

# BUILDING<sup>®</sup> BRIEFS

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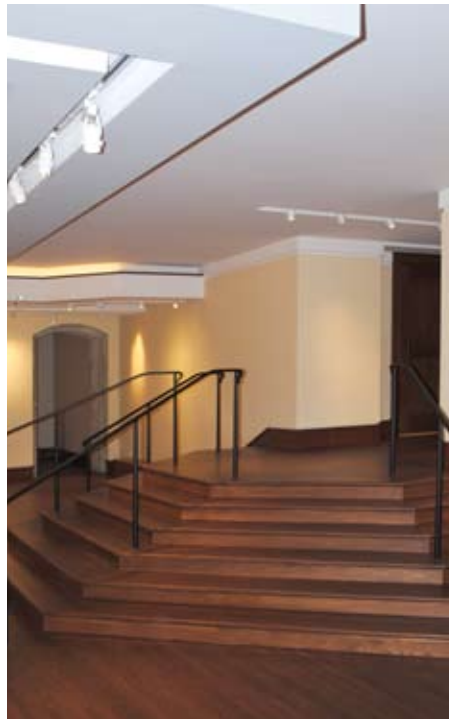
FALL, 2010

## Artistic Adaptive Reuse

The practice of saving significant buildings from impending demolition in the United States may have unofficially started in 1850 when a group saved George Washington's Mount Vernon homestead from destruction. The term adaptive reuse has been widely used in the architectural world for half a century. The industrial revolutions from the late 1700s through about 1860 created many buildings originally used as mills, warehouses and estates. These buildings, many still standing and in relatively good shape except for some neglect, begged to be saved.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation was established in 1949. However, it wasn't until the late 1970s, with the advent of historic commissions, that activism in building preservation began to soar. All of this great building stock was being saved, but did each building truly have a purpose? The typical preservation project was the historic mill being converted to residential units. Before that, many main streets were negatively impacted by the demolition of significant buildings, never to be enjoyed again.

On the campus of Fairfield University stands a majestic Tudor mansion built in 1920 on, what was known as, the Lashar Estate and originally called Hearthstone Hall. The estate was acquired in 1942 to become the original building for the



newly created Fairfield University. Although never considered for demolition, the building took on a new life in the mansion's first adaptive reuse as Hearthstone Hall became Bellarmine Hall, named in honor of the Italian Saint Robert Bellarmine who is the patron saint of Fairfield University.

Petra Construction Corporation was awarded the challenge of transforming the dark and dusty lower level into world-class museum space. Upstairs, the building is still being used to house the University's administration. Downstairs, the changes have been nothing short of miraculous. Working

with David W. Frassinelli, Associate Vice President for Facilities Management and the designers from Centerbrook Architects, the Petra Team has crafted a space worthy of the University's art collection. Much of the collection was donated; as a matter of fact, a large donation in 2003 necessitated the search for, and eventual construction of, this new museum space. The good news continues, as recently the Metropolitan Museum of Art notified the University of their decision to convert the status of eight beautiful plaster casts from "loans" to "gifts."

One of the most rewarding aspects of adaptive reuse projects is the fact that you're recycling a building and reusing it for another purpose, while keeping it as part of the nation's historic fabric. The adaptation is one of the most challenging tasks. In the case of Bellarmine Hall, the mansion's lower level, originally meant for storage and mechanical systems, was converted to exceptional public museum display

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areas and educational space. As a museum, the mechanical requirements alone were substantial. "The biggest challenge on this project was to carefully coordinate all of the building systems so that they would occupy the smallest possible space," said Dave Hall, Petra's Senior Project Manager. Petra used their in-house Building Information Modeling (BIM) capabilities and constant field coordination to ensure that all the new HVAC systems would fit into the allowable space above the ceilings.

In the past, adaptive reuse was sometimes fashionable, but with the tighter budgets of today it is now becoming a necessity. Many companies and institutions are finding that it makes more sense to adapt and

renovate than to build new.

The well-lit space now stands complete, and humidification and temperature balancing are underway, as these factors are critical to art preservation. By working collaboratively, the team was able to deliver the project with no significant issues. Petra is proud to have been a member of this project team, contributing to the overall University ideal of a more holistic

approach to education. With a grand opening in October, soon the empty museum walls will be filled with color.

Adaptive reuse and historic restoration work can be a challenge. To learn more about how Petra Construction can provide assistance with your next project, call Guido Petra, President or Ron Goodin, Director of Business Development at 203-865-6043.



## Project Profile

### Owner:

Fairfield University  
Fairfield, CT

### Project:

Bellarmine Museum

### Project Delivery System:

Construction Management

## Project Team

### Fairfield University

David W. Frassinelli, Associate Vice President for Facilities Management  
Joseph M. Bouchard, Director, Environmental Health & Safety and Fire Marshall  
Walter G. Stapleton, Project Manager, Campus Planning, Design & Construction  
Jill Deupi, Director, Bellarmine Museum

### Petra Construction Corporation

Barry Zorzanello, Project Executive  
Dave Hall, Sr. Project Manager  
Dennis DaRe, Paul D'Amico and Joe DeAngelis, Site Supervisory Team  
Ken Woodward, Director of Estimating  
Glenn Stevens, Architectural Millshop Manager

## Design Team

### Centerbrook Architects and Planners

Jim Childress, Partner  
Stephen Holmes, Sr. Project Architect

### Kohler-Ronan Engineers

Francisco Duraes, Mechanical Engineer  
Peter Beltz, Mechanical & Electrical Engineer

### Gibble Norden Champion Brown, Structural Engineers

Laura Champion, Structural Engineer

Special thanks to all of Petra's jobsite personnel, subcontractors and material suppliers

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