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Pennsylvania sandstone cultures student learning environment

A special blend of Russell Stone Products' sandstone varieties was supplied for the new landscape design at Pennsylvania State University's Brandywine campus in Media, PA

by **Jennifer Richinelli**

An outdoor revitalization project recently was completed at Pennsylvania State University's Brandywine campus in Media, PA – featuring architectural elements fabricated from regional sandstone supplied by Russell Stone Products of Grampian, PA.

With 24 campuses throughout Pennsylvania, as well as its online World Campus, Pennsylvania State University's (PSU) total enrollment during the 2015-2016 school year totaled approximately 97,500. The annual enrollment at its University

Park campus, which is located in State College, PA, registered at more than 46,800 graduate and undergraduate students alone — making PSU one of the largest universities in the U.S. School administrators are devoted to not only maintaining a high level of education at all of its



campuses, but to also create a social and nurturing learning environment through its landscape architecture.

Most recently, an outdoor design was completed at PSU's Brandywine campus in Media, PA. Derek L. Kalp PLA/ASLA/EFP, lead designer for PSU,

explained the design objective was to create a more attractive, functional and engaging landscape for students, staff and faculty. "A fountain became a focal element and landmark at the intersection of six pathways, including one to the entrance of the busy campus

commons building," he said. "Broadly speaking, the focus of Campus Planning + Design with the Office of Physical Plant, which is PSU's facility group, has been to promote the same high-quality landscape amenities at Penn State's Commonwealth campuses



At the heart of the landscape design is a carved sandstone fountain, designed by Robert Wertz of Igneous Rock Gallery, stationed at the intersection of six pathways. (Above) The stone supplied for the project is a combination of Bloom Run and Roaring Run color schemes — a blend used for all of PSU's landscape architecture. (Below)





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as we have developed at the University Park campus in State College.”

Kalp went on to say the 1960-70s-era architecture of the campus was not inspiring and was expensive to modify. As a result, the focus was placed on upgrading the entrances to the buildings with landscapes that promote gathering, socializing and learning in a more positive, uplifting and humane setting. Sandstone, which was quarried in the region by Russell Stone Products of Grampian, PA, was a primary material in the landscape design.

“This project was the third of three separate projects that upgraded building entranceways that all share a common central greenspace,” said the landscape architect. “The previous two projects also used stone, modern furniture and other landscape elements in both functional and sculptural ways, so the stone fountain with benches became a grand finale, if you will.”

According to Kalp, he is an advocate when it comes to incorporating natural stone in his work. “I have developed a reputation, and I’m frequently teased about my obsession with using natural stone in nearly all of my projects at both Penn State and in my private practice,” he said. “I believe in using

locally sourced materials from both a sustainability perspective and to support our local economy. Plus, I believe local stone, in particular, captures the unique character of a place.”

Dave Curulla of Russell Stone Products explained a specific blend of stone, which is a combination of the company’s Bloom Run and Roaring Run color schemes, is supplied for PSU projects. “The stone used was from our main quarry, which is located outside of Curwensville, PA,” he said. “It is sandstone, and its natural structure and color make it ideal for almost any project.”

A team effort

The stone supplier collaborated with Kalp on the selection of the stone, as it varies at the quarry, to ensure the supplied material would fit the specific dimension and color needs of the project. Once the selections were made, it took approximately 10 weeks from the time the stone was quarried until it was ready for shipment.

“Working with Russell Stone is always a thoughtful and collaborative process,” said Kalp. “As a designer, I’ve come to understand the properties of their stone and what is possible

in the fabrication process, which seems almost limitless now. Better yet, they quickly understood our needs and the look that we were trying to achieve and then provided input that helped guide the detailed design process. For example, the finish and proportions of the stone seating needed to be friendly to the touch so the tops were sawn and corners eased without losing the rugged beauty of the stone. Another key detail was the cutting and fitting of the benches to create a unique, interlocking radial pattern. Finally, the fountain, which was designed by Robert Wertz of Igneous Rock Gallery, required the artist to hand select the boulders and create a mockup at the quarry with Russell Stone supporting the effort at each step in the process.”

As the lead designer, Kalp prepared the schematic design drawings and then worked with Derck & Edson Landscape Architects, who prepared the construction drawings. “I was involved in finalizing the stone detailing and also working with Robert Wertz to select and position the standing stones in the mock-up of the fountain,” he said.

According to Curulla, the stone pieces range in size — anywhere from





To create the desired aesthetic, the material was first sawn and then split. Next it was rock-faced and hand chiseled in some instances. The drill marked pieces were drilled, split and then hand pitched to achieve the specific look.

30 x 30 inches and varied 5 to 8 feet in length. "The material was sawn and then split," he said. "It was then rock-faced and hand chiseled in some instances. The drill marked material was drilled, split and then hand pitched to achieve the specific look.

"Visits and discussions were held during the process to obtain the detail that Derek was trying to achieve," Curulla went on to explain. "Finishes, proportions and all details were reviewed on an ongoing basis as the project took place."

The teamwork between the landscape architect and stone supplier achieved a finished design that in every detail portrays the natural features that give the project the look that it has always been there. Kalp explained that care was taken to create a centerpiece to the intersection of the six walkways so it did not appear as a "large featureless chunk of pavement." The feature needed to work like a pedestrian roundabout. "However, instead of just passing through, the stone benches and fountain give you a reason to linger," he said.

From schematic design through construction, the landscape design project at PSU's Brandywine campus was completed in about a year and a half. "The initial response from my Brandywine colleagues has been very positive," said Kalp. "I received an email from one of the campus administrators not long after the project completion. It read: 'Hi Derek. I'm on campus this morning for an event, and I'm stationed near our fountain. It really is beautiful, and the seating around it is very inviting. Passersby have had nothing but good things to say about it. Just thought I'd let you know.'" □

**Pennsylvania State University
Brandywine Campus
Media, PA**

Pennsylvania State University Lead Landscape Architect: PA.

Derek L. Kalp PLA/ASLA/EFP (design)

Landscape Architect: Derck & Edson Landscape Architects (construction drawings)

Sculptor: Robert Wertz, Igneous Rock Gallery, Mechanicsburg, PA (fountain)

Stone Supplier: Russell Stone Products, Grampian, PA