

Private schools: Many new projects put on hold

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The Drew School will start construction early next year on its new \$14 million “New Roots” performing arts building: a 14,500-square-foot structure at the corner of California and Broderick streets that will feature an external vertical garden and a green roof.



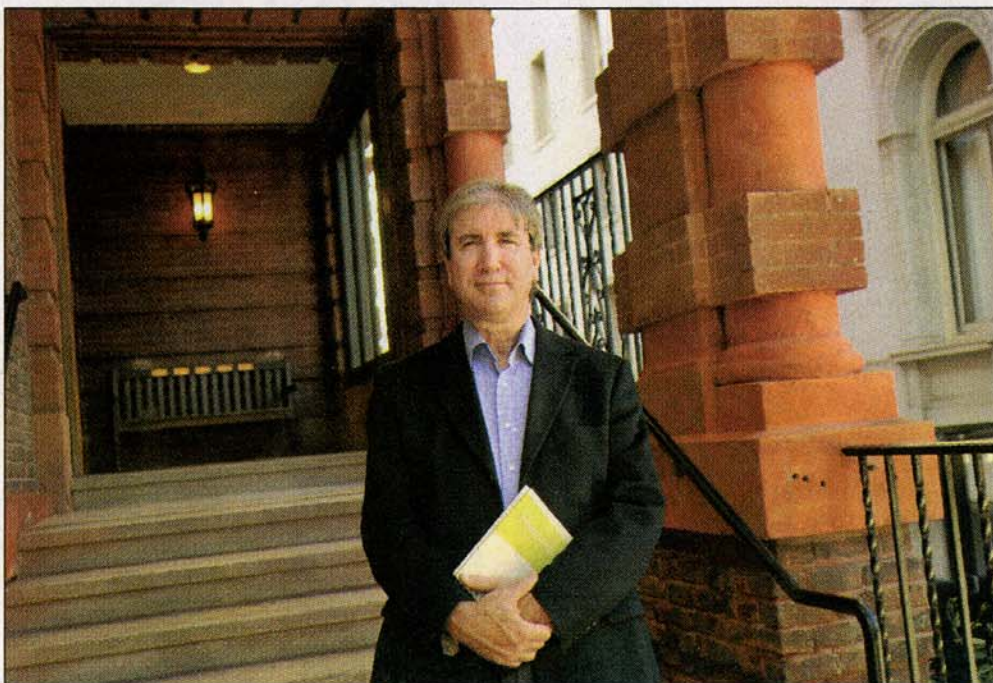
For architect Roma Design Group and contractor Herrero Brothers, the San Francisco private high school project represents a plum assignment: It is one of the few independent school construction

projects going forward at a time when the recession has slowed capital campaigns.

Drew School Headmaster Samuel Cuddeback said the school is able to move ahead because it met its fundraising goal during the fiscal year that ended June 30.

“We had a fantastic year last year before the downturn,” said Cuddeback.

In total, the school will raise \$6 million from foundations and individuals with the balance paid for through tax-free bonds. With about 75 percent of the fundraising goal met, school officials expect to start demolition in November and wrap up construction by January 2011. He said fundraising has been helped by



Many schools are moving slowing in launching projects, says architect Bill Bondy.

the fact that the building will address a fundamental educational need.

“We don’t have any gathering or theater space,” he said. “Our kids are compromised, and I think parents and past parents and friends of the school have dialed into that. Kids today need the arts.”

Other private schools are taking a much more tentative approach, according to Bill Bondy, a principal with Starkweather Bondy Architecture, which specializes in independent school design. Bondy said private schools are delaying costly construction and focusing on long-term planning. Starkweather Bondy, which recently

did a \$10 million renovation of Stuart Hall for Boys, a K-8 school, is finishing up a master plan for the San Francisco School, a preschool through 8th grade school.

“We are seeing projects put on hold,” said Bondy. “Bond financing has dried up. Donors are taking a more conservative view and looking at strategic planning and modified master planning to get a handle on what direction they want to take. A lot of projects that have already done entitlements are on hold.”

Those on hold include the new athletic center and theater for the Brandeis Hillel Day School in San Francisco, a gym-

nasium for the Jewish Community High School of the Bay, and a multi-purpose building for the Gideon Hausner Jewish Day School in Palo Alto.

“The independent school work is cyclical — there tends to be a period of growth and then things settle down for a while,” said Bondy. “Athletic facilities were hot for a while, then science buildings. Things tend to come in waves and stop in waves.”

While most of the Bay Area independent schools are small, several have won national awards for innovative and green design. Architect Peter Pfau received accolades for two projects, the San Francisco Friends School’s \$30 million rehab of the old Levi Strauss & Co. building on Valencia Street and Lick Wilmerding High School’s \$14 million expansion.

Architect Bonnie Fisher of Roma Design Group said the new, sustainable Drew School building will offer students a real-world lesson in the “creative application of science.”

“It’s an incredibly fun project for us. School projects are always fantastic projects for us because they bring together a lot of interesting programmatic responses,” she said. “You have a small urban campus, and you have a little bit of space to work with. The challenge is how to take advantage of the space for maximum benefit to the campus as whole and create an opportunity for a lot of things to happen within that space.”