

The historic home of the University of Minnesota's aerospace engineering and mechanics program gets a stellar renovation

# TOP FLIGHT

By Camille LeFevre



JAMES LOCKWOOD



**BEFORE** *Ecto ium qui volupta dolum ipicid estia velest invellu ptinimil*

The first time Greg Fenton, AIA, walked into the University of Minnesota's Akerman Hall, he was overwhelmed—with both amazement and dismay. First, his jaw dropped. The airplane hangar at the center of the aerospace and engineering building was astounding. The clear-span space, approximately 80 by 80 feet, stood two stories high and was bounded by a U-shaped mezzanine. Who knew the 1949 building, designed by the C.H. Johnston Architects and Engineers (the firm succeeding Clarence H. Johnston, who designed many of the buildings along nearby Northrop Mall) housed such a spectacular space, in which students disassembled airplanes to study their design and construction.

Then, Fenton assessed the hangar's condition. "It was completely underutilized," says the project architect who led BWBR's renovation of the historic building. "Multiple modifications of the space over last three or

THIS PAGE: STEPHAN BERG, AIA



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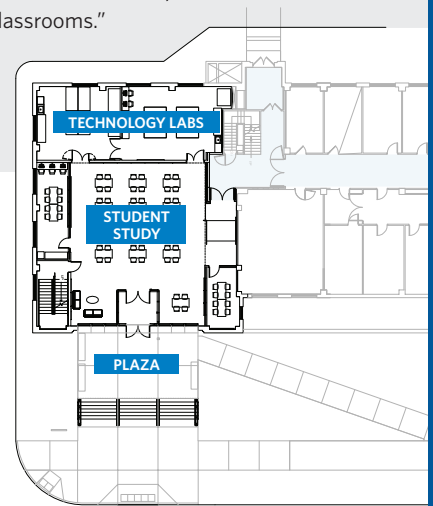
four decades—including room partitions—hadn't retained the spirit of the hangar. Plus, it was a mess, with out-of-date labs and a woodshop."

Still, Fenton adds, "We quickly grasped that we could take the hangar back to its essence and transform it into a modern student workspace, with light-industrial labs, graduate student study rooms, and collaboration space for the department and university at large." One look at the before and after pictures confirms Fenton's contention that "the transformation is off the charts."

Today, the hangar is a light-filled study lounge surrounded by the two-story mezzanine, with collaborative spaces, workstations, and labs tucked along the edges of the space. In the light-industrial and state-of-the-art computer and model-building laboratories, students conduct research on the guidance, navigation, and control of indoor micro-air vehicles, as well as on smart materials and wind turbines. "It was important to us that the renovation focus on improving our students' education experiences," says Dr. Gary Balas, head of the Department of Aerospace Engineering and Mechanics.

"BWBR embraced our vision and helped us meet and exceed our expectations," Balas continues. "The main-floor collaborative space in the hangar is brilliant. It's constantly full of students working, interacting, studying, talking, and hanging out, and the students are not all aerospace engineers since Akerman Hall is home to 10 general purpose classrooms." The glass and steel additions to the mezzanine accentuate

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**AKERMAN HALL HANGAR RENOVATION**

**Location:**  
Minneapolis,  
Minnesota

**Architect:**  
BWBR  
bwbr.com

**Project lead  
designer:**  
Stephen Berg, AIA

**Landscape  
architect/  
Planting design:**  
University of  
Minnesota

**Size:**  
66,000 square feet

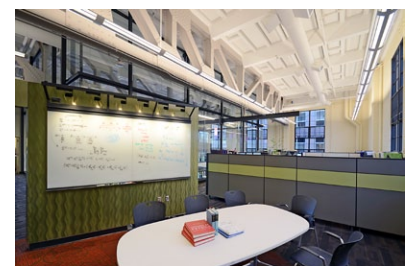
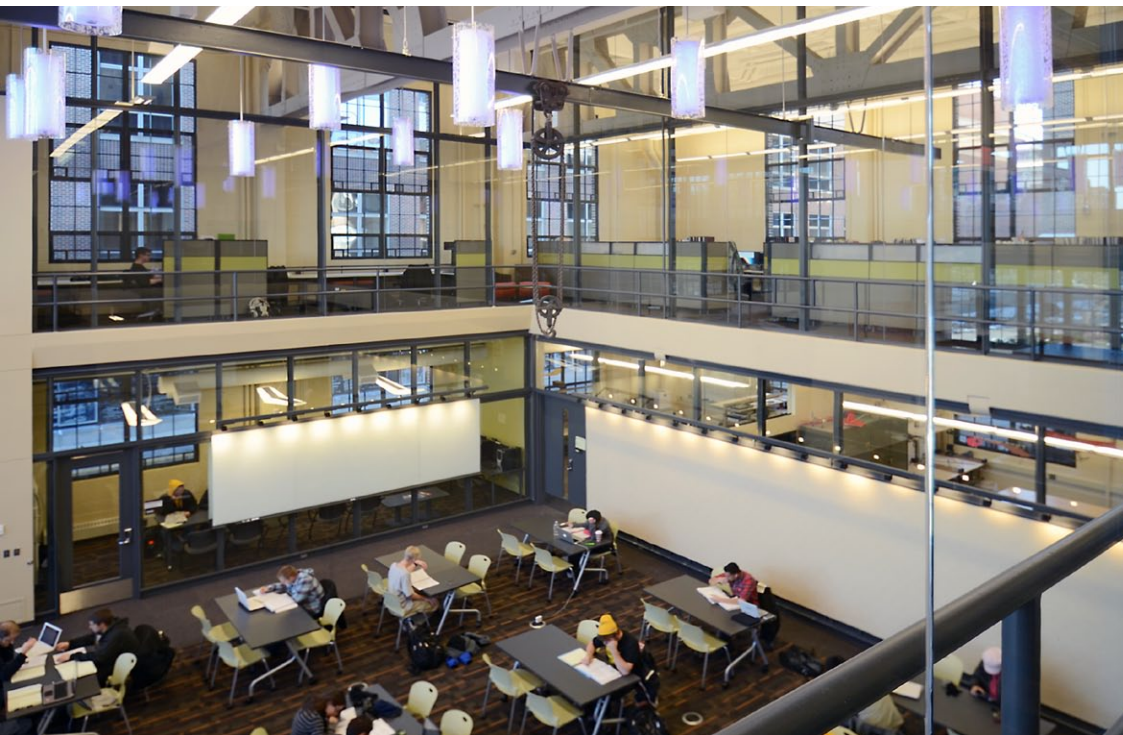
**Client:**  
University of  
Minnesota

**Principal-in-charge:**  
Katherine  
Leonidas, AIA

**Energy design  
assistance:**  
The Weidt Group  
twgi.com

**Construction  
manager:**  
M.A. Mortenson  
Company

**Cost:**  
\$9.5 million



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