

Projects

U. of Cincinnati's Music College Offers a Symphony of Created and Renovated Space

Complex concentrates on blending old and new, creating gathering spaces

by Stephanie Stubbs, Assoc. AIA



Pei Cobb Freed LLP and NBBJ developed a master plan for the College—Conservatory of Music, University of Cincinnati, that is a seven-year, multibuilding study in

balance—between renovation and new construction, academic peace and construction schedules, gathering places and study places.

The major starting point for the architect, who was charged with doubling the school's floor area, was: renovate or build anew? The school's existing precast building, erected in the 1960s, was "crammed like a bone in the throat of an awkwardly shaped, steeply sloped site between undistinguished academic and

residential buildings," according to the architect. Additionally, the existing building had been cut off from the rest of the University of Cincinnati campus by a network of service roads.

Careful study indicated that while the school's existing performance space and its ancillary service areas could be renovated in a cost-effective manner, the existing academic wing needed to be replaced. By pressing an adjacent abandoned gymnasium and obsolete dormitory into service, the architects renovated 137,000 square feet of space, to which they married 146,370 square feet of new construction.

In relation to the existing buildings, it was possible to site the new academic wing to define one side of a new courtyard that has become the school's focal point for the music school complex, which now comprises a renovated

proscenium theater; existing 400-seat thrust-stage theater; new recital hall and studio theater; and numerous renovated and new rehearsal spaces. To make a complex project even more interesting, the work was conducted in six discrete construction phases over a period of seven years to avoid disruption



PHOTO ©SCOTT FRANCESCHI
The newly constructed recital hall.

of the school's academic programs.

Pei Cobb Freed reports that the project had two governing ideas:

- The environmental quality of a campus could be enhanced by the "conservation and imaginative reuse of existing buildings in conjunction with new constructions"
- The first obligation on any campus building project—beyond providing required facilities—is to "shape attractive gathering places, both interior and exterior, that will engender a strong sense of community."

The architects will receive an AIA Honor Award for Architecture for the conservatory of music at the AIA national convention in Denver, May 17–19. [AIA](#)



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New spaces connect to the rest of the campus.