



PHOTOGRAPHS BY MICHELLE V. AGINS/THE NEW YORK TIMES  
Jacques d'Amboise, center, in jacket, at the new home of the National Dance Institute Center.



Inset, the entrance. Above, from left, Mr. d'Amboise, founder of the National Dance Institute; Ellen Weinstein, artistic director; and Ron Moelis, chief executive of L&M Development.

## Dance Institute, Centered in Harlem

By FELICIA R. LEE

For 35 years the National Dance Institute has been a gypsy, in the words of its founder, Jacques d'Amboise, the former New York City Ballet principal dancer. The institute rented and borrowed space here and there as it brought dance, performance and arts education to thousands of New York City public school students.

But its itinerant days are over, as exuberantly demonstrated on a recent fall afternoon by a group of children dancing inside a sleek, modern studio on 147th Street, between Adam Clayton Powell and Frederick Douglass Boulevards. The studio is part of the institute's first permanent home, 18,000 square feet of clean lines and blond wood inside what was once Public School 90, one of the many buildings in central Harlem shuttered in the 1970s as economic decline battered the city.

On Tuesday evening there will be a ribbon cutting to celebrate the official opening of the National Dance Institute Center for Learning & the Arts, with Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg expected to attend. City officials, community leaders and educators hope that the center will become a beacon for the arts in a changing Harlem.

"I think of the center as a crucible of learning and the arts," said Mr. d'Amboise, 77, the subject of "He Makes Me Feel Like Dancin'," which won the 1983 Oscar for best feature documentary. "It will be filled after school and before school and on the weekends, as we reach out to other arts organizations in the neighborhood, senior citizens and preschool children."

The center has four studios (with floors built to accommodate dancers), administrative offices, two art galleries, a terrace (for concerts and other events) and a

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175-seat performance space. It resides inside the former school, an early 1900s castlelike limestone, terra-cotta and brick building, which was gutted and turned into a condominium called PS90 in 2009, its facade, including gargoyles, preserved.

"We saw this site when it was a shell and kind of fell in love," said Kathy Landau, the executive director of the National Dance Institute, or N.D.I. "We loved the idea of returning a former school into an education facility again.



The architecture, the light, were right. How could we not do it?"

The institute paid \$11.5 million for the property and construction as part of a \$20 million capital campaign, Ms. Landau said, with support from board members and \$5 million from George Soros's Open Society Foundations. After buying the new home, it sought an additional \$8.5 million to sustain the institute's programs, she said, and are now \$6.25 million away from the campaign goal. (The institute — which will be

able to serve 5,000 students each week, an increase from 4,000 — has an annual operating budget of \$3.5 million, with \$115,000 coming from the city.)

The move to Harlem is a milestone in the life of the dance institute and signals that "neighborhood revitalization is proceeding apace," said Kate D. Levin, commissioner of the city's Department of Cultural Affairs. "N.D.I. is a strong arts education provider and home to students and artists. It'll be a terrific resource for the community."

Years ago the city took over many of the foreclosed and abandoned buildings in central Harlem and selected developers to revive the area, primarily for affordable housing. The city, L&M Development Partners and Goldman Sachs's Urban Investment Group helped develop and finance the condominium project. The units in the building were sold at market rate and below-market rate in the multi-income building. A number of musicians, artists and photographers are moving in, according to brokers.

"The culmination of the project was N.D.I.," said Ron Moelis, chief executive of L&M. "We wanted to get a use that was good for the community." The center, open since August, has been warmly greeted in the neighborhood, spruced up in recent years with new cultural sites like Harlem Stage and the Dwyer Cultural Center, as well as new housing.

Barbara Freeman, the principal of P.S. 161, Pedro Albizu Campos, at 499 West 133rd Street, said it was exciting to have the center so close. The institute recently completed a two-week residency in theatrical arts and music at P.S. 161. "We're bringing up a generation that should feel cultural institutions are for them," Ms. Freeman said, "and that they're not just places where other people go."