

times at the Institute

Institute for Advanced Study

Designing Spontaneity at IAS

It is nearly impossible to imagine life at the Institute without our dining hall, with IAS scholars circulating and conversing within its storied structure surrounded by light and birch trees. Yet, scholars once crowded into a space on the upper level of Fuld Hall. By 1969, when lengthy conversations were no longer possible in the original, cramped cafeteria, IAS Director (1966–76) Carl Kaysen observed, “The point is not trivial: brash new ideas can be exposed in leisurely luncheon encounters that are too ill-formed to be offered in the seminar room, much less on paper.”

Kaysen sought out architect Robert Geddes to design West Building and the dining hall. Upon completion, Geddes observed that “buildings can divide and bring people together; milieus are created that enable public or private activities. A milieu in this sense is characterized by its ‘possibilities for social life.’ A planned milieu should recognize that it serves a purpose in human communications, that it creates expectations, guides behavior, disappoints or satisfies.” In his design for West Building and the dining hall, Geddes provided a milieu for the institution as a whole.

Geddes used glass extensively, created a green enclosure (known informally as the birch garden), and added solitary spaces ranging from small seminar rooms to lecture halls. In 1976, Kaysen observed, “the dining hall, two stories high and clerestory lit, with its lounges, board room, and garden, has contributed a great deal towards enlarging and humanizing the non-academic life of the Institute. New activities, to counter the tendency towards isolation felt by some members, arise almost spontaneously in its



Lunch in Simons Hall

setting.” Renamed the Marilyn and James Simons Hall in 2012, the dining hall continues to serve as a social hub and idea incubator, and Geddes, with his wife Evelyn, remain closely connected to the Institute as Friends.

The Institute community is invited to attend a lecture, “**Make it New, Make it Fit,**” by Geddes at 10:00 a.m. on **Saturday, April 5**, in the **Dilworth Room**, followed by a tour of West Building and Simons Hall. Participants are invited to bring or purchase lunch on campus and continue conversation in the coffee lounge after the tour. Reservations are required and may be obtained by emailing Susan Olson at eventsymp@ias.edu.