

CITRUS HALL AND THE SPOT

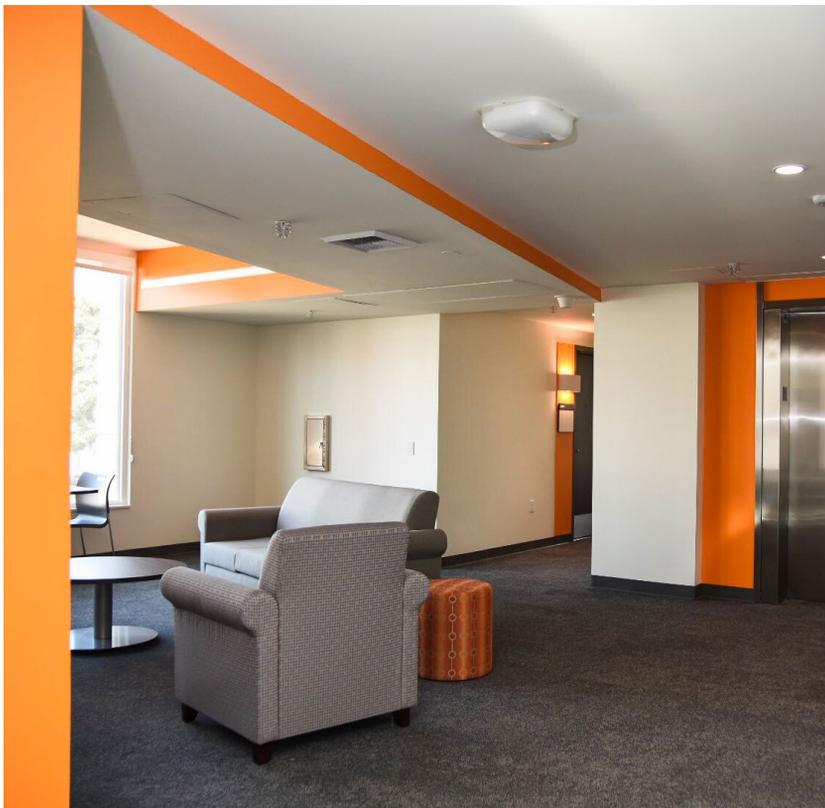
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF LA VERNE

by Monica Rodriguez

University of La Verne senior Joelene Kuaana was overjoyed about moving into Citrus Hall, the university's new residence hall. She took note of the brightly-colored furnishings, the natural lighting, and the layout of her new home for the 2018-19 academic year. But she was even more thrilled with the new pockets of space throughout the building, and in the new attached dining hall, where she can meet friends and build the relationships that are a central part of her college experience.







“I love it,” said Kuaana, an economics major. “I think the university really took into account what students said they wanted.”

The University of La Verne is an independent, nonprofit university located in the foothill community of La Verne, California, 30 miles east of downtown Los Angeles. It is home to about 2,800 traditional-age undergraduate students, and more than 5,000 graduate students and adult learners.

About half of the students at the federally-designated Hispanic Serving Institution are the first in their families to attend college. Instilling a sense of civic and community engagement is a core value of the predominantly-commuter campus.

With that in mind, Citrus Hall and the new dining hall, The Spot, do more than provide students a place to eat and sleep. The \$42 million facilities were constructed next to existing housing, the Campus Center, and athletics facilities to form a student village that will nurture an engaged campus community.

“The university’s residence halls and dining hall used to be dispersed across campus, which segmented the residents and discouraged community building,” said Clive Houston-Brown, vice president for Human Resources, Information Technology, Facilities, and Safety. “Some halls were situated next to city residential areas, which meant programming events could be an issue.”



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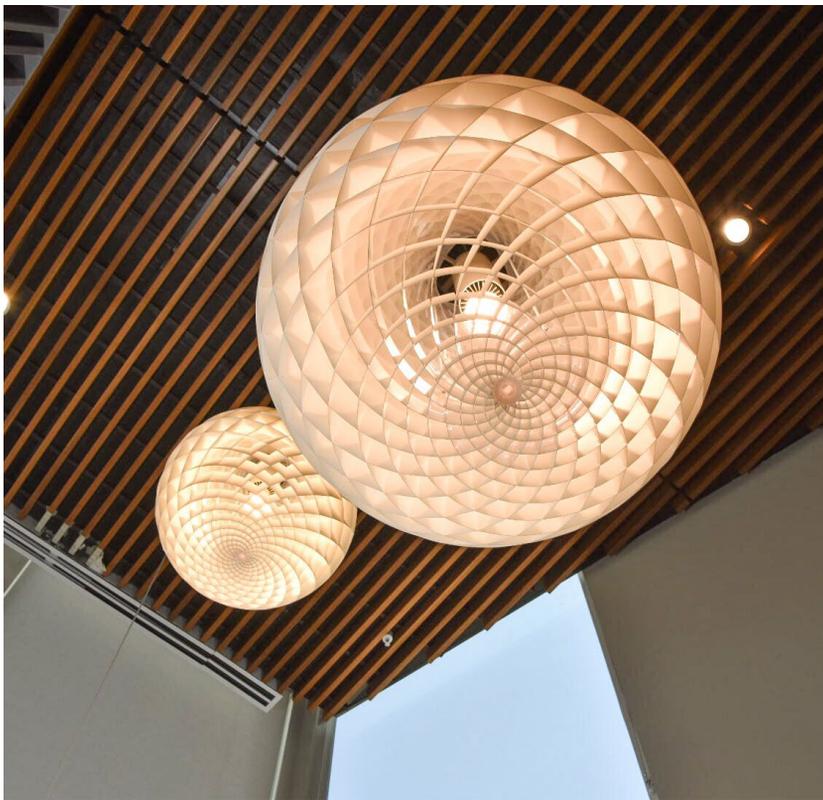
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With the addition of Citrus Hall and The Spot, and the subsequent demolition or renovation of older halls, all residence and dining halls are now in a single area of campus.

“This creates a far stronger community for the residential students living on campus and allows major programming and events to be held internal to campus without impact to city residents,” Houston-Brown said.

Named in honor of the region’s agricultural heritage, Citrus Hall is five stories tall, nearly 115,000 square feet, and fits 396 beds. It consists of three sections joined together by wide, window-lined corridors that encourage students to move from one section to the next.

Long before any conceptual designs were drafted, meetings were organized to collect student, faculty, and staff comments that would help determine what a new residence hall would be like, said Juan Regalado, Dean of Students.

Students liked the Vista La Verne Residence Hall, which opened in 2010, because it offered modern amenities such as central heating and air conditioning, hard-wire and wireless Internet connections, cable television, and suite-style units.

Brandt Residence Hall, which dated back to the 1950s, lacked air conditioning and other modern comforts, but students adored the communal space where friendships formed, diversity was embraced, and community involvement was fostered.

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The goal of the new residence hall is to bring together the best of both worlds.

“This is for the students, but it’s by the students in a lot of different ways,” Regalado said.

Steinberg Hart, a firm with experience designing student housing, was selected as the architect. The firm met with students and designed the hall to incorporate many of their requests.

Concept Becomes a Reality

The 16-month construction project, carried out by Bernards, a Southern California-based general contractor, was completed in August for the start of the Fall 2018 semester. The project came in slightly under budget.

When students enter the ground floor, they encounter a reception desk, student mailboxes and a vast main lounge with comfortable furniture, a flat screen TV, recreational equipment, and an outdoor lounge.

Throughout Citrus Hall are spaces where students can stop to meet one-on-one or in larger groups. Each floor has two group study rooms equipped with tables, chairs, whiteboards and flat screen TVs.

Students requested space for group study rather than having individual study cubicles, Regalado said.



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“Students said, ‘I can study in my room or I can study in the library if I want to study alone,’” he said.

Bathrooms are clustered in the center of each floor, and each floor has a gender-neutral bathroom. Three elevators transport students from floor to floor.

More Than a Dining Hall

Attached to the new residence hall is the 18,700-square-foot dining hall, The Spot, which was named as a nod to the campus mascot, Leo the Leopard. It was also designed to encourage student interaction.

At more than four times the size of the university’s previous dining hall, The Spot accommodates several different seating arrangements: long tables for big groups, booths and small tables for small groups, and a counter with stools overlooks a row of windows.

A food court consists of multiple serving stations and a large salad bar.

Anthony Bencomo, general manager of Bon Appétit Management Company, said the roomy kitchen and serving stations, which include a wood stove pizza oven, allow his staff to demonstrate more of their culinary creativity, which will result in more menu choices for diners.

The new salad bar is three times the size of the one in the old dining hall.



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Increasing Dining Options

“That allows us to have more farm-to-fork items, fresh from local vendors,” Bencomo said. “We will also offer more of a variety of vegetarian and vegan options.”

Regalado said the new dining facility is an important part of making students feel at home. More dietary options, including those that consider religious practices, allow a student to feel welcomed and accepted.

This semester, Bencomo will be preparing meals for about 2,700 students a day plus faculty, staff, and other guests.

As the fall semester began, students were already feeling the impact of the new facilities for dining and living.

Surveying the new facility on move-in day, Kuaana said she felt like she was in the heart of campus. “It feels like a community now,” she said. “You have neighbors. There is something bigger than yourself.”



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Monica Rodriguez writes for several southern California universities, including the University of La Verne, and regional lifestyle publications. She has more than two decades of experience in daily journalism. Reach her at marscribe64@gmail.com.

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