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Designing to Build

*Whether designing an inner-city school or a luxe pool house, architect Peter Gluck makes sure his firm is responsible for every aspect of a project, from the sketches to the screws. **Page 76***

Interrogating the Form

*A conversation with Project Projects' principals reveals the studio's old-school approach to design, based in dialogue and reflection. **Page 102***



Top: Peter Gluck's Pool Pavilion project. Bottom: Project Projects, photo by Noah Kalina.

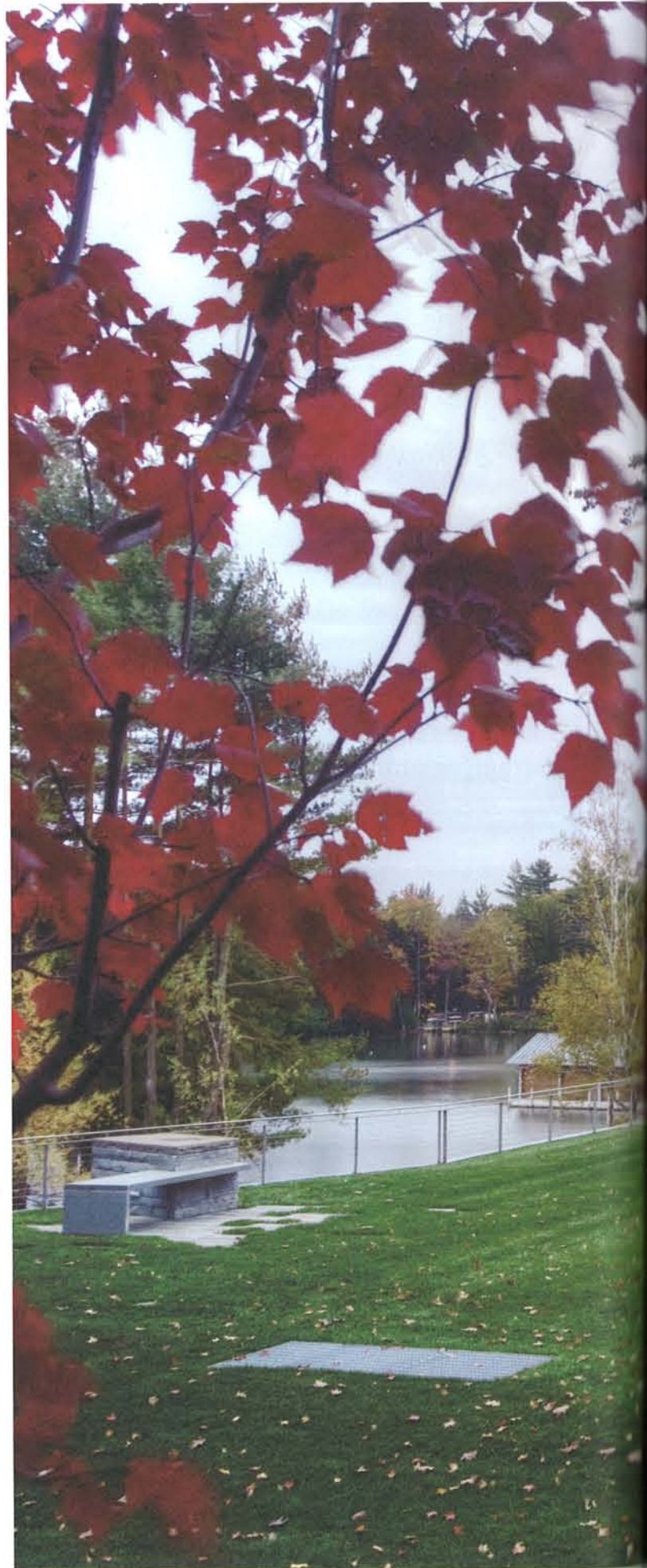
DESIGNING TO BUILD

An inner-city Harlem school and a family estate pool complex don't sound as if they have much in common. But for architect Peter Gluck, the process is the same, no matter the project or price tag.

Text by Anne Hartman

According to architect Peter Gluck, the traditional method of designing and constructing buildings is inherently flawed: architects don't know how to build and contractors don't understand design. So when Gluck started his architecture firm, Peter Gluck and Partners, he did so with the goal of fixing this broken process. "When architects construct buildings, it's common knowledge that there are problems; they take too long to build, they leak, they're over budget. But we really understand construction," Gluck says.

In order to avoid these types of unnecessary building issues, Gluck and his team use a design-build process, meaning that his firm is completely responsible for a project from the first stroke of the pencil to installing the last light bulb. It's this process that has allowed Gluck and his team to build everything from an Adirondacks pool pavilion on a sprawling family estate to an inner-city school in East Harlem.





*Gluck's Pool Pavilion project, located in
New York's Adirondack Mountains*



From flooding to fully-functioning: The East Harlem School Project

The East Harlem School mission is righteous, but dead serious: to provide a rigorous academic program for low-income families at no cost, and to embrace creativity and ambition with a no-nonsense attitude.

But Ivan Hageman, head and co-founder of the school, knew the building that housed it just wasn't saying what he wanted it to. The structural damage was obvious: there were four cramped classrooms for the 60 students enrolled—one of which flooded every time it rained. It had fallen into dire straits. Coupled with the fact that Hageman wanted the student body to triple in size, it meant East Harlem School's beaten-down facility finally had to be ditched for good.

To revive the school, Hageman enlisted Gluck's New York-based architecture firm, where he implemented his design-build process. "The design-build process allows

us to not only do high-end projects, but also some low-end, inner-city work," Gluck says. "We're able to design anything the same way—we'd design a more expensive project, and we can still come in under budget." It's a process that is not far off from how the school itself is structured. "The school is involved with the entire lives of the children, even after they've graduated," says project architect Stacie Wong. "It's not only about educating the kids, but also about being completely committed and accountable in their lives. For us, our process is the same thing."

Spending so much time with co-founder Hageman and the East Harlem School, Gluck's firm became familiar with EHS' ethos. The firm used that knowledge to create a building with a home-like feel, despite its considerable presence. Gluck and company opted for a checkerboard gray, white and black façade. The base used opaque etched glass, which ensured privacy for the building while still allowing passersby to sneak a peek at the building abuzz with activity.

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- Stacie Wong, project architect

Above and facing page: Gluck and his team completed The East Harlem School under budget by \$500,000.



The firm also chose to divide up the five-story school to create smaller, more intimate spaces within the building. Communal areas such as the gym, cafeteria and lobby were placed on the lower level, while the upper levels housed the classrooms and the library. With shorter corridors featuring soft rubber flooring, carpeted classrooms and an airy ambiance, the design rid the school of the drab, institutional feeling found in most other inner-city schools. In another departure from the original structure's cold, utilitarian design, Gluck's camp incorporated whimsical circle detailing throughout—from circular lights to “holes” in the lockers. This motif was meant to echo the school's daily tradition of meeting in a circle, reminding students of the community that they are a part of at EHS. It's a community that both Gluck and Wong have also become part of: Gluck's on the board of trustees at the school, while Wong tutors students in math, grammar and reading in her spare time.

Both Gluck and Wong say this type of project isn't a one-time deal—they're in the non-profit world to stay. “If we were regular architects doing only design, we would never get this kind of work to do,” Gluck says. “And the institutions that we work with would never get the quality of buildings that we're able to deliver to them.”





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- Peter Gluck, architect

Detailing with design build: The Pool Pavilion, Lake George, NY

About 200 miles from East Harlem, Gluck’s team had an entirely different wish list to fulfill for a client in upstate New York: conceiving and building a pool pavilion that would serve as the central gathering place for a family’s estate in Lake George, NY.

Gluck and his team were familiar with the property and the client; his firm had previously built a lake house, boathouse and a couple of guesthouses on the family’s property, each building designed to be private and secluded from one another. With the remaining space on the property boasting a prime view of the lake, Gluck’s team was summoned to create a multi-functional recreational facility for the family, though the architects cringed at the thought of plopping a clunky pool house in the middle of pristine land. “We investigated a lot of ways to maintain that sense of openness,” says project architect Charlie Kaplan. “We liked the idea of creating a central green.”

From that idea sprang a “rift in the landscape” concept. The team built the pool pavilion into a hill so that it gracefully melted into the

land, looking as if it had been there all along. They also made a sod roof for the structure that doubled as an open playing field and connected it back to the original landscape with a sod ramp. Gluck’s team felt this was the responsible option, respecting the natural feel of the landscape.

Like many of Gluck’s buildings, the pool pavilion employed a sleek, modern design using building materials that appear natural: glass, grass and stone. “Rather than take a beautiful spot and destroy it with a big building, this took a spot and enhanced its beauty, and the building kind of goes away,” he says.

The owner’s office was placed on the second story, perched above the roof with a lookout over the lake. And the pavilion’s interior didn’t skimp on features, either, boasting a 75-foot lap pool, sauna, steam room, kitchen and lounge area and a theater. Subtle detailing was added to soften the interior space, including a fabric ceiling liner in the pool area (meant to dampen the hard echoes common with indoor pool houses), and floor lighting in the pool itself, which creates abstract patterns of light in the water’s ripples. It’s these details, Gluck says, that are achievable through the money saved by using design-build. 🌿

Cut, Lift, Punch, Pop-Up: The Pool Pavilion Strategy

Gluck and Partners seamlessly integrated the Pool Pavilion into the landscape with a simple technique demonstrated here in a three-dimensional paper model.

