

# **NeoCon East 2011**

## **Center for Strategic & International Studies:**

*An inside/out view of Washington's most influential think tank*



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Hickok Cole Architects

## **I. Introduction**

### **A. Hickok Cole**

*Mike Hickok, Sr. Principal and Sean Wayne, Principal and Director of Interior Design*

*Hickok Cole Architects is a 65 person regional firm located in Georgetown. We specialize in:*

- *Commercial Office buildings and interiors*
- *Multi-family Housing*
- *Mixed-use Projects*

*We're here today talk about one of our current projects...the new headquarters for the Center for Strategic and International Studies.*

### **B. CSIS**

*"CSIS provides strategic insights and policy solutions to decision makers in government, international institutions, the private sector, and civil society." CSIS is the home of Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Harold Brown with Senator Sam Nunn as the head of the Board of Trustees.*

*CSIS studies some of the most important issues facing our planet; cyber security, global energy independence, the role of NATO, food security, international water resources. They produce reports and recommend policy on these topics and then sponsor international conferences, presentation, and seminars.*

*They are very, very smart people.*

### **C. Learning objectives**

*Today we are going to describe:*

- *The selection process and how we won it*
- *The design itself at urban, architectural and interior design levels*
- *The lessons learned*

## **II. Project description**

### **A. The Players**

*There was a very complex set of players: CSIS themselves, the Board of Directors, the Real Estate Committee, 2 independent real estate advisors, a professional project manager, Jones Lange LaSalle, a host of technical consultants. It was not uncommon that 20 individuals would be present at our weekly meetings.*

### **B. The Site**

*The small 16,000 SF site is located on Rhode Island Ave, between 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Streets, just west of Scott Circle. Scott Circle is an especially important location in L'Enfant's plan for Washington DC as it sits on axis with the White House 6 blocks away.*

### **C. The program**

*CSIS has suffered for many years with sub-standard space in an anonymous K Street office building. Their new headquarters is as their new home for "the next hundred years". Their program is ambitious:*

- *World class conferencing center, three levels of meeting and seminar rooms with a 400-person ball room serviced by a catering kitchen, language translation booths and a state of the art Apex computer system.*
- *The Commons...*



- *The Ideas Lab.....*
- *Boardroom...*
- *...and then, where the work gets done.*

### III. Selection Process

#### A. RFQ list

*The Initial Request for Qualifications was sent out to 40 local and national firms. We had not at the time done a lot of true build-to-suits so we stressed our deep experience in office buildings and corporate interiors and our collaborative work style which brings the two together.*

#### B. RFP list

*From the 40 on the RFQ list, they narrowed the field to 12 firms who would receive the RFP.*

#### C. Short List

*From the RFP we there were 4 firms short listed. 3 national and 2 local:*

- *Gensler*
- *RTKL*
- *Smith Group*
- *Boggs*
- *Hickok Cole Architects*

#### D. Design Competition

*First of all, we HATE design competitions....they are innately unfair; you don't get to meet with the client, you are taking a total shot in the dark. We came very close to NOT submitting. We knew it would be expensive; our experience had been that the big nationals always have the inside track, both in name recognition and resources.*

*But we considered several factors:*

- *Our competitive set- Where did we fit in the group of firms and how could we position ourselves?*
- *The structure of the competition: we knew Jones Lang LaSalle and they knew us; we were assured it was an level playing field, but then they always tell you want*
- *Can you afford financially to take the risk?*
- *Did we have a "winning" strategy?*

#### 1. HCA strategy

*First - Preparation:*

*As always, research the client, CSIS, and try to read between the lines to understand not only what they do, but how they do it....and especially their culture. Thoroughly understand the program and its requirements.*

*Second - Define success,*

*In this case we told CSIS, whether we showed them a building they loved...or hated... that was not measure of success. Instead look at the thought that went into it, the logic of the design and understand the collaborative process we go through (which would have included them if it had been allowed)...and chemistry. Judge us by those standards. We set standards that were intellectual not visual...because of who they are.*

*Third- the Presentations:* Remember....ITS NOT ABOUT YOU, ITS ALWAYS ABOUT THEM

A) We assigned descriptors or characteristics to CSIS.

"CSIS is: Self Confident

- *International*
- *In DC but not of DC"*



- Dynamic
- A window on the world
- Thoughtful

B) We described the importance and appropriateness of the site, its role in L'Enfant's Plan, and by extension the importance of CSIS as an institution in the city.

C) We then showed them a design solution that responded to all of the issues that we identified as important...

We spoke not at all about our work or other projects we used "precedent images" of great works of architecture to make our points

## 2. Cost

"NO SINS OF OMISSION" - Our philosophy in competitions is to select only those where we believe we have a realistic and fair opportunity, assess the availability of our best design staff to work on it. There is no point in going in half way unless you think you are the front runner and will definitely make it to the next round...we didn't feel we were. "In for a dime...in for a dollar."

GO TO THE END OF THE PRESENTATION AND WORK BACKWARDS - Be smart in how and what you choose to spend time designing...in other words if the rear alley elevation is not going to show up in your presentation materials...then don't design it. If the garage is going to be drawn...then don't design it. Decide early in the process what perspective views are going to be shown and design specifically to those views...something may look a little awkward in elevation but great in perspective...then choose based on the perspective.

IF YOU CAN AFFORD AND YOU HAVE THE TOOLS...BUILD A MODEL. We had recently purchased a laser cutter and it has transformed how we design and present our work. Models are always better than drawings, even small study models are effective

In the end we spent nearly \$150,000 of manpower to win CSIS.

## E. Interview

### 1. First Interview

#### INTRODUCTIONS

Our presentation was to a group of at least 20 individuals, most of whom we did not know and had never met. As the team was setting up, we personally walked around the big U shaped table and shook hands with everyone. This is not optional, you MUST make eye contact with every one of them...you may not win the interview in the first 5 minutes...but you sure can lose it. This exercise will also begin to tell you who's in charge, who has strong opinions and who's in a supporting role.

#### THE PRESENTATION

We made the decision early on that ALL team members who worked on the project would have a speaking role. Usually clients want to hear from the people who are going to work on the project rather than the highly polished Principal...not always...but usually. In this case, in order to lower expectations, we told CSIS that everyone was going to speak, not because they were necessarily the smoothest presenters, but because they had earned the right by the hard work and energy they had put into the design.

The presentation must be organized and very clearly scripted with no confusion about who says what, who makes the transitions, from one speaker to another.

The Principals role is to be the ring master...AND...to break in with pithy comments or clarifications.



*Be yourself. If you are naturally slow and measured in you speech, then be slow and measured. If you are high energy, then be high energy. But always be passionate and committed to what you've done. Passion always sells.*

*Be prepared. For some people that will mean highly scripted, for others it may mean cryptic notes. However it works for you...but know your topic and your facts cold. Knowing your material will dramatically reduce your anxiety about speaking to a large group.*

*Read the audience while others are speaking, look for nodding heads or frowns.*

*Take notes on issues that were not stated clearly or that you saw the audience was confused about and then find a graceful way to interject with "just to clarify..." Also, if you are the closer, then take notes on points you saw them responding positively to and include them in your summary.*

*In the Q & A go through the same "active listening." Many times a question will get asked, slightly misunderstood and so the question never really gets answered. It's always alright to say: "Did that answer your question?"*

## 2. Office Interview

*CSIS made the very unusual request to spend a half day in the offices of the two finalists...HCA and a large national firm. CSIS wanted to see our work environment and they wanted to see us "in action" with them. We settled in our conference room, with the entire team, rolled out the trace and began to make changes to our plan based on their comments. We demonstrated that we were collaborative, (like we said we were) and we would listen to them. We demonstrated we were willing to take criticism to make the project better. And we demonstrated that our culture would accept it.*

## IV. The Design

### A. Urban Design

*The urban design implications were straight forward. With Scott Circle to the NE, we felt it was important that the design in some way recognize it. The façade in a way "genuflects" toward to the circle. It is more open in that direction, views from inside are directed that way and the ground floor openings a biased toward the circle.*

### B. Architectural

*Most of our effort was spent on the RI Ave façade, since all other facades face alleys. The building is conceived as a solid block of limestone that has been carved away with a taut glass curtain wall skin stretched between. The ground floor is more solid with slot windows focused toward Scott Circle. The top floor is cut back deeply and sky lighted to create a wonderful terrace off the Board Room.*

*Back to the characteristics we assigned to CSIS:*

*Self-confident - We've chosen materials, limestone and glass that are associated with many monumental buildings in DC and a design that is not recessive but in fact stands proudly on Road Island Avenue.*

*International - We also chose an expression of monumentality that is more modern and even European than is typically found in DC. It is more akin to the National Gallery than it is to a K Street glass box - modern and forward looking but not trendy.*

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*In DC but not of DC - Similar to above, we were looking for a new kind of monumentality, not the tradition base, middle and top organization that is so dominant. Instead we have respected the organization but not allowed it to rule the design.*

*Dynamic - At a large scale the building is asymmetrical, with the more solid corner anchoring the west end allowing the glass portions to open toward Scott Circle. We subtly used a secondary syncopated rhythm in the window patterning to provide a counter point to the solidity and introduce a little playfulness.*

*Window on the world - This phrase was taken from CSIS's publications and provided us with a great metaphor for the building and especially how the interior conferences spaces related to the exterior world.*

*Thoughtful - We felt that this more intellectual approach would appeal to CSIS, and it's the way we work in any case. There was reason for every design decision...and they questioned every one of them.*

### **C. Interior Design**

*We approach the design of a build-to-suit in a collaborative manner, engaging Architects and Interior Designers from the very beginning. This was no different, except that there was little opportunity for the interior design to influence the shape and massing of the building. We were bound by zoning restrictions regarding height and set-backs that demanded that we fill out the total available envelope.*

*Within the building however was a different story. In Dr. Hamre's poetic letter where he described the building as having two hearts, The Public Heart and the Family Heart, we found the core of our organizational concept.*

#### The Public Heart

*In one week alone CSIS hosted two foreign presidents, three foreign ministers, two foreign defense ministers, received calls from the White House and the Defense Secretary and US Trade Representative asking CSIS to undertake special work on an urgent basis.*

*The Public Heart would be the three story world class conference center with rooms ranging in size from seating for 400 to a small conference and library room...complete with fire place. These three floors would be joined by a monumental stair and open atrium with space for cocktail receptions on the exterior façade.*

*This is truly world class space, with stone floors and walls, wood finishes throughout, built in cabinetry and a technically sophisticated programmable management software that will not only set the room temperature, but also the lighting level, the appropriate audio visual settings and lower the shades all tied to a master function schedule of events over the next month.*

#### The Family Heart

*This building would be organized around a multi-story sky-lit atrium which would be the location for the "Commons". This vertical space with intercommunicating stairs would link all office floors metaphorically and functionally. From this central location is access to mail boxes, copy rooms, research library, the Café with tables and chairs with a lounge area adjacent. The most innovative component of the Commons is the Ideas Lab where statistical data can be visualized, and multimedia presentations can be produced.*

### **V. Q & A**