



The renovation has opened up the previously subdivided first floor and uncovered original architectural details. PHOTOS: DAVID SWANSON

Light for Learning

A RENOVATION BRINGS ILLUMINATION TO THE ROCK RESOURCE CENTER.

BY JEANNE M. MCGINN

Can a century-old building gleam? Surrounded by the shadow-casting buildings of Rittenhouse Square, the Rock Resource Center somehow generates a luminosity of its own.

“It’s the light,” explains Michelle Oswell, director of music library information resources. A major renovation completed last September has brightened the atmosphere, enabling students to shine an inquisitive beam on materials for learning through an array of online resources.

Structural enhancements and new furnishings have ushered in opportunities for invigorating the mission. While the tall wood-framed windows seem new simply because the drapes have been removed, the sunlight that pools in the renovated reference room, entrance hall, and reading room has a metaphoric quality: illumination.

To renovate is to “restore to an earlier condition,” as any hard-cover dictionary will affirm; and the word, in the *American Heritage Dictionary*, shakes hands with its neighbor, renown: “the quality of being widely honored and acclaimed.”

Alumni may remember score-hunting in the Bok Room before the library moved, in 1975, to its present location at 1720 Locust Street. In 2000, the building—Knapp Hall—was named the Milton L. Rock Resource Center in recognition of past Curtis board chairman Milton L. Rock’s longstanding involvement with and generosity to the school.

The library earned accolades from visiting scholars, Curtis musicians, faculty, and

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The Milton L. Rock Resource Center at 1720 Locust Street has been fully renovated. PHOTO: TRISH CORVO

accreditation teams during the long tenures of former director Elizabeth Walker and assistant librarian Kenton Meyer, a tradition continued by Dr. Oswell and her staff. In every sense, the Rock Resource Center has earned renown, but one could hardly expect its treasures to be “restored” to the Bok Room (the CD collection alone would barely fit).

Thanks to the library’s online subscription to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, we can trace the etymology of “renovate” to its Latin roots: *re novare* (to restore, renew, refresh, revive). Indeed, in every definition, the library has been made new again.

“This renovation was not just about a new elevator and HVAC system,” observes Dr. Oswell. The librarians were determined to find ways to encourage more engagement with the student body and other patrons. “Now that so many students live in Lenfest Hall, it was a perfect opportunity to create an alternate space for studying, relaxing, and listening to music.”

“We’ve become not just a place for scores and books,” adds assistant librarian Emily Butler. “This is a place for work, activities, and events. Now there’s more of a campus feel.”

COFFEE AND CATALOGUE

The difference, everyone agrees, is the light. Notes Ms. Butler: “It’s bright and welcoming in here. There’s a more fluid layout and we have more usable space. The atmosphere is dynamic.”

Efforts to introduce the freshly painted environs to students include librarian-sponsored open houses with coffee, tea, and baked goods. “We had a hot chocolate bar during finals week with CD and score giveaways,” Molly O’Brien, media librarian, says. “Even though you can access the catalogue from a dorm room, it’s sometimes easier to navigate physical resources in person.” At the circulation desk “there’s always a person to greet you and create a more personal experience; we’re hoping students will discover there’s more than just scores here,” Dr. Oswell says. Darryl Hartshorne, circulation manager, concurs: “Now we have quiet study spaces upstairs and a new area downstairs where you can sit and chat, work, and freely discuss projects. The atmosphere is inviting.”

For students, the Rock Resource Center has become a place of refuge and a portal to the wider world. First-year clarinet student Slavko Popovic notes that the library is a favorite weekend destination: “Usually I go on Sunday afternoons and spend time listening to the recordings with friends, and talk about what we just listened to,” he says. “I have never seen such a variety of recordings before I came to Curtis.” Like Slavko, flutist Lydia Roth admires the depth of the collection: “It really is an invaluable resource for locating scores, listening to recordings, and researching musical topics.”

Students are also taking advantage of generous new lending practices for materials. “In the past you had to know what you were looking for,” says Barbara Benedett, archive assistant and AV manager. “Now the materials are more accessible, which helps students discover new things. Searching online can be overwhelming, but holding a book or a score can spark interest.” A new website (www.curtis.edu/Library) clarifies services and searching and includes a blog from the Curtis Archives that makes Curtis history available to the general public.

Such a major renovation soon becomes part of Curtis’s history. But in this case, it also changes our relationship to that history. Archivist Helene van Rossum explains that the renovation “has opened up amazing possibilities. It’s given us space to do our jobs; it’s made the website possible. It’s a real marker, in many ways.”

The same philosophy of accessibility that students find in the newly appointed rooms of the Rock Resource Center permeates the website and the study guides the librarians create for classes. Given the extraordinary collection and the fine acquisitions Curtis maintains, it may be argued that this is a library under constant renovation.

And to accompany the new materials and the new ways of searching and learning, there are now new places to curl up with some well-thumbed books and texts. New light on old scores is a welcome gleam. ♦

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More Online

Visit the Rock Resource Center on the web at www.curtis.edu/Library