CASE STUDY

THE CENTER OF ATTENTION

SMITH CAMPUS CENTER
HARVARD UNIVERSITY
CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

CONSTRUCTION EXCELLENCE
GOLD AWARD
CISCA
Ceilings & Interior Systems Construction Association
April 2019

9 WOOD

DIVISION 9 ENGINEERED-TO-ORDER WOOD CEILINGS

The new campus center at Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass. features 18,075 sq. ft. of crosspiece backer wood grille ceilings and walls.

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The new campus center at Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass., features a crosspiece backer wood grille ceiling, wood walls and special access panels. The wood grille ceilings total 18,075 sq. ft. They include over 1,500 individual wood grille panels and 72 specialty access panels.

The Richard A. and Susan F. Smith Campus Center is destined to become an icon, a forum uniting various colleges and a central space for students, faculty and visitors. It’s a common space where “people could bump into each other, share ideas, find spaces in which to have meetings,” says Harvard University’s president.

As such, the level of craftsmanship required on the installation was high.

“This is Harvard University, mind you,” says Brad Leonard, project manager at 9Wood. “We had to make it happen.”

Certified beech. The first order of business was finding enough Forest Stewardship Council™ certified beech to use on the project. Many of the beech grille panels were as large as 1 ft. by 12 ft. in size, so the project required lots of this FSC wood.

“Beech is not uncommon, but this needed to be sustainably harvested beech with members as long as 12 feet,” Leonard says. “We see 12 footers all the time, but in the hardwoods, such as walnut and

The FSC certified beech was sourced in Germany. Natural outdoor light activates “the warm hue and deep texture of the European beech walls and ceilings,” says Henry Mossat of Bruner/Cott Architects.

PROJECT

The Richard A. and Susan F. Smith Campus Center at Harvard University
Cambridge, Mass.

EXECUTIVE ARCHITECTS

Hopkins Architects
London, England

Bruner/Cott
Cambridge, Mass.

CEILING CONTRACTOR

Allan Construction
Salem, N.H.

CEILING SYSTEM

9Wood custom engineered wood ceilings and walls,
Springfield, Ore.

beech, the pool of availability gets narrow. Whereas four to five weeks might be normal, we needed four to five months to source all of this beech."

The manufacturer lined up a source of beech in Germany. Samples were sent to the architect, who was strict about knot sizes and knot frequency. In the end, he approved the order.

Care and precision. Garrett Allan, project manager at Allan Construction, Salem, N.H., says the work was technical and complicated. The ceiling crews, for example, had to work around columns and staircases. They made angled cuts in the beech ceilings to line up with the beech walls. They routed and created perfect reveals for light boxes, sprinkler heads, fire alarms, security cameras, AV cameras, daylight sensors and exit signs.

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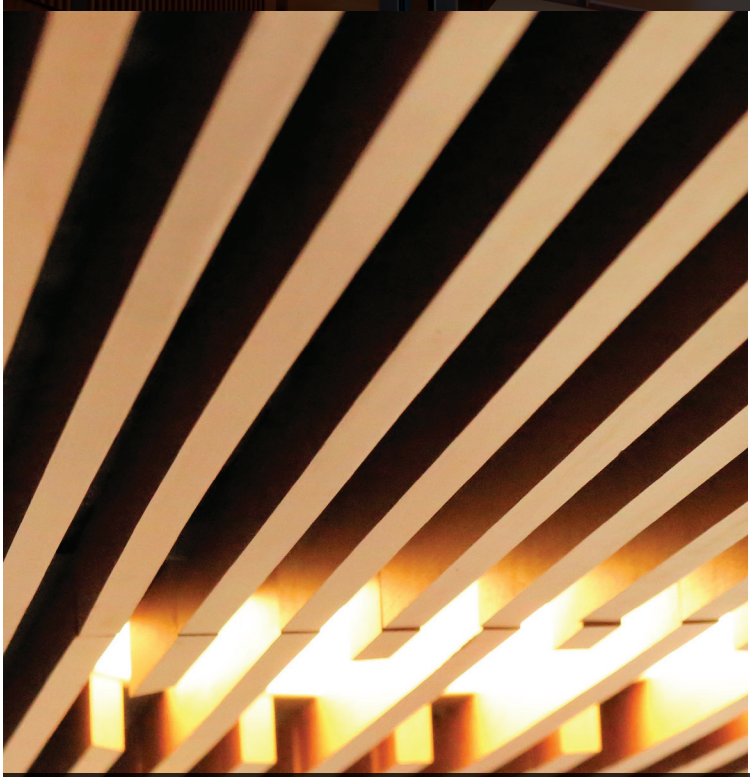
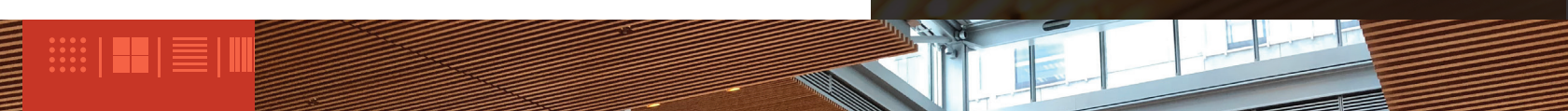
The 18,075 sq. ft. of wood grille ceilings are found on multiple levels. They line up with the wall systems installed by a millwork contractor.



9Wood designed and fabricated 72 special wood grille access panels to cover two kinds of circular light fixtures in the space. The access panels float seamlessly overhead.



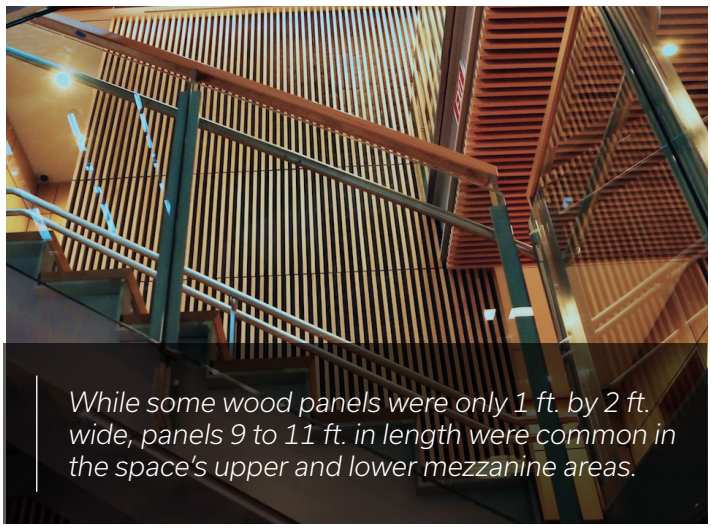
"Our work involved custom cuts," Allan says. "The architect didn't want to see air diffusers. They wanted to see just the wood, so we had to attach pieces of wood which we cut in the field at angles."

Actually, the architect had specified no cutting of the wood grille members at all. This challenging requirement, however, was difficult to follow in practice. So, the subcontractor maintained strong lines of communication with the general contractor and made sure to exercise care and precision in its work.

Street visible. To fulfill the architect's wishes, 9Wood and Allan Construction constructed a 10 ft. by 10 ft., full-scale mockup of the wood grille ceilings. This showed the architect how the wood ceiling panels would line up with the wood walls. The mockup was approved.

Today, the architect is happy with the results. "Precise alignments from wall to ceiling with immaculate detailing at every opening reinforces the main gathering space and is visible from the adjacent street," says Henry Mossat of Bruner/Cott Architects.

"It was the most complicated wood job we've ever done," Allan says. "It was difficult to make it beautiful. But, we made it happen."



While some wood panels were only 1 ft. by 2 ft. wide, panels 9 to 11 ft. in length were common in the space's upper and lower mezzanine areas.

Being a high-profile building, the architects required a high level of craftsmanship to match the prestige of Harvard University and please its donors.

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