

One Minute Modernist: Procter Hall

Dedicated on October 10, 1968, William Cooper Procter Hall was called striking and imaginative by the Cincinnati Enquirer. The building, located on the University of Cincinnati's East Campus, on Vine Street and Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, was designed by Cincinnati Modernist architect Woodward "Woodie" Garber (1913-1994) and was commissioned to serve the nursing students when the college of nursing became its own unit and was named the College of Nursing and Health.

Woodie Garber was one of the first Cincinnati architects to work in the International Style. He designed other buildings on the university's West Campus, namely, Sander Hall and Sander Dining Hall. One of his major works is the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County in Downtown Cincinnati.



William Cooper Procter Hall, Vine and Martin Luther Drive - University of Cincinnati East Campus, Cincinnati, OH, by Woodie Garber, 1968. Photograph from the University of Cincinnati Digital Collections & Repositories @UC Libraries

The rectangular Modernist building contains four-stories. Exterior materials included crushed milk glass, metal, and glass. Automatic louvers on the west and east facades served to shield the interior from the sun, and thus save energy in the summer. An elegant exterior concrete stair curved up to the fourth floor. (Garber originally designed a metal stair however; Hayden May, working for the firm, designed it in concrete while Garber was away working on other projects). The stair's mass complemented the solid geometric form of the building.

Inside, the focal point is a bright airy lounge. A curving wood and metal staircase connects the third and fourth floor. In the center of the lounge hangs a Harry Bertoia (1915-1978) sculpture. Chrome and white-globed chandeliers flank either side of this main space. A patio, 70 by 160 feet, provides an outdoor seating area with plantings. Furnishings, when the building opened, were very bright, with colors popular in the late 60s. Vivid shades of yellow, orange, and turquoise were used on Eames and Bertoia chairs.

Heading the building project in the 1960s was Dr. Laura E. Rosnagle, Dean of the college (1928-1967). Rosnagle was a close friend of Mary E. Johnston, niece of William Cooper Procter (William Cooper was the grandson of William Procter, founder of Procter & Gamble). Johnston provided over a million dollars for the project and a 1.6 million dollar grant from the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare was also used to fund the 5 million dollar building. As an aside, it was Johnston who was chiefly responsible for much of the modern art at the Cincinnati Art Museum. Works donated by her to the museum include a Modigliani, Chagall, Matisse, and Picasso. Her love of avant-garde art must have translated itself to architecture, as she surely exerted her influence in the choice of Garber as architect. She also provided funding for his own Glendale residence and an addition for the Christ Church Glendale (demolished in 2012). Both Garber and Johnston lived in Glendale.

When the Cincinnati Environmental Protection Agency began construction of its new building in 1971, the agency purchased 22 acres of land between East Campus and the hospital. As a result of this project, 225 houses were demolished and Vine Street was raised eight feet. This site change resulted in a relocation of the main entrance of Procter Hall from the west to the north side; the concrete staircase designed by May was demolished. Sadly, the building since then has the appearance of sinking into its surroundings. Worse yet, when the building's exterior was cleaned in 2011 to brighten up the white crushed milk glass, asbestos was found in the substrate. Thus, the University of Cincinnati's Planning + Design + Construction department had an excuse to remove the louvers, crushed milk glass, and expansive glass windows despite impassioned pleas for preservation from Patrick Snadon and Udo Greinacher, Professors at the University of Cincinnati's School of Architecture and Interior Design, to the university architect. Procter Hall, the vision of forward thinking woman, and an early example of sustainable design practice, would now be unrecognizable to the individuals involved in its execution.

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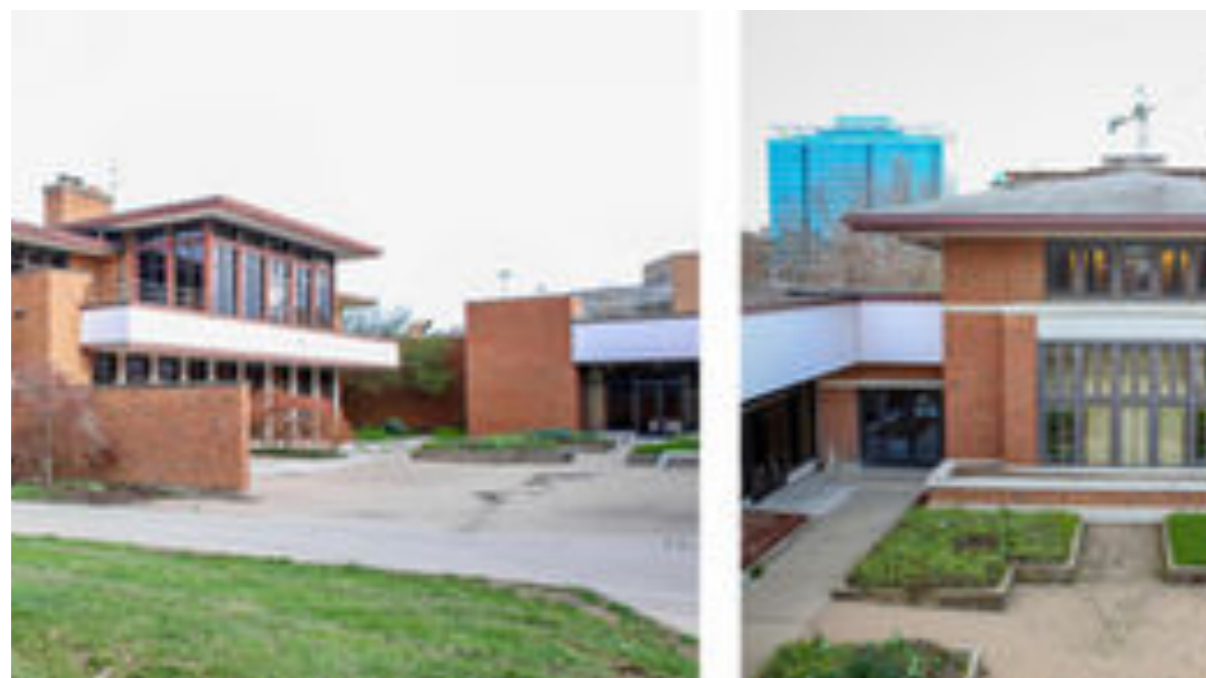


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