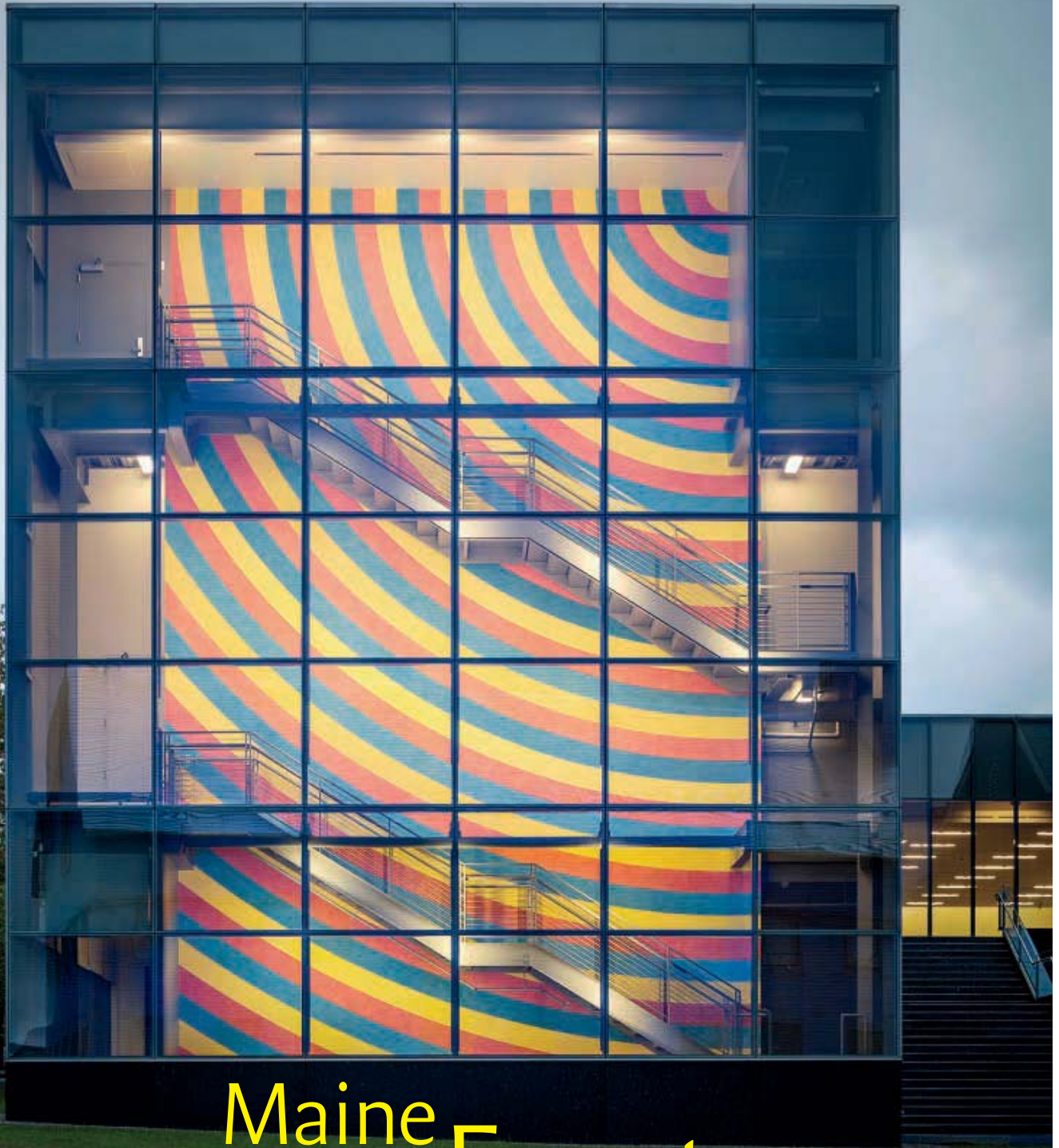


A GIANT, COLORFUL wall painting by the late Sol LeWitt dramatically enlivens the glazed end of Colby College's new Alford-Lunder Family Pavilion, which features clean lines and glass-wrapped spaces to ensure art donated by the Lunder family shines.



# Maine Event

The gift of an art collection — and a museum to house it — puts Colby College on the cultural map

WRITTEN BY WILLIAM MORGAN • PHOTOGRAPHED BY TRENT BELL

## PLACES



**W**ITH THE OPENING OF THE Alfond-Lunder Family Pavilion at Colby College Museum of Art in Waterville, Maine, this July, the small, highly regarded liberal arts school boasts the largest museum in the state — surpassing the Portland Museum of Art — and one of the most important art collections in the

country. “The Lunder gift,” says college President William D. Adams, “put Colby on the cultural map.”

Adams is referring to the bequest of Maine philanthropists Peter Lunder, a Colby alumnus, and his wife, Paula, who have spent a lifetime quietly buying art. In 2007, they promised 500 works worth \$100 million to Colby if the college would expand the museum to house the collection. A \$5 million

**THOUGH IT WAS a challenge to integrate the Modern design of the new wing with the campus’s existing brick ensemble of buildings, the result guarantees the focus of the space is the artwork donated by the Lunders.**



donation from the Harold Alfond Foundation and the Lunders themselves helped fund the \$15 million, 26,000-square-foot pavilion.

Colby has “the best academic museum in the country,” says Adams. And the new wing, which adds both exhibition space and classroom space, is itself an event for Maine. “This was a gift to the people of Maine,” says Museum Director Sharon Corwin. “We want every resident in the state to feel real engagement with and real ownership of this museum.”

The new structure, designed by architect Frederick Fisher of Frederick Fisher and Partners of Los Angeles, is a Modern departure from the brick Georgian-influenced buildings for which the campus is known.

The college was founded in 1813 in the center of Waterville, then a mill town on the Kennebec River, as the Maine Literary and Theological Institution. After World War II, the campus was moved from the town center to Mayflower Hill, open, elevated farmland west of town where an entirely new campus was designed by one of America’s most accomplished collegiate architects, Jens Fredrick Larson.

A flying ace in World War I, Larson is



**THE MAIN ENTRANCE** to the pavilion is across an outdoor sculpture court featuring Richard Serra’s three steel cubes, titled 4-5-6. A pristine Modern palette forms a contemporary canvas composed of the diagonal staircase and the reflection of the brick Georgian of the original museum building.

## PLACES



best known for his work at Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. He designed another complete campus for Wake Forest University in North Carolina, as well as buildings for colleges from Atlantic Canada to the American Midwest. Larson's signature style was a scholarly but inventive Georgian, and Larson biographer Rod Miller says that Colby "is Larson's masterpiece."

Adding the Modern design of the Alford-Lunder Pavilion to such a traditional brick ensemble was a special challenge. Fisher had already designed a 9,000-square-foot wing for the museum in 1999 (also a gift of the Lunders), done in the plain, almost-Shaker spirit of the college's original buildings. "We did not seriously consider other architects than Fisher," Adams says of the new space. "His early work was both exciting and reassuring to us."

Fisher is a low-key minimalist designer who will not do neo anything. After completing architecture school at the University of California, Los Angeles, the Cleveland native worked for renowned architect Frank Gehry, but Fisher credits his study of art history at Ohio's Oberlin College, a liberal arts school very much like Colby, for shaping his aesthetic (he also studied at the American Academy in Rome). He appreciates history but eschews the literal ornament of post-modernism. And unlike many of his Southern California contemporaries, he prefers clean lines and glass-wrapped volumes to twisted forms and sheared skins. In short, his work at universities such as Princeton, California Institute of Technology, and Colby respects context. And he believes a museum should be

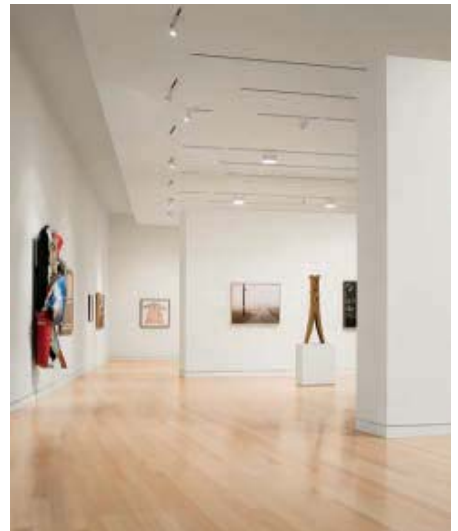
**EERO SAARINEN WOMB chairs (ABOVE) add comfort and color to the student lounge. Contemporary art in the new main exhibition space (BELOW) reflects the strength and depth of the Lunder gift.**

more background player than drama queen, a place where the art is the focus. "Fred wanted this building to be about looking [at the art]," say Corwin.

"There are some," says Adams, "who initially found the departure from the Georgian vernacular to be a little jarring." However, Fisher's refreshing and self-effacing approach has resulted in a beautifully crafted exhibit space that displays the Lunder collection without distracting from it.

Peter Lunder, speaking at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, earlier this year, reminded his audience that Colby has "been a great museum for years." But now, he said, he hoped it would become "a destination, the Clark Art Institute of Maine."

Paula Lunder requested that the building "be more participatory," says Associate Museum Director Patricia King. So



students can access the new wing through several entrances, including one from an outdoor terrace where they can work or have lunch at tables. The first space encountered by visitors is a large interior court, which, King says, “is to be a hive of activity for our students.” Besides state-of-the-art classrooms for foundation studies and photography, there is a student lounge and generous exhibition space for student work.

The four galleries for the Lunder collection comprise the glory of the new wing. This space focuses solely on the art — there are no gimmicks, only Fisher’s brilliance in providing the absolutely right backdrop. The new galleries offer 7,000 square feet of exhibition space on the piano nobile and another 2,500 square feet on the ground floor — which gives Colby many more opportunities to show off its remarkable collection of Marsden Hartleys, Rockwell Kents, and Georgia O’Keeffes. The top floor has classroom and office space, plus a student lounge.

One seemingly unresolved issue of Modern architecture is the varying opacity and transparency of glass. A glass wall that reads as solid by day may be a void at night. “When you fly from the West Coast to Maine,” Fisher says, “you arrive at Colby at night. Lights are on in the studio and students are at work.” And the bright bands of color in the three-story Wall Drawing #559 by the late American artist Sol LeWitt transform the east end of the museum into a billboard announcing Colby’s new image to the world. ■

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## Opening Day

The Colby College Museum of Art celebrates the opening of the Alford-Lunder Family Pavilion on July 13 with seven exhibitions, including *The Lunder Collection: A Gift of Art to Colby College*, on view through June 8, 2014. It features more than 260 pieces of 19th- and 20th-century American art by artists such as James McNeill Whistler, Winslow Homer, and Georgia O’Keeffe. Other exhibits include *Spaces and Places: Chinese Art from the Lunder-Colville Collection and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, 40 works of ritual and mortuary art from the prehistoric period through the Jin Dynasty (1115–1234), and *American Weathervanes from a Distinguished Maine Collection*, designs from the late 19th century, the heyday of weather vane production in America.

### 50-55 • Places/Maine Event

**Architecture:** Frederick Fisher and Partners Architects, Los Angeles, CA; [fisherpartners.net](http://fisherpartners.net). **Architect of record:** Brian E. Duffy Associates, Falmouth, ME; 207-838-9500. **Construction:** Consigli Construction, Milford, MA; [consigli.com](http://consigli.com). **Landscape**

**architect:** Mohr & Seredin Landscape Architects, Portland, ME; [mohrseredin.com](http://mohrseredin.com). **Lighting design:** Fisher Marantz Stone, New York, NY; [fmsp.com](http://fmsp.com).