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Good design is good business

A BUILDING THOUGHTFULLY CONCEIVED EMPOWERS ITS USERS AND ALLOWS AN ORGANIZATION TO MORE EFFECTIVELY DELIVER ON ITS MISSION

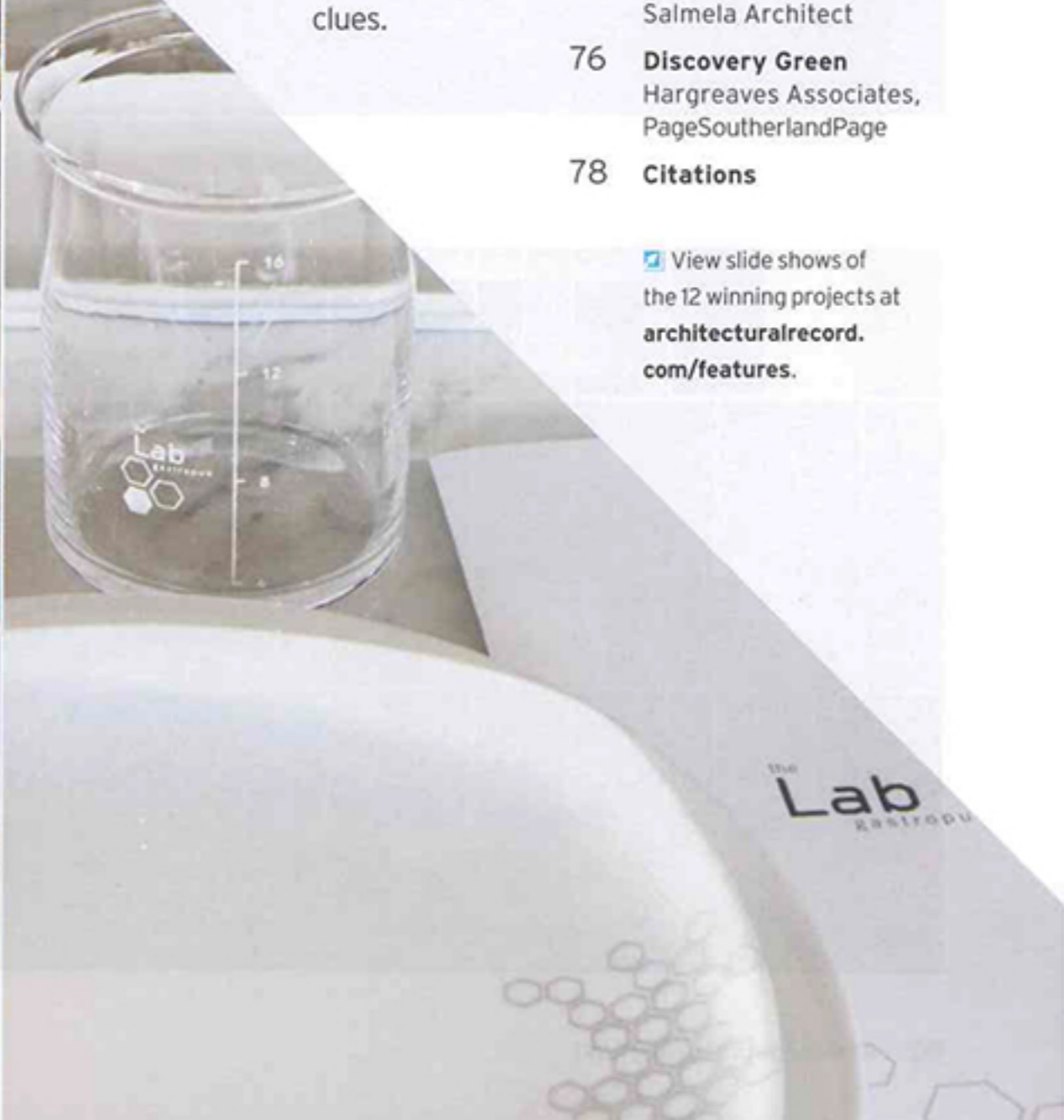
THERE MAY BE SIGNS THAT THE SLUMPED ECONOMY is perking up, but many companies are still struggling. In times like these, it's critical that we champion design and illustrate its value, and the recipients of the 12th annual BusinessWeek/Architectural Record Awards do just that. From a hospital in southern Ontario to a park in downtown Houston, this year's eight winners and four finalists – all projects completed within the past four years – reveal that architecture is more than a grand gesture. A well-designed space can help a company increase revenue, decrease operational costs, and boost employee morale, among other benefits. Judging by this year's entries, clients are getting the message. Our jury of editors evaluated an exceptionally competitive pool of nearly 100 submissions from around the globe. Selecting the winners was tough. In the end, we chose a diverse group of inspired projects that clearly demonstrate that good design is a wise investment. As the economy starts to recover, many are questioning what architecture will look like in a post-recession world. The work featured here – projects that put business goals first – might offer some clues.

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View slide shows of the 12 winning projects at architecturalrecord.com/features.

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1. AC Martin's concept was executed at every level of the 4,300-square-foot project. The firm even designed the restaurant's place settings.

2. An outdoor patio provides patrons with a laid-back place to lounge and mingle.

3. Communal tables give the dining area a relaxed, collegial feel.



THE CAMPUS OF THE UNIVERSITY of Southern California (USC) is some 2 miles from downtown Los Angeles. That fact – and L.A.'s lackluster public transit system – forces students in search of bars and bustle to drive to the city center. So in an effort to create a pedestrian-accessible hangout for students and professors, USC bought an old Sizzler restaurant just outside the campus limits with the intent of converting the building into an Irish pub.

But L.A. architectural firm AC Martin and USC director of hospitality Scott Shuttleworth

wound up creating something more innovative – a gastropub that evokes a vintage high school science classroom. Shuttleworth, who had experience in the private hospitality business, rejected the idea that the restaurant would succeed just because it was close to campus. The Lab Gastropub (“the Lab,” for short) would need to be a draw in itself.

AC Martin looked through old science textbooks for inspiration, and its research is evident throughout the bar and dining area. Walls are clad in subway tile, blackboards, and supersize graphics of scientific

equipment. Christopher King, the Lab's lead designer, says that USC allowed the firm to “design almost every element,” right down to the coffee cups, which are emblazoned with the chemical formula for caffeine. Elegant, humanizing touches keep the space from feeling clinical. A slate dining table is framed with warm-colored wood, and leather cushions cover the chrome barstools.

L.A. has taken notice. While the school expected that the USC community would patronize the Lab, it didn't anticipate the number of locals and downtown profession-

als who have been frequenting the spot since its March 2009 opening. The Lab brings in some \$8,000 a day, more than doubling initial projections.

Next year, the city's new Metro-Expo line will give USC students easier access to the downtown area. But the Lab, just across the street, will likely continue to be a popular destination. *Sebastian Howard*