

Body and Soul

A groundbreaking private school by Richard Cook & Associates stimulates both the intellect and the senses



IN NEW YORK'S TONY, trendy Hamptons, a good real-estate skirmish is as de rigueur as an afternoon traffic jam on Montauk Highway. Usually, cocktail party chatter revolves around the zoning improprieties and architectural audacity of the summer population. Grandiosity is a favorite target—mention the 29-bedroom megamansie being built by mogul Ira Rennert, and eyes still roll. Even a refreshingly different kind of project can generate buzz, as proved by the master plan for the Ross Institute and the Ross School, a holistic, New Age-y private institution founded in 1991 by Courtney Ross Holst, widow of Time Warner chairman Steven J. Ross, to educate her own daughter. Holst's personal project had grown into a full-fledged school when she announced a plan to populate over 150 acres with dozens of buildings, alarming residents who questioned the impact that the largest development on Long Island's

South Fork would make on the environment and government services.

Vociferous public debate notwithstanding, the Ross Institute's first new building, the elegant Center for Well-Being, opened →

Previous spread: Richard Cook & Associates's design for the Ross School's basement-level body-movement studio has an outdoor feeling, thanks to a long skylight that washes a wall of river stones behind a bed of willowy grasses. Large stone-mosaic medallions recall Indian mandalas.

Opposite, top: South Bay quartz wraps the eastern entry to the Center for Well-Being. The tower to the left of the doors houses a staircase.

Below: Sheltered beneath a copper vault, the south elevation features a basket-weave pattern of sustainably harvested Brazilian ipe wood.

Right: A trinity of large stones at the east entry has spiritual connotations. The quartz was configured to resemble a dry-stacked stone wall.

PHOTOGRAPHY: PETER AARON/ESTO





quietly—and to generally glowing reviews in the local press. Designed by Manhattan firm Richard Cook & Associates, Architects, the 48,000-square-foot structure is tucked among scrub oak and pine trees northwest of East Hampton village. The three-level building appears “humble from the street,” says Cook, and is surrounded by a berm that recalls those associated with eastern Long Island’s formerly ubiquitous potato barns. South Bay quartz from upstate New York and a basket-weave pattern of untreated, sustainably harvested Brazilian ipe wood panels wrap the center’s exterior and set the tone for the interior. And then there are the bold flourishes. A tawny quartz-clad wall extends the full height of the building, connecting—physically and metaphorically—the disparate functions housed inside. The wall rises from a koi-filled pool on the subterranean level, becomes a fireplace hearth in the ground-floor lobby, and terminates in the form of a bread-and-pizza oven in the organic café on the upper level. (Cook’s materials choices established a palette that will be used in future buildings throughout the campus.)

The school’s nontraditional curriculum has a global and technological bent, with an emphasis on cultural history, research, and digital technology. Educational tenets combine multiple points of view: mixing Eastern and Western traditions; feeding a student’s body, mind, and spirit; and combining inward contemplation and outward engagement with the community and society at large. Academic classes take place elsewhere on the campus, but the Center for Well-Being partakes of the school’s →

From top: The multifunctional great hall, sheltered by a vaulted wood ceiling, hosts basketball games, lectures, and musical performances. An Asian-influenced study-eating area overlooks the great hall. At the center of a lobby on the lower level, the stone tower joining the center’s three stories terminates in a koi-filled pool. A serene lounge off the main locker area allows students to observe classes in the adjoining body-movement studio.

Opposite: The focus of a gathering space at the heart of the building, a stone-clad hearth boasts a lintel with a chiseled dedication to philanthropist Lawrence Rockefeller. The lantern by Greene & Greene belongs to Ross School founder Courtney Ross Holst.



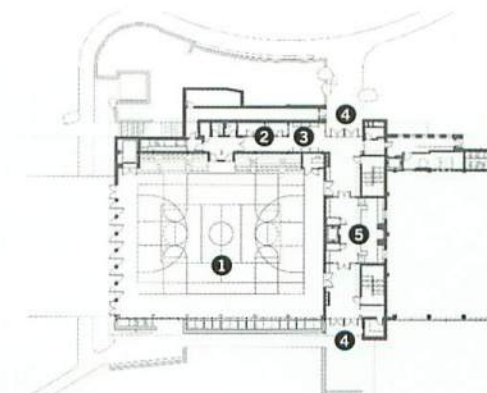


holistic philosophy, with many of the spaces doing double and sometimes triple duty. A large hall on the lower level transforms from a regulation volleyball court to a black-box theater to a screening room. A body-movement studio hosts dance and tai chi classes. Even the locker rooms come equipped with laptop ports. The great hall, sheltered beneath the building's vault of 100-foot-long laminated beams, can be used

for musical performances, lectures, or basketball games. This soaring ribbed ceiling was inspired by Sag Harbor's boatbuilding tradition and, says Cook, by the belly of Jonah's whale. So much flexibility was great news for the architect, who added extra insulation between floors to make sure that students could meditate quietly while basketballs are bouncing directly overhead. →

Above: A Chinese robe from Holst's textile collection hangs at a dressing area's entrance, which is flanked by a patterned wall of lockers in natural and carbonized bamboo. The floor juxtaposes porcelain tiles, tumbled travertine mosaic, and bamboo plywood.

0 10 20 40



- 1 GREAT HALL
- 2 OFFICES
- 3 RECEPTION
- 4 ENTRY
- 5 HEARTH AREA



The great hall's floor was also a challenge, as Holst requested the aesthetic of a painting rather than a basketball or volleyball court. Cook complied by staining the eco-friendly bamboo surface in a subtle and seemingly abstract pattern that interweaves with regulation floor markings (legible to ballplayers). The café floor boasts a more vivid pattern of inlaid wood; the floor of the locker area, adjoining an observation lounge with views of the body-movement studio, combines tumbled travertine mosaics with bamboo strips and porcelain tiles. To protect these precious compositions, wearing shoes is forbidden inside the center; everyone dons Asian-inspired slippers instead.

The strong patterning is not limited to floors. Walls of lockers finished in a combination of natural and carbonized bamboo create a lively checkerboard of light and dark tones; mandala-like stone mosaics animate the river-stone wall in the body-movement studio. The patterning is an intentional nod to Holst's affinity for textiles—pieces from her collection, including a 19th-century Chinese silk dragon robe and several Japanese antiques, are on display throughout the center.

A few of the lobbies and sitting areas feel somewhat slick, straight out of a W hotel. But most of the building is warm, welcoming, and calming—you half expect someone to hand you a terrycloth robe and lead you off to a massage. With luck, visitors who come to participate in the wellness center's many public programs will be lulled by the serenity and put aside any lingering ire. They'll need it for this summer's impending skirmishes.

—Raul Barreneche

Opposite: Strong patterning, inspired in part by the client's textile collection, is found inside and out.

Right: Acoustic insulation above the bamboo ceiling isolates a meditation room from noisy basketball games in the great hall, directly overhead.

PROJECT MANAGERS: CARL WIENBROER; ALEX COMPAGNO; JUDY CHOI (INTERIORS). PROJECT TEAM: ALBERT ZULPS; FELIX ADE; MARK SQUEO; SCOTT STEEN; DAN BRAMMER; CRAIG KRAWCZYK; PETER BLACKIE; ROB MAESTRO; TOM LEWIS; HEATHER CHAMBERLAIN; FRED METZGER; JESSICA GUTWEIN; TOM PEDRAZZI; JULIO SALCEDO.

IPE CURTAIN WALLS: REILLY WOODWORKS. WOOD CEILING: HOWARD MANUFACTURING. BLEACHERS: INTERKAL. BAMBOO PLYWOOD: BAMEX. FLOOR (CAFÉ, GREAT HALL): COMMERCIAL FLOORS. ACRYLIC-IMPREGNATED FLOOR (CAFÉ): PERMAGRAN PRODUCTS. TILE: ARCURI CERAMIC TILE; SOUTHAMPTON BRICK & TILE. LIGHTING: LSI (STUDY-EATING AREA, BODY-MOVEMENT STUDIO, OBSERVATION LOUNGE); NATIONAL CATHODE CORP. (GREAT HALL); KURT VERSEN COMPANY (GREAT HALL). FABRIC (BANQUETTES): UNIKA VAEV. SOFAS (OBSERVATION LOUNGE): CRATE & BARREL. MILLWORK: WHITNEY WOOD WORK. METALWORK: MISON CONCEPTS; PECONIC IRONWORKS. STONE CONTRACTOR: SEVEN SONS. DRY-WALL CONTRACTOR: VALDINI DRYWALL. AUDIOVISUAL WIRING: PEARSON COMMUNICATIONS. PRE-SCHEMATIC DESIGN, SITE-PLAN APPROVAL, ARCHITECT OF RECORD: STELLE ARCHITECTS. MASTER PLAN: SASAKI ASSOCIATES. LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: ANDROPOGON ASSOCIATES. MECHANICAL ENGINEER: CONCESSI ENGINEERING. STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: GILSANZ, MURRAY, STEFICEK. CIVIL ENGINEER: P.W. GROSSER CONSULTING ENGINEER & HYDROGEOLOGIST. AUDIOVISUAL, ACOUSTIC CONSULTANT: WALTERS-STORYK DESIGN GROUP. LIGHTING CONSULTANT: ROBERT WOLSCH DESIGNS. CURATORIAL SERVICES: DEIRDRE JAMES; STEPHEN SZCZEPANEK; JO WHEELER. MOSAIC ARTWORK DESIGNER: PENNY LEA SEFEROVICH. MOSAIC ARTWORK EXECUTED BY: ELINOR SCHIELE. OWNER'S REPRESENTATIVE: BARNEY SKANSKA INC. CONSTRUCTION MANAGER: TELEMAR CONSTRUCTION MANAGEMENT.

