



Key Points:

- Light is an essential attribute of art gallery architecture.
- Edgy galleries are concerned not only with maximizing natural lighting, but also views



Amanda Harrell-Seyburn, Associate AIA is an award-winning designer with a diverse portfolio and expertise in places and spaces for the visual arts. She is an associate at east arbor architecture, a design studio located in East Lansing specializing in historic preservation, traditional detailing, and critical regionalism. She has degrees in Art History and Architecture. She is a curator, an adjunct professor at the University of Detroit Mercy School of Architecture, and a Louise Blanchard Bethune Fellow of the American Institute of Architects.

Published: September 2018

**Previously published in:
CAM Magazine**

AIA Michigan
www.aiami.com

Contemporary Art Gallery Architecture: A New Aesthetic Identity

Amanda Harrell-Seyburn, Assoc. AIA; east arbor architecture

Contemporary art gallery architecture requires a subtle balance. On the one hand it must augment the experience and on the other, allow the art to be the essential focus. The simplest approach to satisfying this balance is the white cube, all-white spaces, that minimize distraction and maximize exhibition space. Regarded for its singular context in which to experience art, the white cube has been ubiquitous to gallery architecture for much of the recent century. As we enter the third decade of the current century, white walls are still hot as ever, yet art gallery architecture is taking on a welcome complexity. Galleries, in pursuit of a less singular experience, are embracing the interplay of natural lighting, views, and open-air spaces—elements redefining architecture of the new millennium.

Natural Lighting

Light is an essential attribute of art gallery architecture. Daylighting, a technique of illuminating a space with indirect natural light, produces ideal conditions for viewing art—particularly from the rooftop. Rooftops allow for maximum illumination without sacrificing exhibition space. Architect, John Soane, introduced daylighting from the rooftop into the design of the Dulwich Picture Gallery in South London which opened to the public in 1817. His innovative design, illuminating galleries with natural light from skylights, took hold and has been influencing art gallery design ever since.

While illuminating art galleries with natural lighting isn't new, what is new is the scale at which the it is being utilized. Natural lighting has gone from supplemental to primary illumination for the dual reasons of light quality and sustainability. Natural light is free and beautiful. In spaces like Paul Kasmin Gallery, located at 515 W. 27th Street, New York City designed by studioMDA you will find no small gestures to daylighting. An expansive skylight dominates more than sixty percent of the overhead space. Natural light floods in and light diffusing baffles set at regular intervals—mimicking ceiling joists—distribute the light evenly throughout the day and evening.

Natural lighting is easy to attain for single story galleries. Those choosing storefront space in a multistory building sacrifice access to natural light and are forced to employ expansive lighting. In search of this coveted natural light, galleries are transitioning to take advantage of the light accessible from the top story. Spaces like Annelly Juda Fine Art, located in London's West End, has no ground floor or storefront presence. Instead they occupy the upper floors of 23 Dering





Key Points:

- Light is an essential attribute of art gallery architecture.
- Edgy galleries are concerned not only with maximizing natural lighting, but also views



Amanda Harrell-Seyburn, Associate AIA is an award-winning designer with a diverse portfolio and expertise in places and spaces for the visual arts. She is an associate at east arbor architecture, a design studio located in East Lansing specializing in historic preservation, traditional detailing, and critical regionalism. She has degrees in Art History and Architecture. She is a curator, an adjunct professor at the University of Detroit Mercy School of Architecture, and a Louise Blanchard Bethune Fellow of the American Institute of Architects.

Published: September 2018

**Previously published in:
CAM Magazine**

AIA Michigan
www.aiami.com

Contemporary Art Gallery Architecture: A New Aesthetic Identity

Amanda Harrell-Seyburn, Assoc. AIA; east arbor architecture

Street with access to natural light sourced from a massive skylight. Forgoing a storefront location is bold. Spaces like Marian Goodman Gallery designed by Adjaye Associates have the best of both worlds. The gallery located at 5-8 Lower John Street in London’s Mayfair, occupies the storefront and the level above where access to huge skylights and a one and half story palladium window illuminate the exhibition space. It is a stunning space where the dramatic light validates the ambitious arrangement.

Views

Edgy galleries are concerned not only with maximizing natural lighting, but also views. A shift to expansive glass facades brings a new aesthetic identity to art gallery architecture. Nearly completely transparent facades, floor to ceiling glass in many cases, opens the space up for natural lighting—drawing natural light through the façade—but also to the surrounding context. Sight-lines to the street, green space, alley, or other environment outside the gallery, becomes a part of the context within which the art is experienced. The art becomes public, on full display to the outside.

There are no small views at Ronchini a contemporary art gallery designed by Architecture OO and located at 22 Dering Street in London. Its floor-to-ceiling glass façade presents a distinctive experience demonstrating that Ronchini is no shrinking violet. It takes serious self-assurance to consign nearly one quarter of the primary exhibition space to dramatic views of the street, a backdrop of architecture and daily activity to the art viewing experience. Between the expansive glass and the first level of the building, set at the same level as the sidewalk, a traditionally defined separation between building and street is zero. The intersection of floor and glass dematerializes the façade and in this bold architecture London, Dering Street, and the gallery are enigmatically linked for a discriminating contemporary art experience.

Open-Air Spaces

A patio here, an enclosed green space there—open-air spaces are being integrated into gallery architecture. These spaces are no longer simply adjacent outdoor space at the entry or exit of the building but located within the building floorplan. A courtyard, light shaft, or terrace offers a welcome pause within the white cube. They provide access to natural light and a place for respite. Offering interaction with light, sky, wind, air, and vegetation to compliment and contrast with the stillness of the gallery.

Rosenfeld Porcini has an open-air space. The contemporary gallery designed by Architecture OO occupies the first and basement levels of a long narrow space in a historic multi-story building that runs East-West from 37 Rathborne Street to 36 Newman in London. Despite a host of constraints, both levels of the minimalist space are awash in balanced light thanks to a design that comprises light sources from three sides: the two storefronts and windows onto a small



Key Points:

- Light is an essential attribute of art gallery architecture.
- Edgy galleries are concerned not only with maximizing natural lighting, but also views



Amanda Harrell-Seyburn, Associate AIA is an award-winning designer with a diverse portfolio and expertise in places and spaces for the visual arts. She is an associate at east arbor architecture, a design studio located in East Lansing specializing in historic preservation, traditional detailing, and critical regionalism. She has degrees in Art History and Architecture. She is a curator, an adjunct professor at the University of Detroit Mercy School of Architecture, and a Louise Blanchard Bethune Fellow of the American Institute of Architects.

Published: September 2018

**Previously published in:
CAM Magazine**

Contemporary Art Gallery Architecture: A New Aesthetic Identity

Amanda Harrell-Seyburn, Assoc. AIA; east arbor architecture

courtyard at the basement level. Open to the sky, the courtyard is a defining feature of Rosenfeld Porcini located at nearly the midpoint of the gallery, equidistant from Rathborne and Newman streets respectively. Surrounded by walls of glazed brick and climbing vines with a view to the sky, levels above, it provides a breath of literal fresh air. Perfect in its proportion and proximity—neither distracting or competing the space—it augments the gallery experience while allowing the art to be the primary focus. Small yet mighty, it provides a perfect balance to the white cube.