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A New Light Shines from the Top of the Cathedral

By Patricia Lomando White

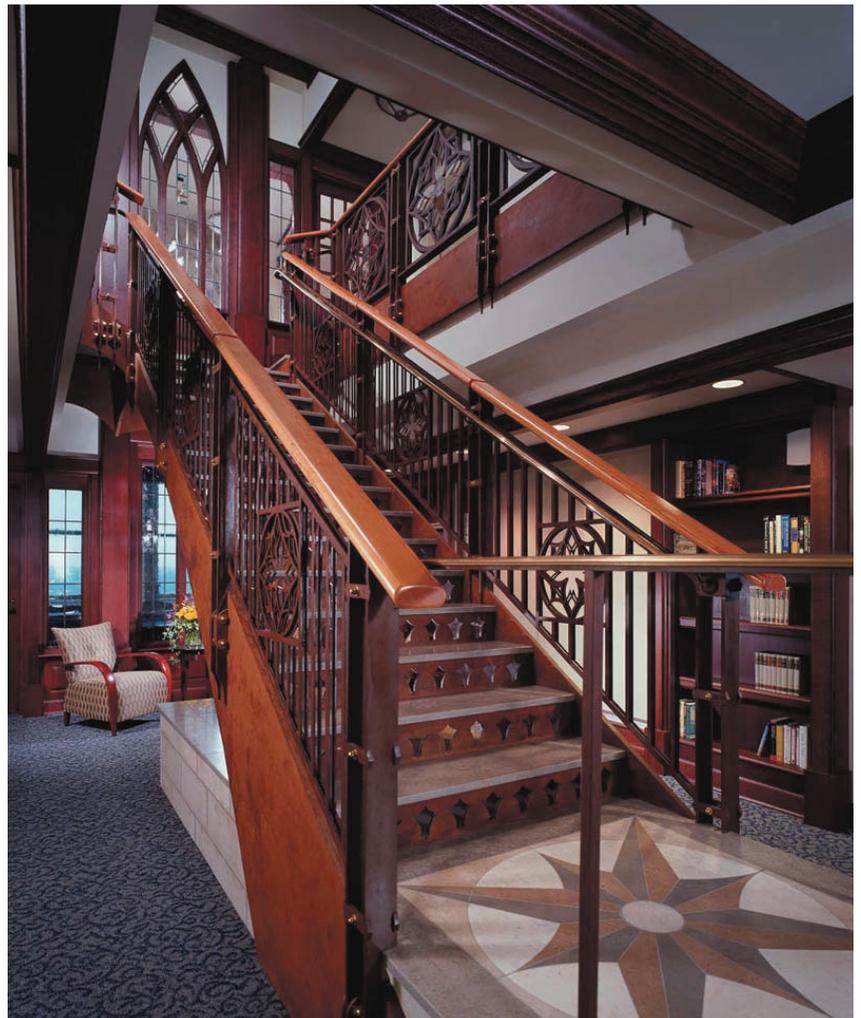
Pitt's most enduring icon is drawing new attention. Renovations this summer to the offices of the Honors College on the 35th and 36th floors of the Cathedral of Learning have created a two-story arched window that's visible at night for miles around. Lead architect Ken Doyno explains, "As you drive up Forbes Avenue, you would see the lights as a beacon at the pinnacle of the incredible icon of the Cathedral."

When the opportunity came to renovate the University of Pittsburgh Honors College, Dean Alec Stewart knew that he wanted to bring the spirit of the Commons and Nationality Rooms to the top of the Cathedral.

"Undergraduate students from throughout the University have lofty ambitions for intellectual attainment," Stewart says. "They deserve a place that celebrates the life of the mind. We hope these renovated quarters that combine lofty purpose, lofty setting, and lofty architecture will further inspire students to corresponding levels of academic and personal achievement."

Doyno, a partner at Rothschild Doyno Architects in Regent Square, says that it was humbling to work in the Cathedral and to honor all the labor and leadership represented in the building.

"A term that we use in architecture with regard to environmentalism and materials is 'embodied energy,'" Doyno explains. "But,



in the case of a building such as the Cathedral, there's all of this embodied craft and the embodied hopes of the community."

Doyno worked closely with Stewart's assistant, Karen Billingsley, on every detail. There goal was to create a place where students would be inspired by a

space that looked as though it had always been part of the Cathedral.

Doyno painstakingly studied the original drawings and history of the Cathedral. The Gothic stone medallions on the building particularly caught his attention, and the four-leaf medieval quatrefoil medallion at the top of

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the Cathedral became a central motif of Doyno's design.

Students also are contributing to the work. Doyno asked Honors College students to go out with digital cameras and search Oakland for designs that could be models for the round medallions decorating the newly installed wrought-iron railings on the stairway and balcony. A design competition in the fall will choose the medallions.

Skilled craftsmen and artists

working in wrought iron and stained glass worked on the renovation. Iron craftsman Vic Reynaud of Technique Manufacturing says that he worked in the spirit of Samuel Yellin, the wrought iron worker whose work decorates the Commons Room, actually forged the wrought ironwork right there.

Reynaud used computer laser-driven cutting to make layers of steel with a rich patina to give it an older, industrial look. Doyno calls the craft and technology of the old

and new ironwork in the Cathedral "the pinnacle of the craft of wrought iron-work."

The stained glass behind the reception desk at the center of the space was designed by Glenn Greene Glass of Regent Square, centered on a design representing the four seasons, done in polished agate.

Many of the craft workers viewed the work as an opportunity to make a lasting monument. Doyno says that carpenters working for contractor Burchick Construction talked of their pride in working on the project. "They said things like, 'This isn't work. This is a place I will bring my grandkids to say, 'I built this.'" Everyone from the University architect to the stone masons poured their hearts into the project, and that spirit will be there forever."

The Cathedral sits almost perfectly at 45 degrees in the four directions of the compass. That helped inspire Doyno to think of the Cathedral as the center of the Pittsburgh region.

"To this day, ideas, understanding, motivation, and entrepreneurial spirit that come out of our schools will define the future of this region," Doyno said. "And nothing says that so clearly as the Cathedral of Learning sitting there in the middle of it all. So, that energy has to come to the top and then out across the landscape, if you will, and across our region, if our region is to succeed and thrive."