About the Renovation

With a $14.5 million renovation launched in 2001, Director Thomas F. Staley and the Ransom Center Advisory Council aimed to transform the imposing Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center building into a welcoming presence on The University of Texas at Austin campus.

The challenge for award-winning San Antonio architects Lake/Flato was to “extrovert” a closed building by doing two things: bringing natural light into the interior and attracting the public’s interest with enticing images representing the Ransom Center’s collections. Lake/Flato decided to use glass as the medium to achieve both goals.

Most noticeably, the architects transformed two of the building’s stone exterior corner spaces into 25-foot-tall interior spaces wrapped in glass and etched with collection images, ranging from a photograph of Pablo Picasso’s eyes to a storyboard from “Gone with the Wind.” These glazed corners now brighten the interior by day and become giant lighted beacons at night.

Similarly, Lake/Flato replaced the Center’s dark, cave-like entrance with a glazed entry, framed by stainless steel and etched-glass signatures of authors and artists whose works are held by the Center. Contributing to the etchings was Austin-based fd2s, a design firm that edited the images and signatures chosen by the Center’s staff. Each image was etched into the inside face of glass and tinted before being assembled.

New glass walls also enclose the second floor balcony, bringing light and warmth into the lobby and reception areas. Visitors can now stand on the second floor and see natural light and trees in four directions. Inside, the redesigned interior features stainless steel and warm pecan paneling.

With the renovation complete, the Ransom Center can now share its collections and its vision with more visitors, patrons and scholars than ever before.

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