

Rice Reprise



Cesar Pelli & Associates rephrase a formal theme developed in an earlier project at Rice University.

CESAR PELLI & Associates' Ley Student Center at Rice University in Houston is the firm's second architectural project on that campus. Following on the heels of a great success at Herring Hall (P/A, April 1985, pp. 86–97), the Ley Center was at once a smaller and tougher problem. The architects' enviable opportunity to reexplore and expand notions of architectural organization and ornamentation first broached in Herring Hall was constrained here by existing conditions and a limited budget.

Pelli's design is an addition to the 1958 Rice Memorial Center, a half-hearted interpretation of Ralph Adams Cram's Tuscan Italianate architecture, which dominates on campus. In plan, Ley Center remains faithful to notions of spatial organization that guided the 1910 campus plan by Cram, Goodhue & Ferguson, which Pelli adapted in recent campus master plan proposals. The architects sought to reinforce the edge of an inner campus street, articulate a quadrangle given definition on the opposite side by Herring Hall, and clarify a syncopated spatial sequence of alternating buildings and open space.

The extension itself, which permits the consolidation of facilities serving a student population that has doubled in 20 years, is a collection of six components: a zone of two private dining rooms added to the existing cafeteria; an east/west corridor "spine," which extends beyond the building as a porte cochère; a group of one-story lounges off this spine which serve multiple activities and may be combined; a two-story "bar" to the north containing workrooms and student advising on the first floor with student activity offices above; an octagonal multipurpose room used for lectures, re-

ceptions, and dramatic performances; and a pair of courtyards comprising an interior garden and a service court with steel gates.

Visual themes explored by the architects in Herring Hall are restated here. The half-columns at the porte cochère are obvious repeats, as is the use of decorative masonry. As at Herring Hall, a modern structure is made to look traditional, although the sleight of hand is revealed. The garden arcade "piers," for example, which do not actually support the cantilevered roof, are articulated as "solid," while the brick veneer, pulled back at its edges, exposes the piers as nonstructural cutouts.

Other elements are less successful. The transition from existing building to new spine is barely articulated. The mass of the gable roof seems visually to weigh down upon its columns, while the fat fascia, designed to conceal gutters, is jarringly thin where it turns at the gable end. Vertical windows along the gallery, while cleverly evoking the rhythm of pilasters, are ungainly proportioned.

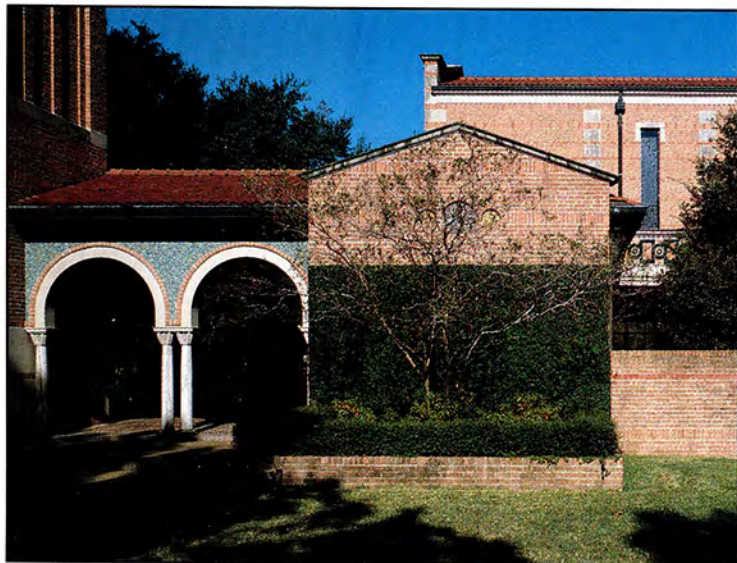
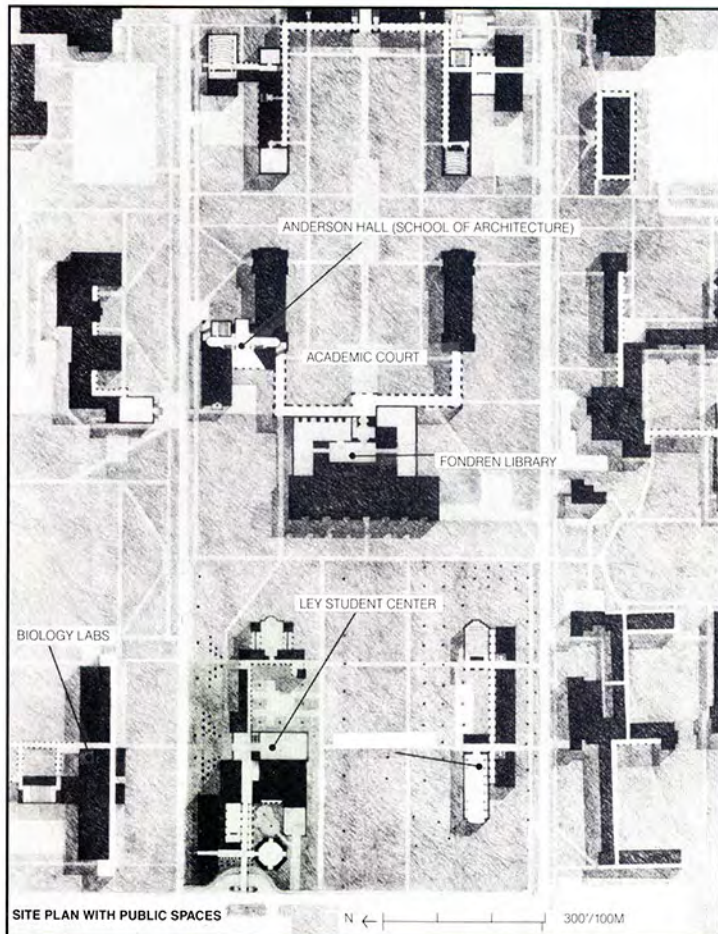
The success of Herring Hall was hard to follow, and the Ley Student Center inevitably suffers by comparison. The biggest problem proved to be the gap between diverse user needs and the restricted budget set by the University at the time of contract bid. Revisions too often resulted in expensive change orders. An entire bay was eliminated during construction; finishes in some sections were downplayed; and custom seating designed for the garden was eliminated.

The project remains, however, a case study in the evolution of a consistent approach to form and detail that is at once modern and faithful to its eclectic context. *Peter C. Papademetriou* ■



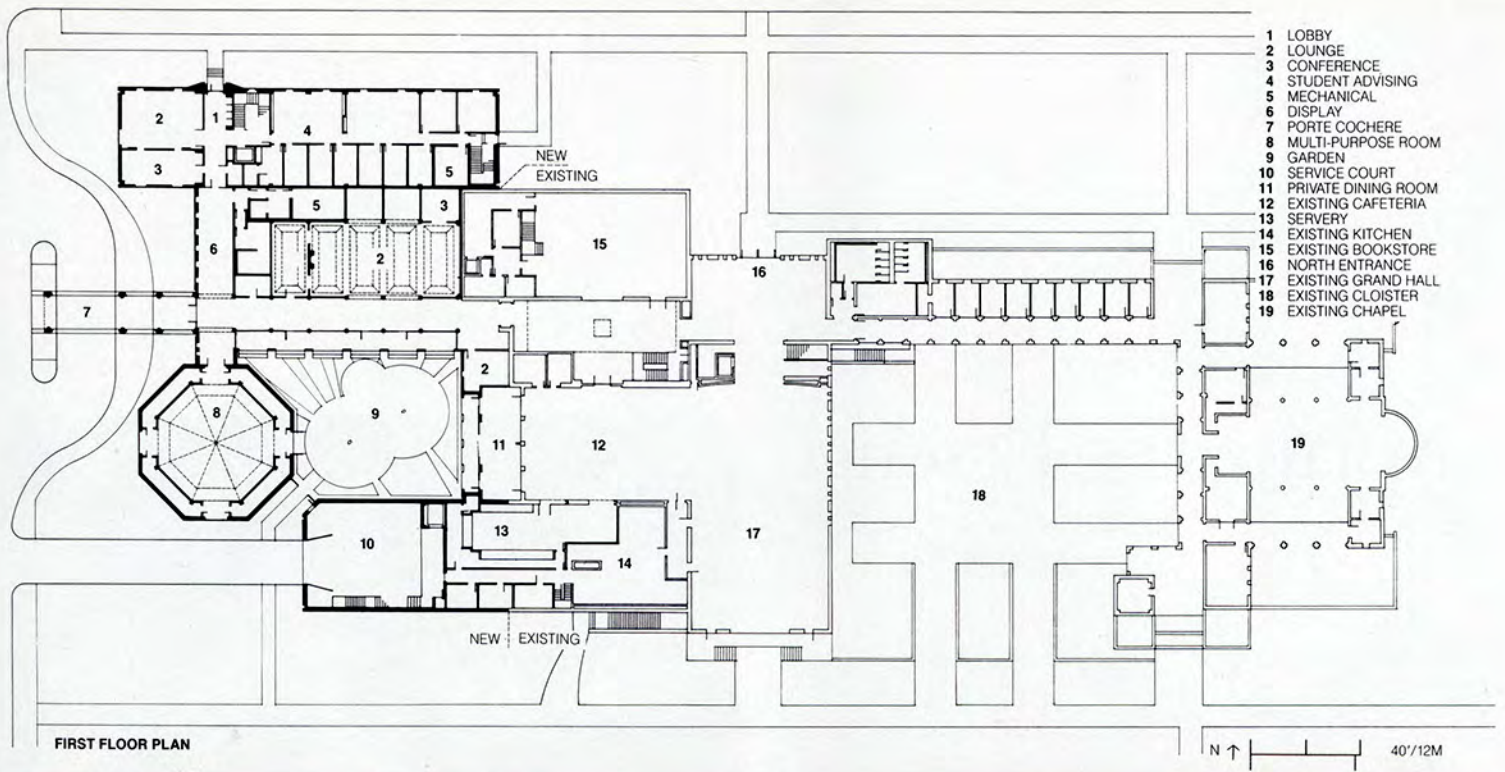
Distant view (above) shows relationship between Ley Student Center at left and Herring Hall at extreme right, with quadrangle between. Existing Grand Hall and Campanile of the Rice Memorial Chapel are seen to rear of Ley Center. Ceramic medallion featuring owl image over entry is by artist Polly Myhrum. Shown below: the south corner of the Rice Memorial Chapel (Harwin C. Moore, architect), directly across from Herring Hall and adjacent to

the 1958 addition renovated by Pelli, illustrates the more liberal architectural detailing and ornament typical of campus buildings after Cram. Site plan at right shows new quadrangle shaped by Ley Center and Herring Hall.



New open courtyard designed by partner Diana Balmori captures sun from the south; benches are substitutes for Pelli-designed seating which had actually priced out below budget, and saplings were installed in lieu of larger specimen trees selected by architects. Paving was designed for natural drainage. Interior of octagonal multipurpose room (facing page, top left) shows thick wall containing support services; main lounge (facing page, bottom), which opens onto corridor "spine," is accented by skylights and lower-ceilinged alcoves; interior spine (facing page, top right) lines courtyard.





Project: Ley Student Center, Rice University, Houston, Texas.
Architects: Cesar Pelli & Associates, New Haven, Conn.
Client: Rice University (Josephine Abercrombie, chair, Trustees Committee on Buildings and Grounds).
Program: 23,500-square-foot addition and 56,000-square-foot renovation of existing student center comprising public lounges, multipurpose room, offices for student activities, garden, and expanded cafeteria, kitchen, and bookstore.
Structural system: steel frame.
Major materials: brick, limestone, glazed brick, tile, clay roof tiles, and sheet metal (exterior); quarry tile, carpet, wood flooring, painted gypsum wallboard and wood wall finishes (interior; see *Building Materials*, p. 156).
Mechanical system: chilled water and steam from central plant; single and multizone air-handling units.
Consultants: Cesar Pelli & Associates, landscape, interiors; Walter P.

Moore & Associates, structural;
 Burns DeLatte McCoy, mechanical;
 Stephan Mesh and Diana Juul, lighting.
General contractor: W.S. Bellows Construction.
Cost: \$3,850,000.
Photos: Paul Hester.