



PUBLICATION

Cleveland.com

AUG 16, 2020

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CLEVELAND, Ohio — The Cleveland Museum of Art, which just completed a major, 6.5-acre landscaping project on its campus, isn't the only institution in University Circle improving its surroundings.

Case Western Reserve University is greeting students returning for the fall semester beginning this month with its excellent new Lucia Smith Nash Walkway.

Named for the late Lucia S. Nash, a CWRU benefactor, the project has turned a crumbling back alley on CWRU's north campus into one of the best, intimately scaled pedestrian environments in the city.

CWRU, which grew out of the 1967 merger of the Case Institute of Technology and Western Reserve University, and which folded its architecture school in 1972, has had a mixed record in architecture, landscape and urban design.

But the Nash project, which grew out of CWRU's 2015 master plan, shows the university knows it needs to improve its outdoor spaces in order to help it attract students and to turn a friendlier face to the surrounding community.

Completed earlier this year at a cost the university declined to share, the walkway is a 900-foot-long pedestrian path extending from Ford Drive to Juniper Road.

The route begins opposite the Peter B. Lewis Building of the Weatherhead School of Management, designed by Frank Gehry, and stretches northeast behind the Mandel School of Applied Social Sciences, and student hangouts including the Coffee House at University Circle and Dave's Cosmic Subs and Music.

The path — a onetime eyesore — also passes the front door of restaurateur Zack Bruell's L'Albatros Brasserie, a highly visible spot frequented by diners from across Northeast Ohio.

"It had always been a heavily used pathway," said Stephen Campbell, CWRU's vice president for planning and facilities management. "We always wanted to upgrade it."

The Columbus office of the national architecture firm of NBBJ planned the rehab as designer of record, working with landscape architect Virginia Burt, of Toronto and Cleveland, and the Cleveland firm of Osborn Engineering.

The walkway is paved with visually attractive blocks of gray-colored variegated asphalt, creating a precise, finely textured grid pattern underfoot.

Planting beds bordering the walkway and connecting paths to adjacent buildings and parking lots, are edged with thin, elegant panels of Corten steel, whose rusty hue complements surrounding greenery.

The best portions of the project are located behind the Mandel School. There, the designers created an outdoor study garden with café tables and chairs invitingly set amid a gravel-paved plaza — a nice place to work or socialize outside during the coronavirus pandemic.

The section behind Mandel also includes a low, stepped wall with bleacher-style seating that rises from the path to the school's internal central court.

At Ford Drive, an existing concrete path extends southwest on the same alignment as the Nash walkway, between the Weatherhead school and CWRU's law school building.

The path splits in several directions as it reaches the new East Bell Commons, a temporary, 4.2-acre park on the former site of the Cleveland Institute of Art's Gund building, jointly acquired in 2013 by CWRU and the art museum, located opposite the commons on the west side of East Boulevard.

CWRU and the museum plan to build a joint art history center on the site in the future. Until then, the commons will host outdoor events and provide breathing room.

Last year, in another smart move, CWRU installed the five 1997 “Turning Point” sculptures by architect and Cleveland native Philip Johnson on the east side of the commons at the end of the visual axis formed by the path that connects to Nash walkway.

The sculptures had been stored since they were removed from their original location south of Bellflower Road to make way for the university’s Tinkham Veale University Center, completed in 2014.

Johnson (1906-2005), who referred to the craggy “Turning Point” sculptures as a “modern Stonehenge,” was experimenting in the mid-1990s with abstract forms inspired by the highly sculptural steel and brick forms pioneered by architect Gehry in projects such as the Weatherhead Building.

Gehry and Johnson were friends, which makes it perfect that CWRU has placed their two works side by side. Saluting them is a nice way to let the CWRU community know that architecture matters, despite the demise of the university’s architecture program.

During his life, Johnson often spoke about the importance of procession — how people move from one architectural space to another. That makes it especially fitting that his sculptures occupy the exclamation point at the end of the processional sequence created by the Nash walkway.

SOURCE

<https://www.cleveland.com/news/2020/08/lucia-smith-nash-walkway-at-case-western-reserve-university-turns-eyesore-into-excellent-public-space.html>