A CHARTER ARTS SCHOOL IN PORTLAND

In 1999, Oregon passed legislation promoting the creation of specialized charter schools to allow for more and varied educational options for students struggling in the traditional public school system. Charter schools help to achieve specific educational visions, gain a bit of autonomy from conventional schools and serve a more specific educational demographic. Specifically, a Charter School for the Arts will cater to artistic young people, their parents who encourage them and the community that this future school exists in and for.

The studio involves the adaptive re-use of an existing building in a vibrant neighborhood of Northeast Portland with a burgeoning art community. The building itself will be mildly historic in nature, but minimal exterior alteration is allowed. The building will be 10,000 - 15,000 square feet (TBD) on two levels; additions to the existing area will not be required. The school will serve 60 to 80 students in a traditional 4-year high-school degree program. In addition to studio space, classrooms and computer labs, there will be teachers’ offices, administrative functions, gallery space, a small auditorium and yet-to-be-determined magic in-between spaces. The students are expected to complete the basic curriculum of traditional schools in addition to their arts focus, thus traditional teaching space must be provided.

This studio will delve into the ever-challenging notion of how current designers create space for future designers. Arts education is different from other areas of focus; the spatial requirements required to foster artistic endeavors will be primary to the studio’s work. Community, both internal and external, is also critical. Charter schools are unique in that students’ parents take a very active role in monitoring the schools’ progress, thus the interaction of the internal and external communities will also be a conceptual source. The idea that exposure to The Arts is of primary benefit to society as a whole should be thought of not only in terms of the students’ learning experience, but also of the public learning experience.

Via case studies and your own experiences, we will investigate effective learning spaces and studio spaces and attempt to break traditional notions of both. This will, hopefully, be the primary idea-generator. The Charter School is an alternative approach to education; the studio will focus on alternative notions of adaptive re-use, community development and sustainable design practices as they relate to materials, passive ventilation, and daylighting.

Media are critical to design process. It’s impossible to design in such a way that your media do NOT impact your design process. Experimentation with media and design process will be encouraged, and all 2D and 3D arenas, digital and manual and the interactions between all of them are fair game. We will produce traditional plans, sections, elevations and perspective drawings, but the drawings that describe your ideas and investigate your questions should be thought of as part of a successful body of work.

Francis Dardis is a licensed architect in Portland and has been Principal of FBD Architecture, LLC for 5½ years. His recent work has focused on commercial infill projects on small to medium lots with a variety of tenants from restaurants and bars to offices and TV Production facilities.