

# East Campus Renovation The Next 100 Years





**“I believe that in a lot of respects, East Campus is a state of mind. There will always be artsy, creative, queer, quirky East Campus types at MIT, and they will find each other and build a community somehow. However, I do think that the physical building of East Campus lends itself towards the specific kind of community that I and many others throughout the years have found so special.”**

Allie Stanton '18, East Campus President, 2017  
DormCon Vice President, 2017-18







# A Home for Self-Expression

---

MIT's mission is to educate the whole student, and residential life is an important part of that goal. The MIT Class of 1893 alumni who partially funded the "East Campus Alumni Memorial Housing" residence said as much in 1923, acknowledging "the great need for dormitories in order that the undergraduate life of the Institute may more adequately and more healthfully express itself" as the impetus for their gift that made it possible to break ground on East Campus.

They predicted the importance of thriving residential communities that are now integral to the MIT student experience. For nearly 100 years, the residents of East Campus have embodied the MIT motto, "mens et manus" ("mind and hand"), creating a singular community where students' unique traits and skills are welcomed, cultivated, and celebrated.

East Campus opened its doors in 1924 and remains a bastion of self-expression for MIT undergraduates. In the courtyard between its distinctive parallel buildings, students cook out, fire dancers perform, and student-built creations—such as the famed roller coasters—thrill residents. These and more expressions of individuality over the years have helped to carve an indelible place for East Campus among MIT residences.

On the eve of East Campus's centennial, a historic renovation will mark the beginning of the residence's second century, with dynamic updates that will revitalize the structures and mark the start of a new era for students who will, as always, shape East Campus for future generations.





“The courtyard sandwiched by two sturdy parallel buildings is iconic, and students live here and leave here assured that the good, funny, outrageous, unforgettable memories created and contained within the halls of these steadfast buildings will continue to reverberate throughout the generations. Over time, living at East Campus enables its residents to initiate and adapt to change, thanks in no small part to the aegis of a trusty place to call home.”

**Sandy Alexandre, Associate Professor of Literature  
East Campus Head of House, 2019–present**







In 1940, East Campus residents lit up their windows to spell "TECH."



# A Dynamic Renovation

---

“East Campus is a creative, dynamic, diverse place where people care about those they live among, and they do so very thoughtfully,” says Eden Medina PhD '05, associate head of house at East Campus and associate professor in the Program on Science, Technology and Society. Medina has developed an ongoing course, STS.S20 Tales of Two Parallels: Documenting the History of East Campus, to harness and give credit to students' existing interest in their home. Hundreds of alumni have volunteered to be interviewed in recent years, carrying on the tradition of caring for their former home by sharing stories with current residents.

One thing, Medina says, has become abundantly clear throughout the course: the residence's culture is always changing and will continue to change as

new generations move into the buildings. Each version of the residence has played an important role in supporting student community and expression.

Project architects have met with residents multiple times to get perspectives on the design and execution of the renovation, both in terms of what students need in a community and how that structure fits into MIT as a whole. The result is a forward-looking design that considers future generations.

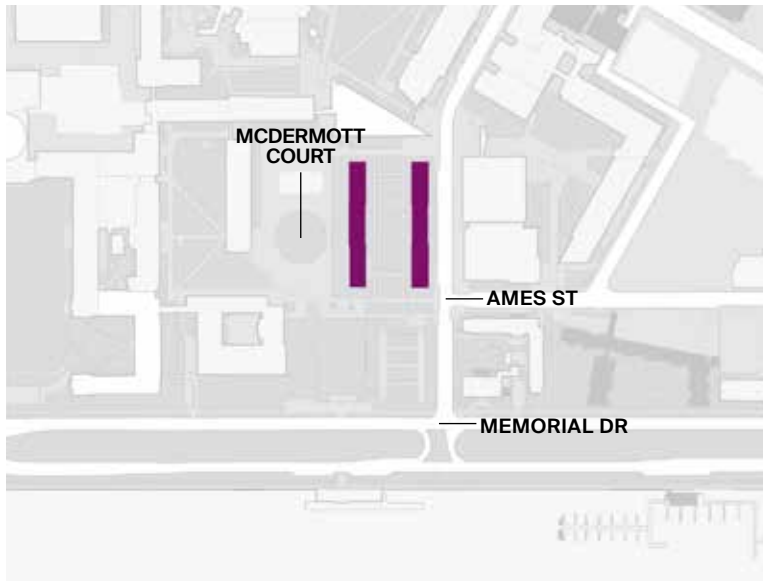
Through a collaborative process that is inherent to the residence's overall character, a plan to take East Campus into its next century is in place.





A large community kitchen and lounge space will be added to the ground floor, along with centrally located elevators.





**350+** UNDERGRADUATES  
AND **10** GRADUATE  
RESIDENT TUTORS CALL  
EAST CAMPUS HOME

## IMPROVEMENTS

- Thoughtful placement of hall lounges, bathrooms, and kitchens to facilitate the flow of residents and guests
- Increased accessibility, including new elevators
- New community kitchen in Talbot Lounge and expanded hall kitchens to better support the cook-for-yourself community
- New light-filled entrance lobbies for each building and updated music and fitness rooms
- Panelized wall system to support student and community artwork
- Relocation of makerspace from the basement to ground level to enhance making and better support courtyard builds
- Lower carbon footprint achieved by replacing gas appliances with electric, installing additional insulation, and improving overall building performance



The layout of the common spaces for each hall will offer two lounges and a kitchen for gathering and socializing.





# Students Shaping the Future of East Campus

---

A participatory, bottom-up input process is central to the East Campus ethos. A renovation committee and advisory group that includes MIT students, faculty, alumni, and administrators were involved in the entire renovation planning process, but student engagement with the East Campus renovation has surpassed expectations. Through a series of meetings held during the 2021–22 academic year, East Campus students met with the architects to contribute to a design that will ultimately allow the community to preserve and create traditions and forge new pathways for connection.

“We’ve never gotten this level of attendance, commitment, and out-of-the-box thinking on a university

project like this,” says Clifford Gayley, principal at architects William Rawn Associates and co-lead of the renovation team. “The discussions with students challenged us to question our own presumptions. It’s been refreshing and exciting, and I think it’s inspired all of us.”

These comments come as no surprise to MIT students, alumni, and administrators who have been involved with student governance and leadership on campus.







“Student government has given me an appreciation for all the different perspectives and stakeholders involved in decisions at MIT. The whole process has reinforced my belief in the importance of student voices in those decisions. In regard to the renovations, I think our process with the architects will lead to a positive impact not just for East Campus, but for the whole MIT community. It will be a great model for future renovations.”

**Zawad Chowdhury '23**  
**DormCon President, 2022-23**  
**4th East, a.k.a. Slugfest**



# An Artistic Maker Culture

---

A making ethos is literally built into East Campus's identity. When Albert Farwell Bemis (1893) became one of the residence's first alumni donors, the interior walls were embedded with burlap, which suited the building's stated practicality. Unsurprisingly, the Bemis Brothers Bag Company was a burlap sack manufacturer. Students could hang pictures and other furnishings from the burlap without damaging the walls.

The renovated East Campus will include another practical innovation: large, movable wall panels to support art in the residential corridors, which are core to community life on the halls. Panels next to each room will provide space for each resident to customize the area around their door with the flexibility to move it if they change rooms.

Another key improvement is the relocation of the makerspace from basement level to ground level, which will provide more accessibility for courtyard builds. The courtyard itself is also being designed to better support materials and student projects.

Most importantly, the artwork and projects produced by East Campus residents will be a continuous evolution of community and individual self-expression. The renovated buildings will support and energize that culture through new opportunities for artistic practices and increased accessibility to makerspaces.

**EAST CAMPUS  
MURALS** HAVE BEEN  
A TRADITION SINCE  
THE **1970s**







The updated makerspace will be more accessible for users and make it easier to move projects to the courtyard.





“During Campus Preview Weekend at East Campus, I saw firsthand the central values of East Campus, and MIT: If you want to know how something works, tinker with it. Don’t be afraid. Just do it. After that weekend, you could not have convinced me to go to any other college.”

**Omobayonle Olatunji '10**  
Former East Campus resident



# Community Connections

---

“Various activities are ever underway, but you have to remember that the very people in the dorm are in progress too,” says Sandy Alexandre, East Campus head of house and associate professor of literature. “After all, students are at that stage of their lives where they’re in the process of self-discovery. At East Campus, one can simultaneously nurture one’s burgeoning independence and one’s compassion for others in a space that is predominantly artsy, quirky, queer, and community-oriented.”

East Campus students, and the unique communities they build and thrive in, are at the center of this renovation. The updates will preserve the iconic shapes of the buildings while adding key accessibility features and improvements that will holistically facilitate the growth and nurturing of future communities.

For example, two spacious, light-filled lobbies—one for each building—will be the main entrances close to the east end of the Infinite Corridor. They will also consolidate

services, open the Talbot Lounge to the courtyard, and facilitate natural gathering and meeting places for students as they go about their days.

Similarly, a brand new community kitchen will better support community-wide events. The courtyard will be enhanced with surface improvements to facilitate student builds and create additional seating areas, cohesively connecting the two parallels and makerspace and better supporting the health of the courtyard’s stately elm trees.

Critically, accessibility improvements will enforce the community’s commitment to inclusion as a core value of East Campus. The addition of elevators at each of the main entrances will provide more accessibility. Hall layouts have been reconsidered to better facilitate the flow throughout community spaces, and include windows at the ends of the corridors to let in more natural light.

**10** HALLS,  
**10** DISTINCT  
CULTURES





Entrance lounges will provide natural gathering places as students go about their days, and new elevators will make East Campus more accessible.









The courtyard, updated to better facilitate student builds and the health of the stately elm trees, will continue to be an anchor of the vibrant East Campus community.





Hall kitchens, which were added to the buildings in 1983, will benefit from expansion along with a refreshed layout and efficient electric appliances.





“At East Campus, our kitchens create community hubs for people to cook, eat, and exist together. Cooking co-ops often spring up between first-year students who are just getting to know each other; birthdays are celebrated in the kitchen; and the occasional spontaneous dorm-wide event involving grilled cheese sandwiches is hosted in the Talbot kitchen. Being able to cook makes a place feel like home.”

**Hannah Kim '23**  
East Campus President, 2nd West, a.k.a. Putz



Updated music practice rooms and fitness rooms will promote student well-being, providing additional venues for artistic expression and exercise.











An aerial photograph of the MIT East Campus. The image shows a dense cluster of multi-story brick and concrete buildings. In the foreground, there are trees with autumn foliage in shades of orange, yellow, and red. A body of water is visible at the bottom of the frame, with a long dock containing several small boats. The sky is clear and blue.

# Building the Future

---

“East Campus residents are builders. They’re the quintessence of ‘mens et manus.’ But what stands out to me is the exceptional leadership skills that East Campus students possess,” says Suzy Nelson, vice chancellor and dean for student life. “They are deeply invested not only in their house but in all of MIT. They believe in consensus, they believe in the democratic process, and they care, as we all do, about the voice of the student.”

Providing an outstanding student experience, both inside and outside the classroom, is a vital part of MIT’s mission to prepare students for effective and enlightened leadership in the 21st century. Just as student voices and actions characterized East Campus in its first century, this renovation will provide a strong foundation for the creativity, uniqueness, and democratic values that its future residents will bring to campus.

We invite you to join us in supporting the East Campus renovation, as alumni did 100 years ago, and witness together how students will make it their home.



[betterworld.mit.edu](http://betterworld.mit.edu) | [#MITBetterWorld](https://twitter.com/MITBetterWorld)