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## The West Campus Gateway

News | J.T. Trollman



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UC Berkeley: Jean Gray Hargrove Music

Library, built in 2004 (credit: Timothy  
Henry Hornbostel), the school's original architect, thought it too big to tackle. The plug is the new Gates Center for Computer Science — along with a new 150-car garage and a west campus quad as well. Estimated to finish by 2009, the project will cost an estimated \$88 million, \$20 million of which the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation donated in September 2004. In comparison to the current newest building on campus — the Collaborative Innovation Center — the Gates Center is roughly 61 percent larger, at 208,000 square feet. It's also 244 percent more expensive and will sit on one of the most difficult plots of land Carnegie Mellon has to offer. Now, out of the 30 architectural firms that applied for the project, the nationally recognized Mack Scogin Merrill Elam Architects is set to take up the challenge.

### The Firm

Atlanta-based Mack Scogin Merrill Elam focuses a great deal of its work on educational buildings, having built libraries and university structures across the country. The firm received the 1995 Academy Award in Architecture from the American Academy of Arts and Letters and the 1996 Chrysler Award for Innovation in Design. Narrowed down from a pack of 30 companies, the firm was one of three finalists for the building, along with prestigious associates like Kohn Pedersen Fox and

Raphael Vignoli. “We do architecture — we do contemporary architecture — that addresses the kinds of technology and lifestyle and work style that you see in [the] present-day world,” said Mack Scogin in a telephone interview last Friday. With the Gates building plans, he said, “I think now we’re somewhere in the neighborhood of at least 9 or 10 [drafts] at this point.” “They are the most amazing architects to work with because they are just so nimble with their ideas,” said Ralph Horgan, CMU’s vice-provost for campus design and facility development. “You suggest something to them one week, and they come back the next week with a full-blown idea sketched. Scogin is here himself every two weeks.” Along with Mack Scogin Merrill Elan Architects, Horgan said the project also incorporates the London-based Arup — “maybe the largest engineering firm in the world,” with 73 offices in 32 countries — to handle structural, mechanical, electrical, plumbing, audio-visual, and data issues. Gary Carlough, president of local architect firm EDGE studio and adjunct professor in the CMU School of Architecture, also helps guide the project.

## Tackling the Site

It’s been no easy task, though — in part because before the Gates building can go up, Carnegie Mellon will end up demolishing buildings dating back as far as World War II. Four buildings in all will be removed; more importantly, four buildings’ worth of campus organizations need to be relocated before a single sledgehammer can strike. That, in addition to a topography that essentially equates to a large gully, has pushed the initial demolition dates back to late March at the earliest. Although the Planetary Robotics building, buggy garages, and print shop will all come down, the 40,000-square-foot Old Student Center has proved the most difficult to deal with. Sitting in Campus Planning’s new office with project manager Max Dorosa, Horgan listed the wide array of organizations looking for homes: music classrooms, C-MITES, Faculty Senate, Academic Development, and more. “The point is,” he concluded, “before we get those spaces completed, we need to move those people out.” This week, Campus Planning will begin receiving bids for the build-out of the Planetary Robotics building, all in hopes of a planned demolition date of late March. As for a site groundbreaking ceremony, assistant vice president for media relations Teresa Thomas said there’s no date yet. “We haven’t talked about that, we’ve been so busy doing all of this stuff!” laughed Horgan. The foundations, though, are set to begin in December 2006, and construction will follow after that. “We’re working on the schedule now,” said Dorosa: “it ranges from 24 to 28 months of hard construction time.” That plan would place a completion date somewhere in the first half of 2009.

## Being Green, in More Ways Than One

In recent years, Carnegie Mellon has taken a leading role in exclusively creating LEED-certified buildings, all of which match up to a national standard of sustainability and environmental concern. To that end, the university has asked that both the building and its surrounding landscape follow examples like New House and the Henderson House rebuild. Altogether, Scogin said, the university’s board of trustees has challenged them to achieve a silver LEED certification for the site. “And right now,” he asserted, “we’re not only on track for it, we’ll far exceed their expectations.” The building construction isn’t the only way the university hopes to stay green. Michael Van Valkenburgh, the landscape architect who implemented Mel Bochner’s Kraus Campo design across the roof of Posner Center last year, will also return for the Gates building project. Scogin said that Bochner’s firm was keen on following the same example in implementing their design.

## Connecting the Campus and Breaking Tradition

It won’t be easy to complete a project that reaches across such a daunting section of topography. In fact, one of Henry Hornbostel’s original master plans simply used the whole depression as a natural “bowl” for playing fields. Campus planners have avoided the concept of erecting anything on the future site of the Gates building for decades. “It’s really interesting,” said Scogin. “If you look up the history of the development of the campus over the years from its beginning with Hornbostel, there’s been a number of master plans and studies — including a number from Hornbostel himself — that incorporated the western part of campus, or in many cases ignored the western part of campus, because of its severe terrain.” So in finally bridging the West Campus with the Cut, the University has decided to do away with Hornbostel altogether. “This is ‘beyond the yellow brick road,’” said Horgan pointedly in his interview, referring to the traditional Hornbostel design that dictated how both the University Center and Purnell Center were shaped. “[The Gates building] will not be a buff-brick building. It’s going to be a contemporary building.” “At least 20 percent of this campus is going to say, ‘Why didn’t you do buff brick?’ I’m hoping it’s not 50 percent!” he continued. “But there’s a unique opportunity with the Gates project to build a 21st-century building. And that’s what we hope to be doing.” Beyond its design, both Horgan and lead architect Scogin hope that the building’s final design will integrate the surrounding campus — and make the west part of campus an actual location, instead of the hodgepodge of alleys and buildings that it is today. The plans have involved thinking “both in terms of pedestrian circulation and in terms of teaching facilities,” according to Scogin. “The space program is an interesting combination of spatial types, and the functions that go on in the building ... [are] an interesting blend of research and teaching facilities, so all of that collectively creates a very dynamic set of circumstances,” Scogin said. Beyond simply connecting the Cut with Newell-Simon and the rest

of West Campus, the project also takes into account possible future development across Forbes Avenue, where the Morewood parking lot sits today. Scogin also acknowledged that because many students frequent the Craig Street area, it should be factored in as well. “The goal there,” he concluded, “is really to make the western sector of campus a real place.... And [with] this particular building, the potential there is for it to do just that.”

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