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Pirie Associates completes \$60m adaptive reuse at Yale Law School

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Baker Hall at Yale Law School before (left) and after (right)

New Haven, CT Architects Pirie Associates has helped transform a concrete and masonry building, intended to be temporary, into a modern new extension to the Yale Law School, the first such expansion since Sterling Law Building was completed in 1931.

The adaptive reuse of 100 Tower Parkway into Baker Hall was made possible thanks to a \$25 million gift in 2013 from alumni Robert C. and Christina Baker, and a subsequent \$35 million fundraising effort led by Yale Law School. Started in September, 2017 and completed this August, the renovation restores the marriage of academic and residential life to the law school, while

honoring student requests for places to enjoy their downtime.

Heather Gerken, dean, and Lillian Goldman professor of law at Yale Law School, says the renovations will have a dramatic impact on student life. “Finally, Baker Hall has a beautiful student space... [with] small meeting rooms and a large common room that includes televisions, seating, and space for events. There are nooks and crannies all over Baker Hall where they can study quietly and other spaces where they can gather in community.”

The furniture, made with wood from felled urban trees, was provided by Hugo & Hoby, a local company founded by graduates of the Yale Entrepreneurial Institute.

Laura Pirie, the principal of Pirie Associates, says natural lighting and material choices throughout the building reflect their commitment to health and well-being. “The nature and quality of materials can help us relax—physiologically—and create ease,” she says, adding that the human body is programmed to respond to nature. “We also took cues from Sterling Law Building, which features such natural materials as wood, ceramic, stone, and white plaster, to develop a simple and elegant palette for Baker Hall.”

Baker Hall now includes a two-story lecture theater and three-tiered student center, as well as several offices for the law school’s various interdisciplinary centers and programs. Pirie said the renovated courtyard helps bridge the 180 yards between Sterling Law Building and Baker Hall and sanctifies the guiding maxim coined by Robert Post, Sterling professor of law and former dean (2009–17): “Two Buildings, One School.”

“There’s a very clear typology on Yale’s campus of residential buildings having courtyards, which also have a gate entrance,” said Pirie. “We designed the pattern of the metal courtyard gate and residential lounge interior screens to reflect what law represents in our society and culture—an armature that evolves over time based on society’s changing needs.”

Post says they originally wanted the building to function as a dormitory, but Pirie encouraged them to reconsider that plan since it would have created a chasm between Baker and Sterling. Instead, they overhauled the entire structure to integrate programming and student needs.

“It was amazing to see what you could get out of following a genuinely original thought,” Post said. “That was all Laura.”