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RUBENSTEIN COMMONS OPENS AT THE INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDY

Conceived as a “social condenser” for the Institute, Rubenstein Commons provides a nexus of flexible gathering spaces, supporting enhanced communication and collaboration among scholars and forming an inviting social hub for the wider IAS community.



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Princeton, NJ — The Rubenstein Commons at the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS) in Princeton, New Jersey is a new commons building on the historic campus. Tasked with creating a new building with long-term architectural significance, the design integrates with the surrounding landscape and the rest of the campus, including the Institute’s flagship 1939 building Fuld Hall where Albert Einstein spent his last thinking years.

The design for Rubenstein Commons is driven by the concept of intertwining. Exterior circulation weaves into and through the building. The building is conceived as a social condenser with a variety of flexible meeting spaces supporting community and academic life on the IAS campus. The new 17,175-sf building follows the existing topography primarily in a single-level program with gradual slopes and offers views of the courtyards.

The building forms an intertwining through the landscape, connecting with pools of water on the north, south, and west. The pools reflect sunlight into interior spaces, producing an atmosphere of reflection. Natural phenomena connect with science, physics, humanities, and art—corresponding to the Institute’s mission.

“It has been an honor and a joy to work on such an extraordinarily important project for the Institute for Advanced Study. We only hope that the inspired feelings we had in creating and making these spaces can contribute to the future social life of the Institute.” – Steven Holl

The geometry of the spaces is formed by “space curves” where two non-planar curves intersect. As former IAS Director Robbert Dijkgraaf remarks, the curved ceilings give space for “thought bubbles” of the scholars.



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Blackboards of natural slate, a storied tradition for intellectual curiosity and exchange at the IAS, line the interiors. Prismatic glass breaks white light into the color spectrum, energizing the interior with natural light and color. Custom hand-blown light fixtures illuminate the curved ceiling geometry. Door handles inspired by knot theory and custom waterspouts greet visitors at the east and west entries to the building.

The landscape around the pools measures the time of a year’s passing through the four seasons. Spring is marked on the east side with pink blooming redbuds emerging in clusters along branches of the grove. Summer is marked to the south with rich green leaves of ginkgo trees, accented by Russian Sage purple flowers. Fall is marked to the west with vibrant red maples and the golden ginkgo leaves provide a striking contrast around the south reflecting pool. The north gardens are framed with a border of white pines and American hollies providing a green backdrop in the winter but also year-round.

Twenty geothermal wells, powered by the cycle of the earth’s seasonal temperature, heat and cool the building with radiant floors. Natural ventilation in wood-framed windows bring light and air into all spaces.



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Steven Holl Architects was selected to design the Rubenstein Commons in March 2016 from an international competition. The Institute for Advanced Study, founded in 1930 as one of the world's leading centers for curiosity-driven research, is unique in its dedication to providing scholars with the tools, colleagues, environment, and freedom to pursue groundbreaking research. Scholars are free from administrative and teaching obligations, and enjoy a tranquil campus setting, spanning 589 acres. Enabled through a visionary gift from businessman and philanthropist David M. Rubenstein, the Rubenstein Commons building will have a transformative impact on intellectual and communal life at IAS.

“With the opening of this forum for curiosity, discovery, and critique, we celebrate the Institute’s enduring commitment to the nourishment of the global collective intellect. This is a place whose beauty will stimulate contemplation and whose space will invite the dialogue necessary for questioning at its most profound.”

– David Nirenberg, IAS Director and Leon Levy Professor

“By having the ability to come together, the great human brain can be improved because all brains, all humans benefit from talking to others. What the Commons is designed to do is to bring people together, who are the great brains of our society, and have them interact; and also, people who visit can meet with the scholars. So that’s really what it’s designed to do.” – David Rubenstein, March 14, 2018, groundbreaking ceremony

The building will be dedicated with a ribbon-cutting ceremony bringing together scholars, IAS Trustees, chief architectural and building partners, local officials, business leaders, foreign dignitaries, and dozens of members of the campus and local community. Details of the rescheduled ceremony will be forthcoming.

About Steven Holl Architects

Steven Holl Architects is a 35-person architecture and urban design office founded in 1977, and working globally as one office from three locations, New York City, the Hudson Valley, and Beijing. Steven Holl leads the office with partners Noah Yaffe, Chris McVoy, Roberto Bannura, and Dimitra Tsachrelia. The firm has realized architectural works nationally and overseas, with extensive experience in the arts, and campus and educational facilities. Recent notable projects include the Nancy and Rich Kinder Building at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston (2020); the Winter Visual Arts Building on the historic Franklin & Marshall College campus (2020); the REACH Expansion at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C. (2019); and the Lewis Arts Complex at Princeton University (2017).

About the Institute

The Institute for Advanced Study has served the world as one of the leading independent centers for theoretical research and intellectual inquiry since its establishment in 1930, advancing the frontiers of knowledge across the sciences and humanities. From the work of founding IAS faculty such as Albert Einstein and John von Neumann to that of the foremost thinkers of the present, the IAS is dedicated to enabling curiosity-driven exploration and fundamental discovery.

Each year, the Institute welcomes more than 200 of the world's most promising post-doctoral researchers and scholars who are selected and mentored by a permanent Faculty, each of whom are preeminent leaders in their fields. Among present and past Faculty and Members there have been 35 Nobel Laureates, 44 of the 62 Fields Medalists, and 22 of the 25 Abel Prize Laureates, as well as many MacArthur Fellows and Wolf Prize winners.

Media Contacts

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For further information on the Institute for Advanced Study, please visit www.ias.edu or contact Lee Sandberg, Communications and Public Relations Manager, lsandberg@ias.edu, +1 (609) 455-4398

Project Facts

program	meeting rooms, an indoor/outdoor café, living room, gallery of campus history, and offices
building footprint	9,620 sqft
building area	17,175 sqft
structural system	precast concrete walls with steel roof
major materials	precast concrete, prismatic glass, copper roof, terrazzo and wood floors, slate blackboard interiors, custom light fixtures

Project Credits

client	Institute for Advanced Study
architect	Steven Holl Architects Steven Holl (design architect, principal) Noah Yaffe (partner in charge) Christina Yessios (project architect) Yun Shi (assistant project architect) Marcus Carter, Alessandra Catherina Calaguire, Michael Haddy, Magdalena Naydekova (project team) Xi Chen, Carolina Cohen Freue, Michael Haddy (competition team)
structural engineer	Guy Nordenson and Associates
mechanical engineer	Icor Associates
interior design	Steven Holl Architects
landscape architects	Hollander Design Landscape Architects
climate engineer	Transsolar
lighting design	L'Observatoire International
façade consultant	Knippers Helbig
general contractor	W.S. Cumby Inc.