

Belmont University Replicates Historic Architecture Within A Tight Budget

By: Phillip G. Loscoe, Jr. - Monday, January 22, 2007

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Replicating important traditional southern architecture was the reason Belmont University, a beautiful private liberal arts university in Nashville, Tennessee, turned to Dryvit EIFS to clad the university's newest building, the stately Gordon Inman Center for health services.

The 55,000, four-story building offering state-of-the-art classroom and research laboratory facilities represented a significant design challenge for the university and the building team selected for the project. Merging the needs of modern educational facilities with the desire to make the building look like the other traditional buildings on campus, the university turned to Dryvit EIFS as their choice for one of the highest-profile buildings on the sprawling urban campus with a distinctly traditional southern architectural character.

"The reason we went with Dryvit was simple: we had to match the other buildings on campus, and Dryvit was really the only material we could find that could get us what we wanted for the design of the building and stay within the project budget," said Dan Calhoun, project manager for General Contractor R.C. Mathews Company in Nashville. "We've used Dryvit EIFS on a number of projects over the years and we've always been very happy with the results. The Inman Center is really a great example of how you can use Dryvit to create a look you could never afford to build with natural materials."

Performance values, like the energy efficiency achieved with the Dryvit EIFS and solid life cycle benefits, were also important to the university, Calhoun said. The ease – and more affordable cost – with which the university's historic architecture could be replicated, however, was the paramount factor in the school's decision to use Dryvit.

"Energy efficiency is important to everyone these days, and it was a factor I'm sure, but they really fell in love with what you could do with the finishes that sold it. And it is a very beautiful building," Calhoun said.

The project architects, Earl Swensson and Associates, specified Dryvit because it was the best way to create the building in the university's image, but also because it enabled them to preserve some of the architectural nuance that is so often lost in modern university construction. The strain on construction budgets and the need to devote precious resources to other pressing educational needs often create very bland and boxy buildings due to the rising cost of construction.

"The very top cornice work is a great example of how Dryvit allowed us to do some things with the design that would not have been possible, financially, for the university," said Wendell Brown, AIA, Senior Project Manager for ESA. "The university was able to achieve the look they wanted for the building and we were able to express the architecture better than we would have if we had used traditional building materials. That's why our firm has used Dryvit for years and years, and why we're so comfortable with the Dryvit product."

While the Inman Center is the newest building on the campus, it is not the only example of how Belmont University has turned to Dryvit for their needs. The Massey Center also features Dryvit cladding, and has stood the test of time for the 15 years of its life on campus.

J.L. Lewis Construction of Nashville was the applicator of the Dryvit EIFS. They installed the Outsulation system on the Inman Center and applied the 55,000 square feet of Sandpebble and Sandpebble Fine finishes in two colors to closely mirror the largely stucco-clad buildings arrayed around the campus.



"Quite frankly, the university wanted to make the Inman Center look like the older stucco buildings on campus, but they also knew they needed a better-performing material than stucco. Dryvit EIFS was the perfect solution to the university's needs," said Gary Lewis, principal in J.L. Lewis Construction.

The winter application of the Dryvit EIFS created some minor obstacles as unusually harsh weather forced Lewis and his crews to tent and heat the elevations as the material was applied to remain in line with the aggressive construction schedule.

"It was a smooth job – the material was delivered when we needed it – and we are really happy with the results. It is a classic-looking building. It's always nice to be associated with jobs like that," Lewis said.

It is a classic southern edifice, to be sure; but and even more classic illustration of how Dryvit EIFS can be used to achieve lofty design goals and high-performance durability in educational settings.