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By Adam Moore | Photography by Kenneth M. Wyner Photography Inc.



FUN AT THE YMCA


Washington, D.C.'s re-designed YMCA Anthony Bowen brings culture and community together.

One-hundred and sixty years after former slave Anthony Bowen established the first YMCA for African Americans in Washington, D.C., the historic Shaw neighborhood is celebrating the opening of a new, fully appointed Y destined to preserve Bowen's legacy for a generation to come.

Designed by DeSpace Designs, the redeveloped YMCA Anthony Bowen connects users to the organization's past, while also providing the amenities needed to improve their future. Large-format images of former Anthony Bowen members (including Supreme Court justice Thurgood Marshall and poet Langston Hughes), text installations, and unique artworks tracing the history of the neighborhood greet members as they navigate 44,000 square feet of childcare, wellness, and community space.

"[Our] goal was to deliver the best culturally and contextually relevant design for the Y, and to advance positive social change, innovation, and social equity," said Diane Taitt, ASID, Assoc. AIA, founder and managing principal of DeSpace Designs.

Among the state-of-the-art facility's highlights are a 27-foot-high climbing wall; a 5,500-square-foot indoor aquatics center with a six-lane pool; a beautiful, stainless steel-filled demonstration kitchen for cooking and nutrition classes; an internet café; and a 3,000-square-foot outdoor ipe wood terrace. A variety of flexible community spaces, including a four-room nursery, lobby lounge, and meeting and conference rooms, help further the Y's community mission.

"People still need places to meet, educate children, and learn ways to improve their well-being," said Janice Williams, senior vice president of program development for the YMCA of Metropolitan Washington. "That's what this 'YMCA of the new age' can accomplish, while serving as a model for how urban YMCAs can operate in the future." 

RIGHT TOP TO BOTTOM The history of YMCA Anthony Bowen is presented to visitors through graphic and text installations as soon as they enter; the central connecting staircase provides views to all of the building's wellness areas; a wall mural created by Y Board Member Andy Shallal faces the workout area.

OPPOSITE Green and orange are common colors used throughout the new Y. Green represents balance, harmony, and growth, while the orange stands for adventure and social communication.



See additional photography from this project in our digital edition at interiorsandsources.com.



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EVERYONE

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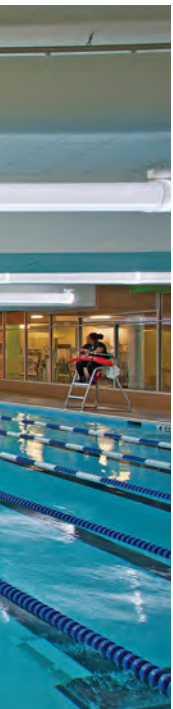
The lobby lounge includes a variety of comfortable seating around a fireplace, continuing the Y's legacy as a community gathering place where ideas can be shared and debated.



ABOVE Storytelling elements and large-scale environmental graphics created by local artists help convey both the rich history and community mission of YMCA Anthony Bowen.



RIGHT TOP TO BOTTOM Sophisticated design details abound within the facility, including the slat wall and ceiling framing the entrance to the locker area; the textured, undulating wall tiles surrounding the six-lane pool; and the stainless steel demonstration kitchen.



The 2-story rock climbing wall helps broaden the appeal of the facility, especially among younger patrons who might not be interested in cardio or weight training.