

EXTRA

The New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects

Volume 43, Headquarters Plan



With this special issue of Oculus the Chapter announces a plan for the reorganization of the Chapter's office space. It will be appropriate to our location in the Villard Houses and worthy of our profession. Your enthusiasm and support will make it all possible—now.

OCULUS

HEADQUARTERS PLAN

Volume 43, Headquarters Plan

Oculus

Editor: C. Ray Smith Managing Editor: Marian Page Art Director: Abigail Sturges Typesetting: Susan Schechter

The New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects The Urban Center, 457 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10022 212-838-9670

George S. Lewis, Executive Director

Executive Committee 1981-82: Joseph Wasserman, President Arthur I. Rosenblatt, First Vice President Tician Papachristou, Vice President Robert Siegel, Vice President Terrance Williams, Secretary Alan Schwartzman, Treasurer Frank Eliseo William Ellis Theodore Liebman Nancy A. Miao Stuart Pertz Mildred F. Schmertz

NYC/AIA Staff Cathanne Piesla Carol Jones Jeannette Manzo Eileen McGrath

 \odot 1982 The New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects.

Photos: Stan Ries Modelmaker: George Raustiala The New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects moved to the Villard Houses early in 1980, happy to become a part of the Urban Center, and this affiliation has already enhanced our active and visible role in New York architecture. We intend to live up to this setting and to expand our activities commensurately.

As we all recognized at the time of the move, the space we occupy in the Urban Center is smaller than our previous headquarters and is awkwardly arranged. Over the past two years, therefore, the officers and executive committees have analyzed this situation, and now architects Voorsanger & Mills along with the Headquarters Committee have created both a greatly improved operational efficiency and a fitting image—one appropriate to our location in this world center of architecture.

The officers and executive committee envision that the plan will be assured of sufficient funding for construction to begin in the summer of 1982. It is anticipated that the reorganized and refurbished office space will be ready for occupancy in January of 1983.

As you will see, this venture is predicated on the widespread support of our local membership, whose encouragement and generous backing for this project will enable the Chapter, finally, to fulfill the promise of our unique location.



The Program

by Joseph Wasserman, President

It has been two years since the Chapter relocated its headquarters to the Urban Center in the Villard Houses. The Urban Center, organized and made possible by the Municipal Art Society, has turned out to be all that we hoped it would be — and more. It acts as a lively forum for urban affairs, as an inspired midtown location at 51st Street and Madison Avenue, and as a catalyst for public as well as professional interest in architecture, urban design, and the other design professions.

To accommodate what the Chapter envisions as continuously expanding activities and increasing membership interest, the officers and executive committee over the past two years have outlined a program — and have now authorized a plan and design that will make such expansion possible, that coalesces our spaces into a single image, and that is ingenious.

Our program is to provide distinguished and practical space. It envisions a suitable entrance to the Chapter's offices that affords a view to St. Patrick's Cathedral in lieu of the present dark passage between work and conference rooms. It creates a new, fixed, and elegant Committee Room where meetings of varying sizes can occur in privacy without disrupting other Chapter activities.

The former conference room will be redesigned as a Members' Gallery. It will provide a new space for reading, for conversation, and for assembly. It will have a large notice board and bookshelves for useful reference material. And it can be used also as a secondary meeting room and as a small exhibition gallery.

Remembering the old Architectural League space on East 40th Street and also with a vision of the Gallery at London's Architectural Association in mind, we envision this new Members' Gallery as having a library of architectural journals from all over the world. It will be open for browsing by members and the public alike. The program allows for a staff member to



The New York Chapter/AIA is located on the third floor of the north wing of the Villard Houses.

sit at a desk there in both a reception and librarian function.

The Staff Room, which is the heart of the Chapter operation, has been thoroughly restudied. It calls for provision of large work surfaces and increased file space and storage. The present staff numbers four, plus executive director; the new design can accommodate additional staff members.

The executive director's office will be housed in the northeast room. This new office will be small but adequate.

The program also calls for the entire space to flow graciously from one area to another as a single consistent space. The design, worked out with executive committee endorsement over the past two years by architects Voorsanger & Mills, promises us a delightful headquarters. We trust that the membership will want to come to this new headquarters often and will think of it as their own midtown club or living room.

Reworking our space will not come easily or cheaply. It will require considerable financial support. In the long run, I believe it will be one of the most rewarding tasks we have undertaken. My thanks to Voorsanger & Mills for their effective design and to Arthur Rosenblatt and Robert Siegel for organizing this effort.





Members and Friends Are Invited to a Reception On the Occasion of The Opening of the New Headquarters and Gallery of Drawings

at The Urban Center, The Villard Houses Madison Avenue between 50th and 51st Street Thursday, September 29 From Five to Eight p.m.







SECTION LOOKING WEST

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The present committee room (left) will be redesigned as a Members' Gallery (right).

The Design

by Voorsanger & Mills

In 1980 the executive committee requested that we begin studies to evolve a design that would solve two of its immediate problems: the admittedly limited area allocated to the NYC/AIA within the Urban Center, and the functional awkwardness of the existing rooms, which were formerly used as a library, bedroom, and dressing room.

The solution that evolved focused on two areas: clarification of the plan by changing two large rooms and one small one into three medium-sized rooms, and the study of finishes to create an equilibrium in character between the disparate rooms, one of which is paneled in dark oak and the other of which is painted off-white.

To help accomplish this, we proposed a new Committee Room, not previously available to the Chapter, where members can meet for the numerous committee functions. This space became the central element of our design and permitted us to think of other uses and reorganization of the remaining space.

In the new headquarters plan, the Committee Room is made possible by enlarging the small middle room currently serving as the executive director's office — into a new, larger "third room" that is more consistent in scale and importance with the two flanking larger spaces. Enlarging this small room will take the form of extensions into the spaces on each side. In shape these extensions are semi-circular, like exedra, approximately 9 ft. high within the existing 13 ft. high rooms. Storage and desk functions will be built into the exedra. Otherwise, the orthogonal shape of the existing spaces will remain intact.

Recognizing the need for a clearly organized entrance from the public hall and for flexible circulation within the space, and also with a view to relieving some of the visual density of the present entrance vestibule, we have widened the doorway into the new Committee Room. This will permit a daylight view to the French doors and balcony overlooking Madison Avenue.

The present committee room overlooking the Villard Houses' courtyard will be refurbished as a Members' Gallery. The Gallery will be a reading room, lounge, reception and exhibition space where members can withdraw or assemble in a midtown club-like atmosphere. The refurbishment will include refinishing the existing walls, carpeting, and installation of a ceiling mural, and new lighting for exhibitions.

The Staff Room will contain an unusual concentration of built-in storage and counter space to accommodate staff functions and expansion. Carpeting, painting, and new lighting are proposed to provide continuity with the other rooms. The color scheme will further unify the space.

We have designed special furniture, such as a large conference table, where specific space requirements must be met. To improve acoustic privacy and also to enhance the image of the offices, floors will be carpeted throughout. This will, in addition, preclude having to replace the hardwood flooring that will be exposed when the exedra are built.

By reorganizing the original plan and refinishing the rooms, the design will visually meld the headquarters space into a cohesive whole.

Evolution of the Plan

by George Lewis, Executive Director

Our former quarters at 20 West 40 Street, to which the Chapter had moved in 1968 after many years at 115 East 40, were always regarded as temporary. Several possibilities were investigated for a permanent home including, actually, a proposal in the early '70's with the help of Jaquelin Robertson, then head of the Office of Midtown Development, to make the north wing of the Villard Houses available. None of these materialized.

In 1977 when plans for the Helmsley Palace Hotel were under way, the Municipal Art Society began exploring the possibilities of the Villard Houses and the Chapter was sounded out about participating. This time, thanks to the strong organizational and fundraising efforts of the MAS, the Urban Center came into being, and in February 1980 –

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The present staff office (left) will become the Staff Room with built-in furniture for greater efficiency and flexibility (right).

along with the MAS – the Chapter, the Architectural League, the Parks Council, and the New York Chapter ASLA moved into the north wing. The main – second – floor is shared for meetings and exhibitions; the constituent organizations occupy the third and fifth floors, and the remaining floors are leased to commercial tenants. James Stewart Polshek & Partners was the architect for the Urban Center. Our lease as a subtenant of the Municipal Art Society runs into 1990, with the probability of renewal.

The Chapter was assigned excellent space on the Madison Avenue end of the third floor, but it was recognized from the beginning that our 2200 square feet would be a tight fit, compared with 40th Street. Further, the space arrangement was awkward (it was not part of the Polshek commission to design the Chapter's quarters in detail). The Chapter decided to make no effort at that time to raise funds for new headquarters, accommodations, or furnishings until the new spaces were tried on for size. But the location, together with the proximity to the other organizations, was an opportunity not to be missed, and we knew that a suitable, functional headquarters could be planned.

In late 1979 Chapter President William Conklin asked the firm of Voorsanger & Mills Associates to evaluate the situation and present a program. Their recommendation that a fundamental replanning rather than a limited sprucing up was required if the Chapter were to function properly — was accepted by the executive committee. And in 1981, while John Belle was Chapter president, Voorsanger & Mills was asked to prepare a preliminary design. This was reviewed and approved by an invited panel, and a contract for complete services was signed.

The developed design is made public for the first time in this special issue of *Oculus*. We look forward to enthusiastic support and speedy implementation.

The Fundraising Program

by Arthur Rosenblatt

To oversee the budget and raise necessary funds for this reorganization, the Chapter has appointed a Headquarters Committee whose major responsibility will be to secure \$250,000 for the new headquarters, including construction, furniture, fees, and financing.

We expect to ask for contributions from Chapter firms, from friends in the construction and furnishings industries, and from other individuals interested in the Chapter. We also expect to recommend at a special Chapter meeting an assessment of our members as an expression of the broadest commitment to this important venture.

The Committee aims for sufficient pledges by the middle of May so that construction can be initiated in the summer of 1982. The schedule envisions disrupting Chapter activities as little as possible.

The Headquarters Committee sees these goals as attainable to make our present lackluster Chapter space representative of this most prominent AIA chapter. Our effort will require the enthusiastic support of the Committee, of Chapter membership, and of all those who applaud the stimulation of public and professional support of architecture. We encourage your participation in achieving these goals with a tax-deductible contribution.

The Headquarters Committee

Arthur Rosenblatt, Co-Chairperson Robert Siegel, Co-Chairperson James Baker John Burgee Lewis Davis James Freed Michael Maas Joseph Wasserman (ex officio)

The Budget

Construction This represents the	\$ 146,000	
proposed contractor's		
guaranteed price.		
Furnishings	\$	69,500
Contingency	\$	10,000
Fees	\$	28,500
Total	\$ 254,000	



A view into the model from the northeast corner shows the Staff Room and the exedra projecting from the new Committee Room. The reorganized Chapter space will achieve more than the functional efficiency of our activities through the multiple use and integration of spaces and furnishings. In addition—and beyond what any practical redistribution or acquisition of new furnishings could achieve—is the contribution of what all architects mean by "design"—the creation of something that meaningfully proclaims its use and users, its stature and prestige. With this carefully considered and integrated design the Chapter can show by example that the art of architecture goes beyond the practical to convey the ultimate dignity and esteem of a historically distinguished profession that has been called the queen of the arts. Your support in this great opportunity is urgently encouraged.