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Views of the Alumni House:  
(this page) the refreshed and  
repainted stairway leading to  
the second floor guest rooms;  
(facing page) a peek into the  
parlor, which has a new coat of  
paint and new furniture.

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# ALUMNI HOUSE



BY ELIZABETH FOY LARSEN → PHOTOS BY CRAIG BARES

Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter slept here. So too have scores of famous authors, visiting scholars, prospective faculty, and first-year parents clutching damp Kleenex. Welcome to the Hugh S. Alexander Alumni House, a Georgian brick colonial located at 1644 Summit Avenue.





More than just a bed and breakfast, Alumni House is a gathering place where members of the Macalester community can host anything from a student association meeting to a wedding. It also sets the tone for guests' first visits to campus. "The Alumni House is the front door to the college for many people," says David Wheaton, vice president for administration and finance.

The impressive yet comfortable house was originally built to be the home of the college's president. The land was donated to the college in 1925 and the land and house were the gift of Macalester trustee George Draper Dayton—founder of the Dayton's department store empire—and his wife, Emma Willard Chadwick Dayton. It became the Alumni House in 1984. (The original Hugh S. Alexander Alumni House—named after a geology professor who was also an 1899 graduate—was on the corner of Lincoln and Macalester.)

Although the Alumni House staff has always provided a warm welcome, the home's faded interior was no longer giving the best first impression of the school. "It really needed some freshening up," says Mary Kay Briggs, manager of both the Alumni House and the President's House, located across Summit Avenue.

The college's Board of Trustees agreed. When three anonymous trustees donated money to update the guest rooms and baths, the college was able to dedicate some additional deferred maintenance funds to cover a new electrical system, sunroom roof, and other structural improvements.

When it came time to choose an architect to spearhead the renovations, the decision was obvious. Award-winning Twin Cities architect **David Heide '83** is not only an expert in historic renovations, but also a former Macalester student. "I remember going on walks on Summit Avenue when I was an 18-year-old and being so enamored of the homes and seeing a light fixture or a bit of a house from the outside," says Heide. "It's been a gift to be able to work on those houses now."

Heide's ultimate goal is that his work remain unnoticed by visitors. "The overarching design philosophy is that we wanted to meet



**Top to bottom:** The spacious sun porch, which opens onto the back lawn; the redone kitchen, with refinished cupboards and new countertops; the second floor Leonard Suite, perfect for families.



what guests would expect to see on the inside when they walk up to the house," he says. "The only cue that the bathrooms aren't original is that they're in such nice condition. The renovation brings the house into the future in a timeless way that won't feel dated in 20 years."

The work began immediately after Reunion 2011 and was finished in November. As the donation totals came in, what started as a second floor renovation turned into an opportunity to spruce up the entire structure. "The house had fallen behind what Macalester is about," says Heide. "It needed to be brought up to the same standards as the school's academics."

To achieve that goal, Heide used classic but well-priced materials—including subway and hexagonal tiles—to update the bathrooms. And he reconfigured the second floor, transforming an office and a small bedroom into a comfortable two-bedroom suite perfect for families. The kitchen cabinets were retained, but modified and updated. French doors were added to the living room to improve the flow of guests from there to the attached sunporch and backyard.

In addition, every room got a fresh coat of paint and new drapes were hung throughout the house. Worn-out sofas and armchairs were replaced with new pieces that are comfortable yet fitting to the house's vintage. The dining room was left largely as is, thanks to its beautiful furnishings, but is now graced by a chandelier for the first time.

The happy result feels like an intimate boutique hotel. Guests are taken care of not only by Briggs but also by a custodian and a small staff of student workers. A map in the airy kitchen—which boasts a gleaming espresso machine as well as a covered cake tray of gigantic muffins—shows where those students are from: Jamaica, New York, Belarus, Ethiopia, Tanzania, India, China. "Guests ask the students a lot of questions," says Briggs. "In the kitchen you can sit down and get to know them."

The Alumni House also acts as a home away from home for those international student workers and their friends. Briggs hosts Thanksgiving dinners and Easter events there, complete with Easter baskets and an egg hunt. Students bring food from their homelands. "The kids feel like it's their house, too," says Briggs. "We all pitch in and work together."

That the entire Macalester community has such a beautiful space for these and other gatherings is a source of pride for the staff. "I'm amazed at how wonderful the renovation turned out," says Briggs. "It's a gem of a place and a little surprise on campus." **M**



Top to bottom: The Cochrane Room; the Davis Suite bath, redone in an era-appropriate style; details from the Alumni House.



## BOOKING ALUMNI HOUSE

The Hugh S. Alexander Alumni House is open 365 days a year. There are four guest rooms, with rates ranging from \$85 for a third-floor room with shared bath to \$140 for a suite. Although rooms are available to the general public, preference is given to members of the Macalester community. The Alumni House is also available for rental as an event space. Call 651-696-6677 for reservations.