



HIGHER EDUCATION The building can be entered at grade or via a new elevated walkway by James Carpenter. This path connects through arched passages to the main historic quad to the east (just renamed for the original campus architect, Julian Abele) and to the Bryan Campus Center to the west (opposite).

West Campus Union | Durham, North Carolina | Grimshaw

Feast for the Senses

Duke University serves a broad spectrum of students and faculty at its new center dedicated to dining and student life.

BY BETH BROOME

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES EWING



Sometimes called “the Gothic Wonderland,” Duke University’s West Campus in Durham, North Carolina, is a storybook enclave. Designed by the office of Horace Trumbauer—under the direction of chief designer Julian Abele, one of the first influential African-American architects—and constructed between 1927 and 1932 (with the Olmsted Brothers overseeing the landscape), it is characterized by its bucolic quads and Collegiate Gothic architecture rendered in the local variegated Duke Stone. It is not a place that takes change lightly.

But, as one of the country’s most competitive universities, the school also knows the importance of staying current to attract the best students and is accustomed to adapting to the times, as it has with its recent reinvention of the historic West Campus Union building. Designed by the New York office of Grimshaw architects, the renovation and expansion transforms a creaky dining facility into a dynamic community center. “For us, there is an important relationship between the academic, residential, and social environments,” says Larry Moneta, vice president for student affairs. “West Union is the nexus—where these three circles overlap.” The original building, completed in 1930 at the heart of the campus, was showing its age. The 200-foot-long Great Hall refectory and adjacent Cambridge Inn dining room may have been hallowed, but they were inflexible spaces, and much of the rest of the building was given over to grab-and-go food vendors and administrative offices. There was nowhere inviting to gather or linger. And it was impenetrable. “It was like a fortress,” says Mark Husser, Grimshaw’s partner in charge. “You couldn’t move through it.”

For the building’s next chapter, the university hoped to reconceive it as a hub for students, faculty, and staff to convene in a variety of spaces—formal and informal. Putting food front and center by displaying preparation, using locally sourced ingredients, and engaging local chefs at 13





diverse venues—with offerings from Tandoor dishes to paella to soul food—draws students and encourages them to stay. The approach reflects the farm-to-table zeitgeist but was also shaped by a widely shared cultural experience. “In my house,” says Moneta, “every important family conversation was in the kitchen. There’s a little of that in our thinking as well. Where one eats is an important place for friendships and relationships and community to thrive.”

West Union is the focal point of a larger plan to reactivate this part of campus—through landscaping, infrastructure, and architecture. The project began with an invited competition that included Foster + Partners, Bohlin Cywinski Jackson, and Shepley Bulfinch with James Carpenter—a clear



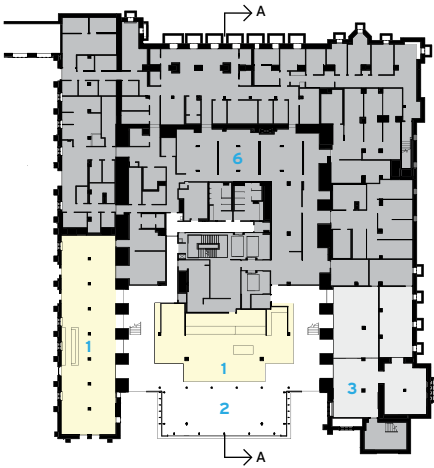
indication of the university's interest in the contemporary despite their embrace of the traditional, as well as a hint that it would probably substitute steel and glass for the ubiquitous stone. As revered as West Union had been—with its towers, clay-tile roofs, tracery, and limestone ornamentation—the love did not extend to the original volume that nestled within its core: a squat, flat-roofed rabbit warren housing a cafeteria servery. Grimshaw, which won the contract in 2012, removed this element, inserting a glass-and-steel box into the remaining U-shaped structure. Though bold in its materiality, the new West Union “bows to the historic legacy,” notes project associate David Cook, pointing to the design's attention to existing elements through

framed views and juxtapositions, such as the dining balconies the team has suspended amid the oak trusses in the Great Hall and the Cambridge Inn. And the building is respectful with its scale: from the sacrosanct Chapel quad to the north, the extension is not visible.

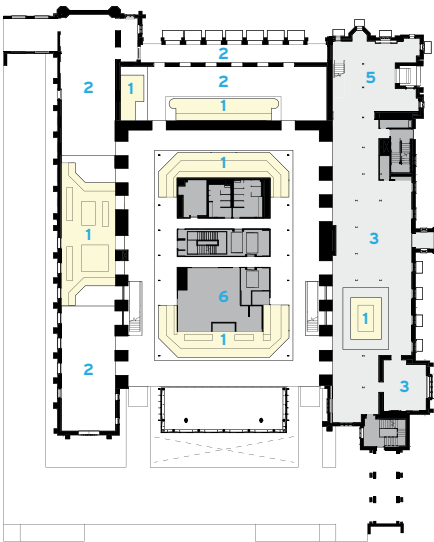
“We inverted the Collegiate Gothic,” says Husser. “The building is transparent and is activated by the life inside. Because it sits at the middle of major circulation routes, we created two ground levels to allow people to pass through.” Students enter at the lower level and via bridges above into a soaring atrium, buzzing with activity. Visitors flow around and through the core, which is screened in louvered Western Red Cedar and ringed by a bazaar of food stalls called “The

CORE CURRICULUM

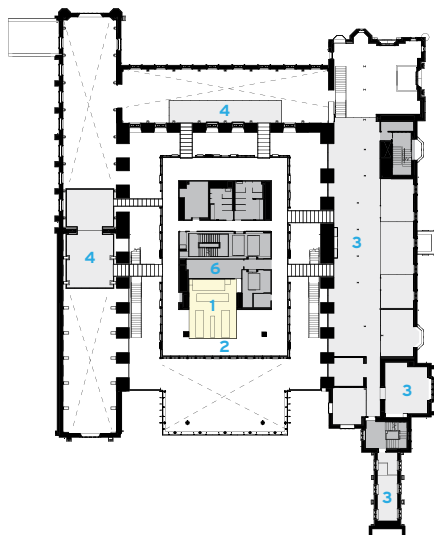
The soaring atrium links to West Union's wood-screened center, with its variety of food vendors and seating. Bridges and stairs connect to the historic east wing (opposite, top). Extra-wide walls between the insertion and the existing Great Hall house mechanicals (opposite, bottom).



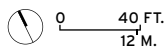
GROUND-FLOOR PLAN



PLAZA-LEVEL PLAN



SECOND-FLOOR PLAN



credits

ARCHITECT: Grimshaw – Mark Husser, partner in charge; David Burke, principal; George Hauner, Andrew Anderson, associate principals; David Cook, Mark Rhoads, Manuel Schmidt, associates; Aimee Duquette, Yunhee Jeong, Michael Wilson, senior architects; Bec Wilkie, architect; Zach Fine, Brooke Gassaway, Vivian Cheng, architectural designers

CONSULTANTS: Reed Hilderbrand (landscape); BuroHappold (structural); Vanderweil Engineers (m/e/p/fp); Front (facade); Yui Design (food service); Celano Design Studio (branding & interior design collaborator)

GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Skanska

SIZE: 113,000 square feet

COST: withheld

COMPLETION DATE: September 2016

SOURCES

CURTAIN WALL: Roschmann

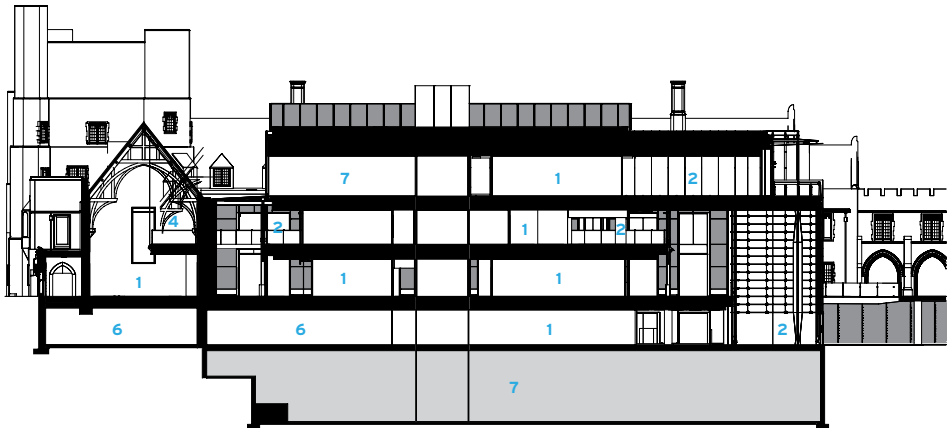
METAL PANELS: Reynobond

METAL FRAME WINDOWS: Wheaton Sprague, Oldcastle BuildingEnvelope

PAINTS & STAINS: Sherwin-Williams



SECTION PERSPECTIVE



SECTION A - A

- 1 FOOD SERVICE
- 2 SEATING
- 3 STUDENT LIFE: MEETING/LOUNGE
- 4 DINING BALCONY

- 5 MULTIPURPOSE/ PERFORMANCE
- 6 BACK OF HOUSE/ KITCHEN
- 7 MECHANICAL

RAISING THE ANTE Food service continues in the historic Cambridge Inn refectory to the north, where the architects have inserted a dining balcony (right). A living room and café are some of the many social spaces that are carved out of the original east wing (bottom).

Market” and by glass-topped passages that link to the existing building on three sides. Glass-and-steel stairs and bridges lead to the balconies to the west and north and to the more compressed student-life areas—lounges and meeting rooms—in the east wing. Ample apertures enable views up, down, and across the interior, as undergraduates share meals or hunch over laptops, faculty meet over coffee, and maintenance workers break for lunch.

True to Grimshaw form, and in response to the historic precedent, the architects have put the structure on display by exposing more of it in their renovation, and also by revealing how the pieces come together in the new construction, notably with towering steel members, which frame the exterior and support the skylight-enclosure system as well as the curtain wall. Here structural glass fins tie into castellated steel columns, providing lateral bracing. Laminated with a ceramic frit, the fins also filter light, easing the transition from this bright, acoustically live space into the opaque, more hushed historic wings. To create the threshold between these spaces, the team punched openings in the dividing walls, which they designed to be extra-wide—7 feet—to hold the extensive mechanicals required by the numerous kitchens. Accommodating the services, given the constraints of the existing construction, was the biggest challenge, say the architects, who also excavated down 10 feet and out to the south, to meet the required needs. With the complex m/e/p systems and all the added ductwork and ventilation, Husser likens the process to designing a lab building.

Just as the new West Union reflects the current attitude toward food preparation and dining, it also communicates Duke University’s perspective on education through interaction. The students clearly love the food, but the social element does not escape them, either. “It’s helping build the community we lost when we left the freshman dining hall,” says sophomore Maggie Finney. “And,” underscores her friend Hawa Tucker, “you run into everyone.” ■

