

29 Garden Street Harvard Graduate Housing Cambridge, Massachusetts

2

JONATHAN LEVI ARCHITECTS CREATES AFFORDABLE UNIVERSITY HOUSING THAT ENCOURAGES A SENSE OF COMMUNITY AMONG GRADUATE STUDENTS.

By Nancy Levinson

Architect: Jonathan Levi Architects—Jonathan Levi, FAIA, partner in charge; Matthew LaRue, AIA, project architect

Associate architect: Bergmeyer Associates—Darryl Filippi, project manager; Doug Coots, project associate

Client: The President and Fellows of Harvard College

Engineers: Weidlinger Associates (structural); Cosentini Associates (mechanical/electrical); Green International Affiliates (civil); Richard Burck Associates (landscape); Lam Partners (lighting); Acentech (acoustics)

General contractor: Suffolk Construction; Bond Brothers

Size: 114,000 square feet

Cost: Withheld

Completion date: August 2004

Sources

Curtain wall: Kawneer; Reynolds

Roofing: Genflex; Hydrotech

Windows: Efcó

Glass: Solarseal

Doors: Blumcraft; Kawneer; Lambton Doors; Total Door

Door hardware: Schlage; Hager;

LCN; Von Duprin; Blumcraft

Acoustical tile: Armstrong

Paints: ICI; PPG

Lighting: Lithonia; Nulux; B-K Lighting; Hydrel; Sylvania

For more information on this project, go to Projects at

www.architecturalrecord.com.

Undergraduate life at Harvard has long revolved around the network of houses the university built in the 1930s—imposing neo-Georgian residences that accommodate communal dining and common rooms as well as living quarters. Graduate student life, however, has enjoyed no comparable amenity. For years, the majority of graduate and professional students who arrived in Cambridge had little choice but to hunt for a good deal on a rental—a nerve-racking pursuit in a market where limited supply and inflated prices meant that most settled for crowded housing in dumpier neighborhoods far from campus.

With the reopening of 29 Garden Street, designed by Jonathan Levi Architects, with associate architect Bergmeyer Associates, the choices have been happily enhanced. A thorough renovation of an undistinguished hotel from the 1920s, 29 Garden features well-appointed student apartments. It also includes a variety of shared spaces intended to encourage a sense of community, a first for the university's graduate apartment-house system.

Program

Harvard converted 29 Garden to housing years ago, but the renova-

Contributing editor Nancy Levinson is a writer and architect based in Cambridge, Mass.



tion was modest in concept and effect, and the building needed upgrading. According to Susan Keller, vice president of residential real estate at Harvard, the motivations for this latest project were both economic and political. "Because of the tight and expensive housing market, and because of municipal pressure on the university to house more students," says Keller, "we wanted to increase

the number of affordable apartments close to campus." The university also wanted to enrich its housing-type mix, adding the "double studio," consisting of two private living spaces that share a kitchen and bath.

Solution

Jonathan Levi Architects responded to the university's requirements with two kinds of double studios. In the

A newly constructed opening on Garden Street (opposite) connects Arsenal Square with the courtyard garden designed by Richard Burck Associates (right and below). The garden covers the roof of the apartment building's parking garage, a space that was formerly covered with blacktop.





Each of the three-bedroom, third-floor faculty apartments is accessed via stairs leading from the courtyard garden.



smaller, students share a kitchen and bath; in the larger, each has a private bath. Three other residence types—one-person studios and two- and three-bedroom apartments—complete the mix. And for each type, the architect has designed stylishly contemporary living quarters. Built-in shelves, tables, and desks “ease the move-in transition for new students,” in Levi’s words, and the birch-veneer cabinetry visually warms the rooms. Kitchens feature translucent-front cabinets (manufactured by Ikea, but with custom-designed hardware) and undercounter refrigerators that allow for maximum counter space. Ceiling-mounted convection heating/cooling valances are sleek, quiet, unobtrusive, and energy efficient, and allow residents to control their thermal environment. (Opening the window automatically switches off the mechanical system, another efficiency touch.)

But Levi did more than satisfy the basic program; ultimately, he convinced the university to expand its understanding of 29 Garden’s programmatic and urban potential.

Early on, the architect envisioned a project that would be more than just another university-owned apartment house. “We became interested in the idea of a ‘graduate house’—something akin to the undergraduate houses, a place that would spur a sense of community,” says Levi. “Since residents would be drawn from different schools and programs, we saw it also as fitting in with the academic trend toward greater mixing of disciplines.” 29 Garden fully satisfies the university’s quota for beds (increasing the number from 121 to 143). It includes a ground-floor buttry/convenience store with an adjacent dining/common room, and light-filled, double-height lounges on alternating residential floors. Especially impressive is a new garden (designed with the landscape architecture firm Richard Burck Associates) located on what had been the blacktop roof of the building’s one-story garage.

Levi’s design expands the urbanistic potential of 29 Garden, too. The building fronts Arsenal Square, a small green space where



Entrances to faculty apartments are joined by a balcony that extends the entire length of the building (left and opposite). A

newly created exterior passageway and grand stair lead from Garden Street (below) to the courtyard garden (top), one level above.





The single-student studio units (above left) have built-in shelves and concealed lighting. Large double studios (above right) feature built-in dining tables and dual refrigerators. The dining commons (left) provides multi-functioning space that can be used for eating, studying, or seminars.

two major streets converge, just beyond Harvard Square. The architect saw this as “a significant urban moment” that demanded an architectural response. In the middle of the Garden Street facade, the architect cut a three-story entryway into the volume of the building; from here, residents can access the ground-floor lobby or ascend a grand stair to the garden. If the gesture is monumental, the materials are modern: The garden entry is a glass curtain wall, and the side walls are clad in metal panels offset to create a sculptural pattern. With this architectural move, the architect transformed a nondescript facade into a graceful and elegant civic presence.



THIRD FLOOR

N 0 20 FT.
6 M.

1. One-person studio
2. Double studio
3. Three-bedroom apartment
4. Two-bedroom apartment
5. Lobby
6. Large double studio

Commentary

At 29 Garden Street, Levi and his associates have programmed and designed a residence that fits the transitional nature of graduate student life, that time between the college dorm and the first mortgage. And in reinvigorating a tired and dreary building, they have produced a place that respects its historic Cambridge context while avoiding any banal imitation of older motifs. At a university that has lately seemed to favor a dull neotraditionalist approach to architecture, 29 Garden is an exemplary blend of old and new. ■

PHOTOGRAPHY: © NICK WHEELER (THIS PAGE, TOP TWO)



The main stair (near left) connects the first-floor lobby (far left) with the second-floor lobby and main corridors. Windows in the ground-floor lobby (below) look into the dining commons.

