

“We shape our
buildings, and
afterwards
our buildings
shape us.”

—Winston Churchill



BUILDING OUR FUTURE

A CONVERSATION WITH LELAND COTT, FOUNDING PRINCIPAL,
BRUNER/COTT & ASSOCIATES, INC.

In addition to the various curricular and programmatic changes taking place within the law tower, BU Law is building—quite literally—for the future just next door. The Sumner M. Redstone Building symbolizes the School of Law’s strong commitment to the “Thinking Forward” mentality: the facility, once complete, will offer the long-desired physical space that matches the caliber of the BU Law experience and allows for future development as legal education continues to evolve.

Every square foot of the Sumner M. Redstone Building embodies BU Law’s commitment to providing an exceptional modern legal education—from the 4,000-square-foot, glass-enclosed atrium down to the student-tested chairs filling each classroom. That’s because Leland Cott and his team from leading Cambridge-based architectural firm Bruner/Cott & Associates understand that educational spaces must facilitate learning and collaboration in every nook and cranny.

“We know that a good deal of learning and interaction takes place in locales apart from the physical classroom,” says Cott. “In the Redstone Building, we have designed a series of places that allow for the creation of community—and for that community to gather and learn.”

Working on college campuses since 1984, Cott and his firm have amassed an impressive portfolio of iconic buildings for the country’s top universities, including Harvard’s Briggs Athletic Center, MIT’s Sloan School of Management, and BU’s own Center for Student Services. He is also an expert in rehabilitating mid-twentieth-century buildings—including those of Josep Lluís Sert, the law tower’s original architect, who was dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Design while Cott was a

student there. The law school approached Cott in 2008, hoping his expertise could guide the effort to improve the School’s challenging facilities.

“The law tower had problems from the beginning, in spite of Josep Lluís Sert’s genius,” says Cott. “This project was a leap of faith because few people believed that a restoration of this magnitude was really possible. But BU had the wisdom to see that this building could be brought back to life.”

Cott’s team produced the 100-plus-page Preservation & Development Plan, which became the basis for a proposed renovation and addition to the School of Law. In 2011, BU asked Bruner/Cott to begin work. By collaborating closely with the administration and faculty to address the School’s greatest needs, they have masterminded an ingeniously custom, state-of-the-art facility that will not only serve but enhance the experience of each student, faculty, and staff member in the Boston University School of Law community.

“The law school will think of itself in a different sort of way as a result of this project,” says Cott. “It is a building that will raise the bar and redefine the way that law is taught at the University.”

To illustrate how every aspect of the Redstone Building will function to facilitate modern legal education, *The Record* asked Cott to walk us through its most important spaces.



A special German limestone will make up the Redstone Building's façade, which will better withstand the extremes of Boston's climate.

First and foremost, will we still have to wait in line for the elevators?

COTT: Of all the people I spoke with from the law school, every one has bad memories of those elevators! Their capacity is clearly insufficient. We've made all of the student spaces easily accessible by foot. Or if you want to use an elevator, we've included two larger, faster models, more in keeping with the twenty-first century, in the new portion of the building. And we do plan to fix the tower's elevators, as well as replace almost everything—from its mechanical systems to windows.

So no more traffic jams?

COTT: A building can't keep getting in your way every day—it should enhance your experience. So we've carefully choreographed how to move students through the facility throughout the day in ways that are spatially economical. For example, we've minimized congestion by spreading out the lockers to the first, third, and fourth floors, so you'll never start your day with everyone in one place. And students can easily get from one session to another since six of the main classrooms are now in the same area within one floor of each other. Just walk right up a flight of stairs; it's this kind of vertical continuity that makes it easiest to have a lot of people in the building.

Speaking of the classrooms, how are these an improvement on the current spaces?

COTT: We will have a total of 25 classrooms, ranging from 30 to 125 seats. The designs we're doing are state-of-the-art,

THE DESIGN GOALS OF THE REDSTONE BUILDING

1. **INSTRUCTION**—Provide quality instructional space supported by well-designed classrooms, outfitted with appropriate technology.
2. **COMMUNITY**—Encourage and support a sense of community for students, faculty, and staff.
3. **COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH**—Increase the availability of study, research, and collaborative learning spaces both inside and outside the library.
4. **PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE**—Support the development of new and existing professional practice program offerings.
5. **WORKPLACE**—Improve indoor air quality and environmental and acoustical comfort for faculty and staff.

with good ventilation and comfort in terms of seating, which is really important for students who need to be alert and learning. We have improved sightlines and utilized vestibules to contain noise. An acoustician consulted with us on the most modern standards to address hearing issues. And of course in terms of audio/visual technology, we've used the most up-to-date equipment available.

And how do you plan for classrooms that can continue to keep up with rapidly changing technology?

COTT: Two ways: One has to do with infrastructure, what is behind the walls. There we've installed state-of-the-art wiring that will be good for many years to come. The second is the A/V equipment can be switched out over time because of changes due to new technologies.

One of our most pressing needs was new facilities to support clinical, transactional, and professional training programs. How do these spaces fit into your design?

COTT: The fifth floor of the Redstone Building is very special—it's all about transactional law and executive education. Here we have three different kinds of spaces tuned to the specific pedagogies of the various programs.

On the north side are professional training spaces—seminar rooms for 35–45 people, breakout rooms that seat a dozen or so, and a multipurpose room with a cantilever balcony over-

looking the Charles River that can be used ceremonially or for larger gatherings. These spaces will be very open with comfortable seating, since people will spend eight hours a day here.

In the middle are the Transactional Law Program seminar rooms, devoted to students who are learning about contracts and practicum-type things. There are also two practice trial courtrooms that have been designed and furnished exactly in accordance with faculty requests. And the Writing Program will be on this floor as well.

One of the project's goals is to enhance community. How can the Redstone Building do that?

COTT: Unless you provide spaces for gathering in a building, you cannot achieve community, really. So we wanted to create many opportunities for conversations and interactions—not necessarily directing that those should happen here or there, but providing places where opportunities can be taken and not lost. The Winter Garden and the second-floor student gathering area are two such places.

What is the Winter Garden?

COTT: The Winter Garden is a new kind of space for Boston University—it's almost 4,000 square feet right on the first floor, a beautiful inside space with a 30+-foot ceiling. It is intended to be a living room for the entire BU campus. This space sits in a highly trafficked area and invites others from around the University to interact with and pay attention to what is going on in the law school. As I, and my team, began to conceive this idea, I imagined a couple of undergraduates stopping and being turned on to a career in law—or architecture—because of what they saw going on in the building. When future alumni think back on their law school experience, what space is going to pop into their minds? It's going to be the Winter Garden and other community spaces, as well as the state-of-the-art classrooms.

And the second-floor student gathering area?

COTT: This is where everyone will be at some time during the course of the day. It is also a 4,000-square-foot space, with moveable partitions that can be used to create three separate areas. I can imagine parties overlooking the river happening here, or a lunch seminar if you pull one of the partitions closed to make a semiprivate room. There will be seating along the wall and looking over the river—some is lounge seating, some for eating purposes. Since there has been no real place for gathering, people have traditionally left the building for meals. But now this space will keep people here, continuing to build that sense of community.

Will there be a dining facility in the new building?

COTT: It will not be a full-service cafeteria but a grab-and-go facility. We worked on this with the food service people at BU, and it is what they suggested. But it's going to be much better than the first-floor café that currently exists. There will be many different possibilities—bar stools, lounge seating, and places to eat and study.

Can you describe the extension of the Pappas Law Library?

COTT: Libraries on campuses are going through many changes right now, and very few are expanding. What differentiated the space here was that “law libraries” were happening in three places: Pappas, the tower, and the basement of Mugar. So we consolidated everything into one big horizontal space on the third floor and made it better serve students in terms of study spaces with lounges and carrels. And it also gives the School the highest degree of flexibility as libraries continue to change. It is a library for today and tomorrow. Pappas will be partially renovated as well.

Why are we bothering to keep the tower if it has been laden with problems since its construction?

COTT: First, removing it would be difficult to do—the building has a certain degree of landmark status. But most importantly, we're going to have an excellent faculty office building when it's done, with great views of the Charles River Basin, Boston, and Cambridge. No law school is building offices for their faculty like this! And we're going to fix all of the leaks and ventilation issues and make it a modern, state-of-the-art facility to match the multi-classroom addition at its base.

Overall, how does this project better serve and enhance the BU Law experience?

COTT: The layout of the building and the way that it relates to the existing tower bring the student spaces into the same environment, all accessible by foot on the first five floors. You have everything under one roof now, which promotes an intensity and community that is quite spectacular. And the tower, with the repairs and upgrades that we are doing, will be a much better building than it has ever been.

It sounds like a lot of work. How has your team handled such a massive project?

COTT: It has been a multidimensional effort, tens of thousands of hours, with three teams—architectural design, preservation, and interior design and programming—working in unison to get this effort moving forward. At its largest, we have had up to 20 people devoted to the project, carefully considering everything from how to integrate the new building with the existing one to whether the classroom chairs should be fixed to the floor. But I must say, with our work on new buildings lately and our history of restoring twentieth-century buildings, this was the right project for us, and a great time for me because it brings together everything that I have been doing over the course of my career. ■

Leland Cott, FAIA, LEED, has over forty years of experience in architecture and urban design with an expertise in buildings for educational use and an interest in the rehabilitation of mid-twentieth-century modern buildings. He was an adjunct professor of urban design at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design for 17 years. He is former president of the Boston Society of Architects, and a fellow in the American Institute of Architects. Cott holds a Master of Architecture in Urban Design from Harvard University and a Bachelor of Architecture from Pratt Institute.