

RESTORATION OF THE FURNESS BUILDING / FISHER FINE ARTS LIBRARY, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

Architects: Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates, Inc.

Location: Philadelphia, PA

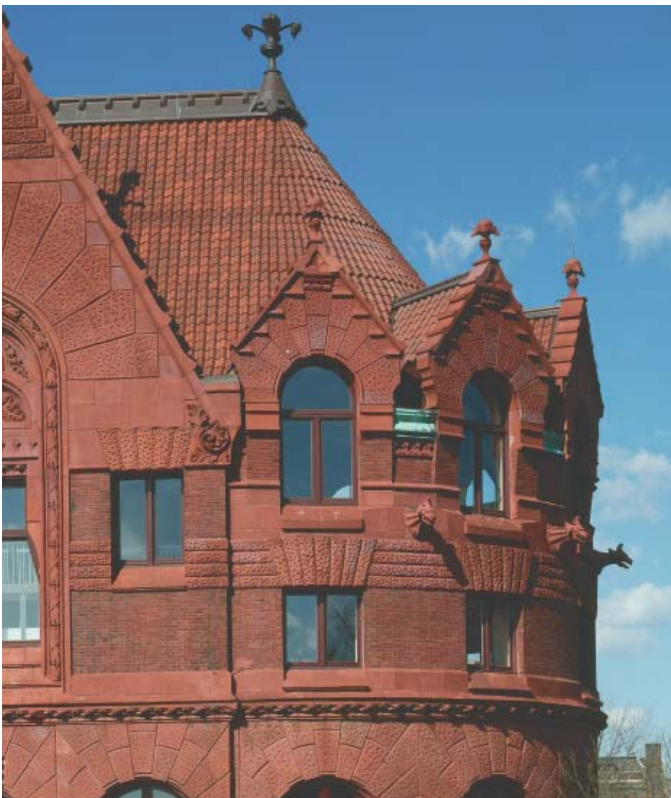
Client: University of Pennsylvania

Area: 117,000 gsf

Construction Cost: \$16,000,000

Completion: 1991

By the early 1980s, the University of Pennsylvania's Furness Building, designed a century earlier by noted Philadelphia architect Frank Furness, faced either major restoration or demolition. Neglect and haphazard alteration had transformed one of the city's great public buildings -- a space of noted structural clarity and remarkable ornamentation -- into a campus white elephant. Yet the structure, located within the University's central quadrangle at the terminus of the main pedestrian axis, had great potential.



VSBA's restoration, in association with the Clio Group, Inc. and Marianna Thomas Architects, began with a three-part master plan study guided by a building committee of librarians and architecture, art history, and historic preservation faculty. The study focused on historical documentation, assessment of building conditions, and program development for restoration and reorganization of uses. Exterior restoration required re-creation of elaborate copper finials from historic photographs. Terra-cotta roof tiles and skylights were repaired and the red brick and terra-cotta walls and rusticated sandstone base restored. Wood sashes, doors, and trim were returned to their original red, deep brown tonalities and finishes. Surviving leaded-glass sashes and doors were restored throughout and the portico iron and leaded-glass light fixture was re-created.

Renovation and exterior restoration of the book-stack building included installation of modern environmental controls and sprinkler, electrical, data, and security systems. VSBA reinstated the logic of Furness's separation of monumental spaces from book stacks and service areas. The restoration preserved and enhanced the library's public spaces while providing secure and up-to-date work areas.



The third phase entailed restoration of the great interior spaces. The Main Reading Room leaded-glass skylight was restored and a 1922 floor addition removed. Generations of paint were cleaned from the buff-colored terra-cotta and red brick walls; five feet of scarred surface all around the room was repaired, including recreation of carved terra-cotta foliated bands and window surrounds using gypsum reinforced fiberglass. Ornamental iron, steel, and copper-work was restored throughout the building. Lighting fixtures and furnishings, designed by VSBA to recall lost Furness pieces, were installed in time for the building's centennial celebration in 1991.

Awards: Finalist Award, Cast-in-Place Concrete Systems, American Concrete Institute, Delaware Valley Chapter, 1993; National Honor Award, American Institute of Architects, 1993; Judges Award, Commerce Bank and Philadelphia Business Journal, Building Excellence Award, 1992; President's Historic Preservation Award, Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, 1992; Preservation Award, Victorian Society in America, Philadelphia, 1991; Award for Adaptive Reuse/Renovation, *Interiors Magazine*, 1991; Distinguished Building Award, Pennsylvania Society of Architects, 1991; Special Engineering Award for Excellence in Design Conducting Site-Cast Concrete Construction, Concrete Construction Committee of Philadelphia, 1991; Merit Award, AIA Philadelphia Chapter, 1991; Outstanding Preservation Award, University City Historical Society, 1990



Reading Room



Reading Room & other renovated areas