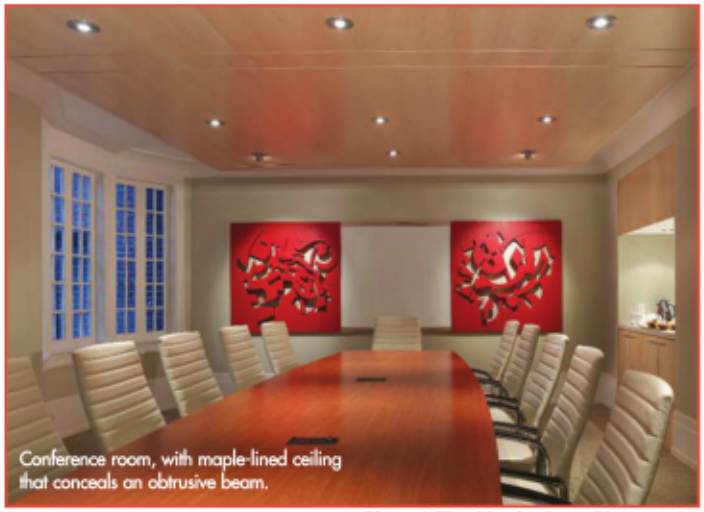
Library space at 1730 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, by Bonstra|Haresign Architects.

Photo © Hoachlander Davis Photography



Conference room, with maple-lined ceiling that conceals an obtrusive beam.

Photo © Hoachlander Davis Photography

Working Space:

Two Projects Renovate Small Office Buildings That Were Once Houses

by Ronald O'Rourke

Many of Washington's late-19th- and early-20th-century houses are located in parts of town that have evolved over time into office zones, prompting the conversion of many of those houses into small office buildings. Recent projects by DC-based architectural firms renovated the interiors of two of those converted buildings.

1730 Massachusetts Avenue, NW

The building at 1730 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, in Washington's Dupont Circle area, is one of several grand residences on the block that have been converted into commercial office use. The property includes the four-level main house plus a rear courtyard and carriage house. To renovate the complex, the building's new owner turned to **Bonstra | Haresign Architects.**

Bonstra | Haresign's design for the renovation retains many of the main building's gracious, historic details while inserting clean-lined, modern elements. The property as renovated accommodates three organizations—the building's new owner and two tenant organizations—rather than the single entity that previously occupied the complex.

"All non-original ornament was removed, the building's original features were restored, and modern HVAC and electrical systems were seamlessly integrated," said **David Haresign, FAIA,** a firm principal. To accommodate the needs of three distinct occupants, the architects adjusted some room layouts by removing partitions and by building in new work stations. Changes to the carriage house included the addition of a large dormer window that admits ample light.

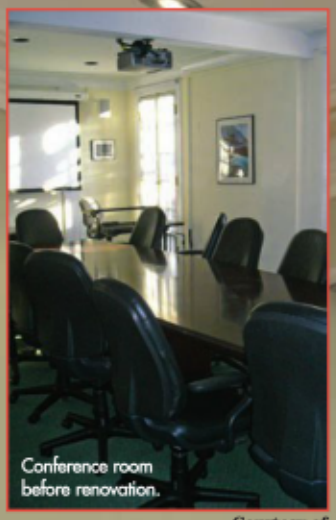
Blending in the new elements with the existing historic details required a careful eye. For example, "In the main conference room, a beam that visually divided the room was concealed with a floating maple ceiling that unifies the space without conflicting with the original, full-height windows and trim," Haresign said.

Transmission of light through the renovated spaces was another key design consideration. "Adding translucent elements—like the resin partitions made by 3form in the lobby and the carriage house's new dormer—allows natural light to penetrate deep into the interior rooms," Haresign said. "The visual connections help bind the interior office spaces to the outside environment, and the main building's offices to those in the carriage house."

The three organizations in the complex share a set of common spaces, including a reception area, two conference rooms, and a reading room on the main building's first floor, and a kitchen, lunch area, and lounge on the cellar level. The shared spaces—which are identifiable by their maple millwork and bright red

Plans of the main floor (top) and cellar level (above) of the renovated building. Note the carriage house at left in the main plan

Courtesy of Bonstra|Haresign Architects.



Conference room before renovation.

Courtesy of Bonstra|Haresign Architects.

Front facade of 1730 Massachusetts Avenue, NW.

Photo © Hoachlander Davis Photography

Project: 1730 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, Washington, DC

Architects: **Bonstra | Haresign Architects**
Structural Engineers: **Keast & Hood Co.**
MEP Engineers: **Capitol Engineering Group**
Contractor: **Prill Construction Group**

Reception area and adjacent meeting space.

Photo © Hoachlander Davis Photography

Courtesy of KUBE architecture

First and second floor plans of the renovated building.

Courtesy of KUBE architecture

Project: CompTIA, Washington, DC

Architects/Designers: **KUBE architecture**
MEP Engineers: **SAI Engineering**
Custom Steel: **Metal Specialties**
Contractor: **The Avenue Builders**

surfaces—permit a more efficient use of the property's total available square footage.

"The project challenges the notion of typical commercial space by housing multiple businesses under one roof while avoiding the pitfall of redundant service spaces," Haresign said. "The building encourages an integrated office community by linking its individual occupants through communal amenities. The sharing of community resources maintains the integrity of the historic main building and, along with the timeless-modern design, unites the individual tenants."

CompTIA

Office space is at a particular premium on Capitol Hill, and numerous row houses in the area have been converted into pocket office buildings. The Washington office of the Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA) is housed in one such building—a small row house at 515 2nd Street, NE, across the street from the Thurgood Marshall Federal Judicial Building. CompTIA hired **KUBE architecture** to renovate the uninspired and somewhat dingy space into a bright, comfortable, and future-oriented facility befitting a technology trade association.

"The building had been badly renovated several times," said **Janet Bloomberg, AIA,** a firm principal. "Each small office had up to 12 recessed downlights, and there was ductwork everywhere. It seemed like there was no natural light, and even with all the light fixtures, it felt dark and uninviting. So our challenge was to create a light and open atmosphere that would be energy-efficient, clean, and modern."

KUBE's design for the renovation employs crisp and rigorously ordered lines, clear glass partitions, and white-painted walls with red and blue accents to achieve an interior that, in spite of being densely packed with offices, is lively, modern, and more open-feeling. Wood flooring adds a note of warmth and comfort to the composition.

"All the offices have full-height glass walls to the main corridor, providing a sense of light and air to otherwise small spaces," Bloomberg said. "The conference room, which had been in the basement, is now a glass-enclosed volume on the main floor adjacent to the entry space."

"One of our main focuses was lighting," she added. "We used no recessed downlights—only linear fluorescents either in coves or with frosted glass lenses. The linear look goes very well with our concept of wrapping the spaces with folding ceiling planes, and the single line of light in each office creates a simple, minimal look while spreading the light much better through the space."

"My favorite element is the new central staircase, which provides a focal point to the whole composition," Bloomberg said. "It is sculptural, providing visual interest, and has lighted niches and a three-dimensional design that transforms what was previously a flat, two-dimensional space." The area above the staircase was also reworked. "We reused the existing skylight but created linear ceiling planes with cove lighting below to tie it in better with the sculptural design of the staircase, replacing the previous look of a single punched opening."

The project employed several sustainable materials, including bamboo floors, recycled rubber, fluorescent lighting, a tankless hot water heater, and no-VOC paint.

"We worked within a limited budget to completely transform this building architecturally, mechanically, electrically, and digitally into a modern and light-filled space, with great flow and inter-connection of spaces," Bloomberg said. "We totally renovated this building while reusing as much as we could—including framing, skylight, and basic room layout—in order to avoid unnecessary waste."