BOSTON UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS, BOSTON, MA

PROJECT CASE STUDY

"Throughout this project, Wenger's attention to detail was outstanding and everything went smoothly. I think Wenger hit a home run with us."

– Walt Meissner, Dean ad interim
College of Fine Arts, Boston University

CHALLENGE

Improve practice facilities for individual musicians and small ensembles.

WENGER SOLUTION

Providing state-of-the-art modular rooms with numerous variations in size and ceiling height. Orchestrating large-scale, multi-phase installation over several months. Coordinating details and timetable with university staff, faculty and project team.

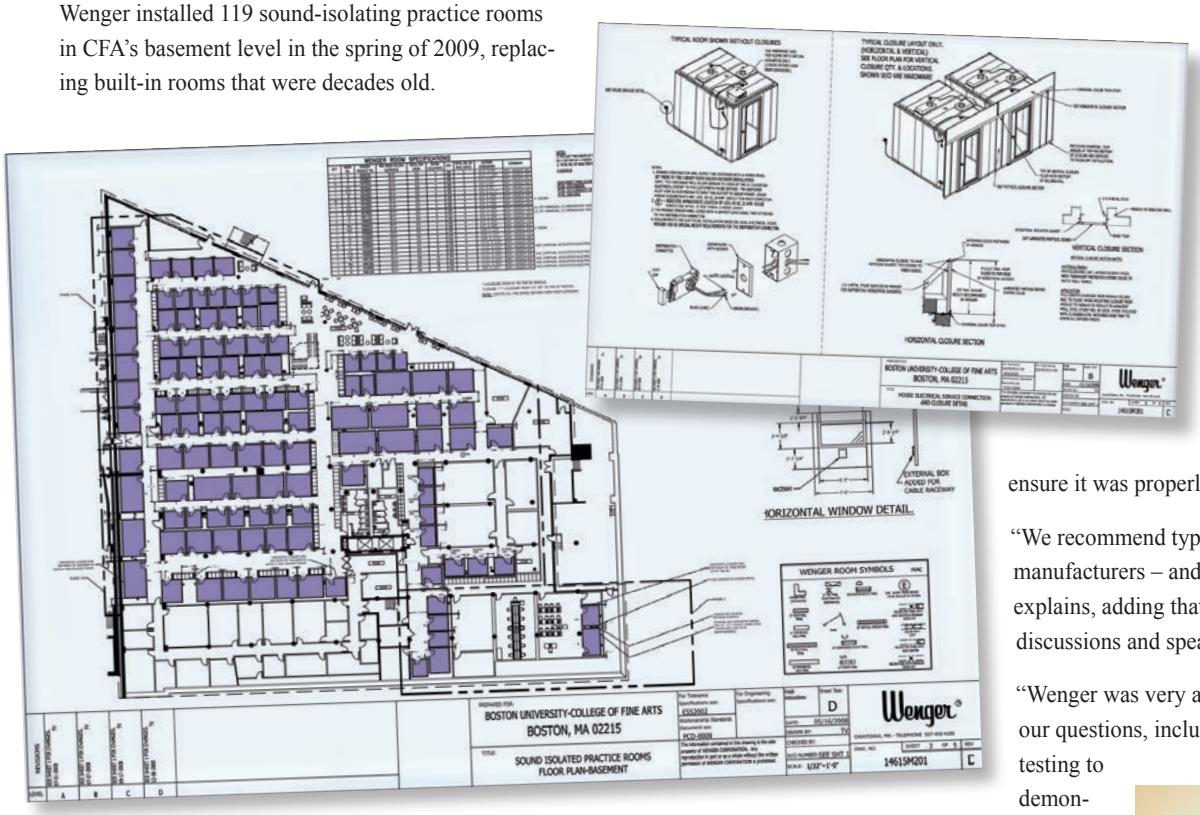
BENEFITS

- Guaranteed sound isolation minimizes distractions
- Integrated environment optimizes teaching/coaching
- Modular construction ensures future flexibility
- Revolutionary acoustical simulations aid learning
- Digital record/playback capability provides options
- Advanced ventilation system offers comfort

HIGHLIGHTS

"Our new practice room area is transforming the school – we're very excited," says Walt Meissner, dean ad interim of the College of Fine Arts (CFA) at Boston University in Boston, Mass.

Wenger installed 119 sound-isolating practice rooms in CFA's basement level in the spring of 2009, replacing built-in rooms that were decades old.



THIS BLUEPRINT SHOWS ALL 119 SOUND-ISOLATING PRACTICE ROOMS ON THE BASEMENT LEVEL OF BOSTON UNIVERSITY'S COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS.

"The previous practice rooms were terrible – they were not soundproof at all," recalls Caitlyn Perry, a graduate student in flute and music education. "We called it the dungeon down there. The rooms were either too cold or too hot."

Along with these shortcomings, Meissner says the rooms weren't used very heavily because over half of them could barely accommodate more than one person.

"A big part of our plan was creating rooms with chamber music groups and other ensembles in mind," explains Meissner, noting that even the smallest of the new practice rooms is large enough to accommodate a trio or quartet.

The footprint of the entire practice room area was increased by more than 30 percent without significantly increasing the number of rooms. One reason modular rooms were chosen instead of built-in was because they saved space, which enabled the practice rooms to be larger.

CFA engaged Acentech of Boston, Mass., as acoustical consultants for this major project. Ioana Pieleanu describes her role as translator, sifting through the technical information provided by Wenger and other firms to ensure it was properly understood.

"We recommend types of products – not specific manufacturers – and our clients decide," Pieleanu explains, adding that she also helped coordinate discussions and spearhead collaboration.

"Wenger was very accommodating in answering all our questions, including performing sound-isolation testing to demonstrate their practice rooms could meet our goals," recalls Pieleanu.

The project architect, Thomas Hains, AIA, of Wilson Butler Architects in Boston, Mass., says the schedule was demanding. "To complete this project in one school year – two semesters plus a summer – meant any deviation from the manufacturing schedule could ripple through the overall

VAE® CONTROL PANEL

WENGER PERFORMED ON-SITE ACOUSTICAL TESTING TO ENSURE ALL PRACTICE ROOMS WOULD MEET SPECIFIC SOUND-ISOLATION CRITERIA.

schedule and make the project a bust," he states.

"After careful evaluation, we were very comfortable with Wenger's ability to handle a project of this magnitude, deliver on-time and work through any problems that might arise," Hains says, adding that Boston University didn't want to take risks when it came to their students' schedules and facilities. "From the evaluation process through installation, Wenger was exceptional to work with," concludes Hains.

A number of the new practice rooms feature Virtual Acoustical Environments (VAE®) technology, which simulates the acoustical characteristics of different spaces along with providing record/playback capabilities.

"We're finding the VAE rooms are even more valuable than we thought," comments Meissner. "Eventually our goal is to install a VAE system in every room." All the rooms are wired for VAE technology so it can be added later. Funding will come from a CFA capital campaign offering donors the opportunity to name a practice room.

"Our VAE rooms are in high demand," says Meissner. "The technology makes it easier for musicians to hear and work with each other if the room is a little more live. A room that's really dead doesn't play well and is not a good practice environment."

French horn student Jonathan Craft agrees. "VAE technology improves the playing environment by making the space more resonant and supportive," he declares. "The recording technology is really useful for providing immediate feedback, either alone or with a small group."

When practice room alternatives were first considered, VAE technology was not the highest priority. "But in the end, it tipped the scales in Wenger's favor in a very, very tight bidding process," Meissner claims. "Wenger

PRACTICE ROOM WITH VAE® TECHNOLOGY

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was ahead of the curve against its competition."

"We also felt the VAE technology offered important advantages – both virtual acoustics and recording/playback," states Pieleanu of Acentech. "We encouraged Boston University to think towards the future."

Acentech considered designing a custom electronic solution, including electroacoustics and recording technology, but customer service would have been problematic. "Wenger offers the advantage of an integrated system and they service everything – whether door gasket or microphone," she explains.

Along with leading-edge technology, Meissner says Wenger also scored points for offering flexibility with the rooms' ceiling height. He wanted each room to be as high as the basement space allowed, given the overhead pipes and other obstructions that made the installation challenging.

"The additional cubic volume absolutely helps, but for me it's much more visceral than that," explains Meissner. "It's more about walking into a room that feels big." The practice rooms range in height from 8' to 10' (2.5 m to 3 m).

Hains also praises Wenger's ability to provide rooms of various sizes and heights while even accommodating changes late in the process.

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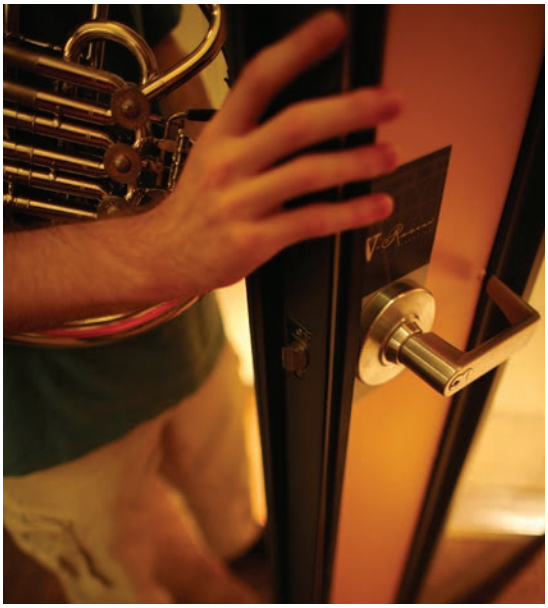

Throughout the multi-phase project, Meissner describes Wenger's attention to detail as "outstanding." He adds, "Everything went smoothly – I think Wenger hit a home run with us."

In the competition to attract music students, Meissner believes adding these new practice rooms was a necessary step. "We felt we were losing out with regards to our practice facilities," he states, adding that students deciding between two similar colleges would likely ask themselves, 'Where am I going to be spending most of my time? Will it be in a comfortable place where I can get some serious work done? Are there enough practice rooms to meet my needs?'

Concludes Meissner, "For these students making decisions, we now feel very strongly that our facilities earn us a positive check mark."

PRODUCT LIST

Sound-Isolating Practice Rooms, some incorporating Virtual Acoustical Environments (VAE®) technology.