

## **JGWA Award Winning Restoration of West Hall Heralded a “Triumphant Revival” The campus of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, NY**

The restoration of the once decrepit West Hall, a building set on the heights above the city of Troy on the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute campus, is one of the oldest buildings owned by RPI. The project represented a remarkable rebirth for this structure and has allowed the building to become a visual link between downtown Troy and RPI. The building has been owned by Rensselaer for more than 40 years, during which time there was little exterior maintenance,

The earliest section of West Hall was built between 1869 and 1873 as the Troy Hospital, established to treat working class women in the industrial city. West Hall, along with the new Experimental Media and Performing Arts Center (EMPAC) building, are the most visible RPI buildings from downtown Troy. Throughout the restoration process, RPI proved that it cared about its past and considered it to be an integral part of its future.

With this in mind John G. Waite Associates, Architects undertook an extensive survey of the building’s exterior conditions. The subsequent report detailed the extensive deterioration of the building’s exterior, but began by stating that “West Hall is in generally in better condition than it would first appear”. While the building appeared derelict, its appearance belied the soundness of much of its intact historic fabric.

The report concluded by recommending that a phased multi-year approach be adopted that would begin at the top of the building and work all the way down. Just days before work on the building began in the early summer of 2004 with the erection of scaffolding around the building, the most deteriorated section of the building’s wooden cornice fell to the ground. With that potentially dangerous condition out of the way, work progressed smoothly through the fall of 2009.

Because of West Hall’s intensive daily use as class rooms, offices, and studio spaces, the building had to remain in use throughout the multi-year restoration effort, further complicating an already difficult project. The first phase of work targeted the slate roofs, wooden dormers, brick chimneys, and badly failing gutter system at the fourth floor of the building. In 2005, work turned to the elaborate but deteriorated wood and sheet metal cornices. This work also involved addressing two large sections of failed masonry behind the cornice.

The third phase included repointing of all of the mortar joints on the nineteenth century section of the building, as well as, painting the brickwork to match its 1923 appearance and restoring all of the nineteenth-century sash



*After Restoration*



*Before Restoration*

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windows below the cornice level. Work then centered on the 1920s wing and the high stone base of the original building. Again, all of the existing wood windows were restored and new interior storms added. This phase also included the restoration of numerous historic doors. The final phase of construction was perhaps the most complex, as it included extensive restoration work on the building itself, as well as earthwork, site restoration, and infrastructure upgrades.



The restoration of the existing historic wood windows and the addition of interior storm windows demonstrated a firm commitment to both quality preservation work and sustainable design. In upholding these high standards, the restoration of West Hall's exterior has created an environment in which students can be proud to learn for decades to come.

The restoration of West Hall's exterior was completed in time for the grand opening of EMPAC, and together the two structures transformed the western edge, and most visible face, of the Rensselaer Campus. Both projects demonstrate the college's commitment to its "arts corridor" and associated programs while at the same time projecting a commitment to the institution's past and future.

JGWA's West Hall project has been awarded the 2010 Preservation League of New York State Excellence in Preservation Award. This award honors notable achievements in retaining, promoting and reusing New York's historic resources. In October, it will also receive a design award from A.I.A. New York State.

# Architects

## John G. Waite Associates PLLC

### Credits:

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### Photo Credit:

#### Photo 1

West Hall - Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute - West Hall after restoration: Image  
Photographer: Randall Perry

#### Photo 2

West Hall - Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute - West Hall before restoration: Image  
Photographer: Randall Perry

#### Photo 3

West Hall - Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute - West Hall Cornice before and after:  
Top Image Photographer: JGWA, Bottom Image Photographer: Randall Perry