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### Author:

[Moffat, David](#)

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# The Campus Guides: More than a Local Resource

David Moffat



Later this spring Princeton Architectural Press will release the *Campus Guide to Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT)*, the latest in a series that is fast becoming an essential resource for understanding the role of campus in North America today.

At some twenty volumes and growing, the series is primarily aimed at local audiences: alumni seeking to recall the source of their affections, students exploring new environments, faculty and staff wandering on unstructured lunch hours.

In service of such readers, the books record the stories behind important buildings, open spaces, monuments and artwork. But they are further distinguished for a general readership by essays that discuss the

campuses as important ensembles of buildings. It is here that the *Campus Guides* provide the most valuable insight into the ideals of American college life as it has evolved over the last several centuries.

## Continuing Themes

In the introduction to the *Campus Guide for Princeton*, Raymond Rhinehart notes how Le Corbusier once likened the American university to a “green city.” In this regard, Princeton “is... the ideal city—a marketplace for ideas set in a garden.”

While partisans of other alma maters might dispute this claim, few would disagree that American campus design sets up such expectations. More than just an infrastructure of

pipes and wires and walkways, a campus provides a physical record of how a university has seen itself through time. Further, writes Rhinehart, campus design is often not simply meant as an “expression of value,” but may be “enlisted to shape values.”

Reading across a range of the *Guides*, one soon becomes aware of other important themes, especially an ongoing tension between overall organizing ideas and the siting and design of individual buildings. While campuses are often conceived as perfect ensembles, they are never realized that way. Indeed, as different administrative and aesthetic regimes come and go, fundamental ideas may be challenged, replaced, forgotten—and reborn.

In other words, a constant cycling



of vision is a universal of campus design. This gives a campus a geological character, where different layers express shifting attitudes toward design and the landscape. In such a view, the best moments appear as those when designers were thinking most clearly and when funding, technology, and social trends come most clearly into alignment.

One can also see a continuing fascination for campus buildings by star architects. Considerable stylistic jousting took place between major U.S. architecture firms on the West Point campus during the years of its expansion in the early twentieth century. Competing aesthetic visions were a constant on the Yale campus in the second half of the twentieth

century. Today, such high-stakes showmanship seems most evident at the University of Cincinnati.

The design of spectacularly bad buildings is also a constant. Thus, the West Point Guide notes how there have been two great acts of treason in its distinguished history: when Benedict Arnold gave a plan of its fortifications to the British during the Revolutionary War; and when the massive Eisenhower auditorium rose up to mar views of the Hudson in the 1960s.

What the books make most clear, however, is that a desire for comprehensive ideals can survive the construction of even the most ill-fitting or arrogant buildings. And it is the continuing rediscovery of such principles,

and the reins they place on the egos of individual designers, that make campuses special places.

Such ideas span an incredible range of possibilities: from the sweeping orientation of UC Berkeley on axis with the Golden Gate and the University of Washington with Mt. Rainier, to

**Opposite:** IIT is the most recent in the Campus Guide series. New dormitories by Helmut Jahn extend out from the left in the middle distance; just in front in the image center is Mies van der Rohe's Crown Hall. From *Campus Guide: Illinois Institute of Technology* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2005).

**Above:** Comprehensive colored axonometric drawings are integral to all the Campus Guides. This from *Campus Guide: University of Washington* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2002).

# The Echo of History

Henry Millon

more urbane notions — the Gothic quads of Princeton, the “yards” of Harvard, the “typologies” of Yale, the red-tile roofs of Stanford.

## A Winning Formula

The idea for the Campus Guides series originated in 1995, with the first titles appearing in 1997. Since then, Princeton Architectural Press has produced, on average, two or three new volumes a year. According to Nancy Eklund Later, the current series editor, the guides are primarily intended to “give students and alumni a sense of the place. This sense of bonding is what a college is all about.”

Most of the books achieve this goal nicely. After a series of forwards and introductory essays, each proceeds to a series of walks. In most volumes, these are organized by precinct, but in others, such as that for Stanford, they trace the development of the campus through time.

At IIT (a small campus) there are three walks; at larger campuses there may be as many as ten or eleven. Each walk is generally preceded by a short thematic description, and each building along the way is credited and fully described. Graphically, each guide also contains a handsome colored axonometric of the entire campus, and important buildings and spaces are photographed, sometimes quite evocatively.

Many of the universities selected, Later explains, come from a wish list of campuses whose architectural and planning history have known merit. In other instances, however, universities and colleges have contacted PAP, asking that it produce a guide, sometimes in honor of a special occasion. Of the authors and photographers involved, some, like the campus historian Paul Turner, have been recruited from among known scholars. In other

cases, relatively unknown contributors — often professors at the college in question — have been discovered, who have already done much of the work needed on their own time.

IIT was selected for the most recent volume because PAP felt it had not paid enough attention to Modernist planning ideas, concentrating almost exclusively on more romantic and/or classical campus schemes. In this regard, an important part of the IIT book is a lengthy essay on the legacy of Mies Van de Rohe — from the Bauhaus to Crown Hall.

The book also corresponds with IIT’s own renewal of interest in its campus. For years the institute was content to rest on the laurels of the Mies plan. But it recently undertook a major landscape improvement program. Two buildings for a new century are also now complete — a student center by Rem Koolhaas, and dorms by Helmut Jahn — both occupying extremely difficult sites beneath and adjacent to elevated mass-transit tracks.

According to current plans, the IIT book will be followed later this year by guides to the University of Chicago and Smith College. Other campuses documented in the series include Harvard, Stanford, Yale, Princeton, Duke, Rice, Virginia, California Berkeley, Washington, UCLA, Columbia, Cranbrook, Cincinnati, West Point, Pennsylvania, Phillips Academy Andover, Vassar, Dartmouth and Oberlin.

The mid-1960s were tumultuous years for universities and institutions in much of the world. Increasing numbers of students sought entry to universities with overburdened and inadequate facilities. Students, reinforced by members of the staff and the general public, made clamorous appeals and demands that university administrations and government ministries institute structural and curricular reforms, in addition to expanding the university system. While the urgency of their appeals may now largely have faded into history, it is important to remember how seminal this period was in terms of reformulating the relationships between the university and society at large.

In 1966, in the midst of the turmoil, the Program in Urban Territorial Planning in the School of Architecture at the University of Venice undertook a research project to address some conceptual and physical aspects of the crisis in higher education throughout the world. The project sought to examine the planning and buildings that were needed in founding new universities and institutes, as well as enlarging those already existing. This multivalent research program eventually resulted in an influential book, *Pianificazione e Disegno delle Università*, edited by the architect Giancarlo De Carlo, who was in the midst of replanning the University of Urbino, a dispersed university, with residential facilities.

The volume was organized in four parts. The first was an urbane introduction by De Carlo to a full range of problems, issues and considerations that govern the planning and construction of new university buildings and campuses. The second, by Luciano De Rosa and Piergiorgio Semerano, presented illustrative materials — photos, charts, tables,