Echelon Glazed Block Provides Dynamic Solution for Ceramics Building at Alfred University in New York

The Challenge
When offered the chance to partner with NBBJ Architecture—listed by Fast Company among the Top 50 Most Innovative Companies three out of the past five years (2013-17)—you jump at the chance. Echelon certainly did, helping NBBJ complete its vision for a project at the New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University. The building, a new addition to the older portion of the school, was an infill into a courtyard constructed to hold the College of Ceramics’ sensitive imaging equipment.

“Our goal was to give some character to what could have been a simple concrete box,” stated William Voulgaris, AIA principal, architect with NBBJ in Boston. “And we wanted to use a material that would be relevant to the ceramic school, yet also unconventional and forward-thinking in the design.”

The Solution
NBBJ settled on a glazed masonry unit, but with a twist. Instead of laying the pieces in the traditional, horizontal configuration, the architects placed the units vertically arranged in a random pattern. Echelon’s Astra-Glaze SW+® figured to be the perfect solution. The pre-faced architectural concrete masonry units feature a thermoset glazing compound permanently molded on one or more faces. This exterior is cured and heat-treated to create an impervious surface that repels water and resists mold, is easy to clean, and installs in only one step.

“One of my favorite aspects of the building is the seasonal sunlight that hits the colors, giving the inside a constant changing character.”
— William Voulgaris, Project Architect

“At first, we were a little concerned about how the glaze facing on the units would weather in New York’s extreme environment,” said
Voulgaris. “However, the Echelon representatives showed us some good examples of past performance and came up with a solution to help make it easier for the masons to lay the units vertically as designed.”

“When we first saw the design, we knew that installation would be a bit of a challenge as the concrete masonry units would have a tendency to tip forward in the vertical format,” explained Echelon Project Manager, Terry Page. “The units were specified at 4 x 4 x 16. In places where the same color butted up together, we took a 4 x 8 x 16 unit and ran a score along the face so it looked like two separate pieces.”

The Results
The innovative approach devised by Echelon not only allowed the mason to lay one unit instead of two in those cases and made it easier to line up the score, but also saved the customer money. After working with NBBJ to ensure the product was up to their team’s design standards, Terry Page worked closely with King Brothers Masonry Construction to facilitate the installation.

“One of my favorite aspects of the building is the seasonal sunlight that hits the colors, giving the inside a constant changing character,” said Voulgaris. “Overall, I know both we at NBBJ and our client at Alfred University are very pleased with the product and the unique solutions Echelon presented to us to help make this project happen.”

About Echelon®
Echelon is the new consolidated brand for the masonry products and services of Oldcastle Architectural. Representing the most comprehensive masonry offering in the industry, Echelon provides a singular go-to source and reliable partner who successfully completes projects from beginning to end. Backed by a national infrastructure with more than 150 operating locations, we have unparalleled logistical capabilities while still providing a local response and presence that feels personal.

Project Details
Project Description:
New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University
Location:
Alfred, New York
Product:
Astra-Glaze SW+

Quantity and Colors:
1,800: 4 x 8 x 16 Astra Glaze W/1 Horizontal Score (Silver Grey)
1,800: 4 x 8 x 16 Astra Glaze W/1 Horizontal Score (Pewter)
1,200: 4 x 4 x 16 Astra Glaze (Earl Grey)
1,200: 4 x 4 x 16 Astra Glaze (Wheatfield)

Installer:
King Brothers Masonry Construction

Architect:
NBBJ Architecture, PLLCs

Photo Credit:
Photos by William Voulgaris, courtesy NBBJ