

# For TRUSTEE HALL at St. Edward's University, in Texas, Andersson-Wise Architects deftly abstracts the traditional

By David Dillon

**T**he first building in a new millennium carries cachet; the first building in a new master plan carries the burden of proof. Every detail, good or bad, becomes a potential precedent. Andersson-Wise Architects wrestled with this dilemma in designing Trustee Hall at St. Edward's University, in Austin, Texas, a small (4,200 students) Catholic school with aspirations of doubling its enrollment in 10 years.

Sited on the highest point in the city, the university overlooks downtown in one direction, and hill country with a fringe of the coastal plateau in the others. At the center of campus stands a pair of turn-of-the-century masonry buildings by the revered Texas architect Nicholas Clayton: The heavily rusticated and fancifully towered Main Hall and the somewhat plainer and blunter Holy Cross Hall. Together, the two structures established a hierarchy and material palette that prompted a response from every architect subsequently building on campus.

In the larger arena, different architects have parsed the precedent issue in different ways. The go-for-the-bold faction, the Gehrys and Eisenmans of the profession, like to challenge convention and tradition by introducing unfamiliar forms and materials that cut against the prevailing vernacular. Confrontation rather than complaisance is the name of that game, and such campuses as the University of Cincinnati [RECORD, February 2000, page 81] document the results, each with a roster of well-known architects, and every building generating its own context.

The more conciliatory approach merely tweaks the architectural status quo, thereby reinforcing the sense of continuity and tradition so dear to alums—and for which they are often willing to pay generously. Theme and variations instead of *Sturm und Drang*. Yale, Princeton, and the University of Virginia come immediately to mind.

St. Edward's stands firmly in the context-and-continuity camp. "Originality for the sake of originality is not our goal," its new master plan states. "Appropriateness is." The document warns against buildings conceived of as "isolated elements" and recommends that new designs "have roots firmly planted in history and place." In practi-

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**Project:** Trustee Hall, St. Edward's University, Austin, Texas

**Architect:** Andersson-Wise Architects—Arthur W. Andersson, AIA, F. Christian Wise, AIA, principals; Christopher Sanders, Adam Pyrek, Vincent

Moccia, Erlene Clark, Tim Dacey, Jim Moore, Grant Rimbey, project team

**Engineers:** Architectural Engineers Collaborative (structural); Aguirre Corporation (m/e/p); Baker-Aicklen (civil)

Trustee Hall celebrates modern construction with concrete elevations and traditional materials, as in its brick-clad facades (below). For its south elevation (back page), the architects abstracted the language of the campus's two Nicholas Clayton buildings, collaging, for example, elements inspired by his turreted Main Hall (in the distance, below right).



PHOTOGRAPHY: © TIMOTHY HURSLEY

cal terms, these guidelines mean brick and stone, deep windows, and pitched roofs—preferably red—and an assortment of sporty towers and cupolas rising tall against the sky. And, as the document suggests, the school trustees intend to remake the university’s image by replacing “marginal” buildings from the 1950s and 1960s—signs of an institution in perpetual transition, in their view—with ones that “balance individual expression with an appropriate contextual response.”

Some of the most recent structures, including Trustee Hall, will form the edges of new academic quadrangles, designed to reinforce the campus’s pedestrian character. “The trustees kept reminding us that the Clayton buildings stood at attention with good posture, recalls Arthur Andersson, “and that ours should do the same.”

Programmatically, Trustee Hall is clarity itself: 12 classrooms, 20 faculty offices, and 3 computer labs, all clustered in a corner tower. For the materials, the architects said no to Texas limestone, which appears everywhere in Austin, because of its relatively high cost and the false sense of importance they felt it would have given the building. They chose instead a soft, hand-formed Mexican brick, similar in color to the Austin Common brick that Clayton had used on Holy Cross Hall, but with a richer texture. Arthur Andersson and Chris Wise also

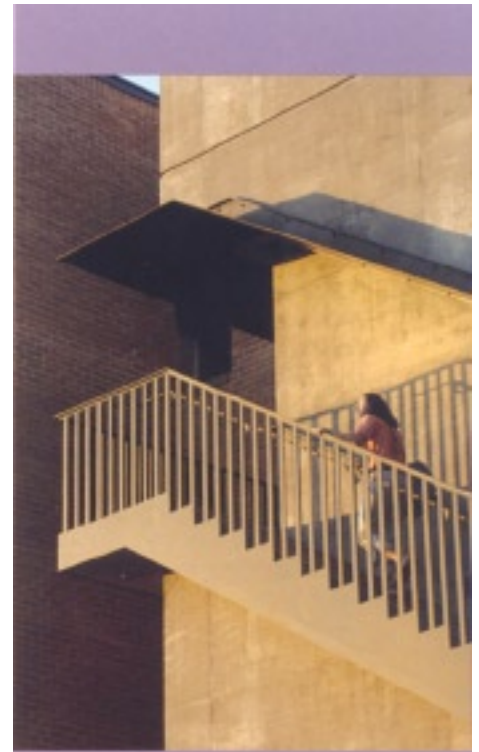
THE MONOLITHIC SOUTH FACADE IS THE MOST DRAMATIC DEPARTURE FROM THE CAMPUS VERNACULAR, WHICH IS UNEQUIVOCALLY MODERN.

acceded to the demand for a red metal roof, though their version is simpler and slightly flatter than its neighbors. Three copper-covered exhaust stacks rising from the roof directly above the computer rooms offer a crisp, contemporary response to the stone turrets of Main and Holy

Cross Halls. The most dramatic departure from the campus vernacular is the concrete south facade, which picks up the color and some detailing of Main, yet is unequivocally modern in its finish and construction—with huge, monolithic slabs. “Concrete is a 2,000-year-old material,” says Wise, “but we used it to show how buildings are made today.”

In addition to showing “good posture,” the facade supports a network of exterior corridors, balconies, porches, and staircases. When classes are in session, it becomes a gigantic theater set punctuated with surprising entrances and exits for students and faculty. Compared to it, the other elevations seem formulaic.

Inside, the bones of the building show through in concrete floors and raw concrete columns, accented with simple metal railings and window frames. Utility and efficiency are the



Computer labs and classrooms occupy a nearly windowless brick tower, which is distinct from the rest of the building (left). Metal detailing of staircases and window frames appear uniformly simple and direct (above). Trustee Hall (opposite, top) helps define the campus’s new north edge. As seen in nearby Holy Cross Hall (left and opposite, bottom), red metal roofs are a staple of the St. Edward’s vernacular. Austin’s relatively mild climate allowed the architects to put much of the circulation on the building’s exterior.



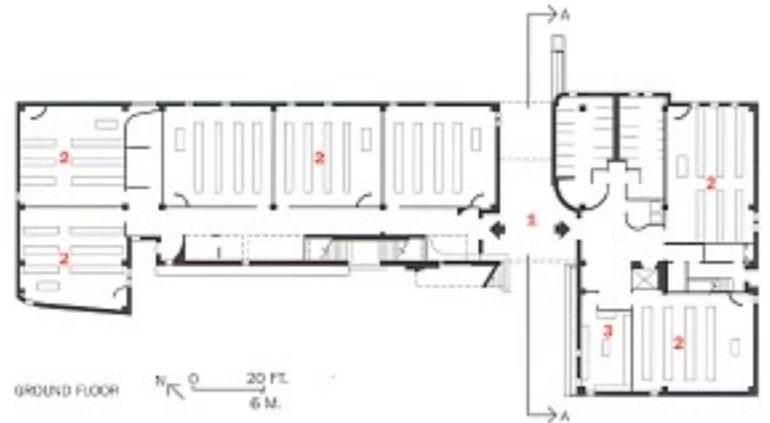


A 5-foot-wide space—wide enough for staircases, balconies, and landings—separates the south facade from the main volume of the building.





THIRD FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR

1. Loggia
2. Classroom
3. Computer lab
4. Copier
5. Lobby
6. Reception
7. Office
8. Secretaries
9. Kitchenette



SECTION ELEVATION A-A

The view from the top of the main staircase (above) includes the campus chapel and a statue of St. Edward, the university's patron saint. Simplified versions of Clayton's pointed-arched windows look out onto the campus, with the building's exterior layers creating a cloisterlike effect (right).





Mexican brick on the Trustee Hall's north facade is punctuated by clusters of tall, narrow windows (left). This fenestration relieves the volume's potential blockiness without destroying its sense of weight and mass. The hall's central staircase appears through a large, multistory window (center at left). The interiors (below) are extremely spare, with polished concrete floors and exposed concrete columns. Small seating niches along the corridors provide places to rest or gather.

themes, especially in the classrooms. Yet the overall mood is calm and reflective, almost like a cloister, where architecture helps turn the mind inward on itself. Except for pointed-arched windows, a too-obvious reference to Clayton, the effects are not forced.

Andersson and Wise started out working for Charles Moore in the 1980s, learning the subtleties of collaboration and the importance of focusing on people instead of ideology. Yet these architects show far more interest in construction than did their mentor. Moore was a teacher and proselytizer, who liberated several generations of young architects but didn't know or care much about actual building. By the time construction started, he was usually onto something else, leaving the details for others to work out.

Andersson-Wise takes a more pragmatic approach. If some of the firm's earlier projects, such as Washington State History Museum [RECORD, October 1996, page 70], were awkward compromises between memory and invention, Trustee Hall is not. It is neither superficial nor narrowly mimetic. With a few exceptions, details borrowed from surrounding buildings are flattened and abstracted into something more contemporary. The monolithic south elevation, facing the center of campus, is more Kahn than Clayton. And unlike many buildings with a Postmodern pedigree, Trustee Hall looks built to last. ■



#### Sources

**Structural system:** CIP Concrete Pan Joist System

**Exterior masonry:** Ladrilleras El Fuerte

**Concrete:** Phoenix Concrete; Capitol Aggregates; Peri Formwork Systems

**Roofing:** Siplast Pardiene (elasometric); Berridge (metal shingles)

**Doors:** Kawneer (entrance); Steelcraft (metal);

Mohawk Door (wood); Smoke Guard (fire control)

**Hardware:** Corbin Russwin (locksets); Hager (hinges); LCN (closers); Von Duprin LCN (exit devices); Kawneer (pulls); Blum, Accuride, Hafele (cabinet hardware)

For more information about this project, go to Projects at [www.architecturalrecord.com](http://www.architecturalrecord.com).

The curving central stair is a sculptural piece in an essentially rectilinear environment.





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