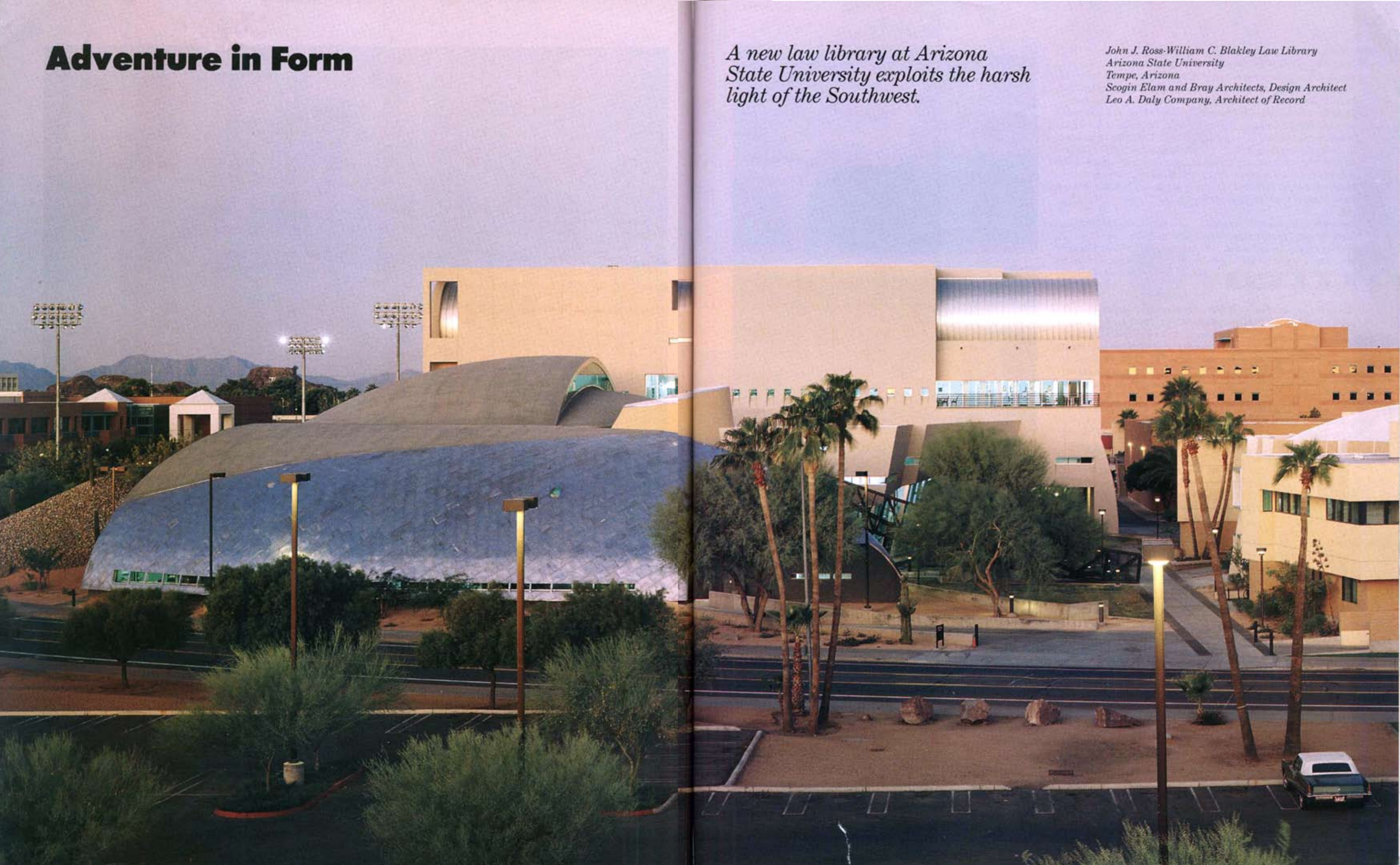


# Adventure in Form

*A new law library at Arizona State University exploits the harsh light of the Southwest.*

*John J. Ross-William C. Blakley Law Library  
Arizona State University  
Tempe, Arizona  
Scogin Elam and Bray Architects, Design Architect  
Leo A. Daly Company, Architect of Record*



The John J. Ross-William C. Blakley Law Library at Arizona State University is a 68,000-square-foot collision of forms and materials, a startling image for lawyers and librarians. "Yet," insists Jonathan Rose, head of the ASU law school user group, "it's incredibly functional." Then there's the more judicious assessment of Andrew Hurwitz, member of ASU's governing board of regents, who spoke at the building's dedication last November. "We believe in the First Amendment," he said of the unusual design. Referring to criticism in the local press, he added: "And we believe in the right of the press to be wrong, spectacularly wrong," suggesting that support of freedom of expression should extend to this building. In any case, architects Scogin Elam and Bray have produced a building that is an incarnation of the legal profession: debate.

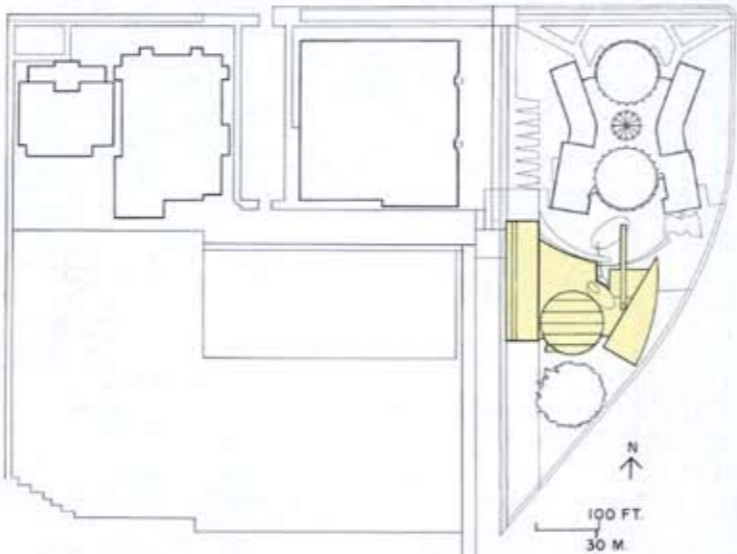
Debate is also a mark of the practice of Scogin Elam and Bray. Says Mack Scogin: "Architecture should raise questions." The Ross-Blakley library, he explains, "looks arbitrary, but it's not. Libraries are extremely precise buildings—they have to be designed from the inside out. We wanted a sense of looseness to counteract the tight [\$110 per square foot] budget."

It was the Atlanta firm's experience in library design [RECORD, May 1992, pages 86-93] that initially attracted the Phoenix firm of Leo A. Daly, architect of record. Together, the team was able to satisfy ASU's requirement for an Arizona-registered architect with library-design experience. "Mack's presentation of his firm's work and the analysis of our site was electrifying. His team was not the safest choice, but we didn't want safe," recalls Rose of the selection process. Library director Rick Brown was reassured by the participation of consultant George Grossman, an expert in law libraries. Says Brown: "Law libraries are different from other libraries. The collection is non-circulating. There is a lot of interaction between students and staff, who aid in research. The facility needs to accommodate study groups, a fundamental aspect of the educational process." In addition, the architects had to house some 310,000 volumes and microfilm equivalents, provide for the increasing use of computer data bases, and ease staff supervision. "For librarians, the perfect library would be on one floor," acknowledges Scogin.

The architects took their cues from the site, located at the east edge of the ASU campus, where the absence of any overall order "gave permission for exuberant form-making," according to Merrill Elam. The architects placed a dominant volume along the west edge of the site adjacent to a wide expanse of playing fields. The three-story rectangular tower topped by a steel barrel vault contains stacks—in essence, it's a book container. In the center is the reading room, with the core collection facing the law school to the north and the more private reserve-reading room oriented to the south. Acting as a shield between the main reading room and a road that outlines the campus is the low-slung technical-services wing, a pie-shaped wedge clad in galvanized steel. Construction methods were conventional to reduce cost—steel frame on concrete foundations covered with different colors of synthetic stucco—and "decoration" is limited to the artistic rendering of functional requirements—a fire-stair is given a sculptural presence in the central courtyard (opposite); fluorescent tubes are suspended like light wands throughout the interior (page 84). According to Hurwitz the library is "where the scholarship of the university meets the action of the profession. Most of the buildings of this profession are jails—acknowledgements of failure." The library, he says, is a symbol of hope.

Karen D. Stein

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Named for two Phoenix lawyers killed in an airplane crash, the John J. Ross-William C. Blakley Law Library occupies a former parking lot south of the law school, built in 1967 and expanded in 1988 (site plan

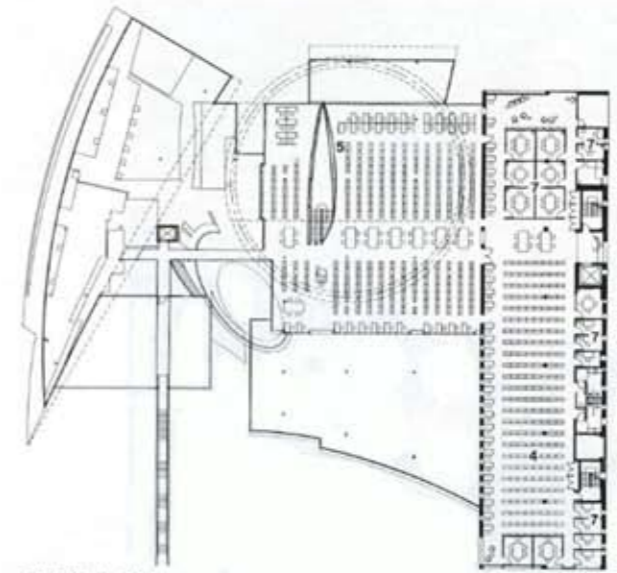
above). Two steel boxes pierce the school's facade, visually linking it to the library (previous pages and top). The library's sculptural firestair reinforces the school's main axis (opposite).





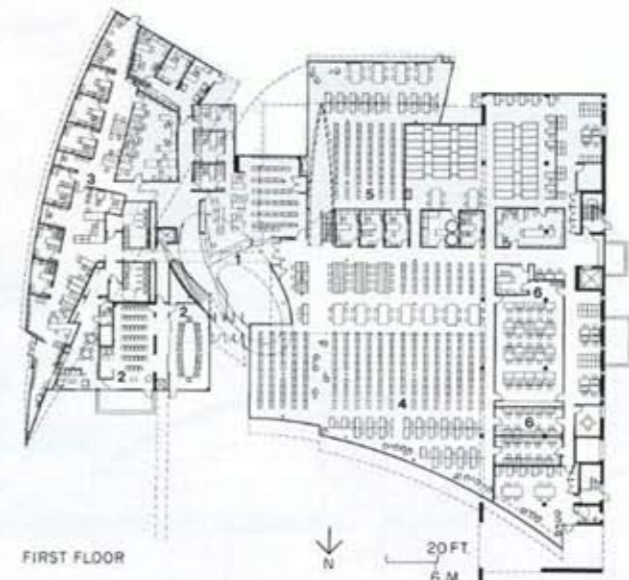
**Up Close**

*Working under the glare of the Southwest sun.* For Atlanta-based Mack Scogin and Merrill Elam, Phoenix provided fresh inspiration. "The Arizona landscape provokes misreadings. Plants look like animals, animals look like rocks, rocks look like animals, plants look like rocks, animals look like plants . . . The sun bursts over the horizon . . . immediately filling an enormous sky with incredible light. Texture and colors vibrate. On the ground plane and along the horizon every form takes on a hyperness," says Elam. Adding to this surreal backdrop, the architects tilted the west facade of the library seven degrees toward adjacent playing fields. The leaning tower softens glare into the building, and appears, at first glance, as a desert mirage (opposite top). Some observers see the tower's profile as an open book. Scogin says that image is unintentional. Small windows admit sun to study rooms, while larger openings indicate circulation zones or balconies. Window "sills" meet an ASU requirement for sloped surfaces to prevent pigeon-nesting, while their depth intensifies shadows, adding texture to the synthetic-stucco facade (opposite bottom left). The south facade overlooks parking lots along the campus edge. To create privacy for the ground-floor reserve-reading room, the architects used dirt excavated during the tower's construction to create a "Magic Mountain" rock garden topped by a giant cactus (opposite bottom right). The tilted and curved storefront-like aluminum curtainwall of the north facade was detailed by computer for accuracy (photos above). Throughout, single-pane green-tinted glass controls glare and heat gain.



SECOND FLOOR

1. Circulation desk
2. Conference room
3. Technical services
4. Core collection
5. Reserve room
6. Computer room
7. Study room



FIRST FLOOR



*Although more apparent in section (next page), the three basic forms of the library are discernible in plan: a fragmented trapezoidal central reading room sandwiched between a rectangular tower of book stacks and a pie-wedge shape housing technical services (plans right). The core of the library's 310,000-volume collection is in the reading room, with special collections in the tower, which can be expanded with the addition of a third-floor mezzanine. Throughout, custom-designed cherry study carrels are wired for students' laptop computers. Computer labs are on the first floor and study rooms for two to six people are in the tower.*



Entry (opposite and below),  
main reading room (top left),  
and reserve room (bottom left).

**Credits**

*John J. Ross-William C.  
Blakely Law Library  
Arizona State University  
Tempe, Arizona*

**Design Architect:** *Scogin Elam  
and Bray Architects—Mack  
Scogin, Merrill Elam, and  
Lloyd Bray, principals; Jeff  
Atwood, Carlos Tardio, Susan  
Desko, Richard Ashworth, Julie  
Sanford, Denise Dumais,  
Monica Solana, project team*

**Architect of Record:** *Leo A.  
Daly Company—Joe Tyndall,  
principal; John Williams,  
Harold Friborg, Thomas  
Findley, Dean Munkachy,  
Raymond Madsen, Norman  
Lin, Rick Reitenbach, Don  
Weiser, Joe McGee, Shawn  
Pickerill, Rashne Shroff, and  
Terri Gervasio, project team*

**Engineers:** *Robin E. Parke  
Associates (structural); Leo A.  
Daly Company (mechanical/  
electrical); Coe & Vanloo  
Consulting Engineers (civil)*

**Consultants:** *George S.  
Grossman (law library);  
Newcomb & Boyd Consulting  
Engineers (lighting)*

**Landscape Architect:** *The  
Campbell Collaborative*

**Construction Management:**  
*CMX Group*

**General Contractor:** *Oakland  
Construction Company*



SECTION

