

# DESIGNSOLUTIONS

Journal of the Architectural Woodwork Institute

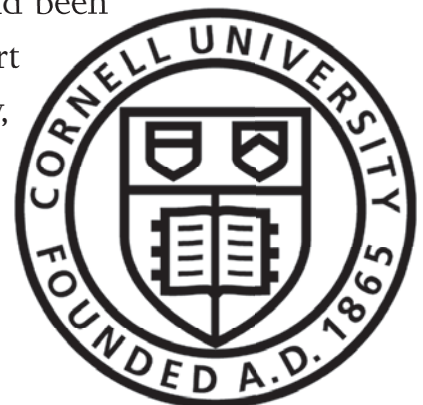
University Library  
Corporate Offices  
Boy Scout Tower  
Courtroom  
Children's Library



**AWI** ARCHITECTURAL  
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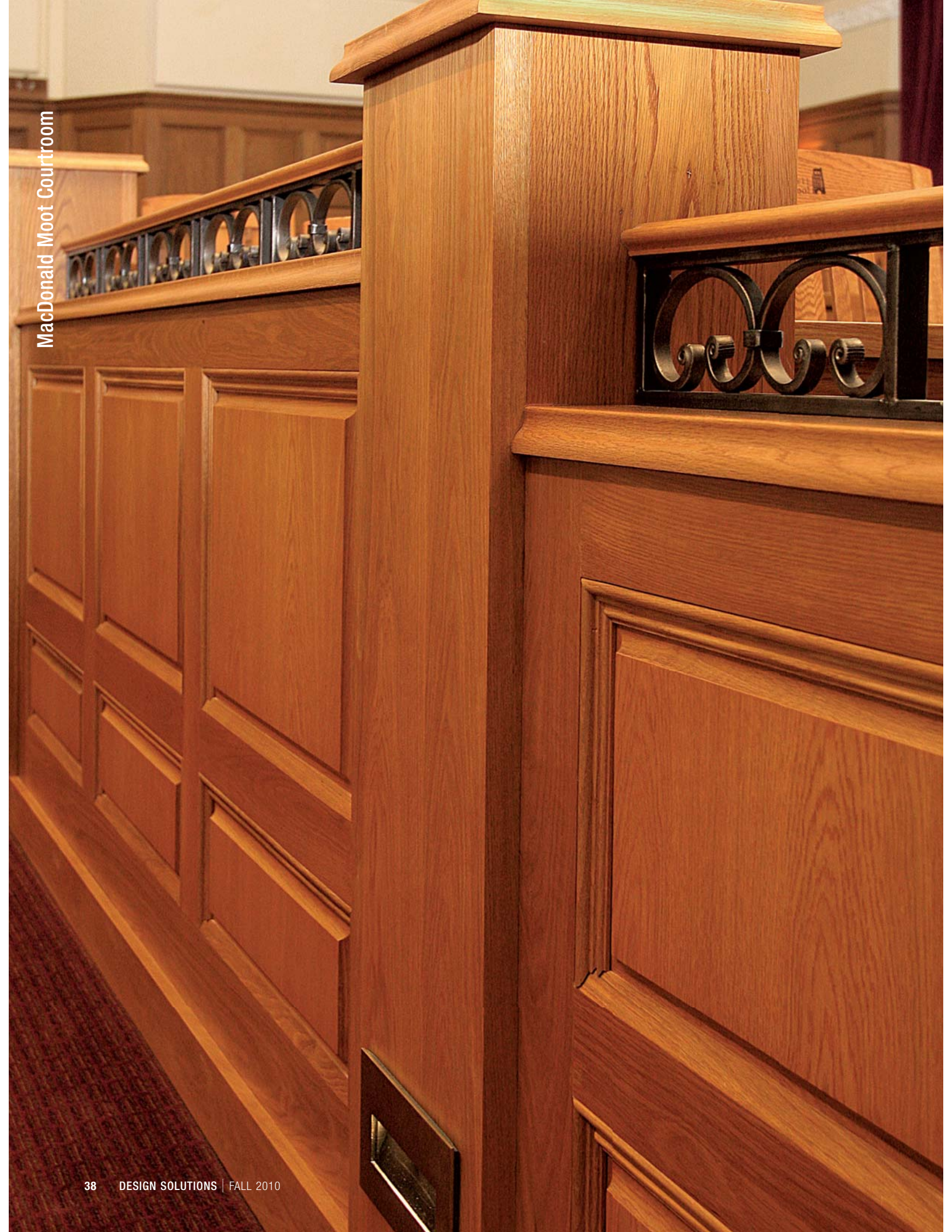
# MOOT COURTROOM REDESIGNED FOR TODAY'S JUSTICE SYSTEM.

**D**edicated in 1980, the John W. MacDonald Moot Courtroom at Cornell University Law School has hosted many fine competitions and been the home of the strong moot court tradition at the school. The stately, wood-paneled room is named for Cornell Law School student and professor John W. MacDonald who taught there from 1930-1973.





MacDonal Moot Courtroom



The moot courtroom, a replica of an appellate courtroom, in a stately Gothic building, is long and narrow, and was renovated and reconfigured in the 1980s to add functionality, but left outstanding issues such as poor acoustics and lighting. The room also lacked any audiovisual system.

Because of a recent major makeover, no longer will students shiver in the winter and roast in the summer as they did in the original room. A new HVAC system provides more temperate heating, air conditioning, and ventilation, and the lighting has been improved. The room, which is used for trial court, appellate court, classes, and panel presentations, is also fitted with LCD screens, projectors, and microphones (even in the student seating), resembling the most up-to-date federal courtrooms, allowing students to hone their skills in presenting their cases

with modern multimedia technology. The room is now handicapped accessible, so that students who use wheelchairs are now able to sit with their peers, instead of separately.

Working closely with the law school, KSS Architects, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, designed a renovation that finally makes the space into a world-class moot courtroom and teaching facility. The new woodwork for the project was fabricated and partially installed by AWI member firm Genbrook Millwork, Inc. of Greene, New York.

#### WARMTH OF WHITE OAK

The project preserves the space's collegiate Gothic architectural character while improving the seating configuration, lighting and accessibility. A new acoustical system seamlessly integrates into the room's grand barrel

vault ceiling, and the new audiovisual systems look as if they were part of the original design.

The original design includes White Oak paneling up to a nine-foot moulding. The new design, explains KSS' Benjamin Shermeta, AIA, incorporates raised Oak panels surrounding new seating tiers that match the existing panels in color and grain. In addition to the tiered seating for 100 students, the courtroom features a judges' bench, petitioner and respondent tables and jury box made accessible in a manner that blends with the architectural surroundings. Vibrant, rich finishes on the raised Oak wall panels and Oak and leather furnishings give the room a reverent but engaging atmosphere.

Genbrook Millwork fabricated the beautiful paneling, using 600 square feet of solid wood and 900 square feet



A FULL VIEW OF THE COURTROOM shows the tiered seating for law students.

of miter rim. White Oak was also used on the seating wall, jury rails, witness stand, paneled projector wall with bi-fold doors, rotating lectern and crown moulding.

“The wall paneling was fully fabricated and finished in our facility, broken down into segments then shipped to the project site,” explains Project Manager Joshua Browning. “The segments were lifted four stories and delivered via a window that was removed. Within the building, each wall was placed over steel tubes set into the concrete and fastened to the floor.”

**TECHNOLOGICALLY FIT**

All walls were pre-fitted with wire chases, and each seat at the walls has a flat screen monitor, computer data port and outlets for electronic devices. The witness stand is handicapped accessible

and equipped with an electronic latch in the gate, while the floor is on a lift that raises and lowers by ten inches.

The lectern is equipped to rotate

and the upper courtroom has a hidden screen with bi-fold doors. The paneling at the rear of the room has hidden access doors for the new air handlers

**AT A GLANCE:**

AWI MANUFACTURING MEMBER: **Genbrook Millwork, Inc.**

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LOCATION: **Greene, New York**

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FOUNDED: **1990**

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FACILITY: **12,000 square feet**

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EMPLOYEES: **10**

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SPECIALTY: **AWI Quality Certified**

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*“Our philosophy is we make your life easy. We do it right the first time. We build value into every job, and we build it to last.”*

**- Joshua Browning, President**



THE FRONT ROW of the beautiful White Oak seating is gently curved.



THIS CORNER OF THE COURTROOM illustrates the merging of the old existing White Oak panels and the new panels.



EVERY STUDENT SEAT is equipped with an LCD monitor and outlets for electronic devices .

underneath the student seating.


“The witness stand and jury box partitions required a seamless integration of LCD monitors,” points out Shermeta. “Because the new paneling had to align and abut the existing paneling, the sizes of panels and finishes had to match flawlessly. The woodworking firm also had to address irregularities in the geometry of the existing building walls and tie them in with the new woodwork to maintain the existing paneled walls’ character.”

**TRUE TEAMWORK**

“Jay Shermeta, project architect, was very easy to work with,” says Browning. “We discussed fabrication techniques based on the best way to accomplish the desired appearance after the shop drawing process but upon changes or new requirements. When he knew we understood the look that he was trying to achieve, he accepted our recommendations and let us proceed without developing new shop drawings, a process that

would have added days or weeks to the already tight schedule.”

Genbrook “showed great skill at studying the original solid Oak panel design and creating new veneered panels that matched. The firm exceeded expectations by suggesting solutions to problems only recognized during construction,” adds Shermeta.

The end result is a new state-of-the-art learning space, complete with current technologies, in harmony with the courtroom’s historic character. 

Project:	<b>MacDonald Moot Courtroom</b>	Ithaca, NY
Project Owner:	<b>Cornell University School of Law</b>	Ithaca, NY
Woodworker:	<b>Genbrook Millwork, Inc.</b>	Greene, NY
Architect:	<b>KSS Architects</b>	Philadelphia, PA
Photographer:	<b>Greg Cobb</b>	Greene, NY