

Comprehensively and
transformatively rebranding
one of the world's oldest
continuously operating
architectural practices

The Comprehensive Rebranding of Shepley Bulfinch, 2006–2014.

Overview

In late 2005 the trajectory of my career as an advertising designer shifted dramatically when I accepted a position to lead graphics and branding for the Boston-based architecture firm Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott (founded in 1874 by Henry Hobson Richardson). Upon starting at Shepley, I was soon presented with a core challenge of helping to comprehensively “rebrand” the firm. Over the 8 years I spent at Shepley Bulfinch, I led its in-house graphic design and branding initiatives, guiding virtually every aspect of the firm’s brand identity. These efforts helped reinvent and grow the firm.

In 2004, Carole Wedge, FAIA, was appointed CEO. Wedge quickly set off to “transform” and modernize the firm. In this process of transformation, Wedge put nearly everything on the table. The firm moved into a new office (one of Boston’s first LEED-certified office buildings). We shortened the name to “Shepley Bulfinch.” Moreover, the firm quickly and comprehensively embraced profound change. The changes included adopting building information modeling, evidence-based design, energy simulation, materials research, and sustainable design. As Creative Director, my role was to manage and help evolve the “identity” of the firm itself while leading the strategy, design, and development process related to these efforts—participating in all initiatives while garnering approvals, guidance, and support from firm leadership and community.

In 2008, only three years into this transformation, this single-office 150-person architecture firm from Boston was recognized with a REBRAND 100 Global Award. At the time, the award was billed as “the highest recognition for excellence in brand repositioning.” Shepley Bulfinch’s one office has now grown to five offices across the U.S.

(Right) The LEED-certified
lobby of Shepley Bulfinch
upon moving to Boston’s
Seaport in 2014

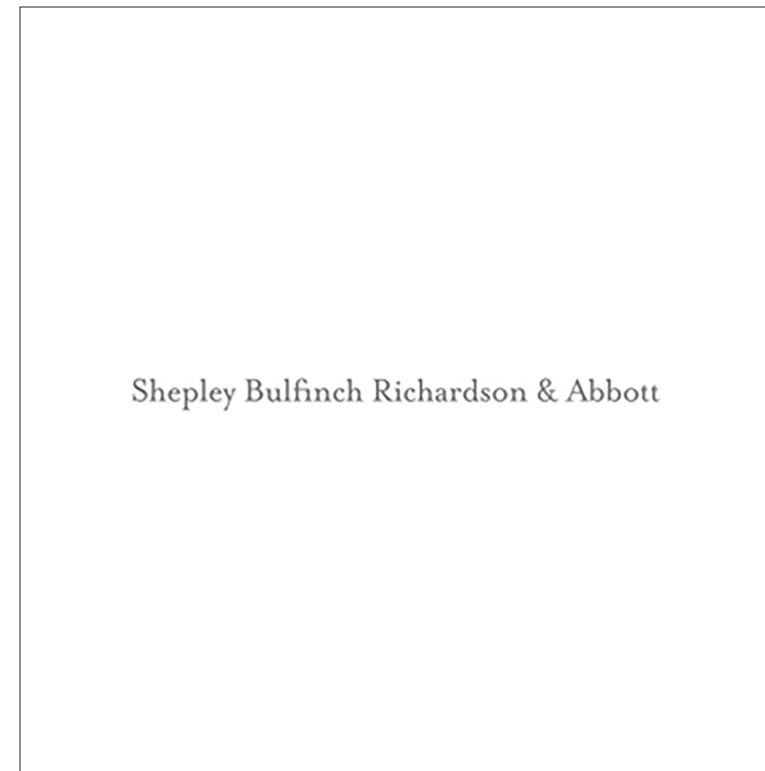


The Comprehensive Rebranding of Shepley Bulfinch, 2006–2014.

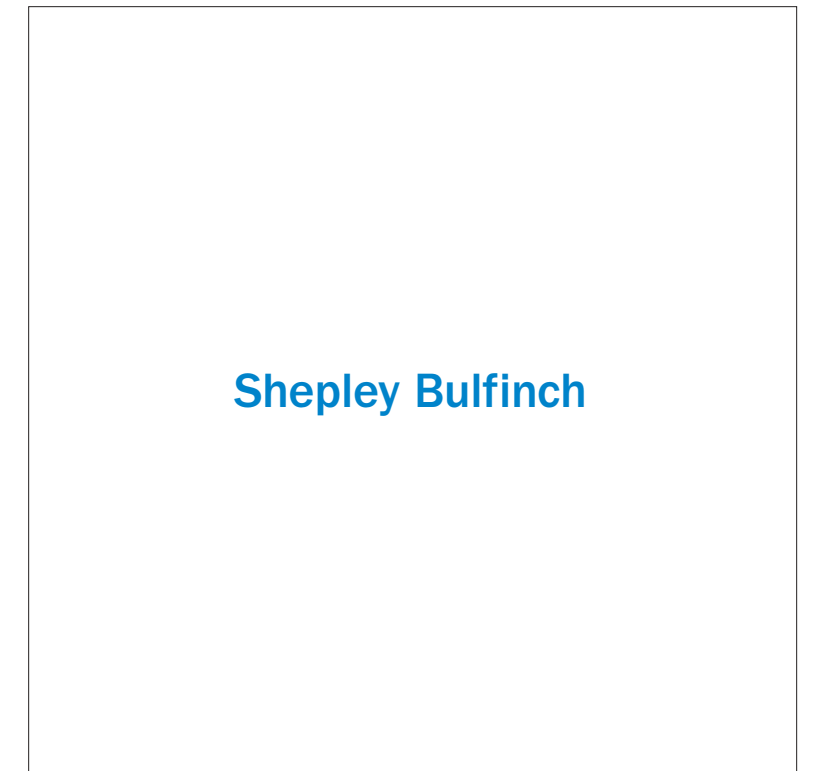
Brand Strategy and Identity



Photo (likely from around 2010) of me participating in one of many multidisciplinary design team charrettes led by firm Principal (and now President) Angela Watson, AIA.



Core identity pre-rebranding



Core identity after rebranding



A few of the books I found useful/influential as I sought to understand the firms' potential.



Shepley Bulfinch's new offices fostered collaboration by design

The Comprehensive Rebranding of Shepley Bulfinch, 2006–2014.

Website

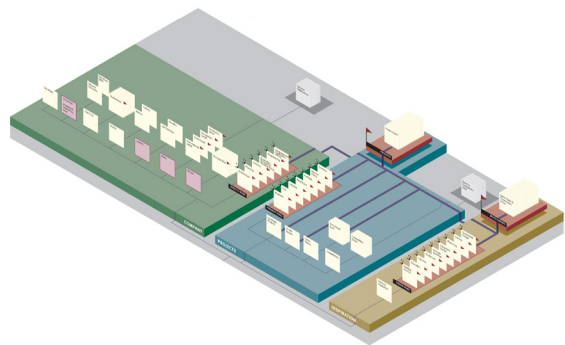
In what became a crucial component of a long term strategic rebranding project, the redesigned website for Shepley Bulfinch helped change the value proposition of the firm from architectural services, to services and *design*. The site adopted a clean approach focused on showcasing projects and photography with plenty of white space and and classical proportions. As Creative Director my role was to develop and oversee strategy, contribute to the design, lead creative direction, project manage and assist with content development. In 2018 the Shepley Bulfinch website was wonderfully updated by Tammy Dayton/moth.

Credits—

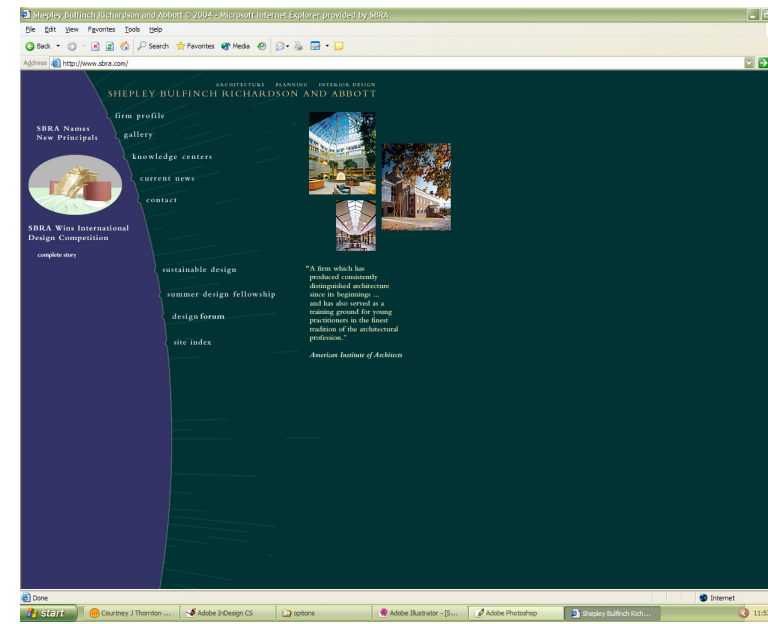
- Jennifer Jonsson, Project Manager
- Pamela Scheideler, Project Manager
- Steven Potter, Design Direction
- Josh Pryor, Web Development
- Terri Evans, Communications
- Adam Larson, Contributing Designer
- Paulo Lopez, Contributing Designer
- Erin Deeley, Contributing Designer
- Neoscape, Strategic Consulting
- Dan Vlahos, Creative Director

Awards—

Best in Class, Interactive Media Council, 2009



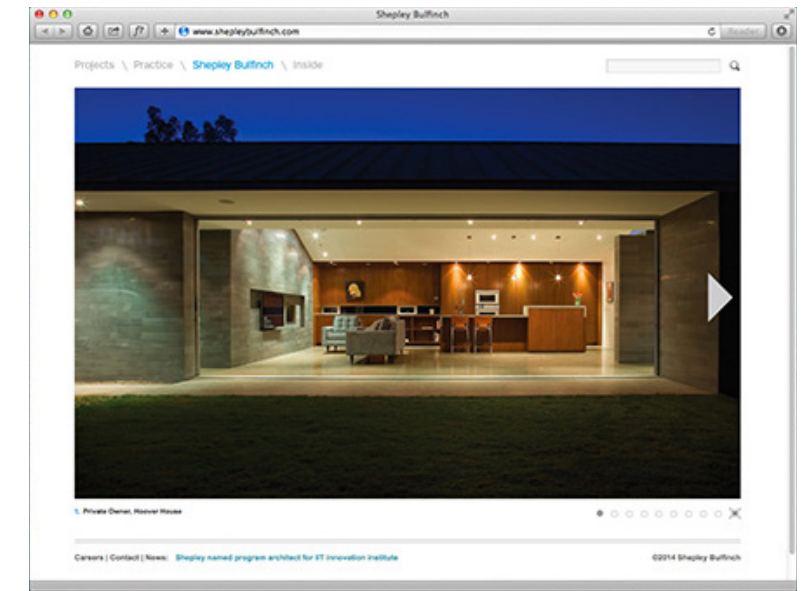
The above three-dimensional information architecture diagram helped the design team and firm leadership intuitively understand the organization of the site.



Website landing-page before redesign.

Shepley Bulfinch Web Site Redesign Project Definitive Strategy Document	
The Strategic Analysis Process	3
The Definitive Strategy Document	4
Discovery	5
About Shepley Bulfinch	6
The Current Shepley Bulfinch Web Site	10
Analysis	12
Project Objective	12
Site Users	13
Understanding Users	14
Personas and Tasks	16
Site Goals	20
Solution	21
Messaging	22
Navigation	25
Design Guidelines	27
Technical Requirements	28
Content	29
Information Architecture	30
The Home Page	32
Future Enhancements	37
Intranet	40
Extranet	62
Appendix A: Site Success Measurement	65
Appendix B: Survey Responses	66
Appendix C: Meeting Notes	102
STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY	
Shepley Bulfinch Web Site Redesign Project Definitive Strategy Document	
Published by Neoscape, Inc.	
Neoscape, Inc. has prepared this document after a comprehensive consulting process with Shepley Bulfinch Richardson and Abbott. The information contained in this document is confidential and proprietary, and is made available to Shepley Bulfinch solely for its consideration in evaluation of the recommendations herein. In no event shall all or any portion of this document be disclosed, distributed, published, or in any way disseminated outside Shepley Bulfinch without the express written permission of Neoscape, Inc.	
Copyright © 2006 Neoscape, Inc. All Rights Reserved.	
Confidential	November 14, 2005
Strategy Document for Shepley Bulfinch Web Site Redesign	Page 2 of 117

Strategy document



Website landing-page after redesign.

NEWS	PEOPLE	CAREERS	CONTACT
COMPANY		INSPIRATION	
PROJECTS			
<p>Page Title</p> <p>Category Name</p> <p>Project List</p> <p>Project Name Client Name DATE LOCATION</p> <p>Sub-Category 1</p> <p>Sub-Category 2</p> <p>Landmark Projects</p> <p>On the Boards</p>		<p>Our Vision for Category Name</p> <p>Did you know?</p> <p>Learn More</p> <p>Recognition</p> <p>Competitions</p>	

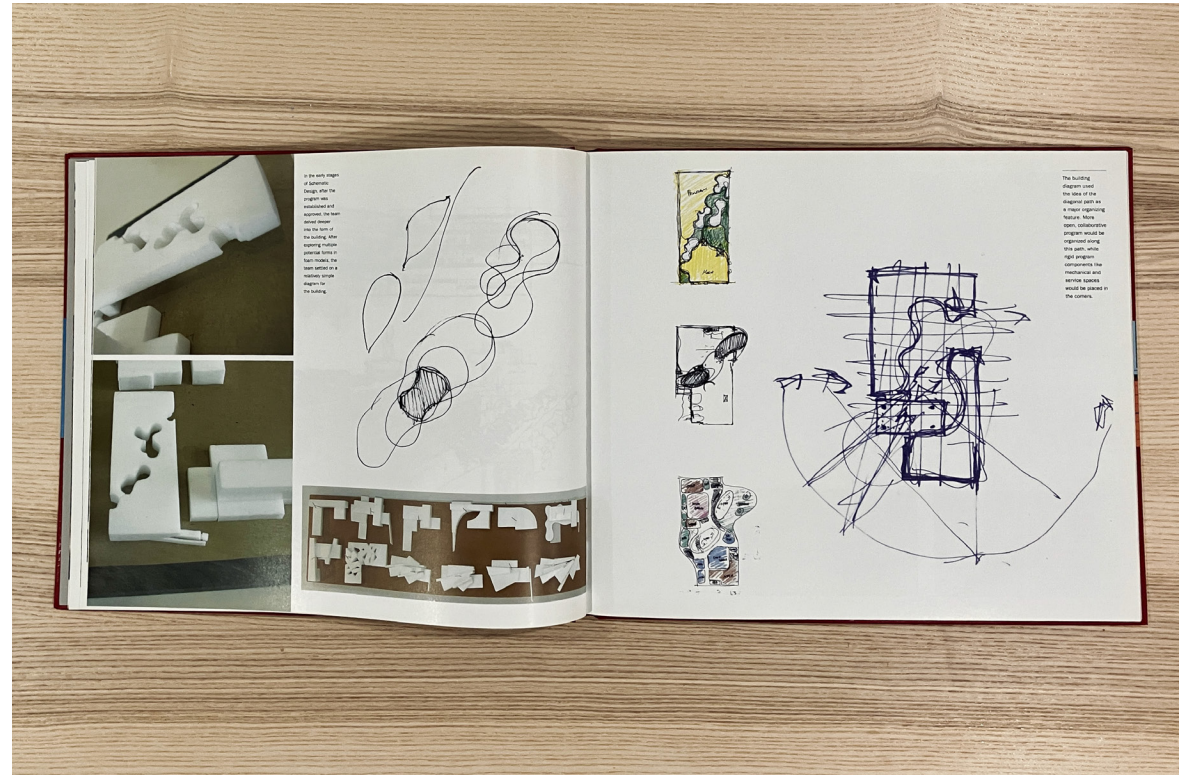
Early wireframe page prototypes were used to refine page content structure and placement.

The Comprehensive Rebranding of Shepley Bulfinch, 2006–2014.

Books and Publications

This series of limited edition series of monographs and books on the projects and process of Shepley Bulfinch reflected on the contributions of the firms' Principal architects, healthcare and education expertise and milestone projects. As a form of visual storytelling the books use project “artifacts” including photography, sketches, diagrams and other visual material tell the stories of the firm. The typography and writing are largely limited to introductions and captions.

Just as I had started working with this firm I acquired a copy of *Projects for Prada Part 1* (2001) an architectural process book of sorts on the work of Rem Koolhaas—which both surprised and inspired me by its focus on “process” over product. Then, Rob Roche the Shepley Bulfinch archivist presented me with a beautiful monograph from the Shepley Bulfinch archives—the book was *Katsura: Tradition and Creation in Japanese Architecture* by Walter Gropius, Kenzo Tange and Yasuhiro Ishimoto. It was designed by Herbert Bayer around 1960. The layout and image proportions within the book are masterful and the photos themselves are wonderfully graphic, poetic and masterfully composed. The printing is exquisite and the cover is adorned with lovely embossed symbol. I’ve also admired the book design of the late Massimo Vignelli, especially his books for Richard Meier.



(Above) Sample spreads and book covers



(Right) One of several information graphics I developed to help clients understand the complex mechanics and benefits of sustainable systems. The graphic at right visually describes the geothermal lake at Sherman Hospital in Elgin, IL.



A key point of reference/inspiration for the series of books I developed at Shepley Bulfinch as “Projects for Prada Part 1” by by Patrizio Bertelli (Author), Jens Hommert (Editor), Michael Kubo (Editor), Miuccia Prada (Editor), Rem Koolhaas (Contributor)

The Comprehensive Rebranding of Shepley Bulfinch, 2006–2014.

Agents of Change

The Shepley Bulfinch “Agents of Change” badge graphic was developed to communicate the idea that architecture is not just about *building* or *buildings*—but also serves as a strategic mechanism for personal, organizational, institutional, and transformational change. The graphic was utilized in both the annual mailing to clients and in an internal card from the President to all staff.

The badge-like graphic was constructed using iconography from the firm’s first logo—a hand-drawn monogram by H.H. Richardson himself drawn around 1882. In a letter to his wife, Richardson described his original seal as “two strange beasts biting at a piece of forbidden fruit,” symbolizing the forbidden. Oddly enough, this reminded me of the wonderful tension between both knowledge and irreverence evident in the present-day Apple logo.

To make things even “stranger,” I then added a self-constructed Latin neologism, “certus intention,” which—at the time—I surmised to roughly translate into “certain intention,” but it could also mean “definitely plan” or even “defining design.” I suppose I was hoping the firm might adopt it as a motto of sorts—or a more abstract way of saying what William McDonough once said: “Design is the first signal of human intention.” Also, “the forbidden” in Richardson’s remarks sparked my interest in further exploring the negative impacts of design—and its role in contributing to crisis. The badge graphic itself was inspired by the work of the American artist and activist Shepard Fairey.

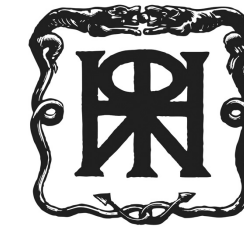
Credits—

Erin Deeley, Graphic Design

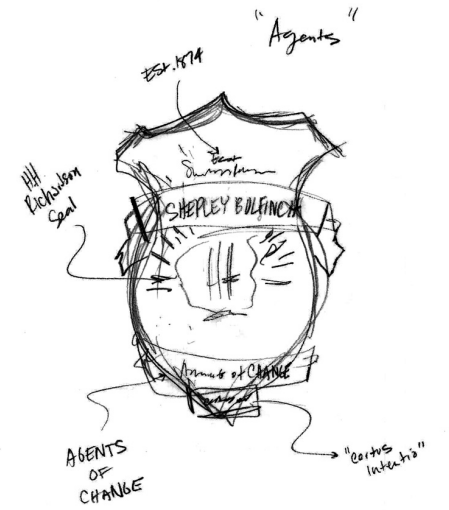
Dan Vlahos, Creative Direction



(Above) Final Shepley Bulfinch “Agents of Change” Badge Graphic



Richardson's Seal



(Left) H.H. Richardson's monogram seal. (Right) Concept sketch for badge graphic.



(Left) Badge graphic on promotional postcard.

The Comprehensive Rebranding of Shepley Bulfinch, 2006–2014.

Blue Journal

As a firm tradition, for years, the Boston-based architecture firm Shepley Bulfinch reached out to clients in an annual winter mailing. This mailing often took the form of a signed card, letter, or a commemorative poster or print. Over time, what started as a holiday gesture became an important statement that exemplified the firm's core values.

In the time I spent helping to develop the firm's brand, one of the biggest challenges was balancing its long history with its vibrant and creative future. It quickly became apparent to me that the previous mailings that celebrated old buildings were placing too much emphasis on the past while not emphasizing the ideas, opportunities, and the future. I wondered how an artifact could symbolize co-creation and creativity.

In this spirit, we replaced the old poster mailings with a sustainably produced, locally-made, highly-tailored bright blue journal. In her always optimistic annual letter to clients, the firm's President, Carole Wedge, continually reminded them that "the future is theirs to create."

In my contextual research, I discovered a rich history around "blue books"—a history that dates back to the 15th century when large blue velvet-covered books were used for record-keeping by the English Parliament. At Shepley Bulfinch, each year, to keep the journal "fresh," we explored graphically themed endpapers. Another challenge with the journals was how to produce them sustainably. The journals were made using 100% recycled paper processed chlorine-free. The journals were then bound in natural linen. The processing (of the paper) also used 100% renewable energy—and the brown craft packaging (also made of recycled material) was designed to be reused as a pen/pencil holder.

Credits—

Dan Vlahos, Creative Director
Kirkwood Printing, Wilmington, MA
Acme Bookbinding, Charlestown, MA



Custom, sustainably designed packaging/mailing solution.



Opened package with letter from President Carole Wedge, FAIA—reminding clients on the firm's creative focus.



The sustainably-designed packaging folds into a desktop pen/pencil holder—an excellent example of res-use and recyclability.



A client workshop/design charrette with participants using the Shepley Bulfinch blue journal.