



Novec™

Brand

Protecting a priceless work of art in a beautiful public space:

The St. John's Bible

Inspired to create a work of art to “ignite the spiritual imagination of people throughout the world,”¹ St. John's University, a 3,600-student liberal arts college in Minnesota affiliated with the Benedictine monks, commissioned a team of scribes, scholars and calligraphers to create a handwritten, illuminated Bible – the Saint John's Bible. The team worked for eleven years, from March 2000 through May 2011, to craft a one-of-a kind illuminated manuscript, using traditional methods and materials such as calfskin vellum, powdered mineral pigments, gold leaf and quill pens.² The final product included seven volumes and has been used in dozens of exhibitions around the world,^{1,3}

including the presentation of a reproduction to Pope Francis.⁴

Such a work of art needed a worthy permanent home – a place where it could be accessible to thousands of visitors while remaining in a climate-controlled environment and protected from fire, water and other potential hazards. St. John's University selected its Alcuin Library as the permanent home for the Saint John's Bible.

Rebuilding an architectural masterpiece

The task of building a gallery to display the Bible became a part of a larger rebuild of the Alcuin Library at St. John's University. This

library, designed in the mid-20th century by renowned architect Marcel Breuer in the Bauhaus school style, needed to be fully renovated to create a space that would go beyond simply storing collections to create an open learning commons for students.⁵ In addition, the existing building needed to include a special collections space with a gallery to display the St. John's Bible to the public and also archives for additional rare books and manuscripts.

St. John's University enlisted CSNA Architects to design the new space with an eye to making these updates without changing the original design intent of Marcel Breuer's architecture.



Photo credit: Hill Museum & Manuscript Library/Wayne Torborg, Saint John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota, USA.

Protecting the Saint John's Bible from fire, water and more

When designing the gallery for the St. John's Bible and the Alcuin Library archives, choosing the right fire protection system was vital. St. John's University needed a solution that would be:

- ▶ Safe for occupants – from curators to visitors to students
- ▶ Free from water or other fluids that might warp, smear or damage the Bible's irreplaceable pages
- ▶ Free of any chemical residue
- ▶ Environmentally sustainable
- ▶ Capable of quickly and effectively extinguishing a fire
- ▶ Suitable for the space constraints of the rebuilt room

In the end, it was an easy choice to choose a system with [3M™ Novec™ 1230 Fire Protection Fluid](#) as the extinguishing agent. "Everyone was on board," said architect Gregory M. Friesen of CSNA Architects.

"Each page [of the Bible] is an original. There is not another one anywhere in the world. So it absolutely had to be protected, and for national treasures, world treasures, irreplaceable treasures, Novec's really the only option."

Building a protected space that welcomes visitors

CSNA Architects worked with [McGough Construction](#) as the general contractor on the library renovation, and with [Summit Companies](#) as the distributor and installer for the fire suppression system using Novec 1230 fluid. When constructing the gallery for the Saint John's Bible, a key construction challenge was to ensure that it would be a feature gallery and keep visitors' focus on the Bible itself, combining protection with visual beauty. All detection and piping systems were concealed and nozzles were installed along the sidewalls so that Novec 1230 fluid could easily discharge into the space but visitors would not be distracted by the mechanical elements of the system.

Despite the constraints of working within an existing building – including some tight spaces – the system installation was smooth and trouble-free. "We have a bit of peace of mind knowing that Novec 1230 fluid is a friendly agent for archives and people," said Andey Rasmussen of McGough Construction. "If there's a release it's not going to damage the contents of the space." With proper protection and a beautiful new home, the Saint John's Bible will be delighting visitors for years to come.

¹ <http://www.saintjohnsbible.org/promotions/news/faqs.htm>. Accessed January 23, 2019.

² http://www.saintjohnsbible.org/promotions/process/production_tools.htm. Accessed January 23, 2019.

³ <http://www.startribune.com/acclaimed-saint-john-s-bible-gets-permanent-home/458507273/>. Accessed January 23, 2019.

⁴ <https://www.saintjohnsbible.org/promotions/lp/francis/>. Accessed January 23, 2019.

⁵ <https://www.sctimes.com/story/news/local/2016/04/18/sjus-alcuin-library-undergoing-transformation/83185152/>. Accessed January 23, 2019.

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