



SCUP/AIA-CAE Excellence in Architecture for Building Additions, Honor Awards

PDSI (Physics, DMSE, Spectroscopy and Infrastructure) Project at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge, MA
and Payette in Boston, MA



Photo by Peter Vanderwarker



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For the past 100 years, the Main Group Buildings at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology served as the campus focus and primary icon for the school, but these buildings were no longer able to meet the functional and academic demands being placed upon them.

The PDSI project was charged with providing a new home for the Department of Physics, addressing the needs of two neighboring departments and accommodating core infrastructure for future renovation of more than $\frac{1}{4}$ of the Main Group's 1,000,000 SF of program area. The new Physics Theory Center was included and was expected to create a contemplative, yet interaction-inspiring environment for approximately 100 theoretical physicists.

The project had four separate stakeholder groups so the architect managed the design process as four separate projects. Each followed its own timeline and worked with different subsets of the design team.

The PDSI project creates an interactive environment, originating within new construction but permeating into the historic fabric without undermining its heritage. It preserves both the interior and exterior public experiences of the Main Group while introducing a teaching and research paradigm that was unachievable within the original geometry.

The academic requirements focused primarily on the Physics Theory Center and its uncompromised accommodation was critical to the success of the project. The goal was to unite two separate groups of theorists and create a single area where they could work together or separately. It was stressed, however, that distraction (audible and visual) is anathema to theoretical physics, so the architecture would need to mediate between the worlds of contemplative seclusion and group work that encourages chance interaction.

MIT's Main Group is eligible for listing as a landmark structure and that, coupled with the demolition of an existing structure, put PDSI into the jurisdiction of the Massachusetts and Cambridge Historic Commissions. In concert with the regulatory requirements, however, MIT was enthusiastic to preserve the character and appearance of the Main Group.

The jury said, "This project is at the heart of what additions are supposed to be . . . pretty spectacular."

Project Team: *Massachusetts Institute of Technology with Payette*, and Imai Keller Moore Architects, associated architect for renovations.

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