



PETER BUSHNELL/AGVS

## Minimal Remake

A truck garage becomes an architectural office with the introduction of a minimalist aesthetic and natural light *By Camille LeFevre*



Project team (from left to right): Marc Asmus, AIA, Martha Yunker, AIA, Bryan Carpenter.

The architects began the renovation by replacing the building's street-side garage doors with windows that open the building to passersby (top), allowing views into the reception area and conference room (below right).

When Y+A Architecture, Minneapolis, began searching for a building to house the 12-person firm, principals Marc Asmus, AIA, and Martha Yunker, AIA, had several criteria in mind. "We liked the idea of a free-standing building," Yunker recalls, "because we're a small firm that's not part of the corporate world of big buildings." The firm also wanted a structure that would express its minimalist personality and interest in the reuse of old buildings.

When Asmus and Yunker discovered the 4,000-square-foot garage on North Ninth Street in the Warehouse District, a former truck-service garage and cabinet shop for the Fanny Farmer Candy Company next door, they were home. "We stepped into the building, which was filthy and full of junk, and fell in love with its giant space," Yunker says.

Even before the purchase was finalized, Y+A began renovating the building by introducing natural light and an unadorned aesthetic that retains the spirit of the structure. "It's a simple little

industrial building with a simple design insertion," Asmus says. The AIA Minnesota 2001 Honor Awards jurors agreed, recognizing the project for an "interiors solution that speaks of simplicity and elegance."

The architects began by replacing the three garage doors at street level with storefront windows to introduce natural light inside and open the building to passersby. Visible from the side-



walk are the glass-walled conference room and the building's large open space, now dotted with workstations. "It's great for the firm to have an identity, especially at ground level," Asmus says. "It's almost like having a storefront."

Inside, the challenge was fitting specific office functions—workstations, bathrooms, reception area, and spaces for copy, printing and plotting machines—into the large space without "wrecking the wonderful quality of that big open room," Asmus says. The solution, he adds, was to "stack things up and to keep everything that would encroach on the space as narrow as possible and on one end."

Thus the reception area and conference room on the south end are topped by a new mezzanine; a floating rectangle of thinly layered plastic sheets suspended by a steel substructure, which houses storage and office machines and functions as a giant light fixture when lit from inside. The remainder of the first level is the high-ceilinged open space. Demountable, aluminum-frame work stations (a Y+A creation), constructed of acrylic, homasote and plastic laminate, have low walls that don't intrude on the space.

Steel tables in the middle of the room provide storage and an informal meeting area in which to study drawings. A cherry-wood wall across the interior's west side creates a hall in back of the open room. Cherry-wood panels on the exterior of the first-level bathroom demarcate "a small volume within the large volume," Asmus explains.

In addition to the mezzanine, the second level includes a conference room, second bathroom, workstations, kitchen and model shop. To augment limited daylight on the upper level, the project team added a translucent clerestory to the wall that separates the conference room and shop from the workspace and painted the metal ceiling a reflective silver.

Throughout the building, the project team largely left the industrial materials as they were. The concrete floor was cleaned up and sealed, but "you can see junk paint and stains that are still there," Asmus says. Mechanical systems remain exposed. "We just really liked the building," he continues, "so we tried to leave it as unadorned as possible."

The cherry-wood paneling, however, is a holdover from the firm's previous office. "We



think of it as the office piece inserted into the industrial building," Yunker says. "It's a way of bringing the old office into the new office. We like the juxtaposition of what was and what is now."

The jurors liked the juxtaposition as well, commenting on how the straightforward nature of the old building is captured in the new use. The architects, they said, "created fairly regimented spaces that get their richness from the materials palette." The project, they concluded, "uses a delicate touch for a sophisticated, successful adaptive reuse."



**Honor Award**

**Service Garage Transformation**

**Minneapolis, Minnesota**

**Y+A Architecture**

**Minneapolis, Minnesota**

*The project team retained the spacious quality of the first floor by keeping workstations low and relegating office machines to a new mezzanine (top). On the second floor, a translucent clerestory admits light to the workstations and the painted-silver ceiling advances the industrial aesthetic (above).*