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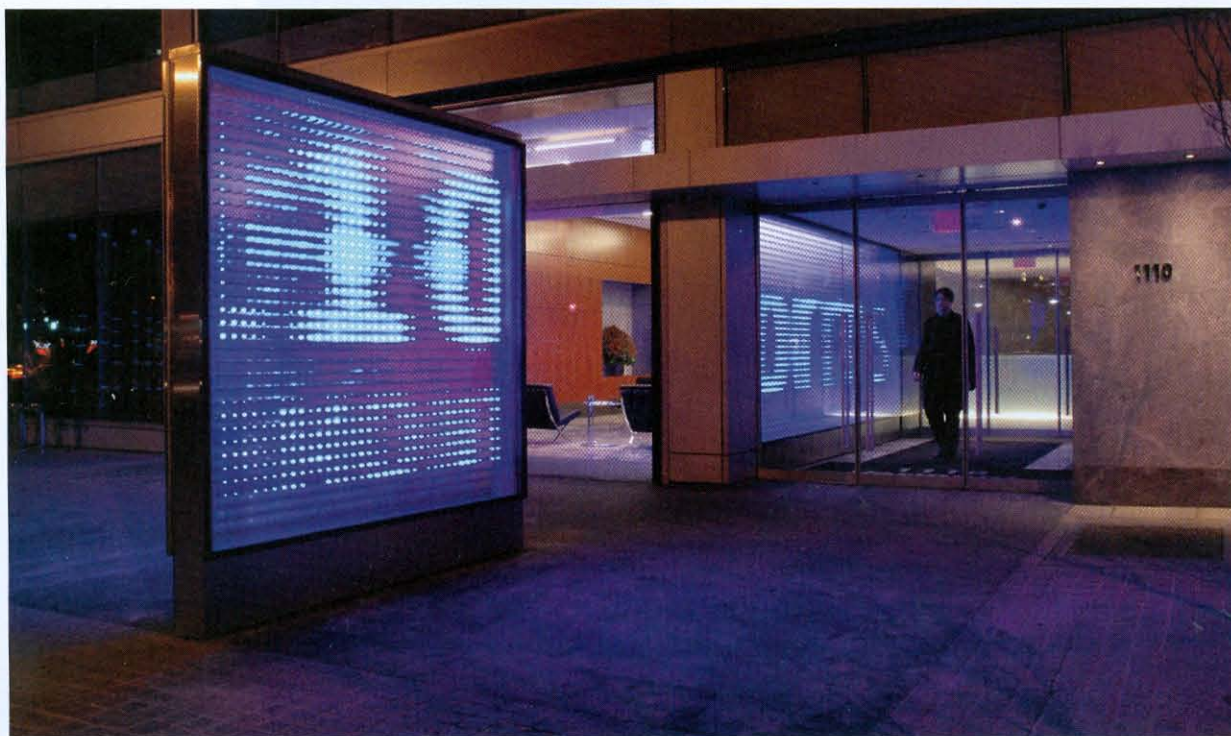
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Exterior view of the building entrance.



Lo Rez continuously streams "1110," the building's street number, overlaid with low-resolution images of sidewalk activity captured by the building's security cameras.



Hi Fi is an interactive musical instrument. Passersby who touch metal sections of its stalks are rewarded with a chorus of notes.

MY Studio/Höweler + Yoon Architecture's *Lo Rez Hi Fi* gives a D.C. building a much-needed sense of place

By Charles Linn, FAIA

Spec office buildings in downtown Washington are so uniformly bland that one wonders whether the city has been forcing developers to follow 1960-issue GSA building standards for the past 47 years. Anonymity worsens at night when the characteristics that differentiate the light beige precast exteriors from the light gray ones vanish, leaving ill-at-ease pedestrians in a monochromatic moonscape.

1110 Vermont Avenue sits in the middle of a block of such buildings, and the advantages of having the property stand out—attention, happier tenants, higher rents—were not lost on its owner, Abbott Stillman. He hired STUDIOS Architecture to renovate it, and sought a way of bringing to its entry a sense of identity. When he saw *White Noise/White Light*, an interactive installation in Athens, Greece, that combined light and sound, he contacted its creators, Meejin Yoon and Eric Höweler.

"I got an e-mail from him out of the blue," Yoon says, and the two of them began to conceptualize a two-part permanent installation

called *Lo Rez Hi Fi*. The *Lo Rez* portion of the work is an electronic sign comprising a pair of two-sided screens made of 10,000 individually controlled LEDs. The lamps are affixed in pairs to tensioned cables placed 2.4 inches apart and suspended between glass panels, etched to diffuse the light. One of these screens is installed inside in the building's entry; the second is aligned with it on the sidewalk. A controller turns individual LEDs on or off in sequences that, when viewed from a distance, form moving images. They stream "1110," the building's address number, and

Project: *Lo Rez Hi Fi*

Client/Collaborator: *Abbott Stillman*

Owner: *Perseus Realty and The Stillman Group*

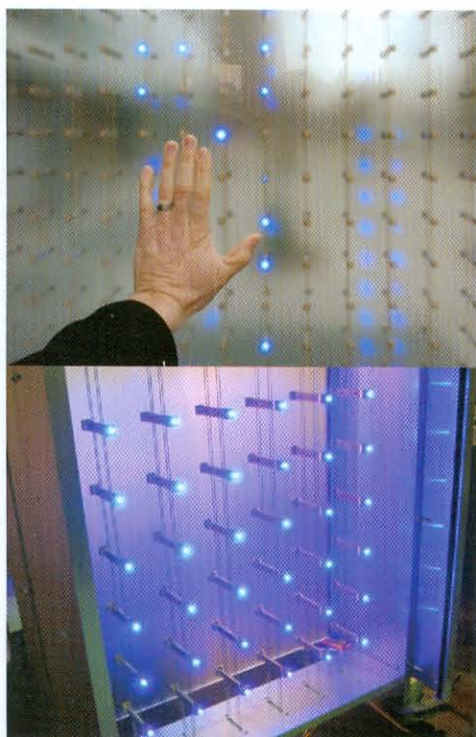
Designer: *MY Studio/Höweler+Yoon Architecture—J. Meejin Yoon,*

Eric Höweler, AIA, Carl Solander, Lisa Smith, Meredith Miller

Architect of record: *STUDIOS Arch.*

Electronics engineer/fabricator: *Will Pickering, Parallel Development*

Sound composer: *Erik Carlson, Area C*



The nets of LEDs created for *Lo Rez* are mounted inside vitrines of lightly etched glass. A different display can be shown on each side of the sign, because each side has its own set of individually controlled LEDs.

may be mixed with images of sidewalk activity captured by the building's security cameras.

The second component is *Hi Fi*, a grid of sidewalk-mounted poles that Yoon describes as "stalks." Each is divided into segments of stainless steel separated by thin LED-illuminated rings. Composer Erik Carlson gave each segment a distinct note or sound sample that plays when touched. They are networked to create a "sound grove." When a person touches a segment, its assigned sound plays and pauses; then a related sound from another stalk elsewhere in the network plays, it is answered by another note elsewhere, and so on. Passersby can make music with *Hi Fi* and see themselves on *Lo Rez*. Both parts of this installation required Will Pickering and his company, Parallel Development, to design custom programmable controllers and circuit boards, which were assembled with the designers' help. "We did a lot of soldering," Höweler says.

The ground floor of 1110 Vermont has been leased to two restaurants and a Starbucks, proving Stillman's hunch that brightening the block's dark mantle would pay off. "He saw the development potential of the building," says Yoon, "but was also extremely concerned that *Lo Rez Hi Fi* really engage the public space. This was not a percent-for-art project, so he had no requirement to do something creative." ■

Readers can see videos of *Lo Rez Hi Fi* and other projects by MY Studio by going to youtube.com and doing a search for the term ehowler.