



Stay & Study – This hotel is a testament to Vassar College

BY ADAM PERKOWSKY ON APRIL 2025

DESIGN: NEW-BUILDS

“Town and gown.” This phrase is used to represent the two distinct communities of a university town; “town” being the non-academic population and “gown” being the university community.

Bridging the divide between town and gown was the inspiration behind the design of The Heartwood at Vassar, a 50-room boutique hotel located on the Vassar College campus in Poughkeepsie, NY. Codeveloped by the institution and Olympia Development, the hotel is part of The Vassar Institute for the Liberal Arts, which opened last October.

“The institute was actually the catalyst for the hotel coming to fruition,” said Mike Zimmerman, president, Olympia Development. “We ended up with this really cool collection of three structures that beautifully combine together. There’s the glass structure of the institute; the hotel, with a lot of traditional Hudson Valley architectural forms and peaked roofs; and this really elegant, single-story connected building that creates the lobby.”

Zimmerman and his team acted as the development consultant and the owner's representative for the college.



The interior design “had to age well over time and needed to be connected to the college, but it couldn't feel like it's just another Vassar building,” Zimmerman said.

The color palette for the interior of the hotel, he said, subtly references the Vassar brand palette with red rose color found in the college's logo, as well as some of the colors from Hudson Valley, such as grays, earthy shades and wood tones.

Art and photography can be found throughout the property. An interactive piece of art by conceptual artist Mark Dion called “The Vassar Athenaeum” sits at the heart of the lobby. It is a collection of curiosities from the more than 170-year history of the institution.

“Mark created this collection of objects and then used the same millwork that he's been using for decades to custom-design the cabinets holding the pieces that he'd archived,” Zimmerman noted. “Some of them are just behind glass, and others can be found by pulling open the cabinet drawers. There's a booklet that goes with them that explains the history of every piece and how it fits into Vassar's history.”



In the guestrooms, guests will find one or two black-and-white photos donated by esteemed photographer and Vassar alum Andrea Baldeck.

Sustainability plays a major role in the design. “There are 56 geothermal wells that supply the heating and cooling to the building, and those supply a series of heat pumps throughout the building, reducing the fossil fuel load significantly,” said Zimmerman. “There’s a solar PV array on the roof of the hotel, which helps supply power to the building, as well as the row of EV chargers on the site. All the leathers are vegan leather or man-made materials, and we worked with the contractor to select local suppliers wherever we could.”

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