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Thomas Phifer and Partners floats a Modern temple onto a traditional campus with its **RAYMOND AND SUSAN BROCHSTEIN PAVILION**

By Beth Broome

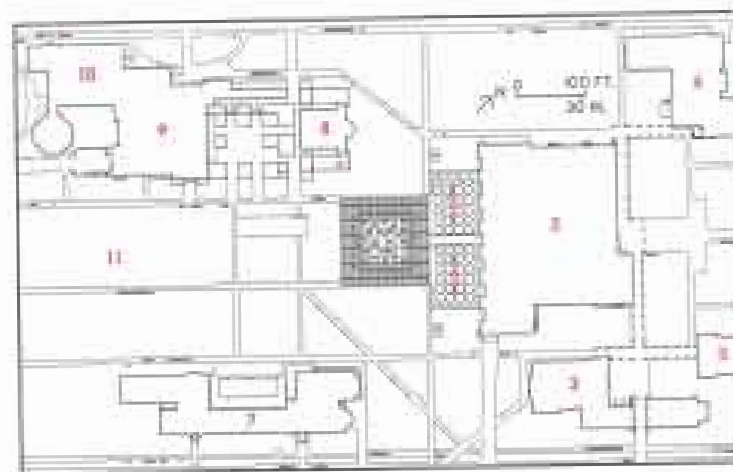
You can almost hear the " Pomp and Circumstance March" as you stroll Rice University's bucolic, 285-acre campus nestled in the heart of Houston, shielded from the hubbub of the city's six-lane freeways and endless strip development. With its tangles of live oaks shading quads formed primarily by neo-Byzantine academic buildings of rose-colored brick, with clay-tile roofs and ample arcades, the university campus, designed over the past century, with an original plan by Boston architects Carr, Goodhue and Ferguson, exudes "collegiate life."

Since his appointment in 2004, President David Leebron has continued the university's longstanding commitment

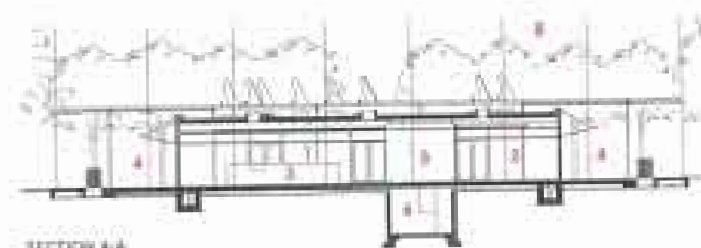
to architectural patronage through commissions with world-renowned architects, including New York-based Thomas Phifer and Partners, who last spring completed the Raymond and Susan Brochstein Pavilion, a 6,000-square-foot glass box, crowned by a broad white trellis, housing a café and lounge.

In initial meetings with Thomas Phifer, AIA, Leebron expressed his desire to create an informal space for undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and visitors to meet and share ideas—a center for the campus whose vitality was challenged in part by the school's nine residential colleges, which hug its physical perimeter, segregating and pushing activity to the university's edges. In choosing the location for the project,

Phifer has used similar trellis systems on a number of projects. He did extensive sun studies to determine appropriate spacing between the rods to eliminate about 70 percent of direct light.



- 1. *Stachstein Pavilion*
- 2. *Fondren Library*
- 3. *Humanities Building*
- 4. *The Grove*
- 5. *Raysor Hall*
- 6. *Anderson Hall*
- 7. *Herring Hall*
- 8. *Rice Memorial Chapel*
- 9. *Rice Memorial Center*
- 10. *Lee Student Center*
- 11. *Central Quad*



SECTION A-A



- 1. *Café seating*
- 2. *Lounge seating*
- 3. *Coffee kiosk*
- 4. *Plaza*
- 5. *Restrooms/stranger junction*
- 6. *Mechanical basement*
- 7. *Basement stair*
- 8. *Sunshade diffuser*

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there was another problem that Leebron hoped to solve. Staub and Rathor's brick, streamlined Renaissance-style Fondren Library, built in the late 1940s, sits smack in the middle of the main quadrangle, creating a front-yard/backyard tension, and had rendered the eastern Central Quad a dead, underused space. "It was a sidewalk and a couple cow paths," says Barbara White Bryson, Rice's associate vice president for facilities, engineering, and planning. Originally envisioned as a café addition to the library, Leebron hoped the project would breathe life into the neglected quad and also bridge the academic and social realms (goals, says Bryson, of Michael Graves's 2005 50-year master plan). Phifer says that after studying Cram and Goodhue's original plan (which never envisioned a building where the library was constructed) and making a diagram of how the students moved through campus, he decided to pull the café out as a freestanding structure with gardens that would function as connectors to the library's new west entrance.

"Once you move into the middle of the campus, the obligation becomes for a much lighter, more transparent building," says Phifer. "It becomes a garden pavilion at that point—the trees and landscape are just as much a part of the architecture as the buildings." The pavilion exhibits extraordinary restraint, treading lightly, indeed almost floating

amid the robust masonry edifices while at the same time it acknowledges the traditional architectural environment in its symmetry, overhangs, and porticoes. "I'm from the south, so I call them porches," says Phifer. "I always think of the southern porch as a welcoming gesture, a gesture of generosity that helps you become a part of something." The building's four, column-punctuated sides are almost identical, but all interact with the site in unique ways. The pavilion follows a Classical model without resorting to historicist pastiche. It is a temple, albeit one that evokes a Texan, or southern, vernacular—a similar spirit is captured by Renzo Piano's nearby Menil Collection Museum building, another airy, low-slung volume with light-filtering canopies shading deep verandas.

A square in plan, the pavilion is supported by a steel frame around its perimeter, which holds floor-to-ceiling panes of high-performance glass. The column-free interior is interrupted only by a core that houses restrooms, storage, and the mechanical room a level below, and divides the

U-shaped, perforated-aluminum sunshade diffusers (above) temper light passing through skylights and create lyrical patterns inside, much the way the campus's stately live oaks (opposite) cast dappled shadows on the ground.

PHOTOGRAPHS: © SCOTT FRANCIS





Light filters through a perforated-metal ceiling system (above) and bounces off the black concrete floor. The pavilion serves as a portal to Fondren Library (its tower wall visible above and opposite, at back).

the 26-foot-wide plaza surrounding the building are shaded by a canopy of steel beams and round aluminum rods supported by slender steel columns. Hanging over the footpaths, the trellis renders the porches active participants in the campus circulation. Taking cues from Cram and Goodhue's neo-Byzantine buildings, with their natural ventilation, thermal mass, and covered arcades, Pfister took a sustainable approach to addressing the hot and humid climate. His hope was that, for much of the school year, the 12 sets of doors would be thrown open, limiting the need for air-conditioning as well as artificial lighting and connecting the interior to James Burnett's surrounding landscape of reflecting pools, live oaks, allée elms, and horsetail reeds. Sadly, on a recent sunny,

space into a cafe area dominated by a white circular coffee bar on the north side and a lounge with TVs to the south. Daylight filters through sunshade diffusers marching across the pavilion's flat roof and is further deflected by a perforated-metal ceiling system that integrates fluorescent lighting and sprinklers. The facades and

75-degree day—as students stopped in for their caffeine fix and professors conversed—all doors were closed) with the air blasting, and lights were fully illuminated.

As the new campus crossroads, the Brochstein Pavilion, with a deft immaterialism, bridges the physical and metaphoric outside and inside, encouraging movement through and around the library and connecting the new residential colleges rising on the south with the science facilities emerging to the north. Though a diminutive building that serves nothing more than coffee and snacks, the pavilion has become emblematic of Rice University's mission. "It is at the very core of what we are about," Leeborn told the press at the pavilion's dedication. "It is a place to exchange ideas and be inspired by your surroundings." ■

Project: Raymond and Susan Brochstein Pavilion, Houston
Architect: Thomas Pfister and Partners—Thomas Pfister, AIA, principal; Don Cox, AIA, managing partner; Erik Rickert, project architect; Ryan Ludwinski, project designer

Landscape: James Burnett

SOURCES

Glass: JNG (Yinson)
Metal ceilings: Lindner USA
Paint: Benjamin Moore
Ceiling panel fabric: Melanohody
Furniture: Fritz Hansen