

Pitch Perfect

GLUCK+ designs sheet-music inspired facade for WHIN Music Community Charter School

By Trevor Schillaci • April 11, 2025 • East, Facades+



WHIN Music Community Charter School has a new home in Washington Heights. (Here and Now Agency)

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“Architecture is frozen music,” a quotation attributed to Goethe, might be one of the profession’s worst clichés. However, at a new school in Upper Manhattan, the analogy applies literally. Building above an existing parking garage, GLUCK+, a New York City-based practice, has created an 8-story tower to house the WHIN Music Community Charter School. To reflect the centrality of music to the school’s pedagogy, the building’s facade resembles sheet music with alternating window heights representing individual notes.

The WHIN School’s educational model is derived from Venezuela’s [El Sistema](#) program, which seeks to uplift underprivileged students through musical training. Founded in 2018, the institution offers tuition-free education awarded through a lottery system to children in

the Washington Heights-Inwood area (hence the acronym WHIN). The school was temporarily co-located within a public school on 164th Street before decamping to a former Catholic Church on 162nd. Its new facility boasts significant programmatic improvements from previous locations, such as expanded classroom space, as well as a large gymnasium and new concert hall.

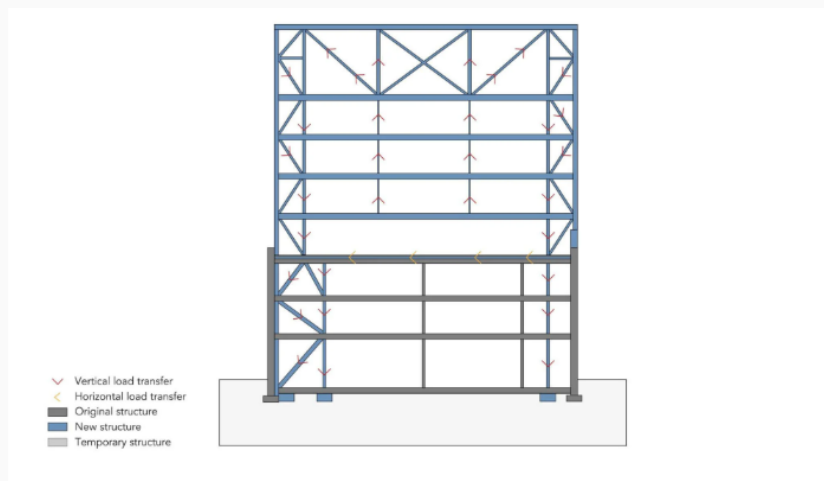


Located on a narrow residential block, the new building is a radical departure from the surrounding architecture. (Here and Now Agency)

GLUCK+ has been involved with the project from the beginning, assisting the school in its site selection process. The team considered a number of locations, but ultimately settled on a lot in Washington Heights occupied by a 3-story parking garage built in 1914.

The architect's scheme for the project involved maintaining the structure of the garage and building five additional stories above. To circumvent reliance on the garage's existing columns, which were too weak to support the planned extension, a 100-foot-long truss was constructed on the eighth floor of the tower. The floors beneath—five

through seven—are hung from the massive truss. Because of the truss's height requirements, the eighth floor is a double-height space that serves as the school's gymnasium.

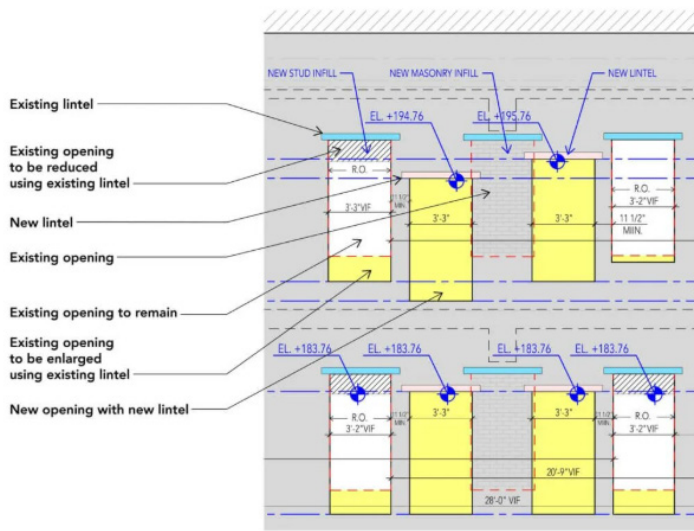


Inside the gymnasium, the truss was painted blue to represent the school colors. (Here and Now Agency)

The facade of the building was conceived as a symbol of the school's unique educational mission. GLUCK+ took inspiration from Gregorian sheet music, particularly "neumes," a square notation that indicates individual musical notes. The tower's punched window openings were conceived as neumes, while the structure's metal wall panels feature horizontal ribs that represent the musical staff, the five lines that organize a compositional sequence. Across the width of the facade, the punched windows jog up and down in height, mimicking the rise and fall of notes on the page.

This sequence of alternating height was particularly difficult to achieve across the existing elevations on the first three floors. Here the existing window openings of the garage were edited, shifted up and down slightly through infill and enlargement, to create the desired pattern.

The rhythm of the facade increases in complexity and variation as the building rises, corresponding to the organization of the school. Younger students are taught in classrooms on the lower floors, while older students capable of more complex music are taught on the floors above.



Existing window openings across the facade of the garage were adjusted to create the desired pattern. (Courtesy GLUCK+)



Set against a metallic background, the school's window frames pop with color. (Courtesy GLUCK+)

The school's focal point, a 400-seat concert hall, is positioned front and center on the first floor of the building and is visible via a glazed corridor that connects to the lobby and street-facing entrance. Directly above this is the school's music department, where 450 wood cubbies were created for students to store their instruments. Upper floors contain the cafeteria and classrooms, and throughout GLUCK+ added touches of blue and yellow, the school colors.



At the WHIN School, students begin choir and orchestra classes in Kindergarten. (Here and Now Agency)

Since welcoming its first class of full-time students less than a decade ago, the WHIN School has proven a success, no small feat in a city where public and private schools alike have faced closure due to a lack of enrollment and funding. The new building stands as a testament to this, while also laying the ground work for the institution's future.

Project Specifications

- **Architect:** GLUCK+
- **Structural Engineer:** TYLin
- **SOE/Shoring Engineer:** JK Blum
- **MEP Engineer:** GEA Consulting Engineers
- **Code/Expeditor:** JM Zoning
- **Geotechnical Engineer:** Geo-Technology Associates
- **Facade:** Forst Consulting & Architecture
- **Elevator:** IROS Elevator
- **Acoustics:** Harvey Marshall Berling Associates
- **Specifications:** Construction Specifications
- **Lighting:** Lux Populi
- **FF&E:** Whalen Berez Group
- **Metal Panels:** Morin by Kingspan
- **Finishes:** Sherwin Williams
- **Hardware:** Fecara Aluminum Systems, Elvial
- **Fabricator:** Advanced Aluminum Solutions