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# Architecture and Symbol in Difficult Times

By Reed Kroloff

No physical record of the Great Library of Alexandria in Egypt, or its contents, exists (see page 73). But written testimony suggests one of humanity's grand enterprises: nothing less than the gathering of all known written materials into one scholarly collection. Imagine a Library of Congress for the entire world. In an age when the contents of ancient Alexandria's collection wouldn't fill a single microchip, the hubris and humanism of the endeavor still resonate.

This month an extraordinary new Library of Alexandria will open, designed by Oslo, Norway-based Snøhetta architects. To be sure, the new library's managers harbor no vision as grandiose as their Ptolemaic predecessors. The world, as we were so painfully reminded last month, is a much more complicated place these days. But the librarians' ambition—and that of the Egyptian government, the new building's sponsor—of at least symbolically fulfilling an ancient cultural destiny, is compelling nonetheless.

Faced with the ruthlessness of the World Trade Center and Pentagon assaults, the library's symbolic functions become even more critical. We need to be reminded that the Middle East has a history of great benevolence and invention, that community can transcend geography and ideology, that evolution trends upward, not the reverse. That's a great deal to ask of any one building (or any group of buildings for that matter). But of all the lessons offered by the Trade Center tragedy—and surely, we are just beginning to understand how many there will be—in this context, one seems clear: The symbolic power of architecture is undiminished in the modern world.

How does that symbolism work? On one level, very directly. To its attackers, New York's mammoth Trade Center towers were a provocative—and vulnerable—representation of America's worldwide economic and cultural dominance. Destroying the buildings was

a blow against American capital; it was an angry rejection of globalism as well.

Symbols, much like terrorism, are remarkably resilient, however. The World Trade Center is gone, but you can still buy a Coke anywhere from Uzbekistan to Uruguay. American economic power simply has too many guises—most of them corporate and dispersed—to be eliminated in a single cataclysmic act. And globalism is by no means uniquely American. In death, however, the Trade Center claims a new, more potent status than it ever enjoyed in life, one, ironically, with great appeal to fundamentalists: martyrdom.

One of Peter Eisenman's more insightful, if characteristically inscrutable, adaptations of contemporary philosophy suggests that in a world forced to speak about such unspeakable horrors as the Holocaust—which destabilized fundamental understandings of society, theology, even our very humanity—traditional readings of architecture could no longer explain the order of things. Absence (that which we cannot easily see or comprehend), he suggested, was now as important as presence (things which are more plainly understood). The destruction of the World Trade Center validates Eisenman's insight (though he would undoubtedly disown this simplified reading): It is the Trade Center's new absence that gives it a permanent, powerful presence.

The presence of the new library in no way compensates for the absence of the Trade Center (or the people lost in its destruction); nor, of course, was it ever intended to. Yet this latter-day legacy of Alexander's Hellenizing—but nevertheless imperialist—campaigns offers the hopeful, reassuring message that now, just as then, humankind can be greater than the sum of its warlike parts.

## AECdirect: A special report

This issue also contains a special report on AECdirect, the short-lived dot-com venture whose failure now threatens the American Institute of Architects (AIA) with insolvency. You won't find this story anywhere else, because months after the misadventure, AIA's leadership and official publications have yet to come clean on the subject. *Architecture* has taken on that task because we believe there are important lessons to be learned here, lessons that can help strengthen the AIA, and thereby build a better profession. ■



The Space Needle was a symbol of high tech – in 1962. Today, this classic landmark gets a 21st century makeover with an all-new Pavilion featuring some seriously high-tech glass: Solarban® 60 Solar Control Low-E Glass from PPG. Resembling a transparent nautilus encircling the base of the Space Needle, the Pavilion

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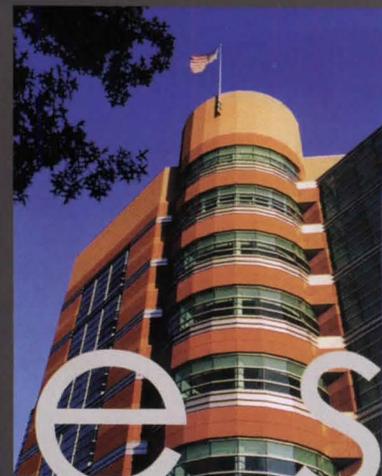
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notification to the local board and possibly other qualifications.

NCARB as an organization cannot require a member jurisdiction to adopt the Model Law. Not every U.S. jurisdiction adopts the Model Law as recommended.

Lenore Lucey  
Executive Vice President, NCARB  
Washington, D.C.

## Rehab Fab

The problem with preservation in the city of Savannah, and in other cities and towns, does not lie absolutely on outdated preservation ordinances or elevated land values (August 2001, page 35). It lies on the inherent lack of creativity provided by architects and

clients. A fundamental vision is lost on these people, who instead of recognizing the value of a historic structure, opt for its demolition. They do not see the benefits that a proper and sympathetic rehabilitation could provide.

The act of rehabilitating 210 Whitaker would no doubt pose many difficult questions. If only architects and clients could understand what would be irrevocably lost once demolition were to proceed. They might force themselves to allow their creativity to explore the program. It should be their duty to at least try, and not give up.

Joshua L. Ward  
Charleston, South Carolina

## Protect the Young

The problem with the winning entry for Milstein Hall, the new architecture school at Cornell University, is that in addition to being very ugly, its design is misguided (July 2001, page 36). An architecture school building should be simply sited, not be confusing or visually aggressive to its surroundings. It should be subtle in appearance and flexible in function. Cornell deserves better!

Peter Szilagyi  
Denver

### CORRECTIONS

The Aga Khan Award for Architecture, not Rizzoli, publishes a monograph of its award

recipients (July 2001, page 52). Also, while the word "Arab" was used to indicate the Islamic world, Archnet itself does not equate the two.

The name of the physician murdered in Buffalo in 1998 is Dr. Barnett Slepian (August 2001, page 34).

### WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

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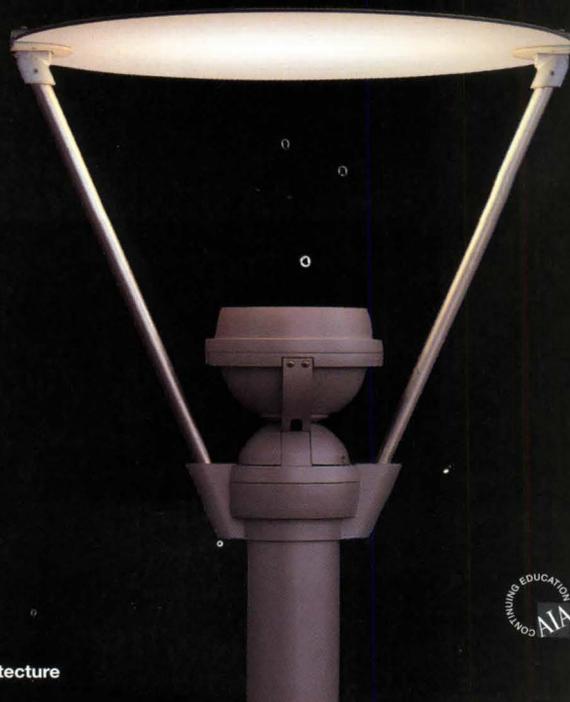
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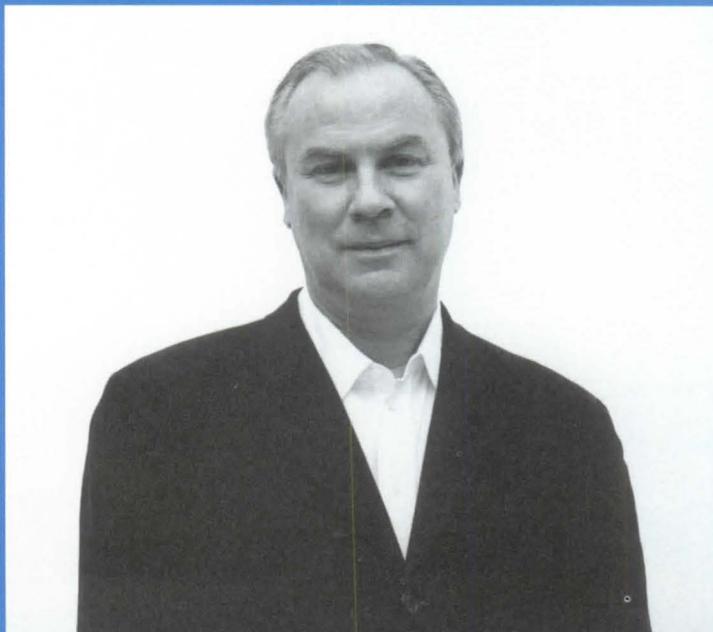
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## Chrysler and National Design Awards Announced

**Laurels** Architecture's usual star architects dominated this year's Chrysler Awards and National Design Awards, presented by the Chrysler Corporation and the Cooper-Hewitt National Design Museum respectively. "Architecture is still determined by the galaxy system," says Paul Warwick Thompson, director of the Cooper-Hewitt. "That reflects much more on the state of the discipline than on the awards program."

While both programs aim to highlight innovative and outstanding American designers, the nine-year-old Chrysler Awards focuses primarily on practitioners (and comes with \$10,000 prizes), while the newer National Design Awards recognizes patrons, corporations, and lifetime achievement.

Chrysler jurors, including writer Holly Brubach, architect Tod Williams, and MSNBC analyst Omar Wasow premiated Thom Mayne's Morphosis, Robert Mangurian and Mary-Ann Ray of Studio Works, and landscape architect Kathryn Gustafson, who designed the Ross Terrace at the Museum of Natural History. Chrysler also gave the nod to graphic designer Susan Kare, who created the hieroglyphic language of our computer desktops with the original Apple Macintosh iconography. Digital designer Daniel Rozin, the founder of Smoothware Design, a

Multidisciplinary artist Robert Wilson, who worked with architect Paolo Soleri early in his career, won a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Cooper-Hewitt.



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## Buzz

**Brian Healy Architects** (Boston) has won the Chicago Housing Authority's competition to design a block of mixed-income housing within the ABLA neighborhood on the Near West Side of the city.

**James Ackerman**, Professor Emeritus at Harvard University, has won a Balzan Foundation Prize for his work as an architectural historian. The award recognizes accomplished individuals in science and the humanities. Every year, winners in four fields split \$2.2 million.

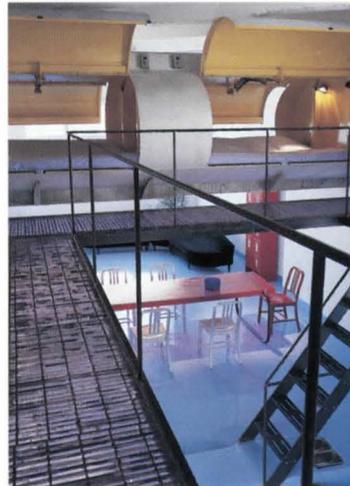
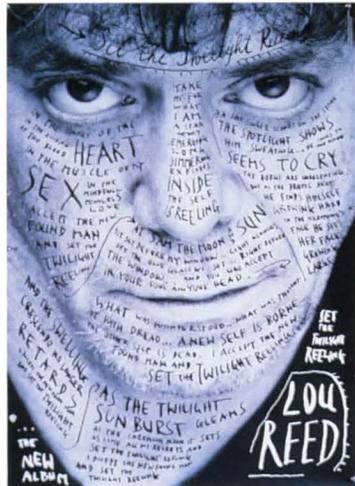
**Daniel Libeskind's** Jewish Museum opened last month in Berlin.

The Akron Art Museum has selected **Coop Himmelblau**—over other finalists **Snohetta** and **UN Studio**—to design a new 50,000-square-foot, \$30 million facility. Ground-breaking is slated for mid-2003, with completion projected for 2005.

Work has begun on a \$650 million monorail system for **Las Vegas** that will make stops along various casinos on the Strip. Showgirls and an Elvis impersonator singing "Viva Las Vegas" were present at the ground-breaking ceremony in mid-August.

**Zaha Hadid** has been picked to design the Tokyo Guggenheim.

**Allied Works Architecture** has been selected over **Carlos Jimenez**, **Mack Scogin and Merrill Elam**, and **Charles Rose** in an invited design competition for the Booker T. Washington High School for the Performing and Visual Arts in Dallas. The proposed 220,000-square-foot,



leader in the field of design and computer graphics programming, also picked up a prize. Graphic designer Stefan Sagmeister, best known for his album covers for artists like the Rolling Stones and Lou Reed, filled out the Chrysler roster.

The Cooper-Hewitt's second annual National Design Awards honored Robert Wilson with its lifetime achievement award. By collaborating with artists from Philip Glass to Allen Ginsberg to Tom Waits, Wilson, according to Thompson, "helped design our artistic consciousness." The corporate award went to Tupperware, creators of the first plastic kitchen storage units. Tupperware revolutionized cooking, eating, entertaining, and marketing as well with the suburban staple "Tupperware party." The first design patron award was given to Stanley Marcus, scion of the Neiman Marcus department store chain.

Since the Cooper-Hewitt's awards occur in two stages, there is still some suspense: finalists in

Clockwise from left: Diamond Ranch High School, by Morphosis; Impressions Collection, by Tupperware; the Morton Apartment by LOT/EK; Stefan Sagmeister's *Set the Twilight Reeling* album cover for Lou Reed; and Alexander Girard's Mikado pattern, part of Maharam's archival collection.

the product, communications, environment (which includes landscape architecture and interior design), and architecture categories were announced, but the winners won't be revealed until November. Maharam textiles, IDEO and its founder David Kelly, and Nike are finalists in the products category. For communications, Edward Fella, John Maeda, and Lorraine Wild are vying for the honor. Architectural in-crowders Diller + Scofidio, and LOT/EK make up the finalists in the environment category, along with radical landscape architect D.I.R.T. Studio. Rounding out the familiar faces for the architecture category are Asymptote, Pierre Koenig, and Peter Eisenman. *Alan G. Brake*

## MARENGO TABLES

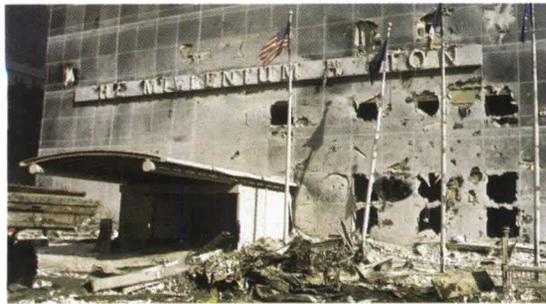
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## Architects and 9/11

### Disaster Relief

The architecture community was quick to act following the events of Tuesday, September 11. Within hours of the collapse of the World Trade Center towers, architect volunteers were assisting city contractors in structural assessments of surrounding buildings (like the Millenium Hilton, above), while the New York chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) assembled a list of firms and their corresponding skills to meet additional

demands. The chapter also catalogued 26 displaced firms and helped them find space and equipment.

The AIA New York also informed Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and Governor George Pataki that it has formed an action committee (with support from the state and national AIA) to provide further professional assistance, including strategies to redevelop other, less utilized parts of the city for displaced businesses, as well as devising building code revisions to speed up the rebuilding process.

AIA National, meanwhile, has directed resources to the New York City chapter: "They're the ones actually on the ground, doing the grunt work," explains AIA media relations director Mike Janes. Although the Pentagon was also damaged in an attack, its assessment and repair have fallen to military staff and contractors.

As the clean-up in New York continues, the rebuilding debate will begin, and architects want to help. AIA New York's executive director Rick Bell says, "This shouldn't be a decision reached only by the real estate community and elected officials." *Jamie Reynolds*

\$30 million building is expected to be completed in 2005.

Note to Brad: Never let them see you drool. **Brad Pitt** confesses to *W* magazine that meeting **Frank Gehry** left him "salivating."

Redding, California, will soon be able to boast of having a **Santiago Calatrava**—designed bridge, one of his first in the United States. Not everyone is pleased, however. Residents have criticized the design as too modern. The structure, which spans 720 feet over the Sacramento River, is part of a \$84 million complex that includes a natural history museum and botanical gardens.

**Tigerman McCurry** will design a museum and education center for the

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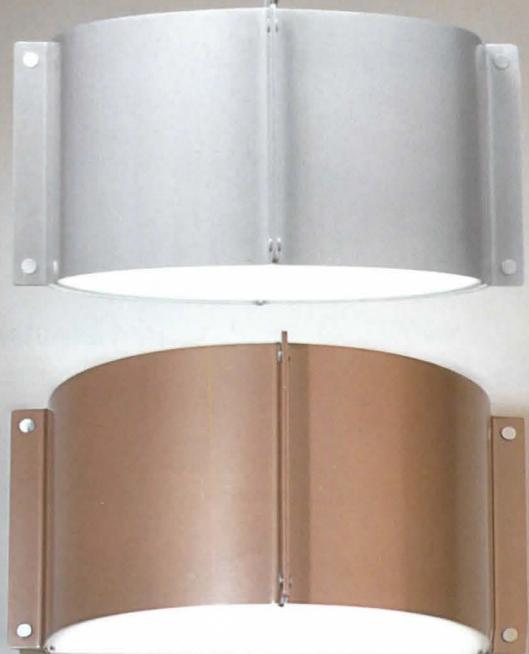
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# Turning Point at SCI-Arc

**Education** Architect and theoretician Neil Denari is out as director of Southern California Institute of Architecture, the West Coast's stronghold of alternative architectural education. While school administrators are painting the breakup as amicable, Denari nevertheless received a no-confidence vote by the faculty in September.

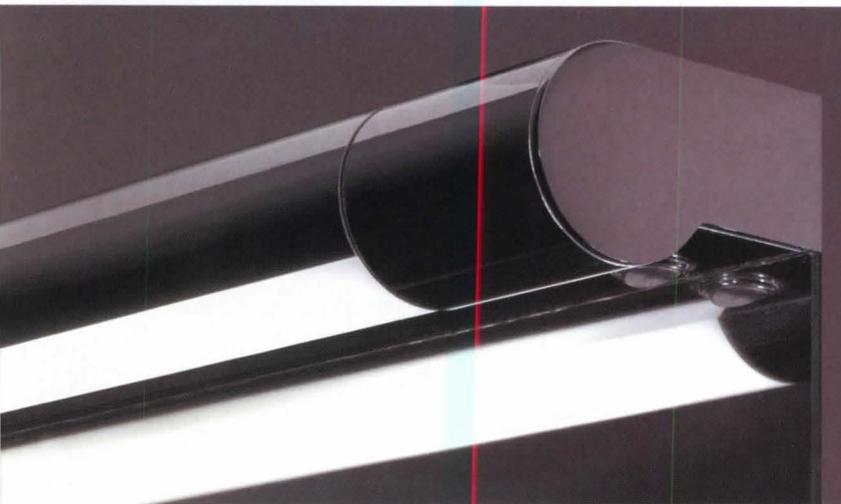
The same peers do laud Denari for his critical role in moving the school into its funky and expansive new digs on the southeast side of downtown Los Angeles. In October, SCI-Arc officially opened its new quarters in the 1,250-foot-long Freight Yard (right), a 1907 structure that has most recently been a favored backdrop for music videos and fashion photographers. The retrofitted building sits on a 10-acre parcel in the city's burgeoning Arts and Cultural Corridor, which will include Frank Gehry's Walt Disney Concert Hall and Rafael Moneo's Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels.

"SCI-Arc is now right in the middle of the remaking of a world city," said architect and SCI-Arc professor Eric Owen Moss. "It is a hypodermic for the city."

Moss himself is rumored to be on the shortlist to replace Denari. "I think there is a possibility I would do it, if the community supported it,"



Moss told *The Los Angeles Times*. Adding to the Moss speculation, Ray Kappe, founding director and current president of SCI-Arc's board of directors, confirms the school will likely select the next director from among its current ranks, or at least someone affiliated with the school. Stay tuned. *Bay Brown*



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## Business

## Fed Design Off TRAC

While the Bush Administration recently announced that it would not support the Truthfulness, Responsibility, and Accountability in Contracting (TRAC) Act (September 2000, page 13), opponents worry that Congress may still pass portions of the bill.

TRAC is designed to prevent excess spending on government building projects by relying, in part, on in-house architects. Private-sector architects could only win contracts by proving their services would save the government at least 10 percent. TRAC would nullify the intention of the Brooks Act, which ensures that architects, engineers, and consultants on federal projects are hired based on qualifications, rather than on price or previous government experience.

Opponents of TRAC argue that cutting out the private sector eliminates the competition that ensures quality competitive prices. According to the

American Institute of Architects, it would destroy a positive working relationship. "It's really not the way that you generate the best ideas," says Dan Wilson, Senior Director of Federal Affairs at the AIA. "The federal employees that the AIA works with want to manage the best firms and encourage the most innovative designs and ideas."

The TRAC Act has two versions in Congress: The original was partially passed by the House of Representatives as an amendment to a Department of Defense authorization bill in August. The second version, which carries wording friendlier to architects, has yet not been voted on by the Senate. While the TRAC Act looks like it won't be passed as its own bill, Wilson cautions that certain portions could be "piggybacked" onto other legislation and are therefore still a threat. Architects should remain vigilant and active, and in touch with their congresspeople. "The industry," he says, "has got to be on guard." *Sara Moss*

Holocaust Memorial Foundation. The 46,000-square-foot building will be located in Skokie, Illinois.

Fans of contemporary painter **Thomas Kinkade** may soon be able to live in houses based on those that appear in his work. The Village, a Thomas Kinkade Community, a 101-home subdivision in Vallejo, California, opened officially the beginning of last month.

The **National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB)** has installed its new board of directors for 2001–2002. The members are: C. William Bevins, president; C. Robert Campbell; Robert A. Boynton; Frank M. Guillot; H. Carleton Godsey; Peter Steffian; Douglas K. Engebretson; Dennis L.



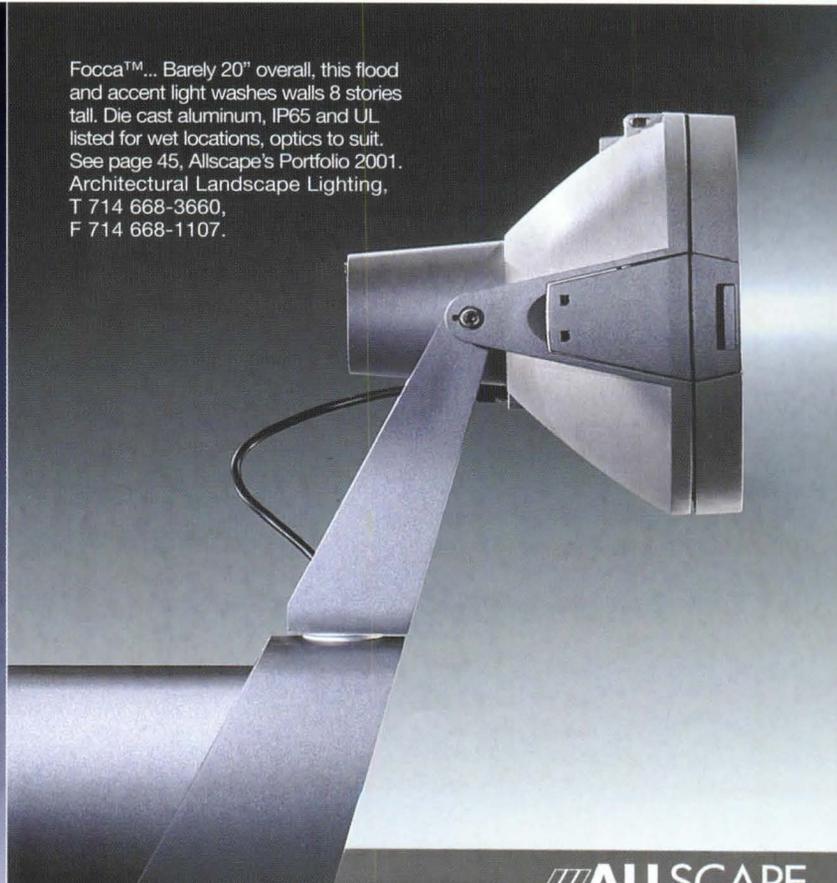
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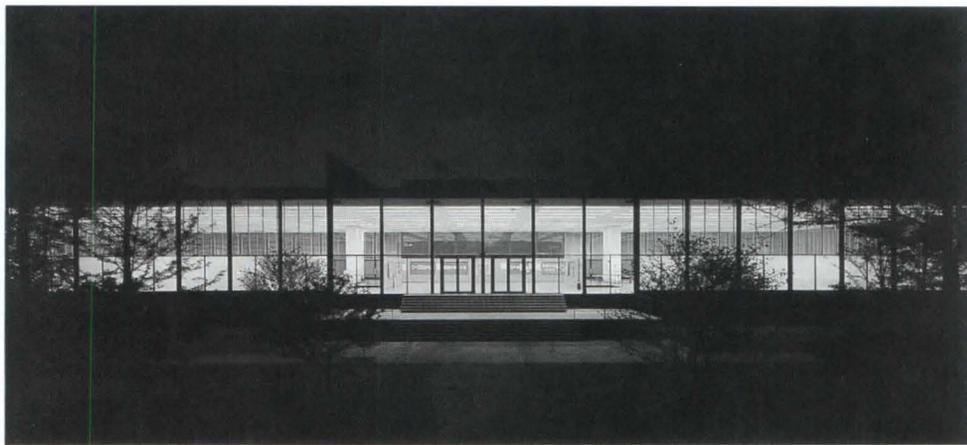
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# New Crown for Crown Hall

**Preservation** The National Park Service tipped its hat to modernism in late August when they named Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's 1956 S. R. Crown Hall (right) a National Historic Landmark—an exception for a building that was not yet 50 years old, the required age for landmark consideration. The building is the best known of the 18 designed by Mies on the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) campus, which he also master-planned. It is considered to be the first large-scale manifestation of what the architect termed “universal space.” Both the building's roof and its steel-and-glass skin hang from four massive 6-foot-deep beams located every 60 feet along the building's 220-foot length.

Crown Hall, which houses the College of



Architecture, will now be restored—along with landmark status comes a \$250,000 Getty Institute Conservation Grant. This money, combined with additional grants from the Pritzker/Galvin Challenge Pledge to IIT and the Arie and Ida Crown Memorial Foundation, adds up to \$750,000 for renovations to the

building's exterior.

For those at IIT involved with the petition process, the designation came as no surprise. The National Park Service “already had us in mind,” says Donna Robertson, dean of IIT's College of Architecture. “There was no convincing to be done.” *S.M.*

Water changes *shape*. Drops of rain.

Blocks of ice.

Waves of ocean.

Water changes *color*.

From crystal clear.

To earthy browns.

To brilliant greens.

Water constantly  
*reinvents* itself.

## Construction

# The Check is Not in the Mail

Just when post offices across the country are scrambling to deliver millions of tax rebate checks, the postal service itself is in need of some financial relief. In March, the Postmaster General's office announced a freeze on more than 800 new building projects that had been planned for 2001.

With the exception of safety concerns—such as a leak in one Seattle post office's roof—all capital commitments that were not under contract by February 22 have been put on hold. According to officials at the Postmaster General's office, the construction moratorium—the first since 1992—will yield approximately \$1 billion in savings, and is part of an effort to offset a \$2–3 billion loss this fiscal year. The freeze includes new leasing and expansion projects. “We don't yet know when the freeze will end,” says postal service spokesman Mark

Saunders. “We're still in the same dire financial straits we were in at the beginning of the year.”

From a 1 million-square-foot facility in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to a mail truck maintenance center in Indianapolis, Indiana, to a new post office slated for the back of the general store in Index, Wisconsin, postal workers and their customers everywhere are learning to cope with the current conditions. But some communities are hit worse than others. In Pinckney, Michigan, for example, where 33 office workers process mail for five surrounding towns in a woefully inadequate 2,900-square-foot space, local officials are fighting hard for a long-promised 12,000-to-18,000-square-foot expansion. If they don't get enough elbowroom soon, somebody may just go postal.

*Alanna Stang*

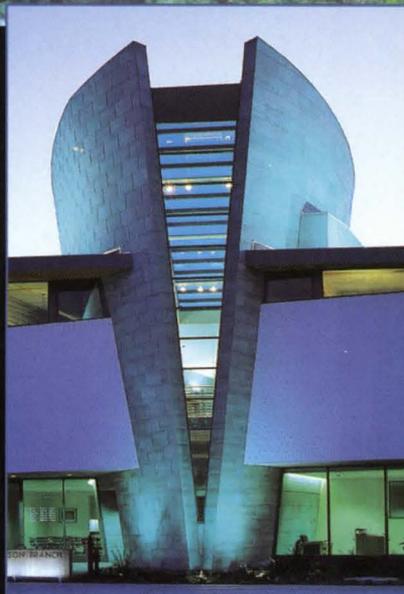
Astorino; Robert E. Luke; Daniel A. Redstone; Melinda E. Pearson; and Cornelius (Kin) DuBois. NCARB also awarded Presidential Medals for distinguished service to: Alan W.T. Baldwin Jr.; Michiel M. Bourdrez; Pamela J. Hill; Petr Bilek; Stephen Sands; and Mary de Sousa.

**Bernard Tschumi Architects** have won four competitions around the world. In Athens, Greece: the new Acropolis Museum, with **Michael Photiadis & Associated Architect** (Athens). The 210,000-square-foot building will sit at the foot of the Acropolis; it is expected to be complete in 2004. In Sao Paulo, Brazil: the 125,000-square-foot Museu de Arte Contemporânea, scheduled to open in 2004. In Geneva, Switzerland: A 70,000-square-foot headquarters

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for Vacheron-Constantin watchmakers. And in Cincinnati, Ohio: a new 300,000-square-foot athletic center for the University of Cincinnati, due to open in fall 2004 (associate architect is **Glaserworks**).

**Ezra Ehrenkrantz**, 69, died on September 22. He was principal of **Ehrenkrantz, Eckstut & Kuhn** and head of the Center for Architecture and Building Science Research at the New Jersey Institute of Technology.

**Steven Izenour**, architect, author, and teacher, died on August 21 at the age of 61. Izenour was a principal at **Venturi, Scott Brown and Associates** since 1969, and coauthor with **Robert Venturi** and **Denise Scott Brown**, of *Learning from Las Vegas* (MIT Press, 1972).

## Fun Money

**Graphic Design** At the end of a trip to Europe, most American wallets are overflowing with funny money: a few guilders change from that layover cocktail at Schipol Airport, a painful 20-franc-note reminder of the weekend with the ex in Paris, and those kroner leftover from interminable business meetings in Copenhagen. How the bank teller glares when you try to exchange the lot back home! It doesn't have to be so complicated, at least it won't starting

January 1, 2002 when the European Central Bank will put its long-anticipated euro into circulation.

The new currency comes in seven bills and eight coins of different denominations, and will be honored by 12 participating nations. If the euro's convenience doesn't appeal, its design might: The banknotes, each a distinct color and size, feature anonymous architectural designs such as a Romanesque doorway, a Victorian greenhouse window, and a neoclassical arch, intended to symbolize the "openness" of the European Union. If only the boys in customs lived up to the sentiment. *Ned Cramer*



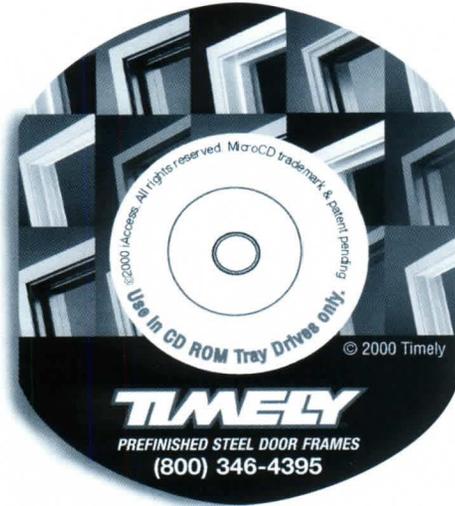
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## Calendar

## Exhibitions

## Chicago

The Idea of Louis Sullivan at the Art Institute of Chicago through November 4 (312) 443-3600

## Houston

Philip Johnson and Texas: The Photographs of Paul Hester at the Williams Tower Gallery through October 26 (713) 526-6461

## Los Angeles

What's Shakin': New Architecture in LA at the MOCA Pacific Design Center through December 30 and at MOCA at the Geffen Contemporary through January 20, 2002 (213) 626-6222

## Milwaukee, Wisconsin

The Industrial Design Aesthetic, 1900-1950 at the Wells Fargo Center, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts opens October 8 (612) 870-3200

## New York City

Vital Forms: American Art and Design in the Atomic Age, 1940-1960 at the Brooklyn Museum opens October 12 (718) 638-5000

Glass of the Avant-Garde: From Vienna Secession to Bauhaus at the Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum through February 24, 2002 (212) 849-8400

## New Haven, Connecticut

Architecture or Revolution: Charles Moore's Years at the Yale School of Architecture opens October 29 (203) 432-2296

## Oakland, California

Utopia Now! at the Oliver Art Center, California College of Arts and Crafts through December 1 (415) 551-9210

## Pittsburgh

Perfect Acts of Architecture at the Heinz Architectural Center, Carnegie Museum of Art through January 6, 2002 (412) 622-3131

## San Francisco

Mathematica: A World of Numbers and Beyond an exhibition designed by Charles and Ray Eames, at the Exploratorium through May 5, 2002 (415) 563-7337

## Washington

Cesar Pelli: Connections through April 28, 2002 and William Price: From Arts and Crafts to Modern Design through March 24, 2002, both at the National Building Museum [www.nbm.org](http://www.nbm.org) (202) 272-2448

## Conferences

An American Legacy: The Sarasota School of Architecture Tour & Symposium sponsored by the Fine Arts Society of Sarasota November 1-5 [www.sarasota-architecture.org](http://www.sarasota-architecture.org)

Space, Social Identity, and the American Campus the first Woltz Symposium at the University of Virginia School of Architecture November 2-3 <http://urban.arch.virginia.edu/~sch-docs/announce>

National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA) Annual Conference 2001 in Las Vegas, Nevada November 4-6 [www.noma.net/conf/index.htm](http://www.noma.net/conf/index.htm)

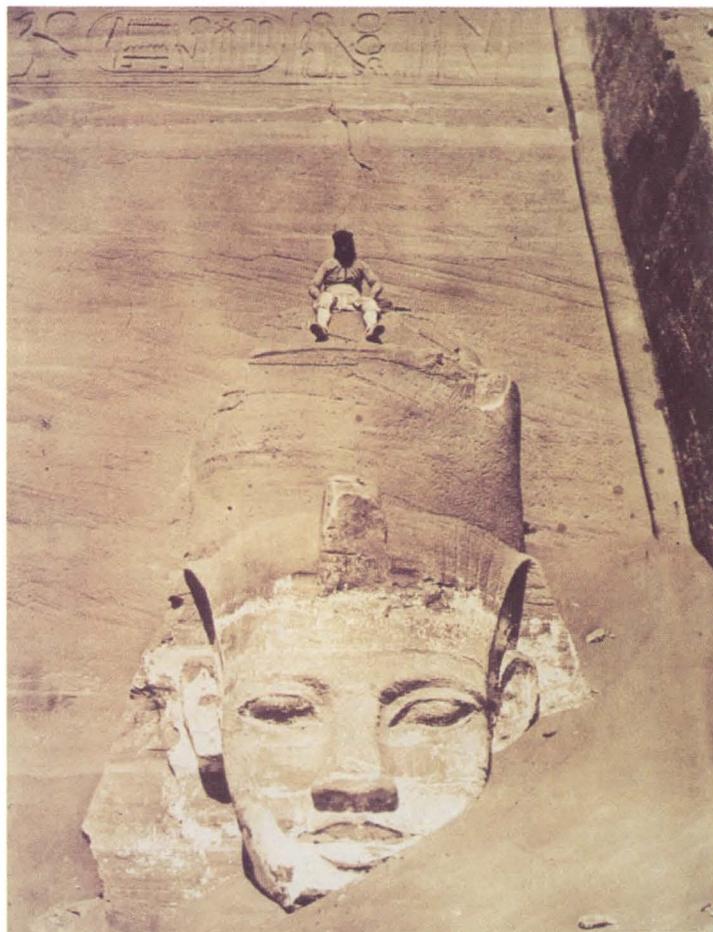
17th Annual Build Boston at the World Trade Center Boston November 13-15 [www.buildboston.com](http://www.buildboston.com) (800) 544-1898

Beyond Sprawl: New Strategies and Prototypes for Housing Los Angeles at SCI-Arc November 17-18 [www.sciarc.edu](http://www.sciarc.edu) (213) 613-2200

## Competitions

The American Academy in Rome invites applicants for the Rome Prize 2002. Application deadline November 15 [www.aarome.org](http://www.aarome.org)

2002 Dupont Benedictus Awards recognize inventive use of laminated glass in built work. Submission deadline March 1, 2002 [www.dupont-benedictus.org](http://www.dupont-benedictus.org)



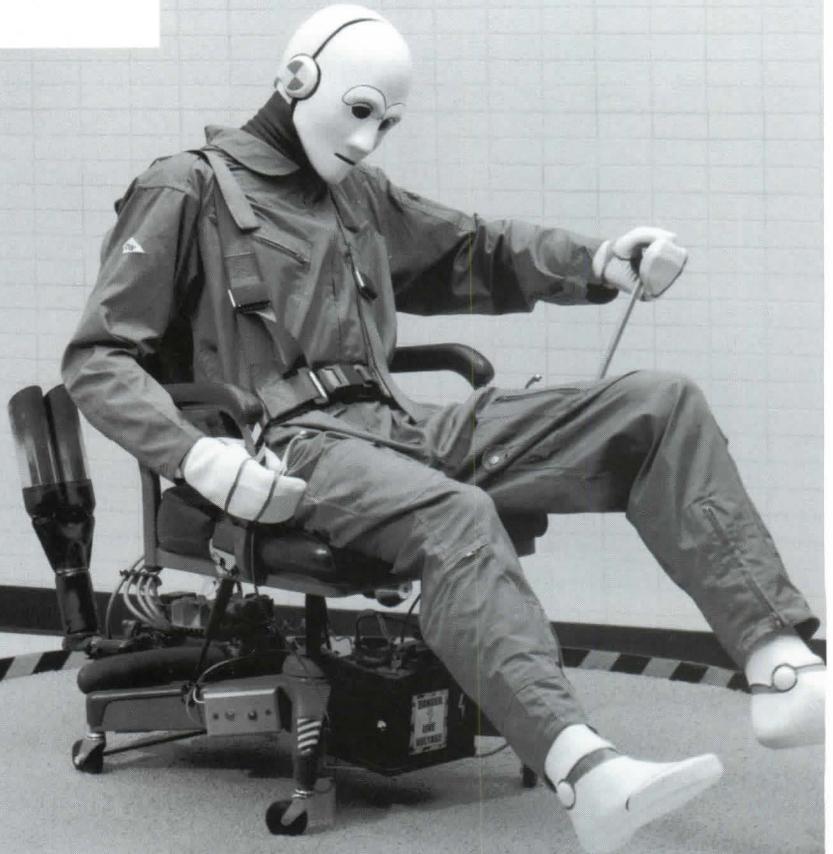
When Napoleon's army returned to France in 1802 with stories and exquisite drawings of their Egyptian campaign, Egyptomania followed. French journalist Maxime Du Camp and novelist Gustave Flaubert traveled to Egypt from 1849-51, photographing its monuments, populace, and dusty terrain. The images that resulted, including *Westernmost Colossus of the Temple of Re, Abu Simbel* (above, 1850)—depicting Du Camp's assistant perched on top of a statue of Ramses II—along with photographs by other Western travelers, can be seen in **Along the Nile: Early Photographs of Egypt** at the Metropolitan Museum of Art concurrently with **The Pharaoh's Photographer: Harry Burton, Tutankhamun, and the Metropolitan's Egyptian Expedition** through December 30. For more information call 212-535-7710.

Pamphlet Architecture is sponsoring a juried competition; the winning project will be published as a volume in the *Pamphlet Architecture* series [www.papress.com/pamphlet](http://www.papress.com/pamphlet)

Open Competition for the New Playhouse for the Royal Theater on the waterfront in the inner harbor of Copenhagen. Submission deadline November 13 [www.dalaa.dk/forside/english\\_frame.htm](http://www.dalaa.dk/forside/english_frame.htm)

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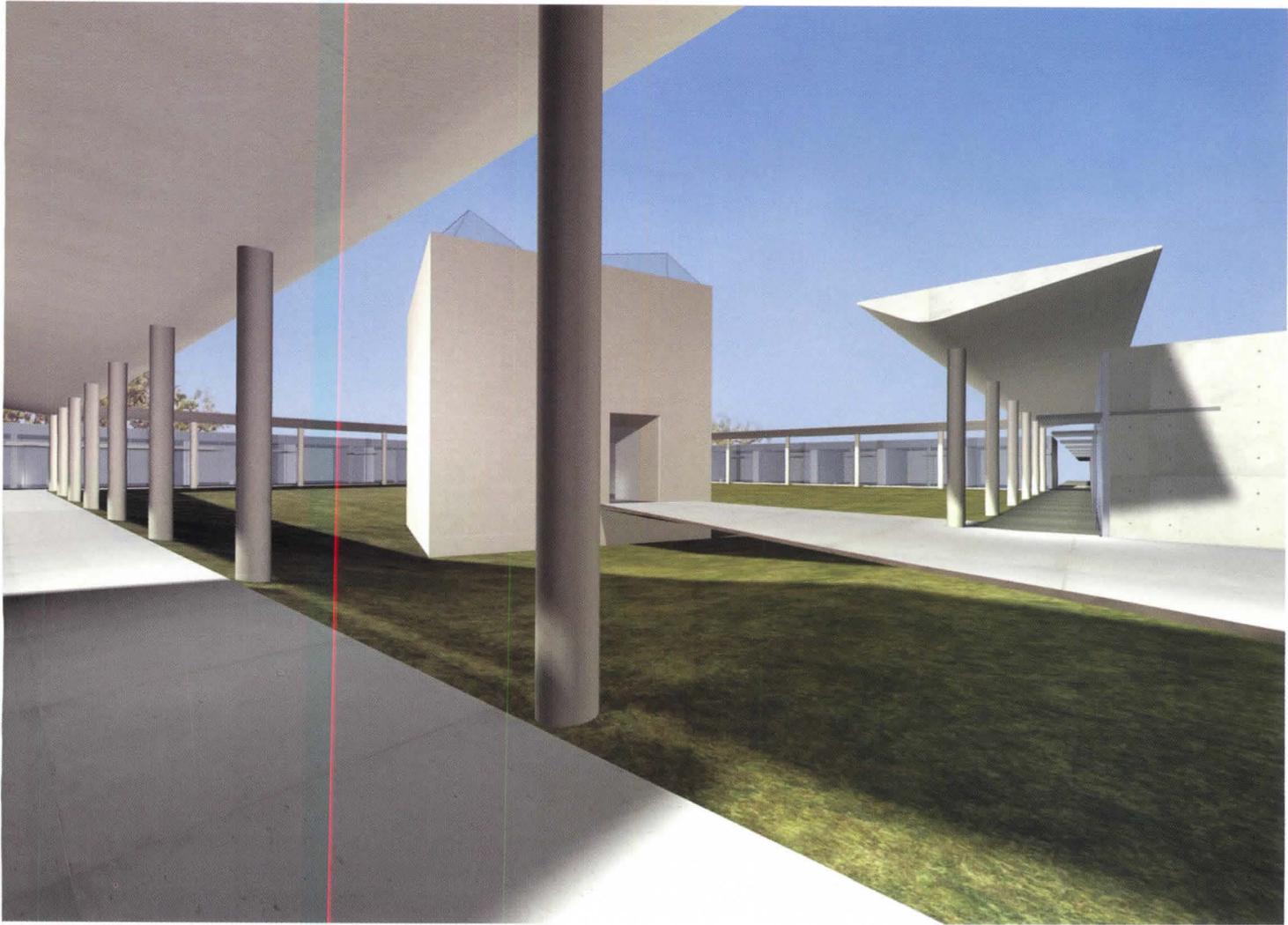
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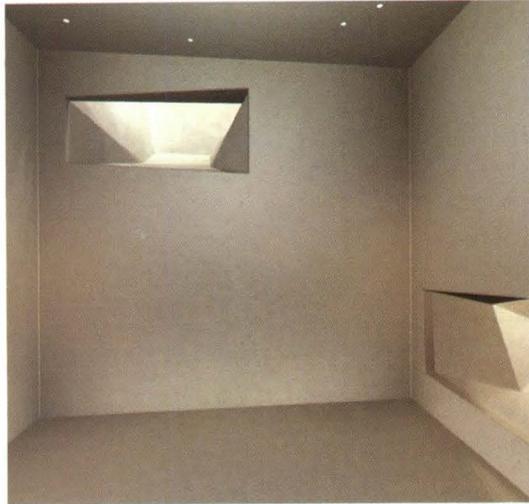
Perspective of courtyard

## On the Boards

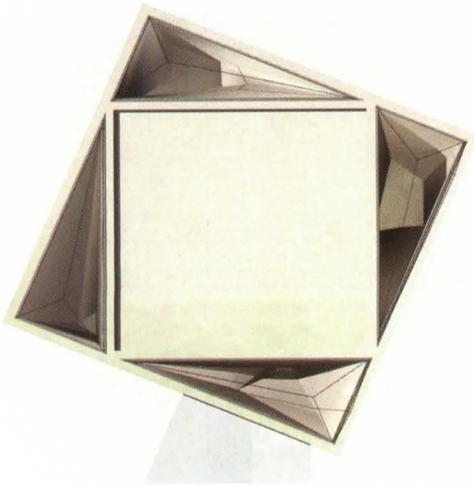
**Trahan Architects**, Holy Rosary Catholic Church,  
St. Amant, Louisiana

There are many precedents for small chapels set in arcaded courtyards, but most famous is Bramante's Tempietto in San Pietro at Montorio (1502). Bramante gave his modest Tempietto an imposing presence, which is emphasized by severe, overscaled ornamentation. Baton Rouge-based Trahan Architects inverts this formal strategy at the Holy Rosary Catholic Church in St. Amant, Louisiana, to create a small chapel, or oratory, that is quiet and minimally beautiful in its open courtyard.

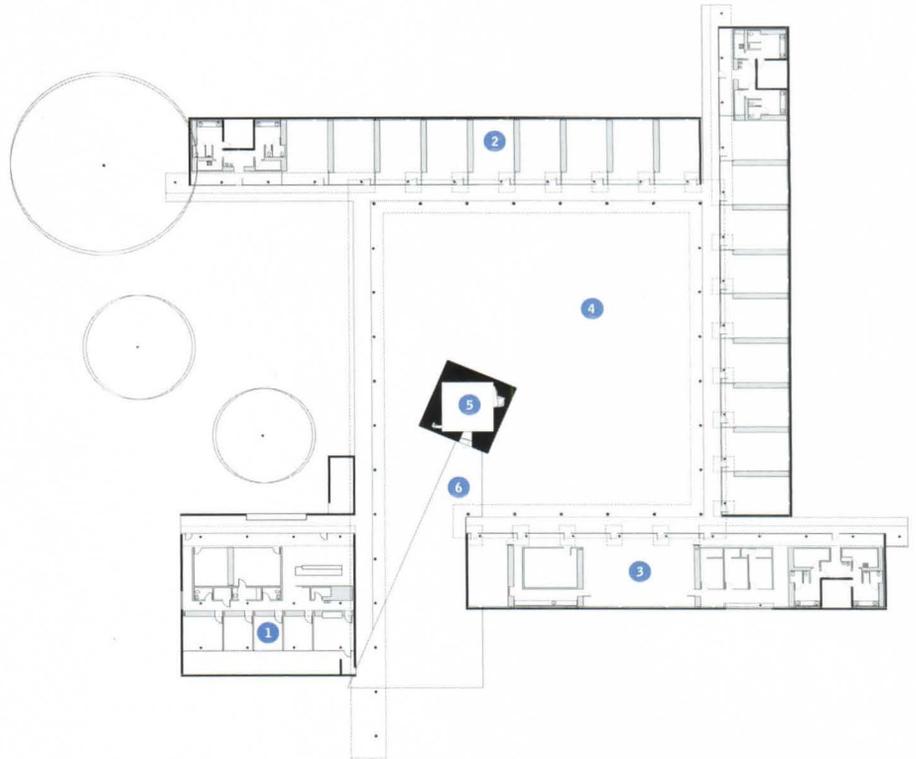
The courtyard is edged by a freestanding arcade, which shelters new classrooms and administrative offices. Floating above the secular buildings, the arcade's cantilevered roof balances on a single row of concrete columns set slightly apart from the pathway and seem-



Oratory interior



Oratory plan



Site plan 1 30' ^

- 1 administration
- 2 classrooms
- 3 multi-use space
- 4 courtyard
- 5 oratory
- 6 entrance ramp

ingly rooted directly in the earth. The 400-square-foot oratory sits at a 23-degree angle 18 feet from the west side of the arcade, inside the 17,000-square-foot courtyard. Visitors access the little building via a sloping concrete platform that rises 30 inches and is unsupported from below. A single glazed entrance breaks the blank façades of the 30-foot cube.

Inside the exterior cube floats a second 20-foot cube, which realigns with the geometry of the arcade. The rotation of the smaller cube within the larger creates light wells at the corners, capped with pyramidal skylights. Influenced by Le Corbusier's Ronchamp, principal Victor F. Trahan III punctures the interior walls at irregular intervals, creating apertures into the light wells. Bright light enters the com-

pressed interior from the openings placed near the ceiling, while those nearer the floor admit a more somber light. This manipulation of natural light adds ambiguity to the experience of entering the sacred space. The use of cast-in-place concrete throughout the complex emphasizes the muted quality of the design.

The redemptive death and resurrection of Jesus, known to Catholics as the Paschal Mystery, inspired Trahan's design at St. Amant. He invokes it metaphorically by creating spatial mystery in the oratory. By realigning the interior's sacred geometry with the secular geometry of the courtyard, Trahan asserts a relationship between the holy and the everyday, with man bridging God and Earth.  
*Alan G. Brake*



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## Desperate Measures

After years of financial instability at the American Institute of Architects, a failed Internet venture now threatens to ruin the organization.

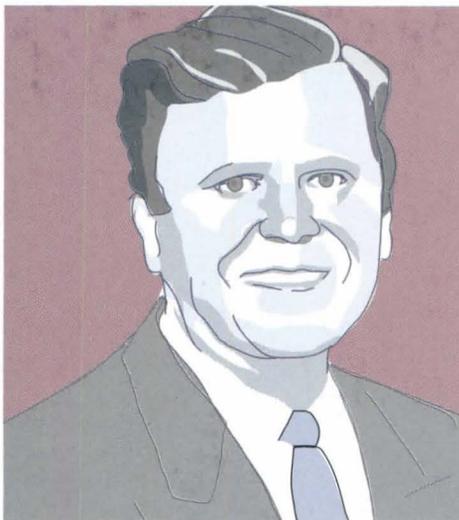
**Bradford McKee** traces the path.

**AIA** For months, there had been rumors, whispers of trouble, and worried looks on the faces of the bosses at the American Institute of Architects' (AIA) national headquarters in Washington. Then came the inevitable admission this past May, just before the Institute's convention in Denver: The Institute is broke—actually, it's worse than broke. On May 8, executive vice president and CEO Norman Koonce sent an unprecedented letter to the AIA's 66,500 members, foretelling good news and bad news to come at the meeting. The good news, Koonce wrote, would be that "in 2000, we added over \$100,000" to the AIA's savings account. The bad news was that the Institute's net

Figures presented by Norman Koonce, AIA president, to the Institute's national convention in Denver, showing the financial loss between 1996 and 2000, and the projected recovery by 2003. The near-vertical drop-off represents the damage from AECdirect.



Norman Koonce has been AIA president since 1999. AECdirect was founded, and failed, on his watch.



James Dinegar, present AIA COO, has worked with Koonce to soothe members' concerns since AECdirect ate up the AIA's reserves.



Fred DeLuca, 18-year AIA CFO, was made president and CEO of AECdirect in February of 2000. Eight months later, he was voted off the job.

worth, which had stood at a healthy \$9 million in 1996, had plummeted, in a worst-case estimate, to a deficit of \$5.6 million.

In his letter, Koonce tried to let the members down easy. He described his start as the Institute's CEO in mid-1999 as a period of unfortunate discoveries. "We quickly identified—quite frankly—a host of institutional financial management problems," he wrote, including "deficit spending and a lack of accountability," which created "a steady weakening of our overall financial condition."

The AIA, Koonce continued, "had not operated with a balanced budget since 1996, with significant operating deficits being incurred each year." Its net worth had fallen accordingly, he wrote, "dipping from the \$9 million range to \$1.3 million over the period 1997 to 1999." The AIA's net worth dropped yet again in 2000, to \$700,000.

The letter then credited the AIA's current managers for having operated on a "balanced budget basis" for the first time since 1996, and for having turned around "previous patterns of financial management."

Indeed, Koonce's letter continued hopefully, the AIA would be on the road to recovery, except for one glaring problem: There were even bigger losses to come from a failed for-profit Internet venture. The enterprise, known as AECdirect, was intended to provide new services to AIA members, all without risking a single dime of their money. But by the time AECdirect's board of directors shut it down last December, barely eight months after its launch, AECdirect had cost outside investors nearly \$4 million, and AIA members an estimated \$6.3 million more. The company's failure, it seemed, threatened to cripple an already ailing organization.

Despite the letter's presumptions to candor, no one, from Norman Koonce to president John Anderson to any of the 46 members of the

board of directors, has yet managed to explain exactly how such stunning losses occurred. In its attempts to clear the air, the AIA's current leadership has raised more questions than it has answered.

Koonce and his chief operating officer, James Dinegar, say they inherited a host of crises that predate their tenures. Yet dozens of interviews with current and former AIA officers and people close to the organization (most of whom declined to be identified for fear of reprisal), as well as a review of internal documents suggest that the AIA has not been entirely forthcoming about its financial picture. Things looked shaky before the current management team arrived, but decisions made by the board and AIA administrators since 1999 have made the Institute's problems vastly worse.

When the massive liability of AECdirect crash-landed on the AIA at the end of last year, it only compounded two other major money crises that were consuming the Institute throughout the late 1990s.

Under James Cramer, who took the reins as the AIA's CEO in 1988, the board developed a pattern of depleting the Institute's reserves to pay for member programs, rather than using current revenues. The AIA's reserves, which only the board can spend, are supposed to be available to help weather events like an economic downturn or a lawsuit. An internal analysis prepared for the board in 1997 shows an \$8 million drop in reserves between 1991 and 1993, to a total of \$2 million.

In 1995, Cramer's replacement, Terrence M. McDermott, cut 75 staff positions and slashed overhead by about \$2.4 million, investing instead in a national advertising campaign, a member newsletter, and a Web site, among other things. The Institute began rebuilding reserves between 1994 and 1996, to a balance of \$5.4 million.

Then in March 1996, the Institute's board of directors, under

President Raymond G. Post and CEO McDermott, voted to end supplemental dues for member architects beginning in 1997. Supplemental dues, a sort of surtax on top of ordinary dues, brought the AIA \$3.9 million each year. The decision to end them was politically popular but economically risky because it cut annual dues revenue by 20 percent, or \$2.4 million. Another \$1.5 million in supplemental dues would still flow in from firms to cover their nonmember employees.

But the AIA knew that during the following year, the Institute would have to reckon with the supplemental dues loss. "There wasn't a lot of fat left" in the AIA's budget after McDermott's restructuring, says a former board member. So the board, when it voted to end supplemental dues, also approved a five-year strategy for a "controlled budget deficit" that would allow the Institute to absorb the dues loss gradually.

That plan called for the Institute to stop funding depreciation on its Washington headquarters building at \$2.4 million per year while continuing to put about \$600,000 worth of improvements into the property annually. Separately, the Institute would begin rebuilding its corporate reserves, from a level of \$4.3 million in 1998 to \$10.5 million by 2003. An internal memorandum to the board dated November 29, 1999 explains that the AIA was by then in the third year of its plan of reporting the dues loss, which had shrunk from \$2.4 million to \$1.5 million.

"We were showing a deficit but still rebuilding reserves," says a former officer familiar with the plan. "We even got ahead of our five-year schedule. We felt that in the third or fourth year, we could come back to a balanced budget. This was all outlined and projected, approved by the banks, approved by the board, and understood by Coopers and Lybrand, [the AIA's] auditors. Everything was always very clean."

But the controlled deficit plan was not widely publicized to members. During a recent interview, Koonce, along with the AIA's chief operating officer James Dinegar and communications chief Charles Hamlin, dissociated himself from the controlled-deficit plan, which went into effect two years before he became CEO. Koonce has told AIA chapter heads that he had trouble finding financial information when he took office.

Koonce said in the interview that he didn't realize the depth of the AIA's financial problems until his first board meeting as CEO, in September 1999. "We had a very thorough discussion about the financial picture, and there was a forecast of continuation of the deficit," referred to as a 'planned deficit budget,' Koonce recalled. "Our board said at that point, 'That's irresponsible. We can't continue to do it.'" Plus, the board expected Koonce to deliver a balanced budget by the end of 2000, he says. "Those were the marching orders I had."

If any members of the board during that September 1999 meeting remembered the round approval of the controlled-deficit plan just a few years earlier, which now seemed "irresponsible," none got up to remind the others. Additionally, a former officer points out, all financial records of the AIA have been available for inspection by any board member at any time. But "the board members were never particularly interested in sitting and listening to hours of financial stuff."

1990	From 1986 to 1990, the AIA added \$5.2 million to its corporate reserves. 1990 year-end balance: \$10 million.
1991	The AIA depletes its corporate reserves by \$1.8 million. Year-end corporate reserves balance: \$8.2 million.
1992	The AIA depletes corporate reserves by \$3.1 million. Year-end corporate reserves balance: \$5.1 million.
1993	The AIA depletes corporate reserves by \$3.1 million. Year-end corporate reserves balance: \$2 million.
1994	In March James J. Cramer, CEO since 1988, leaves office. He is later replaced by Terrence McDermott. Year-end corporate reserves balance: \$2.24 million.
1995	McDermott downsizes the AIA by cutting 75 jobs and overhead for a savings of \$2.4 million. The CEO also contracts out the AIA bookstore, convention planning, and publications sales. Year-end corporate reserves balance: \$3 million.
1996	The AIA board, under President Raymond G. Post, votes in March to end supplemental dues for members, starting in 1997.  New magazine agreement with McGraw-Hill brings in \$1.5 million per year for seven years. Year-end corporate reserves balance: \$5.4 million.
1997	Supplemental dues withdrawn for members. Cost to Institute: \$2.4 million per year.  McDermott leaves CEO job on June 30. Board later hires Mark Hurwitz, executive vice president of the Building Owners and Managers Association, as the AIA's new CEO.  The board approves a "controlled deficit" plan to absorb loss of supplemental dues. Year-end corporate reserves balance: \$2.1 million.
1998	AIA gains \$1.5 million in settlement of expired employee benefit plan, The AIA nonetheless depletes corporate reserves by \$2.1 million. Year-end corporate reserves balance: -\$145,804.
1999	The AIA board fires CEO Hurwitz. Norman Koonce, president of the American Architectural Foundation, becomes interim CEO in January.  (continued on page 61)

Just as Koonce and the board were scrapping the 1997 budget plan, another financial calamity was forming. This one concerned a costly failed attempt to collect member dues differently. AIA members always paid their national, state and/or local dues separately. Some complained of redundancy and confusion. As of 1999, the AIA had spent \$4 million over the previous five years developing a consolidated "single-point" dues system to let members pay them all at once.

But component leaders, who believed they had the most to lose in a national dues collection system, hated the prospect, and could not unite around an easy solution. When Koonce arrived in 1999, he says, he found the project a shambles and widely scorned. "There was no way to keep

## **Within eight months of AECdirect's debut, the investors' money was gone, the venture's leadership and most of its staff were fired without severance pay, and the company's 10-member board of directors voted to close its doors.**

it operating," Koonce says. He cancelled the initiative and ordered the investment written off: an amount insiders say was nearly \$3.5 million. The write-off "immediately put [the AIA] in a deficit situation" only a few months after Koonce became CEO, says a former officer of the Institute. Koonce estimates the write-off amounted to between \$1.3 and \$1.5 million, but says, "I don't remember the precise number."

That account of the 1999 deficit differs from that which Koonce and his management team offered at the 2000 AIA national convention in Philadelphia. At that time, a preliminary "1999 Financial Summary" explained: "The increase in 1999 to a \$3.4 million deficit is largely a reflection of two unusual transactions that took place." The first transaction, it said, was a set of startup costs for AECdirect that had yet to be reimbursed. The other transaction, said the summary, related to production costs for a new ad campaign that had to be recorded all at once rather than stretched out over the three years that the campaign would last. (AIA convention delegates approved a special three-year assessment of \$50 a year to finance the ad campaign).

The 1999 summary also volunteers that "the AIA's total and liquid reserve position is in compliance with Board policy." Three former AIA officers say that this could not have been the case. The AIA's reserves policy is fairly standard for organizations of its type. It says that the Institute must keep total reserves equal to half the current operating budget, of which 20 percent must be liquid. When the reserves meet those marks, the AIA can use its investment income for operations. The rules are written to keep enough money on hand for emergencies.

The 1999 budget totaled \$30 million, but whereas the AIA should have possessed unrestricted reserves of approximately \$3 million, it

was instead suffering a debt of \$3,635,576.

As for the controlled-deficit plan, "I didn't have any responsibility for it," Koonce says. "It was the auditors who came to me and said 'the organization can't continue to operate with those deficits.'" In all, the Institute's net worth dropped from \$9 million in 1996 to \$700,000 in December 2000. And catastrophic losses—the single-point dues write-off, combined with forcing a balanced budget before the controlled-deficit plan had concluded—ate up the AIA's reserves.

Some people close to the AIA believe it decided to start an Internet business out of sheer financial desperation. Others think the Institute had a genuinely good idea. Either way, within eight months of AECdirect's debut, the investors' money was gone, the venture's leadership and most of its staff were fired without severance pay, and the company's 10-member board of directors voted to close its doors.

AECdirect "could not be sustained when the dot-com bubble burst," Koonce wrote in his May letter to members. But former insiders say that AECdirect failed because of internal disarray and because a crucial external partnership never materialized.

The idea behind the startup was to provide a Web portal to architects and others in the design and construction business that would dispense three main products: the AIA's own proprietary contract documents, its widely used Masterspec system, and materials for the Institute's continuing education requirements, all of which could potentially generate millions in revenue each year.

The board approved the formation of the for-profit corporation at its December 1999 meeting in Washington, hoping to "harness the rapid technological and practice advances in the marketplace," Koonce said in a February 2000 news release, "and put them to work for our members and the entire industry."

But from the outset, warning bells were ringing. Members of the AIA's Computer-Aided Practice Advisory Group, which advises the Institute on technology issues, "started telling everyone who would listen that this was a bad idea," recalls Joseph P. Hagan, an architect in Memphis who served in the group. "Once we found out about it, we adamantly opposed it," he says. "Our position was that the Institute should not be in the e-commerce business."

Further, according to one founding investor, the AIA "coupled incompetence with preposterous business planning" in starting AECdirect. "Everybody, including the investors, had visions of sugarplums dancing in their heads. I went to my first board meeting and I came back to work and said, 'We just lost \$500,000.' Everything that could be wrong was wrong."

Despite members' misgivings, AECdirect opened for business on June 6, 2000, roughly two months after the stock market's technology sector began to falter. Norman Koonce became chairman of AECdirect's 10-person board, on which the AIA insisted on retaining six seats. As chief executive officer of the business, the AIA installed Fred DeLuca, who had been the AIA's chief financial officer for 18 years and who would later become a polarizing figure amid the financial failure of the Institute.

The AIA had lined up several outside *continued on page 61*

*continued from page 54* investors—McGraw-Hill, Bentley Systems, Hanley-Wood, CMD Group, iPIX, and Buildscape—to contribute \$3.5 million to the startup. A background paper AIA published for its 2000 Grassroots gathering in Washington stated: “No direct investment of AIA funds are involved in the venture.”

Supposedly, the AIA was investing only its intellectual property. Koonce was reportedly in charge of the AIA team responsible for delivering the contract documents to be sold on the site. Given AECdirect’s opening date in June 2000, the documents were supposed to be ready five months before, an inside source says, but the deadline was postponed to May, then June, and finally November. Koonce delivered the final documents to AECdirect in late November.

Programming difficulties accounted for the delay, Koonce says, and although AECdirect was the brainchild of the AIA, he contends that making the documents operable on the Web site “was not our responsibility at all.” By the time Koonce delivered his documents, it was probably too late anyway. AECdirect had already burned through its investors’ \$3.5 million. The company had no cash flow prospects on the day Koonce finally handed over the contract documents, and the following week the board of directors voted to shut the company down.

Two people present at that meeting say that the call to close the company came from Kenneth Michaels, senior vice president and chief operating officer of the McGraw-Hill Construction Information Group, who represented McGraw-Hill on the AECdirect board. AECdirect’s leadership believed that McGraw-Hill, in addition to its investment in the site, would agree to provide licensing to AECdirect, linking the AIA’s Masterspec system to McGraw-Hill’s *Sweet’s* catalog. But that part of the partnership never came together. “McGraw-Hill wouldn’t link us,” says a former AECdirect insider.

Through a representative, Michaels declined to comment for this story. The president of Michaels’s division, Norbert Young, says that McGraw-Hill saw AECdirect “simply as a way to leverage a relationship with the AIA and to extend our information into a deeper community.” Young disputes the claim that the links between McGraw-Hill’s site and AECdirect never materialized. “The links were made,” Young says, but he declined to elaborate on why the two parties never produced a workable licensing agreement.

McGraw-Hill has had a contentious relationship with at least one other design and construction Web portal. A lawsuit and countersuit *settled in June* between McGraw-Hill and International Design and Construction Online, a Maryland-based Web company, contains allegations that McGraw-Hill partnered with the smaller company and then set about crushing it. The company’s proprietor, architect Joseph Boggs, reeling from the experience, then tried to strike a partnership with AECdirect which, Boggs alleged, was voted out of business shortly thereafter at the behest of McGraw-Hill’s Michaels. McGraw-Hill reportedly settled the suit on the day that Fred DeLuca gave an eight-hour deposition in the case, which, Boggs says, was friendly to Boggs’s version of the events.

*continued on page 121*

1999

(continued from page 53)

A three-year, \$50 per-member dues assessment is approved and imposed to fund a national advertising campaign.

At the national convention in May, the board of directors confirms Koonce as the AIA’s new CEO.

At a December meeting, the AIA board approves formation of a for-profit corporation, which later becomes AECdirect.

The AIA depletes corporate reserves by \$3.4 million. Year-end corporate reserves balance: -\$3.6 million.

2000

In January, Grassroots 2000 attendees in Washington first learn of AECdirect venture. “Some questioned why they had not seen the business plan...”—Grassroots *Digital Daily* newsletter

In February, the AIA formally announces the formation of AECdirect. Fred DeLuca, former AIA CFO, is named president/CEO of the company; AIA CEO Koonce becomes the new company’s board chairman.

In April, technology stocks begin to fall.

At the national convention in Philadelphia in May, DeLuca announces that AECdirect will open for business in June. I believe this will revolutionize the industry,” he says.

At the same convention, Koonce reports an increased deficit of \$3.4 million for 1999. “The Institute’s new management team is already implementing the necessary strategies to rebuild the Institute’s reserve fund...”—convention *Digital Daily* newsletter

AECdirect launches on June 6.

In the first week of December, AECdirect’s board votes to shut down the company.

On December 21, AECdirect issues a new release stating that its board of directors had approved a “restructuring” that “will be transparent to AECdirect’s user base.”

The AIA adds to its corporate reserves by \$100,000, for a total corporate reserves deficit of -\$3.5 million. Costs associated with AECdirect bring the AIA’s estimated net worth to -\$5.6 million.

2001

Speaking before the New England chapter of the AIA in May, Koonce and AIA COO James Dinegar ruminate that in creating AECdirect, the AIA “didn’t know ourselves well enough,” that management needed more efficiency, and that “in hindsight, we should not have done it.”

That same month, Koonce announces the AIA’s cash position is now -\$5.6 million.

# Heads Up

**DRIP, DRIP, DRIP.** A failing roof can undo an architect or client, even though Frank Lloyd Wright—whose roofing problems were legendary—might have disagreed. The roof is unquestionably a primary barrier between a building's interior and the elements, as well as a potential focus for architectural expression. It's with these functions in mind that Architecture presents the following special advertising section on Roofing.

Is there a "right" roof for a project? Industry veterans recommend a cautious approach, examining such factors as local conditions, building construction, interior environment, local codes and construction budget ahead of aesthetics. There's certainly no lack of possibilities: single-ply roofing, built-up roofing, tile roofing, asphalt shingle roofing, wood shingle roofing, slate roofing, metal roofing (aluminum, steel, copper, tin/terne or zinc), and such roofing components as sealants, waterproofing, flashing, gutters and skylights.

Paradoxically, industry consolidation is enabling such broad-based building products manufacturers as CertainTeed to hedge their bets by marketing competing technologies. "We offer laminated fiberglass shingles, fiberglass and organic-based built-up roofing, modified bitumen roof systems and clay tile," says Marcia Hanna, marketing manager for CertainTeed. "Although our products are generally for commercial or residential use, there's frequent crossover—say when a neighborhood shopping center is upgraded with our Ludovici clay tiles, which are typically used for homes."

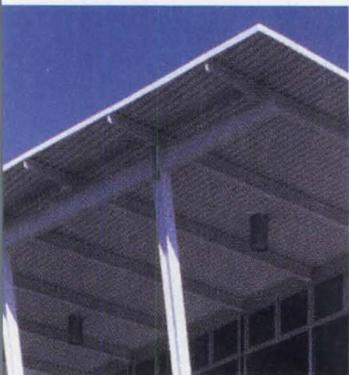
Though some architects regard roofing as a mature commodity, the industry promotes competition to advance performance, increase design options, and simplify design and specification. Consider MBCI, a respected producer of metal roofs. "Our company is constantly developing new ways to make metal roofs

last longer, reduce maintenance costs and offer more durable colors," reports Dick Corbitt, MBCI's manager of marketing communications. "We also test our product in accordance with UL standards against a variety of structural systems and substrates, and share our results with architects. To make it easier to work with us, we provide CAD programs and technical information online seminars offering CEUs and more."

Manufacturers with a broad understanding of roofing technology can often be tapped as sources of comprehensive technical support as well as quality products. One example is Tamko, a leading roofing-products manufacturer of SBS-modified, APP-modified and fiberglass cap sheets and base sheets for commercial construction, laminated fiberglass shingles, organic-based shingles and underlayments/felts for residential construction, and flashing, mastic, waterproofing, cements and coatings. "Our technical services are available to all," observes Mike Hardy, director of sales, education and marketing for Tamko, "homeowners and professionals alike."

Of course, there's no substitute for on-site experience to ground architects in the fundamentals of roofing. Jim Burkett, national product and marketing manager for Genflex, a noted producer of single-ply roofing employing TPO, EPDM and PVC membranes, appreciates the architects' responsibility to choose wisely. "We offer a manufactured waterproof membrane that is ready to install in the field with less labor, fewer application steps and reduced risk of leaks compared to built up roofs," he states. "But it's the architect's job to decide what's best."

Architects should take heart. What they learn about roofing in the following pages and on their own could even make them better designers of roofs than—gasp—Frank Lloyd Wright. ■ Roger Yee



**Melanie Rehak**  
on the documentary  
*Berlin Babylon*  
page 68

**Eric Fredericksen**  
on photographer  
Erieta Attali  
page 70

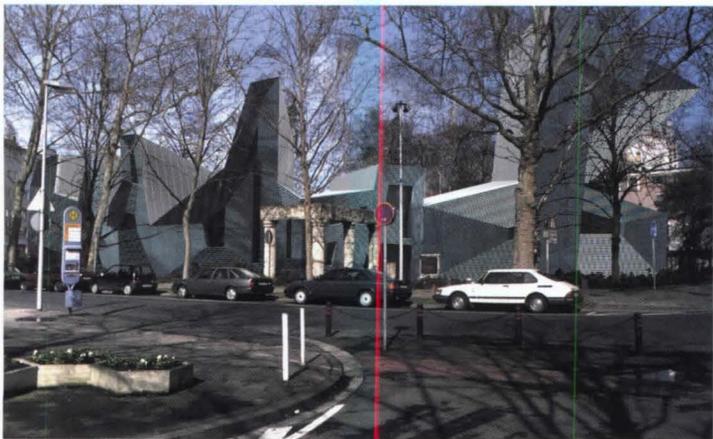
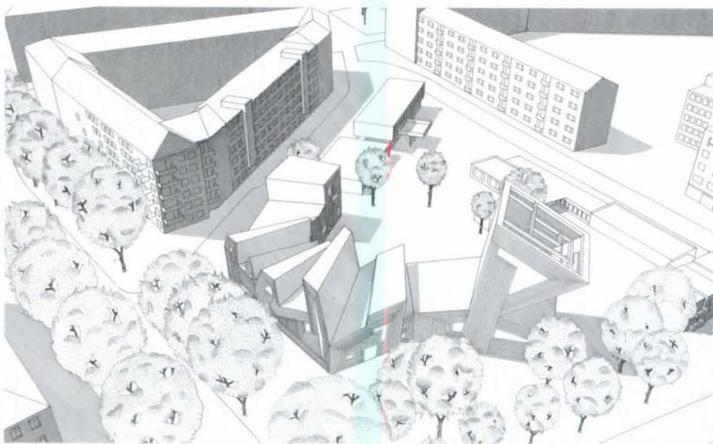


## Germany's New Synagogues

The Jewish population of Germany has tripled since the fall of the Wall. **Michael Z. Wise** asks, In what style should they build?

**Religion** “The history of the German Jews has come to an end,” Hannah Arendt wrote without equivocation soon after the Holocaust. That calamity also seemed to close the book on an illustrious tradition of German Jewish religious architecture. But against all odds, the past decade has witnessed a tripling of the number of Jews in Germany, accompanied by the opening, construction or planning of a dozen new synagogues. Now, the central question that vexed 19th-century German architects—In which style should we build?—is being posed with renewed urgency by synagogue designers in Germany. “It’s

Alfred Jacoby, the venerable German synagogue architect, designed an elliptical sanctuary for the town of Chemnitz (above). Two focal points in the sanctuary express the dual orientation of newly immigrated Jews.



Based on the forms of the Hebrew letters in the word “*kedushah*” or “holy,” the jagged elevation of Manuel Herz’s design for Mainz (above) is also meant to reflect the repeated attempts by others to eradicate the Jewish community. The form of the tall sanctuary (top, at right) is based on the shofar, or ram’s horn, used on Jewish high holy days. The Zvi Hecker–designed Jewish Cultural Center and synagogue, which opened in 1999 in Duisburg (facing page), refers both to the form of an open book and an open hand.

something no one expected,” says Deirdre Berger, who represents the American Jewish Committee in Berlin. Indeed in 1948, the World Jewish Congress issued an appeal to Jews all over the world to “never again settle on the blood-drenched soil of Germany.”

Prior to World War II, the German Jewish community was over 500,000 strong; the overwhelming majority were subsequently murdered or driven into exile. Until the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, only 30,000 Jews lived in West and East Germany. Most were East European Holocaust survivors who emerged from displaced persons camps and somehow stayed in the country. Many professed to be “sitting on packed suitcases” and were so ashamed to have lingered on German territory that when they traveled abroad they often told fellow Jews that they lived in Switzerland.

Now an influx of Jews from Russia and other parts of Eastern Europe has pushed up Germany’s Jewish population to over 90,000, transforming both the community’s size and identity. These new arrivals entered through an exception in Germany’s otherwise tight immigration laws that was created as part of continued German efforts to make recompense for Nazi crimes. Most are nonobservant and uneducated in Jewish practice and thought. But existing communities, dominated by Orthodox leadership, want to integrate the immigrants and build for the future. “On the one hand, we know what happened here in Germany 50 or 60 years ago,” said Rabbi Shneur Trebnik, who leads a small community in Ulm. “On the other hand, today I hope things are changing.”

Meanwhile, younger German-born Jews desire greater religious pluralism and seek to revive the Reform Jewish movement founded in Germany in the early 19th century. A Reform rabbinical school was inaugurated in Potsdam last November, the first Jewish seminary to open in Germany since the Holocaust. At present, the country’s 88 communities are served by 27 rabbis, most educated in Israel or the United States. Amid this ferment, synagogues are under construction in Dresden and Chemnitz—the first Jewish prayer houses to arise in eastern Germany since communism’s demise. The design for a new \$27 million synagogue, community center, and museum complex in Munich was selected in July, and new temples are under discussion in other cities, including Potsdam and Wuppertal.

Funds for these new structures come primarily from German state and city governments. Appealing for additional donations for the Dresden synagogue, Kurt Biedenkopf, state government leader in Saxony, observed, “After all, it was citizens of Dresden who destroyed the original building. Accordingly, it is an act of justice that they support the construction of a new one.”

Immigration has swelled the number of Jews in Dresden from 60 to 365 over the last decade. “We urgently need this center which will lay the seeds for a new religious and cultural life,” says Heinz-Joachim Aris, executive director of the community that prior to the 1938 Kristallnacht pogrom was housed in a majestic structure designed by Gottfried Semper. For the past half-century, Dresden Jews have gathered next to the cemetery in a burial hall converted into a prayer space by the East German regime.

But since Dresden’s new synagogue project got under way in 1997 after a far larger effort began to reconstruct the Frauenkirche, a splendid Baroque church destroyed in the 1945 Allied firebombing, some see the synagogue campaign as a guilty afterthought. Massachusetts Institute of Technology architectural history professor Mark Jarzombek argues that the state of Saxony has become the de facto client, rather than the Dresden Jewish community. He calls the modern synagogue a “billboard” aimed at promoting foreign trade and tourism that is also part of a “state-mandated, state-financed, ‘return to normalcy’” following the trauma of genocide.

The federal government in Berlin is certainly keen to spotlight the upswing in Germany’s Jewish population. To this end, it helped fund a



**“Jewish life in Germany will not be revived by these buildings alone,” says Salomon Korn. “These buildings are the shell. They must be filled with life.”**

touring exhibit organized by the Mizel Museum of Judaica in Denver about Alfred Jacoby, Germany’s most prolific designer of new synagogues. (The show is currently on view in Houston at the Margolis Gallery of Temple Beth Israel through November 30. It will open in March 2002 at the University of Utah.) Yet behind the hype lies a genuine if sometimes halting bid to resuscitate Jewish life. “The communities have grown to the point that existing quarters are inadequate,” says Judith Hart, editor-in-chief of the *Allgemeine Jüdische Wochenzeitung*, a weekly published by the Central Council of Jews in Germany.

The latest designs are divergent in approach and caliber, but several involve formal qualities that assure synagogues renewed prominence in German cityscapes. “Up to now the position of Jews in Germany has been characterized by a feeling of shame and fear,” says Manuel Herz, architect of an attention-getting new house of prayer for

Mainz. But, adds Herz, “This is changing.” The Jews from former Eastern bloc nations have fewer qualms about living in a nation where democracy and prosperity contrast sharply with conditions in their troubled homelands. In addition, a younger generation of architects is far more inclined to break with the muted design strategies pursued in the Holocaust’s immediate aftermath.

The two dozen modest, inconspicuous German synagogues erected in the second half of the 20th century made little or no reference in their design to the murder and dispersal of pre-war Jewry. (Another 40 small communities have been based in renovated pre-war synagogues.) Alfred Jacoby continues to avoid overt references to the past, opting instead for a more abstract approach. In this connection, he cites the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein, “Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.” Jacoby, the son of Polish Jews who



### Film

**Berlin Babylon**, directed by Hubertus Siegert, October 17 through October 23, at Film Forum, New York City

"When Alexander left the building site, it was a vacant lot." So ends the description of the creation and destruction of the legendary Tower of Babylon that scrolls across the screen at the start of *Berlin Babylon*, Hubertus Siegert's wild, engrossing documentary about the construction boom in Berlin since the fall of the Wall. It's a surprisingly apt beginning. At the close of World War II, as archival footage shows, Berlin's city center was comprised mostly of ruins. After they were demolished, Siegert says, the people of Berlin "lived in a city with a lot of fields. You could always see the horizon in Berlin, even downtown."

In the post-communist era, these fields became battle-

grounds for architects, politicians, developers, and city planners, all of whom clashed over how to handle the unprecedented mix of history, opportunity, and economics that was transforming the city at an incredibly rapid pace. *Berlin Babylon* brilliantly captures this sense of relentless forward motion as it follows the contentious process of creating and re-creating the Jewish Museum, the new Reichstag, Pariser Platz (above) and Potsdamer Platz, among other projects. One has the feeling that the city, its horizon studded with innumerable cranes, is being reinvented from the ground up every day.

"My intention in making the film was to show this city when it was falling into the rough hands of the builders, the construction workers and the architects and the investors," says Siegert. "They all have rough hands." *Melanie Rehak*

survived forced labor camps, studied with Aldo Rossi in Zurich, and his work reflects Rossi's predilection for clear geometric forms with sanctuaries that provide serene havens from avant-garde trends prevalent in often intentionally disconcerting Holocaust memorials. At the same time, Jacoby's synagogues in Darmstadt, Heidelberg, Offenbach, Aachen, Kassel, and Cologne are neither set back from the street nor concealed by greenery, as was often the case until now.

## An influx of Jews from Russia and other parts of Eastern Europe has tripled Germany's Jewish population, transforming the community's size and identity.

In Chemnitz, Jacoby has sought to embody the mindset of new Jewish immigrants with little religious background. The elliptical sanctuary will have two focal points—one centered on the ark which contains the holy Torah scrolls, the other a large window placed off axis. "I'm trying to express that these people have a dual orientation," Jacoby says. "They have to integrate into a foreign country and integrate as a Jewish community."

However vividly the designs capture the fractured and still awkward nature of Jewry in Germany, Frankfurt Jewish community leader Salomon Korn cautions against overstating the new synagogues' ultimate impact. "Jewish life in Germany will not be revived by these buildings alone," he says. "That will only be done through people like rabbis and teachers who are in short supply. These buildings are the framework, the shell. They must be filled with life. That is the great challenge." ■



Frankfurt-based Alfred Jacoby's synagogue designs, as in this one for Kassel, display a predilection for clear geometric forms and an avoidance of historical references.

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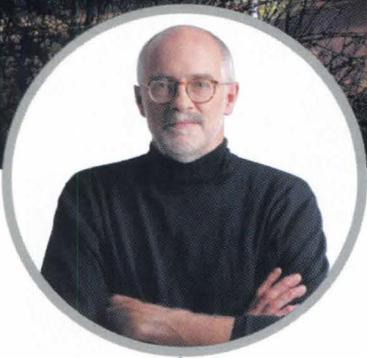
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**73**

## IN SEARCH OF LOST TIME SNØHETTA'S ALEXANDRIA LIBRARY

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## INTRODUCTION

Somewhere beneath the bloated and bedraggled modern city of Alexandria lie the ruins of its Great Library, that vast and fabled repository of classical knowledge. Edward Gibbon, the peerless 18th-century narrator of the Roman Empire's decline and fall, summed up the dismay of generations of scholars when he described the loss of the library's contents as an "irreparable shipwreck of the learning, the arts, and the genius, of antiquity." In those texts that have survived the ages, fragments mostly, long hoarded in the monasteries of Europe and the libraries of the Eastern Caliphs, Alexandria plays a fabled role as the rich and sophisticated Greco-Roman capital of Egypt. Founded by Alexander the Great at the mouth of the River Nile, it was seized and held for three centuries by the Macedonian Ptolemies, and lost to the Emperor Augustus by Cleopatra, last of her proud, debauched line, lover of Julius Caesar and Mark Antony. History has left fewer traces of the library's form, location, or fate, an occlusion of fact that has not deterred the Egyptian government from constructing a new Library of Alexandria in emulation of the old one. Hubris? Perhaps. But the mythic romance of the ancient metropolis, of the decadent colonial outpost that it became in the 19th century, and of the Great Library itself provide impetus enough.

The Great Library was established during the 305–283 B.C. reign of Ptolemy Soter, one of Alexander's generals and his self-appointed heir in Egypt, most likely as part of the Museion, an archive, art gallery, and academy attached to the waterfront royal compound. For over half a millennium, Ptolemy's descendants and their Roman successors hosted a remarkable assembly of thinkers there, from the geometer Euclid, a contemporary of the first Ptolemy, to the last great philosopher of antiquity, Plotinus, the founder of Neoplatonism, who died in 270 A.D. The library's holdings were eventually numbered as high as 900,000 scrolls, thanks in part to an innovative, if inhospitable, method of acquisition: Pharaonic decree suffered every ship passing through the busy harbor to be searched for new texts, which were then seized, taken to the library, and transcribed. The library kept the originals; the rightful owners got the copies. Even the most conservative scholarly estimate of a 50,000-scroll collection seems impressive when one considers that the U.S. Library of Congress got its start with the 1815 purchase of Thomas Jefferson's private library—then the largest in the country, with 6,487 volumes.

Gibbon relates no fewer than three different tales of the Great Library's destruction: most famously, in 48 B.C., as a charred civilian casualty of Julius Caesar's Alexandrian

War in defense of Cleopatra against a coalition of her rebellious siblings; in 389 A.D., at the hands of a Christian mob incited by the archbishop Theophilus to erase all signs of paganism; and lastly during the 639 A.D. Arab conquest of Egypt, when the Caliph Omar reportedly sent the following instructions regarding the library's fate: "If the writings of these Greeks agree with the book of God [the Koran], they are useless and need not be preserved: If they disagree, they are pernicious and ought to be destroyed."

Though uncertain as to the real culprit, Gibbon clearly suspects Theophilus, who he vilifies as "the perpetual enemy of peace and virtue." The author of the most comprehensive recent study of the ancient library, Luciano Canfora, has his own theory—the Roman Emperor Aurelian's sack of Alexandria during a 270–275 A.D. war with Queen Zenobia of Palmyra—but never mind. No amount of dueling scholarship can upstage Elizabeth Taylor in her overblown 1960s vehicle *Cleopatra*, assaulting Rex Harrison, a beleaguered Caesar, with the news of the disaster. Fact, where the Great Library is concerned, has a way of succumbing to fiction.

Fiction also has a way of breeding more fiction. After centuries of decline under Muslim stewardship, Napoleon Bonaparte's 1798–99 occupation brought Egypt to the self-serving attention of the industrialized West, and the 1869 completion of the Suez Canal confirmed Alexandria's cultural and economic renewal as a rich, cosmopolitan port of call between Europe and Asia, an infamously louche setting for foreign and native writers such as Lawrence Durrell, Constantine P. Cavafy, and André Aciman. President Nasser's 1962 nationalization of Egyptian industries and businesses stifled Alexandria's imperialist renaissance, but the city's inhabitants still live with the memory; dim art nouveau cafés linger amidst the concrete apartment blocks of an ostensibly democratic present.

Now Alexandrians can look to the shining metal face of the library that has lately risen alongside the harbor, like a beacon illuminating both the fantastic past and an expectant future. To have faith in renewal—of the institution and of the city—is eminently appropriate in a land regulated for millennia by the daily passage of the sun, and the seasonal cycle of Nile River flooding. So while the new library's current 250,000-volume collection may seem meager when compared to the bibliographic riches amassed by the ancients, the epic task of the modern building's creation and the magnificent scale and bearing of its architecture is a tale worth the telling.



## PLUTARCH ALEXANDER

### PARALLEL LIVES 100 A.D.

Among the treasures and other booty that was taken from Darius, there was a very precious casket, which being brought to Alexander for a great rarity, he asked those about him what they thought fittest to be laid up in it; and when they had delivered their various opinions, he told them he should keep Homer's *Iliad* in it. This is attested by many credible authors, and if what those of Alexandria tell us, relying on upon the authority of Heraclides, be true, Homer was neither an idle nor an unprofitable companion to him in his expedition. For when he was master of Egypt, designing to settle a colony of Grecians there, he resolved to build a large and populous city, and give it his own name. In order to which, after he had measured and staked out the ground with the advice of the best architects, he chanced one night in his sleep to see a wonderful vision; a grey-headed old man, of a venerable aspect, appeared to stand by him, and pronounce these verses—

“An island lies, where loud the billows roar,  
Pharos they call it, on the Egyptian shore.”

Alexander upon this immediately rose up and went to Pharos, which, at that time, was an island lying a little above the Canobic mouth of the river Nile, though it has now been joined to the mainland by a mole. As soon as he saw the commodious situation of the place, it being a long neck of land, stretching like an isthmus between large lagoons and shallow waters on one side and the sea on the other, the latter at the end of it making a spacious harbor, he said, Homer, besides his other excellences, was a very good architect, and ordered the plan of a city to be drawn out answerable to the place. To do which, for want of chalk, the soil being black, they laid out their lines with flour, taking in a pretty large compass of ground in a semi-circular figure, and drawing into the inside of the circumference equal straight lines from each end, thus giving it something of the form of a cloak or cape; while he was pleasing himself with his design, on a sudden an infinite number of great birds of several kinds, rising like a black cloud out of the river and the lake, devoured every morsel of the flour that had been used in setting out the lines; at which omen even Alexander himself was troubled, till the augurs restored his confidence again by telling him it was a sign the city he was about to build would not only abound in all things within itself, but also be the nurse and feeder of many nations.

TRANSLATED BY JOHN DRYDEN / PUBLISHED BY THE MODERN LIBRARY—RANDOM HOUSE

THIS DETAIL OF THE ALEXANDER MOSAIC (PAGE 73), UNCOVERED AT THE HOUSE OF THE FAUN IN POMPEII AND NOW IN THE NATIONAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM IN NAPLES, ITALY, IS A CIRCA 100 B.C. COPY OF A LOST HELLENISTIC PAINTING. IT SHOWS ALEXANDER THE GREAT, THE FOUNDER OF ALEXANDRIA, AS MACEDONIAN WARLORD, LEADING A CAVALRY CHARGE AGAINST THE GREAT

KING DARIUS OF PERSIA DURING THE 331 B.C. BATTLE OF GAUGAMELA. ONLY FIVE ANCIENT TEXTS ABOUT ALEXANDER HAVE SURVIVED, NONE OF THEM WRITTEN BY FIRST-HAND WITNESSES. THE MOST FAMOUS CONTEMPORARY ACCOUNT, THAT OF PTOLEMY SOTER, WAS PRESUMABLY LOST WITH THE DESTRUCTION OF THE ALEXANDRIA LIBRARY, SEEN (FACING PAGE) IN A 1493 GERMAN WOODCUT.



76 | AERIAL

VIEW OF THE LIBRARY FROM THE NORTHEAST

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES WILLIS

## BY MAX RODENBECK

It can happen: A single great building can revive a whole surrounding district. Sometimes an inspiring monument can revive an entire city, as Frank Gehry's molten metal triumph in Bilbao has proved. Yet equally grandiose failures spring to mind. Among the presidentially decreed wonders of modern Paris, such as the delightfully garish Centre Pompidou and I. M. Pei's elegantly restrained glass pyramid at the Louvre, lurk embarrassments like the gloomy Bastille Opera House and the Bibliotheque Nationale, whose four stark towers look like nothing so much as a Lego beast in rigor mortis washed up on the banks of the Seine.

If any town needs a transforming monument, it is Alexandria. The Western imagination still tends to conjure the soft focus setting of Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*, with its "five races, five languages, a dozen creeds... and more than five sexes." The reality is different. The past half-century has not been kind to Egypt's second city.

Today's Alexandria is a lot bigger and badder than Bilbao. The city founded by Alexander the Great now sprawls raggedly along 30 miles of Mediterranean shore. Warehouses and shantytowns fray its extremities, while a constant snarl of traffic knots its middle. Its five million inhabitants are largely poor, conservative Muslims, the provincial inheritors of a town that has grown hugely in numbers but declined in glory since Egypt's 1952 revolution. Thousands of its citizens, first the cosmopolitan foreigners whose privileged place was challenged by the rise of Egyptian nationalism, then educated Egyptians, have emigrated in the turbulent interim. Alexandria has also suffered neglect, with Egypt's hypercentralized government spoiling the capital, Cairo, at the expense of its ancient rival.

Remnants of an earlier gentility endure—King Farouk's palaces, the porticoed villas of Greek cotton merchants, cavernous old cafés, a few scraggly parks studded with ancient stones—but they are increasingly swamped by modern accretions. Few of the institutions that underpinned the older Alexandria's worldliness remain. The consulates have mostly closed. Grand churches and synagogues echo empty behind locked gates. Many an elegant façade in the old city center, that eclectic mix of Neo-Venetian, Neo-Islamic, art deco, and beaux arts that defined the city as thoroughly Mediterranean, has been wantonly remodeled to accommodate the present riot of tatty storefronts. Even the busy commercial harbor, off-limits beyond a security fence, has lost trade to other Egyptian ports.

This is the context into which the gleaming, \$200 million

Bibliotheca Alexandrina, an institution aspiring to the world fame and significance of the ancient library of Alexandria, is being inserted. The new library's erudite director, Ismail Serageldin, calls the idea a "marvelous, noble dream to devote one's life to." It certainly is. The question is whether modern Alexandria has the spirit of openness, the curiosity, the generosity, and the talent to make the dream work.

Perhaps it does. Even without the ambitious library project, change is stirring. Two years ago the government in Cairo, atoning for years of appointing greedy and incompetent governors here, brought in a squeaky clean ex-officer to run the town. Abdel Salam Mahgoub may not have performed miracles, but he has certainly shown what just a little determination can do to the look of a city—and in the process shown how disastrous his predecessors were.

Public squares have been cleared of the bazaars, food stalls, and taxi stands that used to clutter them. The winding seaside Corniche that handles half the city's traffic, until recently a wild rodeo of bucking jalopies that stalled into a fuming, honking cattle pen at rush hour, is being systematically broadened into a Mediterranean Lake Shore Drive. Ranks of concrete bungalows on stilts that used to block the view of the sea have been leveled. A French firm has been contracted to scrub the city's woefully untidy streets. Governor Mahgoub has even banned car horns, which, though spottily observed, has lessened the din.

Archaeology is also lending a hand. Oddly for a city that was the greatest on the Mediterranean for centuries before the rise of Rome, and remained rich and influential for centuries thereafter, Alexandria is relatively poor in antiquities. Some of the most fabled monuments of the ancient world were here: the giant Pharos Lighthouse; the Soma, or mausoleum of Alexander the Great; the fabled palaces of the Ptolemies; and of course the Museion, the temple of the Muses that housed the ancient library where the most illustrious scholars of the age congregated.

Though the city has long boasted a charming Greco-Roman museum and a number of intriguing archaeological sites, little of this prime stuff had ever been located, let alone dug up. The trouble is that modern Alexandria sits bang atop its ancient core. Until recently, the only archaeology possible was carried out in squeezed sites vacated by demolitions and often rushed in advance of construction crews; that is, if the pile drivers didn't get there first.

In the past decade, however, underwater archaeologists have begun to seek, and find, some spectacular treasures. The Pharos has been discovered in the great pile of stones and statuary off the Eastern Harbor where it is now known to have collapsed in a 13th-century earthquake. Across the horseshoe-shaped bay, directly in front of the new library, divers have sighted the extensive ruins of the Ptolemaic palace quarter. Last year an entire sunken city was found a few miles down the coast.

The discoveries have generated enormous excitement, and not just among scholars. They have put Alexandria back on the tourist map, and in doing so have revived the Alexandrians' own appreciation of their past.

The new library promises to revive their pride in the present, but that is not to say it has no critics. Some complain

PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
CHRISTOPH GERIGK

LAST YEAR, A GROUP OF FRENCH ARCHAEOLOGISTS DISCOVERED A SUNKEN CITY 2 MILES OUTSIDE ALEXANDRIA IN THE BAY OF ABOUKIR. THE SAME TEAM WHO DISCOVERED ALEXANDRIA'S PALACE QUARTER IN THE HARBOR, THE ARCHAEOLOGISTS BELIEVE THEIR NEW DISCOVERY TO BE THE PORT OF HERACLEION, WHICH WAS DESTROYED BY AN EARTHQUAKE 1,200 YEARS AGO. THE UNDERWATER SITE HAS BEGUN TO YIELD ARTIFACTS DATING FROM THE LATE PHARAONIC PERIOD TO THE EARLY ISLAMIC. THIS STATUE DEPICTS HAPI, THE EGYPTIAN GOD WHO CONTROLLED THE FLOODING OF THE NILE.



that its stark shape is ugly, or that its roundness clashes with the nearly uniform sweep of staid, five-story Italianate buildings that fringe the Eastern Harbor. "Personally, I'm not thrilled by the architecture," comments Muhammad Awad, a dapper and typically polyglot Alexandrian architect, who is also a passionate conservationist. "But the fact is that we haven't seen a decent modern building here in 50 years. In that sense I'm definitely glad to have it."

Archaeologists, for their part, decry the fact that the library's site was never properly excavated. Indeed, they note, it was only when an infuriated historian who happens to live nearby threatened scandal—after videotaping mechanical diggers lifting chunks of ancient debris and dumping them in the sea—that any archaeological work was allowed at all. Even on a skimpy budget of \$20,000 in the limited time of six months and in the limited space that had not already been razed, archaeologists found some extraordinary traces. Among them was a superb mosaic of a sitting dog with a cocked ear, the uncanny spitting image of the His Master's Voice label. Whatever else was there will never be known. The library's deep foundations may even obscure the site of its own ancient forebear.

Of course, most Egyptians these days are too absorbed in the elemental struggle of getting by to care much for scholarly or aesthetic quibbles. The more common complaint, expressed to me with a snort by a taxi driver, with a shrug by a lady at a fruit stand, and with anger by a group of students milling across the street from the construction site outside Alexandria University's overcrowded, underfunded Faculty of Arts, is that so much money should be spent on an institution that they will probably never use.

It is true that the chosen design was expensive to build and will be expensive to maintain. Virtually all the building's ingredients, from pinewood floors to custom-made aluminum roof panels, had to be imported. Waterproofing alone, which required suspending the entire structure on pylons over a 4-foot-high dry chamber, and extensive use of special sealants, cost over \$20 million. And because the canted roof slopes down into an underground well, electric pumps rather than plain old gutters will be needed to eject runoff from Alexandria's abundant winter rainstorms.

On the money question, at least, there are straightfor-

ward answers. For one thing, the construction cost was mostly borne by foreign donors, not Egyptian taxpayers. (Among the benefactors was Saddam Hussein, whose \$21 million check mercifully cleared just before his 1990 invasion of Kuwait.) The running costs, estimated at \$25 million a year, will initially be covered by Egypt, but since the library has been given unique status under a special law, its budget will not be added to any existing agency's.

Besides, it has a savvy salesman in charge. Ismail Serageldin did wonders raising funds for international agricultural research during his eight years as a vice president of the World Bank. In the tradition of the ancient library, he sees research as a primary function of the new institution. Rather than rushing to build a huge general collection of books, he intends to start by focusing on subjects where the library can both compete and stimulate debate, such as the ethical dimensions of scientific invention, the ancient history of the Mediterranean, and water management, which is an increasingly crucial issue here in the driest corner of the globe. Once these programs are under way, he is confident of winning generous outside support.

Looking at home already in his barely furnished office on the library's top floor with its splendid sea view, Serageldin makes no pretense at apologetics. Even in the United States, he notes, just 50 select institutions attract half of all funding for research: "Centers of excellence are to a country what the 2 percent of DNA is that distinguishes between apes and man. Why shouldn't Egypt, too, have an institution that strives for excellence?"

The director grins, switching mental track with the same facility with which he jumps between French, English, and Arabic. "And you know, even though the ancient library laid the foundations of geometry, astronomy, physics, and half a dozen other sciences, people at the time complained of the same thing," Serageldin's eyes twinkle, and he paraphrases the 2nd century B.C. philosopher Timon of Phlius: "They said, Why should the king pay money for a bunch of scholars to twitter about in the birdcage of the Muses?" ■

*Max Rodenbeck is a correspondent for The Economist. He is the author of Cairo: The City Victorious, and a longtime resident of that city.*



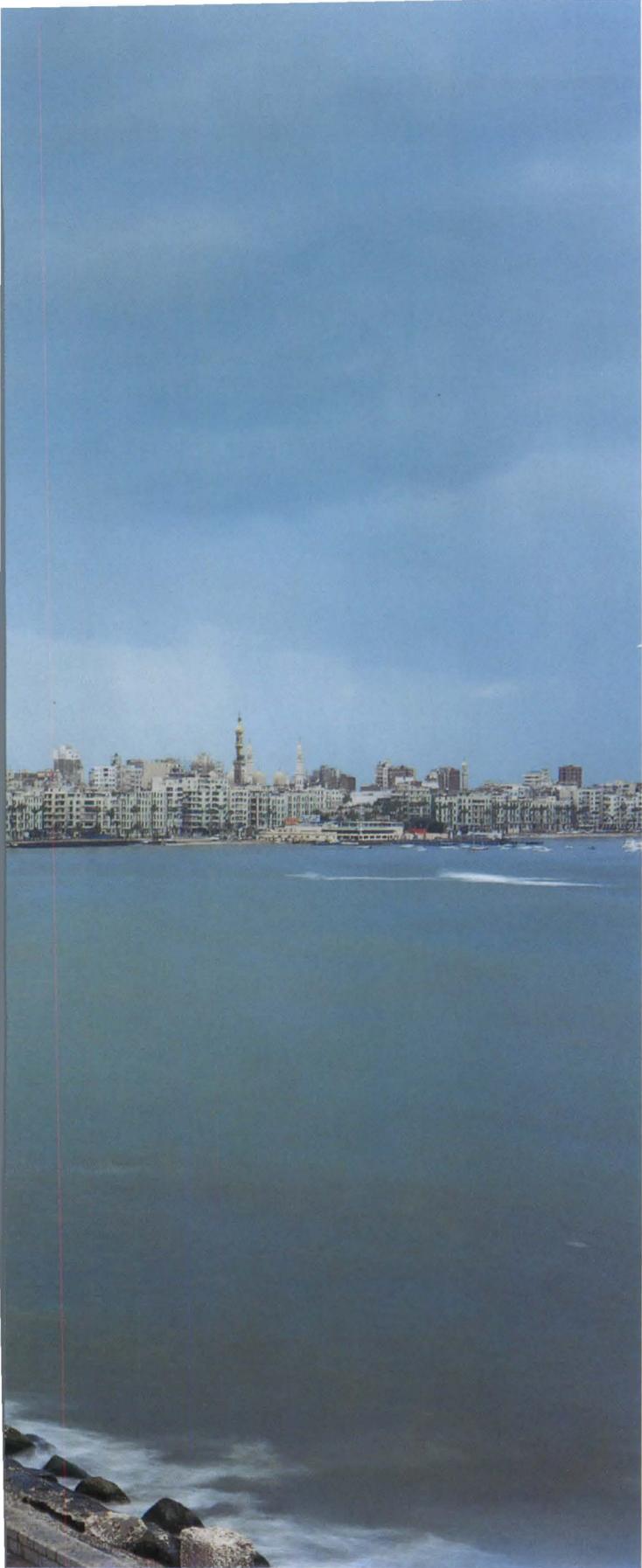
79

# THE CITY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RICHARD BARNES

WATCHING TELEVISION AT A BAR IN THE SOUK MARKETPLACE QUARTER





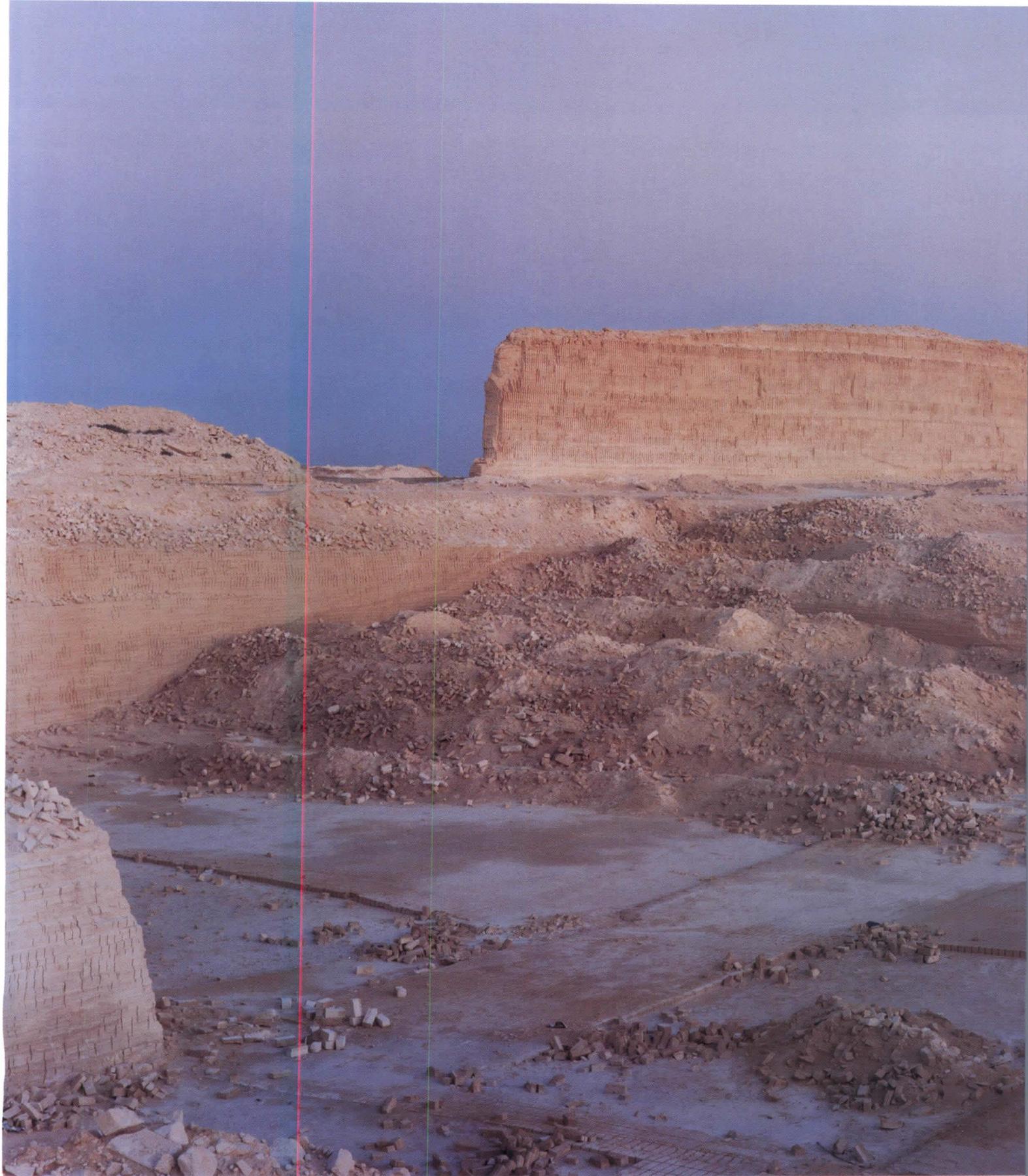
A VIEW OF THE WATERFRONT CORNICHE FROM A HOTEL WINDOW



AN APARTMENT COMPLEX ON THE DESERT ROAD LEADING OUT OF ALEXANDRIA



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT  
A BAR INTERIOR UNDER RENOVATION  
THE PATISSERIE ATHENA ON THE CORNICHE  
AN AL FRESCO POOL GAME IN THE SOUK  
A FURNITURE STORE IN THE SOUK





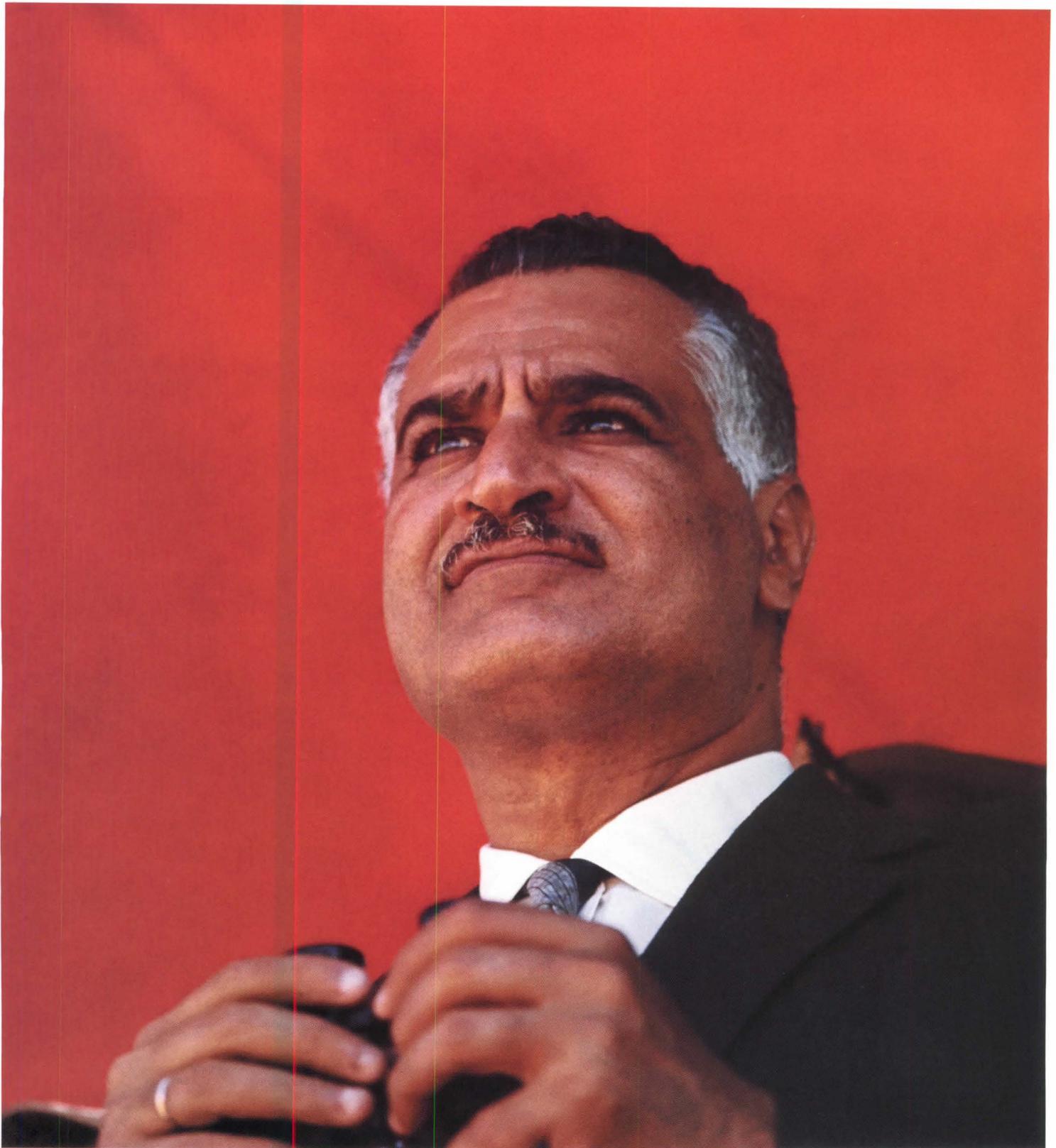
A LIMESTONE QUARRY ON THE DESERT ROAD



العقارات الأخرى  
والتجارة العامة  
www.egyptianrealty.com



ABOVE THE LIBRARY ROOF DURING CONSTRUCTION  
FACING PAGE A COLONIAL-ERA APARTMENT HOUSE



GAMAL ABDEL NASSER RULED EGYPT FROM 1956 UNTIL HIS DEATH IN 1970, HAVING COME TO PROMINENCE AS THE LEADER OF A SUCCESSFUL 1954 MILITARY COUP AGAINST KING FAROUK. DURING HIS PRESIDENCY, NASSER WAS A CHAMPION OF ARAB—AND IN PARTICULAR, EGYPTIAN—NATIONALISM, SEIZING THE SUEZ CANAL FROM FOREIGN CONTROL AND CONSTRUCTING THE ASWAN DAM

IN THE NILE RIVER. HIS RADICAL ECONOMIC REFORMS, KNOWN AS “ARAB SOCIALISM”, DROVE MANY EUROPEANS AND JEWS FROM ALEXANDRIA AND CONTRIBUTED GREATLY TO THAT FORMERLY COSMOPOLITAN CITY’S GENERAL DECLINE.

**LAWRENCE DURRELL****JUSTINE 1957**

Money falling into the tin bowls of beggars. Fragments of every language—Armenian, Greek, Amharic, Moroccan Arabic; Jews from Asia Minor, Pontus, Georgia: mothers born in Greek settlements on the Black Sea; communities cut down like the branches of trees, lacking a parent body, dreaming of Eden. These are the poor quarters of the white city; they bear no resemblance to those lovely streets built and decorated by foreigners where the brokers sit and sip their morning papers. Even the harbour does not exist for us here. In the winter, sometimes, rarely, you can hear the thunder of a siren—but it is another country. Ah! the misery of harbours and the names they conjure when you are going nowhere. It is like a death—a death of the self uttered in every repetition of the word *Alexandria, Alexandria*.

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PUBLISHED BY PENGUIN BOOKS

**E.M. FORSTER****ALEXANDRIA: A HISTORY AND A GUIDE 1961**

During the thousand years and more that intervene between the Arab conquest of Egypt and its conquest by Napoleon, the events in the history of Alexandria are geographic rather than political. Neglected by man, the land and the waters altered their positions, and could Alexander the Great have returned he would have failed to recognise the coast. The fundamental change was in the 12th cent., when the Canopic mouth of the Nile silted up. Consequently the fresh water lake of Mariout, being no longer fed by the Nile floods, also silted and ceased to be navigable. Alexandria was cut off from the entire river system of Egypt, and could not flourish until it was restored; she has always required the double nourishment of fresh water and salt.

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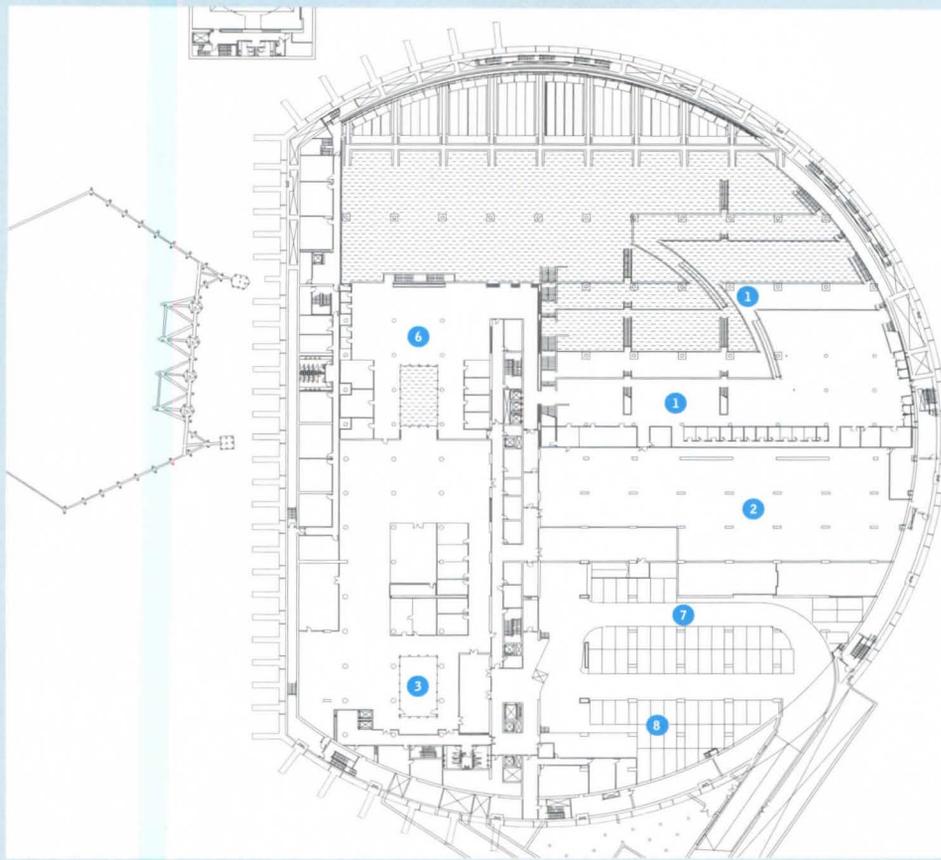
PUBLISHED BY ANCHOR BOOKS, DOUBLEDAY & COMPANY

**ANDRÉ ACIMAN****“ALEXANDRIA: THE CAPITAL OF MEMORY”****FALSE PAPERS: ESSAYS ON EXILE AND MEMORY 2000**

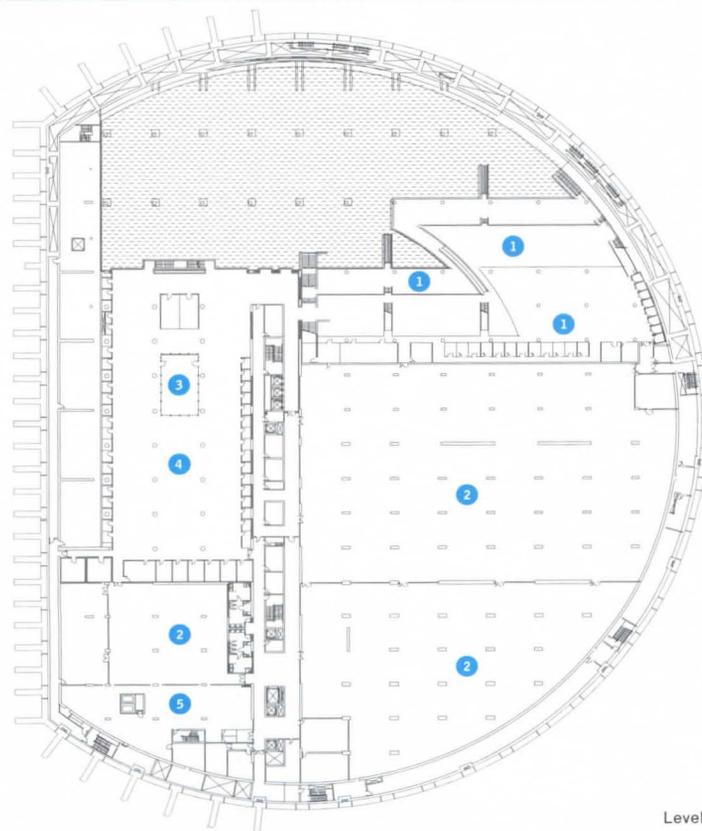
The Alexandria I knew, that part Victorian, half-decayed, vestigial nerve center of the British Empire, exists in memory alone, the way Carthage and Rome and Constantinople exist as vanished cities only—a city where the dominant languages were English and French, though everyone spoke in a medley of many more, because the principal languages were really Greek and Italian, and in my immediate world Ladino (the Spanish of the Jews who fled the Inquisition in the sixteenth century), with broken Arabic holding everything more or less together. The arrogance of the retired banker, the crafty know-it-all airs of the small shopkeeper, the ways of Greeks and of Jews, all of these were not necessarily compatible, but everyone knew who everyone else was, and on Sundays—at the theater, in restaurants, at the beach, or in clubs—chances were you sat next to each other and had a good chat.

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PUBLISHED BY FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX

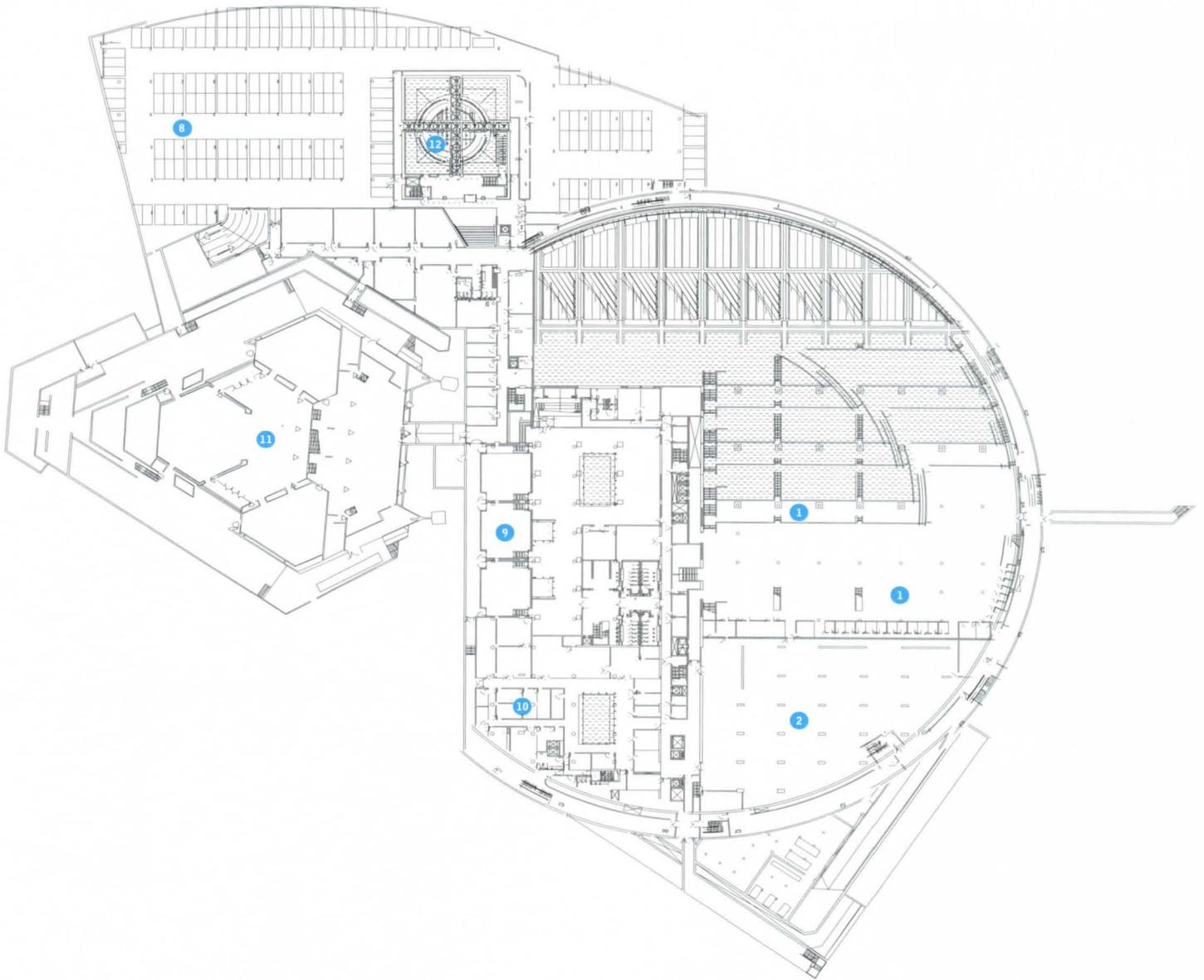


Level three, basement

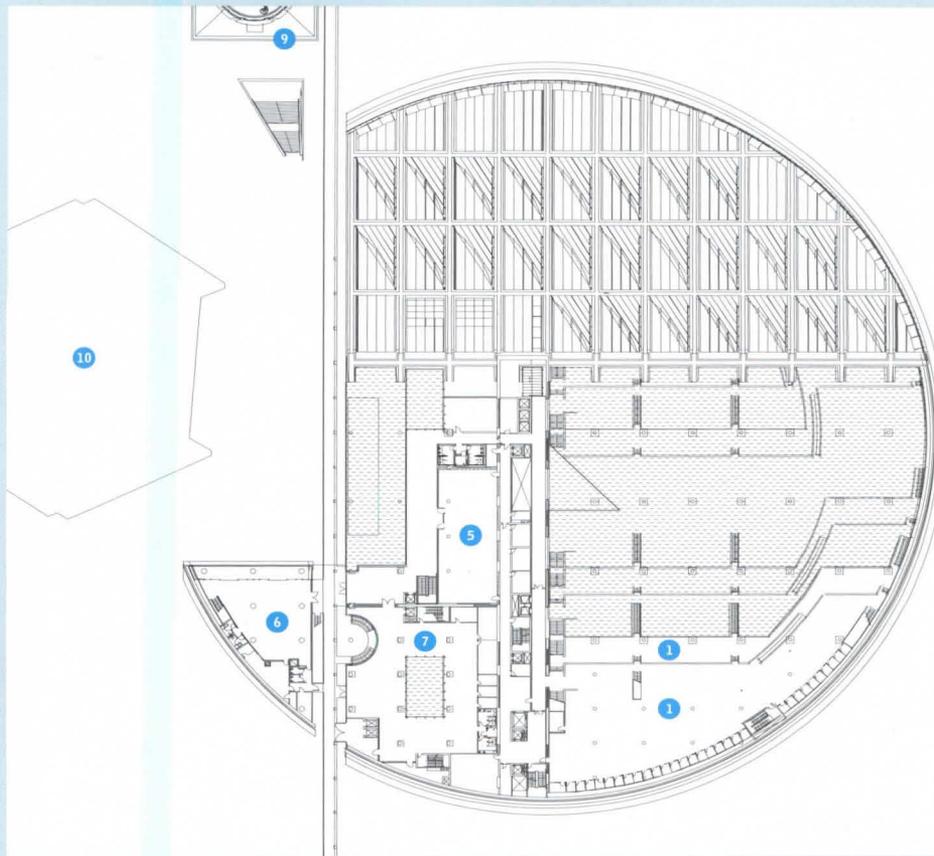


Level two, basement 63' 1

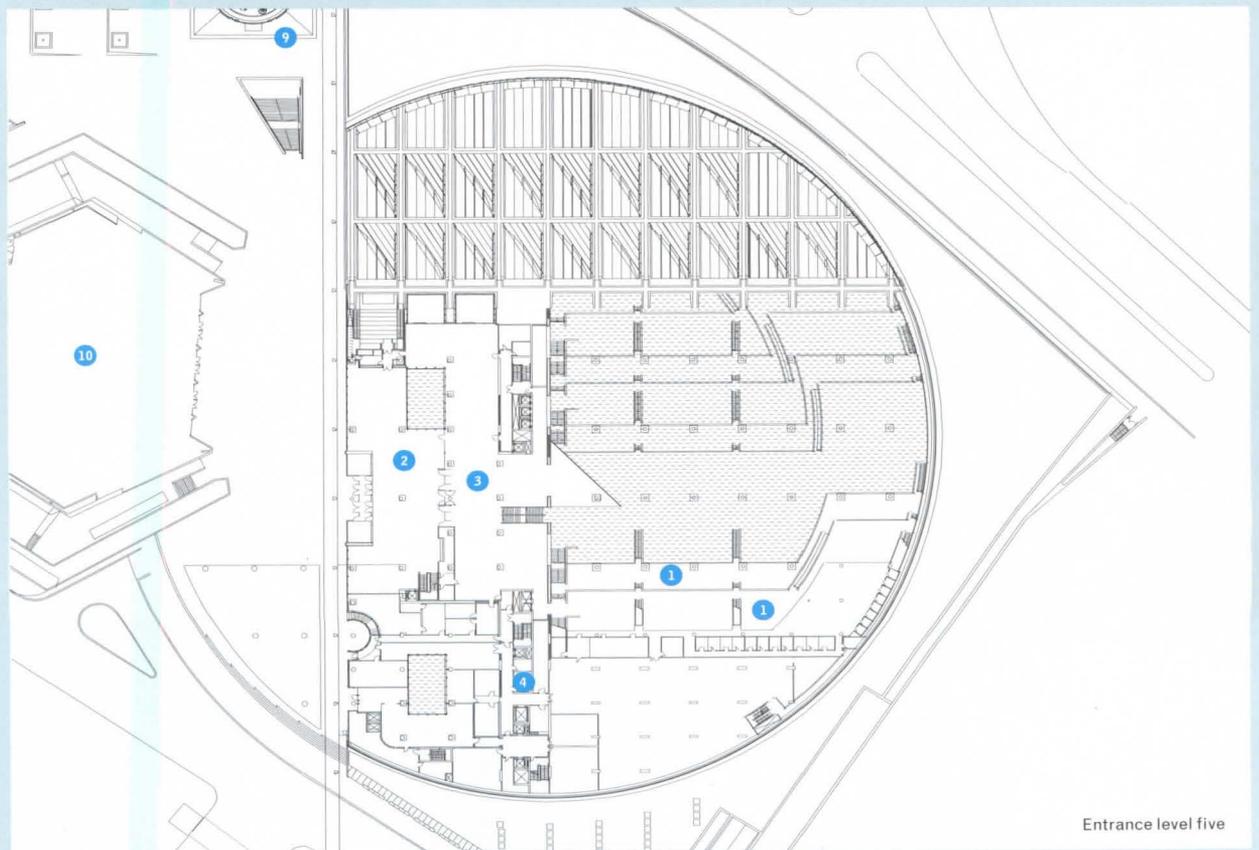
- 1 reading room
- 2 book storage
- 3 light court
- 4 audio visual department
- 5 computer room
- 6 music department
- 7 loading dock
- 8 parking
- 9 meeting rooms
- 10 offices
- 11 existing conference center
- 12 planetarium



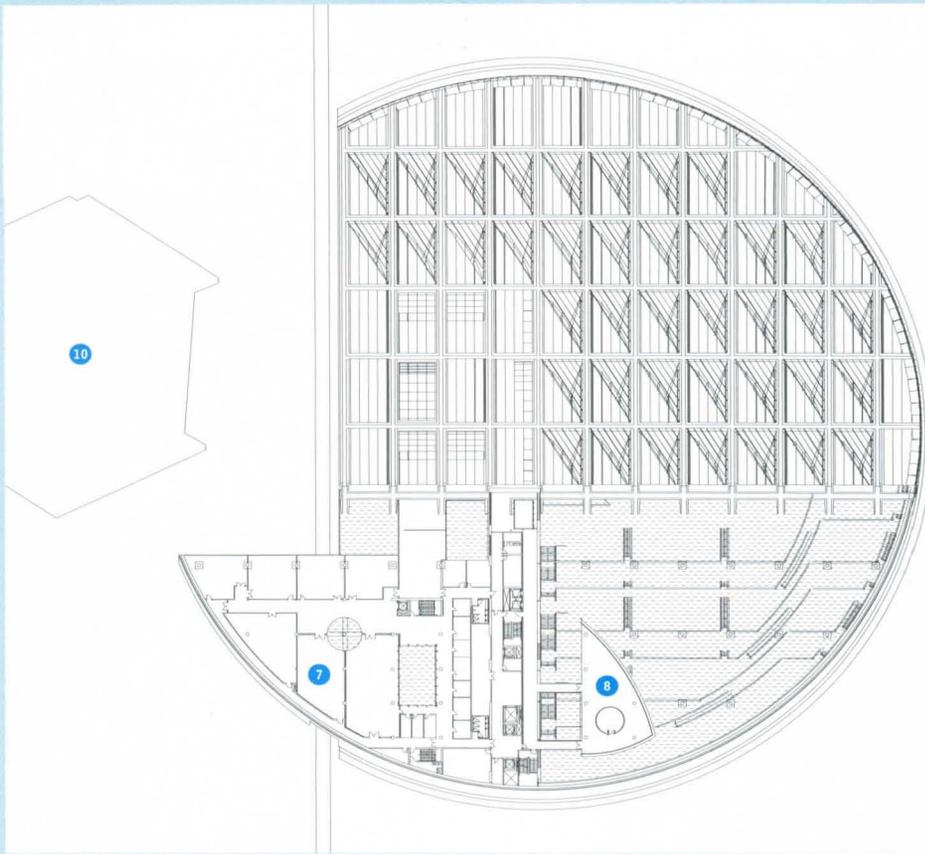
Level four, basement



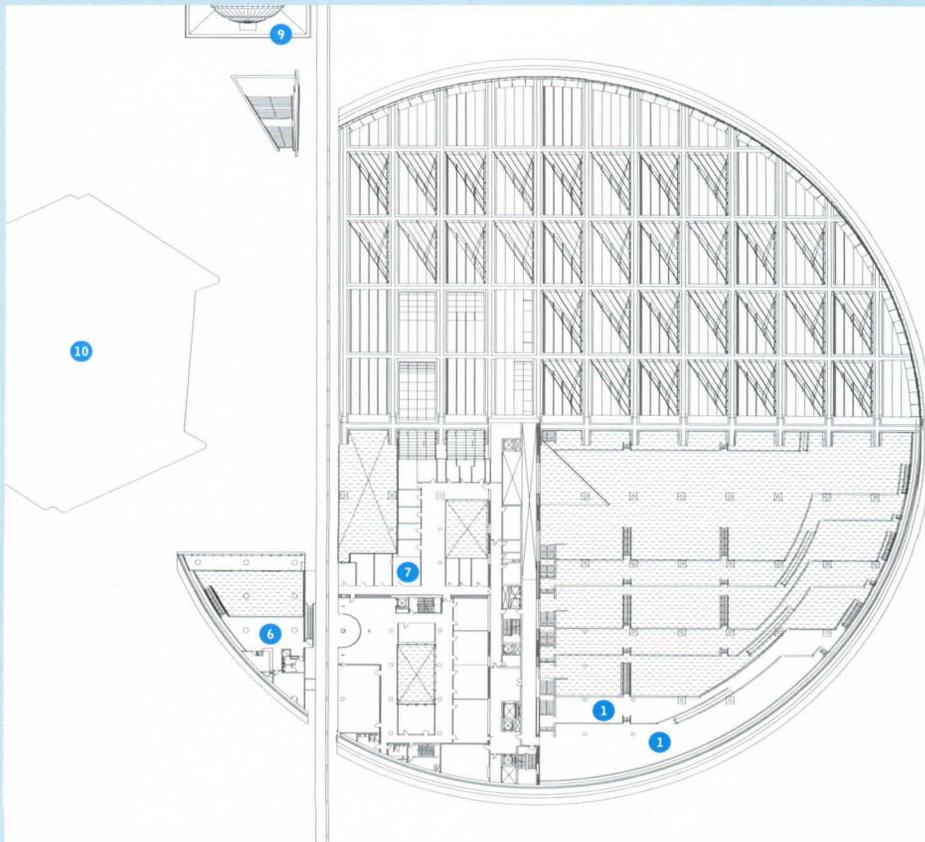
Level six



Entrance level five

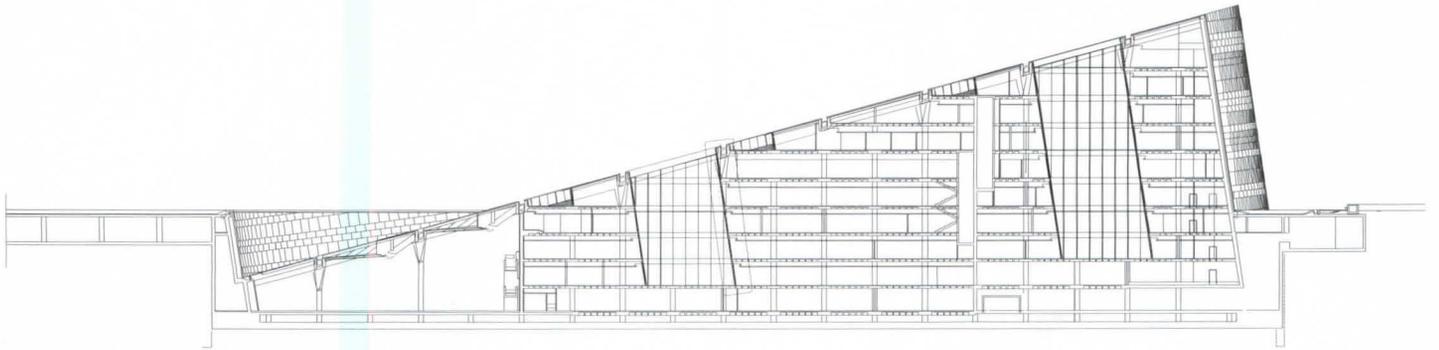
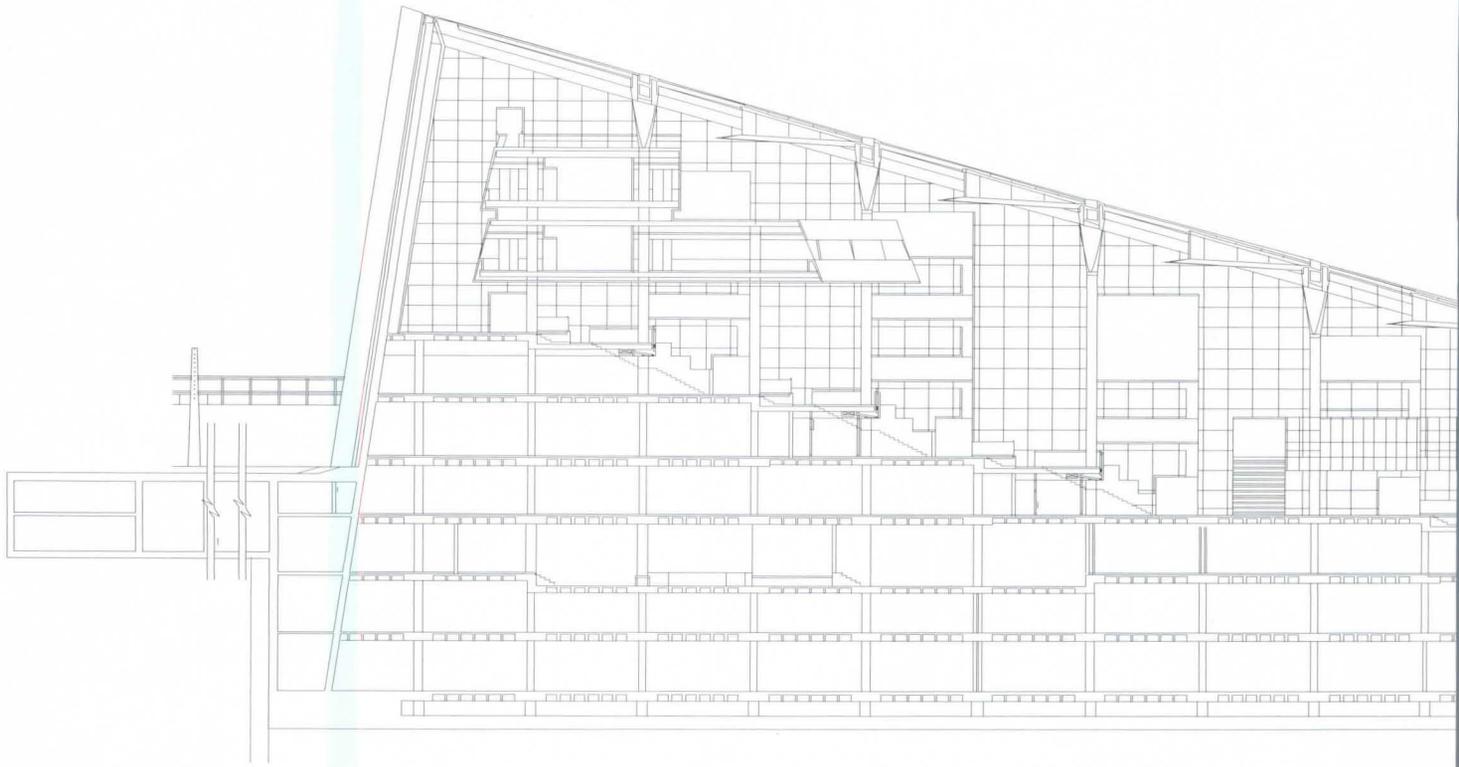


Level eight

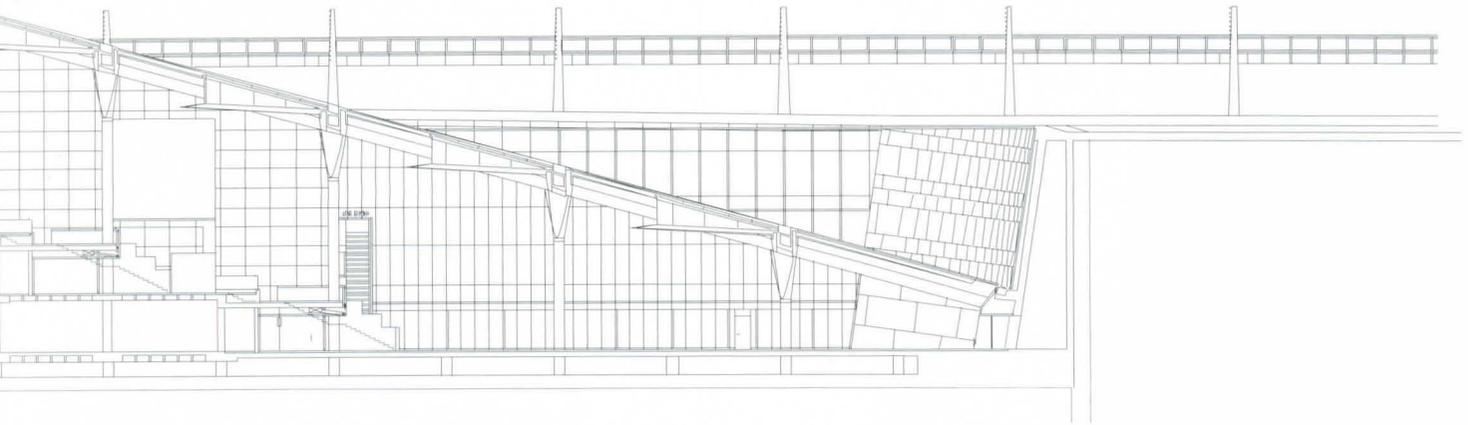


Level seven

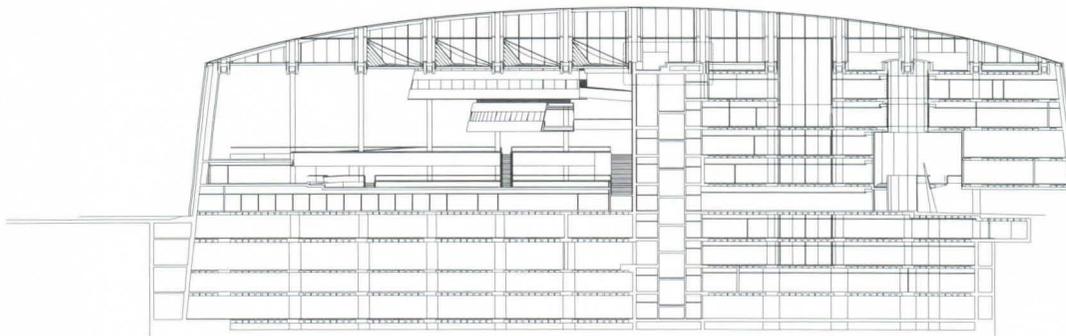
- 1 reading room
- 2 lobby
- 3 registration
- 4 offices
- 5 children's library
- 6 cafeteria
- 7 International School for Information Studies
- 8 group study room
- 9 planetarium
- 10 existing conference center



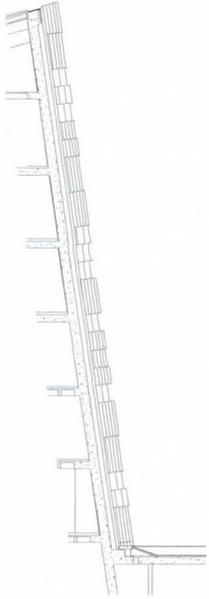
Northwest-southeast section through light wells 147'



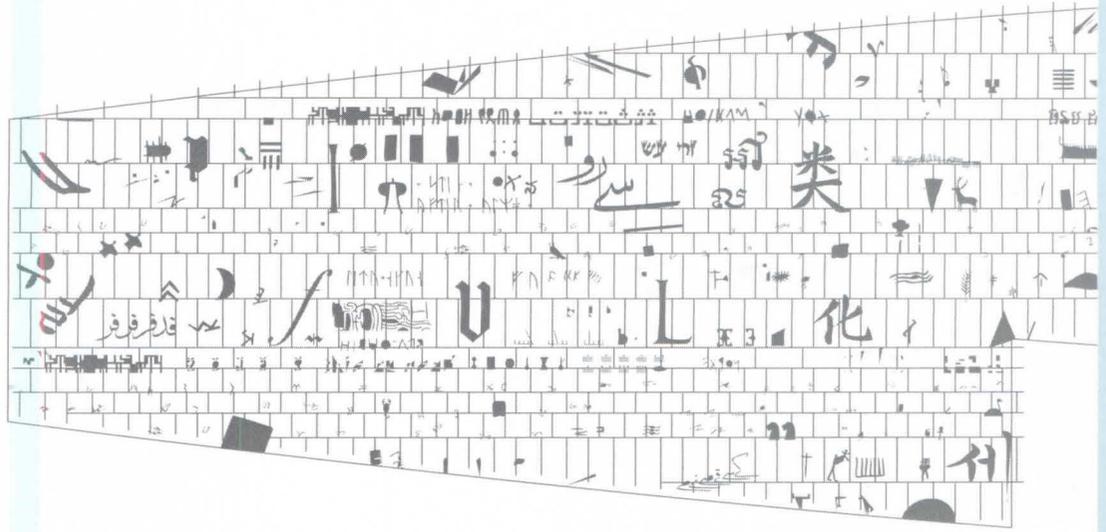
Northwest-southwest section through reading room 11'



Northeast-southwest section through reading room and Information Studies school 57'

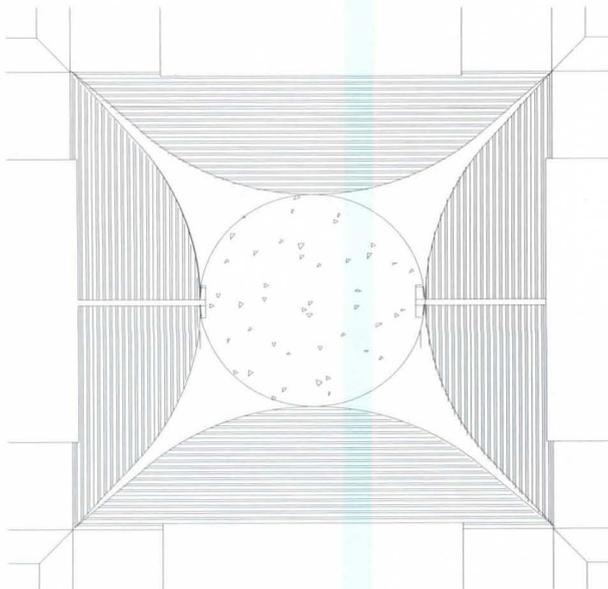


Detail section through exterior stone wall 10'

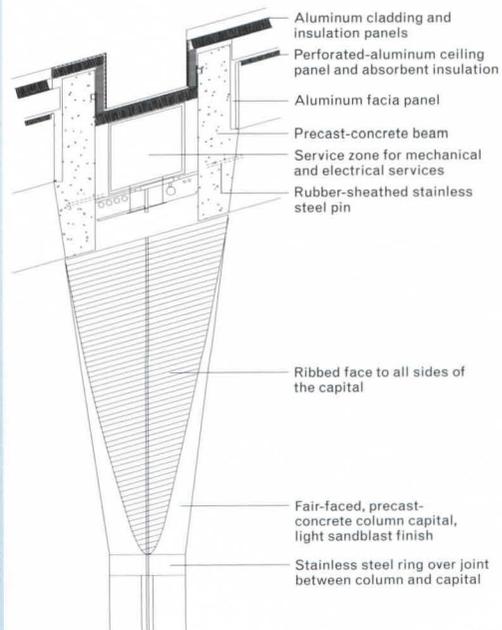


Elevation detail showing patterning of stone wall

THE LIBRARY'S GRANITE CLADDING IS SECURED TO THE CIRCULAR CONCRETE DIAPHRAGM WALL (ABOVE LEFT) VIA STAINLESS STEEL CLIPS. EACH OF THE WALL'S 3,750 PIECES—WHICH RANGE FROM 6 TO 12 INCHES THICK—WAS HAND-CARVED WITH LETTERS AND GLYPHS (ABOVE RIGHT) ON THE GROUND AND THEN INSTALLED, PUZZLE-LIKE, WITH A CUSTOM-BUILT GANTRY FRAME. EACH OF THE LIBRARY'S 88 CAST-IN-PLACE CONCRETE COLUMNS TERMINATE IN A CAPITAL ON WHOSE CORNERS EIGHT ROOF BEAMS MEET. TWO BEAMS REST ON EACH OF THE FOUR CORNERS (BELOW LEFT), LEAVING A CENTRAL VOID THAT HOLDS MECHANICAL AND ELECTRICAL SYSTEMS (BELOW RIGHT). BECAUSE EACH BEAM WEIGHS 20 TONS, WEIGHT ALONE IS ALMOST ENOUGH TO SECURE THEM IN PLACE, WITH RUBBER-WRAPPED STAINLESS STEEL PINS ADDING EXTRA SECURITY.



Column plan at capital (viewed from below) 11'



Column section detail 13'

## SNØHETTA OSLO NORWAY

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PÅL LAUKLI



Craig Dykers



Christoph Kapeller



Kjetil Thorsen

In 1989, 28-year-old Craig Dykers was winding down a two-year stint in the Los Angeles office of Barton Myers, and wanted to think big. He and a friend named Christoph Kapeller, a Norwegian architect also living in L.A., decided to enter what was the biggest competition of the moment, that of the Alexandria Library in Alexandria, Egypt. Kjetil Thorsen, a friend of Kapeller's from architecture school who had set up a small practice in Oslo called Snøhetta a few years before, was also planning to enter, and the two decided to throw their lot in together. Rounding out the team were three other architects, an artist, and an art historian. They convened in Los Angeles, rented an apartment in a retirement home (the cheapest place they could find) and got to work. After two intense months and several research trips to the desert outside L.A., they sent off their submission under the name Snøhetta.

Once the euphoria of beating out Paolo Portoghesi, Hans Asplund, and 521 other competitors had worn off, the magnitude of the job ahead set in. Not only would they have to work out the details of their 1.25 million-cubic-foot reading room, but they would have to work with two national governments and two different arms of the United Nations, which oversaw the early parts of the competition. In 1989, the collaborative moved to Oslo, and began the long and complicated task of shepherding their proposal through a process that was as much about politics as design or finances: At the time, Norway was playing an increased role in the brokering of the Middle East Peace Process and was also hoping to raise its profile as a design powerhouse among

the Nordic countries, and therefore was eager to provide Snøhetta with financial and political backing. The Egyptian government was also helpful, according to Dykers, and in particular, Suzanne Mubarak, the wife of Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak: Dykers speaks with gratitude about her ability to cut through the red tape and confusion inevitable in a project this size, and commitment to the proposal of a group of very young architects (they ranged from 28 to 33) with no track record or ties to Egypt.

Twelve years later, librarians are putting books on the shelves of a building that many doubted would ever be built. It wasn't easy, and the task of seeing the library through while also running a regular practice undoubtedly took its toll. Two of the initial team members left Snøhetta early on, and Dykers, Kapeller, and Thorsen have spent a lot of the intervening time on airplanes. As the building is readied for its opening in April of next year, Dykers speaks of the process as one that has been both pleasurable and odd: "About a year ago, when construction was nearing completion, there was a funny feeling in the office," he explains. "It was as if we'd taken a trip to the moon and just returned; what would we do next?" That question has been answered for the moment, however. Last year, Snøhetta, which is now a practice of 39, won another major international competition for the National Opera House in Oslo (September 2000, page 50). It is a project of similar scale and complexity to the Alexandria Library, though the site is a lot more convenient to the firm's offices.

## BIBLIOTHECA ALEXANDRINA, CORNICHE, EL GUIESH, EL SHATTBY, ALEXANDRIA, EGYPT

CLIENT: ISMAIL SERAGELDIN (DIRECTOR, BIBLIOTHECA ALEXANDRINA); MOSHEN ZAHNAN (PROJECT MANAGER, BIBLIOTHECA ALEXANDRINA)

ARCHITECT: SNØHETTA HAMZA CONSORTIUM; SNØHETTA, NORWAY—CRAIG DYKERS, CHRISTOPH KAPELLER, KJETIL TRÆDAL THORSEN; HAMZA ASSOCIATES,

CAIRO—MAMDOUH HAMZA, AHMED RASCHID; SCHUMANN SMITH, HERTFORDSHIRE, ENGLAND—NICK SCHUMANN, DAVID SMITH ENGINEER: HAMZA ASSOCIATES

CONSULTANTS: GIG FASSADENBAU, AMERAYA METAL COMPANY (ROOF, GLAZING); GRANITA, HAZ (STONWORK); LAUBEUF (PRECAST CONCRETE PANELS);

MOBICA, BOSVIK (FURNISHINGS AND INTERIOR PARTITIONS) GENERAL CONTRACTORS: BALFOUR BEATTY; THE ARAB CONTRACTORS; RODIO TREVI

COST: WITHHELD AT OWNER'S REQUEST



EUROPEAN ARTISTS OF THE 19TH CENTURY WERE FASCINATED BY THE DECAYING LATE ROMAN EMPIRE, ALSO KNOWN AS THE BYZANTINE AFTER THE ORIGINAL GREEK NAME OF ITS NEW CHRISTIAN CAPITAL IN THE EAST, CONSTANTINOPLE. FLAUBERT'S FANTASTIC 1874 NOVEL, THE TEMPTATION OF SAINT ANTONY, ABOUT THE FAMOUS HALLUCINATING FOURTH-CENTURY EGYPTIAN HERMIT OF THE

THEBAID DESERT SOUTH OF ALEXANDRIA, IS ONE SUCH EXAMPLE. ANOTHER IS THIS 1880 PAINTING AT THE CHRYSLER MUSEUM IN NORFOLK, VIRGINIA. PAINTED BY FRENCH ACADEMIC JEAN-PAUL LAURENS, THE WESTERN EMPIRE: HONORIUS, SHOWS THE FIRST WESTERN RULER OF THE WESTERN HALF OF THE NEWLY BIFURCATED EMPIRE—AN 11-YEAR-OLD BOY.

## GUSTAVE FLAUBERT

### THE TEMPTATION OF SAINT ANTONY 1874

He thinks himself at Alexandria, upon the Paneum—an artificial mountain in the centre of the city, encircled by a winding stairway.

Before him lies Lake Mareolis; on his right hand is the sea, on his left the country; and immediately beneath him a vast confusion of flat roofs, traversed from north to south and from east to west by two streets which intercross, and which offer throughout their entire length the spectacle of files of porticoes with Corinthian columns. The houses overhanging this double colonnade have windows of stained glass. Some of them support exteriorly enormous wooden cages, into which the fresh air rushes from without.

Monuments of various architecture tower up in close proximity. Egyptian pylons dominate Greek temples. Obelisks appear like lances above battlements of red brick. In the middle of public squares there are figures of Hermes with pointed ears, and of Anubis with the head of a dog. Antony can distinguish the mosaic pavements of the courtyards, and tapestries suspended from the beams of ceilings.

He beholds at one glance, the two ports (the Great Port and the Eunostus), both round as circuses, and separated by a mole connecting Alexandria with the craggy island upon which the Pharos-tower rises—quadrangular, five hundred cubits high, nine storied, having at its summit a smoking heap of black coals.

Small interior ports open into the larger ones. The mole terminates at each end in a bridge supported upon marble columns planted in the sea. Sailing vessels pass beneath it, while heavy lighters overladen with merchandise, thalamegii inlaid with ivory, gondolas covered with awnings, triremes, biremes, and all sorts of vessels are moving to and fro, or lie moored at the wharves.

About the Great Port extends an unbroken array of royal construction: the palace of the Ptolemies, the Museum, the Posidium, the Caesareum, the Timonium where Mark Antony sought refuge, the Soma which contains the tomb of Alexander; while at the other extremity of the city, beyond the Eunostos, the great glass factories, perfume factories, and papyrus factories may be perceived in a suburban quarter.

Strolling peddlers, porters, ass-drivers run and jostle together. Here and there one observes some priest of Isis wearing a panther's skin on his shoulders, a Roman soldier with his bronze helmet, and many negroes. At the thresholds of the shops women pause, artisans ply their trades; and the grinding noise of chariot wheels puts to flight the birds that devour the detritus of the butcher-shops and the morsels of fish left upon the ground.

The general outline of the streets seems like a black network flung upon the white uniformity of the houses. The markets stocked with herbs make green bouquets in the midst of it; the drying-yards of the dyers, blotches of color; the golden ornaments of the temple-pediments, luminous points—all comprised within the oval enclosure of the grey ramparts, under the vault of the blue heaven, beside the motionless sea.

But suddenly the movement of the crowd ceases; all turn their eyes toward the west, whence enormous whirlwinds of dust are seen approaching.

It is the coming of the monks of the Thebaid, all clad in goatskins, armed with cudgels, roaring a canticle of battle and of faith with the refrain: "*Where are they? Where are they?*"

Antony understands that they are coming to kill the Arians.



100 | AERIAL  
VIEW OF THE LIBRARY FROM THE WEST  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY JAMES WILLIS

BY RICHARD  
INGERSOLL

Alexandria, since its founding in 331 BC by the eponymous conqueror of the ancient world, has represented as much an idea in history as a place on earth. This perhaps explains the extraordinary cultural expectations behind one of the truly great architectural projects of the last decade, the new Library of Alexandria. Designed by Snøhetta, an international group of architects based in Norway, as an enormous glowing disk on the shore of the city's densely built Corniche, it conveys a modern effort parallel to that of antiquity to harbor a center for world enlightenment.

Alexander the Great's prodigious efforts to Hellenize the rest of humanity left a mandate for his new capital in Egypt to serve as the universal Greek metropolis of the Mediterranean, a goal that was more or less realized by his successors during the 250-year reign of the Ptolemaic dynasty. With its Greek-speaking ruling class, Syrian and Jewish merchant class, and indigenous Egyptian working class, Alexandria developed into a multiethnic society of over a million residents, surpassed only by ancient Rome in wealth, size, and power. The two most noteworthy Ptolemaic acts of patronage—the Pharos Lighthouse, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, and the Museion, the progenitor of all museums, an academy which assembled antiquity's preeminent library—eventually became synonymous with the city. Although both the lighthouse and the library have long vanished, their memory is deeply ingrained in world history. The mythic dimension of these lost glories of Alexandria has been astutely synthesized in Snøhetta's new building, which reads as a lighthouse/library: a diagonally cut cylinder 525 feet in diameter that catches the daylight in its reflective aluminum-clad roof while at night projecting vertical light through its porous surfaces.

Alexandria's current population of five million is about a quarter the size of Cairo and slightly larger than the state of Israel. After nearly disappearing—the number of inhabitants had shrunk to 4,000 by the time of Napoleon's advent in 1798—Alexandria underwent a phenomenal urban revival during the colonial period of French and British hegemony, and was stocked with lavishly decorated, seven-story apartment buildings that aspired to Haussmann's Paris. Since the nationalist coup in 1952, it has ceased to be the cosmopolitan port described in Lawrence Durrell's *Alexandria Quartet*, slowly converting from a multilingual European outpost dominated by prosperous Greek, Armenian, Italian, Jewish, and French communities, into a predominantly Arab one with a few foreign inflections.

Charming European cafés that line the Corniche survive as a legacy of the high life of a previous age.

The new library, which is a uniquely progressive intervention in this postcolonial setting, offers a clear secular strategy for urban regeneration amid the strong currents of fundamentalist reaction that are everywhere apparent. Alexandria's central train station, for instance, undergoes a dramatic conversion into a place of prayer, with carpets systematically strewn over the platforms and main hall. While the ephemeral effect of Islamic ritual softening the industrial shed and bringing the frenzy of the busy station to a standstill remains an incredibly moving sight, the significance of requisitioning the most explicitly secular space in the city for religious functions seems an obvious assault on the idea of the liberal, nonsectarian state. That the interior of the new library, a magnificent hypostyle hall, evokes immediate associations with mosque architecture inevitably appeals to the contradictions between secularism and fundamentalism that have recently acquired such importance. Egypt is an Arab country, but a nonsectarian state with very strong contrasts during the past 50 years due to the resurgence of the Islamic brotherhood, which periodically threatens the secular status of the government.

The new library rises dramatically in the city's fabric at the terminus of the crescent-shaped, 1-mile-long Corniche. It stands directly opposite the fortress of Qayt-Bey, which was built by Egypt's overlords from the 14th to the 18th centuries, the Mamluks, on the site of the ancient lighthouse. Although few archaeological remains were found on the library's site (two fragments of Roman floor mosaics may be featured in the internal courtyards of the new building), it is almost certain that the area belonged to the immense royal palace compound, which is believed to have been adjacent to the ancient library. The southern side of the new library is a curved, clifflike elevation of carved granite blocks designed by the artist Jorunn Sannes. In it graffiti-like signs and symbols from the major living and dead languages of the world have been incised as nonsensical hieroglyphs. A footbridge joins the building to the University of Alexandria's campus, which stretches inland for several blocks.

One of the problematic invariants of the site remains a large, extremely awkward auditorium, built from 1982–91 and used frequently as a convention hall by the Arab League. The new building deftly defers to this modern relic of angled concrete surfaces and mirror-glass panels by slicing an orthogonal notch out of the library's circular roofscape, thus creating a mitigating frame. In the residual space a generous gap has been left for the major points of circulation to converge. The existing auditorium has been connected below grade to new auxiliary meeting rooms and parking to improve its capacity as a convention hall. Looking east from the papyrus-filled pools that surround the new library, Alexandria sprawls interminably as a thin band of coastal development for nearly 19 miles. The sharply canted cylinder of the library's masonry profile establishes a new threshold between the city center and its linear beachfront suburbs.

Allegedly, Richard Nixon's 1974 visit to Egypt after the

PHOTOGRAPHY BY  
PAUL M'MULLIN



ALEXANDRIA'S NEW LIBRARY WAS A COMPLEX SIX-YEAR CONSTRUCTION PROJECT. THE TORUS-SHAPED BUILDING IS SUPPORTED BY THE WORLD'S LARGEST CONTINUOUSLY REINFORCED CIRCULAR MEMBRANE WALL (525 FEET IN DIAMETER AND 131 FEET DEEP) AND A FOREST OF 600 DOUBLE-BELLED PILING DRIVEN

INTO SANDSTONE SOME 90 FEET BELOW GRADE. THE BUILDING'S FOREST OF SLENDER (2 1/3 FEET THICK), CAST-IN-PLACE COLUMNS SITS IN A 47-FOOT-BY-31 1/2-FOOT GRID, AND RISES TO A HEIGHT OF 53 FEET. THERE, PRECAST LOTUS LEAF-INSPIRED CAPITALS (CRANED INTO PLACE, THEN WELDED TO THE COLUMNS)

Camp David Accords inspired the first serious discussions within the University of Alexandria of reviving the Library of Alexandria. The president confidently asked to tour the pyramids at Giza and the nonexistent library. From this egregious gaffe, the idea for a new library to serve the University's 75,000 students slowly snowballed into a more ambitious project of international scope, led by an independent Egyptian agency, the General Organization of the Alexandria Library (GOAL), which during the 1980s joined forces with UNESCO and the United Nations Development Program in promoting the concept. After the early planning stages, the project was taken over by the Egyptian Ministry of Education, which eliminated UNESCO's role and retained GOAL as managers. Suzanne Mubarak, wife of the current Egyptian president, has been among the most diligent players in the process, attracting an international support group that included the late French president François Mitterand, Italian cultural magnate Susanna Agnelli, former Greek minister of culture Melina Mercuri, and the sultan of Oman—not to mention \$21 million from Saddam Hussein.

In 1989, at the request of GOAL, the International Union of Architects organized an international competition, which attracted 700 entries from 52 countries. The jury, which included among others architects John Carl Warneke of the United States and Fumihiko Maki of Japan, selected the winning project because of its clarity of form and satisfaction of a complex program, which aside from an enormous library now included three museums, a planetarium, a school of library science, and convention facilities. Such a program was meant to generate international response, because from its initial collection of 500,000 books, the library hopes to gather as many as eight million volumes within its 915,000-square-foot interior to become the major research institution in the Middle East and one of the largest libraries in the world. During the intervening 12 years, most people abroad assumed that like so many competitions of this sort, the Library of Alexandria was a well-intended pipe dream that would come to naught. How surprising, then, to learn that not only has it been built faithfully to Snøhetta's original competition-winning design, but also that it has been possible in Egypt, a country that is more famous for perceived problems of underdevel-

opment than for its modern architecture, to produce a wonderful modern building with generous spaces, ingenious technical solutions, and luxurious details, putting to shame a more famous library built recently in Mitterand's France.

Both on representational and practical levels, the new Library of Alexandria will soon be recognized as one of the most significant architectural achievements of our times. In early 2001, a national law decreed that the Library of Alexandria be converted into a public juridical entity, independent of other bureaucracies and answerable only to the president of Egypt. The director, Ismail Serageldin, responds to an elected board of directors—including Umberto Eco and Daniel Boorstin, former Librarian of Congress—who serve short terms to guarantee a dynamic and open administration.

The relatively unknown designers, Snøhetta, located in Oslo, until now have been distinguished for a small fishing museum in a remote Norwegian village (November 1998, page 136) and for the Norwegian component of the Nordic embassy complex in Berlin (March 2000, page 122). They designed the competition project in Los Angeles as a casual group of five friends, three from Norway, one from Austria, and one from the United States—all in their early 30s or younger—assisted by five other friends from the United States, Egypt, Germany, and Norway. Since two members of the team already had a small practice in Norway, named Snøhetta after a Norwegian mountain, they expediently located their office there. This proved to be a wise political choice, since the Norwegian government was quite intent on shepherding the project, and aside from absolving Egypt of some of its foreign debts during the negotiating phase, it participated actively in cultural and professional exchanges. Of the original team, three principals have seen the building through: the American Craig Dykers, the Austrian Christoph Kapeller, and the Norwegian Kjetil Thorsen. The associated architect in Egypt, Dr. Mamdouh Hamza of Cairo, provided engineering and architectural assistance. During the intervening decade, Snøhetta has grown into a substantial practice with 39 members, and while the Library of Alexandria has been their bread-and-butter commission, they have also produced a considerable number of smaller-scaled projects



SUPPORT MORE THAN 400 PRECAST 46-FOOT-BY-6-FOOT-BY-1-FOOT ROOF BEAMS, WEIGHING AS MUCH AS 18 TONS. THE ROOF, ANGLED AT 16.08 DEGREES FOR OPTIMUM SOLAR SHADING, COMPRISES BAYS FILLED WITH ALUMINUM PANELS SANDWICHING AN ALUMINUM HONEYCOMB. ALUMINUM-WRAPPED, STEEL-

FRAMED MONITORS IN MANY OF THE BAYS ELIMINATE THE NEED FOR ARTIFICIAL DAYLIGHTING IN THE READING ROOM. THE PLANETARIUM IS CONSTRUCTED OF SIX PREFABRICATED STEEL TUBE TRUSSES WELDED TOGETHER, LIFTED INTO PLACE ON SITE, AND LATER WRAPPED IN GRP PANELS.

for public buildings and landscapes. They recently won the competition for the Oslo Opera House (September 2000, page 50), a project that will be almost as large as the Library of Alexandria.

Since the Snøhetta office operates as a collaborative, there is no particular style that unifies their projects, except in the case of the large-scale works, when they tend to revert to the design strategy that succeeded in Alexandria: the big roof. The idea of pitching an autonomous roof under which multifarious functions and scales can be arbitrarily tucked is traceable to vernacular solutions for covered markets, but remains a peculiarly modern approach to architecture, enabled by the new structural capacity to achieve ever greater spans. Both Le Corbusier's unbuilt project for the Strasbourg Convention Center (1964) and Mies van der Rohe's project for the Chicago Convention Center (1953) can be cited as canonical precedents, while the early poets of the big roof remain Oscar Niemeyer of Brazil and Arthur Erickson of Canada. At the Alexandria Library, the slanted disk roof provides a strong iconic presence, suggestive of the sun god Ra's disk or Euclidian geometry. At the same time, it admirably serves to mediate the light and climate of the terraced reading room, suspended seminar rooms, and stacks of offices below with the same ingenuity of the wooden window lattices, or *mashrafiyya*, of Mamluk-era houses. Statically, the roof behaves as a single plane without moment joints, supported by the compression of the cylindrical perimeter walls and a forest of nearly 90 columns set on a 31 1/2-by-47 1/4-foot modular grid (a measure derived from standard compact library storage systems).

Like other breakthrough projects won in competition, such as Jørn Utzon's Sydney Opera House (1956) or Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers' Centre Pompidou (1971), the design for the Alexandria Library was infused with formal and technical idealism for which supporting solutions had to be found retroactively. The geometry of the library is much more mannered than what first meets the eye: It is not a true cylinder but a fragment of a torus, a doughnutlike figure, and it is not resting on the ground plane but is actually sunken 40 feet below grade, like a Leaning Tower of Pisa that has yielded to the earth on one side. The 16.08-degree

inclination of the roof allows for optimal natural light to filter into the immense reading room, and the eye-shaped clerestories provide a variety of views to the sea and the sky from the internal terraces. The foundations for such a structure—with its tendency to push down on the southern side and push up on the north, and which because of its subterranean component is constantly tempting the water table—required an abnormally heavy substructure extending 108 feet below sea level. Supposedly resting on the heaviest foundation cage ever prepared, the 620 piles on the foundation raft work both in tension and compression to compensate for the changing behavior of the vertical members during construction. Among the structure's important innovations is a system of cathodic, fiber-optic cabling set with reinforcing rods to electronically monitor structural flaws over time.

In a joint venture with an Egyptian company called Arab Contractors, Italian contractors Rodio/Trevi oversaw the foundations, and British contractors Balfour/Beatty the rest of the construction. Technical elements were imported from France, Norway, Britain, Austria, and the United States, but what is truly remarkable is the high quality of construction. About 50 percent of the materials were locally produced. Polished raw concrete surfaces of slender columns and perforated interior walls match the elegance of those made for Tadao Ando in Japan. Luxurious acid-stained bronze panels that grace the lobbies were locally fabricated, as were the many of the interior partitions. The black Zimbabwe marble revetment adds another layer of opulence, and all of the hardware, bathroom fittings, and railings have a coherent, modern verve. At a total cost of \$223 million—the foundations alone cost \$65 million—this was an undeniably expensive building, but one for which, after the initial bureaucratic snags were concluded, never encountered financing controversies or needless waste.

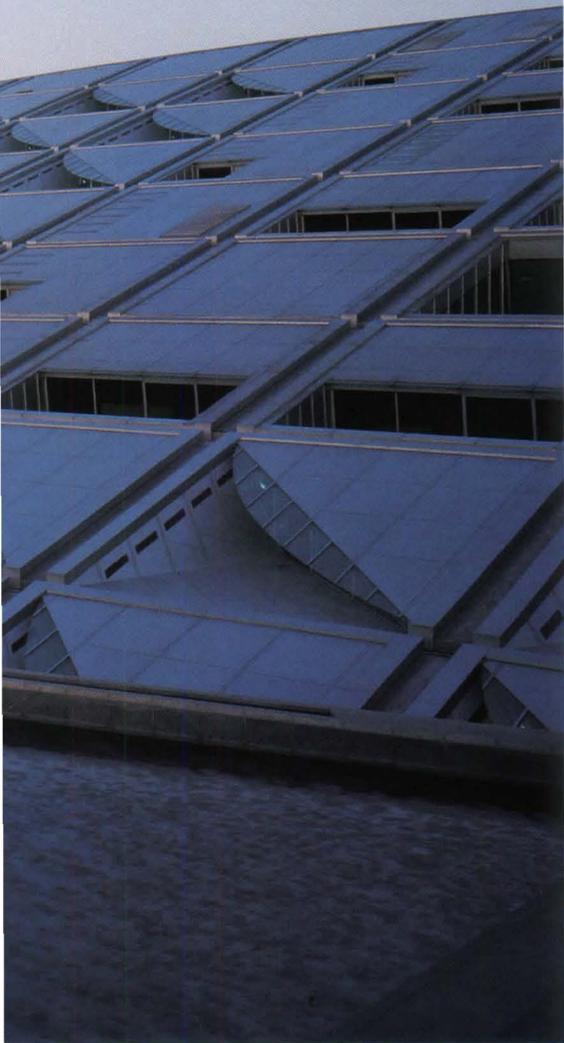
One approaches the new library either from the northern waterfront, where the planetarium (an enigmatic sphere scored with illuminated meridians) is suspended in a glass-lined, light-emitting socket, or from the university campus, where a slender steel-and-glass bridge pierces through the solid mass of the granite elevations on the south. The main lobby, a triple-height *continued on page 122*



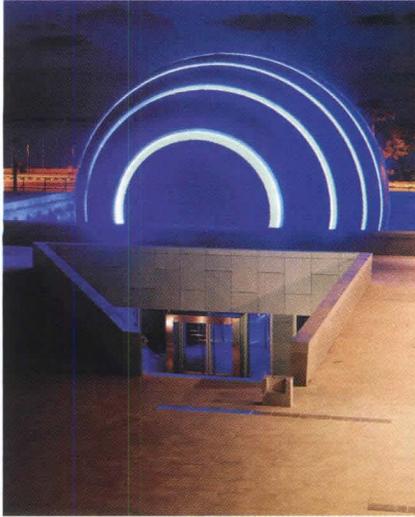
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# THE LIBRARY

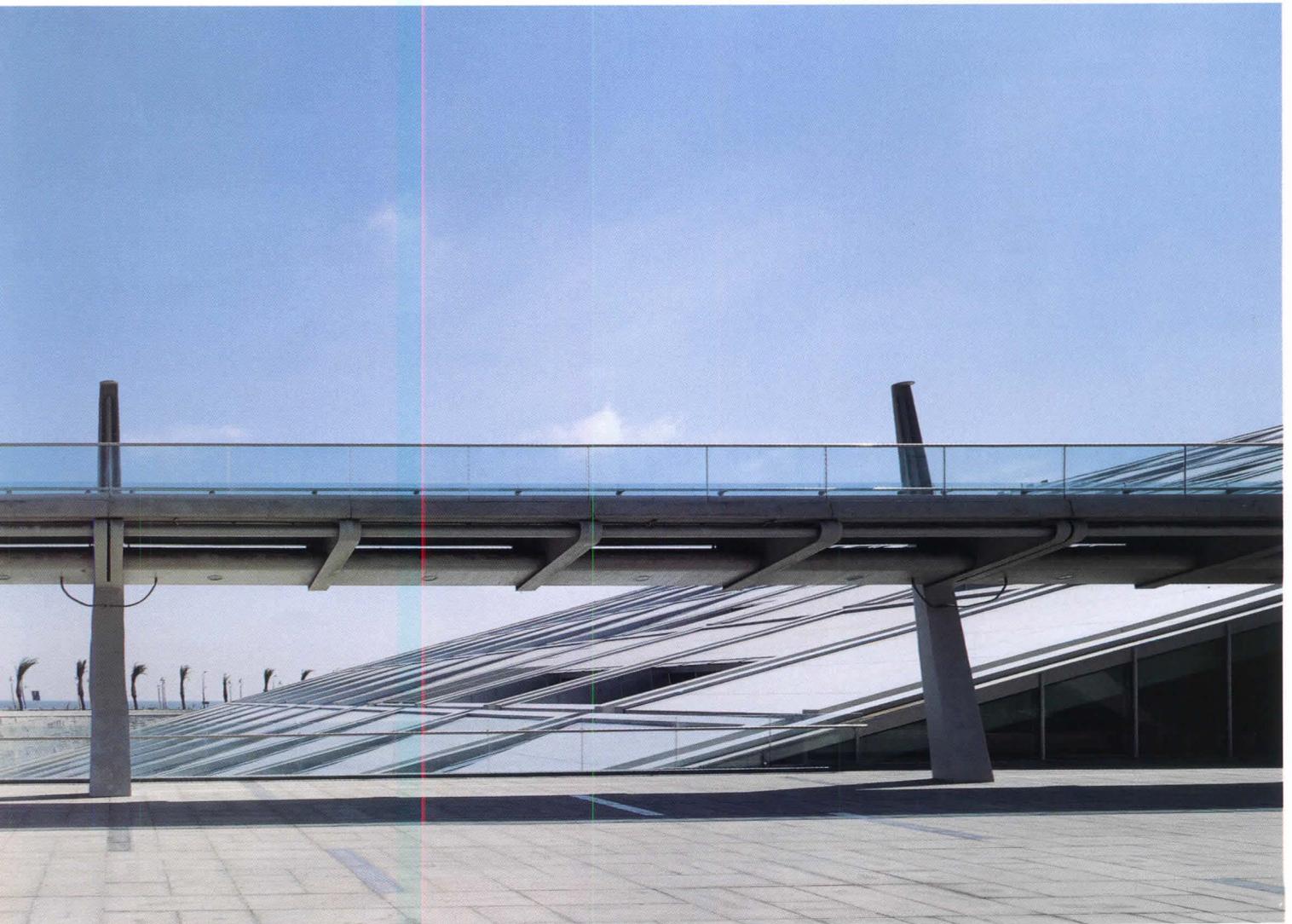
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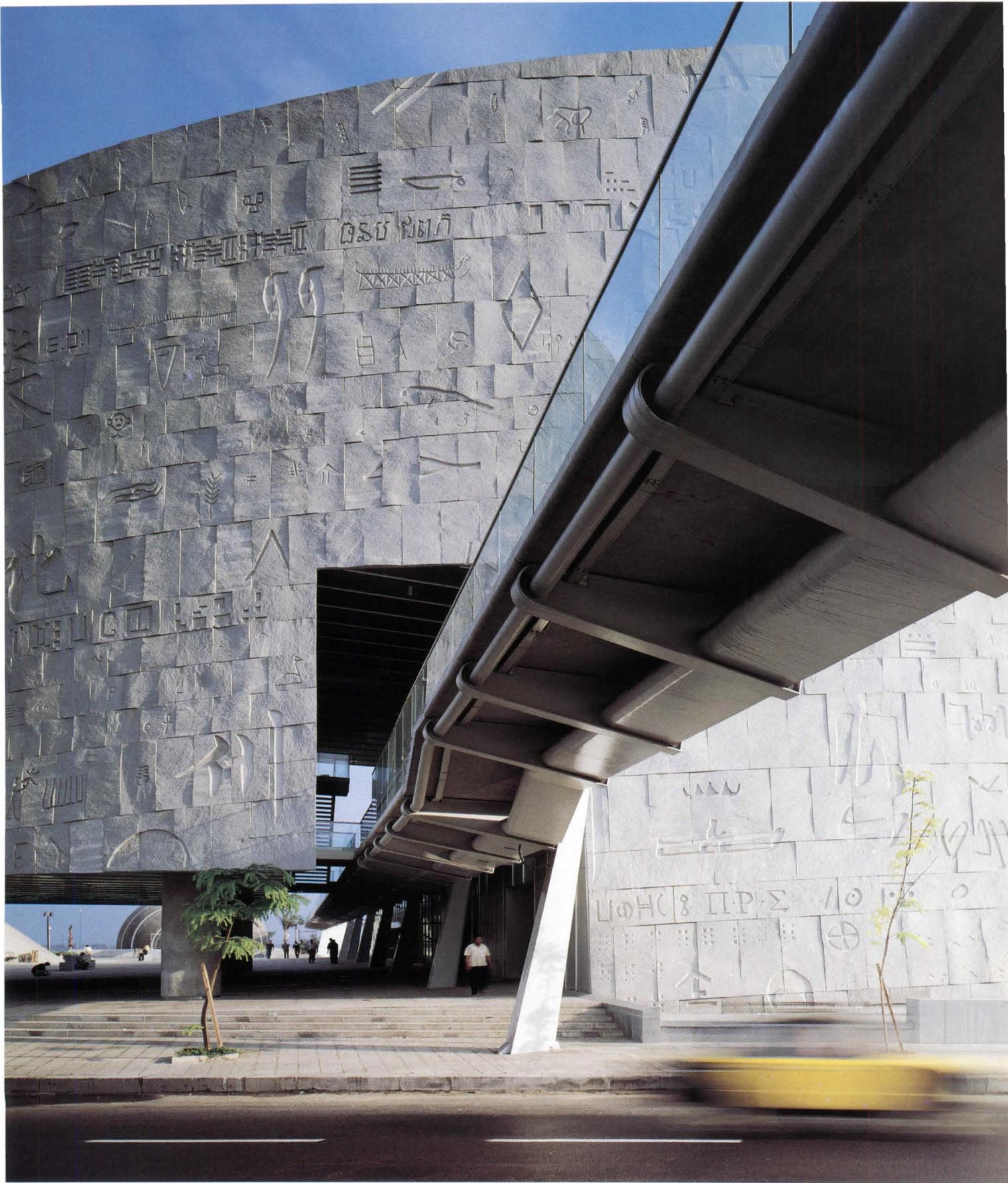


THE TILTED ROOF OF THE LIBRARY (LEFT) IS FACED IN ALUMINUM HONEYCOMB SANDWICH PANELS AND STAINLESS STEEL COVERINGS OVER INTERNAL CONCRETE BEAMS. IT LOOKS ACROSS A REFLECTING POOL TO THE HARBOR OF ALEXANDRIA.



AN OPEN-AIR SKY-BRIDGE (BELOW) CONNECTS THE LIBRARY TO THE UNIVERSITY OF ALEXANDRIA CAMPUS. IT PASSES THROUGH A SLOT IN THE LIBRARY (FACING PAGE) AND DOUBLES AS A CANOPY OVER THE BUILDING'S MAIN ENTRANCE (LEFT). JUST BEYOND THE SKY-BRIDGE'S TERMINUS, AN INDENTATION IN THE PAVEMENT LEADS TO THE BELOW-GRADE ENTRANCE OF THE LIBRARY'S SPHERICAL PLANETARIUM (FAR LEFT).







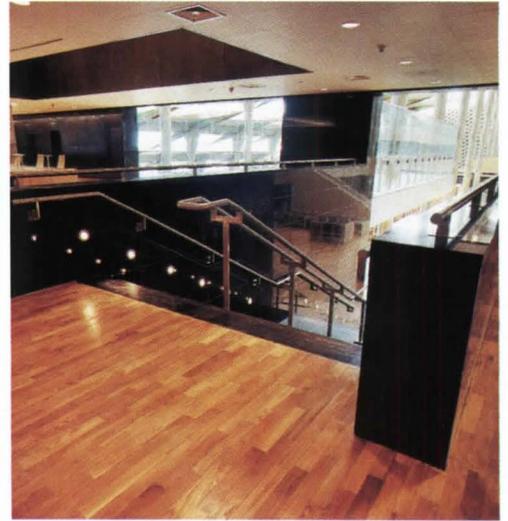
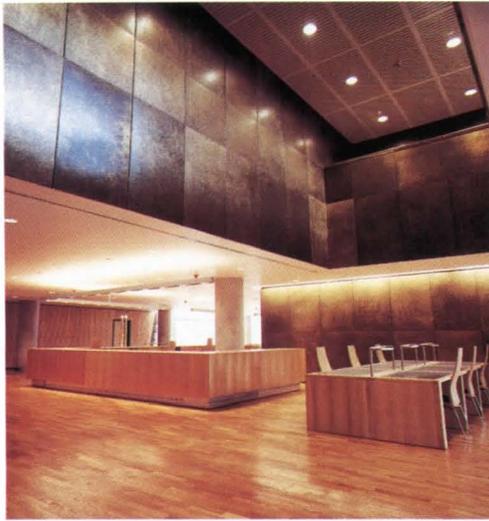
THE ARCHITECTS DESIGNED THE LIBRARY AS A TILTED TORUS WITH A SLANTED ROOF (BOTTOM), AND REMOVED A WEDGE OF IT ON THE WEST (LEFT) TO CREATE AN ENTRANCE COURT FACING AN EXISTING ASSEMBLY HALL. THE RECTANGULAR CURTAIN WALL ON THE SOUTHEAST SIDE OF THE COURT (BELOW, AT RIGHT) IS THE FAÇADE OF AN INFORMATION SCIENCES SCHOOL INCORPORATED INTO THE LIBRARY PROGRAM.





THE TRIANGULAR, SOUTHWEST-FACING CURTAIN WALL (LEFT), WITH ITS INTERIOR CABLE TRUSSES PROVIDING LATERAL STABILIZATION, OPENS ONTO THE TRIPLE-HEIGHT LOBBY OF THE LIBRARY (BELOW). JUST BEYOND THE LOBBY IS THE LIBRARY REGISTRATION AREA (FACING PAGE, TOP RIGHT) AND A STAIRCASE LEADING DOWN INTO THE MAIN READING ROOM (FACING PAGE, TOP FAR RIGHT). THE LIBRARY IS 10 STORIES AT ITS HIGHEST POINT, WITH FOUR LEVELS BELOW GRADE; IN ORDER TO BRING LIGHT INTO THE BUILDING'S LOWER REACHES, THE ARCHITECTS INCORPORATED SEVERAL LIGHT WELLS WITH CANTED WALLS (FACING PAGE, BOTTOM).





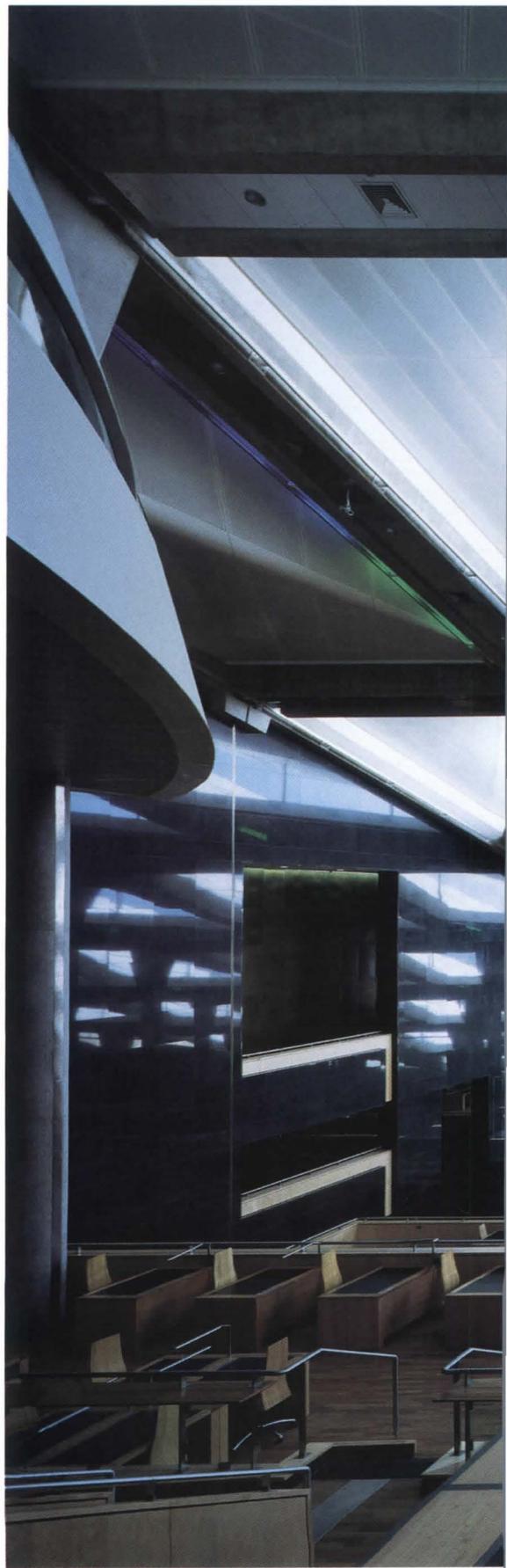




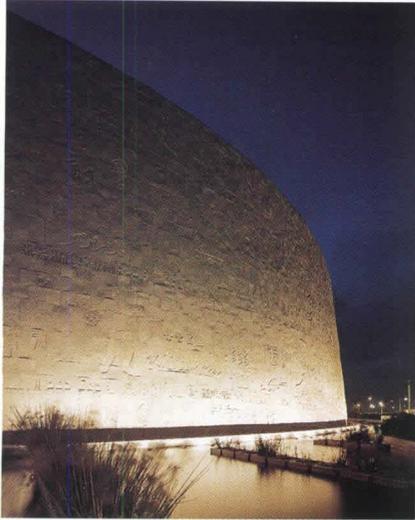
THE MAIN READING ROOM (LEFT) IS ORGANIZED ON SEVERAL TERRACES THAT RECEDE FOLLOWING THE SLOPE OF THE ROOF ABOVE. TWO WEDGE-SHAPED ROOMS PROJECT INTO THE LARGER READING ROOM (BELOW); THE LOWER ONE HOUSES GROUP MEETINGS, THE UPPER SERVES AS AN OBSERVATION DECK. CORRIDORS BENEATH EACH TERRACE LEAD TO STACKS (BOTTOM).



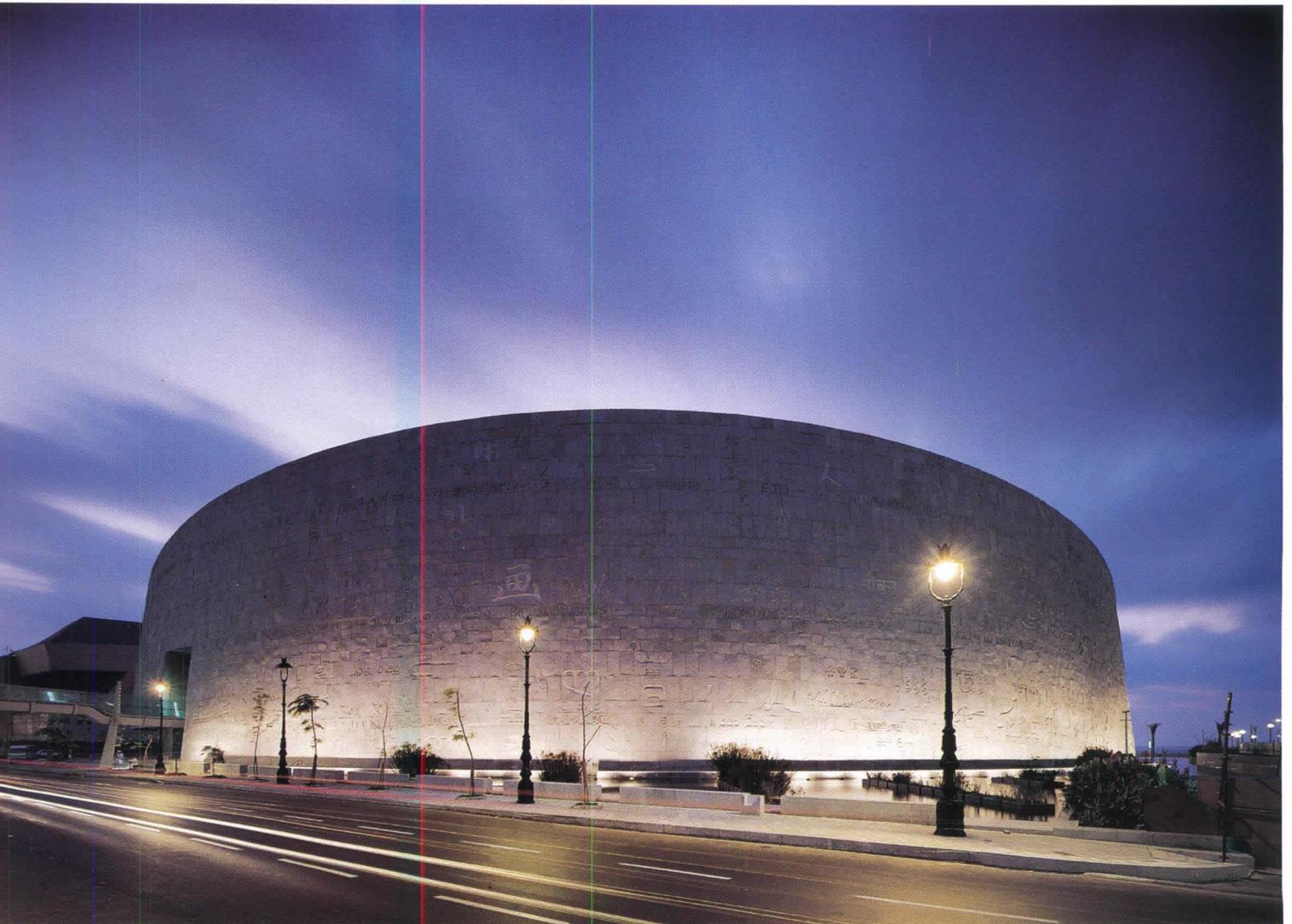
WITH ITS FOREST OF COLUMNS (RIGHT), THE MAIN READING ROOM RECALLS THE GREAT HYPOSTYLE HALLS OF ANCIENT EGYPTIAN TEMPLES. FURTHERING THE COMPARISON, THE GRID OF EYEBROW-SHAPED SKYLIGHTS IN THE CEILING FILLED WITH GREEN AND BLUE GLASS BLOCKS (BELOW) RECALLS THE TEMPLES' ROWS OF CLERESTORY WINDOWS, AND THE TOPS OF THE CONCRETE COLUMNS (BOTTOM) RESEMBLE THE LOTUS-BUD COLUMN CAPS OF PHARAONIC TIMES.



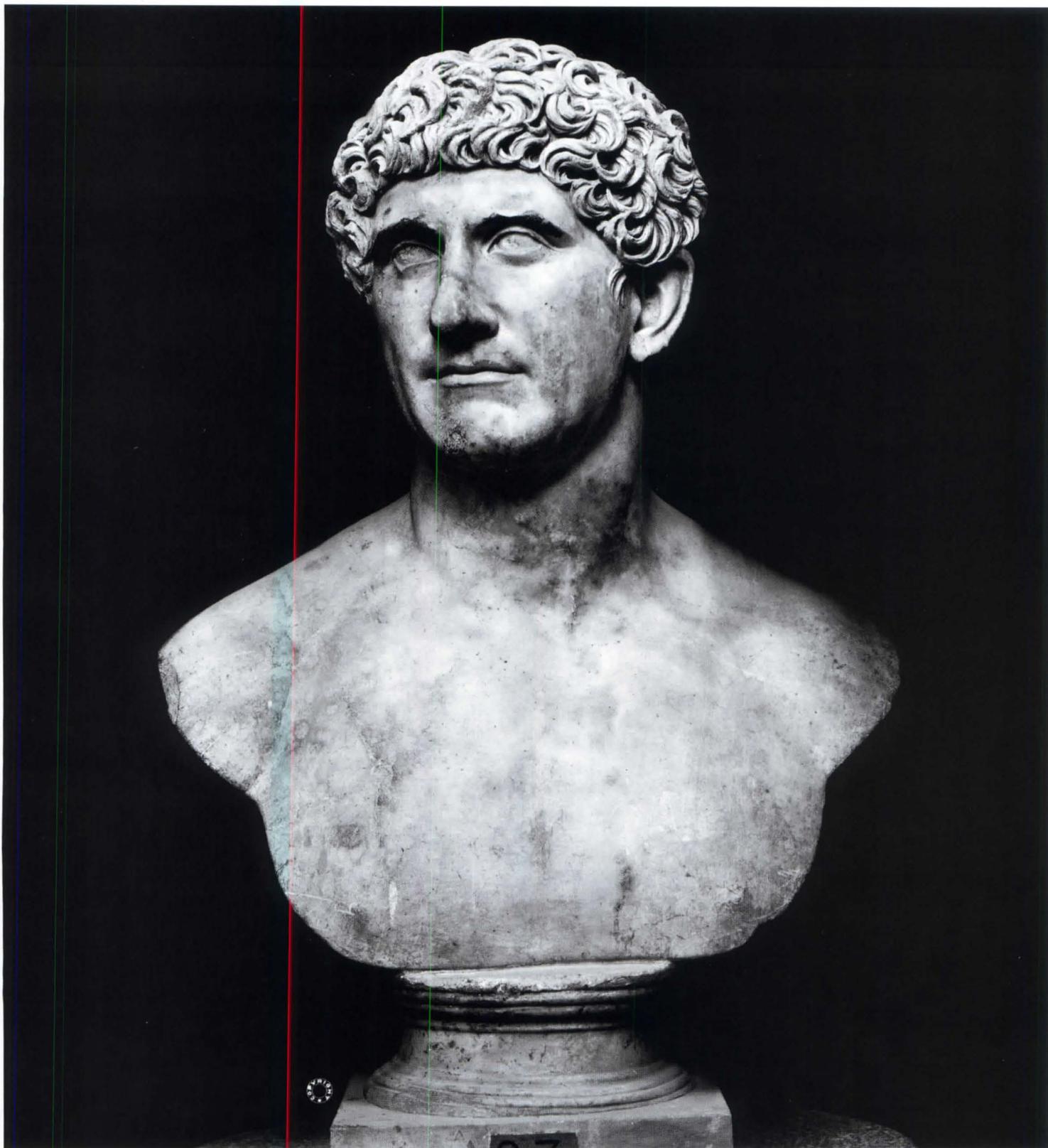




ETCHED INTO THE STONE FACE OF THE LIBRARY (LEFT AND BOTTOM) ARE SIGNS, LETTERS, AND SYMBOLS FROM MANY OF THE WORLD'S LANGUAGES, LIVING AND DEAD. AT NIGHT, THE METAL FACE OF THE LIBRARY SHINES ACROSS THE ALEXANDRIA HARBOR (FACING PAGE) MUCH LIKE THAT OTHER GREAT BEACON OF ANTIQUITY, ALEXANDRIA'S PHAROS LIGHTHOUSE.







ONLY FIVE PLAUSIBLY IDENTIFIABLE CONTEMPORARY SCULPTURES SURVIVE OF THE ROMAN GENERAL MARK ANTONY—LOVER AND ILL-FATED CHAMPION OF CLEOPATRA, LAST OF THE PTOLEMIES—INCLUDING THIS BUST IN THE VATICAN. THE COUPLE COMMITTED SUICIDE AFTER THEIR DEFEAT BY THE EMPEROR AUGUSTUS AT THE NAVAL BATTLE OF ACTIUM IN 31 B.C. IN SHAKESPEARE'S FAMOUS

TRAGEDY ABOUT THEIR AFFAIR, THE SOLDIER WHO CAME UPON CLEOPATRA'S BODY, WITH ORDERS TO TAKE THE QUEEN ALIVE, ANGRILY ASKED OF THE HANDMAIDEN WHO LAY DYING BY HER SIDE, "WHAT WORK IS HERE! CHARMIAN, IS THIS WELL DONE?" "IT IS WELL DONE," CAME THE ANSWER, "AND FITTING FOR A PRINCESS DESCENDED OF SO MANY ROYAL KINGS."

## Desperate Measures

continued from page 61

Boggs's lawsuit says that AECdirect's fate was sealed during a November board meeting, which Michaels attended. The meeting began with DeLuca outlining a potential revenue plan. Then, Boggs's suit says, "Michaels requested that the AECdirect board go into an executive session. During the session, Michaels stated that he had a strong problem with the revenue plan and wanted to shut AECdirect down."

A board member who attended the final meeting of the AECdirect board believes that Michaels was right to want to shut down the business. "AEC was a victim of a total lack of oversight on the part of AIA," says the board member. "Within 45 minutes, Ken had his way. The board voted Fred out."

Young would not specifically verify or dispute Boggs's suit, which claimed that Michaels voted to shut down AECdirect. He said only that "when you look at businesses and business plans and changes in the environment, that then requires tough decisions."

McGraw-Hill's investment of \$500,000 cash and \$500,000 of in-kind advertising in AECdirect seemed a natural extension of its complex relationship with the AIA: one involving financial support for conferences, publication contracts, and awards programs. But at the same time McGraw-Hill was making the investment it was considering a related site of its own. While AECdirect was forming in the spring of 2000, McGraw-Hill was negotiating with a firm called BuildPoint to create an elaborate Web venture called Construction.com. The Construction.com site carries a number of features similar to those planned for AECdirect, such as project news, leads, and product information.

In an interview, Koonce declined to speculate as to why the partnership never materialized with McGraw-Hill—specifically, the licensing of content from McGraw-Hill's Construction Information Group, which could have represented a major source of revenue. Although he was chairman of the board of AECdirect, "I can't speak to that," he says, "because that was not my responsibility."

Once the AIA settles with its creditors, the total cost of AECdirect will probably be just under \$10 million. Even if the investors simply walk away from their \$3.5 million, the AIA, and its members by extension, has burned through \$6 million. In the context of countless failed Internet startups, that figure does not seem extraordinary, but it is a perilous sum to a midsized nonprofit group like the AIA.

A bad ending for AECdirect was not supposed to affect the Institute's books. But the Institute's 60 percent stake in the venture means "there's a lot of cash that's had to be spent by the AIA because of [AECdirect's] failure," Koonce concedes. "When AIA is a majority owner...accounting rules require that a certain percentage of that [loss] be consolidated with the AIA statement."

By May, the board found itself cutting its own expenses, along with advertising expenditures and funding to allied architectural groups. The board also unveiled another plan to rebuild the AIA's net worth and reserves by somehow finding more than \$8 million—the plan involves a reduction of \$4.49 million in expenses and the creation of \$4.21 million in unspecified revenues—to bring net worth up to \$2.5 million in 2003 with "no adverse impact on vital professional services to our members."

But whether the AIA will see its new reconstruction plan through, no one can be sure. Leadership at the Institute is transient. The AIA has been through four CEOs in the past decade, and as many financial executives. Forty-six members of the Institute's board of directors steer the AIA's strategic and financial direction in three-year terms. With so many administrations regularly rotating in and out, past leaders have complained that no continuity exists at the organization, and that it suffers from a lack of institutional memory. Where there is an AIA board and a plan today, there will be another AIA board and another plan three years from now—if it takes that long for a complete rotation. Nothing in the AIA's past decade suggests stability, and nobody has fully explained what the AIA has done with so many millions over the past four years. "As boards change, they want to do things differently," says one director. "There really isn't anybody around at the AIA who knows the big picture." ■



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## Critique

*continued from page 103*

space lined with aluminum panels, allows one to filter through to the north-south circulation spine of the library and reading room, or proceed to auxiliary functions, such as the calligraphy, antiquities, and science museums; the children's library; the conservation institute; the convention rooms on the lower level; the information science school; and the 108,000 square feet of administrative offices. These latter two areas are gathered around two internal light courts whose glazed shafts obliquely penetrate four levels.

The major interior destination of the library is the 215,000-square-foot reading room, which embraces one with its grandly curved perimeter walls. The scale of this hypostyle hall is exhilarating, at once comprehensible as a whole, yet with varying degrees of intimacy on its seven levels. Le Corbusier's General Assembly Building at Chandigarh or Frank Lloyd Wright's workroom for Johnson Wax in Racine come to mind as quickly as the Mosque of Cordoba, but rarely has a such magical interior atmosphere been achieved: the constantly changing perspectives as one moves through the space, the enchanted and variable behavior of natural light, punctuated by ethereal rays of green and blue cast through the glass bricks embedded in the ceiling's structural grid, the comfortable work spaces, oak floors, and natural materials that greet the body when it comes to rest.

Exceedingly positive feelings transmitted by the quality of details compete with a transcendent sense of doubt that tweaks one's consciousness, because despite the rationality of the grid of columns and the constant awareness of the sky through the roof, it is never quite clear where one stands in relation to the earth. Nor is it clear if the room is not slowly sinking underground to join some lost layer of Alexandria's checkered past. Such a saturnine contrast is worthy of the city's greatest modern poet, English-educated, Greek-speaking, Constantine P. Cavafy (1863-1933), whose verses capture the melancholy evanescence of Alexandria's fleeting grandeur.

The magnificent columns, topped by a stylized variation of a lotus capital, vary in height from 13 feet at the lowest level to 20 at the highest. The hollow of their capitals has been

designed to compensate for the different tolerances of the intersecting beams, similar to interlocking Chinese roofing systems. As in Louis I. Kahn's structures, these structural members have been hollowed out to carry the services such as air returns, lighting, and wiring. A similar spirit of exploiting hollow governs the parallel sets of stairs that connect the interior terraces, with service closets tucked between them. They have been pulled away from where they meet the terraces to permit a lateral passage underneath. The ramps connecting all seven levels reinforce the curvature of the perimeter walls and represent for Egypt the first case of a completely handicap-accessible public building.

My visit to the Library of Alexandria coincided with a two-day shutdown of the mechanical systems. Instead of the anticipated suffocation, the sort that one feels with the systems working at the new library in France, the room's agreeable climate and natural lighting genuinely startled me. The possibility of optional mechanicals was a supreme joy in such a large building in one of the world's hottest climates. Similar to the double-height salons in Mamluk-era houses, the reading room's height—138 feet from its lowest to its highest points—allows for excellent diffusion of hot air to the upper range, leaving a pleasant temperature below. A g stone-clad wall on the south side shields the building from direct exposure to the sun and works as a natural heat sink. The shallow surrounding the eastern half of the building also contributes to this beneficial climate control. East-west diagonals cut the grid of the roof, from which the eye-shaped clerestory windows droop below the roof's surface. Daylight thus filters indirectly from the north, providing sufficient natural light work without incandescent support.

Two ship-shaped volumes for isolated seminar rooms have been perched in the upper ranges of the reading room. They contribute a further note of fantasy to the great space and bring to mind Timon of Phlius's famous, albeit sarcastic, description: "In this populous land of Egypt many are they who feed, cloistered bookworms, endlessly argue in the birdcage of the Muses." In defense of the Library of Alexandria's secular mandate, one could ask for no better analogy. But considering the material beauty of the reading room, its exceptional quality of light, and its appeal to metaphysical reflections, will anyone be surprised if people come here to pray?

# specifications

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Normal by Jean Nouvel for Bulo

## Nouvel and SOM Burst the Dot-Com Bubble

Two recent exhibitions at the National Building Museum and the Museum of Modern Art documented the past—and attempted to chart the future—of workplace design. Office system juggernauts Herman Miller and Knoll, with Resolve and this year's A3 systems respectively (July 2001, page 94), are exploring bold new forms and unconventional materials, banking on a more flexible and less formal work environment. As innovative as these systems are, with nontraditional forms and brightly colored, digitally patterned fabrics, they suggest dot-com era aesthetics.

Every trend has a countertrend. Bulo and ICF have introduced two new architect-designed furniture systems that are as linear and definitive as Knoll's A3 is curved and translucent, signaling a return to more reserved, though decidedly modern, office environments. Jean Nouvel's Normal system for Bulo features a 102-by-41-inch flagship-sized desktop with a drawer unit and a credenza positioned at right angles to each other. The system also includes storage units of various sizes. Available in white and black laminates or oak, padouk, and black ash veneers with ash wood edging, Nouvel's system is dignified and formally impressive in its clarity and expansiveness, but it is conservative in its conception of work. Normal is essentially a conventional executive desk with consoles, and its huge size may limit its applications, even in

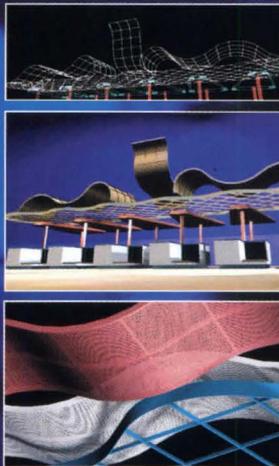
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Epoch by SOM for ICF

For information on the products specified in this section, go to: [www.thru.to/architecture](http://www.thru.to/architecture)



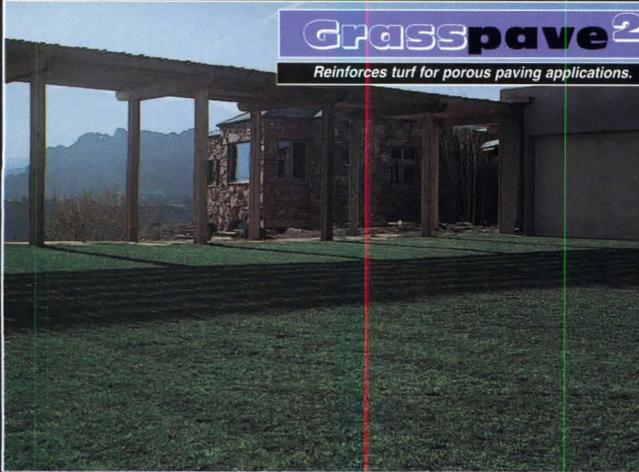
upmarket settings, with rising rents and shrinking workspaces.

SOM's Epoch system for ICF combines aesthetic purity with formal innovation. It consists of three parts: a "work surface" that is a flip-top desk that doubles as a small meeting table when closed; a "technology plane," or space divider, that can stand alone or be hung, concealing flat screen monitors, teleconferencing systems, and white boards; and a "vertical tower," which provides space for files and a compact closet. The casework is quietly detailed, in SOM's signature modernist lines, but components' panels open to reveal luxurious finishes including suede, silk and velvet, in its upmarket editions, and more durable surfaces in its midmarket editions. "Design should always be subservient to humanity," says Sashi Caan, Epoch's codesigner at SOM with Stephen Apking. "Many of the new systems are overdesigned to compensate for decades of mundane office systems," she adds. Epoch integrates technology, but folds it inside the casework, allowing unobstructed work surfaces and efficient use of space. Epoch is appropriate for open or walled offices, giving it flexibility across a floor plate. With Epoch and Normal, SOM and Nouvel envision the future of work looking more like Lever House than a SoMA loft. *Alan G. Brake*

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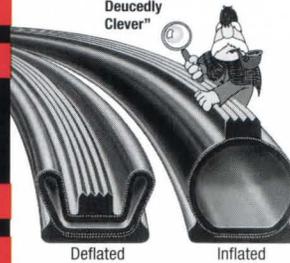


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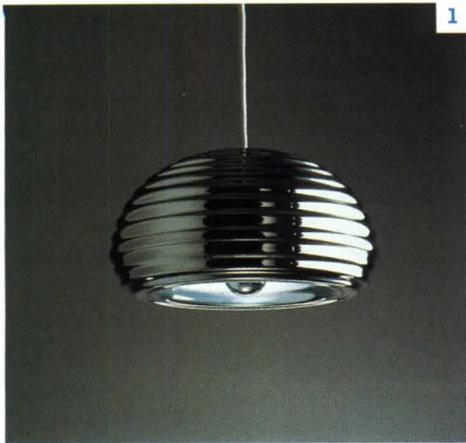
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1



3

## 1 HIGH BRAU

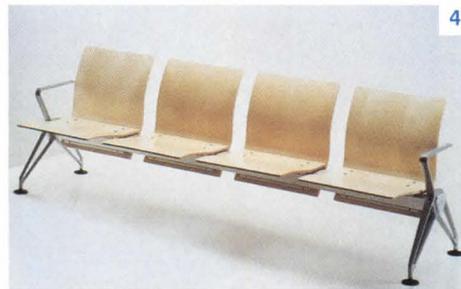
Designed in 1966 by Achille Castiglioni, the **Splugen Brau** fixture is made of double-skinned, polished spun aluminum, and is available from **Flos**. Its form is both organic and abstract. Striking alone, as in a residential setting, or repeated throughout a larger lighting design, the Splugen Brau measures 14 inches in diameter.



2

## 2 TEMPLE OF PLANETARY HEALTH

Finding environmental benefits in coal-burning power plants is not easy, but **Temple** has with its line of green **Certified Gypsum** wallboard. Synthetic gypsum prevents quarrying, and is harvested from the stack scrubbers at coal plants. Combined with recycled paper backing, Temple Certified Gypsum is made of 95 percent postconsumer waste.

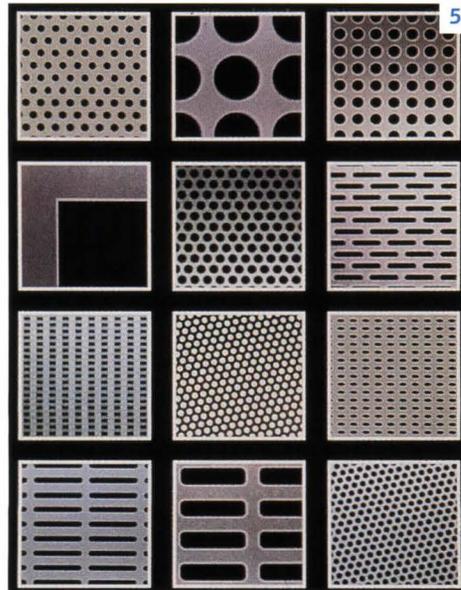


4

## 3 FAST COMPANY CARPET

In keeping with the rapidly changing economy, **Shaw Contract** introduces **S/C extreme**. With the largest distribution system in the U.S., Shaw ships the line in less than two weeks for up to 2,500 square yards. With broadloom (pictured), modular, and educational styles in a variety of patterns and colors, S/C extreme can be specified and installed almost immediately.

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5

## 4 AIRPORT PARKING

Norman Foster designed his new **Air Line** public seating line for London's Stansted International Terminal. Available from **Vitra**, the seating affixes to an aluminum beam supported by die-cast aluminum legs, with the seats, backs, and tables mounted with simple fittings. Requiring only an Allen wrench for alterations, the flexible system comes with wood, aluminum, or upholstered contoured seat backs.

## 5 HAIL CESAR

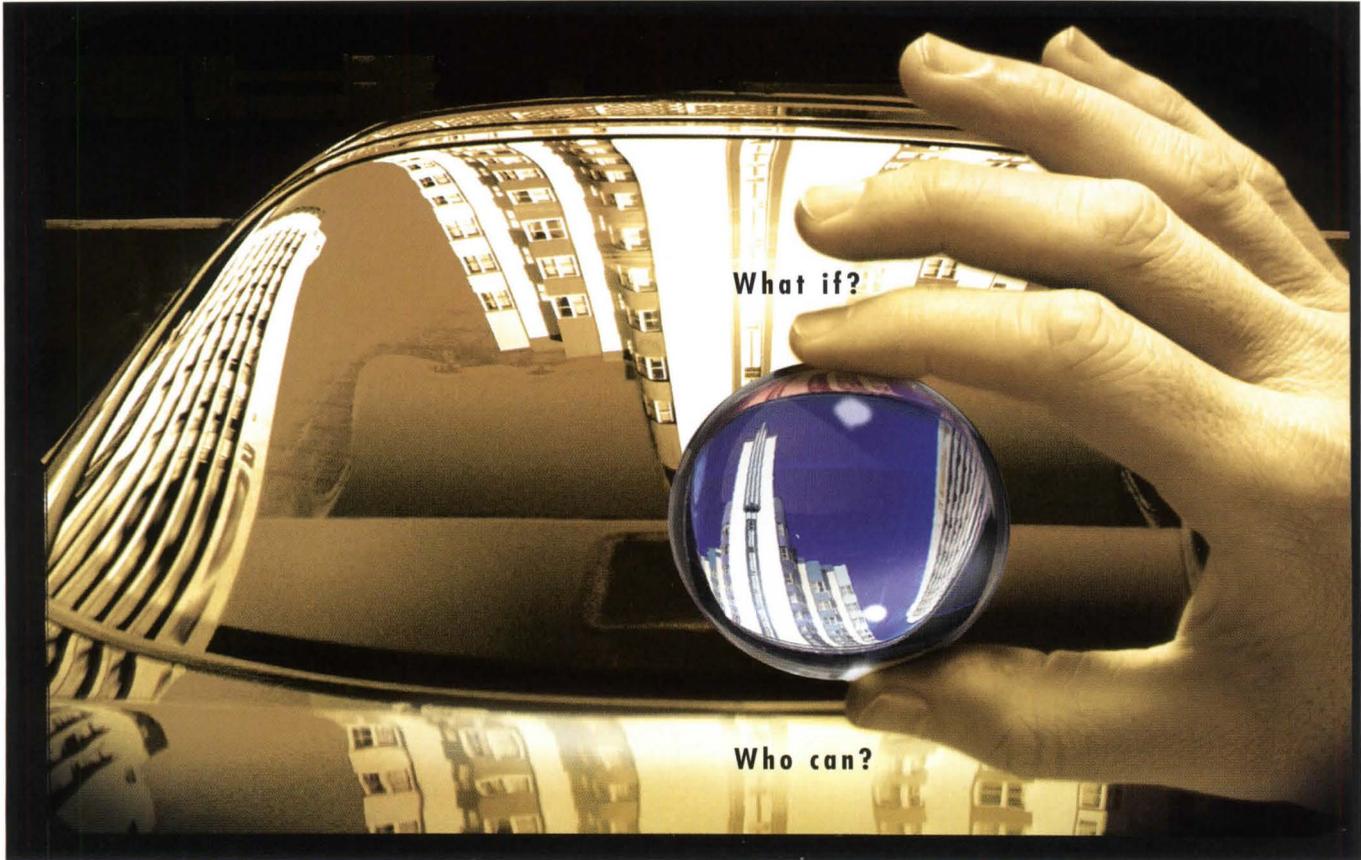
**Cesar Color** offers nine geometric patterns of architectural glass with its **Perforated Glass** collection, designed by artist Claire Steiner Cesar. The laminated safety glass is appropriate for interior and exterior applications, from space dividers to skylights. Offering benefits from privacy to energy cost savings, Perforated Glass provides visual texture and intriguing plays of light.



in memoriam

In an interview with the journal that would later come to be called *Architecture*, World Trade Center designer Minoru Yamasaki claimed “man needs a serene architectural background to save his sanity in today’s world.” Serenity was not a value commonly associated with the World Trade Center. But seen from a distance, their metal surfaces softly gleaming, Yamasaki’s twin towers could sometimes, despite their gargantuan scale, achieve something like it. Since September 11, serenity has been the hardest thing to come by. ■

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