



Up From the Ashes

by Carlos N. Moreno, AIA

Project Old Main Building Restoration, San Antonio

Client Our Lady of the Lake University

Architect Kell Muñoz Architects

Design Team Henry R. Muñoz III; Ronald J. Biediger, AIA; Steven Land Tillotson, AIA; Claudia Carlos, AIA, IIDA; Joaquin Abrego, IIDA

Contractor Bartlett Cocke General Contractors

Consultants CNG Engineering (MEP); Coyle Engineering (civil); DataCom Design Group (telecommunications); COMBS Consulting Group (technology); Garabedian Associates (code)

Photographers Chris Cooper Photography; Mark Menjivar



On the evening of May 6, 2008, an electrical short lead to an eruption of flames inside the upper levels of Old Main at Our Lady of the Lake University in San Antonio. Fortunately, no one was injured, but the four-alarm blaze destroyed the building's dormered roof, top floor, and one of its circular four-story twin turrets. Although firefighters heroically extinguished the flames, water damage ultimately ruined most of the historic French Gothic-inspired landmark that dates to the institution's late-nineteenth-century origins.

Our Lady of the Lake University (OLLU) was founded in 1895 by the Sisters of the Congregation of Divine Providence. Construction began that same year on the main building, designed by local architect James Wahrenberger in a style described as Chateausque Revival, for the campus overlooking Elmendorf Lake just west of downtown San Antonio. Bracketed by the spired towers, Wahrenberger's original design for the building was expanded to include a north wing added in 1899 and a south wing in 1900.

In late 2010, Old Main was reborn and returned to its standing as the signature profile of OLLU's campus. As if through a purification rite, this \$21 million rebuilding effort lead by Kell Muñoz became a project that helped revive this 116-year-old bastion of academic excellence and renew its leadership's clarity of vision for its future.

Classes resumed in Old Main at the beginning of the Spring 2011 semester, more than two and a half years after the fire, with students enjoying the latest in educational technology, as well as expanded and updated dining and social spaces. The project team took extra steps to ensure that the building's historic charm was maintained while also employing "green" building practices, of which included the installation of energy-efficient systems and eco-friendly materials.

The magnitude of the project – relocation of occupants and programs, as well as repairs, restoration, and reconstruction of the building – shook



the entire OLLU family to its core and tested its faith. But thanks to an outpouring of financial contributions and community support, OLLU's leaders were afforded a rare opportunity to rethink and reprogram Old Main. Hence, this became a transformative process rather than a mere process of rebuilding.

Working with the architects of Kell Muñoz, OLLU formed an internal team of faculty, administrators, students, and staff with a single task—to restore Old Main as the front door to the campus and the daily touchstone for the university community. According to project architect Steven Land Tillotson, AIA, the design team responded with an updated comprehensive building program that reorganized Old Main's core functions across its 89,000 square feet. The scope of the project included the offices and departments for admissions, academic affairs, human resources, faculty, as well as classrooms and food services. In addition, the architects provided activity nodes for students to study, access computers, meet in small groups, and even lounge. The guiding objective of the programming strategy was to create an atmosphere of synergy among these diverse activities to satisfy OLLU's current needs while also positioning Old Main to meet unforeseen demands as the new century unfolds.

The construction history of Old Main is as diverse as the programs accommodated within its walls. The building experienced seven distinct stages—called “episodes” by the renovation architects—and several remodel-

els that culminated in 1904 with its T-shaped plan. Subsequent additions and alterations extended Old Main's footprint but maintained its essential chateausque architectural style. Overall, Old Main has experienced more than a century of continued construction and improvements. That legacy contributes to one of the building's greatest attributes—strength and resiliency of its structural core. Though an ongoing canvas of change, the

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four-story concrete superstructure (chassis) remained well intact up to May 6, 2008, and continues to this day.

Kell Muñoz and general contractor Bartlett-Cocke approached the project by first thoughtfully addressing the historicity and architectural character of the building. The team's rigorous preservation program also recovered much of the original interior spatial qualities, restored water- and smoke-damaged finishes and assemblies, and provided entirely new systems to bring the building into modern code compliance.

Initially seen as an aesthetic challenge to OLLU, the design team encouraged a return to tradition for Old Main by restoring the unique palette of

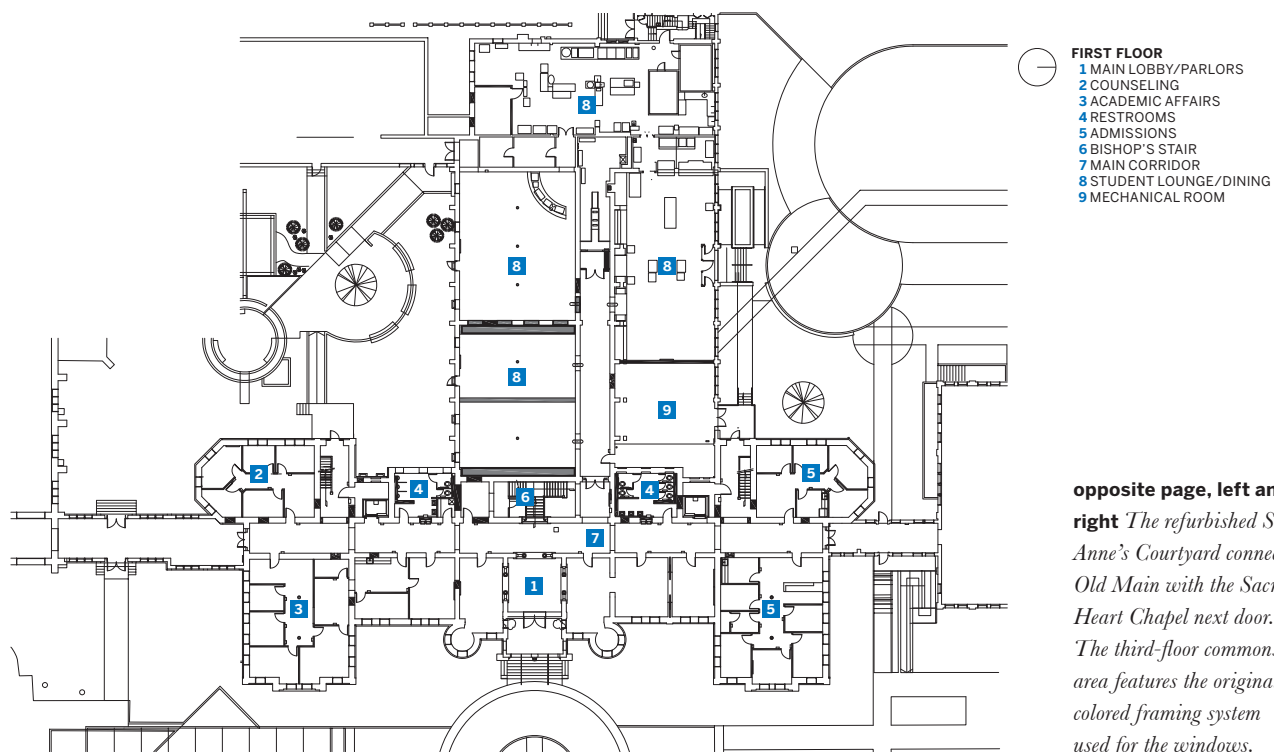
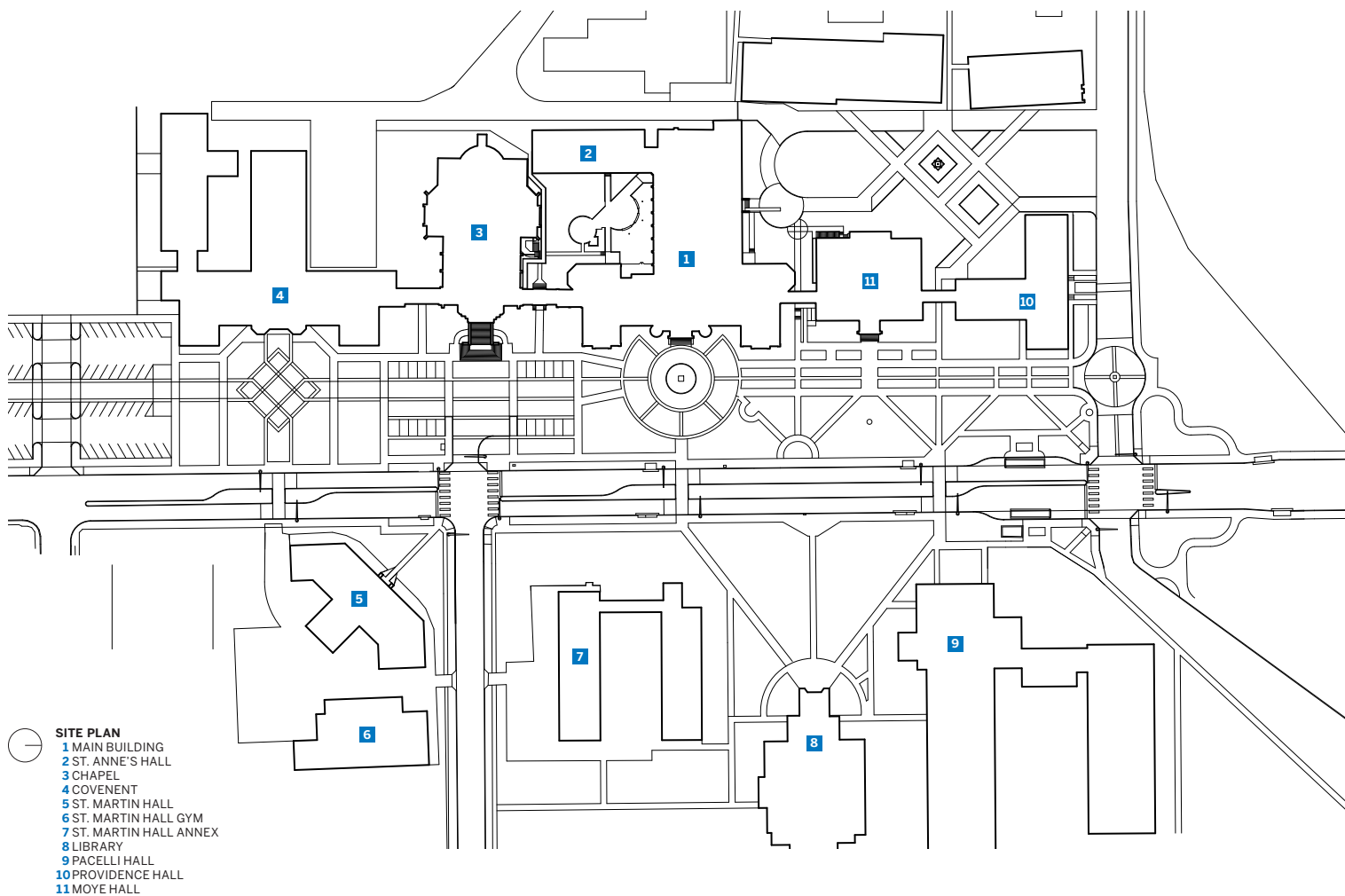


preceding spread *Reconstruction of Old Main included replacing the conical roof of the circular north tower (on right). Along with updating the flooring and wall and ceiling finishes in the West Wing, the project added stenciled glazing to doors along the corridors.*

clockwise from far left *As represented by the woodwork of the entrance lobby, the university's architectural legacy set a high standard for the rebuilding. To enhance the height of the third-floor conference center, the design team created coffers between the original concrete ceiling structure. Following the \$21 million reconstruction, Old Main re-opened in September 2010.*

Resources **CONCRETE MATERIALS:** Alamo Concrete; **MASONRY AND MASONRY UNIT RESTORATION:** Curtis Hunt Restorations; **LIMESTONE:** I-10 Stone Source (Curtis Hunt Restorations); **GRANITE COUNTERTOPS:** Artistic Counters; **RECONSTRUCTED STONE:** Edison Coating Products (Curtis Hunt Restorations); **METAL CASTINGS/METAL WORK/PREFABRICATED ROOF SPECIALTIES:** Progressive Solutions; **LUMBER:** SA Comfort Construction/AFS Custom Framing; **ARCHITECTURAL WOODWORK:** The Koehler Company, Progressive Solutions; **LAMINATES:** Wilsonart (The Koehler Company); **METAL SHINGLES/FASCIA/SOFFIT PANELS:** Berridge Manufacturing; **WOOD/SPECIALTY DOORS/CASEWORK:** The Koehler Company; **ACCESS DOORS:** DEA Specialties; **METAL WINDOWS:** St. Cloud Window Company (Ed Flume Specialties); **GLASS:** Oldcastle; **TILE:** DalTile, American Olean; **STAINED GLASS RESTORATION:** The Cavallini Co. Stained Glass Studio; **TERRAZZO RESTORATION:** Venice Art Terrazzo Co.; **ACOUSTICAL CEILINGS:** Armstrong (J.P. Hart Lumber dba Hart Acoustical & Drywall Supply); **METAL CEILINGS:** American Tin Ceiling Company; **WOOD FLOOR RESTORATION:** S&S Wood Floors; **ACOUSTICAL WALL TREATMENTS:** Wall Technology; **PAINTS:** PPG Pittsburgh Paints; **SIGNAGE:** Corpus Christi Sign Works; **OPERABLE PARTITIONS:** Hufcor (DEA Specialties); **BLINDS/DRAPERY/CURTAINS:** Service Shade Shop; **TOILET PARTITIONS/TOILET ACCESSORIES/VISUAL DISPLAY BOARDS/FIRE PROTECTION:** DEA Specialties; **SOFTWARE:** DC CADD







vibrant colors that once adorned its exterior. That meant matching the old green-tinted window and portal frames, along with the crimson metal roof tiles that had been replaced before the fire. There was also the recovery of much of the original qualities of the interiors and assemblies, from the ornate millwork of the main entry vestibule to the intricate yet simple wood details of the cased openings to each doorway and stairwell. Worthy of note, the Bishop's Stair just inside the ground-floor lobby is significant for its history and craftsmanship. The stair was once considered to be "celebrated" only when the diocese's highest-ranking cleric – its sole user – visited the campus. In all cases, such devotion to detail demonstrates an acknowledgement of the importance of OLLU's architectural legacy.

In addition to the reconstructions, the architects accomplished vast improvements to Old Main's low-voltage mechanical and life-safety systems. While the original 13-foot ceilings were modified to accommodate improved HVAC systems, the design team maintained a minimum clearance of 11 feet along each level's main corridors. That decision helped retain the long internal vistas on all floors, and also the borrowed scenery framed by the many windows along the hallways and activity nodes. Another improvement replaced the formerly single-paned glass with energy-efficient double-paned glazing.

The reprogramming of Old Main dedicates each floor to one or more uses. The first floor contains a reception lobby, student dining rooms, and lounge areas, along with offices for admissions, counseling, and academic

affairs. On the second floor are office suites for the Department of History and the Department of English, classrooms, and a communications studio. The third floor contains faculty offices, the Department of Business and Leadership, and a corporate conference center. The university's administrative suite takes the top floor.

And as part of preparing Old Main for future demands, the project team installed an array of telecommunications and data systems throughout the building. Given the ever-present use of multiple technology platforms, this "technology backbone" represents one aspect of OLLU's commitment to move the university forward into the twenty-first century.

Among the many milestones found along the chronology of Old Main, this "out of the ashes" rebuilding endeavor is an accomplishment that stands as a testament of extreme transformation. Not in the sense of "changing a building," but rather in increasing and enhancing the overall usability of a building that remains to represent a century of quality, integrity, and stamina indicative of Our Lady of the Lake University. It is the "rebirth" of an impressive jewel that rallied together a community of students, faculty, and public to re-imagine Old Main for today and years to come.

Carlos N. Moreno, AIA, practices with RVK Architects in San Antonio as leader of the firm's senior living sector.