

ANIMAL SHELTER



James Garrison looks for “mutually reinforcing ideas” in his projects, meaning that program and environmental systems are highly coordinated in order to drive the form-making. But his firm’s projects don’t look overly diagrammatic or weighted with gadgets—these clean, modern buildings are of their time without looking overly trendy, something Garrison prizes.

His mid-sized, Dumbo-based firm works at a variety of scales, including institutional work like the recently completed renovation of the Syracuse University School of Architecture (Garrison’s alma mater) and residence halls at Bard College, as well as private residential work, both houses and apartments. The firm has also become known for sustainability and for prefabricated and modular construction. But Garrison is not doctrinaire in applying any one principle or building technique. His interest is in problem-solving and building as intelligently as possible. At Syracuse, Garrison analyzed the Beaux Arts building and uncovered a natural ventilation system already built into the structure that made air conditioning largely unnecessary. His work was as much about peeling away obstructions as it was about inserting new spaces inside.

In recent years, and especially through the recession, the firm has worked for the General Services Administration, on a border-crossing station along with other current projects, as well as for New York City’s Department of Design and Construction (DDC) and a variety of nonprofit organizations. “They are very committed to making architecture,” he said of the DDC. The same could be said of Garrison, an uncommonly thoughtful architect.

ALAN G. BRAKE



ANIMAL SHELTER
STATEN ISLAND

This animal shelter, commissioned by the DDC, is a simple building with a versatile polycarbonate skin. The goal of the shelter is to prepare animals for adoption, and the architects put a “cat wall,” at the entrance to act as a visible invitation from the outside. The skin, while it admits light and therefore some heat, has an R-value twice that of glass. The doughnut-shaped building has a heat-exchange system and the generous ventilation required for animal shelters.

KOBE COTTAGE
ALBION,
MICHIGAN

This house may look like an expensive second home, but in fact is a guesthouse for families of children enrolled in a nonprofit boarding school for troubled youth. The house plan, two bars that meet in the center, allow two bedrooms to be at opposite ends of the very small building. The modular house cantilevers over a hillside, offering privacy and dramatic views of the site. With a warm wood interior and a Cor-Ten exterior, the cottage blends in with its forested surroundings.

AMBASSADOR'S
RESIDENCE
SAMOA

Simple materials of concrete, steel, stucco, and wood contrast with generous spaces in this residence made for diplomatic entertaining. The rippled roofline, which Garrison said was inspired by vernacular boat design, accommodates heavy downpours and allows for ample ventilation. Three gardens of various sizes are integrated into the plan, and roomy porches, accessible by vast glazed sliding doors, help knit the five-bedroom house into the landscape.

NET ZERO HOUSE
BROOKLYN

This house in Red Hook, for an environmentally committed client, is expected to generate more electricity than it uses. The modular house is heavily insulated and has a solar array on the roof, solar hot water heaters, and a green roof over the garage. Its verticality allows for views of New York Harbor. The shifted boxes break up the massing, while also creating outdoor spaces that include a large covered porch at the top level.

RESTORATION PLAZA
BROOKLYN

Founded as a community development and social services organization in the 1960s, Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration occupied a 1970s-era courtyard plaza that needed a facelift. Garrison began by removing a preserved facade, which unfortunately looked like an abandoned building, to open up the courtyard space to the street. They wrapped the courtyard in glazed panels to create a “Walk of Fame” honoring the organization’s activities and founders. New lighting, a video projection screen, and new signage complete the outreach design program.

KOBE COTTAGE



AMBASSADOR'S RESIDENCE



NET ZERO HOUSE



RESTORATION PLAZA



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