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### Accepting the Past while Emphasizing the Future

A pressing debate in architecture is whether or not to preserve a building's legacy or eliminate it in order to create a new, innovative rebranding. Both sides have valid points. People are often apprehensive about letting go of the past even though moving away from that past can offer the possibility of a fresh and exciting future. However, as seen in the addition to Isenberg's School of Management, there is no need to choose one when both are possibilities.

The purpose of this addition was two-fold. First, to create a smooth continuation that engages and references the original Isenberg's architecture. Second, to point to the future by displaying a "re-branding" that highlights innovation and a "new phase of growth"<sup>1</sup>. The addition was intended to stand out from the rest of campus, as well as symbolize Isenberg's importance as being one of the most celebrated schools at UMass. The architects successfully achieve their purpose, as the new addition creates a seamless transition from old to new through referencing and expanding on old designs, emphasizing the innovation through creative and complex design, and engaging with the site and the rest of campus.

The addition to Isenberg School of Management, completed in 2019, is located along a central path that faces the Haigas Mall. Haigas Mall features a main loop that allows students to easily arrive at and access the central area of campus. This addition was designed by Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG), a firm from Denmark and is internationally known for their distinctive

designs.<sup>2</sup> In this particular case, their complexity is found in the “domino effect” seen on the facade.<sup>3</sup> As the building begins to curve, the copper faced pillars and glass slowly start to fall in on the building. This effect ultimately creates a forty-five degree angle with the ground thus making the entrance a right triangle. This building stands apart from the rest of campus not only for its striking design, but also for its prime location on campus. It is a staple in student’s day to day activities and an admired building by visitors.

To complement these aesthetic features are some more practical provisions. The new addition provides space for 5000 students and 150 faculty members, allowing for the entirety of the business school to be located in the same building. The addition also accommodates for the business school’s rapid growth.<sup>4</sup> Upon entering the building, one immediately experiences a vast triple heighted “innovation hub” that allows students to learn, socialize, and engage with one another. This emphasis placed on student interaction is also seen in the upper floors, as the double-loaded hallway is interrupted by small study nooks that, as Bjarke Ingels describes, provides the opportunity for “chance encounters” among students.<sup>5</sup> These hallways also provide a nearly 360 degree view of campus, in addition to an interior view of the outdoor courtyard.



Image one: Aerial view of the old Isenberg (right) along with the new addition (left).<sup>6</sup>

This 360 degree exterior view is unique to Isenberg as it provides a smooth transition and expansion on the ideas that guided the design of the original Isenberg. As seen in image one, the curvature of the older building is almost perfectly reciprocated on the opposite side, providing a satisfying shift from old to new. This transition is then expanded on as the curve continues to create a full circle. Critics could argue that this outward facing addition opposes the inward, more private and tucked in entrance of the older building. However, this is where the architect's success is apparent. This continuation of a curve turns into the rebranding and innovative design that was set out to be created. The old inward and private entrance has now been inverted to display a more accepting design that symbolizes the growth and new age that the University wanted to depict.

Another aspect of the addition that both references the past legacy while emphasizing the new future is the facade of the main entrance.



Image two: View of the Isenberg addition along with the old building from Hagais Mall.

As seen in image two, the structural frame of the building continues from the straight rectangular form into the smooth curve of the addition. As Ingels explains, the domino-like facade peels away from the building to reveal the main entrance.<sup>7</sup>The fact that this domino effect occurs at the main transition between the two buildings reinforces the idea that the facade is

peeling away old ways of thinking to expose future innovation. Interestingly, this exposure features the main entrance of the building that houses the space named the innovation hub. This design combined with the name of the entry space emphasizes Ingels' goal of creating a space that creates a feeling of innovation. Alternatively, it is possible to interpret the peeling away design as more of a leaning-on effect. This interpretation would help one argue that the new design is actually depending on the legacy of the old rather than expanding to create the new. Although this is a plausible argument, the leaning idea implies a dominant downward force that strongly contradicts the feeling of lightness, which the use of a glass facade evokes. This design presents a new look in architecture on campus and highlights the architects success in rebranding an old legacy.

Also visible in image two is the addition's relation to its site. Although there is a slope towards the back of the addition, the building mimics the flatness of Hagais Mall throughout the first floor remaining unresponsive to its specific site. One could argue that the addition has no relation to the landscape and therefore no true ties or relevance to a learning environment. Although the addition could be placed in any site and viewed as just an interesting design, critics have to remember the building's ties to Hagais Mall. The grade of the Mall, a common arrival, gathering space and walking route for students is continued straight into the new addition. This lack of grade change from a relevant communal area shows Ingels' desire to replicate the use of the Mall in his innovation hub. Letting students flood in from the Mall to learn, work, and think together is the exact rebranding that both he and UMass wanted to achieve in the new addition to Isenberg.

Despite these counter arguments, the success of Isenberg's new addition remains

untainted. Bjarke Ingels Group achieves their purpose of designing a building that successfully references past legacy while also transitioning to a new age of growth and innovation at the University. Their success is visible in several different ways, most notably: expanding on the curvature of the old building, the peeling of the facade, and the building's response to the site. Although many may choose to remain in the past or replace the past with a completely new design, Bjarke Ingels Group proved that it is possible to successfully combine both old with new.

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