



PROJECT UPDATES

Smith Center

Construction is underway on the Smith Center for the Performing Arts, the public/private partnership that will become the centerpiece of cultural life in Las Vegas. Check out the progress on the project's webcam of the construction site (www.lvpacfoundation.org) to see the growth of the cultural complex, slated to open in 2012.



Views of the construction site in downtown Las Vegas.

HARRAH'S AND SARATOGA RACETRACK: IT'S ABOUT MORE THAN JUST THE BUILDINGS



Our 2009 Yale Summer Intern Carmel Bonfigli and Jason Barrett made this rendering for the Harrah's project. This article ran on 7/12 in the Las Vegas Sun.

The firm applies a 360-degree perspective to two unique projects

A cursory glance at the David M. Schwarz Architects' practice reveals seeming contradictions: Are they generalists, or a specialized boutique? Do they excel at vast public projects built to last for centuries or a private home designed to suit a growing family? Is their strength the populist amenities of a sports arena, or the elegance and refinement of a concert hall? And in a year when most architects are being directed to put down their pencils, how is this firm busier than ever?

The answer is simple: Every single project is special.

What does special mean to DMSAS? A great deal, actually. It means that the client intake process is as important as the firm's output. It means research, research, research — ideally, in a group environment where the client plays a role. It means understanding the metrics of success for corporate clients, and their goals for growing their brand.

Two current projects are representative of this approach — a retail, dining and entertainment district for Harrah's in Las Vegas, and a refurbishment of the historic Saratoga racetrack in Saratoga Springs.

In Saratoga, DMSAS has been retained to do a master plan and conceptual design for a long term overhaul of the legendary facilities, including historic renovation, adaptive re-use and contextually appropriate new construction. The standards for the project are high: Saratoga is the oldest continually operating sports venue in the United States, and ranks top 10 in the world of horseracing in the level of its purses and quality of horses. With verdant, bucolic surroundings, Saratoga's facilities must evolve to retain their leadership



Aerial map of the Harrah's properties.



Harrah's before picture.

position and cultural import. DMSAS is tackling a new plan for the grounds – but also re-thinking services, telecommunications infrastructure, hospitality and patron amenities including a more enticing food and beverage offering.

As with other projects like Schermerhorn and Bass Hall, the DMSAS team accompanied the clients on a research trip, traveling to England to see Ascot, Goodwin, and York. They observed how a balance is created between the income streams of wagering, the gate, and food service in the midst of beautiful settings that appeal to a large variety of patrons. They questioned the clients rigorously about their impressions and opinions. On the final day of the trip, the firm received a great compliment when client Charles Hayward said delightedly “I’ve been with them for 4 days and they haven’t talked once about materials or finishes. They just want to know about my business and how it works”.

With the Harrah’s project – one piece of Harrah’s 270 acre holdings in Las Vegas – DMSAS is focused on designing a pedestrian-friendly environment that will integrate food and beverage with a unique retail tenant composition. The goal for the Harrah’s project is to increase the connectivity between their existing brands by reducing “friction” (any visual or physical cue that is unpleasant, uncomfortable or off-putting) and adding things for people to do that will create a deeper loyalty to the brand. The project was as meticulously researched as Saratoga – the team has visited every competing destination in Las Vegas, Atlantic City and Biloxi – and relies heavily on the firm’s simple yet profound commitment to build places for people.

These projects are proceeding (despite the general economic challenges) because they are being approached in a thoughtful, intelligent manner. Nothing is being torn down or blown up just for the sake of replacing it with a grand egocentric gesture. Places of importance are being preserved, upgraded and added to. The client and architect are making the health and vibrancy of the end result a shared priority. And the end user – the quality of their experience, and the balance between their appetite for change and need for familiarity – are always top of mind. The individuated approach that dictates that the firm starts anew with each project, learning and testing and thinking things through is keeping them very busy.

EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT: VIRGINIA ESCALONA

When Virginia Escalona arrived for her interview with David M. Schwarz Architects in 1994, she got an immediate sense of the pace at which this architectural practice moves. Although most firms were in the grip of a recession, Escalona was hired on the spot by Michael Swartz and David Schwarz. She started the following day.

Her passion for architecture and art was cultivated during her childhood in DC when, she says, “I remember the time when I understood perspective for the first time – at the age of 10, standing across the street from the FBI building”. At 13, she accepted a summer job assisting an art teacher. Her creativity found its expression through acrylics and oils, and she gravitated to studies of landscapes and buildings. Throughout a series of part-time and summer jobs as a convention planner and assistant in the Bureau of Statistics, that internal pull toward the art and practice of designing places for people never abated. In her own words:

What was the most important thing you learned at school (the University of Maryland)?

The one thing I walked away with is that nothing is impossible, even though initially some classes seemed ridiculously difficult. I really believe that if you work hard enough and want something enough, you can have it. As an undergrad, I had to take calculus and physics and I remember how tough my first calc class was. I worked very, very hard and was lucky to have great TAs – and once I made it through that first class, everything became so much easier. That was a really valuable lesson.

What’s your favorite thing about being an architect?

There are two things I really love – the process, and the product. It is so awesome to see something that you have helped conceptualized and draw made into a reality. When I was a convention planner, I was already in architecture school and my boss took advantage of my skills. I did all of the floor plans for our events. He asked me to draw up plans for a kiosk and actually had it built. The first time I saw it built

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Saratoga Racetrack

On August 24, David Schwarz and Craig Williams made a presentation to the executives and board leadership of the Saratoga Racetrack. The hard work paid off and the client was enthusiastic about the firm's ideas. Craig's \$20 bet on Marschino Red paid off less well — the filly was passed by half a head at the finish line.



University of South Carolina George Dean Johnson, Jr. College of Business and Economics

The topping out ceremony for the University of South Carolina George Dean Johnson, Jr. College of Business and Economics took place on July 27th. The DMSAS Team Leader Ted Houseknecht is pleased to report the project is scheduled to open on time (and on budget!) in the Spring of 2010.



Featured in GoUpstate.com — George Dean Johnson, Jr. signing the beam that was raised during the topping out ceremony at the George Dean Johnson Jr. College of Business and Economics. (photo: Gerry Pate).

out, I had a great sense not only of accomplishment but also of wonder: something that was born inside my head was actually made real.

Architecture is very revealing. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder and everyone has their own taste so when you draw something and it is built, you are saying something intensely personal about yourself. When someone chooses a specific architect, they're not choosing a style of building — they are choosing people. Our office is a great example — although at times we have been considered traditional architects, we can essentially do anything. The residential project I am working on in the Western United States is an example of that — we worked very hard to develop and realize the client's ideas and desired aesthetics. But much of it came from the office. As a team, with David leading us, we pushed and pulled the masses in model form, generating multiple versions until the best design was produced.

What distinguishes you in the firm?

I actually have had a really diverse experience at the firm, both on the types of projects I've worked on and the roles I've played in those projects — I've done schematics, construction docs, CA, almost everything. So I feel like I can jump into any project, which is a really great thing.

How would your colleagues describe you?

I have heard that I am easygoing although I apparently am also known for being, well, loud — everyone says they always know what I am doing. It's my speaker's voice coming through.

What's your favorite part of your job?

I love the variety — since I've been able to work on virtually every aspect of our discipline and on projects with such a great breadth and scope. And we've got great snacks, which always makes long days easier!

What was your favorite firm project?

The one I am working on now — in this case, a private residence. But I always think that the project I am working on in the moment is my favorite. Looking back Bass Hall will always be special to me because I got to see it go all the way through construction and it was my first project.

What do you have to have on your desk?

My son's Transformer drawings. I must be a strange Mom — I don't have a picture of him on my desk, because I have him engraved on my heart. But I have to have his drawings. He says he wants to be an architect.

It's often said that the profession of architecture is not encouraging of women. What's it like to be a woman in architecture?

I think it's a meritocracy, not a boys club. Our firm rewards hard work and skills and teamwork — it's not about being a man or woman, tall or short. Having worked in this firm since I graduated from architecture school, I don't know if the same can be said for other firms.

What's your favorite building of all time and why?

I don't have one favorite, but I have a passion for lots of classical buildings. In my home, I have great images up of the tower in the Piazza in Siena and the Basilica di Santa Maria della Salute in Venice. I love to be surrounded by those images.

What do you do when you're not working?

Hang out with my amazing six year old son, Jacob. The latest hobby I picked up — out of necessity — is cooking. So we cook together. We play with Transformers. And I started running, squeezing it in whenever I can.

If we were casting: David M. Schwarz Architects: The Movie, who would play you?

Julia Louis Dreyfus as Elaine in Seinfeld.

FAMILY NEWS

Best wishes to all in the David M. Schwarz Architects family who will celebrate a birthday in this fall. – Ramsay Fairburn (September 5), Jason Barrett (September 19), Jason Arnold (September 27), Rhianna Schroth (also September 27!), Monika Dew (October 2), Jordan Graves (October 10) Nima Govind (October 27), and Robert Dew (November 24).

Best wishes to all those celebrating anniversaries with the firm. Celebrating more than 10 years with DMSAS are: David Schwarz (31 years!), Jerry Marshall (23 years), Eric Jackman (20 years), Ted Houseknecht (18 years) and Joseph Rapazzo (18 years).

This year's annual summer party for the DMSAS staff was "A Day At The Races". Held in Fauquier County, Virginia, the staff was encouraged to sport their spiffiest racing finery (including some seriously large hats) for an afternoon of competitions (Best Hat and Best Horse Name were awarded prizes), swimming and wagering with funny money. Everyone got into the spirit – as you can see from the following:



A Day At The Races.

Christmas will be upon us soon, and as always, DMSAS staff will channel their inner elves at Gingertown, the annual one-of-a-kind holiday initiative that brings together architects to master plan, design and build a gingerbread community. We invite you to attend the merriment on December 2nd at our office. For more details or to get a jump on your coconut snowflake and Twizzler caryatid planning, become a fan on our Facebook page or find details at www.gingertown.org, where we will be previewing the upcoming original Gingertown holiday song by singer-songwriters Laughing Pizza!



On Saturday September 12th, the DMSAS CANstruction team completed the build out of their Ben's Chili Bowl themed project "CAN I get a chili half smoke and a chocolate shake". All the CANstruction creations stay on view at the Shops at 2000 Penn until Saturday September 26th when awards are presented and the projects are DE-CANstructured and donated to the Capital Area Food Bank.

Please see www.wafonline.org/programs/canstruc.html for more information.



FAMILY NEWS

Jen Paloski and Ken Stinson were married on the 22nd of August at St. Mathew's Cathedral in Washington, DC. After a reception at the Franciscan Monastery, the newlyweds honeymooned in the Canadian Rockies. We wish them great happiness!



Timothy and Joyce So welcomed daughter Lyla Ching So, who was born on July 21.



Chris Teigen and Jamie McGinty were married on Saturday, July 25 at St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota. Jamie is a teacher at Elizabeth Steon High School in Bladensburg, MD.



Jason Arnold, Alexandra Dickson, John Herrington, Jon Toonkel, Dave Derenick, Matt Ireton and Monica Regnier have passed their LEED exams!

Additional projects have been uploaded to Google Earth — please visit www.earth.google.com to see the models we've created in Google SketchUp.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Readers,
We welcome your feedback and comments to our newsletter. Submissions can be sent to newsletter@dmsas.com for potential inclusion in our next edition!

Dear DMSAS:

Thank you for sending out your newsletter- DMSAS always takes my breath away whenever I see the work you create. Its magnitude, and its great beauty never fails to make an impression that inspires those of us in the business, as well as to those of us involved in creating positive change of any kind!

**Joy Silver, President/CEO
Rainbow Vision
Sent 5/28/09**

Dear David et al,

It's a delight to receive the firm's newsletter, and catch up with your many projects. I am particularly interested to follow the progression of your work in South Carolina for the business school – coming on the heels of the Chapman Cultural Center, it is clear that your architectural practice will have a strong hand in shaping a more creative, substantive and engaged Spartanburg community for the future. It's one of the reasons, David, why I was so pleased you accepted my invitation to join the Edison public school advisory board in Miami. You bring an extraordinary level of understanding to each of your projects and the students of Dade County will be the richer for it.

Again, my congratulations on such a robust year.

Best,

Craig

**Craig Robins
Founder and CEO of Dacra
Development / Miami, Florida**