A Walking Tour of Pewabic Pottery on the MSU Campus

In conjunction with the Kresge Art Museum exhibition, Pewabic: A Century of Michigan's Art Pottery, we present this website of Pewabic installations on the MSU campus and in the East Lansing community. Pewabic on campus ranges from the striking medieval-style lobby of North Kedzie to simpler fireplace surrounds in a number of dormitories. Also, several sculptures by artists were glazed and fired at the pottery.

Pewabic is found mainly in older buildings from the 1920s, a few from the 1940s, and several from the 1950s. From 1926 until 1940, many campus buildings were completed primarily in the Collegiate Gothic style that was popular for university and college campuses across the country. During the war years, little construction occurred but when it resumed, the prominent International style with its geometric, severe, simpler modern lines replaced the earlier historic and symbolic architecture.

In the early 1900s Mary Chase Perry (later Stratton) made many advances with glazes and pottery vessels. She also became interested in making tiles at this time, her own home being the first opportunity to apply her ideas. For her East Grand Boulevard house in Detroit, architect William B. Stratton asked Perry to create tiles for a fireplace. After making the first one by hand, a plaster mold she cast from the original was used to create the rest. Perry's handmade tiles with rounded edges and varied surfaces appealed to Stratton and others, and orders for additional fireplace tiles came in.

With these orders the Pottery began to grow. In 1901 Perry began working from a carriage house on Alfred Street. She adopted the name Pewabic Pottery in 1905, and a new studio was built in 1907, the present day location, on East Jefferson Avenue. This building includes Pewabic tile on its chimneystack, the fireplace, windowsills, and floors. Over the years the Pottery created fireplaces, floors, fountains and other architectural pieces for a variety of private and public buildings among them churches, monuments, schools, libraries, and museums in Detroit and the surrounding area, East Lansing, Ann Arbor, and elsewhere throughout the United States including the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.

Mary Chase Perry Stratton’s death in 1961 did not immediately result in the closure of the Pottery as her assistant oversaw production through 1966. Henry Lewis Caulkins, son of Pewabic's co-founder, inherited the Pottery after Mrs. Stratton’s death and began to explore the possibility of its donation to MSU. This was completed in 1965. In 1979 the private, non-profit Pewabic Society was founded and two years later MSU transferred ownership to the Society, which continues to run the Pottery today. The Pewabic Society was responsible for the restoration of the Jefferson Building and reviving the Pottery's fabrication program. Today the Pottery continues to produce work and installations for both private and public institutions. Recent downtown Detroit installations include work in the People Mover Stations, tiles that line the exterior of Comerica Park, and a large commission for CompuServe's new world headquarters.

This tour offers the online visitor a chance to see examples of the Pottery's installations in buildings at Michigan State University. The walking tour takes approximately 1½ hours.
Map of Pewabic Pottery Walking Tour

List of Sites on the Tour:
1. Kresge Art Museum
2. Alumni Memorial Chapel
3. Kedzie Hall — North
4. MSU Union
5. Cowles House
6. Landon Hall
7. Yakeley Hall
8. Williams Hall
9. Shaw Hall
1. Kresge Art Museum

Pewabic: A Century of Michigan's Art Pottery
Exhibition runs from October 22 through December 16, 2005

Over 140 examples of historic Pewabic pottery, drawn from public and private collections in Michigan, provide a unique look at Pewabic's significant place in the Arts and Crafts movement in America.

Kresge Art Museum’s collection has one large vase created by Mary Chase Perry Stratton in the 1920s. Measuring 22 inches high with a glaze inspired by Babylonian pottery, it is an excellent example of the iridescent glazes for which Pewabic became known. This vase was given to MSU President John Hannah by Henry Lewis Caulkins, son of Pewabic’s co-founder, when MSU took over the pottery in 1965.


2. Alumni Memorial Chapel

Foyer, aisle, and altar.
Visiting hours vary. The chapel is closed to the public during private events and ceremonies.

Ralph R. Calder designed the Collegiate Gothic Alumni Memorial Chapel in 1952. It was built with contributions from MSU alumni and friends as a memorial to the 500 plus MSU alumni in the armed forces who died while serving their country since 1861. Above the entrance on the building exterior is a sculpture by Leonard Jungwirth (whose sculpture inside Landon Hall is also featured on this tour). The stained glass windows are registered in the Michigan Stained Glass Census overseen by the MSU Museum. Over two-dozen stone fragments from damaged or ruined European cathedrals and a brick from the White House are embedded in the chapel walls. Today the chapel is used for special events such as religious services, christenings, weddings, and memorial services.

Unglazed Pewabic tiles cover the floor of the chapel. A brown-tan color, these 4 x 4-inch tiles were commissioned by Calder in 1950. The majority was completed in 1951; an additional 300 tiles were ordered in 1952 at a total cost of $2,756. Pewabic completed a number of commissions for churches in Detroit including the Church of the Most Holy Redeemer and the Cathedral of St. Paul.
3. Kedzie Hall North (formerly the Chemistry Building)

Malcolmson and Higgenbotham designed the Collegiate Gothic North Kedzie Hall. The inside evokes a medieval world, complete with lancet windows, oak paneling and multicolored Pewabic tiles. Originally the “Kedzie Chemical Laboratory,” the building was named after Robert Clark Kedzie who taught chemistry at MSU from 1863 to 1902.

Pewabic Pottery completed the interior and exterior tile in 1926. On the exterior stone plaques feature shields accented with multi-colored Pewabic tiles that reflect light when the sun shines on them. Nine in the upper corners are placed on top of open books while an equal number without books accent the exterior towers. Pewabic ordered the stone shields from Detroit Cast Stone in Detroit.

The finest example of Collegiate Gothic on the campus appears inside. The North Kedzie entrance two-story lobby has over 100 various colored 4 x 4 inch square Pewabic tiles on the upper concrete brick walls. The motif of shields reappears on the interior with two examples. Nine carved decorative relief friezes below each window are bordered on the sides with Pewabic tiles glazed in the blue, green, brown, and iridescences that Pewabic is most known for. Mary Chase Perry began experimenting with iridescent glazes in 1902, at the urging of Charles Freer, and by 1906 had successfully developed different colors.
4. MSU Union

The Collegiate Gothic MSU Union was originally built in 1924 by Pond and Pond. In the 1949 addition, Pewabic tile was commissioned for three fireplaces including one in the Women's Lounge and two in the basement Men's Lounge (today the Computer Center and the U-Cue Billiard Room).

The Women's Lounge fireplace is made up of various sizes of tiles. The face is lined with 8 x 8-inch tiles in a range of green, brown and blue glaze. Smaller iridescent tiles were inlaid around the edges and at the top center. Unglazed square tiles make up the hearth.

The Computer Center in the basement was originally a Men's Lounge. This fireplace has unglazed, rectangular tiles (formed by cutting a square tile diagonally) in various shades of brown and tan, arranged in a Roman Brick formation.

The U-Cue Billiard Room was also part of the Men's Lounge. This fireplace is made up of smaller square, green matte tiles accented by purchased red rectangular tiles. The hearth was made with larger square, green matte glazed tiles.

The total cost for the three fireplaces was $950. The Pewabic records also document four Pewabic tile fountains in the MSU Union.
5. Cowles House (Not open to public)

The oldest existing building on campus, Alice B. Cowles House was built in 1857 by J. J. Scott and renovated in 1950 by Ralph R. Calder. It was named after Alice B. Cowles, the mother of Frederick Cowles Jenison, an MSU alumnus who funded the 1950’s renovation. Since 1941 it has been the official residence of MSU’s President. Cowles House is listed on the State Register of Historic Sites.

Pewabic tile was commissioned by Calder for the living room, library fireplaces and floor of the vestibules. Iridescent tiles line both fireplaces and make up the hearths.
6. Landon Hall

Sculptures above the fireplaces in the cafeteria

Landon Hall contains sculptures that while not made by Pewabic Pottery, were fired and glazed there. In 1946 Leonard D. Jungwirth, Assistant Professor in MSC’s Department of Art, worked with visiting sculptor Charles Rudy to create 12 bas relief sculptures for the Landon and Yakeley Hall cafeterias. They were fired and glazed at Pewabic to their specifications. The sculptures are inscribed with the date 1946, but the firing and glazing was completed in 1947 according to the Pottery’s records. Jungwirth approached Pewabic about firing the panels because MSU’s kilns were especially busy as a result of the school’s high enrollment at the time. In 1939 and 1940 Jungwirth had attended classes at Pewabic taught by Mary Chase Stratton through Wayne State University. Jungwirth’s six sculptures (15” x 29” x 6” each) in Landon Hall are installed in the cafeteria above the two fir...
7. Yakeley Hall

Yakeley Hall, like Landon Hall, includes another project that Pewabic assisted with. The six bas relief sculptures (15” x 19” x 4” each) in this cafeteria were created by sculptor Charles Rudy. Pennsylvanian by birth, he was known nationally for his sculpture and was a visiting professor at Michigan State College in 1946.

The three sculptures above the east fireplace depict men preparing food. From the left, a man makes a pie; a man tastes soup from a spoon; and another man sharpens a carving knife above a cooked bird. The right panel is signed Rudy 1946, whose monogram “CR” is on the left panel.

The three sculptures above the west fireplace depict women. On the left, a woman works with a machine resembling a drill press, reminding one of Rosie the Riveter. In the middle scene of motherhood, a woman holds a child while a young girl stands beside her. In the right panel a woman artist carves a nude female sculpture. The left and middle panels are signed Rudy 46 and the right panel has his monogram.

Yakeley Hall was built in 1948 and, like Landon Hall, was designed by Calder. It shares the same Tudor style that combines late Medieval English (Gothic), Renaissance, and Arts and Crafts Movement elements.
8. Williams Hall

Sculpture outside the north entrance (Grand River Avenue), Fireplaces Recreation Room 17A and 18A (west basement)

The Tudor Style Williams Hall was built by Ralph R. Calder in 1937. It was named after Sarah Langdon Williams, wife of Joseph R. Williams, the first president of Michigan State (1857-59).

The sculpture Children Reading by Clivia Calder Morrison installed outside the north entrance is another example of an artist firing and glazing at Pewabic Pottery. This sculpture and the fish water spout below it were glazed with Pewabic’s signature K4 blue glaze in 1938. Clivia Calder created these pieces for the Works Progress Administration’s Federal Art Project where she also served as the ceramic supervisor. From the 1930s through early 1940 she glazed and fired many of her sculptures at Pewabic.

Pewabic tiles line two nearly identical fireplaces in the basement Recreation Rooms in Williams Hall. Presently only the fireplace in Recreation Room A is accessible, though images of both are included on this website. These fireplaces are faced with 6 x 8-inch green matte tiles. The upper corners are accented with a grouping of tiles measuring 8 x 8-inches, framing a flower pattern square tile. Smaller multicolored tiles also accent the middle of each fireplace. Green matte square tiles make up the hearth. Each fireplace cost $68. The commission for these fireplaces came from Flint Mosaic and Terrazzo in 1937, which installed them.
9. Shaw Hall

Fireplaces in the Dining Room and the East and West Living Rooms, First Floor

Ralph R. Calder designed Shaw Hall in 1950. Originally a male dormitory, it marked a transition in the architectural style of residence halls at MSU. Unlike the dorms of East and West Circle inspired by historic designs, Shaw Hall embraced the International Style. Located between Shaw Lane and the Red Cedar River, the building blends into the slope of the land along the river. Shaw Hall was named about Robert Sidney Shaw, the eleventh president of MSU (1928-1941).

Pewabic tiles are found inside around two fireplaces in the dining room and fireplaces in both the east and west living rooms. The dining room fireplaces are created from diagonal halves of tiles. These unglazed triangular shapes exhibit a range of colors from light tan to red. The west living room fireplace is composed of 8 x 8-inch tiles glazed to create a mottled green effect. These were installed to create a stepped-out effect. The east living room fireplace is installed similarly but its 8 x 8-inch glazed tiles appear brown with green highlights. The total cost for all four fireplaces was $1,180.