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2004

DESIGN DIGEST

Rossetti and Hamilton Anderson Make a Profound and Beautiful Statement

Wayne State University Welcome Center
achieves Monumental Scale with
Renaissance Masonry Units

Wayne State University Welcome Center
Architects: Rossetti Associates Architects,
Hamilton Anderson Associates
General Contractor: Walbridge/Jenkins
Masonry Panels: National Precast
Masonry Material: Arriscraft
Renaissance® Masonry Units, Sage
and Mankato stone



Rising from Detroit's cultural corridor is a gem of modern architecture and engineering. The new Wayne State University Welcome Center fulfills its mission, greeting students and visitors to the historic downtown campus while making a bold statement about the university's innovative spirit. The four-story, 70,000-square-foot, \$18.5 million structure serves as a one-stop information, application, enrollment and service center for Wayne State's 31,000 students.

During the Welcome Center's grand opening ceremony, WSU President Irvin D. Reid reminisced about when he first approached architect Gino Rossetti, FAIA, concerning his dream of a portal on Woodward that would announce Wayne's presence to the world. He told Rossetti he wanted to build a place that celebrated the entry to this distinguished university by creating something profound and beautiful. Despite the challenging financial constraints, Rossetti Architects, along with Hamilton Anderson Associates, and the construction firm Walbridge/Jenkins, found a way to realize Reid's dream and made a timeless architectural statement in the process.

From the beginning, the project's design team, headed by Rossetti's architectural design lead Tod Stevens, AIA, faced serious challenges. Lack of adequate time was a major concern.

The State of Michigan was funding a portion of the cost. It had to be completed by a certain date or the funding would be lost. Another concern was a historic residence along the northern face of the building with a zero lot line. The solution: pre-cast masonry panels.

"We wanted to minimize our impact on that historic property and reduce our construction timeline. Pre-cast masonry panels allowed us to clad the building quickly, and it enabled us to apply masonry along the northern face



WSU Welcome Center Design Team (from left): Kirk Phillips, Paul Weld, AIA, and Rainy Hamilton, Jr., AIA, President, Hamilton Anderson Associates; Tod Stevens, AIA, and Kevin Ashby, AIA, Principal, Rossetti Associates Architects.



without impacting the neighboring residence," Stevens said.

Aesthetics were another main concern. The site is located on the corner of Woodward and Warren, where the city meets the urban fabric of the campus. The design team wanted the Welcome Center to harmonize with this environment.

"Our objective was to design a building that connected the geometry of the city with the urban landscape of the campus. The surrounding cityscape is Detroit's Cultural Center that includes the Public Library, museums and other public buildings. We wanted to pick up on the materials used in this area to give the Welcome Center some 'monumental scale' and Arriscraft™ sage Renaissance® stone was the material that best fit the bill. We also selected Mankato stone as

an accent material to connect the building with the historic urban feel of the campus," Stevens said.

"We chose sage Renaissance for several reasons. Renaissance was used on the Museum of African American History across the street, so it had a natural tie-in there, and it was consistent with the monumental mentality we were trying to achieve. The University's colors are green and white, and the subtle green of the sage stone combined with the green glass allowed us to incorporate those colors. Further, the sage stone has mottled color variations, which added warmth to the building while complementing the Mankato stone," Stevens continued.

The pre-cast masonry panels afforded the opportunity for large ribbon windows that create movement and extend the university to Woodward Avenue. The large windows open up the building, providing great views of the city skyline.

Stevens is proud of the building's modern vocabulary, and the critics apparently agree. The building and its designers recently received a 2004 Design Award by AIA Michigan for this stunning architectural achievement. ♦



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