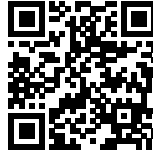




## THE HEIGHTS: CASACADE OF GREEN TERRACES

*Posted on October 31, 2019 by martabugues*



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The Heights: Cascade of Green Terraces  
<https://urbannext.net/the-heights/>

Designed by BIG-Bjarke Ingels Group and Executive Architect LEO A DALY, The Heights building opens as a cascade of green terraces fanning from a central axis, addressing the academic needs of Arlington's two county-wide school programs while forming a vertical community within its dense urban context.



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Located along Arlington's Rosslyn-Ballston corridor, The Heights merges two existing secondary schools – the H-B Woodlawn Program and the Eunice Kennedy Shriver Program – into a new 180,000sf building to accommodate an expected enrollment of up to 775 students. BIG and LEO A DALY were commissioned in 2015 and worked closely with Arlington Public Schools (APS), WRAP (West Rosslyn Area Plan) and the Arlington community to design state-of-the-art educational facilities that support both H-B Woodlawn's visual and performing arts-focused curricula and Shriver's extensive resources for students with specialized educational needs. The Heights is currently on track to achieve LEED Gold.

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#### THE HEIGHTS BUILDING SITE

The compact urban site is bounded by roads on three sides with an existing 7-11 convenience store located on the busy corner of Wilson Boulevard and North Quinn Street. Along 18th Street, the site shares a common edge with Rosslyn Highlands Park.

Situated within a compact urban site bounded by roads on three sides and a portion of Rosslyn Highlands Park, The Heights is conceived as a stack of five rectangular floorplates that rotate around a fixed pivot point, maintaining the community feeling and spatial efficiencies of a one-story school. Green terraces above each floor become an extension of the classroom, creating an indoor-outdoor learning landscape for both students and teachers – an educational oasis rather than a traditional school setting.

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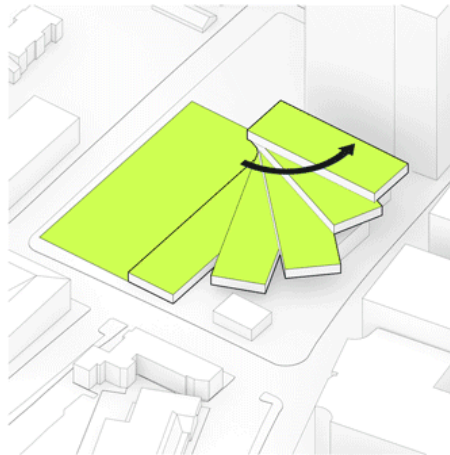
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"The density of the urban Arlington neighborhood became the inspiration for the school – we fanned the classrooms to allow each and every floor to be connected to the roof garden on top of the classrooms below. The resultant cascading terraces are connected by a curving stair that weaves through all levels – inside as well as outside – making all students, from both programs and all ages, visually and physically connected to each other. Each terrace is landscaped to lend itself not just to the social life of the students but also as informal outdoor spaces for learning." Bjarke Ingels, Founder & Creative Director, BIG.

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#### **CASCADING TERRACES**

To create green space adjacent to the classrooms, the bars are rotated around a single hinge point. This creates 4 cascading terraces leading from the instructional spaces of the school to the recreation field. The first terrace will be accessible to the public when school is not in session.

A rotating central staircase cuts through the interior of the building to connect the four-tiered terraces, allowing students to circulate outside and forge a stronger bond between the neighborhood and the school. While the upper terraces are more suitable for intimate classes and quiet study areas, the spacious first terrace and 18,700sf recreation field also serve as public event venues for school-wide and neighborhood activities.



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"The Heights extends the educational experience outdoors, transforming terraces into a space where learning and playing can flourish. From every floor, students and teachers can immediately connect with nature and the surrounding neighborhood, creating a 21st-century school as well as a space for Arlington's children, parents, teachers and neighbors to gather." Daniel Sundlin, Partner, BIG.

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From Wilson Boulevard, students, teachers and staff are greeted by a triple-height lobby with stepped seating that double as an indoor gathering space for both student assemblies and public gatherings. Many of the school's common spaces, including the 400-seat auditorium, main gymnasium, library, reception and cafeteria, are centrally located and directly adjacent to the lobby.

Easy accessibility to the community-oriented programs hosted in the school encourages public interaction throughout the building, creating a welcoming environment while heightening the visual connectivity between the shared spaces. Other specialized student spaces include an art studio, science and robotic labs, music rehearsal rooms and two performing arts theaters.

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"Underneath the canopy of fanning classrooms, a giant cave holds spaces for all the communal spaces – the theatre, the sports hall, library and canteen – creating a multitude of spaces where students can linger for fun or for study on their own or in groups. Glass walls open up views between the different activities, making it a three-dimensional composition of all aspects of learning and living in the school." Bjarke Ingels, BIG.

The classroom bars serve as the primary organizing elements, surrounding a central vertical core that contains the elevators, stairs and bathrooms. As students enter from the central staircase, they are greeted by an expanded gradient of the color spectrum: each classroom bar is defined by its own color, combining intuitive wayfinding with a vibrant social atmosphere from the ground to the sky.

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The Shriver Program providing special education for students aged 11 to 22 occupies two floors of the building accessible from the ground floor, and is outfitted with specialized spaces dedicated to supporting APS' Functional Life Skills program while providing privacy and ease of accessibility. The gymnasium, courtyard, occupational physical therapy suite and sensory cottage are designed to aid in sensory processing.

The Heights' exterior is materialized in a graceful white glazed brick to unify the five volumes and highlight the oblique angles of the fanning classroom bars, allowing the sculptural form, the energy and the activity of the inside to take center stage. In keeping the surrounding neighborhood and former Wilson School in mind, the building's material palette pays homage to the historical

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architecture of Old Town Alexandria.

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