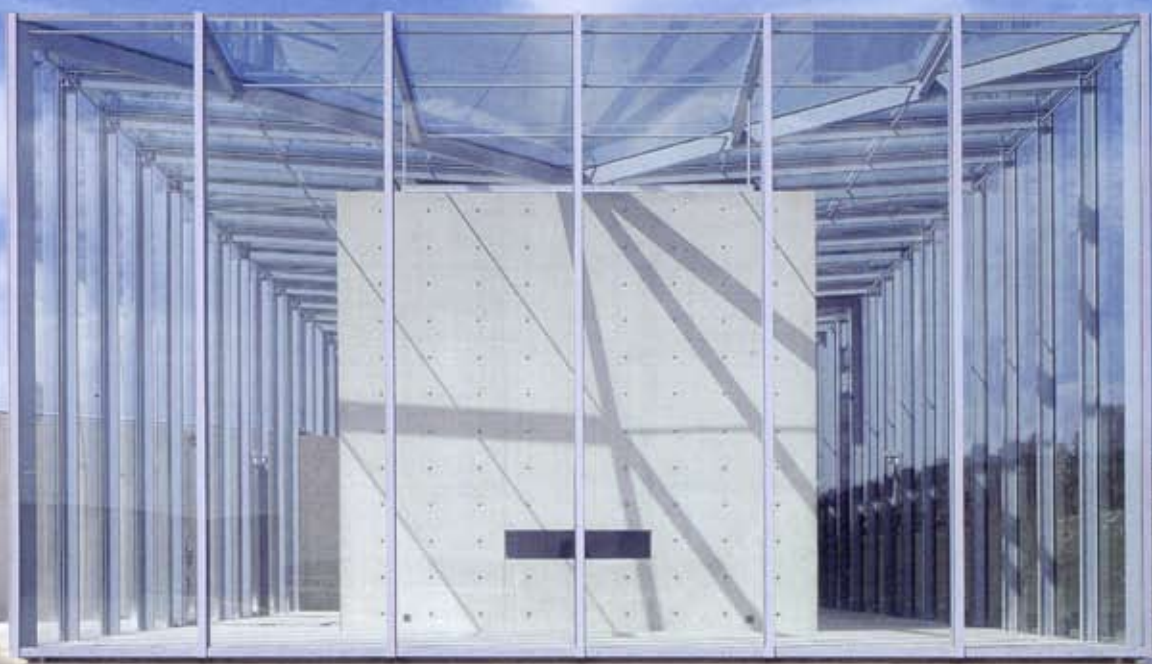


# ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

McGraw-Hill  
CONSTRUCTION

07  
2006

\$9.95 A PUBLICATION OF THE MCGRAW-HILL COMPANIES www.architecturalrecord.com



TADAO ANDO

An Island Between  
Earth and Sky

RESIDENTIAL SECTION

Kitchen & Bath Portfolio



# Mack Scogin Merrill Elam angles its architecture toward the landscape and culture of Wellesley with the idiosyncratic **WANG CAMPUS CENTER**

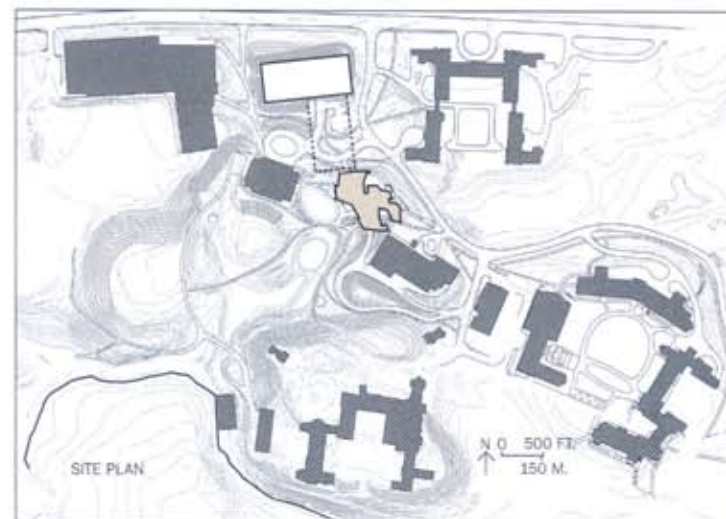
By Nancy Levinson

In the process of choosing an architect for the campus center at Wellesley College, the school administrators asked the short-listed firms not for conceptual sketches of proposed structures, but instead for analyses of potential sites. The emphasis on landscape instead of buildings might seem unusual, but at Wellesley, a passion for its 450-acre campus—a wooded terrain of rolling hills, gentle plateaus, and flat meadows along the northern edge of Lake Waban—dates to the school's founding in the 1870s. In 1902, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., as a consultant to the college, wrote a lengthy letter describing the campus as “not merely beautiful but with a marked individual character not represented so far as I know on the grounds of any other college in the country.” The letter, urging the administrators to respect the “exceedingly intricate and complex topography” by building along ridges rather than across meadows, would profoundly affect Wellesley's physical development. The latest evidence of Olmsted's beneficial influence is the Lulu Chow Wang Campus Center.

Designed by the Atlanta firm of Mack Scogin Merrill Elam Architects, the 50,000-square-foot building rises on an escarpment overlooking a cattail-filled meadow that slopes down to the lake—a setting the great landscape architect would surely have approved. Moreover, as Mack Scogin, AIA, explains, the Olmstedian philosophy and its particular meaning at this women's college west of Boston have informed not just the building's placement, but also its design. “Wellesley has always rejected the idea of imposing any abstract or geometric order on the land,” says Scogin. “They've chosen instead to value the natural and the irregular.” As a result, you come to understand this campus neither easily nor quickly, but gradually, as you meander along its paths and tramp its hills and valleys. And so, Scogin adds, “Our idea was to embody in this project the values of the landscape—to make a place that draws you in, a place that you discover slowly, over time.”

The architects' focus on a process of discovery resonated with Wellesley's leaders, who envisioned the building's program as open-ended and evolving. The clients admit that they were clearer about what they did not want than what they did: They did not want to pander to national campus-consumerist trends with a building devoted to cappuccino and rock-climbing walls. As Wellesley president Diana Chapman Walsh notes, “We didn't want a place that was more about marketing than about enhancing campus life.” Ultimately, the college leaders decided on a nonprescriptive program: The center would house the student post office, a bookstore, and

Nancy Levinson, based in Massachusetts, is a contributing editor to *RECORD*.



**Project:** Lulu Chow Wang Campus Center and Davis Garage, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts  
**Architect:** Mack Scogin Merrill Elam Architects—Mack Scogin, AIA, Merrill Elam, AIA, principals; Timothy Harrison, AIA, Christopher Agosta, AIA, David Yocum, AIA, Kimberly Shoemake-Medlock,

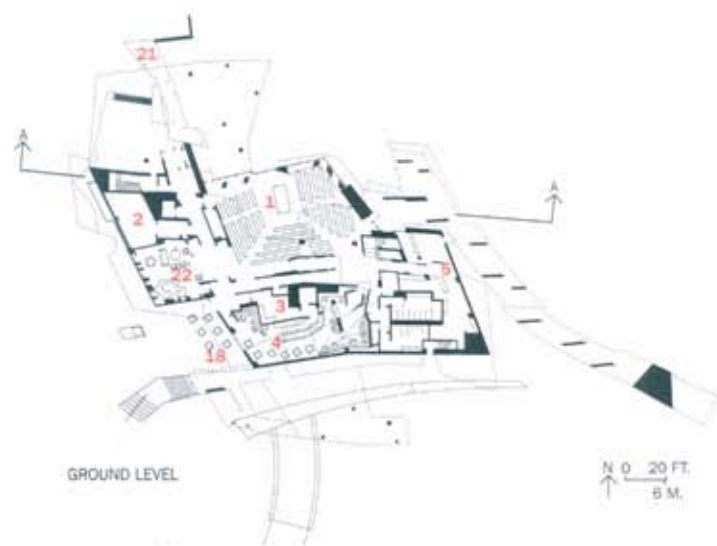
Jeffrey Collins, Jennifer Pindyck, Barnum Tiller, Christian Rice, Michael Wirsching, Jennifer Hurst, John Trefry, Stephen Trimble, Kevin Gotsch, Andrea Korber, Jane Lee, Ashley Moore, Margaret Fletcher, Brian Bell, AIA, Trey Lindsey, Sophia Greenbaum, Helen Han, Ted Paxton, design team



The ramp leads up from the east, extending pathways from the dorms. The glazed dining room, on the top floor, includes an intimate space, supported on columns, that bends around (this page and opposite).

PHOTOGRAPHY: © TIMOTHY HURSLEY, EXCEPT AS NOTED





GROUND LEVEL



SECOND LEVEL



MEZZANINE LEVEL



TOP LEVEL

- |                     |                           |                        |
|---------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Commons          | 9. Post office            | 16. Serving            |
| 2. Storage          | 10. Student resource room | 17. Dining             |
| 3. Catering kitchen | 11. Administration        | 18. Terrace            |
| 4. Pub and bistro   | 12. Open to below         | 19. Ramp               |
| 5. Café             | 13. Lounge                | 20. Bridge to sidewalk |
| 6. Meeting          | 14. Bookstore             | 21. To parking garage  |
| 7. Lobby/forum      | 15. Retail                | 22. Multipurpose       |

A bent, boomerang-shaped wall (below left) partially encloses the light scoop that directs rays into the commons. Another exuberantly angled and gestural wall

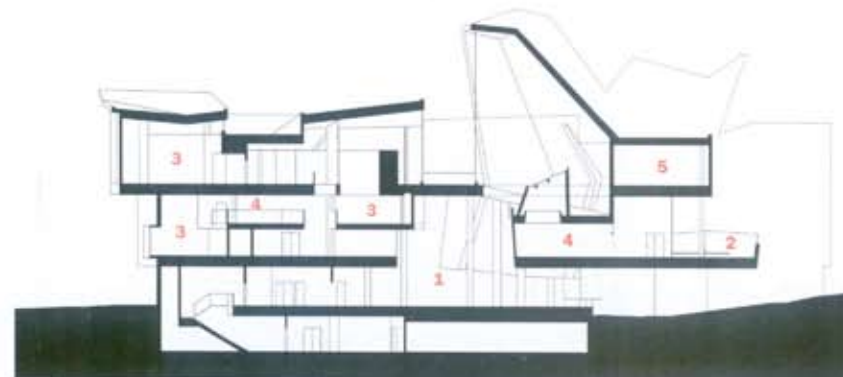
(below right) embraces a small garden that extends between two dining areas on the top floor. This planted bed offers visual access only.



PHOTOGRAPHY: © PETER VANDERWARKER (OPPOSITE TWO)

1. Commons
2. Terrace
3. Meeting
4. Student lounge
5. Dining

A dramatic light scoop crowning the building (above) illuminates the north-facing commons, on the ground floor. With a 1923 building by Cram (far left in photo, right), the Wang helps define a green space.



SECTION A-A

0 20 FT.  
6 M.







The two-story-high commons, or great room, features a light scoop and a Mondrianesque wall of windows (right). Wood storage cabinets, lit from within, glow through disk-shaped lenses (left).

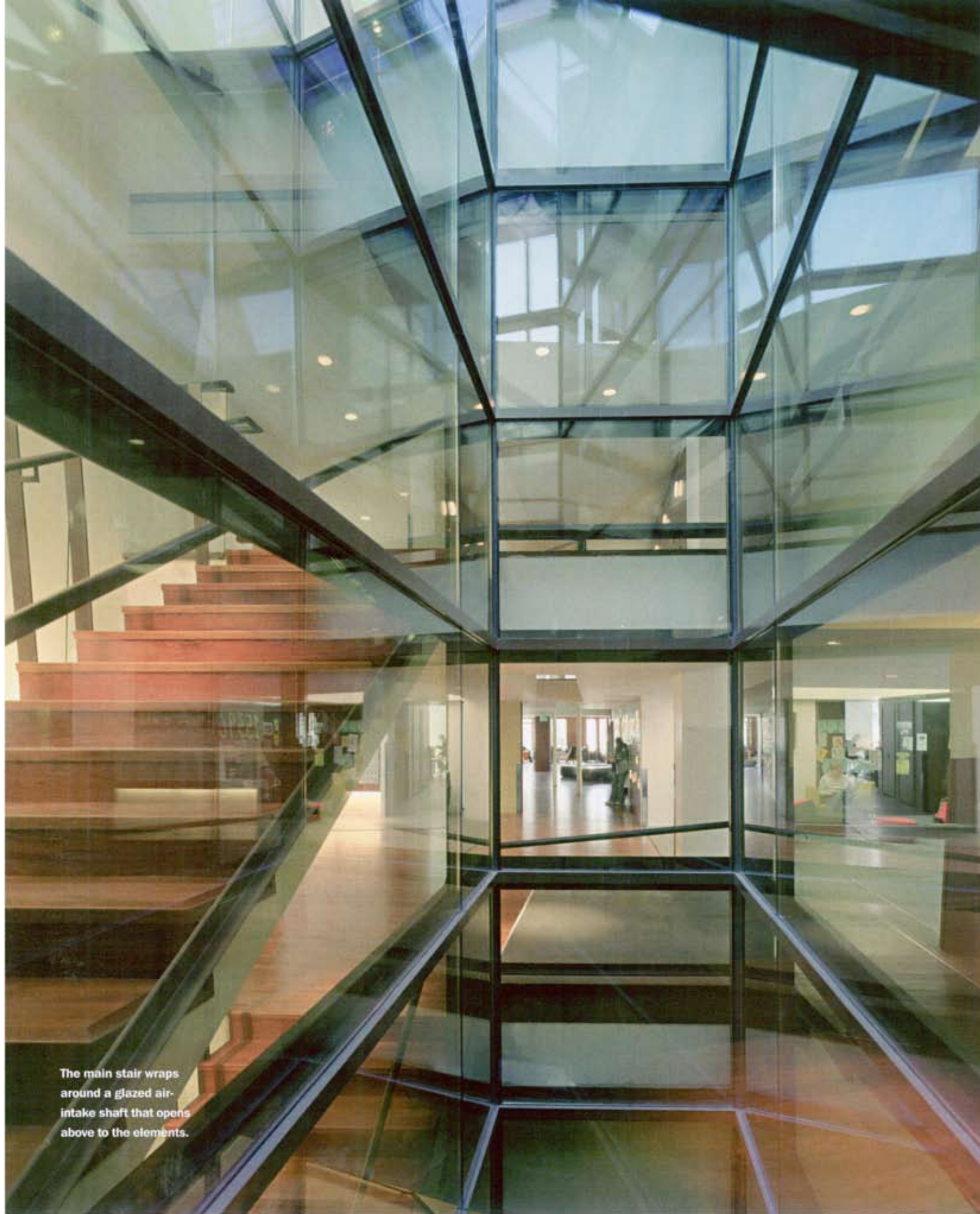
other spaces where the entire community could socialize. "We didn't want any group to feel it 'owned' the center," says Patricia M. Byrne, vice president for administration and planning. "The Wang is for everyone at Wellesley."

It seems unlikely that anyone on campus regrets the lack of climbing walls (and happily, there is no lack of cappuccino). The architects have succeeded in making the center as rich and idiosyncratic as the landscape. Unfettered by an elaborate program, Scogin and Elam created four intersecting levels of spatially graceful and diversely scaled spaces for eating, drinking, meeting, studying, and relaxing. The ground level includes an atmospheric bistro and pub, with deep red furnishings, and a double-height commons, with a dramatic four-story light scoop. The second level has a wood-paneled living room with a fireplace and, nearby, a coffee bar. The mezzanine has a lounge with a pool table and flat-screen TV; and the top level, two airy dining rooms and a southwest-facing terrace. Some spaces are linked visually by interior windows, or vertically by overlooks and balconies. The corridors are lined with wood-paneled storage cabinets (for campus groups). The cabinets are lit from within, glowing through translucent disks on their doors that provide illumination and generate a playful pattern.

The building's exterior is no less expressive. Viewed from any direction, the Wang is an exuberant and asymmetrical (to say the least) composition of jutting volumes, canted walls, swooping ramps, and tilting roofs, all articulated in slate, glass, and copper. Those who prefer their Modernism crisp and Miesian might wonder what all the zigzagging is about, but the design decisions are neither arbitrary nor whimsical. The architects have shaped the building to fit a complicated site, with each elevation responsive to its particular setting. To the north, the Wang is on axis with the campus's main automobile entrance, and its scale corresponds







The main stair wraps around a glazed air-intake shaft that opens above to the elements.



The bistro and pub, on the ground floor, have moody, deep red furnishings. The "forum" (below) has a fireplace and piano.

accordingly—visitors, faculty, and staff, who usually arrive by car, cross a footbridge (which connects to a new, 563-car garage, also by Scogin and Elam) and enter a lobby with an inviting glimpse of the coffee bar; to the east are a series of footpaths, the main approach from the dorms, and here you encounter first a pedestrian ramp, arcing into the landscape and drawing you up into the building. To the west is Alumnae Hall—designed in 1923, in vaguely Jacobean style, by Ralph Adams Cram—and here, the Wang's height and mass respond to the older building; together the structures frame a green courtyard. To the south, the meadow sweeps down toward the lake. At this point, the Wang becomes a large-scale composition, configured to bring in light and, says Scogin, "hold its own against the landscape." (Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates remediated the meadow from a brownfield, and designed its landscape.) As Wellesley assistant art professor John Rhodes writes in the college magazine: "The more one encounters [the building] in person, the more one appreciates its responsiveness to its setting."

The Wang has already become central to campus life. It has also become another example—along with Rafael Moneo's Davis Museum and Cultural Center and Paul Rudolph's Jewett Arts Center—of Wellesley's willingness to embrace contemporary architecture. Which, on a New England campus with its share of Collegiate Gothic, "is not always an easy sell," as Byrne says. But the college planners persisted, and through a thoughtful design process, have built a place of its time, and emphatically of its place. ■



**Sources**

**Curtain wall:** Wausau  
**Roofing:** Sarnifil Energy Smart (PVC); American Hydrotech (green)  
**Suspension grid:** Armstrong  
**Paints and stains:** Benjamin Moore  
**Wood paneling:** Smith & Fong Bamboo  
**Furnishings:** Herman Miller, Steelcase;

Edra; Dryade; Zanotta; Stylex; Fritzy Hansen; Thos. Moser; Frighetto; B+B; ICF; Vecta; Cassina; Wernld; Moroso; Baleri Halia; Nienkampe; Metro

For more information on this project, go to Projects at [www.archrecord.com](http://www.archrecord.com).