Smithsonian Institution, National Museum of American History, South Wing
WASHINGTON, DC

BBB’s conversion of an underground parking garage into a suite of spaces for museum operations allows additional public space to be dedicated to the visitor experience.

The National Museum of American History, Kenneth E. Behring Center is one of the Smithsonian’s most visited museums and home to over three million objects. Designed by Walter Cain of McKim, Mead & White and opened in 1964, the museum is a National Landmark and preeminent example of Classical Modern architecture, blending the traditional architecture of the National Mall with more modern design to reflect its role as a cutting edge museum.

The Smithsonian engaged BBB to increase exhibit and public space through the relocation of non-essential workplace and building service functions to the museum’s existing parking garage. The primary design challenges for the renovation of the long and narrow underground space were spatial quality and light. To mitigate the narrowness of the site, BBB’s design jogs the long east-west-oriented circulation and egress corridor and creates ‘nodes’ at the intersections. In addition, glass entry ‘pavilions’ are located at the far east and west ends of the space to create a strong visual impression at the two entrances. Maximization of natural and artificial light is achieved through the use of luminous ceilings, glass walls, glass clerestory windows, glass sidelights, illuminated display cases along the corridor, and open office landscape areas.

Client  Smithsonian Institution
Size  30,000 SF
Completion Date  2012
Construction Cost  Confidential