

RIVER HOUSE RENEWAL

Cambridge, MA

Three pilot projects completed 2015

340,000 SF

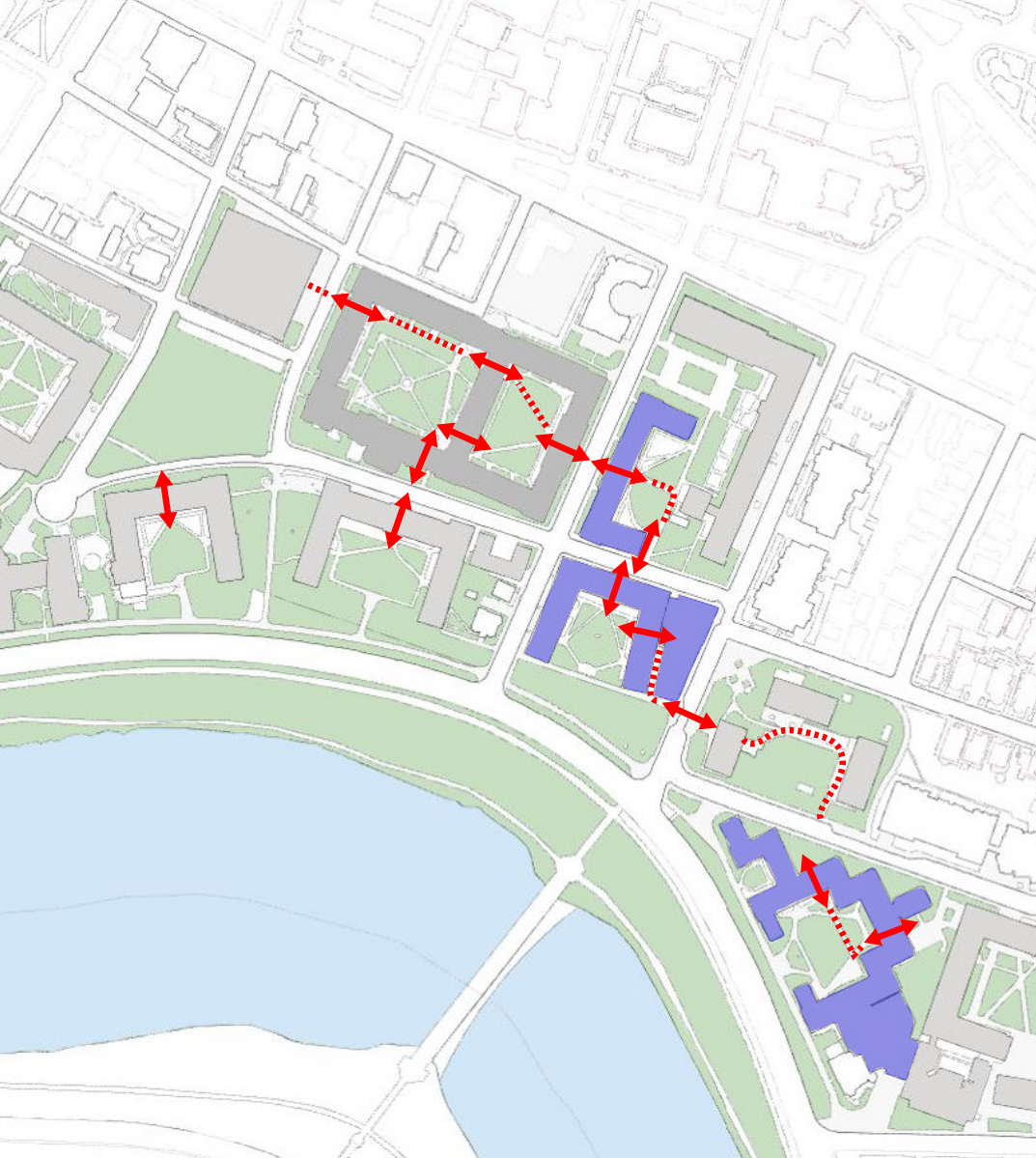
Harvard's 85-year old residential House system forms the basis of its undergraduate education. In the 1930s, the Harvard House system was conceived as an entirely new kind of undergraduate life for an American college. Today, the Houses remain the core of a Harvard undergraduate's college experience, with ninety-eight percent of students calling one of the twelve Houses home. But except for minor code upgrades, most of the Houses remain as originally built, lacking modern amenities, efficient building systems, and accommodations for residents requiring mobility assistance.

Each Harvard House carries its own distinct identity and renovation challenges, but the House system as a whole offered a unique planning opportunity to take a district-wide approach across a combined 2.5 million square feet. To assess needs and opportunities, the architects conducted intensive site studies to carefully set a standard for the system-wide physical renewal of a major portion of the Harvard campus and the preservation of the undergraduate college's cultural identity.

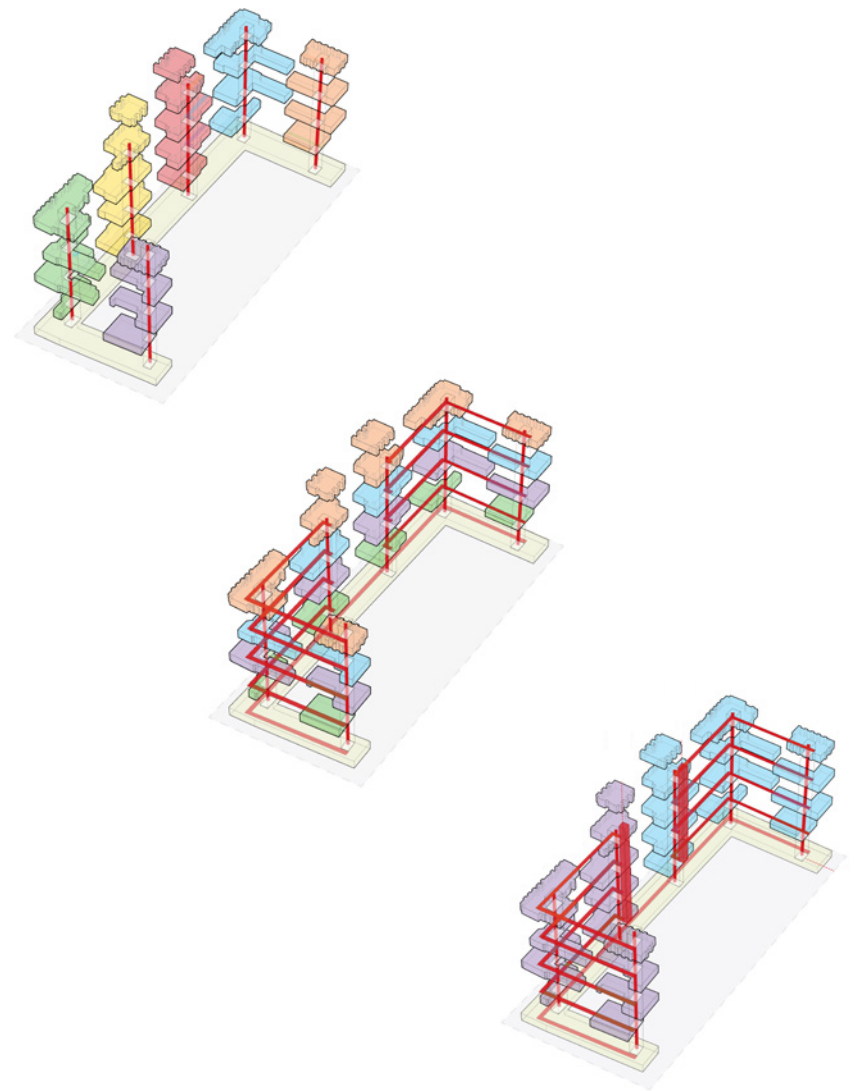
The goals of the system-wide renovation of the twelve Harvard Houses, which accommodate roughly 4,500 students, were to renew the House life experience, preserve the buildings' historic character and culture, connect spaces and nurture communities, provide modern accommodations, and plan for their next century of use.

Harvard's House Renewal program is a billion dollar renewal investment in the University's core educational values and traditions.

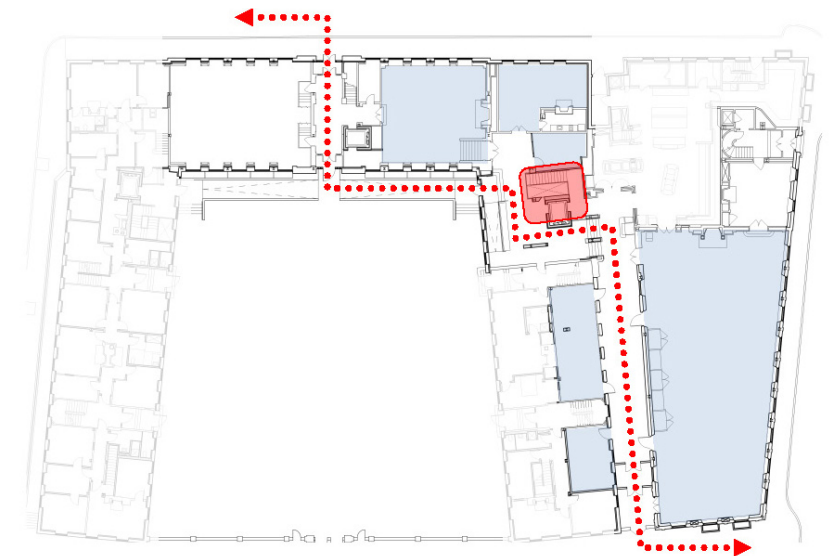




In designing the three pilot houses, the architects needed to set a paradigm for renewal that established standards and policies related to sustainability, building restoration, residential and social programs, space and resource management, and systems design. Given the Houses' location, stewardship of the Charles River is fundamental. Measures have been taken to reduce flood risk, limit potable water use, and improve water quality discharge to the Charles River.



Reinforcing existing connections between Houses and creating new circulation within the buildings was essential to House renewal. For instance, the new interior hybrid circulation system maintains social interaction and connectivity.



Historically-designated exteriors were redesigned but in a few critical locations, modern interventions establish new pathways and connections while striking a delicate balance between preservation and transformation.



The design encourages spontaneous encounters and human interaction. A light court transformed a dark alleyway between the residential hall and the dining hall. It is now an active common space in its own right, providing flexible connections among dining hall, seminar rooms, lounge space, and games area.



Wheelchair accessibility was achieved throughout each building despite multiple level changes—sometimes as many as twelve per floor—making these buildings seamlessly livable for those requiring mobility assistance within the context of the historic interior and exterior.



The former basement spaces were transformed by the addition of new social and recreational amenities, linked to the traditional entry level common spaces by new circulation systems that draw students down to the lively 24/7 world of fitness, dance, music, games, and cafes below.



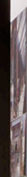
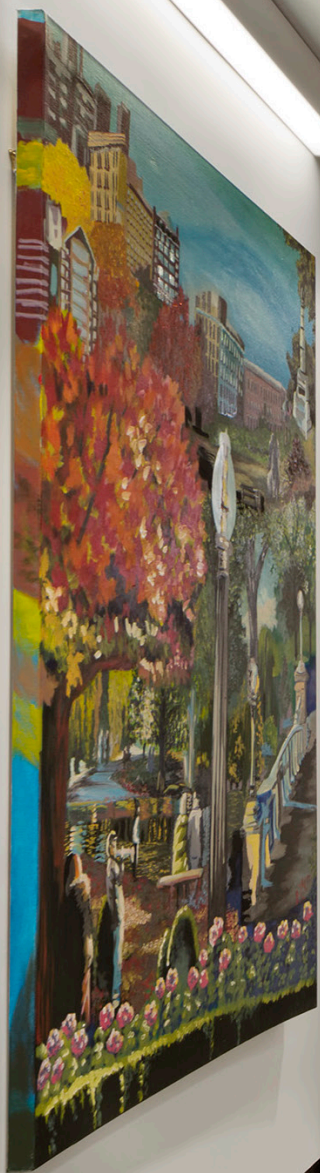
Strategic opportunities to bring daylight into the building include the conversion of an unused side yard into a sunken courtyard that opens off of a new lower level lounge and, at the upper floors, the creation of informal study niches in the dormer areas of the upper level residential corridors.



The buildings' existing configuration afforded left over nooks and crannies that were converted to a variety of informal study and gathering spaces to supplement the completely rebuilt private residential areas.



Most of the former double-height squash rooms were re-programmed for fitness, dance, basketball, music, art, and games.





The quality of the beautiful historic interiors dictated that modern interventions achieve an equally high standard of craft and materiality.





Historic rooms such as the dining hall were carefully dismantled to conceal new state-of-the-art building systems, then restored to their original condition.



The renewed Houses are technologically enabled throughout, with printer closets on each residential floor and spaces such as this faculty instigated "smart classroom" that is scheduled for regular classes and also available for student homework and group projects.