top honors this year were six projects: an uncommonly attractive contractor's field office (forget the trailer), a chapel in the vales of Montgomery, a big Baptist church in Troy, an architect's

office in Fairhope, a home on Lake Martin and the new wing of The Children's Hospital in Birmingham.

The jury for this year's awards was a panel of architects from Arkansas. Awards were presented at the Alabama chapter of the AIA's banquet in July at the Grand Hotel in Point Clear, Ala.



Storefront Studios

Offices of Walcott Adams Verneuille Architects, Fairhope
Walcott Adams Verneuille Architects, Fairhope

Within the past 13 years of its operation, Walcott Adams Verneuille Architects has grown to a 12-person staff. At first they did business out of a small building—less than 1,800 square feet—on Fairhope's main street. The



growing architectural firm has always held a strong belief in "practicing right out in front of everybody." Striving to "demystify" the general public image of their profession, they attempted to build a "storefront" image by placing sketches and models of their local works on the windows of their office building.

Committed to this pedestrian-oriented culture but becoming crowded in their building, the architects went shopping for a larger street-front space, one they could redesign to express better their storefront image.

The site they selected was a 3,300-square-foot building located on the corner of Magnolia Avenue and Section Street, two central thoroughfares in downtown

Fairhope. With more than 50 percent of the building fronting the two streets, the new office was ideally situated to meet the firm's needs. Constructed in the 1940s, the building was renovated in the 1970s, when it was given a brick façade that the architects believed would make an appropriate contrast for contemporary interiors.

The design achieved a working environment that placed all of the major rooms on the storefront. Accessible by two doors, one on each street, the lobby is inviting for prospective clients and curious pedestrians alike. The conference room, located on the north side of the building, is accessible to the public through a large studio window, from which clients can view activities taking place in the room.

Displays mounted in a series of unique, rusticated niches along the storefronts provide clients with work samples and other materials. Interior details include French doors, rounded arched doorways, built-in work stations, a unique lighting scheme and "Malaga Green" highlights.

The storefront space on Section Street is lined with business offices that can be accessed through large French doors. One of the rooms is a library from which clients are allowed to check out a variety of books and other materials. The overall effect is a relaxed atmosphere that encourages clients to be more comfortable while making their decisions—an atmosphere that begins on the street with the firm's storefront image.

Born-again Sanctuary

First Baptist Church of Troy
Peter Weiss, architect, Auburn

When the 111-year-old First Baptist Church of Troy began to have serious seating problems, a decision had to be made—whether to build a new church or add to the small historic building, which then could only seat up to 540 of the 900-member congregation. In addition to the seating problems, congregation members were faced with structural difficulties—the result of a 1910 addition to the sanctuary that reoriented the inside of the church from north/south to east/west. During the reorientation, large structural columns were placed between the original sanctuary and the addition, creating a distinctive division within the church. Church officials were also striving to halt the rapid deterioration of the church, which was being accelerated by a pending drainage problem. Whether members decided to renovate and add to the church or select a new location for their sanctuary and congregation would be a vital decision. In either case, the budget was set at \$3 million.

Located in the oldest section of Troy and surrounded by a diversity of 19th- and 20th-century homes, the church campus was an elevated center of religion and history. For this reason church officials and architect Peter Weiss chose to make renovations and add to the sanctuary.

"The program solution was to rotate the interior sanctuary back to its original orientation and add an addition to the south end to enclose the open space between the sanctuary and the adult classroom buildings," said Weiss. Weiss and church officials

