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A&A Building renovation to restore historic elements

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Paul Needham
Staff Reporter
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Paul Rudolph's orange carpet is coming back to Yale.

In what can best be described as a carpet-to-skylights renovation, the Art & Architecture Building is being brought back to — and in some ways, beyond — its original design. And an addition, which will house the History of Art Department, is going up adjacent to former architecture dean Rudolph's 1963 Brutalist landmark.

But while the construction at the corner of York and Chapel streets may seem endless to those living and working nearby, the massive project, budgeted at around \$130 million and designed by New York architect Charles Gwathmey ARC '62, is on track for completion this summer.

On a tour of the site with the News on Monday, Robert A.M. Stern ARC '65, dean of the Yale School of Architecture, emphasized the strong ties that both buildings will have to each other, to the rest of campus — and to history.

Little about Rudolph's original design was easy on the eyes, but perhaps the most striking element of all was the brilliant orange color of the carpet in his A&A Building, which, thanks to a \$20-million gift for the renovation from Sid Bass '65, will now be called the Rudolph Building. But an unexplained fire in 1969 and subsequent renovations leached the building of many of its distinctive quirks, including the orange carpet. Many of the 37 sub-levels scattered among the nine stories Rudolph incorporated into the building were covered over with temporary floors.

Stern and Gwathmey are restoring the original design of the building with zeal, in much the same way Polshek Partnership approached the 2006 renovation of the Yale University Art Gallery, Louis Kahn's iconic modernist debut building across the street. The architectural team even salvaged a two-inch-wide swath of the original carpet cleaned and analyzed by computers so that it could be reproduced exactly for the renovation.

Stern, who used to walk on the orange carpet while an architecture student studying under Rudolph at Yale in the early 1960s, said the process of restoring the building down to its smallest details has been a special pleasure for him and his colleagues.

"We've been spending a lot of quality time doing this research," he remarked, smirking.

That is not to say that the project has been an easy one. Gwathmey, who is designing both the renovation and the addition despite Yale's original intention to split the projects into two commissions, said the task is a difficult one not least because his clients are all architects.

"The hardest building to do is a school of architecture," Gwathmey explained. "You know the risks, but you have to take the risks to grow as a creative person."

Two eras collide

The building's quirky design made it a challenge to build and even more difficult to restore.

A particular challenge in Rudolph's multi-level building is achieving compliance with the Americans With Disabilities Act. But the addition to the Rudolph Building, which will be named after donor Jeffrey Loria '62 and will house the History of Art Department, makes achieving compliance easier. Additional elevators to service the complex will be added in the Loria Center, and the two buildings will share a handicap-accessible entrance.

The buildings will also feature a joint central air-conditioning system, a new convenience that does not come easily in a building that long made its inhabitants suffer during warm months. In a revealing indication of their age, the ceilings in the Rudolph Building, which were originally sprayed with asbestos that has since been removed, offer precious few opportunities for Gwathmey to hide wires and air ducts.

Yet another obstacle is the replacement of Rudolph's suspended incandescent lights with a

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Gary Fox/Senior Photographer

The Art & Architecture Building will emerge this summer as the Rudolph Building, which will harken back to its original design.

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high-efficiency equivalent designed by Gwathmey's firm. Additionally, restored skylights will provide natural light throughout the building.

These complexities have long been reason enough to avoid a thorough restoration of the Rudolph Building, Stern said. But Stern has made the project a focus of his deanship and said he lobbied University President Richard Levin for years in support of the project.

"Frankly, this building survived as long as it did not because it was beloved by anyone except architecture students, but simply because it was too expensive to tear down," Stern said. "I think it's one of the most important restorations of a modernist building, following up on the restoration of the Art Gallery."

For its part, the Loria Center will consciously reflect many of the features of its eclectic group of neighbors, University Planner Laura Cruickshank said.

The materials used on the Loria Center are inspired by the zinc panels on Kahn's British Art Center and the limestone of James Gamble Rogers' Collegiate Gothic residential colleges, she said. And, where it intersects with the Rudolph Building, glass and aluminum panels will help connect the buildings aesthetically. The two buildings will be connected internally by a library, named for Robert Hass '69.

Most prominently, the protruding limestone-clad section of Gwathmey's building will complement a window-laden depression in Rudolph's otherwise cast-in-place concrete structure. But Gwathmey also pointed out the dialogue between the addition and the renovation as seen in the views out of Rudolph's enormous windows.

All throughout the Rudolph Building, vistas to the north of campus will be both interrupted by and, Gwathmey hopes, enhanced by the Loria Center addition.

"When you have a framed view, the view is much more intense, in a positive way, than if you just have a horizon view," Gwathmey said.

A 'difficult' building begins anew

Reveled by some, admired by others, Rudolph's creation has had a life few buildings can match. Swept by the forces of catastrophe and revisionist tinkering, it has evolved into an edifice much different from that which Rudolph designed in 1963.

In many ways, the building's unsettled history echoes its construction. Rudolph had an open-ended contract with Yale, so he was free to change his design, even during construction. And he did not hesitate to invoke his architectural prerogative.

"It was a teaching tool," Stern said. "And it still is."

Despite its past, though, the building has stood the test of time — and, Gwathmey said, is stronger for having done so.

"The building has gone through hell," Gwathmey said. "But it's an indestructible building, and we all love it and acknowledge its eccentricities."

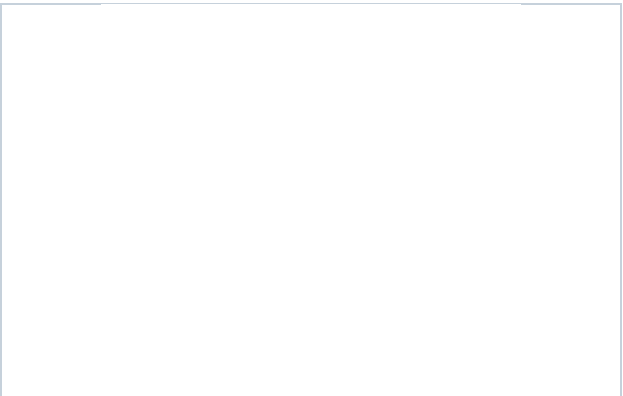
Paul Goldberger '72, the architecture critic for The New Yorker, noted in an interview with the News last month that while buildings have an obvious obligation to functionality, it is their eccentricities that can — and, in the case of Rudolph's, do — prove most interesting of all.

"I think the Rudolph Building is one of the great buildings of its time," Goldberger said. "It's a difficult building, a problematic building, but a lot of great literature and music is difficult. Why can't a building be difficult?"

And with its exposed, rough corduroy concrete and its sheer size, the Rudolph Building, even with its new addition, will always be somewhat difficult.

But unlike great literature, architecture can be tweaked over time, for better or for worse. With their work on the Rudolph Building, Gwathmey and Stern are paying restorative homage to their former teacher in the form of air conditioning, a new neighbor and — not least of all — orange carpet.

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