

**Engineering progress
Enhancing lives**

Sacred Heart University

West Campus welcomes students with stunning
high-gloss and mirrored entrance.

na.rehau.com/projects



Former corporate headquarters re-imagined as bright and modern university building

While university buildings aren't always known for cutting-edge design, the West Campus of the Fairfield, Conn.-based Sacred Heart University had several unique aspects that took it out of the realm of a typical facility remodel.

First, the university had recently purchased the former GE corporate headquarters building when the company relocated to Boston, and it was not a "typical" college building, forcing the design team to be more creative in re-imagining the building with numerous offices as an open and airy space for students to learn, gather and relax. Second, one of the executives at the university loved architecture, and often traveled the world, bringing back unusual ideas, making him more amenable to creative design solutions for the space.

And third, the design team from the Glastonbury, Conn.-based SLAM (The S/L/A/M Collaborative) had a powerful creative vision of how the building could be repurposed into a bright, modern and student-friendly space. Their vision translates to unique materials, such as the reflective RAUVISIO crystal slim Mirror and curved RAUVISIO brilliant Bianco panels, that help to give the space its crisp and clean white palette, and a backlit metal mesh wall that adds a striking touch.



Located half a mile from the main campus, the new building "was the first academic piece at their West Campus, and needed to function in a sort of a self-contained way," according to SLAM principal and architectural designer Rick Herzer, AIA, LEED AP. The university wanted to ensure that students who would be there wouldn't feel let down that they weren't on the main campus, and as such, the university was willing to invest, both financially and creatively, in making the space special.

As SLAM senior associate and interior designer Tracy Herzer, IIDA, LEED AP, NCIDQ, WELL AP, COEE explained, "The greatest design challenge was to do something very unique, creative and modern in this existing setting. They wanted very unusual things."

She continued, "It is a very modern interior, so we knew we were going to be using whites and greys." Having worked with the client before, the



Herzers knew that they liked a crisp, clean palette, and the school colors of red and grey had to figure prominently into that. "The challenge in a building like this," she said, "was to not make it look like a sports facility, [even though] it's branded all over the place, but rather to make it fun and exciting and still have the character of the building itself."

Material choices can make or break a project and, for Rick Herzer, REHAU played an essential role in the design of the space. He'd first seen a physical sample of the company's RAUVISIO brilliant Bianco surface in his company's office on someone else's desk and grabbed it, explaining, "It was so beautiful in its own right, I couldn't wait to use it. So, I was just waiting for an appropriate opportunity where this would be the perfect material because it's so good looking, and this was it."

In addition to a wing of classrooms, the building had a surplus space that could be used as a break area or a student collaboration space. "It's basically an active learning classroom in which there's no front of the classroom, [but rather where] groups can be working

Project: Sacred Heart University West Campus, Fairfield, CT

Project type: University building, renovated in 2019

Architectural designer: Rick Herzer, SLAM

Collaborative

Interior designer: Tracy Herzer, SLAM Collaborative

REHAU products used: RAUVISIO brilliant™

Bianco, RAUVISIO crystal slim™ Mirror

Photographer: Caryn B. Davis Photography

semi-independently all around the room, with large TV monitors on the wall and group tables arranged adjacent to the monitors so people can hear instruction simultaneously, or do their own thing.” With a goal of creating a bright, modern vibe, the Herzers re-imagined the space with curved walls, lots of light and floating columns.

RAUVISIO brilliant Bianco high-gloss acrylic surface was used in both flat panels and curved panels in the design, with RAUVISIO crystal slim Mirror decorative reflective acrylic surface used on the video wall. Two columns in the lobby extend into the ceiling, with video screens on all sides, and RAUVISIO crystal slim Mirror is used above to reflect the video walls.

The RAUVISIO brilliant material “was perfect in the white, just to play with light, since we definitely wanted the light to hit differently on the different portions of the curve,” Tracy Herzer said, noting that the grey in the entrance adds contrast, while continuing the use of the school colors.

There were challenges in that they had to deal with the curves, and the spacing, and the best way to pair it with the translucent Lumicor “Lumiclear,” which is an 8 mm thick clear resin material. The designers also went back and forth on how many panels to use, ultimately deciding on three stacked panels. “Some of the earlier designs had more, smaller panels, and with the detailing of the metal trim system, it became obvious that we had to reduce the number of individual panels to reduce the labor. But mostly, we decided on the final design of the panels based on what looked cool,” Rick Herzer explained.

“Another successful choice is that we put a recessed metal base under the panels, so it looks like it’s floating on this metal which helps to give it that modern feel,” Tracy Herzer added.

“The Lumicor resin panels have a depth to them in real life that is very interesting against the high polish of the RAUVISIO brilliant surface,” Rick Herzer noted.

The existing columns were also re-imagined to offer a unique design

element. “The columns had to be there, and had to be protected, so we just did a simple stainless corner guard; everything is very crisp and light and simple. There’s a floating white plane divorced from the ceiling around the columns, and those that that have the school crest are for video monitors. What they display changes constantly. That idea came directly from a hotel in Vegas. That kind of willingness to be different gave us both the challenge and the opportunity to think up and go outside the standard playbook,” Rick Herzer stated.

Another exciting design element is a rainbow-colored palette located behind a metal screen. “We went with perforated metal screens that are backlit, adding subtle illumination to the different colors in the wall behind them. These beams have up lighting between them and the seating, and there are high top tables that have a unique wood grain where the students can plop down with their laptops, or meet with friends after class,” Rick Herzer noted.

“Rick came up with these pale tones (for the mesh lighting), and then we worked the overlap with the backlighting to make it more subtle, working with the design on the metal to figure out how to make that interesting but not detract from the actual colors in the background,” Tracy Herzer noted. While she questioned whether the university would accept the pastel colors, the renderings were powerful enough to convince them.

The luxury vinyl tile flooring has a concrete look to it, blending nicely into the space, while the LED lighting throughout adds a note of sustainability.

The end result was a warm and welcoming gathering space for students with stand-out design elements that transform the space from merely ordinary to exciting, unique and fun.



For updates to this publication, visit na.rehau.com/resourcecenter

The information contained herein is believed to be reliable, but no representations, guarantees or warranties of any kind are made as to its accuracy, suitability for particular applications or the results to be obtained therefrom. Before using, the user will determine suitability of the information for user's intended use and shall assume all risk and liability in connection therewith.