



At SCAD, the Shed and Herstand Hall

Description

Paula Wallace, founder of the Savannah College of Art and Design, recently designed The Shed and Herstand Hall as part of the university's commitment to modernizing downtown Savannah and respecting its architectural history. The Shed is a think-tank collaboration between the School of Design and the School of Digital Media. Herstand Hall – once home to the largest dry goods wholesaler in town – is now an open-atrium building housing the educational fundamentals of the university. A+A recently interviewed Wallace about the buildings via email:

How did the functions of the buildings drive their design, and what's their intent for the students?

We begin every [SCAD](#) architectural rehabilitation project by asking, "What do the students need?" Is the space to be residential? Instructional? SCAD has theaters, museums, classrooms, studios, dining halls, dormitories and guest houses, in addition to recreational and athletic facilities. For academic buildings, we start with the degree programs and what technologies those programs require. Render farms for digital media. UX and fabrication labs for design. Studios with Cintiq tablets for animation. Green screens, motion capture labs, Foley stages, rehearsal studios. We teach highly specialized disciplines at SCAD.

Herstand Hall is located close to The Hive (where most first-year students live at SCAD Savannah), and so we repurposed this historic structure to be our Grand Central Station for the first-year experience. The first-year experience of SCAD, or FYE, includes a series of workshops and courses that integrate students into the professional and academic life of SCAD. We also offer many courses from SCAD Core (the general education curriculum) at Herstand, and so the building features classrooms for art history, liberal arts, and foundations courses. We added prominent red and blue bump-outs to provide niches to pin up artworks — a necessity for critique sessions in first-year courses.

There are many glass walls throughout the building, too, helping new students see and feel more connected to all that's happening around them. Walking through the building, you see students studying classical iconography, modern photography, color theory, 3-D design. It's a "maker" space, which is very energizing for SCAD students. As one professor said to me last week, it's like teaching and learning in an authentic Renaissance studio!

What are the buildings' physical and/or historical context?

The Shed sits next to Montgomery Hall, a former casket and wagon factory in what was once an industrial area of Savannah. Savannah's an old port city full of shipyards and switchyards, and many of its old dry goods warehouses and factory buildings can still be found here. The Shed was a storage barn adjacent to a former warehouse, now the home of SCAD's School of Digital Media — technically the largest film production facility on the eastern seaboard. The Shed is a collaborative space shared by students and professors of the SCAD School of Design and SCAD School of Digital Media.

We teach students to work in cross-disciplinary teams so they learn to respect each other's expertise and to collaborate as they will after graduation. The Shed's original skin was corrugated tin. We liked its informality and texture, suggestive of the building's industrial history and also its present and future as a lab that embraces the flexibility of UX and digital design. The new charcoal gray box-ribbed steel panels carry that story forward.

Herstand Hall is the diametric opposite of The Shed! Herstand is a handsome downtown building, constructed in 1926, a building to be seen and heard. The commercial-style brick exterior with neoclassical touches extends a very Vitruvian narrative of strength and purpose; its original designer was noted Savannah architect Cletus Bergen. The property spent most of its life as Slotin & Co., one of Savannah's largest dry goods wholesalers (again, we see the industrial history of the city), and was acquired by SCAD in 1990. It sits on a major downtown corner, where MLK Blvd. and Broughton Street meet, right in the heart of the city's dining and retail district.

What were the challenges in designing them?

We maintained the handsome silhouette and footprint as well as the industrial character of the Shed, but otherwise created an almost wholly new building. The roof had suffered termite and water damage, so we had to rebuild much of that. The main structural support of the building consists of four massive (24'-wide) interior brick party walls, so we preserved those. The interior contains highly sophisticated, tech-saturated teaching and learning spaces and studios (e.g., AR/VR labs, UX labs).

Technology abounds in The Shed, because the disciplines offered there stand at the vanguard of new media technologies, coding and electronics. It's one of SCAD's hotbeds of invention.

Our students need more than technology to thrive, though. They need joy. They need art. SCAD designs interiors that surprise and delight students with vibrant, playful, inspiring storytelling. The storytelling reminds them to suffuse all their work with passion and spirit. American education already has enough dismal brutalism for its millions of distracted denizens.

Herstand had other challenges. There's an atrium, for example. With historic buildings that have lived many lives, we always have to decide which of the "interventions" should be maintained and which should be discarded. As for the atrium and glass elevator, we installed new skylights that flood the interior with light, and we clad the elevator with louvers that allow passengers to see and be seen.

When we removed the sheetrock at Herstand, we noticed that some of the joists didn't meet in one corner. Not good. We took it all the way back to the brick to reinforce the stability of the structure. Most of the bones on these old buildings are solid, but not always. Timber and iron last, but the joists need to meet! The building is much, much stronger and safer now, after SCAD's intervention.

And its cool factor is much enhanced. Herstand is highly Instagrammable. We designed extra-wide stairs for the interior — stairs for students to sit, study, meet. We were inspired by a similar wide staircase at the Rem Koolhaas-designed Prada store in SoHo. Today, fashionable SCAD students vogue on Herstand's monumental stairs. Very extra! The interior of Herstand features art works by SCAD graduates alongside a fiberglass Big Boy and a carnival crown (it's lit!). The décor is modern (seating with built-in USB charging capacity) and fun.

Your background in architecture?

I serve as president of a university that confers NAAB-accredited M.Arch. degrees among more than 100 other SCAD degree programs. At SCAD, I've had the honor of rehabilitating for student use over 100 buildings on three continents, ranging from a 13th-century maison forte to brand-new construction. I'm also an honorary member of the American Institute of Architects, and I'm very proud of that. I think I've earned it!

For more, go [here](#).

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