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# NIGHT & DAY

The difference lighting makes,  
in five projects

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## MARCEL WILSON

Inventions far from the crowds

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## TURF WITHOUT SIN

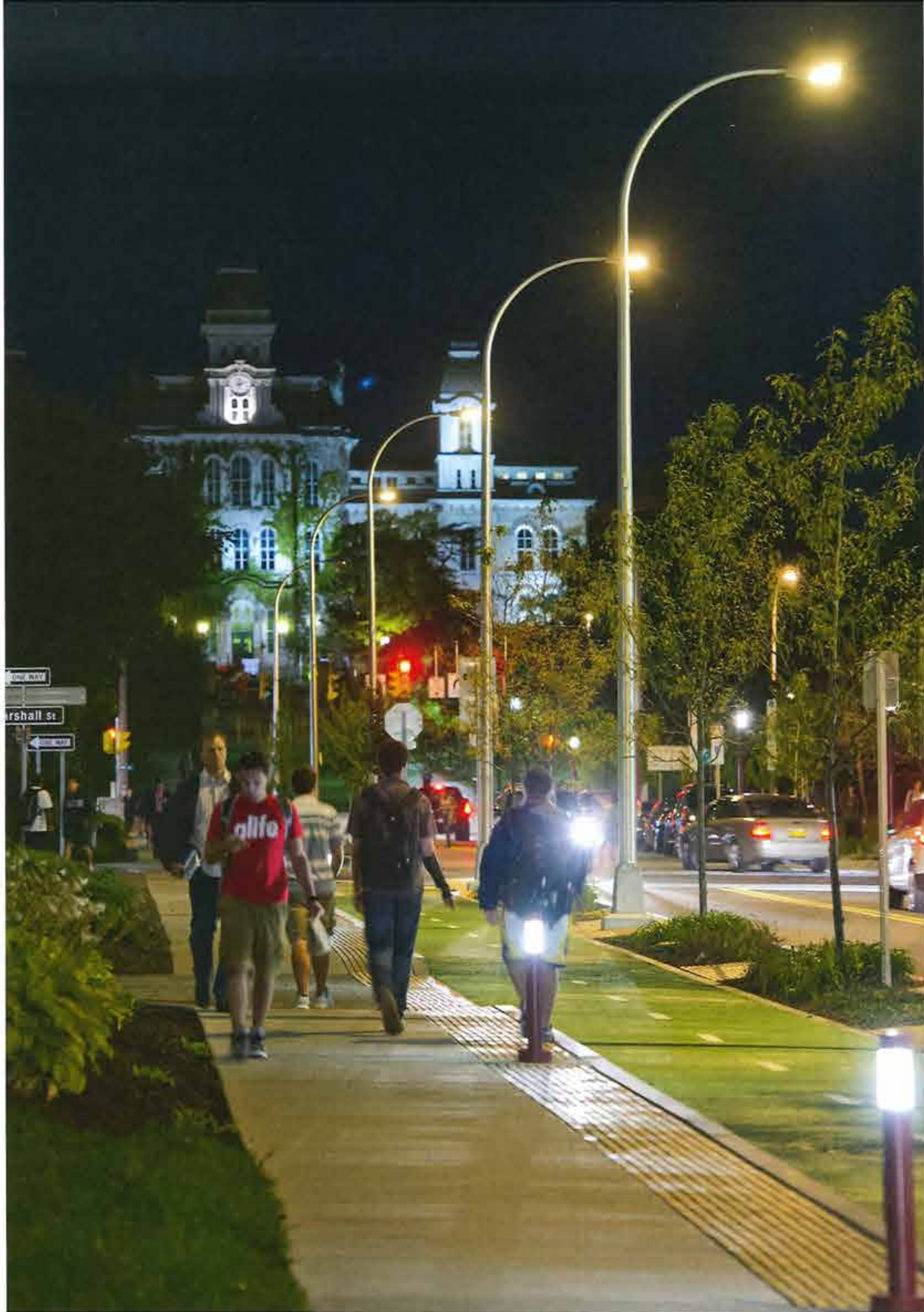
The search for sustainable lawn grass

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## VANISHING TYPE

Good-bye to one-of-a-kind signs





**UNIVERSITY AVENUE**  
The original low light bollards seen here were eventually replaced with light poles.

# RED ALERT

YOU CAN'T MISS LINNAEA TILLET'S LIGHTS  
ON THE STREETS OF SYRACUSE.  
THAT'S THE POINT.

BY ALEX ULAM

**A**T THE END OF THE GREAT ICE AGE, when Upstate New York's Finger Lakes were formed, Mother Nature decreed that the site where the city of Syracuse is located was to be one of the most sunlight-deprived places in North America. Not only does Syracuse's metropolitan region regularly receive more snow than that of any other large city in the lower 48 states, it is also the fourth rainiest. Considering its challenging climate, one wonders whether Syracuse would have succeeded in becoming the architecturally distinguished city that it is today if it hadn't been for the Erie Canal, built in the 19th century, which still runs through the city's center. A short walk through Syracuse's downtown

takes you past parks with historic wrought-iron fences and elaborate fountains as well as soot-darkened office and bank buildings that run a gamut of styles ranging from Greek Revival and Federal to neoclassical and art deco.

But it isn't Syracuse's frequently overcast weather, empty streets, and many derelict buildings that cause the pedestrian to stop and wonder whether he should continue. Syracuse also suffers from a host of urban renewal projects built during the 1960s and 1970s that included the demolition of downtown blocks to make way for hulking garages and parking lots, which at nighttime and on many weekends, when there is not a sports event

## CONNECTIVE CORRIDOR

- 1 DOWNTOWN
- 2 FORMAN PARK
- 3 UNIVERSITY HILL  
NEIGHBORHOOD
- 4 NEAR WESTSIDE  
NEIGHBORHOOD
- 5 ERIE CANAL

at Syracuse University, become large dead zones. Then there is the elevated section of Highway 81, known as the city's Berlin Wall, that cleaved it in two. But the coup de grâce for many of downtown Syracuse's stores and restaurants was the construction of the nearby Carousel Center mall in 1990, which was recently expanded into the sixth-largest mall in the country and rebranded as the Destiny USA.

Now the largest public works project in Syracuse in more than 30 years, a \$42.5 million streetscape initiative called the Connective Corridor, is seeking to help the city recover from the tabula rasa era of urban planning by building bridges to its past and to its future. The project is establishing a distinctive design identity and a green ethos along a two-mile route leading from the core of Syracuse University's imposing 19th-century hilltop campus toward a downtown that is finally awakening after decades of decline.





I-690

1

FAYETTE STREET

GENESEE STREET

2

I-81 / ALMOND STREET

UNIVERSITY AVENUE

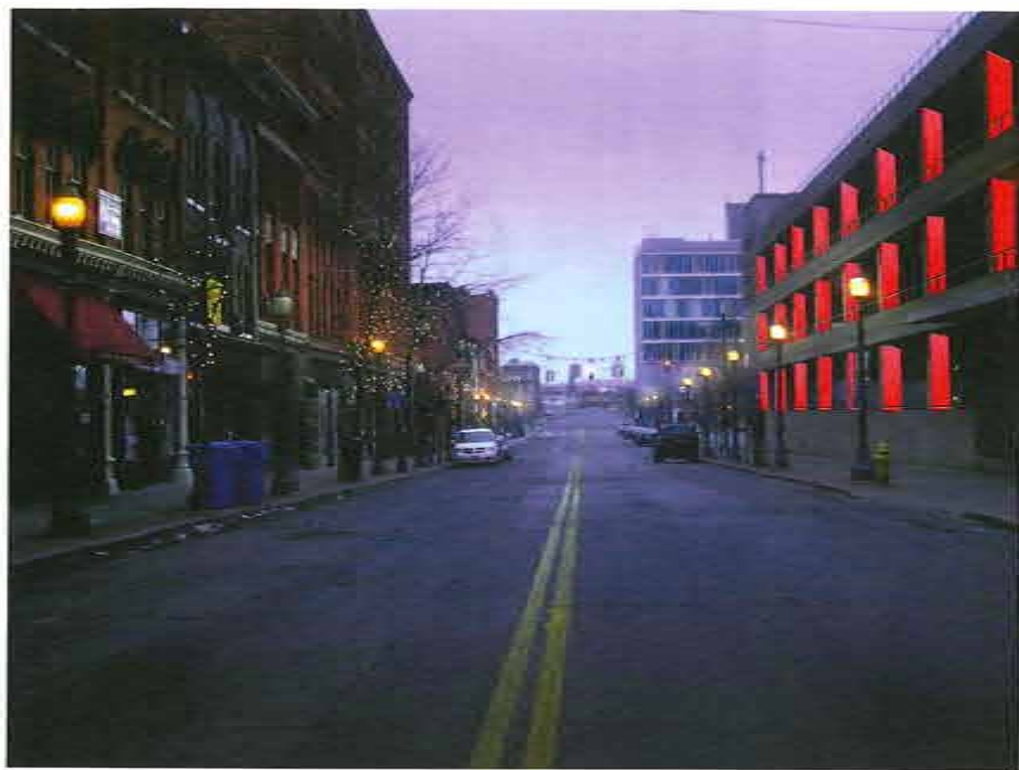
3



**TOP AND OPPOSITE**  
Tillett studied various groupings of the red elements before settling on the final design.

**RIGHT**  
A new bike path along the Connective Corridor encourages Syracuse residents to ride instead of drive.





Though only about 40 percent complete, the Connective Corridor already is receiving national attention. A 2012 U.S. Green Building Council Global Community Leadership Award recognized Syracuse's leaders for their sustainable initiatives, singling out the work that is taking place along the Connective Corridor. The project includes a three-for-one tree replacement program, bikeways, and rehabilitated parks. Among its ambitious goals is a plan to harvest and manage 22 million gallons of stormwater a year through a network of green roofs, porous pavement, and bioswales.

Giving a project with such a diverse program an identity is a challenge. Some locals I spoke to didn't even know it existed. The focal point of the route is a series of shimmering light poles and bollards that are painted with reflective red paint and topped with softly glowing fluted fixtures. In places, they play the leading role in an ensemble of red-painted street furniture that includes curved, backless metal benches and trash cans with logos that say, "USEME." In other locations, they are alone. These beacons, which are placed at irregular intervals, would stand out in any city. But on Uni-

versity Avenue, a wide, car-whizzing thoroughfare lined with institutional buildings and pockmarked with the city's ubiquitous parking garages and lots, the rows of red light poles reassure the visitor that pedestrians also are important and suggest that somewhere, something is going on.

In contrast to so many other cities, where lighting is installed primarily for security and safety, the red light poles along the Connective Corridor function more like public art. And from a strictly utilitarian point of view, they were not needed along University Avenue, which already had an array of gray cobrahead lights that tower above and flood the roadway and sidewalks with a cold, blue metallic light. The objective here is more about changing perceptions than it is about people physically being able to see where they are going, says Linnaea Tillett, Affiliate ASLA, a principal in the Brooklyn, New York-based Tillett Lighting Design and the lighting consultant for the Connective Corridor.

"In most cases, street lighting, roadway lighting, is added at regular intervals and at regular heights, and the reason for that is that everyone wants it to



**RIGHT**  
New benches in Syracuse's historic Forman Park are lit with tiny LED lights inspired by fireflies.

**OPPOSITE**  
The Connective Corridor runs between the university campus and downtown.



go away or they want to make it look like a 19th-century street," Tillett says. "What we are trying to say here is, 'pay attention if you are a bicyclist, pay attention if you are a pedestrian, pay attention if you are a car.'"

Tillett's work along the Connective Corridor also includes work on the OLIN Partnership redesign for Forman Park, originally built in 1839. Here Tillett installed more than 100 tiny pulsating LED lights in the park's new custom-designed red-painted benches. Tillett, a quietly exuberant woman dressed in blacks and grays, calls these lights fireflies. And on a winter's night with the park's historic fountain silent and its many bushes and trees denuded of all greenery, the little specks of flashing light highlight the unusual red benches and create an enchanted environment throughout the space.

The use of avant-garde lighting schemes to revitalize worn-out buildings and public spaces is not new to Syracuse. In fact, the city has some of the most dramatically lit buildings in the country. One prominent example is the art deco National Grid building, once home to the nation's largest

electric utility company, which is bathed top to bottom in a bold colored lighting program created in 1999 by Howard Brandston, the designer of the current lighting plan for the Statue of Liberty. "Because of these long, gray, snowy winters, lighting has been a focus for us," says Linda Dickerson Hartsock, director of the Connective Corridor for the Syracuse University Office of Community Engagement and Economic Development, the entity charged with developing the two-mile route.

In addition to Tillett's work, the lighting plan for the Connective Corridor includes a facade grant improvement program with requests and guidelines for owners to illuminate their buildings. Hartsock says the facade lighting project will build on Tillett's scheme "so that moving out from the streetscape, we will be lighting up a series of beautiful iconic buildings that go back to the mid-1800s."

The Connective Corridor, which is a partnership between Syracuse University, the city of Syracuse, and Oneida County, is already paying huge dividends. It has been linked to \$270 million



“THE OBJECTIVE HERE IS MORE ABOUT CHANGING PERCEPTIONS THAN IT IS ABOUT PEOPLE PHYSICALLY BEING ABLE TO SEE WHERE THEY ARE GOING.”

—LINNAEA TILLET







**TOP AND OPPOSITE**  
 Bollards, bike racks,  
 and benches are  
 arrayed in various  
 configurations along  
 the Connective  
 Corridor.

**RIGHT**  
 Syracuse University's  
 Warehouse building  
 houses classrooms,  
 galleries, and  
 studios downtown.







in private sector development in the past three years, and it is credited with a 35 percent increase in people living downtown in the same period. Prominent architects such as Toshiko Mori and Richard Gluckman are designing new buildings and redesigning old ones alongside it. And the Connective Corridor's environmental ethos has also inspired the construction of five new LEED Platinum buildings alongside or nearby it.

One of the biggest challenges in designing the route is that it runs along preexisting streets that pass through different neighborhoods with different aesthetics. "We couldn't make everything match and coordinate the way that we can when drawing in the studio or doing a ground-up development," says Mark Robbins, who, when he was dean of the Syracuse University School of Architecture, oversaw designing and planning for the project. Tillet was a natural fit for the design team, which was seeking to both push boundaries and respect the past, says Robbins, who is now president of the American Academy in Rome. "I thought we all appreciated her [Tillet's] ability to look at what was there on the

ground and make a design that could respond to and make some resonance between the old and the new."

Tillet began her career as a lighting designer working in museums and galleries. But after developing an interest in using lighting to improve conditions in low-income neighborhoods and doing volunteer work in places such as East New York, she took almost a decade off from professional work in the 1990s to get a PhD in environmental psychology from the City University of New York. She says that her studies enriched her career as a lighting designer because environmental psychology "has a tradition of looking at the social, the personal, and the private—how they affect each other and the elements of everything from the construction of houses to physical distance to sound."

Tillet says her degree also gave her the confidence and the expertise to transform her lighting business from one that was primarily oriented around indoor lighting to a practice that today is about 50 to 60 percent focused on landscape architecture. "It changed everything I did," she

says. "About a week after I did my PhD defense, I got hired by Quennell Rothschild to work with Maya Lin in Grand Rapids, because that was an urban renewal project."

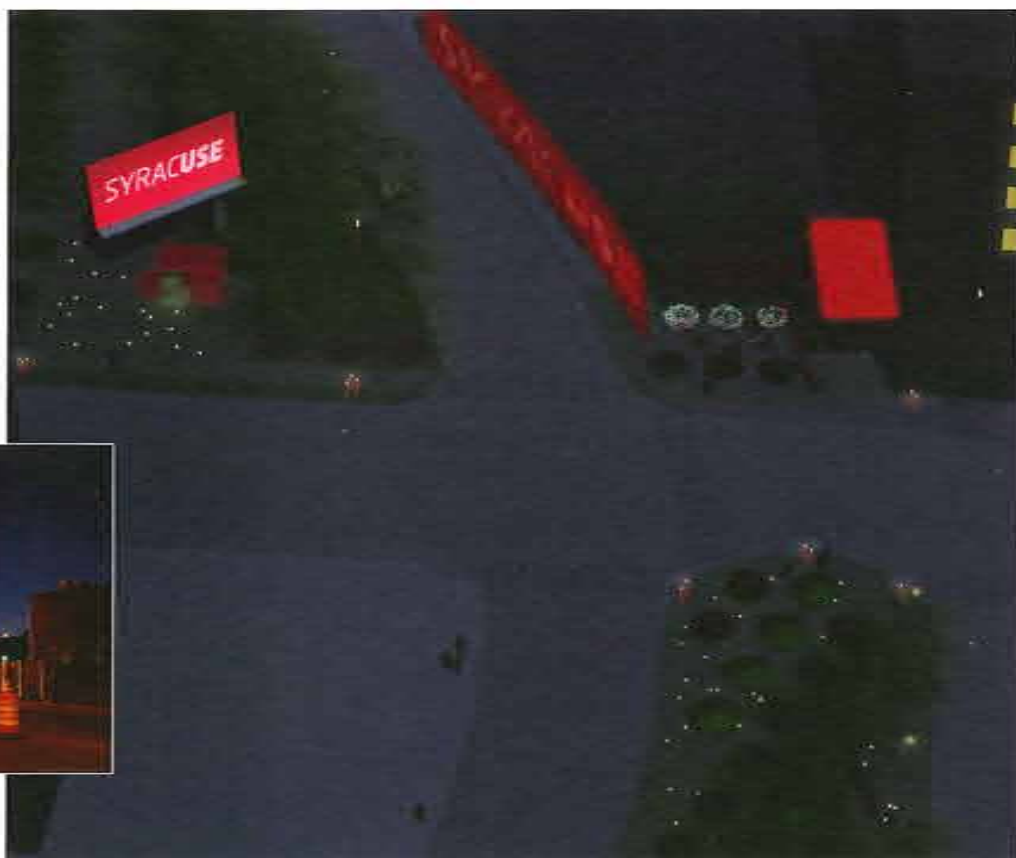
In addition to her sensitivity to the complex cultural conditions along the Connective Corridor, Tillet's approach to lighting is in keeping with the environmental agenda for the project. Using low-wattage LED lights to reduce light pollution and reflective red paint to recycle light from car beams was only one part of her strategy. She also felt strongly about retaining the existing streetlights even though they clash with the new bike- and pedestrian-friendly aesthetic. "We could have taken all the cobraheads out and replaced them with red fixtures, but that was totally antithetical to how I think about things," she says. "In New York City, they [cobras] are an insult to the second-story apartment, but they are efficient; they get the job done." Although cobras are more oriented toward cars, Tillet says, "We are a driving nation; you need cars, bikes, and pedestrians."

One place where Tillet's lighting plan ran into trouble was with a series of bollards she designed that originally ran up East Genesee Street and onto part of University Avenue. Shortly after they were installed on University Avenue, vandals started breaking the glass fixtures. As a result, the bollards along University Avenue have been replaced with more of Tillet's red light poles, and the lights in the remaining bollards along East Genesee Street that were not vandalized have been shut off until protective cages can be installed. "In New York you always think about vandals, and you put everything eight feet up in the air," she says. "I would love to put things closer to the ground, but maybe that is not what we are ready for as a society, because people get angry at things."

Tillet says that she was warned by others on the design team that the bollard lighting would be subject to sabotage but that she had pressed for it anyway in the hope that it wouldn't get destroyed. The bollard lighting was an important aspect in the design, and in places it was bundled in groups

**RIGHT AND INSET**  
A billboard can be reappropriated for cultural events.

**OPPOSITE**  
A park near the Warehouse has in-ground solar pavers.







of two or three together with arty bike racks and trash cans to create what Tillett refers to as a “series of events” at key spots along the corridor such as stores or bus stops. “We had this theory that if you put two or three together, they wouldn’t get broken,” she says.

As with any large project that seeks to make a bold statement, some of the design decisions along the corridor have had to be rethought. “When people have taken a leap to do something different, it is not always an unqualified success,” explains Robbins, “but if we don’t take these kinds of risks, and we don’t encourage people who make decisions about what gets built, then we don’t have a prayer of getting new work done.”

As the most identifiable marker along the Connective Corridor, Tillett’s lighting certainly is changing the city’s appearance and opening possibilities for the future. “If you think about great European cities, one of the things that I think truly makes them special is the way that they use

light,” says Hartsock. “Syracuse has a lot of that style of architecture here, and there is so much more that we could do with lighting—looking at it both from a functional point of view and also as art to illuminate a public space.” ●

ALEX ULAM IS A FREELANCE JOURNALIST WHO WRITES FREQUENTLY ON ARCHITECTURE AND DESIGN. HIS WORK HAS APPEARED IN THE *NEW YORK TIMES*, *MACLEAN’S*, *ARCHAEOLOGY*, *ARCHITECTURAL RECORD*, *THE ARCHITECT’S NEWSPAPER*, AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS.

#### Project Credits

**DESIGN, ENGINEERING, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE, AND CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT** BARTON & LOGUIDICE, D.P.C., SYRACUSE, NEW YORK. **LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE CONSULTANT** OLIN, PHILADELPHIA. **LIGHTING DESIGN CONSULTANT** TILLETT LIGHTING DESIGN, BROOKLYN, NEW YORK. **IDENTITY AND INSTITUTIONAL PARTNERSHIP BRANDING CONSULTANT** PENTAGRAM, LONDON/NEW YORK. **DESIGN VISION** CLEAR, SYRACUSE, NEW YORK, AND UPSTATE: A CENTER FOR DESIGN RESEARCH AND REAL ESTATE AT THE SYRACUSE SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE, SYRACUSE, NEW YORK. **CONSTRUCTION AND CONSTRUCTION INSPECTION** BARRETT INDUSTRIES, ROSELAND, NEW JERSEY, AND C&S COMPANIES, SYRACUSE, NEW YORK. **LANDSCAPE INSTALLATION** BALLARD, SYRACUSE, NEW YORK.