



Baltimore Jewelry Center
Baltimore, Maryland
Commercial Architecture

The Baltimore Jewelry Center (BJC) is a not-for-profit communal fabrication and educational space designed to accommodate the teaching of the technical and artistic foundation of jewelry design as well as to provide space for local artisans to produce their own work. Originally housed in a mill complex, The BJC was woefully short of the space and infrastructure needed to operate effectively as well as meet modern codes for safety around volatile elements. When their instructional mission was separated from a local art college the time was right to establish an independent presence in a new and modern space.



Existing facility

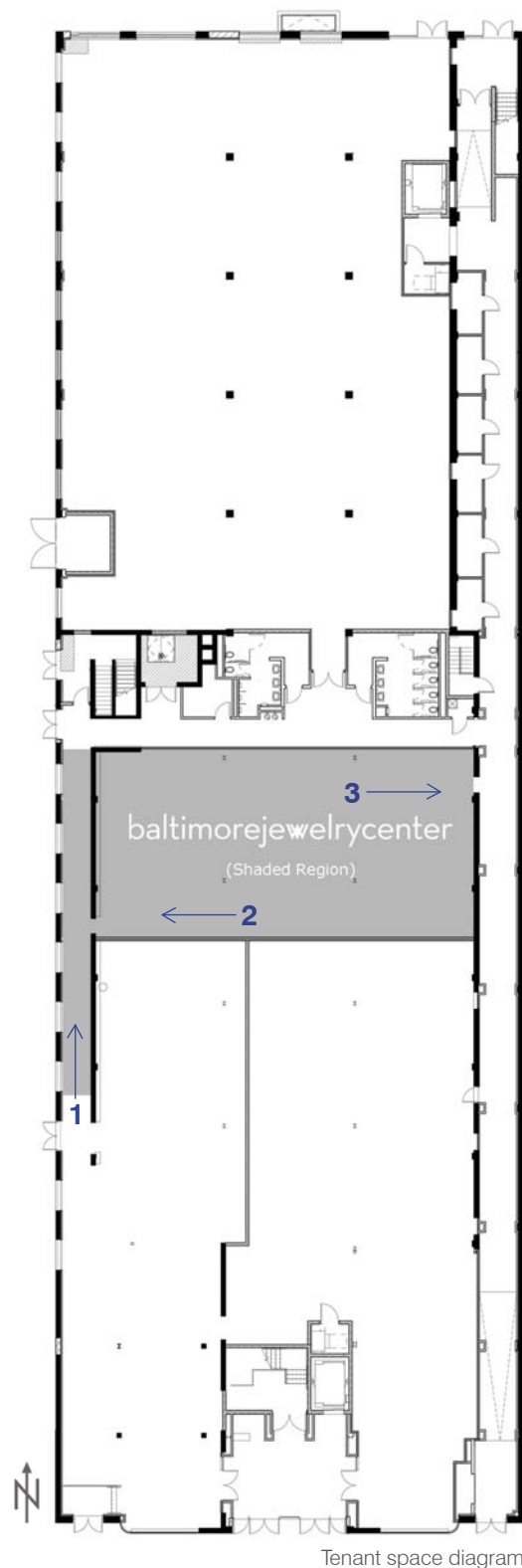


Created at BJC

With cost a major concern for such a major project, potential spaces were limited to smaller and less expensive options. In an emerging arts district, the conversion of an old movie theater/car dealership/check processing facility into a center for arts and education became the site of choice. Buried in the center of what was originally the theater's inner shell, the space was to be accessed by a long shared corridor and core that lay between the inner and outer walls. As part of the design conceptualization the interstitial zone on the opposite side originally intended as service corridor was added to the space to create a



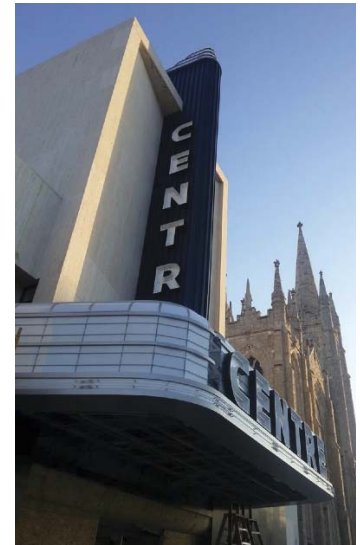
separate private access to the space. This allowed for natural light into a gallery/office zone and a more identifiable entry. Less noticeable but equally important, the added peripheral access allowed safe delivery and storage of combustible tanks as well as access to fresh air to make up for the high ventilation demands of the fabrication areas.



Existing service corridor (1)



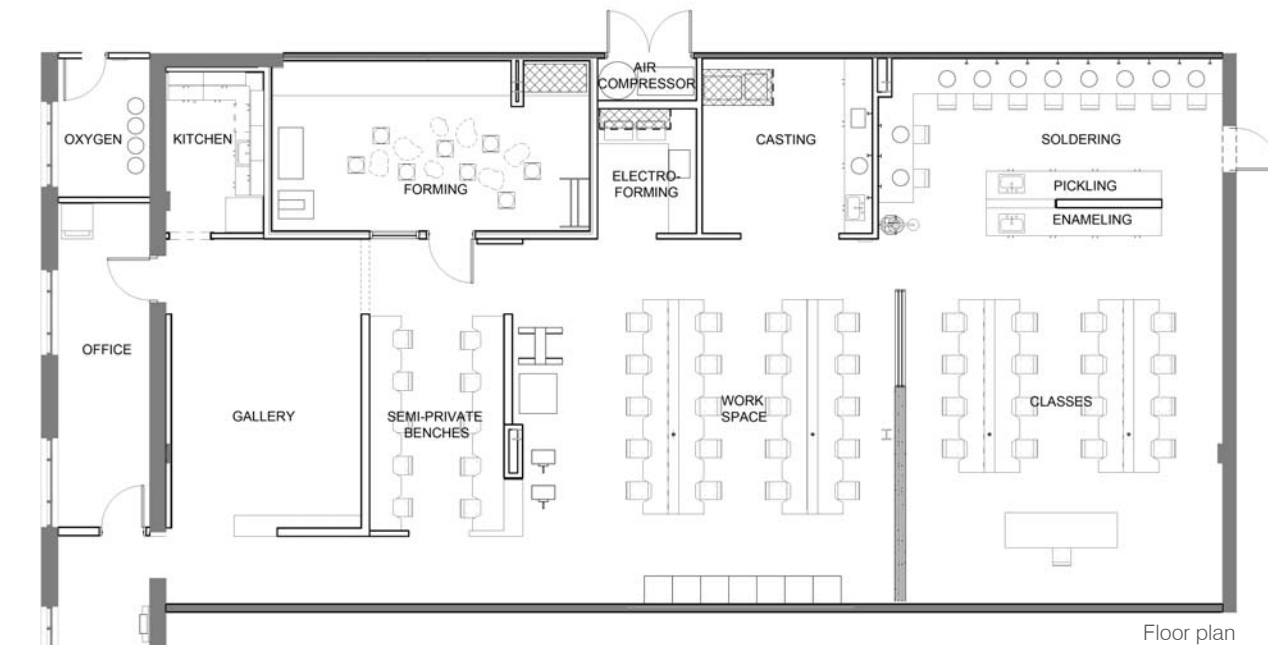
Existing theatre building (2)



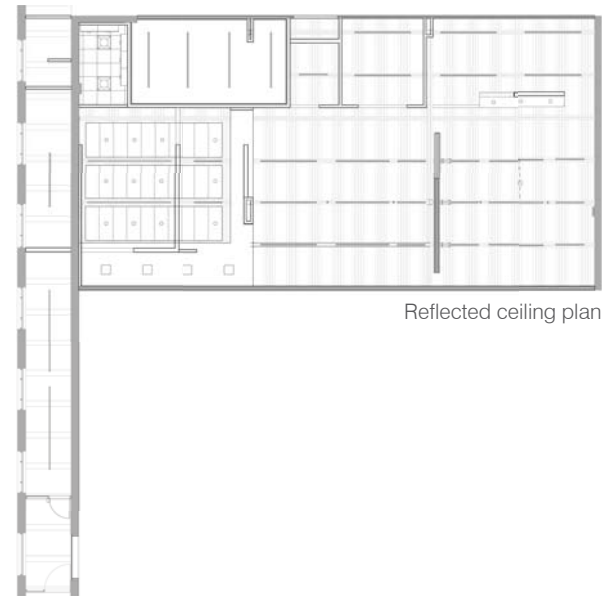
Historic theatre building



Existing theatre building (3)



Floor plan

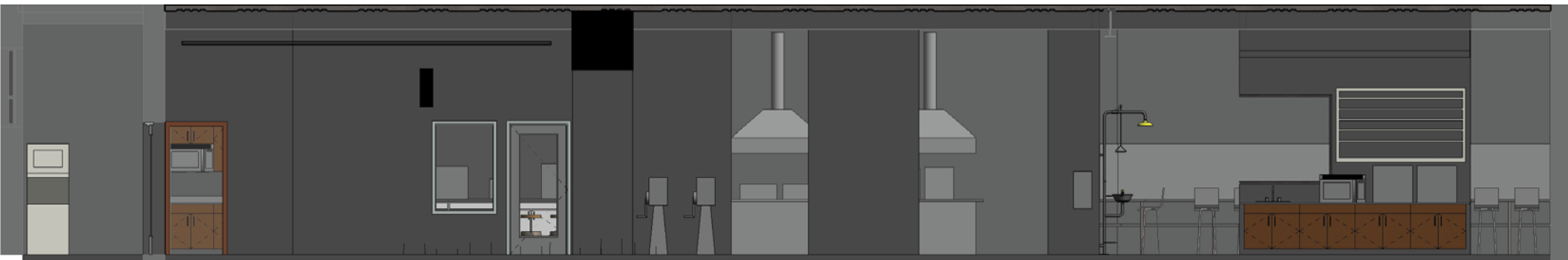


Reflected ceiling plan

The plan's organization is very simple but highly effective relative to the demands of the space. Divided primarily into technical fabrication areas and open space, the plan allows for maximum visibility between the custom work benches and the various processes used in jewelry making. This connection allows for greater safety as well as ease of instruction. A primary circulation path along an internal façade connects the various zones. The ceiling plan reflects this organization exposing the high open precast ceiling over the open areas with a lower ceiling at the more sound sensitive areas. Lighting and power are organized relative to the structural framing above and the plan needs below.



Detail of lighting and power drops (above, top) and interior elevation (below)





Entrance corridor gallery



Existing service corridor (left) and the entrance corridor gallery viewed from the office (below)



The light filled peripheral zone added to the space allows a dramatic entry gallery with custom display areas mounted to the exposed block of the original theater shell. The office is located at the end of the gallery adjacent to the portal into the main spaces allowing for visibility and control of access. A poured concrete ceiling accents the interesting proportions of the space which by its narrowness forces a more intimate relationship between viewer and displayed pieces.





Classroom area

The heart of the space is the open classroom/work area with custom designed benches allowing 36 workspaces. An additional 10 benches in a semi-private area are available for rental by professional artisans looking for access to the technical fabrication areas as well as the camaraderie of other artisans. Made from reclaimed wood, each space has individual power and lighting for Dremels and other tools that are part of the fabrication process. A large sliding door (still in the funding/fabrication process) will divide the classroom space for greater flexibility of usage.





Existing facility (top, above)

Soldering, pickling and enameling area

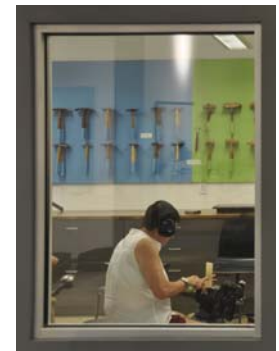


The soldering area presented a particular challenge relative to ventilation and was a primary driver of HVAC costs. Because of the toxins in the off-gassing, a large volume of conditioned air was required to replace the vented air. After research into practices in laboratories around the globe, small individual air scrubbers were found in Europe that achieved the same results and saved large installation and operational costs for the BJC. Previously housed in a cramped hallway zone, the new soldering station is open to the class area enhancing its safety and making instruction easier. Included in this fabrication area are pickling and enameling stations with their associated equipment, workspace, and cleanup sinks.



Forming room

One of the more visually exciting but acoustically challenging spaces is the cold forming room. The noise generated by the continuous hammering was a particular issue considering the BJC is just a tenant in a building occupied by others including sound studios on the floor above. A floating ceiling and wall system as well as an independent HVAC system allow for complete isolation while sound glass and an acoustic door allow visibility from the rest of the space.





Casting area



Existing facility (top, middle, above)



The electro-forming and casting areas are also located in the zone of fabrication areas but are each distinct spaces due to their venting and other safety needs. Again they are open to the classroom space for ease of access as well as for safe oversight. Custom casework allows for ample support storage and cleans up what was once one of the most chaotic and potentially dangerous areas of the BJC.



Gallery



View toward gallery

At the head of the open zone is a gallery space supported by a kitchenette that is used for conferencing, class pin-ups, exhibits, and public events. It is semi-enclosed to shield the semi-private work benches from the more public areas and to enhance the multi-functionality. As the BJC grows into its new space with enhanced class offerings, special exhibits, and greater access to the surrounding artistic community, it will fulfill its mission of sharing and celebrating the fine art of jewelry making and doing so in a space that is truly its own, operationally clarified and energetically creative.



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