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Wausau Curtainwall Provides “L-Worthy” Acoustical Performance for Koolhaas-Designed IIT Center

Wausau, Wis. – Thanks in part to Wausau Window and Wall Systems® high-performance SuperWall and sliding glass doors, the Illinois Institute of Technology McCormick Tribune Campus Center opened in September 2003 prepared to withstand the extreme vibration of Chicago’s elevated train that thunders through the building.

Working closely with glazing contractor Huron Valley Glass of Ypsilanti, Mich., Wausau used 15,000-square-foot of double-paned soundproofing exterior glass units to engineer and manufacture a glazing system capable of withstanding the “L’s” 110-decibel levels.

In addition to contributing to the building’s excellent acoustical performance, the Center’s award-winning design relies heavily on a glass exterior including an orange honeycomb panelite infill that wraps around the west and north side of the structure. The floor-to-ceiling panes bring warmth to the interior and allow for plenty of natural light to flow into the building.

“Oversized glass lights, high-spans and optimum acoustic performances were accomplished by using a combination of Wausau’s deep SuperWall framing members plus oversized 5100 Series patio doors,” explains Wausau’s Chicagoland sales representative Patrick Duffy.

Wausau’s flexible SuperWall Series was provided in system depths ranging from 7 1/4" to 11 3/4" to address the varying span/load conditions of the unique facade design. The SuperWall supports oversized lites of art glass, many of which were peppered with a pattern of small silk-screened icons visible only from close-up. Wausau’s applications engineering expertise was put to the test in accurately dimensioning and laying out the walls’ intricate geometry and infills for the Huron Valley Glass installation crew.

Envisioned by Pritzker Prize-winning Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture along with Holabird & Root, the project plan won the Richard H. Dreihaus Foundation International Design Competition in 1998. The \$48.2 million, 110,000-square-foot-structure is a tribute to the late architect, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe who served as the director of the University’s architecture department and designed several of the campus’ existing buildings during the 1950s and 1960s.

Differing from these neighboring, neutral-toned, sharp-angled buildings, Koolhaas’ modern interpretation embraces colorful, flowing design. The main entrance to the Center features a 20-foot glazed image of Mies van der Rohe’s face looking out at the buildings he designed more than 50 years ago. A large glass wall with an orange inner layer, dubbed the ‘Mies Wrap’, continues along the north and west elevations of the building.

As Koolhaas’ first completed project in the United States, the Center unites the architectural vision of two European masters, celebrating their differences between classic and contemporary, and solidifying them on one U.S. campus. One of the first new construction projects on campus in 40 years, the structure emerges from what was once a barren, unused space between the campus residential east side and academic west side.

The building encapsulates the elevated train tracks that divide the campus within an enormous tube clad in corrugated stainless steel panels. The structural design and choice of materials address the acoustical considerations, helping reduce the outside noise level of 110-decibels to an inside level of less than 70-decibels.

The single-story building appears to be squeezed beneath the suspended “L” train track. Underneath, a contemporary layered interior is designed as a structural grid with exposed steel-members and piers supporting the tracks and the tube. Inspired by Koolhaas’ observation of the paths students took as they crossed the vacant site, the layout preserves these shortcuts incorporates “programmatic islands” of interior space. Spaces within this expansive interior include the University Club dining area, welcome center, conference rooms, café, lounge, convenience store and a hanging glass garden suspended overhead that draws light into the building.

Nationally recognized for its innovative expertise, Wausau Window and Wall Systems is an industry leader in engineering window and curtainwall systems for commercial and institutional construction applications. For 50 years, Wausau has worked closely with architects, building owners and contractors to realize their vision for aesthetic beauty and lasting value, while striving to maintain the highest level of customer service, communication and overall satisfaction.

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