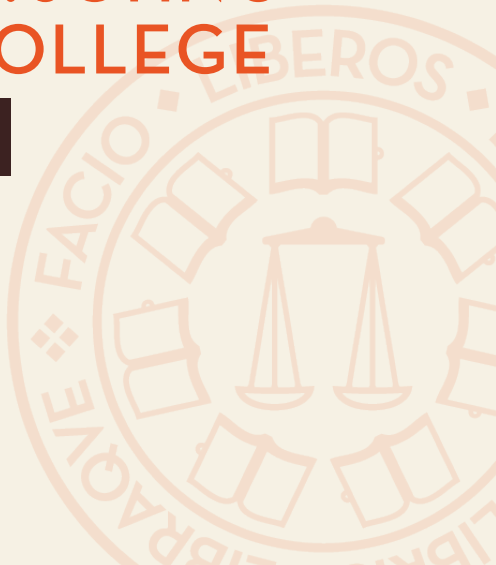


ALEXANDER  
GIRARD  
AND

ST. JOHN'S  
COLLEGE





## HISTORY OF THE SANTA FE CAMPUS OF ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE



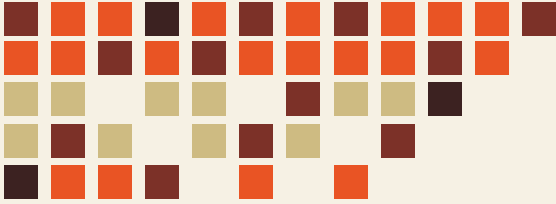
JOHN GAW MEEM  
AND COLLEGE  
PRESIDENT RICHARD  
WEIGLE LOOKING  
OVER THE LAND  
DONATED FOR  
ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE  
IN SANTA FE.

St. John's College, founded as King William's School in Annapolis, Maryland in 1696, is the third oldest college in the United States after Harvard and the College of William and Mary. A coeducational liberal arts college with no religious affiliation, St. John's in 1937 instituted a program of study recognized in the eight decades since for both its radicality and its traditionalism: an all-required curriculum devoted entirely to the reading and discussion of the core foundational texts of Western civilization. This curriculum—four years of twice-weekly seminars (literature, philosophy, political science, and religion), four years of



language (Ancient Greek and French), four years of mathematics, three years of laboratory science, and one year of music—continues unchanged to this day. Due to its singularly demanding reading list and approach (approximately 200 primary works spanning 3,000 years of Western thought), the St. John's College Program is widely held to be the most rigorous undergraduate education in America.

In 1960, faced with increasing numbers of applications for admission to its Annapolis campus, the College made a second radical decision. Rather than expand the original campus to accommodate greater numbers of students and thereby sacrifice the sense of community this College seeks to foster, it elected instead to open a second campus in a new location, with the very same curriculum. The ensuing search for the most suitable location brought invitations from 30 different cities and communities around the country. In the end, Santa Fe easily won for its welcoming environment and its long and rich literary, artistic, and cultural tradition. The Santa Fe campus of St. John's College opened in the fall of 1964 on land donated primarily by John Gaw Meem, a local architect revered



both then and now for his influential Pueblo Revival style and his work towards preserving the distinctively traditional architectural character of Santa Fe's Downtown Historic District. Although Meem was at this point retired and did not himself design the St. John's College campus buildings, he exercised considerable influence over the original construction.

This included recruiting California landscape architect Garrett Eckbo to be the campus's landscape designer. It also included bringing in Alexander Girard to serve as the interior designer.



A VIEW OF THE DINING HALL WITH THE TABLES AND ONE OF THE CHANDELIERS THAT GIRARD DESIGNED.



## ALEXANDER GIRARD'S WORK AT ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE



At the time of the St. John's College campus's construction (1962-1964), Girard was in his fifties and at the very height of his renown and productivity as a fabric, textile, furniture, interior, and industrial designer. In the 1950s he and his wife Susan had fallen in love with the Southwest and purchased a home in Santa Fe, from which he continued his work for iconic American home furnishings company Herman Miller and his many other clients. In 1961 Girard had just completed his high-profile design of the La Fonda del Sol restaurant in New York's Time-Life Building. He was also working, concurrently with the St. John's campus project, on a 180' x 8' keynote mural for the Eero Saarinen-designed John Deere and Company headquarters in Moline, Illinois (1964). And, very soon thereafter (1965), he was to begin his famed design work for Braniff Airlines, which included wholesale logo and palette redesign of everything from the ticket counters and the flight attendant uniforms to the colors of the very planes themselves.

Girard's assignment at St. John's College was to design the interior of the Peterson Student Center, the campus's central and most frequented building. This included a cafeteria, coffee shop, bookstore, auditorium, art gallery, hallways, and various meeting spaces. The Girard-designed Student Center interior ultimately combined many of the trademark threads of Girard's work: furniture design, murals, bright colors, and a distinctively whimsical playfulness. The president of St. John's College at the time, Richard Weigle, described Girard's work in the Student Center as follows:

*Simplicity of design was the keynote. The effects achieved in the student center were most pleasing. Square bricks were used to advantage in certain walls and simple vertical paneling in others. Chandeliers were imaginatively designed for the dining hall. Most of the furniture, executive and student desks, dining room and coffee shop tables, and common room furniture, were designed by Girard and constructed locally. Use of laminated wood block tops throughout resulted in significant economies and produced a harmony of appearance. Walls were painted white, except for bright colors here and there. On the first floor of the student center a door, a fire extinguisher, and a register were hidden by the way the wall was painted into sections, each part filled by some appropriate educational symbol, such as the Mendelian inheritance formula, Shakespeare's signature, Einstein's famous formula, an Egyptian eye, and the like. Paneled doors were painted in bright colors so that they added life to the interiors. All of this Girard accomplished well within the budget that had been given him. (The Colonization of a College, 1985)*



## VIEWING GIRARD'S WORK AT ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE



The Peterson Student Center of St. John's College is open to the public seven days a week. Please feel free to wander the halls of the Student Center, visit the campus Coffee Shop and Bookstore, and see Alexander Girard's legacy at St. John's College first-hand. Visitor parking is available free of charge in the first lot to the left as you enter the campus off Camino Cruz Blanca (a three-minute drive or one bus stop away from Museum Hill). A one-minute walk from the visitor parking lot will bring you to the campus's central Placita. As you ascend the steps to the Placita and the Fish Pond, Peterson Student Center will be the large building with three sets of doors on your right. Among the items to look for as you tour the building:



## IN THE ENTRANCE LOBBY



ON YOUR RIGHT as you enter, note Girard's hallmark mural of 36 symbols illustrating the liberal arts at the heart of the St. John's College curriculum. A printed key to the symbols in this mural is available in the wall slot just ahead to the left, past the stairway and across from the Bookstore entrance.



ON YOUR LEFT, near the mailboxes, note the low Girard-designed benches which you will find in numerous other locations throughout the building.





ON YOUR LEFT, note the Girard-designed telephone pole painted above the aluminum doors of the pay phones. The Greek translates as “Telephone.”



**As you continue down the hallway beyond the mural:**



ON YOUR RIGHT, just past the Campus Bookstore, you will pass the entrance to the Campus Coffee Shop. Inside the Coffee Shop, note the Girard-designed tables and also Girard’s distinctive brick tilework, variations of which appear in other Girard-designed interiors, such as The Compound, a Santa Fe restaurant, and the Unitarian Church in Albuquerque.





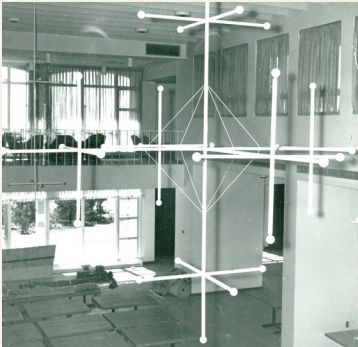
ON YOUR RIGHT, note the blank rectangular spaces continuing down the hallway. Originally, these spaces were slated to be filled with more symbolic renderings of the various elements and texts of the St. John's academic program. While the College archives retains a list of the symbols Girard had proposed for the rest of these empty spaces, this continuation of the mural was never completed.



ON YOUR RIGHT, note the brightly-colored Girard-designed doors, variations of which appear throughout both floors of the building.



AT THE FAR END of the hallway is the entrance to the Campus Dining Hall. If these doors are open, note more Girard-designed tables and Girard's distinctive tubular chandelier design.





## UPSTAIRS

AT EITHER END of the first floor of Peterson Student Center are stairways leading to the second floor. Feel free to wander through the upstairs hallways and any open rooms to find more Girard benches and painted doors.



ALSO UPSTAIRS is the St. John's College Art Gallery which will feature a display of St. John's Girard-related holdings, including a selection of Girard's original hand-colored sketches for the Peterson door designs, as well as various archival photos and other items. This exhibit will run through October 27, 2019 as a companion exhibit to the Museum of International Folk Art's extensive Girard exhibition.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION REGARDING THE ST. JOHN'S DISPLAY, please go to [sjc.edu/girard](http://sjc.edu/girard).**



PLEASE  
VISIT

**Museum of International Folk Art  
*Alexander Girard: A Designer's Universe*  
May 5 – October 27, 2019**



ST JOHN'S  
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