

AIA New York Chapter

The Founding Chapter of The American Institute of Architects



17 July 2006

Ms. Nancy Cline
Roy E. Larsen Librarian of Harvard College
Widener Library, Room 110
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139
ncline@fas.harvard.edu

re: Woodberry Poetry Room

Dear Ms. Cline:

On behalf of the Interiors Committee of the American Institute of Architects New York Chapter, I am writing to you regarding the preservation and restoration of the Woodberry Poetry Room. Many of us read with interest a recent article about the renovations to this rare gem by Alvar and Aino Aalto, located in the Lamont Library. The New York Times, on Monday, July 10th, reported the effort to refurbish the reading room and introduce current technology.

We applaud your efforts to restore the room, improve its functionality by incorporating technology, and remove unsafe conditions. However, we hope in so doing, the original character of the room is not compromised. We hope that the renovations will bring the room more closely back to its original state, and that the technology will be incorporated discretely and sensitively. Within this process, we would also hope that the furnishings would be restored as well. In particular, we urge that the original Aalto lounge chairs, if they cannot be repaired, be replaced with new Aalto lounge chairs. In the context of the comprehensive "total design" of the room this is a most critical element.

The capable architect in charge of the renovation, David N. Fixler, speaks of the need for evolutionary and managed change, along with the dynamic nature of architecture and design. In this most special location, however, the balance must be carefully weighed. We suggest that Harvard restore the reading room more closely to the original design, which has been somewhat modified over the years. New functional requirements can be adapted, as necessary, to the space. In this way the room serves as artifact, historical record and dynamic space.

We respectfully ask that you seriously evaluate any proposed alterations to the Woodberry Poetry Reading Room in this light, and that any changes due to technology be done in such a manner as to not compromise the original design. This extraordinary room by Aalto will become a significant example of how enduring design excellence can be made safe and functional, without sacrificing its spirit or character.

Respectfully,

Rocco Giannetti, AIA
Chair, AIA New York Chapter Interiors Committee

cc: Prof. Sidney Verba, Dean Jeremy Knowles, Frederic Schwartz, Toshiko Mori & Rick Bell

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