



## MOSHIER STUDIO

ARCHITECTURE • INTERIORS • PLANNING • SUSTAINABLE DESIGN

# Sisters of St. Francis of the Neumann Communities



The green renovation of the dining hall of the Motherhouse.

The original ceiling in the dining room was decoratively painted canvas, over horsehair padding and a rough plaster base. The windows were amber stained glass panels. The wood wainscot, doors, casings and other trim were chestnut. When the building served as a convent, meals were served at long tables, and a reader would sit at the far end to present the daily lesson.

At some point the canvas ceiling was repainted beige, and 'modern' lighting was installed. Later, carpet was applied to the walls, and a stretched fabric ceiling was installed over the painted canvas one. These changes increased the amount of sound that was absorbed by the walls and ceiling. Most of the lighting was directed downward. Unfortunately, a lack of make-up air at the exhaust hood in the adjacent kitchen put the dining room under negative air pressure, causing dirt and coal dust from the attic to be drawn through the ceiling layers, discoloring the stretched fabric ceiling. After this ventilation situation was corrected, the Sis-

ters saw an opportunity not only to replace the ceiling, but to rethink how the architecture might support the community's present needs. This project's goals were to replace the discolored ceiling material to improve the appearance of the room, design a more flexible lighting system, replace the original wiring, improve the sound characteristics of the room, integrate the beverage station into the room's architecture, provide additional storage space, and make the room feel more intimate for daily use.

The new ceiling is the same fabric style that was used before, but in a lighter color. The old fabric, acoustic padding, canvas and horsehair were removed, and a spray-on acoustic material was installed over the old plaster. The new fabric was installed on the old tracks. Above the ceiling, attic insulation was blown in to reduce heat loss.

Around the perimeter of the room, a new cornice was constructed for indirect cold cathode lighting. Eight of the windows at the end of the room were reglazed with very clear insulated glass, opening the room to the outdoors for the first time and improving



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thermal performance. Each of the amber and clear windows has new roller shades to black-out the room for audiovisual presentations.

At the entrance wall of the room, a closet was built to house the new electrical panel boards, dimmer panels and audiovisual equipment. The chestnut doors on this closet were reused from campus inventory. On the other side, a new countertop and cabinets enclose the beverage machines. The cabinet doors were formerly toilet stall doors in the Motherhouse, and the countertop is made from rapidly-renewable kraft paper. Wainscot, casings and other running trim were reused in this new construction, to give the appearance of being original construction. By directing more light upward to the new ceiling, the room appears much brighter. The cloistered effect has been replaced by views to the outdoors, and the acoustics now support the lively conversations of the community.

**Project Team:** Moshier Studio, Massaro Corporation, CJL Engineering

**Construction Cost:** \$500,336  
**Completed:** 2005

**Reference:**

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[www.moshierstudio.com](http://www.moshierstudio.com)