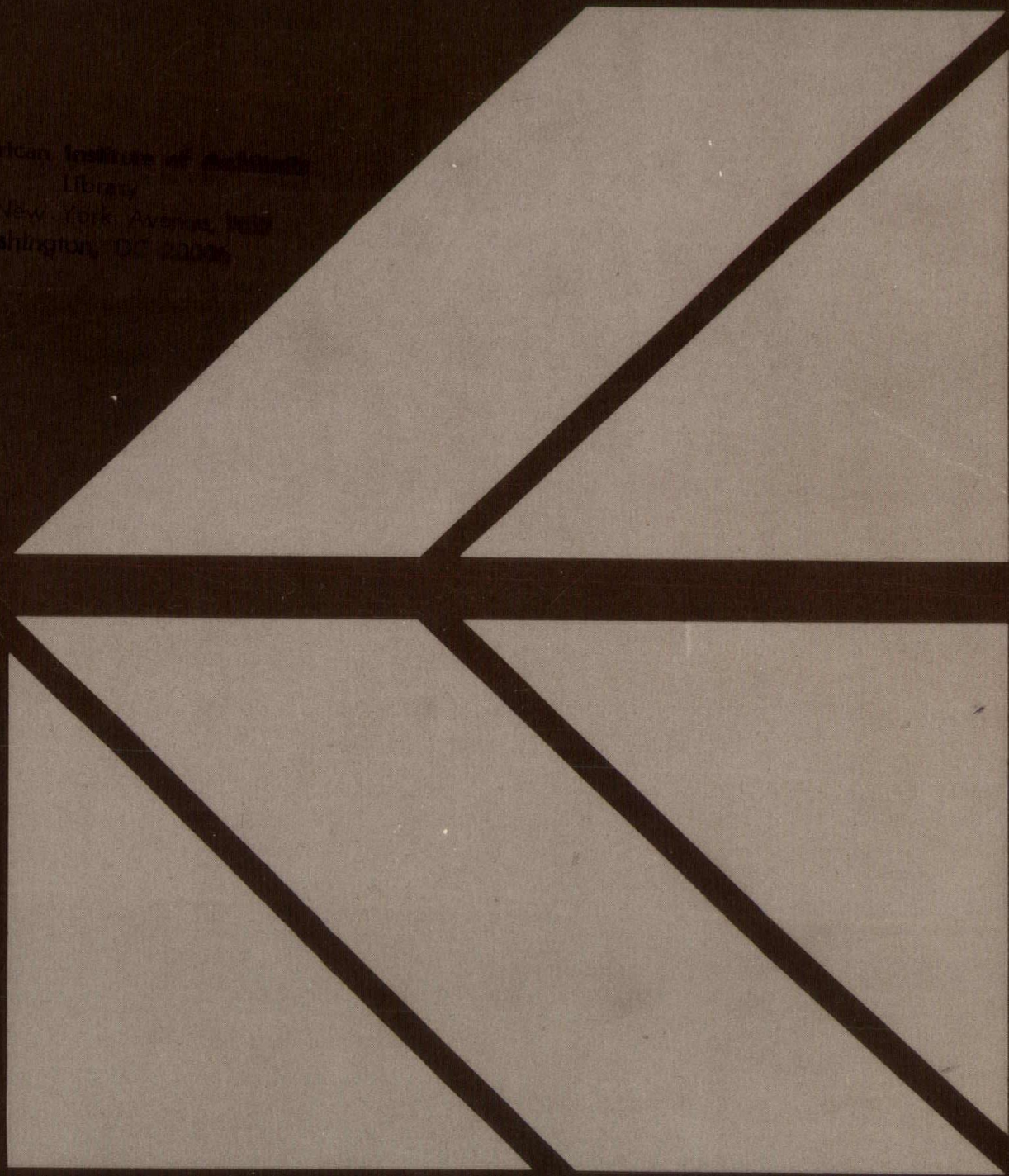
ARCHITECTURE NEBRASKA



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editor's message

BY JOE BERCHENKO AND KIM CLAWSON

During the spring semester of 1976, in conjunction with a school of architecture course on architectural criticism taught by Professor Roger Schluntz, a group of students gathered together to produce a magazine about architecture. The result was *Architecture/Nebraska.*

Despite divergent interests in the group, one overriding factor bound the effort: the belief that criticism can affect the profession and provide impetus for change. The idea was to provide a forum for students (and eventually faculty and professionals) to express their own critical reactions to the built environment. Criticism then, along with background information and occasional pieces of historic or philosophic interest will provide the focus for *A/N.*

As editors we have tried to avoid developing a specific ideological stance, letting the contributors develop their own. Instead we have based editorial decisions on quality of writing, clarity of argument and the ability of an article to generate interest.

Our biggest problem was time. Since all of us were non-paid, non-professionals and could work only in our too scarce spare time, the production of the magazine occurred over a considerably longer time-span than we had expected.

Nonetheless, we feel the effort was useful. All of us learned a good deal more about effective writing. Moreover, we have given life to a project that we hope will have some permanence and possibly contribute to the state of the art. We hope you--the reader--enjoy the magazine and relate to us your thoughts and comments on *A/N.*

NBC Center from the South on 13th Street

photo courtesy of NBC

nbc center: background

BY STEVE EVEANS

As early as 1967 the National Bank of Commerce felt the need for expansion inherent with being a growing and prosperous financial institution. It was around that time that NBC and NBC Co. (a newly created affiliate which would act as the holding company for the new bank structure) began studying the possibility of a new building. This extensive study and review by the bank's corporate structure, with the expertise of various consultants and advisors, established a direction for the construction of the bank. While some contact was made with individuals in the design profession in Nebraska, the bank's directors were primarily interested in considering nationally known architects for the commission.

These studies and considerations were said to reflect the bank's concern for their customers, clients, stockholders and employees. In its original conception, the new NBC Center was outlined by the NBC board of directors as not only a financial center providing basic banking services and tenant space, but also as a center providing a wide variety of activities for downtown Lincoln. The building was to be one of superior quality in design, material, and construction. Paul Amen, Vice-Chairman of the board of NBC Co. and Vice-Chairman of the board of the Narional Bank of Commerce, said, "A decision that was made early in the planning stage, even before we had any architects on board, was that we wanted an owner's building. We did not want an investor's building. We did not want to find someone that would build a building for us with our input and then lease the building from them. We wanted to own the building so that we could control every aspect of the construction and plan it in a way that we thought would result in something that would be a real asset to the city. We felt that kind of obligation." Glenn Yaussi, chairman of the board of NBC Co. (quoted from the bank's 1975 annual report) announced the construction of a new facility for Lincoln in a speech in March of 1972. He said, "We know of no better way to express our confidence in economic strength of Lincoln than to build an architectural focal point for the city." It was with this idea that they committed themselves directly to the philosophy of serving the community.

ORGANIZATION

The NBC board of directors then began organizing internally to accommodate the complexities of the project by establishing two committees, the Directors' Building Committee and the Bank Building Committee.

The Directors' Building Committee was appointed to select design professionals and the construction firm as well as other necessary banking consultants. This committee was made up of senior officers, who were also directors, and non-officer directors of the bank and the holding company. This committee was also responsible for meeting with the design firm in planning sessions and acting in the capacity of the respondent regarding the basic design alternatives. In addition, this committee was responsible for the expenditure of funds directly related to the project.

To assist in considering the efficiency of operation within the realm of banking functions, a Bank Building Committee was formed in conjunction with the Director's Building Committee. The Bank Building Committee (also referred to as the Internal Building Committee) was made up of the heads of major departments within the bank. Ross Hecht, presently senior vice-president in the Consumer Division of the bank, headed the committee which was charged with providing the interface between the bank and the selected design professionals to plan the interior space. Since the banking functions would have to relocate in other facilities during the construction phase of the project, the Bank Building Committee was placed in charge of locating temporary bank space, planning that space, and coordinating the moves to the temporary bank space, planning that space, and coordinating the moves to the temporary facility. The move to the new facility was also to be handled by this committee.

This complicated process involved the energies of several additional local consultants and designers. In describing other functions and responsibilities of the Bank Building Committee, Amen said, "It had the responsibility of working with the architect as far as the space that was going to be occupied by the bank was concerned; the ordering of the furniture, the security system, the communication system, the vault and vault doors, all of the things that related to the bank." These two committees provided the direction for the project.

SELECTION

A very important aspect of the bank project was the final selection of the architectural design professional. The bank had been searching for a Nebraska firm that would best meet their selection criteria. They evidently believed their goals required the services and expertise of a more prominent and nationally known firm. The Nebraska firm which NBC had contracted with during the early stages of the project was Davis, Fenton, Stange and Darling (DFSD) of Lincoln. After the decision was made to look further, DFSD acted as a consultant in obtaining information about firms across the country which met the credentials sought by NBC. In regard to architect selection, Amen said, "Knowing that we had an unusual configuration of land to work with, and knowing that we wanted to have something that was truly spectacular, we said we wanted to find the best architectural firm in the whole country; especially one which had a very positive, strong reputation for design."

DFSD provided the Director's Building Committee with a list of nationally known firms which they thought would best meet NBC's expectations. From DFSD's list and the list they had compiled themselves from various sources with the banking industry, the Director's Building Committee screened the firms. This list included Perkins and Will Architects, Inc., Chicago; John Carl Warnecke and Associates, San Francisco; Thomas E. Stanley, Architects and Engineers, Dallas; Minoru Yamasaki and Associates, Architects and Engineers, Troy, Michigan; Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo and Associates, Hamden, Connecticut; Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, Chicago; Hugh Stubbins and Associates, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Pietro Belluschi Inc., Boston, and I. M. Pei and Partners, New York. After personal interviews with the selected firms, I. M. Pei and Partners was chosen.

THE FIRM

There has been much written about the firm of I. M. Pei and Partners in recent years. The subject matter of the comment ranges from negative criticism of the controversial John Hancock

Building in Boston to the praise of *New York Times* architectural critic, Ada Louis Huxtable. She stated in an article in the February 1973 issue of *Architecture Plus* that, "I. M. Pei and Partners was probably the best practicing firm in the United States today." Much the same attitude was expressed by *Architecture Plus* in its first two issues in February and March of 1973 which were devoted to portfolio of the Pei firm's work. The editor, Peter Blake, called the firm a group of architects in search of the best possible worlds rather than the advocates of dreams. Blake said, "The dreamer doesn't have to deliver--nobody expects him to, but the seeker of the best of all possible worlds is judged by the degree to which he succeeded in finding it, and in nailing it down." In 'Pei's Place' an article published in the January 1976 issue of *Architecture and Urbanism,* Stanley Abercrombie attempts to define the position of I. M. Pei among other American architects but concludes this is clearly impossible to accomplish; "there being no real consistent body of opinion among American architects on any subject." Abercrombie also wrote, "Despite a preponderence of 'rich man's architecture' among its past work, the firm has an active social conscience."

THE DESIGNERS

James Freed was the design partner placed in charge of the NBC Center by the Pei firm. Freed is considered a brilliant manager and designer by the NBC board of directors--combining what they called 'the aesthetic and cultural aspects of the project' with his architectural expertise. He worked with Pershing Wong, designer and technologist; and William Hidell, designer, project coordinator, and representative of the firm in Lincoln during the construction of the project. Together they developed the project from the preliminaries, to the final design, and through construction. Pei was instrumental to the direction of the project, especially in the area of urban design. The guiding philosophy was expressed in a quote by Pei in the NBC annual report; "meaningful environment for an urban society can be achieved only when individual building projects are conceived within the framework of their larger urban setting." It is this type of urban concern that marks the Pei tradition.

THE ASSOCIATE FIRM

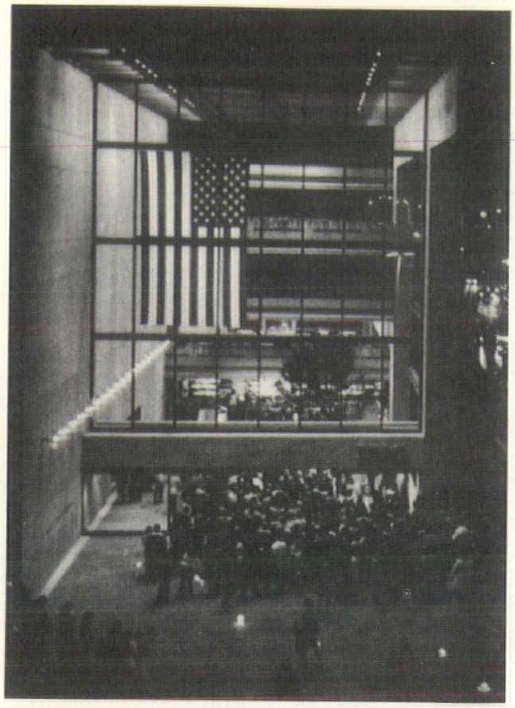
It comes as no surprise that Davis, Fenton, Stange and Darling (DFSD) was selected to collaborate with the Pei firm in the completion of the project. DFSD was charged with doing the detail and working drawings of the bank. It is, of course, common practice for a firm doing a project in a fairly unfamiliar locale to associate with a firm from that area so that they might obtain insight into that location's special idiosyncrasies and aid in site inspection and shop drawings. DFSD's previous involvement in the project, their obvious proximity to the site (being directly across the street) and their own pursuit of architectural excellence were decisive factors in their selection.

THE CONTRACTOR

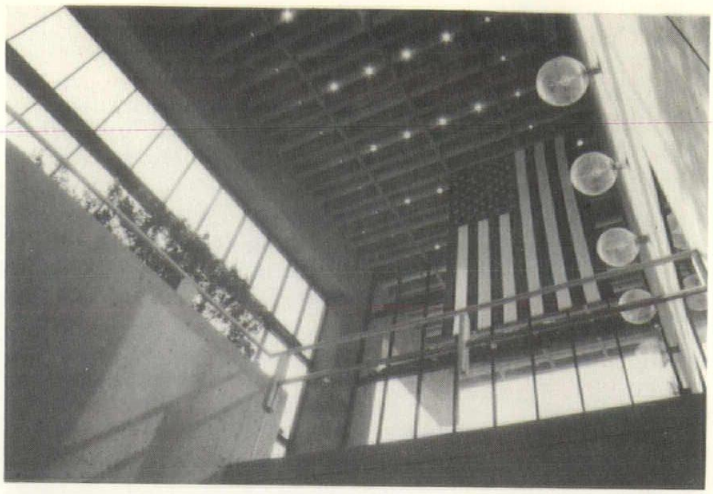
Shortly after the architects were selected, the Directors' Building Committee selected the general contractor. They went through much the same process in selection that was carried out for the architects. Recommendations were made by the Pei firm and DFSD of the qualifications of the different contractors. The Henry C. Beck Company was ultimately selected because of their capabilities in regard to the qualifications, their estimated bid, and, most importantly, for their statement of estimated construction time of 18 months (compared to the actual completion time of approximately three years). Due to the proposed phased nature of the project, the fast-track construction method was to be used. H. C. Beck had a considerable experience in this area as well as in the use of cast-in-place concrete.

OTHER CONSULTANTS

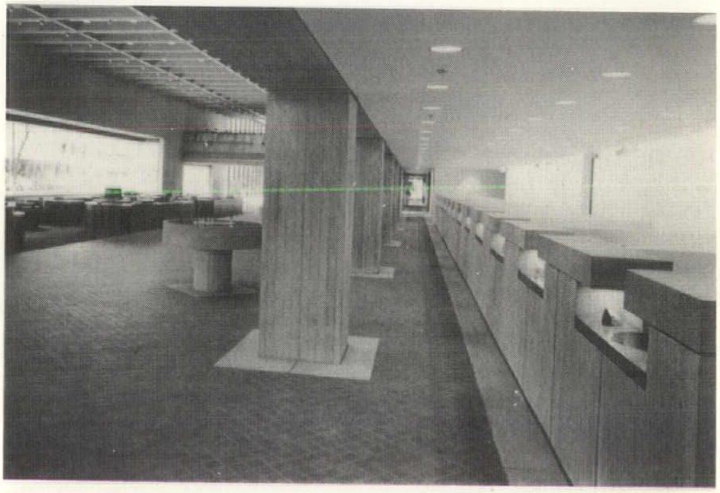
Due to the deep concern of NBC they hired Marvin Knedler of Denver, Colorado (a firm which specialized in bank buildings and banking functions) and also the Alvarado firm (an interior design firm who renovated their old location in 1967). The Knedler firm was placed in charge of programming and design of the bank's departmental office space: finance, marketing, investment, etc., while the Alrarado firm acted as an interior planning consultant for those spaces.



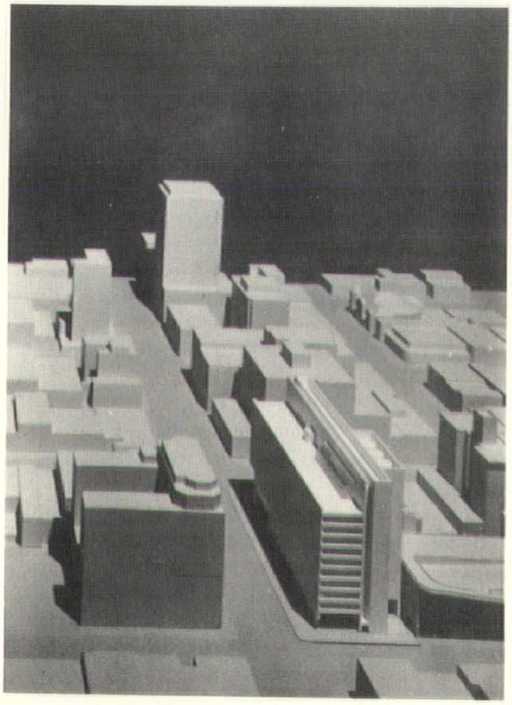
Grand Opening Night Festivities photo courtesy of NBC



Ceiling of the Garden Court looking up from from the Monumental Stairs photo by Kevin Smith



The Teller Counters and Banking Hall photo by Kim Clawson



Site Model in Urban Context photo by Mark Taylor

Personal Banking Area in Banking Hall photo by Kim Clawson

nbc center: excerpt from a tape

The following excerpt from a taped interview with a bank official concerns the decision to give the interior contract to a Denver firm rather than to the I. M. Pei firm. In many ways this shows the problems of communications that occur between architect and client--even with a well known firm like Pei's and a sophisticated and knowledgeable client like NBC.

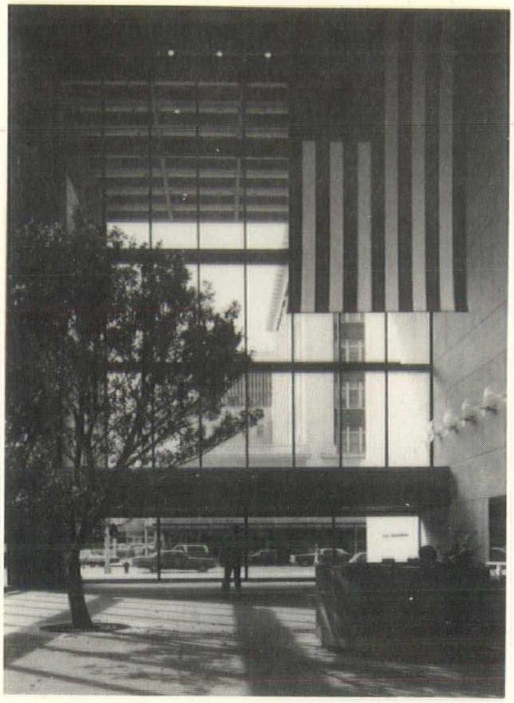
Of course it must be remembered that many factors are considered when awarding contracts and other sources may have differing perspectives on the same situation. Nonetheless, we thought this interchange was worth noting. The preceding question asked why Pei's firm had not been awarded the contract for the interiors.

Bank Official: "We were a little overwhelmed, just honestly, by I. M. Pei's scope of some of the building he had built, particularly bank buildings. Our bank is $250 million. They built a bank building in. . . Toronto that was like a six billion dollar or a sixty billion dollar bank--it was certainly out of our class. The guy that came down to talk to us about interiors had just finished designing that bank and he just scared the hell out of us. He really did. He just did not talk our language. He could not--nor did we give him the opportunity to--come down to our level. We didn't really explore how much he knew and how much we knew. We went through someone (The Nedler firm) who we felt comfortable with, who had done some work for us before. . .

"We felt that architecturally they (the Pei firm) would design a beautiful building. Functionally we were frightened of them because we did not know how much they knew about banks our size. . . We were scared that Pei would say 'form first and function never'. . . Remember, architects really don't know a damn thing about your business. . ."

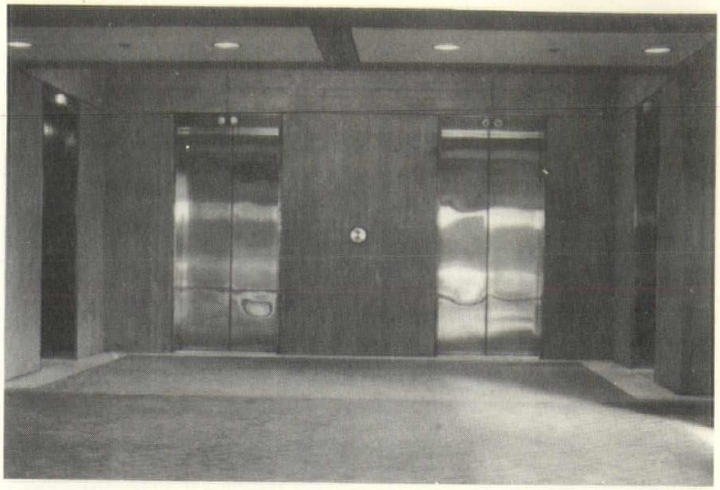
Interviewer: Did you think their client education program was good?

Bank Official: "I thought their client education program was lousy. . . They just overwhelmed us. They scared us to death. We didn't know whether we could trust them. We didn't know whether they would put us into bankruptcy. They didn't relate to us what they could do for us. . . I think Pei's firm could have done a better job of informing us at the outset of what was going to be expected of us."



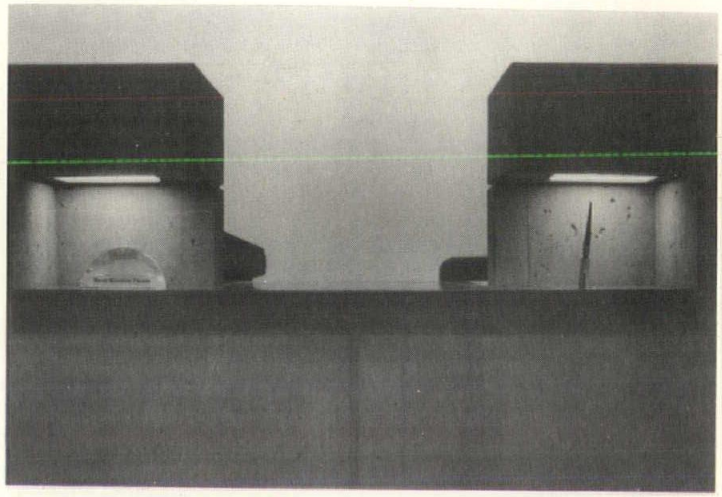
The Garden Court

photo by
Ronald B. Entrekin



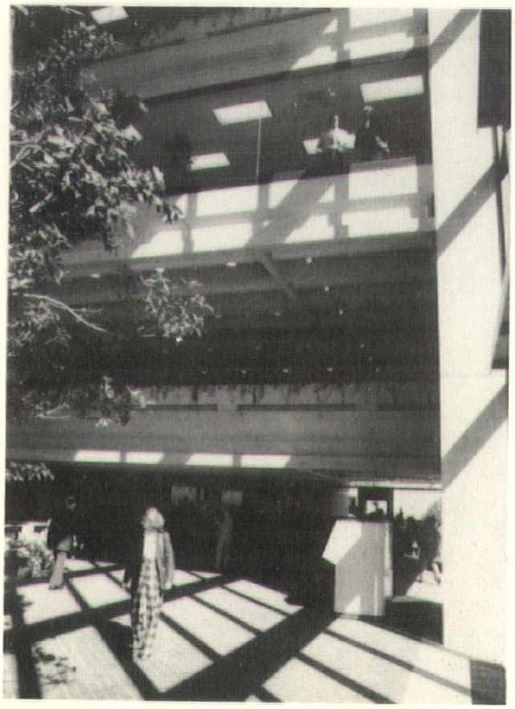
The Elevator Lobby on the First Floor

photo by Kevin Smith



Teller Counters

photo by Kevin Smith



View of Mezzanine
from Garden Court

photo by Kevin Smith

The Concourse Level

photo by Kevin Smith

nbc center: critique

LARRY BOBOLZ AND SCOTT BEMAN

Where else would Lincoln's prestige banking and office center be located other than the most prestigious address in the city? The intersection of Thirteenth and 'O' Streets was described by NBC spokesmen in the initial publicity releases as the "One Hundred Percent Corner" of Lincoln. Without a doubt, this intersection creates the greatest concentration of business activity and pedestrian traffic in the city.

As the 'Main Street' of Lincoln, the commercial importance of 'O' Street need not be emphasized. Thirteenth Street would most likely follow 'O' Street as the city's second ranking business thoroughfare; it is lined with leading office buildings, banks and department stores. This street also leads northward to the center of the University of Nebraska campus, which is of vital interest to most of the merchants of the city.

Another factor in favor of locating the new NBC Center at this site was the long-established reputation of the previous National Bank of Commerce Building. The general public was accustomed to the bank's Thirteenth and 'O' location, and associated that corner site with its name. Another advantage of this site was its adjacency to Rampark parking garage already owned by the bank. The parking requirements for the new NBC Center would be satisfied by this existing garage, thereby freeing the proposed structure of these constraints.

BUILDING + URBAN ELEMENT

NBC Center is part of a new wave of modern buildings which attempt to make a contribution to the urban environment. Prime rental space was sacrificed to provide public plazas and a glass-enclosed garden court for the enjoyment and benefit of the public. Cultural and social events are planned to occur in these spaces, providing the office and retail workers and shoppers with a pleasant change from the daily routine.

Nature and art will be an integral part of the finished building site. Closely spaced trees line Thirteenth Street, contrasting with the concrete structure. The mullion-free windows of the banking hall extend the beauty of these street trees within to complement the ficus tree

planted in the garden court. Outdoor sculpture will soon adorn the sidewalk at the southeast corner of the site.

THE ALLEY

Before the construction of the NBC Center, attempts were made to convert the east-west alley between 'O' and 'P' Streets into a pedestrian route. Though it did attract some pedestrian traffic, the space remained an 'alley.' Service vehicles still used the alley during all hours of the day, blocking pedestrian access and discouraging its wider use by people on foot.

The NBC Center is changing the image of that space into a more pleasant and attractive one. The former east-west alley now is an 'L' shape, to permit uninterrupted north-south pedestrian movement through the bank's interior. A crisp white plaster ceiling with recessed lighting now covers the alley space, giving it an unexpected light and airy quality as well as shelter from the elements. Attention to detail has not been slighted in this space simply because it functions primarily as a service entrance. The same brass letters and door hardware used in the more public areas of the building are carried through in the alley; the walls are constructed of the same board-formed concrete. Even though the orientation of this alley has changed, it should generate greater amounts of pedestrian traffic than were experienced before.

INTERACTION WITH THE SKYLINE

Two major changes were made in the plans for the NBC Center after the design was substantially completed. An additional, 11th floor was added at the client's insistence, and windows were added to the west elevation at the suggestion of the realty company marketing the space. A roof garden was sacrificed to permit the additional floor of leaseable office space. Although this change did not alter the total height of the building (the west portion of the building with the mechanical equipment areas remained the same height), it did change the building's proportions. Particularly when viewed from the east, the additional row of windows at this height detracts from the basic compositional form of the building, and the repetitive grid of the east facade becomes even more dominant. In addition, the NBC Center is no longer the same apparent height as the nearby Stuart Building, an early design consideration.

The introduction of windows on the west face of the building appears somewhat haphazard. The architects had been told that no windows would be allowed on the west side of the site next to Hovland-Swanson, because city ordinances forbid windows overlooking adjacent property which is owned by another party. After the original plans were completed and construction had begun, a space marketing consultant recommended that windows be added to the west wall of the rental floors to enhance their marketability. Bank officials and attorneys then informed the architects that since the west fifty feet of the NBC Center site was owned by Hovland's and only leased by the bank, windows overlooking the adjacent property would be legally permissible. The window pattern which was designed at this late stage does not seem to be well coordinated with the rest of the structure. Unfortunately, this west-facing aspect is the first view of the building for most visitors entering Lincoln from the Municipal Airport and Interstate-80.

The great length and limited breadth of the NBC Center give it the appearance of a wall when viewed perpendicular to its long dimension. Particularly from the northwest, this wall-form dominates the skyline of the downtown area (with the exception of the Nebraska State Capital), despite its lack of great height. The broad two-dimensional expanse of the west facade offsets the height advantage of the competing bank's tower. The west elevation is the building's weakest point and it regrettably detracts from the overall image of the building.

From the east, however, the building's dominance is diminished considerably. The great wall is balanced by buildings of similar height on the opposite side of 'O' and 13th Streets. Additionally, the Stuart Building is viewed slightly nearer in the foreground, and blocks out the north half of the NBC Center.

THE PEDESTRIAN LEVEL

It is at the pedestrian level that the NBC Center is most successful. The 13th and 'O' Street corner of the building with its recess and overhang and the

glass-enclosed garden court give a sense of drama to the downtown area. The square window bays of the east facade form interesting shadow patterns throughout the morning. The uninterrupted glass walls of the banking hall breathe life into and out of the bank's interior. The entire effect is the type of sophistication not often occurring in small midwestern cities. Hopefully this sort of example will influence future projects in the city to raise the standards of expectancy for building design and quality.

PREDECESSORS OR SIMILAR SPIRITS

Like the Ford Foundation by Roche and Dinkeloo in New York City, or the Crystal Court of the IDS Center in Minneapolis by Philip Johnson and John Burgee, the new NBC Center is largely composed of spaces which defy labels such as interior or exterior, enclosed or open. The comparison of the NBC Center to these buildings is deliberate--the interiors of the NBC Center owe much to its predecessors. The function of the interior public spaces of the NBC Center closely parallels the function of the interior spaces in the other structures, and the psychological effect of the indoor 'oasis' in the dead of winter will also be similar.

SEQUENCE OF SPACES

On the ground floor the architect juxtaposed four uniquely different volumes to create the most exciting spatial qualities of any major building in Lincoln's recent history. Sandwiched between two covered exterior plazas at the north and south extremities of the site are two vastly dissimilar 'interior' spaces. Each of these spaces relates closely to its adjacent 'exterior' counterpart in scale and proportion. Dividing these pairs of interior and exterior spaces is a low bridge leading to nowhere; or, conversely, a portal leading to everywhere.

The sequence of entry is a carefully controlled progression. From the infinite height of the open sky on the south along 'O' Street to the covered but open volume of the south plaza seems a subtle change to the pedestrian. The cantilevered floors overhead are so far above the horizon plane of a person on the sidewalk that this first transition goes virtually unnoticed. Then one passes beneath a low concrete canopy which compresses the visitor's frame of reference. Following this, the ceiling plane shifts to its former sixty foot height, creating an interior volume such as Lincoln has never seen before.

A second low concrete canopy separates the enclosed garden court from the banking hall, where all financial transactions occur. The progression of spaces from the partially defined enclosure of the covered exterior plaza to the limited enclosure of the glass box to the more complete enclosure of the banking hall heightens the psychological sense of security of this banking facility.

SOUTH PLAZA

The south exterior plaza is a volume of space open to 13th Street on the east and 'O' Street to the south. In a sense the plaza respects the scale of the neighboring buildings on 'O' Street; it is approximately the same height as the adjacent Hovland-Swanson Building. The positive-negative relationship of these buildings, however, results in a mixed blessing. The cut-out of space removed from the building frontage along 'O' Street breaks the rhythm of the existing storefronts. Instead of a strong corner at the intersection of 13th and 'O' Streets, the city has gained a 'notch.' On the other hand, this configuration also lessens the impact of the tall slab form on the surrounding structures.

The extra open space allowed by this setback respects the significance of this corner as a pedestrian traffic node, and emphasizes its importance by providing additional public activity space. Unfortunately the public's interaction with this space has been minimal. Part of the cause for this lack of activity could be attributed to the absence of street furniture or landscaping. This deficiency may be ameliorated to some measure by the planned 'O' Street Beautification Program which includes these amenities.

The customary attention to details of I. M. Pei and Associates is evident in this project. The exterior sidewalks and interior traffic areas on the ground floor are covered with four inch square brick pavers layed in whole and half units only. This precise degree of definition and alignment is maintained throughout the

building and site design. Examples, such as that of the trees along 13th Street aligning with the vertical joints in the glass wall of the banking hall, are commonplace.

Brass graphic lettering and a row of clear globe light fixtures comprise the only decoration on the warm-tone concrete structure. This level of restraint contributes to the overall sophistication of the project. The exposed shuttering technique used in the forming of the cast-in-place concrete in combination with the excellent coloring of the admixture impart a richness and pattern unexpected in this type of construction.

The enclosing plane overhead consists of the cast-in-place concrete joist system with expressed distribution ducts containing lighting and wiring. Designed primarily for interior application, this air tube system incorporated the mechanical and electrical requirements as well as being perforated for acoustic control. Continuing this system outside for aesthetic reasons might be objected to for its lack of honesty, however, the finished esult seems to justify the means.

Noteworthy is the elimination of a corner column through the use of the concrete transfer girder. This was obviously a costly gesture on the part of the architects and the client, but one which is rewarded by the drama of the south plaza.

GARDEN COURT

The transition between the south exterior plaza and the enclosed garden court is accomplished by way of an air door beneath a low, horizontal concrete canopy. This canopy plays a non-structural role; it apparently does not act to stabilize the column or transfer girder, and was, in fact, poured months later. The canopy merely houses the air door blowers and acts as a spandrel beam for the glass wall of the south side of the garden court.

In comparison to the Ford Foundation garden, the NBC Center's garden court is a small space. The architects considered its modest dimensions, 40 feet by 80 feet by 60 feet high, to be only large enough for three design elements: the huge American flag, the ficus tree and the information desk.

The west wall of the garden court consists largely of unrelieved cast-in-place concrete. There are three square openings at ground level which provide visual and pedestrian access to the lease space to the west, however, the remaining expanse of wall is broken only by the joint pattern of the concrete formwork. The solidity and monumentality of this wall form an interesting contrast to the transparency of the glass walls, but the west wall is stark, nonetheless, and perhaps would profit by the introduction of wall hangings, tapestries or other decorations.

THE BRIDGE

The bridge on the mezzanine level which separates the garden court from the banking hall performs a more important function than merely serving as 'leftover' office space. It acts as a spatial compression element from four different directions of traffic flow, and directs persons entering the building through the east doors to the elevator lobby. The subordinate placing of the elevator lobby away from the major volumes on the ground floor is also a unique design decision. The space beneath the bridge is a human-scaled zone, in contrast to the monumental volumes, which allows persons to more easily orient themselves and decide their destination.

THE BANKING HALL

The duality inherent in locating two major interior spaces on the same floor in close proximity to each other produces problems on the symbolic and communicative level of experience. The question might be asked, "Why is the most important banking space secondary in prominence to the lobby?" Actually the banking hall is not without its share of drama and visual interest, yet it must share the limelight with a space which largely exists for 'non-productive' purposes. Perhaps the device of contrast is once again being exploited to make the large volume of the banking hall seem more personal and intimate in scale and feeling.

The atmosphere which greets a person entering the banking hall is one of surprising calm and serenity. The reaction of more than one observer has been, "I have the feeling of being outside," to which might be added, "without all the noise." Indeed, the east wall of the

banking hall is essentially defined spatially by the trees at the edge of 13th Street. This verdant quality is made possible by the 120 by 9 foot high mullionless 'panorama' window, broken only by a four foot wide column. The entire north wall of the banking hall is glazed with the exception of the concrete box which frames the north entry doors, enhancing the open quality of this space.

Contributing also to the sense of calm which pervades the banking hall are several more 'concrete' factors--primary among these are the integrated ceiling and the warm tone of the cast-in-place walls. The artificial light which softly illuminates the banking hall is largely indirect, reflected off the architectural concrete of the wood-formed joist system. The quality of light thus produced seems almost like natural sunlight filtering through an overcast sky. The lighting is subdued and restful, in contrast to the more conventional suspended ceilings with 100 footcandle levels of cold fluorescent lighting.

Despite the warmth of the wall surfaces and lighting, the interior of the banking hall is rather austere in appearance. The blank and unbroken expanses of concrete and plaster on the west walls of the hall and the teller area create a stark impression. Concrete, in whatever form or color, connotes a feeling of 'coldness' to many persons. The use of concrete in bank furniture, such as check writing stands and teller counters, is so unlike what is expected in a midwestern bank that some persons may find it difficult to accept. Contrary to fact, many persons believe that the use of concrete throughout the banking hall was a cheap, makeshift construction method. Little do they realize the difference between this 'artificial stone' and the ready-mix used in the grain elevators to which they are accustomed.

Poured-in-place concrete teller counters were also too novel a concept for the board of directors of the bank to accept readily. Through the dedication and persistance of the architects, the client was 'educated' toward approval of this aspect of their proposal. This process took many forms: conferences, sketches, models, and even full-size mock-ups of portions of the designs.

Considerable warmth and richness are added by the black glass counter tops, oak trim and brass accessories. Complementing the linear composition of the teller counter are three circular check writing stands which continue the vocabulary of materials and architectural treatment.

Juxtaposed with the hard surfaces of the concrete walls and brick pavers is an island of deep brown carpeting with four oaken work centers. These work centers, each accommodating four employees, are the epitome of 'corporate contemporary' design. The crisp, clean detailing of the oak millwork is combined with inlaid black glass tops to produce distinctive and functional office landscaping elements. At the architect's insistence, the desktops of these work centers are to be cleared every evening before closing to enhance the image of the banking hall after hours.

THE NORTH PLAZA

The 30 by 40 foot exterior plaza to the north is the least emphaized element on the ground floor. The transfer girder and building setback permit limited sun penetration during the morning hours, but this plaza is sunless throughout much of the day. Entering the building from the north plaza during the daytime is like 'coming in the back door.' At night, however, the fully glazed north wall permits a fine view of the banking hall; almost as if the space was open to the outside.

BELOW GRADE

The entrance to public areas below grade can become an equally difficult problem for the designer. To avoid the 'dungeon effect' in the NBC Center, the architect has introduced an open monumental stair. This stairway may be conveniently entered from the side entrance and the banking hall, but, paradoxically, it is not directly accessible from the primary entrance to the south. To enter from the south plaza, one must pass through the garden court, around the information desk, beneath the mezzanine bridge, and then turn a complete 180 degrees.

As one descends these stairs a number of interesting spatial qualities and architectural details can be observed. The apparent height of the garden court is increased, and the west wall becomes an increasingly dominant blank plane. The

volume explodes outward from the compressing effect of the space beneath the mezzanine bridge. The glass-paneled railing on the south side of the stair opening permits changing views toward 'O' Street as one passes beneath the ground plane. In addition the high degree of detailing typical of the public portions of the building, is shown in the carefully handled brass pipe railings.

The first thing to catch the eye on the concourse level is the white cylindrical form which extends from floor to ceiling in front of the Travel Unlimited office. This contains the root system of the ficus tree in the garden court above, and is treated as a display rack for travel brochures on the outside. This circular idiom is repeated in several desks on the concourse level.

I. M. Pei and Partners were responsible for the interiors of all of the public spaces on the ground and concourse levels, as well as the interiors of the Travel Unlimited office. Originally intended to occupy the prime space off the garden court, the small area alloted to Travel Unlimited demanded very efficient space utilization. The offices as designed are handsome and innovative in the division of space and the provision of storage and working space for each employee. Functional problems have been voiced by some employees--file cabinets are inconveniently low, desks and storage cabinets are not large enough, etc.--however, the space limitations are quite likely as much to blame as the designers.

The mezzanine bridge, somewhat neglected, is currently utilized for interim office space. It could make a splendid viewing gallery of the ground level of the bank, as in the rotunda of the Nebraska State Capital. While this is a net loss to the general public, those persons with offices on the bridge have reaped a windfall. The finest views in the building may be experienced from this vantage point--to one side is the garden court and 'O' Street, and to the other is the banking hall. It would seem difficult for an employee to get any work done in this space.

Unfortunately, these are not the only distractions. The noise level on the bridge can at times be quite noticeable, due to the airborne noise produced by cars and people on the street, the air door blowers, and people on the ground floor of the bank. The space was not originally intended for office use and cannot be expected to function well for this purpose. It would perhaps be better to give it to the public or consider some other use for this 'prime space.'

INTERIOR SPACES

The remaining interior space occupied by the National Bank of Commerce (except for the 11th floor) was programmed and designed by Marvin E. Knedler and associates of Denver, and Custom Wood Products of Englewood, Colorado. Due to the immensity of their responsibility, a detailed appraisal of their work would be practically interminable. There are, however, certain general aspects which deserve consideration here.

Office landscaping may be sweeping the nation, but there are still some strongholds of conventional office arrangement. Tradition prevailed in this building as each department head, as well as many assistants, were walled off in individual enclosed offices. In a long, narrow building with so many windows on the north, east and south sides, one would expect all employees to have a view outside. Not so; many of the private offices are located on the perimeter of the building, blocking all outside views. Furthermore, the office layout does not respect the modular system of the exterior windows. Partitions occur in the middle of window bays on a number of occasions, upsetting the rhythm and pattern of the window treatment. Very little alteration would have been required in the space planning to avoid this result.

Despite the recent interest in the Beaux-Arts tradition, historical styles were not a determinant of the architectural design of this building's exterior. Why then, do not all of the interiors reflect the contemporary nature of the design? It is disturbing to note the eclecticism and 'traditional' treatment applied, at the client's insistence, to several of the executive offices. The questions might be asked, "Does French Provincial styling really belong in a contemporary, twentieth century bank?" The answer would not be of interest to one satisfied user who claims, "I don't care if it's good or not, I know what I like." Fortunately, the furnishings are not permanent, and can be removed should tastes, styles or (more conveivably) officers change.

Without going into any great detail, it can be said that these interiors lack distinction. A group of interior designers toured the building and were amazed at some of the things that were done. It does not require the training or expertise of an interior designer, however, to recognize the glaring examples of inappropriate and inconsistent design. Incongruous wall covering patterns are juxtaposed in employee lounges with disastrous results. Plaid and striped fabrics are similarly mishandled on several occasions. Some of the furniture selections look as if they were chosen from the catalogs of a Chicago mail-order house (e.g. chartreuse, tie-dyed velvet sofa!).

The most disappointing aspect of the interior design of these upper floors is that it maintains neither the meticulous attention to detail of the Pei office, nor their dedication to the highest ideals of contemporary design philosophy. It is grossly unfair to treat a fine work of architecture with so little care and sensitivity in the design of much of its interior.

The old adage "too many cooks ruin the broth" was disproven in the case of the NBC Center due to the strong building form and the interior design of the public areas created by the architects, I. M. Pei and Partners and Davis/Fenton/Stange/Darling. It is unfortunate, however, that the architects could not have convinced the client of their ability to handle the total design of a project of this size. The New York image of I. M. Pei and Partners may have permitted them greater control and latitude in their design over what local designers could accomplish, but the scale of their larger projects intimidated the building committee of the bank into the misconception that they could only work within such a vast framework. Had they been given responsibility over the entire range of design services on the building, the result would have undoubtedly been of a more uniform, high standard.

CONCLUSION

The importance of this building goes much further than merely providing the National Bank of Commerce with a new and vastly improved facility and image. It embodies the bank's commitment to the downtown. As the designer and partner-in-charge, James Freed, expressed it, "This building was designed to be one of the mainstays of the Lincoln community."

The impact of the NBC Center as a catalyst toward growth and revitalization of the downtown core is already being felt. The designs for the beautification projects on 13th and 'O' Streets (by the firms of Clark & Enerson, Hamersky, Schlaebitz, Burroughs and Thomsen; and Bahr, Hanna, Vermeer and Haecker, respectively) were already in the works before the NBC Center was completed, but these plans were first implemented on the NBC Center site. It would be fair to suggest that the NBC Center has also widened the horizons of other Downtown Advisory Committee proposals. Such new developments as the Centrum, the Atrium, and the Gunny's complex were probably given a boost as well.

At a time when cities the size of Lincoln are losing the fundamental importance provided by a strong business core, the contribution of the National Bank of Commerce is unparalleled.

"... showed a high level of competence and a gratifying lack of current magazine fashion."

nebraska aia awards, 1976

BY RICK KUHL AND GARY DUBAS

On November 14, 1975 The Nebraska AIA Awards presentation was held at Sheldon Art Gallery on the UNL campus. Of the twenty-five entries submitted for the Honor Awards, five received recognition. These five were selected by a jury of three California architects. The jurors were Joseph Esherick, FAIA, Esherick, Homsey, Dodge & Davis, San Francisco, Chairman of the jury: Mr. William Trunbull, Jr., AIA, MLTW/Trunbull Associates, San Francisco and Theodore C. Bernardi, FAIA, Wurster, Bernardi & Emmons, San Francisco.

JURY COMMENTS

"The submissions to the Nebraska Honor Awards program for the most part showed a high level of competence and a gratifying lack of current magazine 'fashion'. What did seem to be unsettling was, in some cases, a ponderousness about the buildings, a monumentality of form that made little of the idea that the places were for people. The architecture dealt with problem solving; spaces, circulation, mechanical systems and budgets and did it very well. Organizing concepts that had the capacity to raise the solutions to greater levels of intellectual and emotional appreciation were not always present. Architecture starts with the pragmatic but its effective end is the poetical. The competent excellence was all there to be seen but broader goals seemed sometimes to be occluded."

photos & plans courtesy of Neil Astle & Associates

FIRST HONOR AWARD

PROJECT: **DALE BALL RESIDENCE, OMAHA**

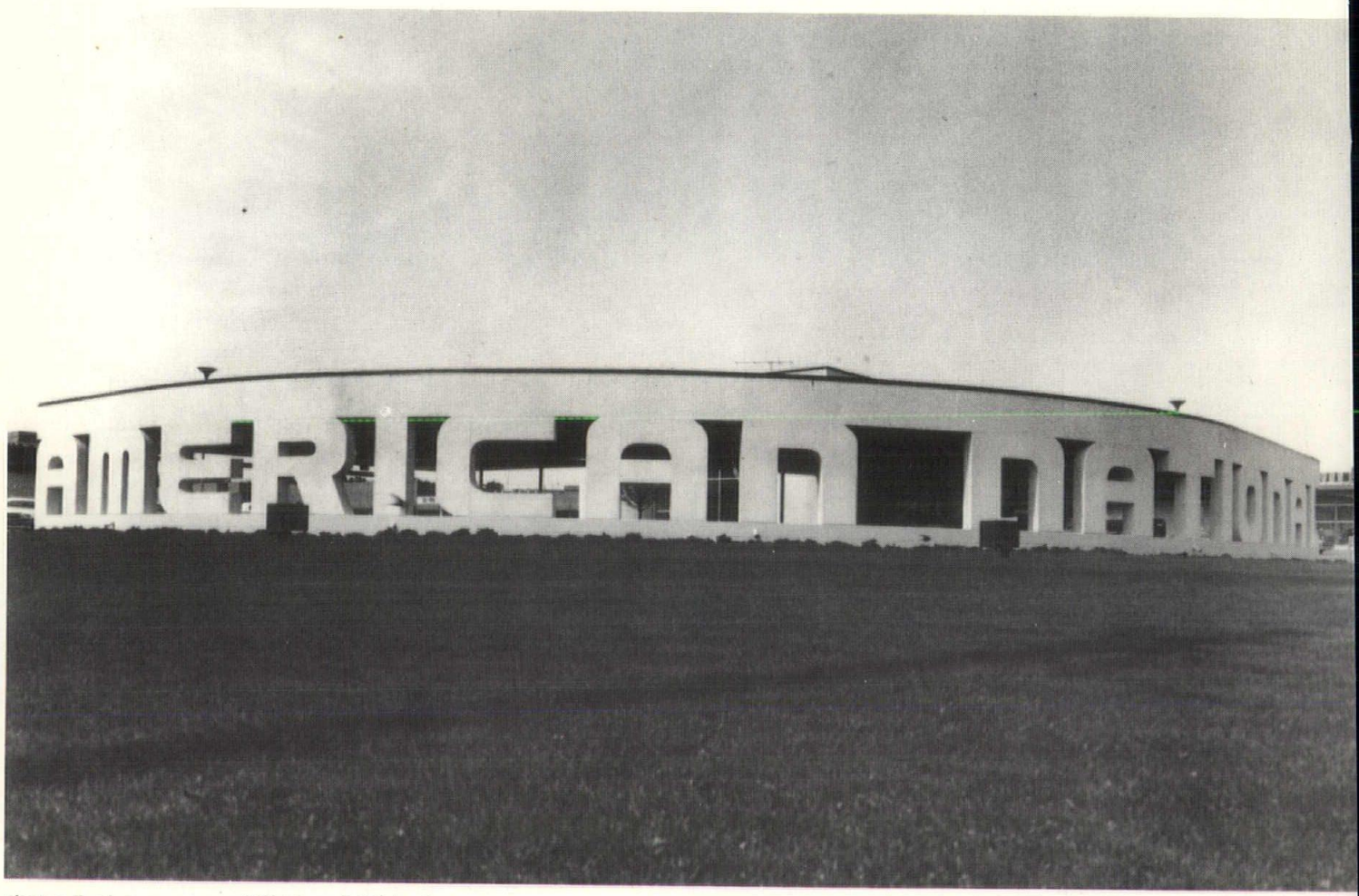
ARCHITECT: **NEIL ASTLE & ASSOCIATES, OMAHA**

This residence is skillfully placed among the existing oak trees and utilizes the slope of the site to define three major interior levels, with the bedrooms and den in the upper level, breakfast and dining at mid level, and living and master bedroom on the lower level. By stepping the residence downward to the rear of the site, the architect has created interior spaces which flow out naturally to become part of the landscape, producing a horizontal interior and exterior exchange of space. The use of the skylights over the circulation areas achieves essentially the same exchange vertically and also accents the interior level changes. The skylights have inherent problems with excessive summer heat build-up in circulation spaces. Consequently, the architect has attempted to provide for summer shading and winter sun penetration by preserving the existing deciduous trees.

Through the use of an exposed structure of red cedar and rough sawn red cedar siding, the architect was successful at relating the scale of the surrounding residential development with the aesthetic of the existing landscape.

JURY COMMENTS

"Project 7512 - Residence - This was an enthusiastic and unanimous choice. What makes a jury without much comment be unanimous about a project when they can disagree to a greater or lesser degree on other submissions? At least as exemplified by the photographs there is a combination of site, plan, materials, and proportions that reached our hearts, and the chances are that in approaching the house and taking the tour it is even better.



photos & plans courtesy of Kirkham & Michael

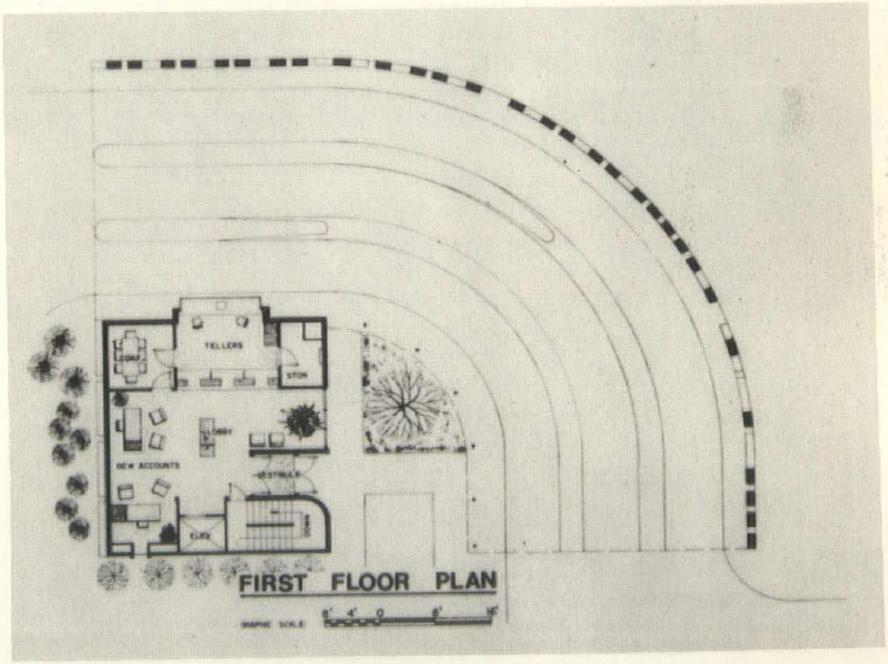
CITATION AWARD

PROJECT: AMERICAN NATIONAL BANK
90TH AND MAPLE STREETS
OMAHA, NEBRASKA

ARCHITECT: KIRKHAM MICHAEL & ASSOCIATES, OMAHA

When the people at the American National Bank decided they needed another facility, they were interested in obtaining good public exposure. A site was selected on the southwest corner of 90th and Maple adjacent to a shopping center. The high traffic count and the high degree of commercial activity influenced the site's selection.

The client's requirements for a small, highly visible, easily identifiable drive-in bank, and the degree of competing visual clutter in this area presented an interesting design problem. A small, jewel-like building striving for identity only through detail refinement or color restraint was not needed; what was needed was something to attract attention. The solution adopted by the architect was to integrate large super-graphic signage with the total design. Specfically, the solution was a rectangular building and a semi-enclosed curved canopy extending along two sides of the building which employed the name 'American National' along its radius. These letters not only serve to stimulate curiosity, but they act visually to support the canopy.



JURY COMMENTS

"Project 7525 - Drive-In Bank - An audacious solution which, as undoubtedly anticipated, amused us all. Perhaps the canopy could have been a better solution if its underside had been better considered. Perhaps, money, time or energy was lacking."

photos & plans courtesy of Bahr, Hanna, Vermeer and Haecker

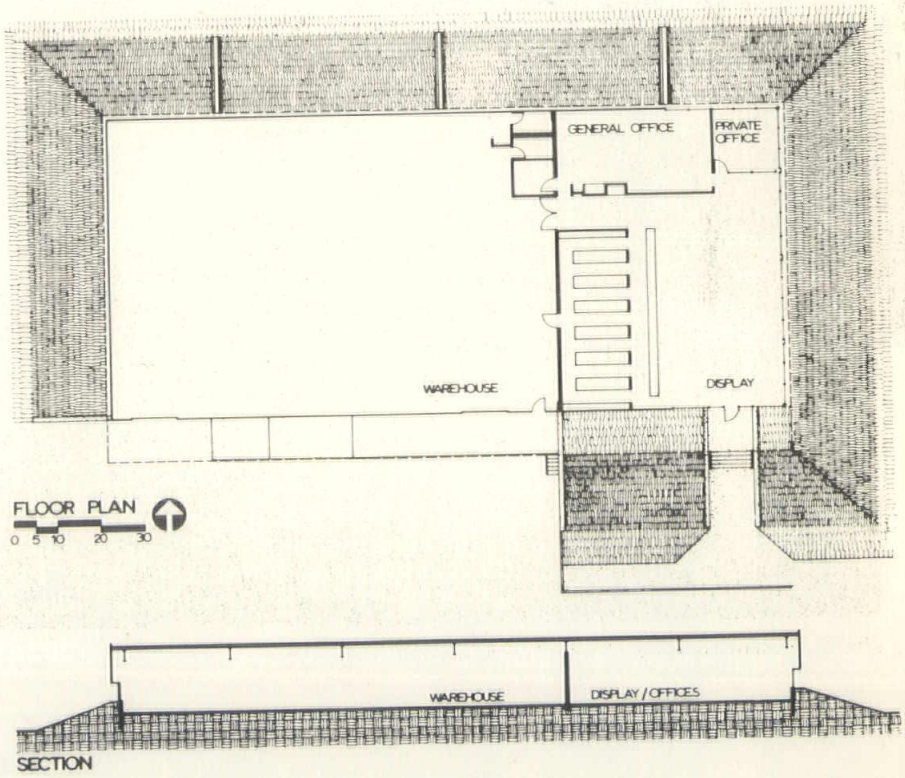
CITATION AWARD

PROJECT: **FUCHS MACHINERY & SUPPLY, INC.**
19TH AND CORNHUSKER HIGHWAY
LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

ARCHITECT: **BAHR, HANNA, VERMEER & HAECKER, ARCHITECTS, LTD., OMAHA & LINCOLN**

Fuchs Machinery & Supply is an excellent example of an 'off-the-shelf' architectural components approach to building systems. The client came to the architect with the site already selected. It is located in an area zoned and used for light industry where the typical structures are of metal construction. By utilizing the combination of an earth berm and metal building components, the architects were able to provide 12,000 square feet of office and warehouse space for slightly less than $22.00 per square foot.

The introduction of the earth berm provides the essential element to visually balance the building and the site. The berm also supplies natural insulation for the otherwise exposed four foot high concrete foundation wall. A sixteen foot ceiling height was required for the warehouse space. By maintaining this height throughout the administrative and showroom spaces, a uniform building facade was produced. This long uninterrupted facade created a surface for large signage appropriate for the busy highway it faces.



JURY COMMENTS

"Project 7526 - Warehouse and showroom for Industrial Equipment - The idea of building-as-sign is very well carried off, both as a well designed sign and as a straightforward use of the standard industrial building system. The jury was particularly impressed with the building as an appropriate expression of an industrialized product and as an expression of efficiency and economy."

photos & plans courtesy of Leo A. Daly Co.

MERIT AWARD

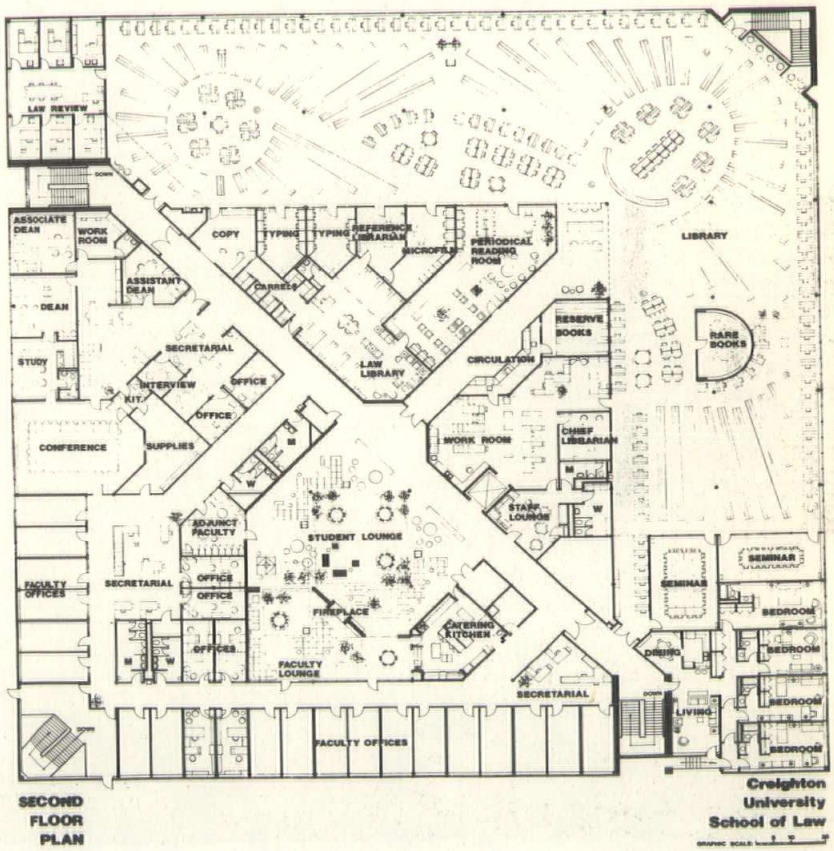
PROJECT: **CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY AHMANSON LAW CENTER**
22ND AND CALIFORNIA STREET
OMAHA, NEBRASKA

ARCHITECT: **LEO A. DALY COMPANY, OMAHA**

Located on the perimeter of the Creighton University campus on the downtown side, this professional school of law is intended to serve both students and practicing professionals. It is this dual concern which generated the diagonal circulation pattern linking the University (student) entrance and the public (professional) entrance with common core services.

Interior space assignments revolve around two dominate spaces: the moot court and the library. The moot court is oriented diagonally within the 30'X30' structural grid to obtain the largest unobstructed space. This room can accommodate a single lecture class of 600 persons, or it can be partitioned into five secondary spaces. The library was located over the parking level on the sloping site as an attempt to provide easy and economical future library expansion.

An interesting feature of the school is the sky-lit student lounge area. Plantings and umbrella shaded tables simulate an exterior patio.



JURY COMMENTS

Project 7502 - Professional School of Law at Private University - It might be said that a square plan solved as a diagonal is a cliche until you get one solved as well as this. And the external expression, simple use of straightforward concrete is quite successful and evidently relates to trees that were there before."

photos & plans courtesy of Leo A. Daly Co.

MERIT AWARD

PROJECT: **BOYNE SCHOOL OF DENTISTRY, CREIGHTON UNIVERSITY**

ARCHITECT: **LEO A. DALY COMPANY, OMAHA**

Located immediately west of Omaha's North Freeway and adjacent to the University's teaching hospital is the new three-story structure for the Creighton University School of Dentistry. Designed by Leo A. Daly Co., it is associated with the Creighton Omaha Medical Center, and is a part of the more expansive Greater Creighton Development Plan, also prepared by Leo A. Daly.

This steel-framed structure contains nearly 194,000 square feet of operational space. Between each floor is approximately nine feet of service space, allowing easy access to electrical and mechanical systems and permitting future revision of these services at a minimum of functional disruption and cost. Steel trusses in the interstitial space provide for unobstructed floor areas, permitting greater flexibility for partitioning and zoning.

The internal configuration is formed by a flexible central clinic area, ringed with a system of peripheral corridors and departmental offices. Vertical circulation is accomplished within the cylindrical stair shafts along the building's periphery. Their location provides maximum flexibility for future expansion. Vertical air circulation also occurs here, by using the center core of the shaft as a vertical duct.

The exterior of the building is done in light buff colored brick and precast concrete which not only ties in with existing campus buildings, but also very successfully defines the separation of functional levels, mechanical levels and vertical circulation elements.

JURY COMMENTS

"Project 7515 - School of Dentistry The clear, simple plan is probably deceptive of the process of keeping it so in the face of the many forces and people clamoring for attention. The external 'sculptured' look is elegant, somewhat over expressed by the 'emergency' stairs."

32 "Architects loathe mansards."

the return of architectural aesthetics

BY JOE BERCHENKO

Today's mail brings another promotional give-away contest; this one featuring a grand prize of a $76,000 colonial house. The idea, of course, is bicentennial. The architect, however, is not as likely to be reminded of the bicentennial as of the great gap in taste that exists between the design professional and the public at large.

It seems the professional design community has developed an aesthetic vocabulary that diverges quite radically from the aesthetic vocabulary of the larger community. Architects are noticeably intolerant of buildings with ersatz period decoration--like the give-away colonial house. After all, it is rather disheartening to deal with a house which looks like it might have been built by a great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-great-grandrelative. (Never mind the last 200 years of changing architectural style; people like porticoes and windows with shutters and that's what people build.)

Colonial houses are not the only problem. Quite often stylistic devices which are in vogue generally prove anathema to the architect. One would be hard pressed to find, for example, a device less popular in the architectural world than the ubiquitous mansard roof. Architects loathe mansards.

Moreover (and perhaps worse), stylistic devices used by architects are often not popular with the general public. Concrete used as an exterior finish material, for example, meets a good deal of public resistance--the problem being that concrete buildings are said to look harsh, cold and sterile. No one wants an insurance company that looks like a Nazi machine-gun implacement.

The architect might argue that concrete is actually more sensible than some other materials. Concrete is not only functional (being a structural material), but being fairly plastic it is potentially more sculptural and hence, more desirable aesthetically. Concrete makes more sense than a material like brick which is not as adaptable structurally or sculpturally and expensive to boot. Still, many tend to find concrete inordinately ugly: a prime example of the divergence of public and professional taste.

TWO FACTORS

Of course this state of affairs is of serious concern to the profession. Indeed the problem is fairly common to this century and extends to a number of the arts. Fields like music and painting are probably in worse shape than architecture since modern music and painting are virtually incomprehensible to all but an elite corps of critics and artists.

How did we get into this predicament? The problem probably arose in the nineteenth century with an event that radically changed the nature of art and architecture: the artist abandoned the search for beauty as being the central issue of artistic endeavor. For architecture, at least, this meant a drastic change in focus. Functionalism became the new issue. While the public retained a concern for prettiness and decoration, the architect moved on to what were felt to be issues of more substance.

Two factors played a role in this shift. 1) Standards of beauty. Philosophically, the search for beauty is difficult. Not only is the question of beauty itself problematic, but there is some question as to whether any sorts of standards of beauty are even theoretically possible. This will be discussed momentarily. 2) Kitsch. It seems possible that artists became unhappy with the direction of nineteenth century Romanticism and were reacting against that. Indeed it may be possible that artists were reacting against a very specific fault of Romanticism--its tendency to lapse into sentimentality and kitsch. Let us discuss this factor first.

KITSCH

Kitsch, a German word meaning rubbish, is used to describe works of art which are considered to have no true artistic merit but are widely popular nonetheless. Architectural period decoration and mansard roofs are sometimes considered kitsch. Characteristically, kitsch is cloying and saccharine, superficial in meaning and overly sentimental. Tourist shop momentos like Eiffel Towers or cheap dime store prints of wide-eyed kittens are good examples of non-architectural kitsch.

The origin of kitsch is a hotly debated item among people who hotly debate such things. The emergence of the petit bourgeouisie as a market for kitsch, and the development of industrialized capitalism as the means for producing kitsch, are certainly factors. (Marxists might argue, as the critic Hermann Broch notes, that capitalism inevitably cheapens art by attempting to turn it into a marketable item ready for mass production.)

It seems likely, however, that kitsch is also a natural by-product of Romanticism. Indeed, Romanticism may never have been anything more than kitsch. The problem is that the line between 'true' beauty and superficial prettiness is too thin. When looking for a Platonic ideal like beauty (a characteristic of Romanticism) it is always possible to lapse into cheap aesthetic effect.

STANDARDS OF BEAUTY

Then too, there was the philosophic problem mentioned earlier of the existence of beauty. There is a persuasive school of thought, *subjectivism,* which argues that Platonic beauty not only is unattainable but may not even be a valid concept. Rather, beauty may be merely a subjective response, that is, beauty exists in the eye of the beholder and does not exist as a separate entity.

After all, taste and judgment do vary. Just as one person likes spicy Mexican peppers and another likes delicate French sauces, so one person likes Brahms and another Schubert. This does not mean one is intrinsically better than the next.

If so called 'classic' beauty exists, it is certainly not evident in dress or cosmetic fashions which seem to change constantly. Not only do changes in fashion occur from person to person and time to time, but also from one culture to the next. Western European ideals of personal beauty are quite different from non-western European ideals. 'Primitive' peoples disfigure and scar their faces and bodies, sometimes stretching appendages or even filing or breaking teeth into decorative patterns while 'modern' peoples surgically alter their noses, enlarge parts of the body with silicone, and even have hair implanted in their scalps. Yet these drastic and painful cosmetic improvements have only limited appeal. even appearing grotesque and ugly to members of the other culture. Surely there is no right or wrong about personal

beauty any more than there are rights or wrongs about tastes in food.

Indeed, our cultural milieu is so vital in shaping our opinions, one wonders if it is at all possible to judge art or beauty cross-culturally or cross-temporally. Can one imagine the effect of the discovery of perspective to a culture which had never seen a photograph? Can a German truly appreciate Shakespeare or an English person Goethe? Can a twentieth century person judge second century pottery?

Moreover, critics--who, if anyone, should be able to make judgments about art--often disagree among themselves. Even when critics agree they sometimes offer erroneous judgments. One age decries a work or a style that the next adores--or vice versa. It is not uncommon for an artist to be shunned in her or his own age only to be heralded in the next. (One should also note that all these arguments are debatable and other schools of thought do exist.)

MORAL IMPERATIVE

Given then that Romanticism was seen to be based on dubious philosophic grounds and that the movement was degenerating into kitsch, is it any wonder that the tenets of Romanticism were abandoned by early twentieth century architects? The very idea of prettiness and decoration soon became detestable.

The architect came to feel that good design was not whimsical fancy based on abstract notions of Platonic Beauty; instead, good design was a real and legitimate response to human need. The primacy of function was almost a moral imperative. The architect should not have the right or the power to impose a capricious design on a user. Indeed, design based on factors other than user need was and is regarded as mere conceit--the result of the natural vanity of an effete intelligentsia.

It is difficult for the non-architect to appreciate the force of functionalism. Aesthetics, while admitted to being an important issue, is not really taught in any kind of formal sense anymore. Design is taught as problem solving. One isolates problems and solves those problems using scientific methodology. One begins a design problem by doing bubble diagrams rather than by composition studies. The architect has ceased being a decorator of boxes and become instead a scientific--albeit creative--problem solver.

Design methodology is now THE gut issue of architecture, not aesthetics. We have reached a point where computer programmers, who are trained specifically in the methodology of problem solving, would probably make better architects than architects. In design studio, the student is often rewarded for the simplest, most clearcut solution rather than the more complex (and perhaps more satisfactory) solution. The computer programmer, whose goal is to solve a problem using the smallest amount of computer memory and the least amount of computer time, would probably be good at this.

Now, though, a new development has occurred. A number of theorists are questioning the validity of this programming-like approach to design.

FUNCTIONALISM

When one looks at functionalism very closely one begins to raise questions. What *is* functionalism after all? Great care was taken to align the exposed form-ties in the concrete of the NBC Center. Is this functional? It is generally considered non-functional. Does this make it bad or worthless or without merit?

Are applied finish materials non-functional? Exterior paint might protect wood from moisture, but what of the painting of interior drywall partitions? Is some decoration necessary or is all decoration inherently wasteful and capricious? How does one distinguish between 'necessary' and 'non-necessary' decoration?

Are eight foot ceilings necessary since people are never more than seven feet tall? Would one feel cramped by seven foot ceilings? Perhaps there is a *psychological* need for eight foot ceilings. If nine foot ceilings were common in all buildings would there be a psychological need for nine foot ceilings? Is there a psychological need for mansard roofs?

Are automobiles attractive because they are functional and lack period decoration?

If this all sounds silly, it is because it is silly. That's exactly the point. Functionalism, like solipsism, quickly leads to logical quandries and silly metaphysical dead ends.

User need does exist; no one denies that. Certainly one would not want to build a theatre with the seats facing in

random directions or with no doors leading to the main hall. The problem is that functionalism goes on to assert that user need can be quantitified and organized in a somewhat scientific manner and that buildings therefore can be designed in a systematic, computer program-like fashion. This is where the problem arises. 'Needs' and 'user problems' can just not be quantitified and organized into that sort of systematic, rational package. The approach is too mechanistic and results in overly simplistic solutions. How does one assign relative importance to different functions? How does one decide what is a 'need' and what isn't? Determination of needs, as discussed above, can be very subjective indeed--just as subjective as the search for beauty. We must learn to recognize the subjectiveness of functionalism.

CONCLUSIONS

Where does that leave us? Possibly we may see a return to style and aesthetics of sorts. (Why not?) Certainly we will see a trend to less simplicity and more complexity as suggested by the theorist Robert Venturi and others.

Hopefully architects will become less dogmatic about functionalism and admit that eclectic decoration can play a major role in buildings just as factors like circulation, adequate lighting, life safety and thermal and acoustic control. (Decoration liberation?) That is not to say that such functional requirements are not necessary. It is only to say that such requirements should not be arbitrarily exaggerated into simplistic, exclusionistic over-riding design factors. A building is a wholistic work of many factors *including aestheticism.*

From where will we derive our aesthetics? Will architects return to period decoration and ersatz styles as mentioned at the start of this essay?

One likely avenue for the development of a new style may be the growing field of semiotics. Semiotics is the study of symbols and communication. Semioticists claim that all objects that can be perceived convey meaning. (See *Meaning in Architecture* by Jencks and Baird, and *Meditations on a Hobby Horse* by E. H. Gombrich) That is, although a mansard is merely a pile of shingles tacked onto wood framing, it symbolizes, for some, certain ideas--perhaps "hominess" or "warmth." All facets of architecture convey meaning. Some buildings have an "institutional" look some have a "residential" look. It may be possible through semiotics to learn to devise a new eclectic language of architecture.

Whatever the case, we will likely see the creation of a new, post-modern movement of architecture as unlike modern architecture as modern architecture was unlike its predecessor. This is an exciting possibility. Let us hope we can make the most of it.

"Functionalism, like solpsism,
quickly leads
to logical quandaries
and silly metaphysical dead ends."

"If one accepts the premise that
modern architecture is indeed at a
turning point in which the philosophy, art and
practice of architecture are
changing . . . then Aalto's
relationship to the
modern movement
as a whole becomes much clearer."

aalto as fifth wheel

BY KIM CLAWSON

Aalto was, perhaps, what one might call 'the fifth wheel' or 'the odd man out' of the masters of the modern movement. His name does not come to ones lips as quickly as the other four (Walter Gropius, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Le Corbusier) and yet his stature as a master has been repeatedly reaffirmed. Over two dozen major one-man exhibitions of his work have taken place outside of his native Finland since 1933. He was the recipient of numerous awards and honors including the Gold Medal of both the Royal Institute of British Architects (1957) and the American Institute of Architects (1963).

And yet Aalto has always been somewhat of an anomoly for the architectural community, or at least since the mid nineteen-thirties when he began to move away from the 'International Style.' For instance, in 1961 Columbia University granted Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degrees to the other four masters (Wright posthumously) in a special joint ceremony. Later, realizing that they had committed a bit of a *fau pas,* the University held a separate repeat ceremony in which Aalto was also granted an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters in 1964.

There are perhaps three main reasons for Aalto's anomalous relationship to the other four masters. First, he did little to promote the widespread distribution and acceptance of his ideas. Second, (which may partly explain the first) his ideas are not easily transmuted into any form but three dimensional, that is, into any but pure architecture, and only then with great pain and care. Third, his ideas are in many respects counter to those of the other four masters (except for Wright in a certain manner) and therefore all the more difficult for the profession as a whole to accept.

Through the entire 78 years of his life, Aalto did very little writing compared to the other four masters. About one-half of his literary output is contained in a small volume entitled *Alvar Aalto Luonnoksia* which was not published until 1972 and is presently available only in Finnish and Swedish. It is a collection of essays that he wrote from 1921 through 1968. Some of these essays have appeared elsewhere in foreign periodicals, but few have

received any real widespread distribution. Most of the other half of his writings are also short essays which have appeared in a variety of publications, but seldom in more than one language--a curious situation for a man who spoke with varying ease, Finnish, Swedish, German, French, Russian, and English.

In contrast to this stand the writings of the other four masters, most notably Le Corbusier who was responsible for no less than 37 works not including the eight volumes of *Le Corbusier: Oeurve Complete,* or the numerous articles in periodicals--most notably those in *L'Espirit Nouveau.* Most of his more important works have been translated into English or German, or both. Some are available in other languages as well, such as *Le modular* which has been translated into Spanish and Japanese.

Frank Lloyd Wright's *Ausgefuhrte Bauten and Entwurfe von Frank Lloyd Wright* (the Wasmuth portfolio--1910) and Frank Lloyd Wright: *Ausgefuhrte Bauten* (the Wasmuth book--1911) are certainly among the most influential publications in the history of architecture. He produced about a half-dozen other books, and wrote numerous essays for a variety of periodicals. Among his more important ones were two entitled 'In the Cause of Architecture' which appeared in *Architectural Record* in March 1908 and in May 1914. Some of his writings were collected into books edited by other persons, including one by Frederick Gutheim and two by Edgar Kaufmann.

In the case of both Wright and Le Corbusier, many of the basic ideas remained unchanged from one volume to another: instead certain points were clarified or elaborated upon. Since the book buying public is prone to purchasing more recent works over older ones, this technique of re-issuing old ideas under new covers insured, to some extent, that those who did not get exposed to the contents of the last book will probably read them in the latest, and those who did read the last book will be re-assured that the ideas are still current and valid when they read the more recent one. Thus the number of people exposed to an idea is increased, and to a certain extent, the validity of the idea is reinforced.

Gropius also used the printed word to his advantage. He wrote three of the fourteen *Bauhausbucher,* and at least four other books as well as numerous essays.

Although Mies van der Rohe was nowhere nearly as prolific a writer as the above mentioned three masters, who with Mies formed a sort of 'quad-umvir' which ruled over modern architecture during the middle third of this century, he did write a number of essays and articles which appeared in the highly influential magazine *G,* which he helped to found in 1923. His famous *Arbeitsthesen* (Working Thesis) appeared in the first issue in July 1923. Other essays by him appeared in following issues of *G* and in other periodicals, most notably *Die Form,* which was the official organ of the *Deutscher Werkbund.*

Despite his minimal amount of writing, many of his ideas were put into print by his friends and associates, most notably Ludwig Hilberseimer, whom Mies had brought to the United States with him upon becoming the head of what was later to become the Illinois Institute of Technology. Also, Philip Johnson, as head of the Architecture Department of the Museum of Modern Art, was responsible for that institution's major exhibit of Mies in 1947, and for the accompanying catalog which contained several of Mies' writings translated into English. In addition, Mies propagandized and polemicized through a number of organizations in which he was a member, and often a leader. Among them were the *Novembergruppe, The Zehner Ring* (which he founded), and the *Deutscher Werkbund* (in which he served as vice-president and later president).

In addition to disseminating their ideas through the printed page, the other four masters employed a second technique which Aalto used only limitedly. All of the other four, with the exception of Le Corbusier, taught extensively. Gropius founded the Bauhaus and was its director for ten years. Later he became a Professor at Harvard University, and shortly thereafter the Chairman of the Department of Architecture of the Graduate School of Design.

Mies served as the director of the Bauhaus for three years, and as the Director of the Illinois Institute of Technology for twenty years. Although Wright's Taliesin Fellowship was not a school in the same formal sense that the Bauhaus, Harvard, and the Illinois Institute of Technology were, it was still a place where the word of the master was passed down as something considered

almost an absolute.

There appears to be a correlation between teaching and writing. That is, Mies taught the most and wrote the least, while Le Corbusier taught the least (for all practical purposes he did not teach at all except through his atelier) and wrote the most. Aalto wrote little and taught little. He was, at varying times, on the staff of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology from 1940 to 1946, but the total amount of time he taught, and the number of students he taught is probably insignificant when compared to Mies and Gropius, who nearly saturated this nation's architectural schools with the methods and curriculum of the Bauhaus. Thus, unlike the other four masters of the modern movement, Aalto did not promote his ideas through writing and teaching, and because of this he was less successful at having them accepted and adopted by a large number of other architects.

This brings us to the second characteristic of Aalto's work that sets him apart from the other four masters. Arthur Drexler summed it up quite well when he wrote in his book *Mies van der Rohe* that "the key to Mies' enormous authority lies in one simple fact: his ideas can be taught. His art is communicable. It can be practiced by others with measurable success. The Miesian discipline has attracted architects of every degree of talent, and Mies does not disdain an academy."

Perhaps the main reason that Mies ideas can be taught is that they can be expressed in a relatively small number of simple rules. Jurgen Joedicke has listed six design principles which are fundamental to Mies work. Architectural critics and historians have often stated that Aalto's work expresses 'humanism' and a form of rationalism (which is in some respects more 'rational' than that of the other four masters) but they have been largely unsuccessful at clearly explaining it. Instead they have acknowledged the fact that Aalto's work is hard to classify, and have only been able to offer an analysis of a few limited aspects of it.

Mies and many of the other modernists have given the vast majority of the architectural profession exactly what it wanted; a simple set of rules, a checklist if you will, which they could follow to insure that they were constructing a building that was in the current architectural fashion. The vast majority of the architectural profession (like the vast majority of any profession) does not have the time to carefully consider the strengths and weaknesses of theory and philosophy. They are caught up in the worries of meeting payrolls, keeping clients happy and contractors off their backs. They are often quite content to let someone else look beyond to the broader (and currently less pressing) issues. And this is what Mies, Le Corbusier, Wright, Gropius (to a lesser extent) and many of the other early figures of the modern movement did.

When Mies wrote, he often used simple, concise sentences that made easily remembered 'truisms' which architects could use to tell themselves what to do, or which they could use quite convincingly to defend what they did from a client's protests. A good example of this technique occurs in his *Working Thesis.* Another example is his oft quoted aphorism "less is more." There is no need to struggle with the pros and cons of different aesthetic theories, you just do as he says. Everything is explained and all of the problems have been taken care of for you by a careful spelling out of what architecture should be.

LeCorbusier used the same technique and probably in a more effective manner. He also wrote simple, compact sentences which formed simple, compact paragraphs, which led the reader from one apparently logical idea to its apparently logical conclusions, which was of course another simple, compact idea. Good examples of this are found in *Vers une architecture* (three reminders to architects: mass, surface, plan) and 'the five points of the new architecture' (pilotis, roof gardens, free plan, horizontal window strip, and free facade). This certainly has been characteristic of much of the literature of the modern movement. It has been employed by everyone from Muthesius and Van de Velde, to van Doesburg and the de Stijl group, to the Constructivists, to Bruno Taut. It was used to define the characteristics of the International Style (architecture as volume, the use of asymmetry, and the avoidance of applied decoration) in the exhibition and the book by the same name. Wright wrote less strict (and at times almost poetic) essays on how to "destroy the box." They are easy to follow, but still require more effort than the essays of Mies and

Le Corbusier, which may explain in part why more boxes were built than destroyed.

One can read Aalto's essays and perhaps become inspired, but it is difficult to transmute this inspiration into the physical form of architecture. One can read an essay by Mies or by Le Corbusier, and maybe be inspired or maybe not be inspired, and yet at least know exactly what is expected.

Reyner Banham has said that the International Style is the first style of architecture to be created by photography. Widespread use of the camera coupled with cheap printing methods further helped to promote the ideas of the modern movement. Those ideas that were expressed in buildings which did not photograph well, or required a great number of photographs to explain them (such as the 'post-International Style' works of Aalto do) inevitably suffered because of it. The strength of Aalto's mature work lies in its richness and subtleties, in its scale, its sequences, its use of light and space, in its *ambiance.* These are qualities which are lost or distorted in photography. These are qualities which cannot be easily explained in written form (one can only grope in frustration at the limited number of words the English language has to describe, say, the qualities of space) nor be shown through photographs. They must be experienced first hand. The fact that Aalto constructed only one permanent building outside of Finland (Baker House dormitory at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology) prior to 1951 is perhaps why, up until recent years, there has been so much mis-directed appreciation of his work.

Robert Venturi summed up the strengths of Aalto's work when he wrote "the best twentieth-century architects have usually rejected simplification--that is simplicity through reduction--in order to promote complexity within the whole. The works of Alvar Aalto and Le Corbusier are examples. But the characteristics of complexity and contradiction in their work are often ignored or misunderstood. Critics of Aalto, for instance, have liked him mostly for his sensitivity to natural materials and his fine detailing, and have considered his whole composition willful picturesquesness. I do not consider Aalto's Imatra church picturesque. By repeating in the massing the genuine complexity of the triple-divided plan and the acoustical ceiling pattern, this church represents a justifiable expressionism different from the willful picturesquesness of the haphazard structure and spaces of Giovanni Michelucci's recent church for the Autostrada. Aalto's complexity is part of the composition of the whole rather than a device justified only by the desire for expression," (in *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture*).

This brings us to the third, and most important, characteristic of Aalto's work which sets him apart from the other four; his ideas were, in many respects, counter to those of the other four masters. It appears that Reyner Banham was the first to clearly recognize Aalto's position in the modern movement when he wrote in an article that appeared in the *Architectural Review* in February of 1957 that "Aalto's generation were free to make a set of decisions that had been closed to architects nearer the center of Europe for almost a decade. Before them still stood the possibilities thathad faced Gropius and Mendelsohn in 1920; the choice, roughly, between synthetic and natural materials. Before them stood an open door that the masters of the International Style had slammed behind them, and through it they took with them possibilities that those masters had left behind." The truth is, then, that Aalto never really did accept the basic ideals adopted by the other four masters of the modern movement, but instead went on to develop his own; and now many of the same ideals promoted by Aalto so long ago are now beginning to gain acceptance with the architectural profession. (To what extent this is due to Aalto's examples and efforts, versus society's rejection of the modern movement because of its failings, cannot of course be determined at this early point in time).

If one accepts the premise that modern architecture is indeed at a turning point in which the philosophy, art and practice of architecture are changing in the manner set forth by Ada Louis Huxtable in the *New York Times* (27 June 1976), then Aalto's relationship to the modern movement as a whole becomes much clearer.

Huxtable contends that the basic beliefs and tenets of the modern movement--functional and formal purity, and rejection of the past--are being increasingly debated and denied. Banham and others have pointed out the manner

in which Aalto developed his own definition of functionalism independent of the rest of the modern movement. Formal purity has also been rejected by Aalto except on a few occasions. Little has yet been written, however, about his relationship to the architecture of the past.

The architecture of antiquity has been a point of dispute among the modernists. Gropius totally rejected the past, while Le Corbusier, upon being asked who his favorite architect was, reputedly answered "the history of architecture." Aalto, like Le Corbusier, appears to have been quite fond of the architecture of the past--most notably that of the Greeks. Like Le Corbusier, he appears to have been influenced by what he saw on his visits to Greek ruins in the 1920's.

For instance, portions of the exterior of the art museum at Aalborg Denmark (which Aalto designed) have an uncanny Greek-like manner. The building, which is clad in a marble as white and as bright as that found on the Acropolis, has a crisp, trabeated structural system. The building crowds the hillside, into which, an outdoor amphitheater has been built. Columns more Greek-like than those on the west facade of Aalborg, appear at other Aalto buildings, such as the interior of the library at Rovaniemi or at the townhall at Seinajoki where white ceramic tiles form deep flutes with large, bold, rounded edges.

The quality of Greek-like architecture in Aalto's buildings is not a contrived idea either. The evidence of Aalto's interest in Greek architecture lies in print. To begin with, one need only to open the pages of the two volumes on Aalto's work which were written by his former associate, Karl Flieg, under Aalto's supervision and approval.

In describing the cultural center at Wolfsburg Germany, the first volume states that "although an enclosed structure, it is intended that it should assume the role of a Greek agora, which of course was an open, outdoor place." This sense of an enclosed outdoor place is felt in many of Aalto's works: in the courtyard of the townhall at Saynatsalo, in the piazza of the civic center at Seinajoki and certainly in a large number of places at the Technical Institute at Otaniemi.

In the book *Alvar Aalto Luonnoksia* there are sketches Aalto made in 1929 of various Greek buildings at Delphi, Mount Olympus, Athens and other sites of Greek ruins. Two of the sketches are of the outdoor theater at Delphi and bear an uncanny resemblance to the numerous outdoor theaters which appear in Aalto's work, such as the aforementioned one at Aalborg. Other ones appear at Aalto's studio-house in Munkkiniemi, and at the Technical Institute at Otaniemi. The last building is a significant example, in that a preliminary sketch of it done by Aalto, has only two elements clearly conceived at that early stage: one is the outdoor amphitheater, and the other is a curious group of free-standing columns arranged in two rows and located at what, in the built form, became the courtyard of the school of architecture wing of the building. The columns were never installed, but examination of the drawings of the elevations of the building and the plan show that they were intended to be eight classical columns of different orders. The columns also appear in a design sketch of the entrance tract of the architectural division. This entire building (and nearly all the other buildings on the campus) is faced with a red brick, except in this same courtyard of the architectural wing of the building where it is (significantly) faced with white marble.

One can see further qualities of Greek architecture at the College of Education in Jyvaskyla where the faculty dining hall, clad in its white marble and setting in its position of prominence, is irresistably described as being a little 'jewel box' or temple. In fact, the manner in which the landscaping has been handled around the buildings on this campus (almost all of which are Aalto-designed) gives one the sensation that they are recently excavated ruins. (The landscaping, you can be assured, is permanent, and this effect is not the result of current construction in the area). This idea of Aalto's buildings having the quality of ruins has been discussed at length by George Baird in his book *Alvar Aalto.*

In her description of the changes taking place in architecture, Huxtable writes that "this generation (young architects now practicing) has indulged in a romantic revivalism that accommodates both the most superficial nostalgic kitsch and the most informed historicism." I do not think that anyone would suggest that any of the five masters of the modern movement ever consciously employed kitsch in their works (though there certainly are many who would champion

the idea that some of the works of the masters is kitsch). Certainly Mies and Le Corbusier were influenced by architectural history, but neither ever engaged in any historicism of any kind (except for a few early houses done by each).

With Aalto the question of historicism is left open. This re-occurring theme of 'ruins' brings to mind other architectural aberration such as Castle Howard. If anyone today were to design a building such as the Institute of Technology at Otaniemi and then drop a few Greek colums, complete with capitals, in its midst, the whole act would be labeled a 'pop gesture.' Certainly Aalto was attempting to employ a bit of the 'richness of life' into his buildings (after all that is basically what his humanism is all about) but he probably did it with a great deal more seriousness than, say, Venturi or Charles Moore (or did he?).

It is at this time that the profession of architecture seems to be the most attuned to the ideals Aalto promoted. If the number of books published about him in the last five years is any indication of increased interest, then it is an indication of a swelling interest. Venturi's book *Complexity and Contradiction in Architecture* has certainly served as a major catalyst for the upheaval within the profession. The work of Aalto, together with that of Le Corbusier, is cited and is presented as examples in forwarding the arguments within that book far more than that of any other modern architect. If the direction of architecture continues to shift in the manner which it has in recent years, the influence of Aalto will undoubtedly continue to grow and he will cease having such an anomolous place within the modern movement.

"With Aalto
the question
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Lincoln Air Terminal and Parking Areas
from the southwest

photo by Ronald B. Entrekin

lincoln airport: background

BY KEITH DUBAS

The previous Lincoln air terminal, constructed in 1959, was characteristic of that era's solution to air facilities. It combined the more primitive functional services of air travel with a matching aesthetic. In 1962 an addition of eight gates was constructed in a most direct, industrial manner. Nonetheless, at the end of that decade the Lincoln Airport Authority and community leaders began discussing the need for an entirely new facility. Additional revenues from increased rent charged the air carriers for the expanded space would provide, together with other revenue, sufficient funding to construct a new terminal. The architects were assured of an adequate budget. No public bond issue was needed.

The Authority proceeded with their plans by retaining the Chicago consulting firm of Birken and Associates to prepare studies for the projected growth of Lincoln's air travel. Based upon the performance data from the previous ten years, three projections were made for air service in the year 1990. A high, medium, and low estimate for enplaning and deplaning was determined. The local Authority considered all three estimates to be too high and further reduced the low estimate. Actual use of the terminal to this date indicates that even this reduced projection had, in fact, been overly optimistic.

The Airport Authority determined that a local architectural firm should receive the commission. Other than by an informal selection procedure no set process was developed for determining the architect. The firm of Davis, Fenton, Stange, and Darling (DFSD) and the firm of Clark and Enersen, Hamersky, Schlaebitz, Burroughs and Thomsen collaborated (as Davis, Clark and Associates) to pursue the commission. Following an interview with the Authority and the consultants, Davis, Clark and Associates were presented the project. The mechanical and electrical responsibilities were handled by the Clark firm while design conception rested with DFSD.

In preparation for the design, a team of architects from Davis, Clark and Associates visited terminals in Houston, Tulsa, Dallas, Sioux Falls, Jacksonville, and Shreveport. After having toured these facilities and having met with their

designers, the architects returned to Lincoln and began programming.

It has become traditional practice that a design for a new air terminal is presented with some mindful conjecture on possible expansion, and justly so. The history of aviation has been so dynamic in the past quarter century that it would be folly to do otherwise. Furthermore, corporate logic usually cannot grasp the possibility that a plateau has been reached in consumer demand for their service.

When the architects for the Lincoln terminal devised the linear configuration for gates, they demonstrated the growth potential of the facility. With the addition of appendages to the north or south, and construction of a pod, two gates can be added at each end. The new terminal has the capacity with expansion of the old terminal and eight gates. Should further increases in air traffic necessitate it, a duplicate terminal would be constructed across the median from the present one. An umbilical, with retail space and a restaurant, has been imagined to connect the two terminals. It is not clear whether this would connect the mezzanines of the terminals thus penetrating the angled roof, or whether it would be at grade or below grade. A parking structure could be built over the existing parking to increase the number of parking stalls.

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Rendering of Lincoln Air Terminal and its site

rendering photo coutesy of D.F.S. & D.

lincoln airport: thoughts on airport design

BY KEITH DUBAS

Throughout the history of transportation, ceremony has been associated with points of transfer. The great boat docks and rail stations of the world were enormous halls where persons engaged in arrival and departure. These spaces rivaled the great cathedrals for their inspirational volumes, and were reminiscent of the great halls of antiquity in which kings and queens conducted audiences with travellers. With the quick emergence of air transportation, it seemed only a matter of time before air terminals would inherit this legacy.

With Eero Saarinen's Trans World Airline Flight Center at Kennedy International Airport, this ceremonial ancestry re-emerged. Opened in 1961, this terminal was the source of great speculation in architectural circles. Was it a bird? Was it a plane? No, just a terminal! This building sends out more visual transmissions than any broadcasting tower on the prairies of Nebraska.

Another terminal by Saarinen was completed shortly after TWA presented another set of images. Different in appearance as it is, the Dulles International Airport near Washington is an equally ceremonious structure. It was the first civil airport in this country specifically designed to service jet aircraft and it quickly became the prototype (if not in form at least in theory) which sent every form giving architect's imagination souring.

Under the sleek, dramatic curve of the roof is a single universal space divided into as many booths as you would find at the Nance County Fair. Terminals later completed the business of accommodating modern jet setting in similar halls. Other areas are allocated on lower floors or in appendages to handle additional mundane functional requirements.

Some air terminals have thus come to represent much more than buildings whose functional requirements involve arrival and departure sequences. Cities have been quick to recognize the value of combining the significance of this ceremony of transfer (human transportation) with the creation of positive images for their cities through advertising. The type of Madison Avenue mentality which made the association

between a smiling grey-haired colonel and a juicy piece of chicken is now employed to merchandize the city of Houston via the new Houston air facility. In Houston's current advertising blitz the description of its new airport is primary; it is larger than the island of Manhattan, says the ad, and three times the size of Kennedy International.

Community buildings historically exhibit architectural theatrics which mirror the value system of the community. Induced by the potential for commercial success it is not surprising, then, that communities should construct terminals which should succumb to such theatrics (In some instances being exaggerated images). A civilization is remembered by its architectural marvels rather than its quantity of substandard housing. Like the cathedrals of Europe which were the embodiment of the community, air terminals have represented a character which is meant to suggest a progressive, enterprising community spirit.

AESTHETICS: 'IMAGE' VS. 'FUNCTIONAL'

While some recently completed air terminals suggest the persistence of this architectural idiom of ceremonial imagery, another prototypical aesthetic has emerged. This industrial solution employs a pragmatic tradition less conscious of the singular form expressing characteristics of the 'TWA school'. Because of increasing costs of materials and labor, changing air service, and sophisticated modular component systems, the functional requirements of a terminal created an aesthetic of a less theatrical nature. O'Hare International in Chicago was one of the terminals at the vangard of this new industrial aesthetic. Completed in 1963, the structure has expanded and adapted with the flexibility which many monolithic solutions are incapable.

Lincoln's new terminal is conceptually aligned with the 'image' school of design. If increased passenger volume and air traffic could not substantiate the decision for a new terminal in Lincoln, then what prompted the decision to construct a new terminal could be perceived to be the regard for 'image'. The first impressions of a visitor to Lincoln as they deplane at the terminal was to be translated to a favorable image of the city that they would retain after departing.

A more 'functional' approach would consider the pragmatic problems of terminal design. As for the capacity of the Lincoln facility itself in pure gate totals - with no aesthetics considered--the old terminal contained eight gates while the current one services only four. The 'functional' solution would match or surpass the number of existing gates at the onset.

A COMPARISON

Because there are probably a finite number of satisfactory solutions to most building types it isn't surprising that two terminals should resemble each other. However, the similarities in form between Boston's John A. Volpe International terminal (*Progressive Architecture* 2:76 p. 76-79) and Lincoln's terminal are unusually arresting.

Both buildings are sectional solutions of how to accommodate second level boarding gates. But their sections are next to identical. One of the earlier solutions to the Lincoln terminal was a two-story space extending from the Mezzanine over the lobby, past the glazing to a canopy suspended two stories above the entrance. This solution would have been hyperbole. The present roof shape, which is so like the Boston one, evolved as the architects adjusted the roof shape downward.

It is interesting to note the likeness of these two terminals, but it is even more important to be aware of how the architects interpreted the issue of terminal design - 'image' vs. the 'functional'. Similarities of Lincoln's terminal to the prestigious Dulles terminal present a likeness in character and form, but the comparison to the Boston terminal is strictly in terms of form.

Boston was not trying to create an 'image' for the city. It already has one. Realizing this, the architects, Kubitz and Pepi, and Desmond and Lord, chose to define their building as a functional transfer mechanism in straight-forward terms. Since this is an international terminal, and it exists in the Boston airport amid a myriad of existing 'image' stating structures, a decision to avoid adding to the visual confusion achieved architectural notoriety for the terminal.

INTERIORS

The Lincoln terminal, like the Boston one, is a single continuous space behind the long horizontal entrance canopy. The choice of structure and selection of materials in this space indicates directly the two different aesthetic interpretations of these two terminals. The 300 foot long Lincoln lobby uses large steel beams which span the space and are supported by solid columns. The girder at the top edge of the shed roof passes through the end wall of brick and glass. Using Corten Steel where one can see the steel weather naturally on the exterior is perhaps quite appropriate, but where the interior has to be painted to match the finished color of the exterior steel is perhaps less than a straight-forward 'functional' use of the materials. Large beams support the lobby's shed roof and extend out to support the cantilevered canopy.

At the Boston terminal a steel space truss system spans the lobby. Left exposed, this direct expression of structure acts to reinforce the 'functional' aesthetic of the building. The light gray porcelain-enameled steel surfaces and tinted glass mounted flush with the walls conform to the basic industrial vocabulary of the terminal.

A simple palette of materials - bronze tinted glass, brown brick walls and brick pavers - achieve a satisfying unity in the Lincoln terminal. The controlled selection of materials reinforces the intent consistent with the objectives of 'image' conscious architecture. But the architects were still capable of creating a building which is a pleasure to experience which other 'image' conscious structures in this locality are not.

It is the development of the lighting which is least satisfying in the Lincoln structure. The very large white rectangular fixtures suspended in pairs from the ceiling interfere with the flow of this nicely created volume of space. While their scale is massive their actual need is less than expressed. Is their size an attempt to imply an image of monumentality? Other lighting in the lobby is handled sensitively with the use of recessed tube-type fixtures. The lighting level need not be uniform across the lobby floor. Being reduced in traffic areas and supplemented by table lamps or increased lighting only at the furniture groupings could have retained the continuous flow of space.

The lighting in the Boston lobby is developed around the steel space trusses and works without the addition of other noticable visual elements. Two sophisticated lighting schemes emerge. At night by washing the ceiling with light, the pattern of steel trusses adds yet another dramatic dimension to the building. For daytime lighting requirements, globes are suspended above the bottom of the trusses. By keeping them above the bottom truss members, an implied plane helps to keep the lobby space flowing without major visual interruption. The only objects suspended in the space are banners depicting local scenes in clear, bright colors. This maintains an air of informality in the room.

The two terminals share a similar lighting device. In the Lincoln structure a clerestory extends above the mezzanine. But it is at a height and scale such that it neither supplies sufficient light past mid-morning to the lobby, nor acts as the strong visual design element it might have been. At the Boston terminal a skylight runs the entire 792 feet of building. The banners are hung below it.

EXTERIOR

Where Lincoln is weakest in its 'image' approach is in its external form. In Lincoln's terminal the composition of elements diminish its assertiveness. The building would have been a clearer expression of its section had the stair towers and the mechanical shaft at the front of the building been deleted. As a visual element they may be interesting but they confuse the strong architectural elevation the building could have had without them.

CONCLUSIONS

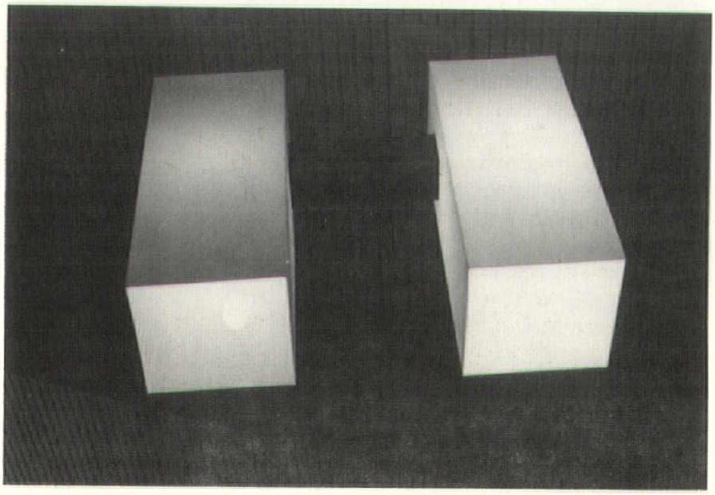
Although their forms are undeniably similar the Lincoln and Boston terminals suggest two distinctly different possibilities for the conception of an air terminal. It is the monumental, public-'image' conscious building recurring in the one and the no frills 'functional' non-additive approach being attempted in the other. Both are successful because they are completed with restraint, conviction, continuity, and an order expressing their particular approach.

Control Tower photo by Stephen M. Eveans

Air Terminal from the northwest photo by Stephen M. Eveans

Old Lincoln Airport Terminal photo by Stephen M. Eveans

Interior of the Air Terminal photo by Ronald B. Entrekin



Architect-designed lighting fixtures photo by Stephen M. Eveans

lincoln airport: conversations with architectures

BY JOHN Z. BALLEW

OLD: You know the green plants sure give your lobby a nice feeling. How did you ever get away with them?

NEW: I fought for them tooth 'n nail.

OLD: What's the matter? Is the Authority against living things?

NEW: Not consciously, I don't think. They grew up with the same myths that most of the population has in regards to institutional architecture.

OLD: What myth?

NEW: That the major design determinants are extreme ease in maintenance and virtual indestructability of furnishings.

OLD: But things don't seem that bad around here.

NEW: A little care and consideration was allowed to slip through such as the plantings, the brick floor, the carpeted seating areas and second floor, the conversational groupings of chairs. . .

OLD: My, that's good. Gang seating is such a bore.

NEW: I was going to be even better! Originally I was to have wood slab chairs with orange cushions, but when the first purchase order fell through, they were axed by the Authority in favor of "indestructable" metal and vinyl. *C'est la vie.* You win some, you lose some.

OLD: Talking about losing some, those grand-lantern plexiglass lights pendants appall me.

NEW: Wait a minute. They're not all that bad. What would you have done? I have to illuminate a great expanse of floor area so far below. How else could I do it?

OLD: There is a distinct difference between light fixtures that illuminate and those which obliterate. Your fixtures are such visual albatrosses. Any poor soul that walks through the visitor lobby is caught by that row of white gleaming boxes. It is even worse from the balcony. Their sheer dominance nearly destroys the effect of that great volume of space.

NEW: Picky, picky, picky! How would you know about the aesthetics of two story volumes? You didn't even have any.

OLD: I didn't need any. I functioned quite well on one level. It seems as though you're not as capable.

NEW: You may have functioned on one level, but not well! The reason I am not a one level operation is simple; the board insisted on second level loading.

It's rather *passe* to enplane and deplane on outdoor ramps. Only the President does that. More importantly, you can't depend on Nebraska weather. Tracking snow and water around would have increased maintenance costs.

OLD: But the cost of those boarding tubes is tremendous, besides, not all of the aircraft using this airport can even connect to them.

NEW: You're forgetting a very important point. I am here because you no longer presented the image that was necessary to promote good business and trade relations between the city and the rest of this country.

OLD: At least I had free parking!

NEW: Look, a visitor's first impression of a city is often at the airport. Here this visitor deplanes through the boarding tube into a modern--that's a key word--welcoming waiting lobby, walks easily to the escalators--stopping at the concessions if he or she chooses--and down to the main exit and out into his or her waiting limousine.

OLD: What about the baggage?

NEW: Oh, well, instead of swooping into a waiting limousine, they scramble back behind the escalators to the baggage claim area, grab their bag and then saunter out to the car to zoom off to the center of town on the new four lane highway.

OLD: Except it's not four lane all the way.

NEW: Well, if they'd ever widen Cornhusker Highway, we'd be set. To zoom along a four lane and be abruptly channeled onto a pot-holed alleyway does ruin that glamour. That minor detail aside, you have to admit I provide a much better image to the visitor than you did.

OLD: Modern and new image maybe, but not better.

NEW: Be stubborn then.

OLD: My point is that functionally I was just as good. I just couldn't keep up with the new fashions.

NEW: You were not only ugly, but uncomfortable as well; and you know it! Besides, if you were built with care, you needn't worry about fashion. A quality building always supplies a need. But, since all you seem good for now is storage. . !

OLD: Humph! A minor point at best. One thing that has bothered me, though, is the concept change. I thought I performed rather well in a pier configuration. My concourse arm stretched out to greet the aircraft and lead the passenger to them or back from them but you're arranged differently, in some linear configuration.

NEW: Don't let that bother you. Of course, I realize your method of operation is used quite successfully in many airports.

OLD: Then why change a good thing?

NEW: Um. . .I assume that the designers were trying for an arrangement that afforded more ease in operation and expansion. The linear concept is very old and simple. It can easily provide direct relationships between ramp footage and curb space while maintaining good integration of the terminal building with access and egress activity.

OLD: In English, please. . .

NEW: That means that most operations and passenger circulation are direct and to the point with a minimum of fuss and walking.

OLD: And?

NEW: Oh. . .because of its simplicity and self-contained features, it is easily expanded by adding sections in a linear manner.

OLD: Good in theory, but you don't work that way.

NEW: No, I'm a combination of both the linear and the pier configurations. The visitor lobby is set up to serve eight gates of operations. I have four right now; though I use only two (the air carriers refused to pay for two more boarding tubes). When there's a need for more gates, I'll have to grow an appendage pier parallel to the present waiting lounges.

OLD: Why parallel?

NEW: It wouldn't be linear if I didn't! Besides it makes a nice hard edge and interface between the structures and the aircraft aprons.

OLD: But even with those two piers you only have eight gates, right? And that's as many as I had.

NEW: True, but when demand grows high enough to warrant it, a twin facility will be created directly across the parking area with a parking structure between. Presto, chango, sixteen gates!

OLD: At least I understand a little better now why I was replaced, not that I totally agree.

NEW: Still stubborn, eh?

OLD: No. I just disagree. But there are some other traits of yours that I don't understand.

NEW: Such as?

OLD: Well first, you remind me a lot

of Cousin Dulles near Washington, D.C. Were you influenced by her?

NEW: Oh, I imagine I inherited a little of her expressive ways but I'm really quite different. I evolved as a direct expression of the functions of the services I offer. At one time I was planned with a two story visitors' lobby and the curb canopy extended over the drive at second floor ceiling level. But then it became evident that a much clearer expression was possible by sloping the roof from the curb canopy over the visitor lobby and across the second level.

OLD: Symbolizing flight?

NEW: Ah. . .well, no, really, just a simple expression of function. No flights to fantasy, please.

OLD: I've noticed that you're not oriented on the cardinal points. That's unusual around these parts.

NEW: When you're sandwiched between two parallel runways that run northeast to southwest it makes sense to orient yourself in their directions (it's also nice not having to fit the grid).

OLD: If that is so, then you're fairly independent of climatic design factors?

NEW: Low energy consumption cannot be the overriding issue for *all* buildings, can it?

OLD: Oh. . .no, of course not! You talk about me being behind the times. It's not exactly fashionable to ignore the energy dilemma. It seems to me you might have given that factor more consideration since you're a big drain on power, yet, at the same time, you're sited rurally with the sun at your disposal.

NEW: It wasn't that great a design factor when I was planned.

OLD: An easy out for one so symmetrical designed.

NEW: There is nothing wrong with symmetry if it is used right. I have two major air carriers which require separate facilities. A simple rational solution is a symmetrical layout of duplicated facilities. It's also easy to expand from both ends. Since all passenger circulation is channeled at the center axis for vertical movement, my expansion on either end merely extends the walking distance without disrupting current services. In any case, I'm symmetrical only on one axis.

OLD: You're symmetrical on one axis which your twin facility will be also. Then you're connected by a central parking structure on an axis bisecting the parking lots and the control tower, right?

NEW: Right, except that the control tower was too stubborn to play the game. He's just to the northwest a bit off axis.

OLD: Not very balanced of him, but at least he does wear the same skin as you.

NEW: I had to plead and beg. The Others wanted him to wear white. Can't you see how gauche that would have been?

OLD: His form itself is bad enough.

NEW: I had no control over that, unfortunately. That was the Others' folly.

OLD: Speaking of form again, I question the success of the clerestory as a visual separation between lobby and loading facilities. Don't you think maybe a skylight of some sort might have worked better? Also, you went to a lot of effort to express the structural system. Why not use a system which expresses itself by its very nature, such as two and three dimensional trusses?

NEW: I prefer solid, bold lines and expressive massing. I feel I'm quite attractive and I do my job quite well.

OLD: What kind of problems has the new security regulations caused? They just came into existence shortly before I retired.

NEW: The problems are rather minor but the restrictions did invalidate one of my major visual elements.

OLD: Those bridged walkways and stair towers, right?

NEW: Right. Security has made them into restricted emergency exits.

OLD: I think that they would have only caused confusion as to where to go next once a passenger had deplaned.

NEW: They were placed there both because there was need of an exit and to allow passengers easy access from the waiting lounge to the parking lots.

OLD: I hardly think passenger traffic is high enough to warrant that, not to mention that most passengers would probably need to claim baggage before they leave. Great ex-post facto reasoning though. Keep trying! Now tell me how such a minor function as an emergency exit stair was developed into such a dominant monumental element of the visual form of the terminal as a whole. A strange sense of importance.

NEW: We choose our priorities in light of our values. . .

OLD: Then you made some questionable choices on your interests.

NEW: I concede a certain lack of control in their development but I am

attempting to shape them up. I'm not happy with the service my catering client is providing to the public and his taste in furnishings isn't exactly top notch.

OLD: How true! That's a major sore spot along with the oversight of not providing restroom facilities within the confines of the restaurant and lounge.

NEW: Very touchy all right, but hopefully the customers can hold on until I can ease the pain.

OLD: It seems to me you could speed that healing process by livening the lobby up a little. Something to give it a vibrancy of its own. You have a great volume of space. . .if you got rid of those awful lights you could hang banners or photos or balloons or something to add some interest to the place. The plants can't do it by themselves.

NEW: Maybe a marching band! Would that thrill you enough?

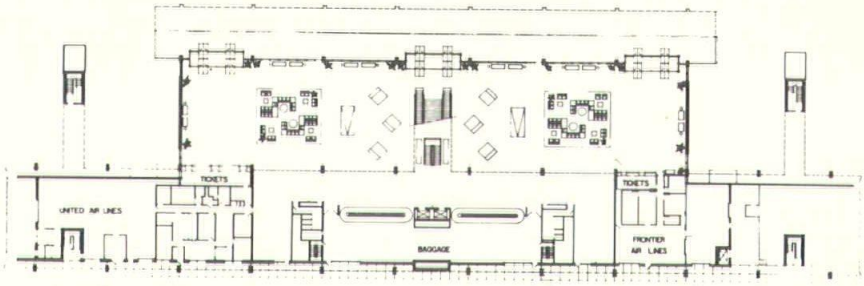
OLD: It seems unlikely, but you might try. . .and for goodness sake, tell the Authority to get rid of those trashy advertising stands. Isn't anything sacred from commercials anymore?

NEW: Ride the bus, they have no advertising; but leave flying to us.

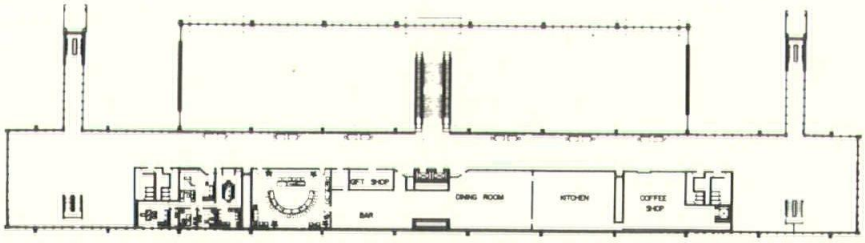
"It's not exactly fashionable
to ignore
the energy dilemma."

Interior of the Air Terminal photo by Stephen M. Eveans

Escalators to the Second Level photo by Ronald B. Entrekin



First Floor Plan



Second Floor Plan

plans by the firm, D.F.S. & D.

lincoln airport: critique

BY KEITH DUBAS

The new terminal is a building that exists on several levels of design theory. The sense of anticipation which is associated with arriving and departing is present as one travels to the airport from Lincoln. The relationship of a person to the terminal is experienced initially some distance from the terminal. As a vehicle arrives at the terminal the relationship becomes more immediate.

After parking the sequence from auto-to-mall, stairs-to-entrance is a well-developed one. It provides an immediate sense of anticipation as you proceed to the building. As you change elevation your relationship to the canopy varies and by the time you arrive beneath the canopy it has a more personal scale than you first perceived. This play is effective on the exterior but does not extend into the interior of the building. Once you enter the terminal doors you have ARRIVED: There is no more anticipation.

From the lobby the relationship between the terminal and the parking lot permits the viewer to look back across the field without having his/her view obstructed by autos. As the landscaping matures the grassy mall between the two parking lots will become an attractive element. If the second terminal is added, and a connector extended between the two, the entire spatial experience will be altered.

INTERIORS

Green plants have been accepted as a humanizing element in contemporary buildings. The plants included in the new Lincoln terminal indicate a concern for amenities which often do not find their way into public architecture. Having included the plants in the completed project benefits the space, but having provided planters as an integral element in the building design would have been a stronger statement of their importance.

The seating groups in the lobby also reflect sensitivity to humans. The small areas, indicated on the ground plane by carpeting, are an opportunity for a traveler to rest and assess the space he/she being occupied. The architect's selection of small wood slab chairs would have been much much more inviting than the

current metal and vinyl chairs. Because of the client's fear of vandalism the architects suggestion was vetoed.

The baggage claim area is under the mezzanine. There, many of the advertisements are seen by incoming travelers. This visually prominent advertising is neither creative nor interesting.

The mezzanine at Lincoln's terminal is composed of restrooms, a bar and lounge, restaurant and snack bar. The lack of development here as interesting commercial spaces is a waste. The spaces were completed without the assistance of the architects and were totally under the control of the leasee. The lack of excitement which befits a major point of passenger transfer has hurt their operations.

AIRLINES

Presently the terminal has room for only two major airlines. There is sufficient space for the smaller carriers, but the bulk of space is leased to United and Frontier operations. In order to attract another major carrier some further expansion would have to occur.

The airlines were of little assistance in determining the program for the terminal, and their lack of eagerness shows up in their unimaginative space. Content with their existing operations, the airlines resisted the decision to build a new facility. Not until the time of near occupancy did they notify their in-house architects who planned the bulk space leased to them. The fact that all airline counters coast-to-coast appear the same is no testimonial to the relevance of their design staffs.

GATES

The gates are nodes at the ends of the mezzanine. Their design is fairly straightforward. The original design included two extending arms at each end of the waiting room. Due to the airline's opposition, only one was located in the center. This can pivot in either direction.

One of the few demands of the Airport Authority was the requirement for second level loading. Unfortunately, now that the terminal has been completed, only United Airlines is equipped with planes which can take advantage of the convenience of the extending arm. Other airlines must yet walk their passengers down a flight of stairs, out a door and onto an apron to board a plane.

CONCLUSIONS

The design of the emergency exit-only stair towers at first seems questionable, but they were designed before the tightened security procedures made necessary by an international increase in skyjacking. It was envisioned that a deplaning passenger would have direct egress to a waiting vehicle. What had been planned as a convenience to travelers became a very expensive emergency exit and a dramatic compositional design element.

The Lincoln terminal is a much improved facility over the previous one. It is a ceremonial structure which symbolizes a progressive-if yet conservative image. The building is a carefully choreographed piece. That the architects wanted to make a statement is obvious. In Lincoln what that image does in architectural terms is to provide a prudent, safe enclosure. It is not at all an offensive design although it lacks the interest and imagination which make some spaces more memorable.

The terminal is so carefully planned that one receives exactly what he or she expects--much like a movie where after the initial scenes the audience is able to anticipate not only the story but the dialogue. It is just that type of building. Perhaps, in Nebraska, not to be memorable is better than to be controversial.

"Once you enter the door
you have ARRIVED . . ."