Under Wraps

Nominally, Harvard’s official color is crimson. But this summer, a lot of the place went green—with numerous sites swaddled in or fenced off by construction wrapping, Christo-style, during another busy season of renewal, renovation, and repair.

The big-ticket new construction remains the action in Allston, during the final year of work on the billion-dollar science and engineering complex, to which much of that faculty will relocate next summer. (Renovation of 114 Western Avenue, part of the same project, is concluding; it will house School of Engineering and Applied Sciences staff, classrooms, and a new childcare center.) But in toto, Harvard’s numerous lower-profile jobs probably create just as much work for architects and members of the building trades, if not more.

As contractors put the finishing touches on Lowell House—the largest House-renewal project to date—the hard, hot work of tearing into Adams House’s below-grade utilities and infrastructure, and of gutting Claverly Hall and Senior House, got under way directly across Mount Auburn Street (see harvardmag.com/adams-renewal-19). The Lowell flag and shield came down at the former Inn at Harvard, now swing housing, and Adams insignia took their place.

A year-long updating, inside and out, of Radcliffe Institute’s Schlesinger Library neared completion, yielding new exhibit spaces, a technologically spiffed-up seminar room, and other twenty-first-century enhancements.

Last year, in Harvard Yard, Massachusetts Hall underwent its own makeover, welcom-
ing a new president to refreshed offices (see page 22). But no peace in the neighborhood: beginning in June, just across the roadway entering from Johnston Gate, Harvard Hall was “taken offline.” Its mechanical systems were in dumpsters within days, the first step toward a wholesale redoing of the teaching spaces within, and restoration of the masonry and cupola. Classes will resume by January, at the start of what is (laughably) called “spring” semester.

Notable high-altitude nips and tucks administered during the long-daylight months included redoing the roof atop Sanders Theatre—the first phase of an ambitious reroofing of the entire Memorial Hall, after 140-plus years of service by the original slates; tweaking the subroofing ‘neath the Sever tiles, and touching up some stonework and tiles themselves; fixing part of the Carpenter Center roof (do you detect a theme?) and installing ventilation for new, laser-cutting equipment being brought online for the cutting-edge artists; and forging ahead on replacing the biological laboratories’ massive heating, ventilating, and air-conditioning systems with more energy-efficient ones. Unaccountably, mere months after its opening (“Harvard Hubs,” November–December 2018, page 24), Smith Campus Center was scaffolded again, for reroofing—adding to intense construction, both commercial and for the MBTA’s elevator and bus tunnel, in tourist-clogged Harvard Square. (Note to sidewalk superintendents: if you missed out making millions in software, think scaffolding; somebody is billing handsomely for all those pipes and joints.) On terra firma, the Graduate School of Design invested in rewaterproofing Gund Hall’s entry plaza.

Farther afield, adjacent to Harvard Business School, a massive, multiyear renovation of the Soldiers Field Park housing complex continued apace. And to the north, in Cambridge, other faculties joined in the uproar, with two big jobs breaking ground. The Law School started to refurbish and augment its Lewis International Law Center, with a western addition and a new top floor, all scheduled for completion in mid 2021. And perhaps the largest project, relative to the size of the facilities and campus, is the wholesale reshaping of the Divinity School’s central space, including catching up on deferred maintenance, replacing internal systems, and augmenting and adding to classrooms and common spaces—all behind spiritually soothing patterned green fencing. When complete in 18 months, the 1911 building née Andover Hall will have
Year One
The Harvard community learned at least two things about Lawrence S. Bacow during his first year as the University’s twenty-ninth president: he is very much a people person, and very peripatetic. The two are connected.

During a conversation at Massachusetts Hall a couple of weeks after Commencement, Bacow said, “This was a year in which I learned a lot about Harvard.” That is saying something. He first dipped a toe into higher education in Boston by entering MIT as an undergraduate in 1969; earned three graduate and professional degrees at Harvard; had a long and increasingly senior run at MIT; and then presided at Tufts. Beginning in 2011, as a retirement activity, Bacow honed his view of the University from the top, serving as a fellow of the Harvard Corporation. Nonetheless, he said, during the past academic year he scheduled lots of time to get to know people, beginning with faculty and staff members.

Locally, he said, “[I]t was important that I get out and around so that people could get some idea of who this new president is.” Accordingly, he spoke at forums on the economy and on social enterprises at the Business School; a Kennedy School citizenship ceremony; the Radcliffe Institute’s vision and justice “convening”; a summit on gender equity; the Institute of Politics; a School of Public Health gathering; a Medical School conference celebrating an enormous gift; the Harvard Heroes staff-recognition event; and many more formal occasions. Faculty members briefed the president as he prepared for his trip to Asia, and for his presentations across the United States and in Silicon Valley (see below). He engaged spontaneously with proponents of divesting fossil-fuel investments (who aim to reverse University opposition to doing so), and with picketers supporting the graduate-students’ union (now in protracted contract negotiations; page 34). And he dropped in on lunch at Annenberg, accepted invitations to dine in the Houses, and welcomed students to join his runs around the Charles River. Of mingling with students, he said, “I hope to do a lot more next year.” Not living on campus, he noted, unlike his former arrangement at Tufts, “means that I have to work harder to engage.”

Alongside those engagements, Bacow had another travel agenda. From the announcement of his appointment in February 2018, he conveyed deep concern about rising criticisms of higher education and eroding public perceptions of the value of college. Accordingly, he traveled widely and often to address the public, showcasing Harvard scholarship in service to society. He spoke with high-school students about the worth of postsecondary education at a meeting in Pontiac, Michigan, his hometown, before appearing at an economic-development forum in Detroit—and unveiling research partnerships with the University of Michigan on opioids and urban poverty and inequality. His San Diego visit showcased a high school’s use of a HarvardX online humanities course, and the Phoenix stop highlighted the University’s partnership with Bloomberg Philanthropies.

August 28, 2018: An on-the-run president, out for a run with students
Tufts, “means that I have to work harder to engage.”

In town and farther afield, Bacow invested heavily in meeting “some of our best supporters, our alumni, around the country and around the world.” And how. After an initial alumni gathering in Detroit, he appeared in New York, San Diego, Miami, Phoenix, Houston, and Chicago. He broke bread with the Varsity Club and had a pre-Game reception in Boston. During the winter, he visited London on the way to the World Economic Forum in Switzerland. In March, he attended alumni events in Hong Kong and Tokyo, bracketing an official visit to Beijing (where he met with President Xi Jinping) and a stop in Shanghai. And of course he and many alumni met in Tercentenary Theatre at Commencement, where he hosted German chancellor Angela Merkel.

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The day before, Bacow conversed with immediate predecessors Drew Gilpin Faust and Derek Bok (interim 2006-2007).