

**Bad Design****SIMMONS HALL**

The newest dormitory on campus, Simmons Hall, is my choice of the worst design here on MIT's campus. Even though I do not live in the residence hall, I have several friends who do, and I would like to bring up several problems with Steven Holl's design for this building. One of the biggest concerns during the design phase was that the building would foster social interactions. For that reason, the "traditional" hall-style dormitory idea was not adopted; instead, a revolutionary sponge-like building was constructed.

The largest dorm on campus, Simmons combines art and engineering to create a living space for three hundred and fifty undergraduate students. It is made of concrete and steel, with more than 5,500 windows. There are ten floors inside, a dining hall, a kitchen, a meditation room, and several large student lounges. Inside, there is even a *Yin/Yang Pavilion* with a shallow pool and Zen garden.

Even with all these beneficial features, I feel that this dorm fails to make its design specifications and also was extremely costly. The concrete halls feel rather cold, and the large atriums are isolated from many of the rooms. The elevator system was deliberately designed to make it difficult to access certain parts of the dorm, again separating some of the dorm's residents from others. The sponge design creates three towers, restricting travel between the residents. In addition to all these flaws, the dorm also grossly wastes space. The large missing "chunks" could have been used as room space if a more rectangular construction had been used for the dormitory. In some of the rooms, there are blob-like concrete intrusions which serve no purpose and prevent the residents from efficiently using the space. My final complaint is that the dorm was not designed for the environment into which it was placed. The metal and concrete structure seems to be better suited for an art museum than for the city skyline, and the thermal insulation of the dorm is lacking. During the winters, the class corridor on the bottom floor must be taped shut because of the heat losses it experiences. The materials selection was poor for the environment, and the result was much more costly to the campus than was needed.

Had I been on the team that helped to design this dormitory, I would have appealed to a more traditional construction, such as that of Next House or Baker. The footprint of the dorm would have been much smaller, and more thermally appropriate materials, such as brick and insulation walls would have been used. Larger windows would have been installed, contrasting with the architects' idea to use nine small windows in each room. The dorm would have been constructed in a more rectangular fashion, and it would have been engineered to use renewable energy and rainwater to increase its cost effectiveness. Solar panels could have been installed on the large roof, and a rooftop garden could have also been created. Heat and energy efficiency as well as cost would have been my top two priorities, and I would have made sure that student input was considered during the construction process.



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