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BEYER BLINDER BELLE REVITALIZES HISTORIC FRANKLIN SCHOOL, NEW HOME TO D.C.'S INAUGURAL LANGUAGE-ARTS MUSEUM, PLANET WORD.

Opened to the public on October 22nd, the Museum brings language to life through revolutionary technology, interactive exhibits, and voice activation.



Credit: Photographs in the Carol M. Highsmith Archive, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

November 19, 2020 (Washington, D.C.) — Beyer Blinder Belle (BBB) announces that Planet Word, a revolutionary museum dedicated to the power, beauty, and fun of language, opened to the public on October 22nd. The Museum is housed in D.C.'s historic and long-vacant Franklin School, which was revitalized by Beyer Blinder Belle.

Planet Word is the world's first voice-activated museum, featuring three floors of interactive galleries and exhibits to engage visitors of all ages in experiencing words and language from a wide range of perspectives—from the science of how language skills develop early in life to how words are used creatively and persuasively in music, poetry, humor, advertising, oratory, and literature. General admission is free.

BBB oversaw the preservation and rehabilitation of the 53,244-square-foot Renaissance Revival building designed by Adolf Cluss, which is recognized as a National Historic Landmark. Standing at 925 13th Street NW, the building opened in 1869 as the cornerstone of a comprehensive system of segregated education for the city of Washington. The school was chosen to house Planet Word in large part for its rich history in public education and historic connection to the museum's mission. It was here that Alexander Graham Bell made the first wireless transmission of the human voice — words — using a Photophone, a precursor to fiber-optic technology, in 1880.

“It has been an incredible opportunity for our team to realize the experience of Ann Friedman’s vision for Planet Word in the National Historic Landmark Franklin School,” says **Gretchen Pfaehler**, AIA, Partner and Senior Preservation Architect. “Planet Word is as revolutionary to experiential museums as the Franklin School was to educational buildings when it was built. The project celebrates historic spaces like the Great Hall while bringing new uses to spaces like the Mansard Room, an event space configured from the existing attic.”

Beyer Blinder Belle was chosen to oversee the preservation and rehabilitation of the Franklin School due to the firm's specialization in historic buildings, its specific knowledge of the building methods of Adolf Cluss, and the strict preservation standards and sensitivity applied to renovate the Franklin School's interiors and striking architectural details. BBB's role included replicating the building's original frescoes, restoring some of its original classrooms, and restoring and renovating two grand staircases with their ornate cast-iron and wood railings. A fourth floor was created under the original soaring mansard roof to house a new event space, the Mansard Room, and connects to a new roof terrace on the historic roof overlooking K Street and Franklin Square. Besides housing an exhibit on the diversity of the world's 6000 languages, the building's central Great Hall has been rehabilitated to serve as a grand space for concerts, gatherings, and performances. Planet Word also has nine other immersive galleries; two classrooms; an auditorium; a lobby welcome area; a restaurant; a gift shop, administrative spaces; an open patio; and a new accessible entrance.

BBB's work included comprehensive design services, coordination with exhibit designers, furniture design, interior design, historical exhibits, and graphics and wayfinding systems. BBB led reviews under the National Environmental Policy Act and the National Historic Preservation Act as well as consultation with the National Capitol Planning Commission, the Advisory Council of Historic Preservation, and the D.C. State Historic Preservation Office. BBB also collaborated with [Local Projects](#), which designed Planet Word's ten immersive learning galleries.

ABOUT BEYER BLINDER BELLE

Founded in 1968, Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners is an award-winning architecture, planning, and interiors practice of 170 professionals in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Boston. The firm's multi-faceted portfolio encompasses preservation, urban design, and new construction projects that span a wide spectrum of building typologies and sectors, including cultural, civic, educational, residential, and commercial.

For more than five decades, BBB's work has focused on the revitalization of nationally celebrated museums and historic buildings, including the Smithsonian Institution and Washington Monument's New Visitors Facility in Washington, D.C.; The Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Met Breuer, and The Frick Collection in New York City; and the Red Star Line Museum in Antwerp, Belgium. With extensive experience in restoration, BBB specializes in adapting existing structures for new uses and in sensitively integrating contemporary building systems within historic contexts.

BBB approaches all projects with a deep understanding of their character-defining features and contexts, and brings creativity, place-making, and authenticity to the design of buildings and dynamic public spaces that meet the needs of current and future generations.

ABOUT PLANET WORD

Planet Word is a nonprofit museum dedicated to the power and fun of language. Founded by philanthropist Ann Friedman, the museum invites visitors of all ages to experience what words mean to the human experience in a fun, technologically advanced, immersive environment. Opened on October 22nd, 2020, it is housed in the Franklin School at 13th and K Streets, NW, a National Historic Landmark with a rich history in public education and the site of the first wireless voice transmission by Alexander Graham Bell in 1880. Planet Word is overseen by a Board of Directors that includes leaders in education,

media, real estate, technology, the arts, and museums, led by Chair Ann Friedman. Renovation of The Franklin School was overseen by Beyer Blinder Belle and the general contractor was Whiting-Turner. Planet Word's project partners include Local Projects for exhibit design and media production, Solomon Group as exhibit fabricator, installer, and A/V integrator and Lone Shark Games for development and production of "Lexicon Lane: A Word Sleuthing Adventure!" For more information, visit PlanetWordMuseum.org.

Please find a selection of visuals [here](#).

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