

In architecture, addition doesn't have to be subtraction

IN New England, we are blessed with the Yankee sensibility that buildings are not always disposable. Although this attitude could be ascribed to the high-minded historic preservationist ethic or the newly found religiosity of the green movement, I think most of us just don't like waste.

Even with the slowpoke growth of New England, New Haven's downtown core needs ever more square footage. That's why we've seen far more vertical construction in the last generation than at any time in the city's history where tiny lots get tall buildings to accommodate extra space.



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But what happens when you need more space and the overcrowded building you're dealing with is so special, an icon, that you cannot tear it down and go vertical? You add on. It's harder to design an extension, takes more time to build and costs more per square foot — but you build less and save all that embodied energy and memories existing buildings hold within them.

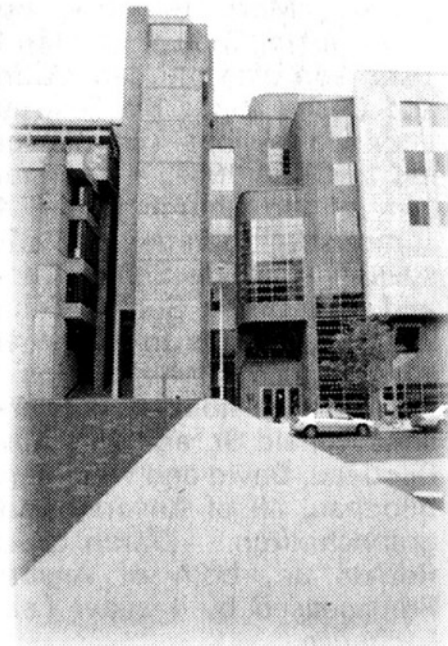
The best evidence of how difficult it is to add on to an icon can be seen in the 30-year struggle involving New Haven's City Hall, built in 1861 and designed by the storied architect Henry Austin. It's a true High Victorian statement, a jewel in the crown facing the Green. Even in the go-go '60s, when demolition became as fashionable as miniskirts, the thought of tearing down City Hall was anathema to everyone — so adding on became a design requirement.

In 1965, the city wanted to create a government center designed by I. M. Pei preserving just the front façade of City Hall, a project that died on the vine. A decade later, the task was given over

to Paul Rudolph, dean of Yale School of Architecture, where again a lot of the original City Hall was to be removed. They went so far as to actually pour the foundation for the project when it was called to a halt during a fiscal crisis. After another decade, a city government bursting at the seams made adding onto the existing City Hall undeniably necessary. The result was the 1995 deferential addition by architect Herbert Newman that fully preserved and renovated the vast majority of the existing building. The subordinate addition's most memorable event is its interior — the long gallery/arcade that rests behind City Hall

A similar approach can be seen in the addition to the New Haven Free Public Library, which also sits on the Green. The 1908 Classical design by Cass Gilbert was as much a part of the city's identity as Austin's City Hall. Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer's 1991 design for its addition managed to maintain background status despite adding twice as much space as the library originally had — simply by wrapping around a largely buried extension. Once again, deference was the better part of valor and the original icon was both polished and enhanced.

The recently completed Jeffrey H. Loria Center



Peter Hvizdak/Register photos

LEFT: Yale University's new Jeffrey H. Loria Center for the History of Art, at right, is attached to Paul Rudolph Hall, which opened in 1963. **ABOVE:** New Haven City Hall, built in 1861, had a new wing added on in 1995, shown at left.

for the History of Art addition to Yale's Art and Architecture Building, now called Paul Rudolph Hall, is more controversial. The dynamic quality of Rudolph's semi-Brutalist interweaving pinwheel of four concrete towers stands in contrast to the new, seemingly ad hoc addition of several materials and systems of construction. The addition lays glass up against one of Rudolph's towers and casts off a perfectly blank and flat floating stone rectangle on its York Street-facing façade. It is somehow simultaneously both overwrought and apologetic. Although the reviews of the addition have been mixed, the original Art and Architecture building has had its interior exquisitely restored to its original interweaving clarity.

Additions to icons can actually be the tail that wags the dog, especially when the addition itself aspires to be an icon. A proud example of this can be found in Louis Kahn's 1953 addition to Yale's Old Art Gallery, the 1927 building by Egerton Swartwout. Here, contrast was key with the precise blankness of Kahn's perfect Modernist detailing, delightfully contrasting the eclectic "Tuscan Romanesque" styling of the existing gallery — a relationship that enhances both sides of the ensemble.

If you doubt that it's easier to wipe the slate clean, that design approach is going to be in full view before us in the next month as Yale University seeks to demolish a variety of buildings to build two new residential colleges. It can be argued that those buildings biting the dust may not be as iconic as any mentioned here, but some of them are fine examples of existing architecture. Unless a growing outrage reaches a point where it hurts Yale's image, the university will raze everything on a 6.5 acre site this fall.

Obviously, it costs more time and thought to renovate and add onto buildings than execute a scorched earth policy of demolition and building new. But that cost recognizes an even greater cost we can easily visualize: What would New Haven be like if the City Hall, our library, Yale's old Art Gallery, and the Art and Architecture Building were leveled in favor of new construction? Would this be a better place to live? I don't think so.

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