



PORTER BOATHOUSE

VJAA carefully modeled the boathouse's surfaces with inset doors and a projected window wall (opening into a rowing tank) to give the building heft amid stone-and-tile neighboring buildings.

With a deft use of form and materials, **VJAA** tucked the daylight-filled **PORTER BOATHOUSE** amid handsome older neighbors

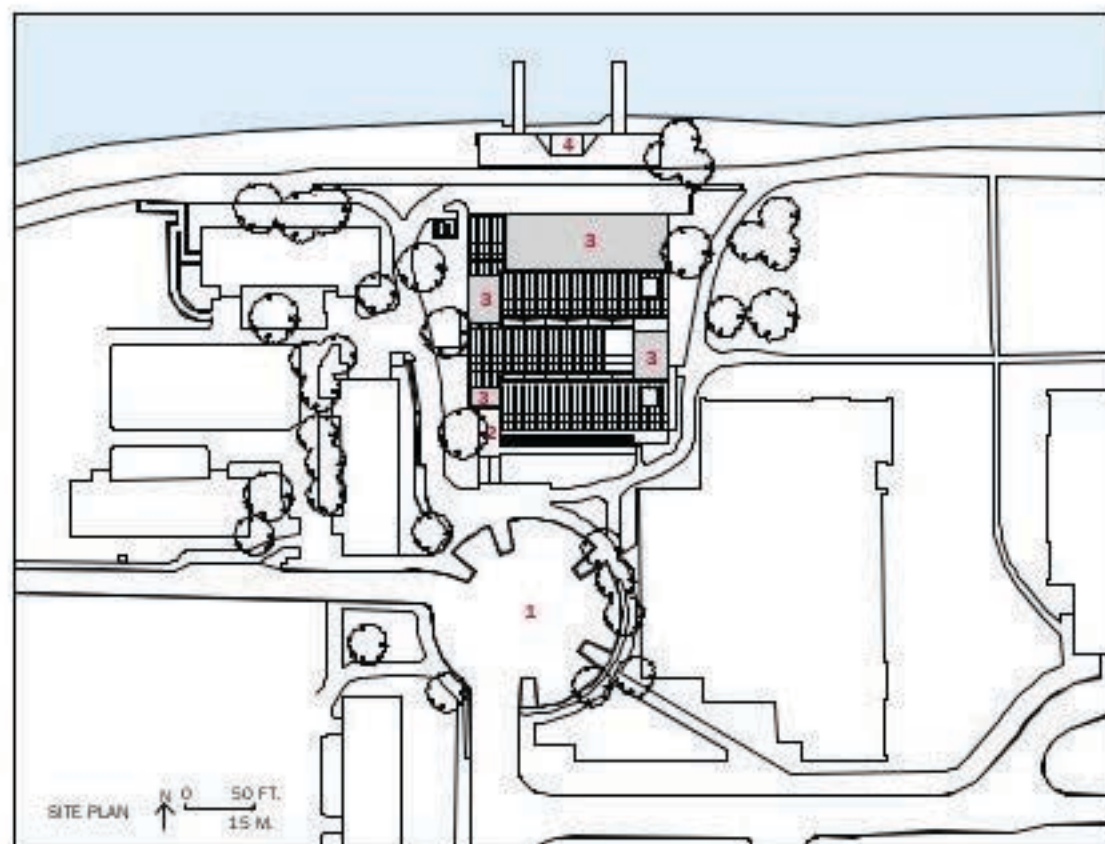
By Nancy Levinson

Rowing is the oldest sport at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, and one of the most illustrious. In the past century, the school's varsity crews have won dozens of intercollegiate titles, and Wisconsin rowers were part of every U.S. men's and women's Olympic team from 1968 through 2000. This competitive record is especially remarkable given that for decades the university's rowers trained in a facility that all agree was egregiously inadequate: a one-story concrete boat-storage structure built in 1967 to replace a grand but dilapidated Shingle Style boathouse from the early 1900s. Never commodious, the structure was dated almost right away, when in the early '70s two women's crews more than doubled the program's size. "The old building was dark, dank, and very crowded," recalls Chris Clark, head coach of the men's team. "It was more like a bunker than a boathouse."

Today, memories of the bunker are fading fast: This spring, the rowing program moved into the \$8.56 million, 52,000-square-foot, up-to-the-minute Porter Boathouse. Designed by Vincent James Associates Architects (VJAA) of Minneapolis with KEE Architects of Madison, the new structure is as sleek and elegant as a racing shell, with a no-nonsense program dedicated to storing boats and training rowers. Almost the entire 17,000-square-foot ground floor is taken up by a high-ceilinged space that can house more than 200 shells (ranging in length from 28 to 57 feet), as well as all the accoutrements of the sport (hundreds of oars, outriggers, boat slings, etc.). From this space, six garage-style doors open onto a poured-concrete apron and the shores of Lake Mendota. On the second floor are coaches' offices and team locker rooms, as well as a small lounge and a lobby where memento-packed display cases comprise a hall of fame of Wisconsin rowing. The most eye-catching space is the one that contains two moving-water, adjustable-current rowing tanks—valuable equipment in Madison,

where the lakes are frozen for much of the winter.

The third level consists almost entirely of a large, light-filled space that can accommodate 150 rowing machines—enough for the entire program. "In the old building, we could fit only about 10 ergometers," says Clark. "Here, everyone can work out together, which is great, not just for training, but for team spirit." Sliding glass panels allow the space to be subdivided in three, according to the training needs of the crews (men's, women's, and light-weight women's); a north-facing terrace provides breathtaking views of Mendota, and in good weather, alfresco



1. Parking
2. Entry
3. Terrace
4. Boat-launch apron

Project: Porter Boathouse, University of Wisconsin-Madison
Architect: VJAA—Vincent James, FAIA, Jennifer Yoos, AIA, Nathan Knutson, AIA, Andrew Dull, Chris Wegscheid, AIA, Lev Bereznycky, Steven Philippi, Paul Yaggie, AIA, Donovan Nelson, Bob Loken, Karen Lu, Carl Gauley, Dzenita Hadziomerovic
Architect of record: KEE

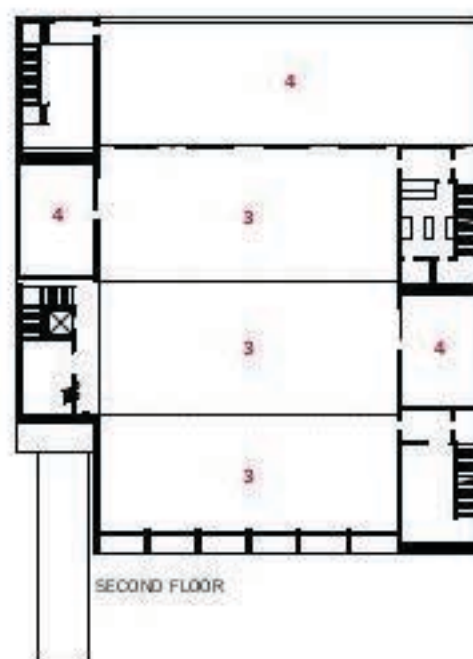
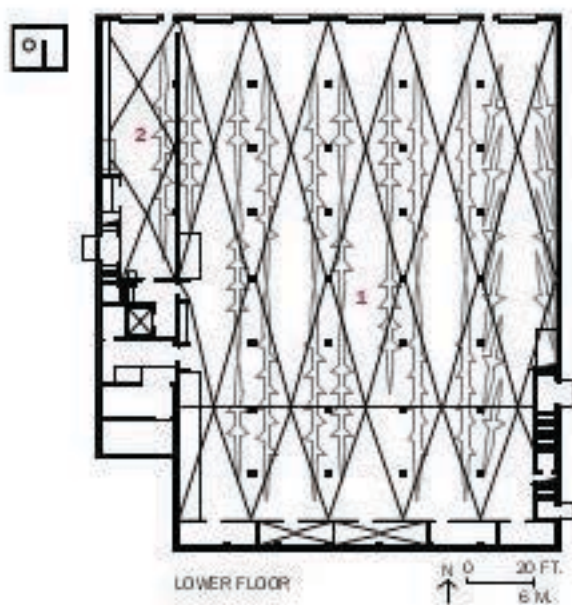
Architects: David Ewanowski, AIA, Jan Eymann, Douglas Kozel, AIA, Kandy Bouchoud, Peter Crennell, AIA, Paul Cuta, AIA, Rick Gabriel, AIA, Sohail Khan, Assoc. AIA, Linda Page, Michael Zuehlke, AIA
Consultants: Strand Associates (structural, civil); KJWW Engineering (m/e/p); Ken Saki Design (landscape); Jeff Peterson, AIA (rowing)
Contractor: Miron Construction

Nancy Levinson, a RECORD contributing editor, lives in Boston.

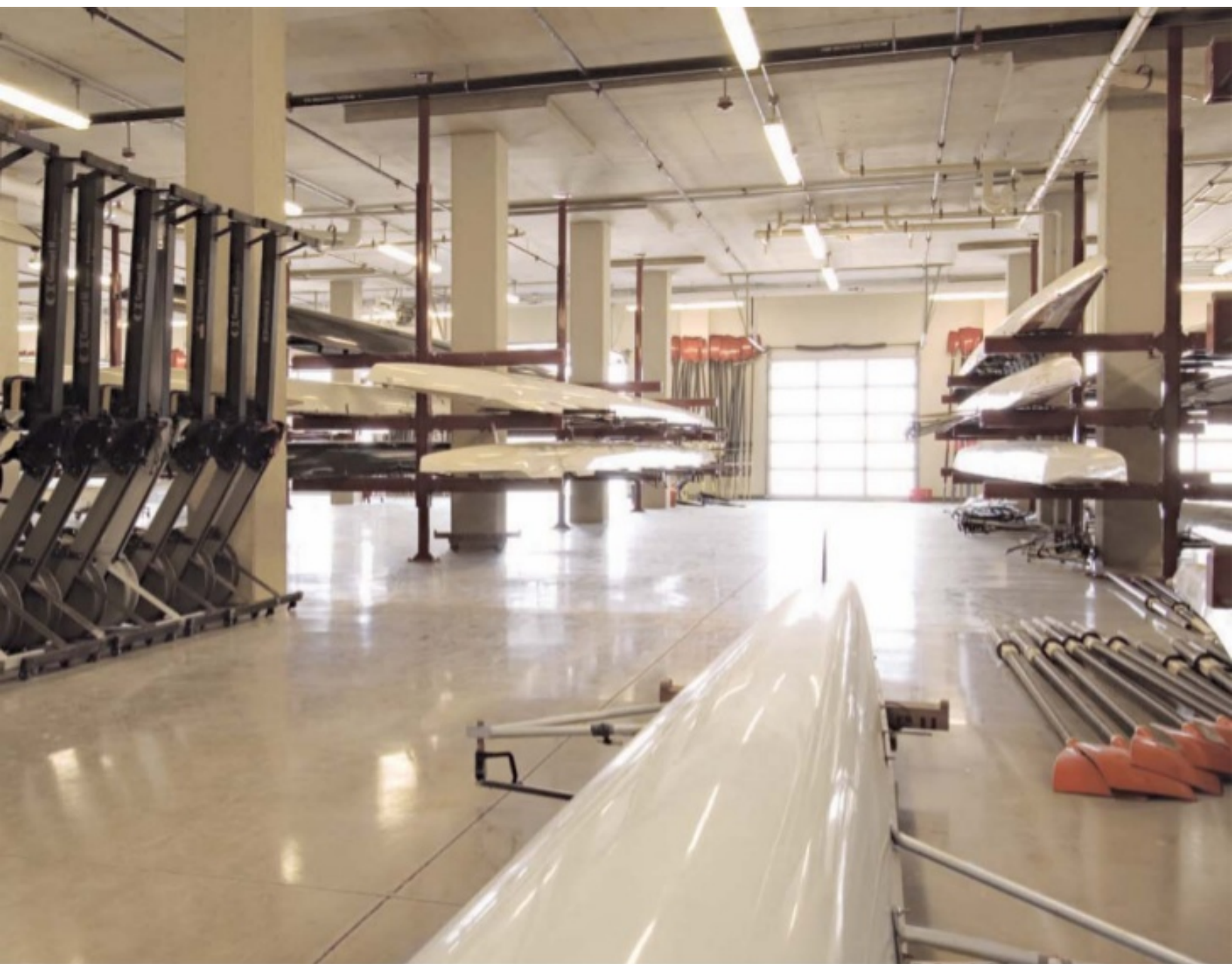


The new rowing center, set on the site of its predecessor, frames tight vistas to Lake Mendota (left). Above an austere base of concrete surmounted by limestone, the architects created a sail-like silhouette in metal (opposite). Offsetting each monitor in plan encourages a play of light. Land-side entry is on the second floor, above the boat-storage level, and beneath the daylighted, workout room (plans, opposite). A top-level terrace opens to the lake (bottom).





- 1. Boat storage
- 2. Boat repair
- 3. Workout
- 4. Terrace



workout space. Saw-toothed monitors with operable windows bring light into the middle of the room; they also enhance ventilation in the un-air-conditioned space, which becomes a true athlete's "hot box" when those ergometers are all whirring.

The design principals, Vincent James and Jennifer Yoos of VJAA, are especially pleased that the university was receptive to a contemporary-style boathouse. (One of the firm's earlier projects was the

A CONTEMPORARY FORM USING TRADITIONAL MATERIALS WON OVER AESTHETIC SKEPTICS.

Modernist Minneapolis Rowing Club Boathouse, on the banks of the Mississippi.) James remembers a sentiment early on to mimic adjacent structures—mostly four-story dormitories built in the '30s, with stone walls and red-tiled, hipped roofs with deep eaves. James convinced the client that this particular idiom, given both the tight site (exactly where



Translucent doors daylight boat-storage and repair bays on the ground floor (opposite, top). The top floor, now filled with ergometers (not shown in these early photos), offers a workout area that faces views of Lake Mendota (bottom). South-facing windows are inset (top). Sidelighting is balanced by toplight from clerestories, which vent heat generated by rowers. Operable windows (opposite, bottom) supply fresh air. To share its long horizontal loads with the vault, the window wall gently cants.



the earlier boathouse had been) and the space needs of the program, would make the boathouse look like a bloated version of a fast-food franchise. "We made a model with a hipped and tiled roof," he says, "and because we felt the point was important, we even added Burger King signage." The three-dimensional argument was so convincing, says Alan R. Fish, Wisconsin's vice chancellor for facilities and planning, "that it had us looking for the drive-through window." The hipped roof was history. The design has drawn praise even from early skeptics. It didn't hurt, Fish notes, that the architects chose materials—poured concrete and limestone for the walls, tern-coated copper for the scooped roofs—that complement the surrounding masonry architecture and echo the metal roof of the nearby university observatory. "Those of us who favored the nontraditional approach," says Fish, "were able to argue that the new boathouse was not trendy, but timeless." And ultimately the building itself has proved the strongest argument. "When I saw the proposal, I thought the design looked cold and austere," says the women's head coach, Bebe Bryans. "But the building itself is anything but—it's very

warm and welcoming, a fantastic environment for both working and working out."

Coach Clark views the new boathouse as crucial not just to maintaining but improving Wisconsin's record. "Because rowing is an endurance sport," he says, "there's a tight correlation between training time and ultimate performance." A lousy facility can make the strenuous regimen feel even tougher. Adds Clark, "I expect that in the next couple of years we'll see the advantages of the new place reflected in our results." ■

Sources

Exterior stone: Anamosa limestone

Roofing: Una-Clad (tern-coated copper); Firestone (EPDM)

Curtain wall, windows, entrances: Vistawall

Glass, glazing: Interpane; Oldcastle Glass Wausau

Overhead doors: Arm-R-Lite

Epoxy terrazzo: Terrazzo & Marble Supply

Lighting: Cooper

For more information on this project, go to Projects at www.architecturalrecord.com.