

Tired, outdated buildings get architect's artistic touch

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Thomas E. Hall looks at a building and sees a work of art.

In the Duke House on New York's Fifth Avenue, he sees smooth stone finishes and simple, elegant lines. In decaying, old structures, he sees the potential for beauty and revival.



Hall

His background in architectural design shapes everything he sees.

When the 50-year-old president and owner of the architectural firm Thomas E. Hall & Associates Inc. of Wayne was working on his

bachelor's degree in architecture at the New York Institute of Technology, he took a year in the late 1970s to study and draw at the American Academy in Rome.

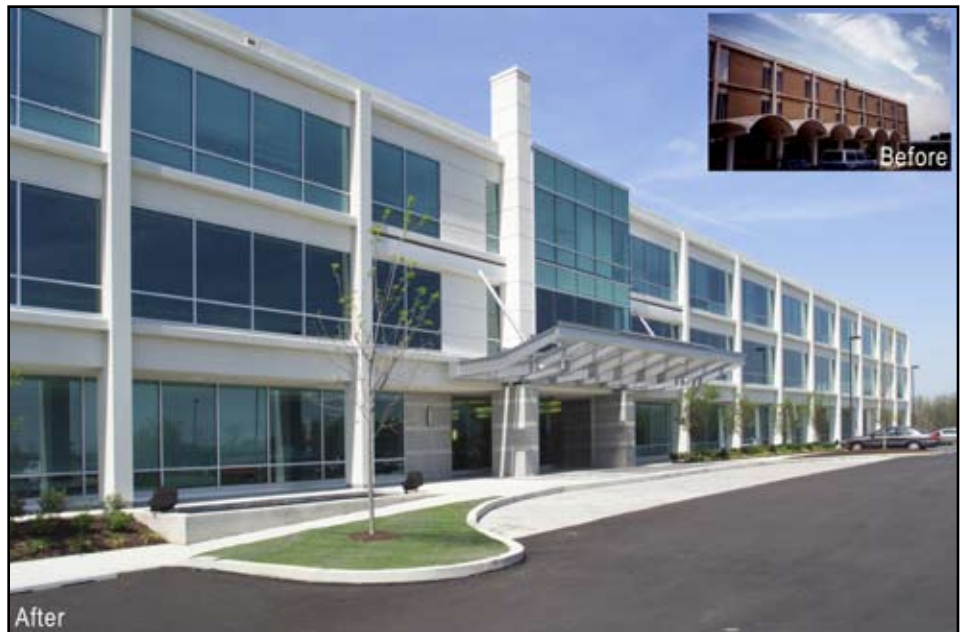
He knocked around Europe that year, padding through the architectural masterpieces of his textbooks. The experience was "profound," he recalled.

His father, the late Edwin F. Hall of Bucks County, got him interested in drawing. Though an electrical engineer by trade, the elder Hall was a talented illustrator and encouraged his son to go into architecture.

Many years later, Thomas Hall is a registered architect in 12 states and runs a firm of 16 people focusing on commercial building rehabilitation, residential design and interiors.

In particular, Hall has carved out a niche in the rehab market. "Clients come to me with a building that's old and tired and needs to have a new skin," he said.

One completed project Hall is particularly proud of is a 21-story rehabbed office



STEVE WOLF PHOTOGRAPHY

O'Neill Properties turned to Thomas E. Hall & Associates to give the Horizon Corporate Center in Trevese a new life and look.

building in Wilmington on 1105 Market St. The structure was originally designed by the world-famous I.M. Pei, known for edifices such as the Louvre Pyramid in Paris and the National Gallery in Washington.

The Delaware building was falling into disrepair, and Hall's firm was called in to resurrect it. They did the exterior in new glass and glazing, added a granite lobby, custom lighting, new panels, and left portions of the original concrete exposed, in an effort to be sensitive to the original design. The project cost "many millions of dollars," and Hall's client sold the building last year for a profit.

Developer Bill Glazer, president of Keystone Property Group in Conshohocken, has been working with Hall for almost a decade and said the architect has "tremendous vision and creative prowess."

"What separates Tom from all the other

architects in the market is that he has an energy, that je ne sais quois, which gives the buildings that much more sex appeal," he said.

Glazer is working on about eight projects with Hall that cover 1 million square feet of space in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware. The team completed the \$42 million redevelopment of the Parkview Towers in King of Prussia, which Glazer said is a signature building that defines the community's skyline.

He first worked with Hall in 1997 to convert an industrial building to office space in Fort Washington. Though Glazer had worked with other architects, he couldn't get this particular architect off of his radar, once the project was done. Hall kept coming up with powerful, compelling designs.

"Anybody can be current," Glazer said. "He's current with the right sense of

UP CLOSE

COMPANY: Thomas E. Hall & Associates Inc.

LOCATION: Wayne

OWNER/PRESIDENT:

Thomas E. Hall

TYPE OF COMPANY: Architectural firm specializing in office and retail building rehabilitation, residential design and interiors.

EMPLOYEES: 16

BIG DEVELOPMENT: Involved in eight projects with Keystone Property Group covering 1 million-square-feet of space in Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware, and is developing separate plans to turn office space in the Martin Tower — the old Bethlehem Steel building in Bethlehem — into upscale condos.



STEVE WOLF PHOTOGRAPHY

One Windsor Corporate Center in Allentown sports a new 'skin' designed by Hall.

HALL: Architectural firm grew out of a home-based startup

proportion. He's current with the right sense of space. He's current with the right materials."

Hall strips a structure down to its steel frame and works his way out.

The process of designing and renovating a building can take 18 months. Hall starts by visiting a site with clients and discussing their goals. Then he and his associates prepare sketches "that represent exciting solutions and designs that will achieve their objectives, not just from an aesthetic standpoint but from an economic standpoint."

"They have to put an exciting building out on the marketplace so people will rent it or buy it," he said.

He is lured by the challenge of transforming something ordinary into something "wonderful."

A few years ago, Hall branched out into residential design, which he said was challenging, since his firm was more familiar with commercial criteria.

So rather than leave that part of the business to chance, he hired an expert in June

2005. Gregory Wissman had designed buildings for national developers such as Toll Brothers of Horsham and McKee Group of Springfield, and Hall wanted him to be director of residential design.

Wissman was already an admirer of Hall's keen eye for scale, proportion and selection of high-quality materials.

"I think he's fabulous, sensational, incredible," Wissman said. "It's been a really good working relationship."

Now Wissman's residential clients want Hall to design their office buildings, and Hall's commercial clients want Wissman to design their residential undertakings.

Hall went into architecture because he wanted to design homes; he stayed because of his passion to contribute to the aesthetics of a place. He is thrilled to have his hands in all aspects of the building process, since he said architects are expected to "execute everything."

A native of Bucks County, Hall got his first architecture job on the Main Line, right out of college. He continued working for other architects until 1988, when

he opened his own business out of his Haverford ranch home.

He quickly hired four other people, and the five-person team worked out of Hall's basement office for six years, even when the roof was being ripped off his house — one of his first projects.

Now he lives in Bryn Mawr with his wife Lisa and children, Kathryn, 7, and Thomas, 3.

Among his future endeavors, he has his eye on turning former office space in the Martin Tower — the old Bethlehem Steel building in Bethlehem — into upscale condominiums. He gushes about the "absolutely gorgeous building," the "spectacular" views of the Lehigh Valley, how the project will have 18-foot-high ceilings on the first floor, an all-glass façade and that it will fill a gap in the luxury condo market.

"We're still working on conceptals there," Hall said.

But you can practically hear the mechanical pencil scratching on trace paper inside his churning mind.