

MIT List Center

Steven Holl

I am Steven Holl with Steven Holl Architects here in New York.

Before Holl began working on Simmons Hall, Vassar Street was an empty block, isolated from the rest of the campus. He hoped the building finished in 2002 could animate the forlorn urban space with a design born out of the idea of porosity. Being able to see through the building and feel of what he calls a lightness.

If you think of the whole building as a sponge, it has organic carving out vertically, horizontally, diagonally, in many different directions-- first the large block with five big openings.

These indicate the five separate houses within the building.

Then the two-story lounges would show up as cut-outs in the outside facade. They create connections between the floors and become the public vessels which also bring air and light down through the section. They're kind of like lungs in the building. Then there are nine windows per room.

The main structural support is in the outer wall, a series of interlocking vertical and horizontal beams that create the space for the windows. The sea of windows filters in light during the day. At night, as the lights flicker on in the dorm rooms and first-floor cafe, the building glows.

Like a slice of the city, the building becomes urbanistically very positive because at night when people are occupying the cafe, the lights are on and the street is alive.

The effects of transparency are also integral to artist Dan Graham's Yin Yang Pavilion. Additional commentary on Graham's work for Simmons Hall is available on the List website.