Schoolhouses Getting Hip

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the building to evoke life outside the classroom. Officials at Sperer say their school is organized like the city grid, with hallways branded as boulevards. They culminate in common spaces with names like "Village Square." Classrooms are bordered with stretches of artificial turf described as "backyards."

"The Village Square is a place where people gather," said architect Christopher Grabé. "The boulevard is a wider expanse of being able to leisurely get from one place to another. The backyard is where you stop and rest and relax."

Planners and educators aren't concerned about distinctions that might stem from students congregating outside classrooms. "It used to be seen that any space where students were lounging it was idle hands at the devil's playground," said George Davidson, who heads Grace Church School, which opened the first phase of a new high school last year in a renovated East Village landmark. The building will ultimately be 100,000 square feet and is expected to cost $28 million.

"We think that students should lounge together, and when they do that they will work together in ways that make them more productive," Mr. Davidson said.

The idea of school architecture reflecting society isn't new. One-room schoolhouses matched the simple agrarian communities they served. As the industrial revolution took root, schools began to resemble factory assembly lines—a series of rooms off a central hallway.

The challenge now is what would you do to build a school for 15 years from now, not for 15 years ago?" Mr. Bordwell said. "That changes your whole perspective because we all know how fast things are changing."

Avenues officials said the school already made adjustments over the summer, reducing individual study spaces and adding more group tables.

Interactions between teachers and students are also being rethought through design. At Trevor Day School, which plans to open a new 101,000-square-foot building in 2014 for grades 7-12, offices are eliminated entirely—teachers' desks rim the student common area with no barrier in between.

City public schools are also embracing change, with brighter colors and more inviting entrances, said Bruce Barrett, vice president of engineering and architecture for the city's School Construction Authority. Once designed to protect against rock-throwing vandals, lobbies now feature glass and offer views inside the school to forge connections with the local community.

Old School Patrons Wary of New Look

Like the rise of the nouveau riche, the dazzling state-of-the-art buildings touted by New York's newest schools can be viewed askance by some of the centuries-old institutions that rule the city's private-school scene.

Their modest-to-pitifully-facilities are badges of honor, their reputations rooted in intellect and character, they say, not cutting-edge cafes.

So when Collegiate School—an all-boys K-12 institution on the Upper West Side that has been in its current location since 1892—announced this year it would move to a brand-new building in the same neighborhood, the reaction was, perhaps, predictable—apprehension.

School officials gave the architects simple instructions: Make it nice, but not too nice.

"There is a pride in how limited the facilities are," said headmaster Lee Levinson. "That we can have this kind of building yet generate some of the most creative and thoughtful and talented high school graduates in the country. It wasn't a function of having a shiny new building."

There was also visible history in scuffed stairs, aging wall murals, and scratched desks. After learning that some of its space would be taken back by its landlord, the school initially wanted to simply renovate. But practical issues couldn't be ignored. There were deferred maintenance costs, such as a limited sprinkler system. There was no air conditioning in classrooms. Space was already so tight that one teacher had an office in a closet and students were forced to work in hallways. English classes met in biology labs.

"The building will be impressive...but it won't be flashy."

The school rented out Alice Tully Hall at Lincoln Center to present its new plans. Hundreds came to listen.

"Collegiate doesn't want to destroy its brand," said architect Peter Gluck, "The building will be impressive, it will be an event in New York, but it won't be flashy."

The new building—expected to open in 2016—will have nine floors above ground and two below, additional classrooms, a significantly larger library and triple the outdoor play space. Early designs reflect many of the new principles of school architecture—including natural light, visual connections between floors, and creative common spaces—in a spare, elegant style. The architects have also drawn in the city, describing the new building as a series of interconnected neighborhoods.

"It seemed like a terrific way to understand the culture of the school which is very similar to the culture of a city," Mr. Gluck said. "The city brings everything together—all kinds of people, all kinds of ideas, all kinds of opportunities. The richness of the city we thought was really a good analogy to the richness of Collegiate."

Still, success is an open question. "I think to get it right will be to balance a long, respected history with a thoughtful look to the future," said Susan Rodriguez, an architect and Collegiate board member who has designed several schools in the city, including an acclaimed public school, the Frank Sinatra School of the Arts in Queens. (She is not directly involved in Collegiate's design.)

"There's a subtlety to it."

—Sophia Hollander

Change Targets 'Molly'

BY ALISON FOX

Sen. Charles Schumer proposed a new act to combat the increasing popularity of synthetic drugs after a hybrid of ecstasy known as "molly" caused the deaths of two people during a concert on Randall's Island this summer.

On Sunday, Mr. Schumer introduced the Protecting Our Youth from Dangerous Synthetic Drugs Act of 2013, in which the Food and Drug Administration and the Drug Enforcement Agency would be able to "ban substances that were similar in composition and effect to the 56 synthetic drugs already banned."

He said this latest form of ecstasy is "becoming increasingly common and increasingly dangerous." Mr. Schumer said these variations would have the same penalties attached as the original banned substance they are inspired from. They would include any variations of all drugs currently considered to be illegal.

"We need to give our DEA and FDA greater power to ban the counterfeit analogue drugs just like they banned the regular drugs," Mr. Schumer said. "This will be applied to any tweaking of a banned drug that makes the drug either worse or the same in terms of its effects."

Mr. Schumer said drug producers currently make minimal changes to the chemical composition of a banned substance, making the drug different from the original and no longer banned under current law. Under Mr. Schumer's proposal, such new variations would also be banned. He said this would apply to all drugs, "but 'molly' needs it in particular."

He also called for an increased focus on labs that produce "molly" by having the New York/New Jersey-based anti-drug task force High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area put more emphasis on this new drug. HIDTA is composed of state, local and federal officials.