



View from Ipswich St.



Interior stairs act as gathering space.

Kiera Gates

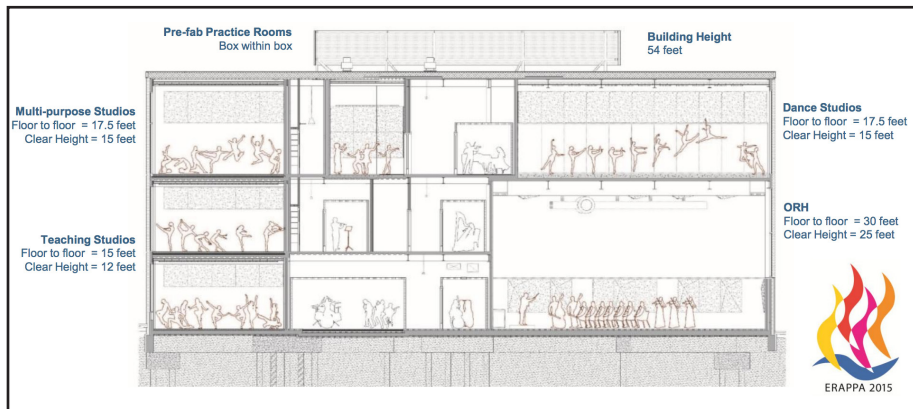
Ipswich Studios

Boston Conservatory

The Boston Conservatory is a prestigious school of performance art located in the Fenway/Kenmore neighborhood of Boston. Established in 1867, the school boasts an urban campus in the heart of a historic city, as well as a world-renowned program. Today, in 2016, the Conservatory plans on merging with the Berklee School of Music, and will be known as “The Boston Conservatory at Berklee.”

Preceding this change of identity, the Boston Conservatory decided to revamp its facilities. With enrollment at approximately 750 students, the school was looking to expand its limited campus at 8 The Fenway in order to accommodate students and their expansive areas of study in classical music performance, education and composition as well as dance and musical theater. The Conservatory therefore commissioned the construction of a new building in order to fill the deficiencies on their existing campus. The resulting project however, does a bit more: it re-brands the school, brings the student body closer to their surroundings, and together.

Ipswich Studios, the Conservatory’s 2015 addition designed by Utile and Handel Architects LLP, is located at 132 Ipswich Street. The facility contains orchestra rehearsal space, teaching studios, practice and multipurpose rooms, and a new dance studio. Roughly 20,000 square feet were added to the Conservatory’s campus with the three floors of the new building, which acted as a relocation of the program once situated at the corner of Boylston a and Mass Ave. More than that, however, Ipswich Studios acts as a relocation of the visage of the Conservatory. Previously condensed on the East side of the fens, the Conservatory was frequently seen only by the casual pedestrian traffic and car occupants during rush hours. Although a popular thoroughfare, the buildings receded into their environment. Built in stone and brick, the historic building reflects the preferred classic Italianate typology of its time. Ipswich Studios

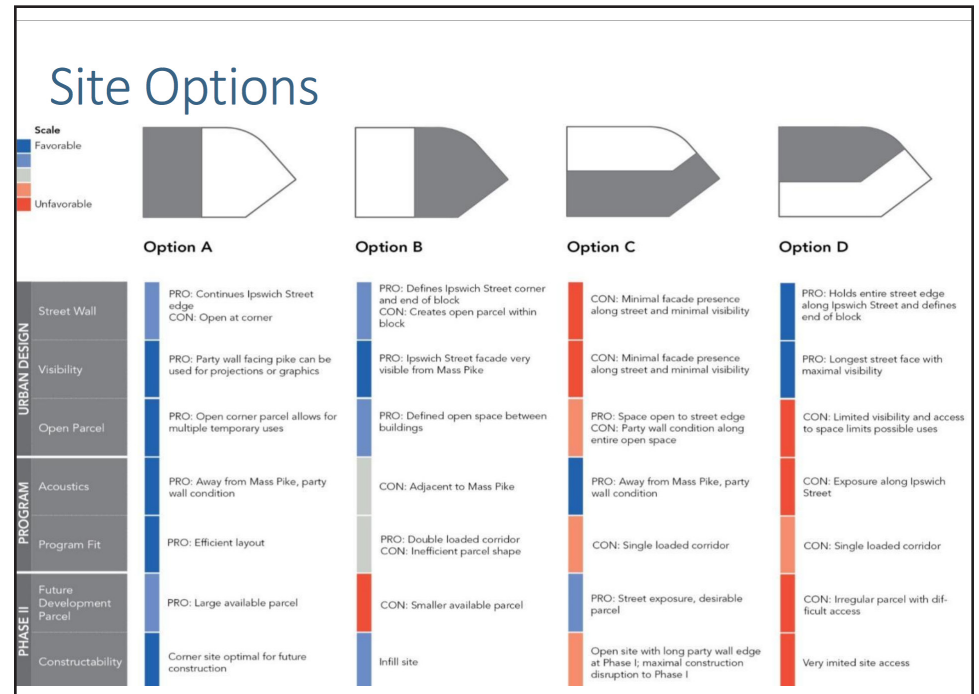


Programmed, transverse section.

adds a contemporary image to the campus in both form and location.

While built from typical Boston building materials, the brick and glass exterior of Ipswich Studios deviates from the typical through the dynamics of angular and rounded forms. The brickwork is made up of prefabricated panels, the glass is expansive curtain wall, and the lights brightly illuminate the central staircase at night.

The location of Ipswich studios plays a major role in the building's presence and expression. In the aspect of re-branding, the location has a direct link to I-90, and is thus in a far more frequented location for vehicular traffic. The Conservatory now has a façade that can be seen by anyone passing through, into, or out of the city of Boston. This location also becomes a major design challenge, however, with the activity and traffic on the street becoming a direct influence of the acoustic design within the building. The proximity of the site



to I-90, the commuter rail, and the independent sound isolation within made the acoustic aspect of the entire building an important consideration. To address this issue, the engineers required that the envelope and interior be regarded as separate entities, not unlike Louis Khan's concept at the Arts United Center. By treating the two as independent aspects (what Acentech calls "Box-in-a-box Construction") the designers were able to isolate vibrations and distance them from the noise-sensitive programs. Practice rooms were also constructed modularly to further this effect at a smaller scale. This acoustic treatment lends itself to the program assembly within the building, putting the dance studios on a floating slab at the top level, allowing inspiration from both view and light.

To access aforementioned studio, students climb the exposed three-flight stair that becomes the main organizational point for the building. Revealed on the exterior via curtain wall, the stair links not only the floors of the building, but also the students to one another. At every landing visitors are able to stop at a lounge space, opening up the feeling of the studios to social interaction and rest. Through

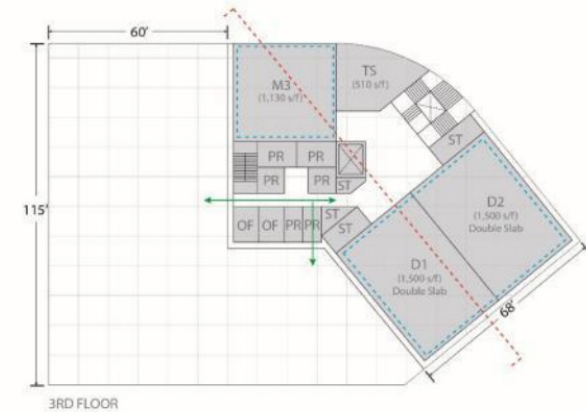
the lens of placemaking, this datum-stair becomes an important feature, encouraging pause and thought in an otherwise bustling area. Additionally, its presence from the exterior of the building connects these students to their surroundings, and the community back to them. Opening a visual dialogue between neighborhood and occupant is a powerful tool in establishing belonging, allowing visitors to experience a sense of place and pace while remaining safely isolated.

The Ipswich Studios have aimed at accomplishing many things within the Conservatory, namely promoting thought about the future. While the project currently brings the institution up to speed on contemporary street presence and connecting students, it also sets a precedent for continued occupation. Looking to strengthen their presence within the Fenway neighborhood, The Boston Conservatory has started strong with the addition of a thoughtfully programmed and formally beautiful addition.

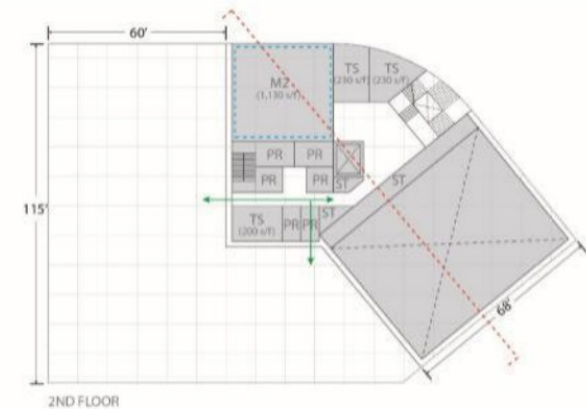


View of dance studios.

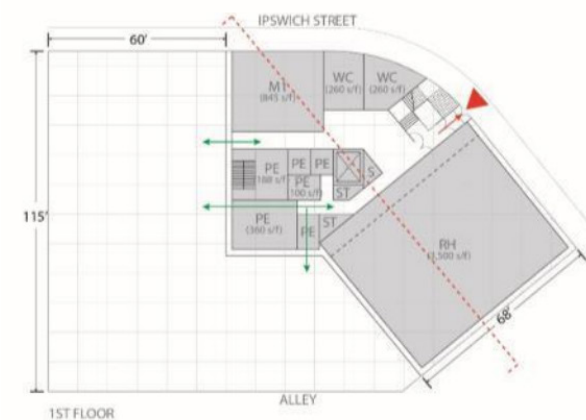
L3



L2



L1



Floor plans illustrating program.