

Hill College House: University of Pennsylvania

Designed by renowned Finnish American architect Eero Saarinen and built in 1960, Hill College House at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, underwent a 15-month, \$80 million, LEED Gold certified renovation.

The internationally recognized landmark reopened to 500 student residents in August 2017. One of 12 undergraduate residential houses at the university, Hill College House features more public and communal space than any other campus residence.

Adapting and Reusing

Although the architecture continued to foster a strong sense of community, the dated systems, worn finishes, and lack of air-conditioning combined to make the building unappealing to prospective residents.



Design objectives included strengthening communal living at the heart of Hill's original design; respecting the historic materials and details; creating comfortable, welcoming, and accessible student accommodations; and attaining LEED certification.


Mills + Schnoering Architects and interior design studio Floss Barber worked in tandem with Knoll dealer CFI to ensure consistency across aesthetics, functionality and design. Respecting the original floor plan, the team glazed the interior atrium to brighten the overall space; formerly solid walls that separated lounges from corridors were replaced with glass, bringing natural light into the hallways and lounge areas. Flooring patterns, finish selections, furniture – from Florence Knoll sofas and lounge chairs to Antenna Tables and Sprite stacking chairs - all took cues from midcentury modern design and details found in Saarinen's other work.

Leveraging Knoll Classics

For one of the study areas that overlooks the main atrium, the team mixed workstations and Saarinen Executive Swivel chairs with adjacent refuge spaces composed of Saarinen Womb Chairs and Florence Knoll sofas. One level up, there is an outdoor space that feeds light into the building through the large floor-to-ceiling windows. Rather than leave this space empty the team proposed and installed 1966 Dining Tables with Spark side chairs and Maya Lin Stones. Together these products provide a fresh pop of color and enable students to study or gather outside.

Furniture and finishes were selected to echo the building's midcentury style and reinterpret

Saarinen's bold color palette. Knoll's storied history and diverse portfolio of modern designs were a natural fit to ensure the consistent aesthetic of Hill College House.

The University Architect summarized, "In this complex and challenging renovation . . . multiple deft interventions accumulate into a complete refresh of this important building – one that respects and invigorates Saarinen's design and the community life it so richly fosters." 

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Project Overview

Sector: Education

Completed: 2017

Location: Philadelphia, PA

Team: Mills + Schnoering, LLC; Floss Barber, Inc.; CFI, Philadelphia, PA

Scope

- + 195,000 square feet
- + 6 floors
- + 3 private offices
- + 5 sets of workstations
- + 2 conference rooms
- + 3 lounges
- + 1 cafeteria

Knoll Products

- + **Systems:** Dividends Horizon®; Reff Profiles™
- + **Task & Side Seating:** Sprite Chairs, Saarinen Executive Arm Chairs, Bertioia Barstools
- + **Lounge Seating:** Womb Chairs, D'Urso Swivel Chairs, Florence Knoll Sofas
- + **Storage:** Calibre®
- + **Tables:** Antenna Simple Tables; Saarinen Oval Coffee tables, Schultz 1966 Dining Tables
- + **KnollTextiles:** Atlas, Prairie, Cato, Journey, Rivington

Drivers

- + Strengthen communal living
- + Create comfortable, welcoming and accessible student accommodations
- + Attain LEED certification

Tactics

- + Increase the number of collaborative areas to promote exchanges
- + Update existing infrastructure with new amenities and a contemporary HVAC systems
- + Leverage the center atrium to flood the space with natural light and create outdoor study areas

Outcomes

- + An attractive dormitory and study spaces for students and residents
- + A successful adaptive reuse that revitalizes Saarinen's original design, further honoring the landmark building