



## **Payette completes 70,000 s/f Gary C. Comer Geochemistry Building for \$32 million**

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Payette has completed the 70,000 s/f Gary C. Comer Geochemistry Building on the Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory Campus for Columbia University. The total project cost was \$32 million.

The new building includes laboratory space supporting research that, among other important contributions, has led the development of our understanding of climate change. The building includes specialized mass spectroscopy, geochemistry and instrument-based laboratories. Divided into three parts, the north-facing lab zone is tied to a south-facing office zone through a central atrium area that accommodates group and interactive work.

Payette opted to forgo the designated hillside site for the building, and turned instead to a former parking lot near the geochemistry division's existing home. Recognizing that three levels of naturally-ventilated office space comfortably occupy the same building height as two levels of high technology laboratory space, Payette compacted the program into a single, 30-ft. high volume which minimizes the building's profile atop the Palisades escarpment.

A spine of common spaces, including meeting rooms, a videoconference center, lounge areas and a 100-person seminar room, runs through the center of the building and emerges as a pair of elevated decks on its east side with views of the Hudson River. Two top lit atrium's with open switchback stairs connect the offset lab and office levels, and provide visual continuity for researchers as they move back and forth between the two wings.

While the building's plan is straightforward and well-suited for science, its "skip-stop" section arrangement transforms it into an unexpectedly dynamic place of varying scales and levels of intimacy. Each office features a floor-to-ceiling expanse of the hillside forest just feet away, and each laboratory includes a similarly broad prospect of the campus interior. All of the building's corridors terminate in either a double or triple-height glazed overlook of the river valley. High clerestory windows flood the two atriums with abundant natural light.

Exterior materials reflect the building's internal organization. The office and lab wings feature aluminum curtainwall and aluminum panel façades, while the prominent central spine, with its slightly elevated and sloped roofline, is clad in zinc and teak elements which will develop a rich patina over time. Steel mesh gabions filled with Palisades basalt, a dark local stone, act as retaining walls where needed to mediate the existing topography.

Every major design decision from the placement of the building to the design of the office mechanical systems was reviewed for opportunities to push the environmental envelope. Importantly, these initiatives were pursued within a strict doctrine of cost control and limiting cutting-edge technology that might fail over the long haul. The resulting building is one that raises the bar on sustainability while still relying on everyday technology and normal construction practice.

In addition to programming and design, Payette was also the interior designer and landscape

architect on this project. Other project team members included Vanderweil Engineers, mechanical, electrical and plumbing engineers; Weidlinger Associates, structural engineers; Stantec (formerly Volmer Associates), civil engineer; and Mueser Rutledge Consulting Engineers, geotechnical engineer.

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