

# New Classrooms for Older Campuses

By ELSA BRENNER

**H**OW do you build a middle school in the early 21st century alongside a neo-Gothic-style high school from the 1920's and an austere classroom addition from 1960, and how do you do it without creating a hodgepodge of architectural styles? Educators in the Pelham Union Free School District recently grappled with such a challenge.

So did educators at the School of the Holy Child, an independent Roman Catholic school for girls in Rye, where the quandary was to design a school addition to bridge the gap between a stately 1930's Tudor-style mansion and a flat-roofed no-frills administration building dating to 1958.

At the Hackley School, a private coed boarding and day school in Tarrytown, architects and educators also wrestled with the issue of how to blend disparate architectural styles when adding classroom space. "The challenge is making the new compatible with the old," said Peter Gisolfi, who owns an architectural firm in Hastings-on-Hudson.

Peter Gisolfi Associates has designed a new middle school, a science building and a cafeteria addition on the 285-acre Tarrytown property, where a Gothic Revival structure from 1910 shared the campus with several outdated modernistic structures erected about 40 years ago.

The task of blending styles from different periods is especially difficult when classroom additions from the 60's and 70's — "a particularly hideous period for educational architecture" — compete with older, more elegant, styles, explained Mr. Gisolfi, who designs schools throughout the United States.

"All over the country now, they are tearing down school buildings from that time," he said of the ungraceful additions that were often built with flat roofs, cheap materials and straight corridors lined with classrooms.

The three Westchester schools solved the problem of coordinating architectural styles in different manners. In Pelham, architects and educators decided that instead of razing the 1960's addition, they would build around it and minimize its presence



Susan Farley for The New York Times

## A FRESH LOOK

Andrea Steele, the architect, and Ann Sullivan, the head of the School of the Holy Child in Rye, in the 20,000-square-foot addition.

with plantings. At the parochial school in Rye, part of the 46-year-old nondescript addition was demolished to provide more space for the new building. And at the private boarding school in Tarrytown, most of the 1960's-style buildings were eliminated, so that the Tudor architecture of the new construction could blend seamlessly with the old building and re-emphasize the predominant style on the campus.

In Rye, Andrea Steele, the architect for the 20,000-square-foot \$6 million addition at the School of the Holy Child, where 310 girls are enrolled in Grades 5 through 12, explained that it would have been "cost prohibitive" to replicate the style of the mansion.

"Instead, we decided to use old materials in new ways," said Ms. Steele, who works for Murphy Burnham & Buttrick Architects in Manhattan. She cited as an example the use of slate, the existing roofing material on the old Tudor mansion, which is repeated in the new building, but as siding that is hung vertically on pins. The style of the new building, which is almost completed, has a contemporary, fresh look, she explained, and was chosen to mediate between the two existing ones.

In Pelham, Gary Engel, an architect and the project manager for Cannon Design, said cost constraints were similarly factored in when de-

signing the 65,000-square-foot three-story school building under construction there. Instead of replicating the 1910 building, now being used as a high school and middle school, the architectural firm incorporated some of its neo-Gothic elements — pitched roofs, gables, limestone around windows and arched stone entryways — in the new building.

And instead of fieldstone, which was used for the facade of the original school, the new \$27 million middle school has a masonry exterior that looks similar to fieldstone but cost less. "It's not imitation fieldstone, but it's compatible with the original," emphasized Mr. Engel, whose company has offices in Manhattan and other locations. "The whole point is that they look right together."

As for the 1960's addition, Mr. Engel said that while it would continue to be used, it remains as an architecturally incompatible element on the campus. "Institutions that were too poor in the 60's and 70's to build additions actually came out ahead," he said, "because they don't have to deal with 'the building in the middle' problem now."

At the Hackley School, which has 800 students in kindergarten through 12th grade, plans included demolishing most of the "aesthetically and educationally incompatible" older

structures, according to Walter C. Johnson, the headmaster. The 60,000-square-foot, \$17 million addition, which is designed in the same Tudor style as the older structure, is positioned to form quadrangles with the existing structures to help unify the campus.

While architectural style considerations provided constraints on the exterior, there were no such limitations inside, where educators planned the additions with the latest teaching goals in mind.

In Pelham, the middle school design follows "a child-centered pedagogical approach," which places each grade (sixth, seventh and eighth) on its own floor, said Charles Wilson, superintendent of schools. The plans also call for "maximum separation between the middle and high school," Dr. Wilson said of the project, which is being financed with a bond that was approved by voters.

At the School of the Holy Child, the library was designed specifically for girls, said Ann Sullivan, the head of schools. "Girls take a very different approach to studying," she said. "They like to work at a table together with other girls. They prefer to collaborate, while boys prefer study carrels. What we've built is definitely a women's library."

Throughout the addition, which has been financed through a capital campaign, the architects have included benches and other areas where the students can gather and work together.

Like school administrators in Pelham, the educators at Hackley decided to cluster individual grades at its new middle school, which is being financed through a capital campaign. "The social dynamic is better for students that way," Mr. Johnson said.

Instead of using a "double-loaded" floor plan with classrooms on both sides of a corridor — a cost-effective design measure used in schools that were built during the 60's and 70's — the corridors at the new Hackley addition have classrooms on only one side of a windowed hallway.

The goal, the headmaster explained, is to maximize the use of natural light.

"A single-loaded plan is more expensive, but it's worth it," Mr. Johnson added. "Studies show that people work more efficiently in natural light. Aesthetics is not just a frill if it supports an educational goal."