

The
Kirner-Johnson
Building
Makes a Grand Entrance



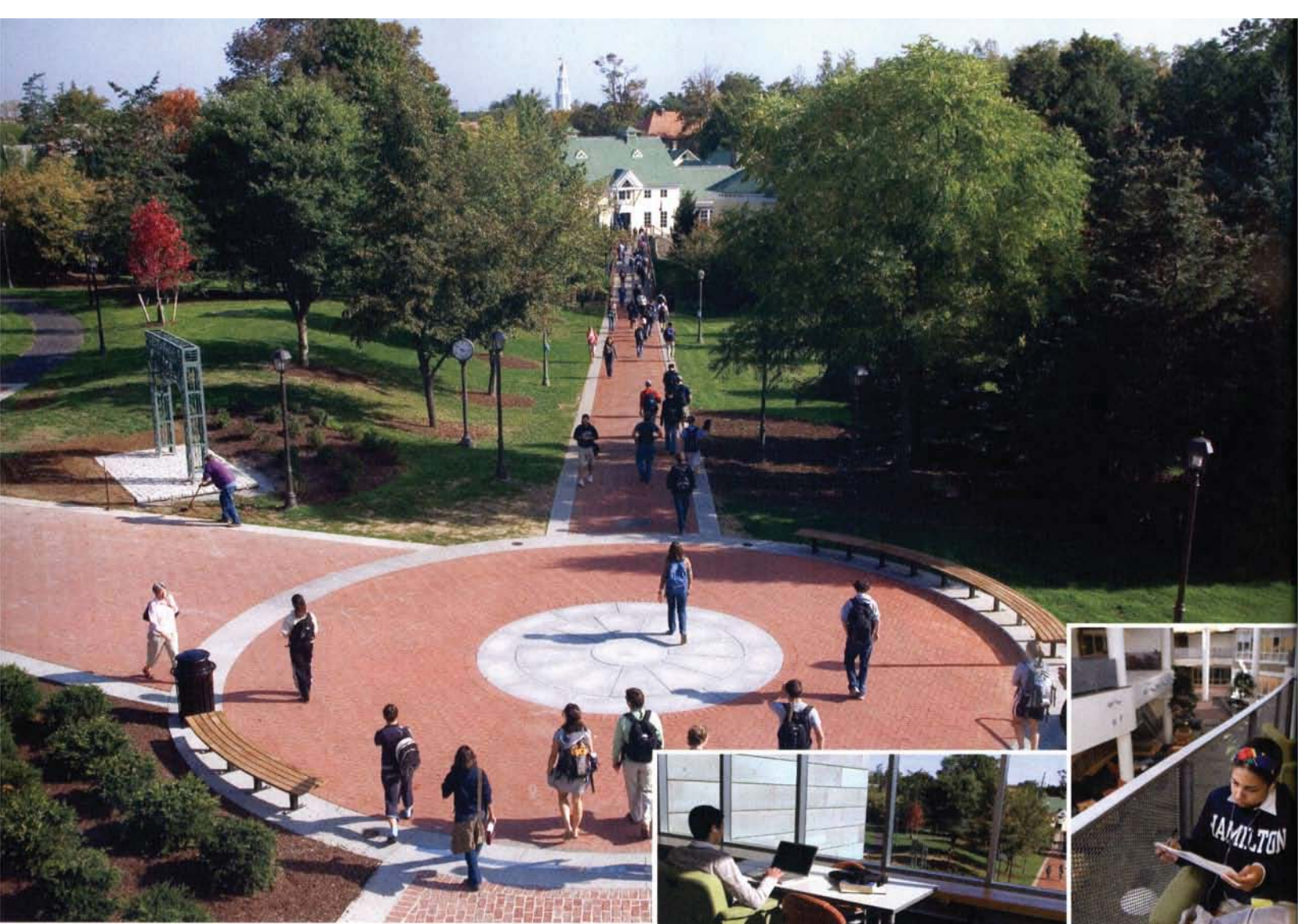
Don't believe that nonsense about the newly expanded Kirner-Johnson Building being completely different from the original.

The Red Pit will still be red.

As for everything else, well, see for yourself.

LARGER, LIGHT-FILLED, environmentally efficient and outfitted with cutting-edge teaching technology, the 2008 incarnation of KJ opened for business in August to rave reviews, concluding the first phase of a \$37-million overhaul that is scheduled for completion next summer. It adds about 40,000 square feet of space to the original building, opened in 1968 as the hub of Kirkland College.

Home to the College's social science departments as well as the Arthur Levitt Public Affairs Center, the Nesbitt-Johnston Writing Center and the Oral Communication Center, the new KJ is "everything we in the social sciences hoped for," says Professor of Economics Paul Hagstrom, who served as a faculty coordinator during planning stages of the renovation.



The building's most arresting feature is the airy, sun-drenched commons that greets pedestrians as they arrive via Martin's Way. It is "not so much a walk-through as a destination in itself," says Professor of Economics Christophre Georges, who also was involved in planning the renovations. Students frequent the commons throughout the day and night and find it "a good place to come and study," says Erich Romero '12, but they also find it an inviting place for conversation.

And how do the bookish and the talkative coexist without glares and shushes? The secret's in the water. Four small waterfalls at the inner point of the commons provide just enough white noise to encourage conversation while acoustically insulating those who prefer to study. When the system is turned off for maintenance, "students start leaving," Georges says.

But, as always, the first consideration in re-imagining KJ was the student-teacher relationship. Planners held focus groups with students and talked at length with faculty members. They also visited other colleges to see what worked and what didn't. "We were looking for improved technology, we were looking for places where we could meet with students outside the classroom, we were looking for students to have their own meeting spaces" for collaborative projects, Hagstrom



The second-floor mezzanine of the renovated Kirner-Johnson Building provides a scenic view down Martin's Way. Photos above and facing show other spaces in the KJ commons, including (above) A.G. Lafley, chair of the Hamilton College Board of Trustees, meeting with students during Fallcoming Weekend. Small "team rooms" (right) provide meeting spaces where students can study or work on collaborative projects.

Design & environment

OUTSIDE: Kirner-Johnson's exterior is faced primarily with copper panels from Revere Copper Products in nearby Rome, N.Y. The material has been aged to give it a greenish tint like copper that has weathered for many years.



WATERWORKS: A 40-foot water feature in the commons creates a soothing cascade of water over four small waterfalls. The soft background noise creates a warm environment conducive to both studying and conversation.

LEGACY: Wood from the original KJ was used to construct planters for trees on the first floor. Brick floors on the first floor — which extend the outside design — use bricks from the original building as well.

LOCAL: Ninety percent of the contractors and builders who worked on KJ came from within 50 miles of campus, supporting the local economy.

LIGHT: The roof of the commons area is covered with solar panels, and the glass-enclosed space allows natural light to cascade down to the first floor. On most days, supplemental lighting is not needed. Glass throughout the building is argon-insulated for high efficiency.

AIR: Sensors detect the number of people in KJ and adjust fresh-air flow accordingly. In cold weather a heat recovery system preheats incoming air. Both systems are highly energy-efficient.



Teaching, learning & technology

■ All classrooms are designed so that professors can navigate the room easily while remaining within a few feet of every student. Four tiered “case study” classrooms have two rows of seats in a horseshoe configuration to further encourage student-teacher and student-student interaction.

■ All classrooms are “technology-enhanced,” including either a projection screen and data projector or a LCD screen on the wall. Classrooms are equipped with large flat-screen computer monitors that allow students to collaborate; “annotation screens” allow students and professors to add comments to computer displays.

■ Some student study areas are equipped with LCD screens so students can plug in laptops and work on presentations. The building features wireless Internet access throughout.

■ The Nesbitt-Johnston Writing Center triples its previous size with 2,850 square feet of space and now features dedicated tutorial spaces, a staff meeting room and a computer lab.

■ The Oral Communication Center nearly quadruples in size, to 2,306 square feet. It includes a 20-seat classroom where students can practice their skills and boasts technology such as digital cameras, data projectors, a flat-screen projector, whiteboards and teleconference capability.

■ The Arthur Levitt Public Affairs Center grows to 3,650 square feet and features a conference room with a videoconferencing system and a “team room” where students can host discussions using an interactive whiteboard. Like the Writing Center and Oral Communication Center, it is now located adjacent to the commons area.

■ Next fall the Red Pit and one classroom will become “classroom capturing.” A professor’s remarks and the information on a data projector can be stored and replayed by students within their online blackboard space.

Tiered and horseshoe-shaped classrooms (top, with Emily Conover, assistant professor of economics) allow teachers and students to interact more directly. “This layout is ideal for class discussions and debates, student presentations and small ‘breakout’ groups in addition to traditional lectures,” says Christophre Georges, professor of economics. The KJ Auditorium (inset) was remodeled to create a larger presentation area and improved visual angles. The Nesbitt-Johnston Writing Center (second from top), Oral Communication Center (third from top and inset) and the Levitt Center (bottom) all have a new and larger home facing the Commons.



says. "We were looking to put in anything that would improve the quality of our teaching and the education of our students."

As a result, tiered and horseshoe-shaped classrooms now let teachers move easily among students and foster exchanges between classmates because they're facing one another. Computer terminals at every seat allow collaboration and sharing of data. A digital control unit at the teacher's podium is automated to perform such functions as lowering a screen and controlling room light levels.

Planners also took an important lesson from the original KJ in using space wisely. "We discovered in the old building that if you had a classroom that held 30 people and one person was using that room, nobody else would enter," Hagstrom says. So the redesign provided smaller spaces for collaborative work — so-called "team rooms" — that afford a degree of privacy but also feature glass walls looking out on corridors. "If you come by in the evening," he says, "you'll find the team rooms are filled with student groups doing their own projects."

George Baker '74, who teaches and has an office in KJ as distinguished lecturer in government, thinks of the new building — the design for which received an Award of Merit from the American Institute of Architects — as a counterpart to the Science Center as an icon of contemporary Hamilton. "The KJ renovation is an enormous success pedagogically and architecturally in every regard," he says. Jeff Little '71 P'04, who chaired the recently concluded Excelsior campaign (page 20) of which the Kirner-Johnson renovations are a key element, agrees. "It makes for a happier learning environment," he says. "We like to think that the KJ Building does away with the whole idea of the 'dark side.'" ■

PHOTOS BY TIM SOFRANKO;
PHOTO OF A.G. LAFLEY AND STUDENTS
BY CLAUDETTE FERRONE '88



KJ provides a range of classroom sizes with flexible seating arrangements. All "have state-of-the-art technology including annotation devices and document cameras," says Christophe Georges, professor of economics. (Top) Yvonne Zylan, assistant professor of sociology, and (above) Jeff Pliskin, director of the Arthur Levitt Public Affairs Center and associate professor of economics, hold classroom discussions. A site sketch (below) shows how KJ has been expanded in Phase One of the project. For more views and information, go to www.hamilton.edu/news/kj.



Kirner-Johnson
Courtyard enhancement
Kirner-Johnson expansion
Milbank Residence Hall
McEwen Dining Hall
Road realignment for new drop-off and arrival area
Extension of Martin's Way

The Kirner-Johnson Site Plan