

# Progressive Architecture

NOVEMBER 1988





## K-Mart for Information

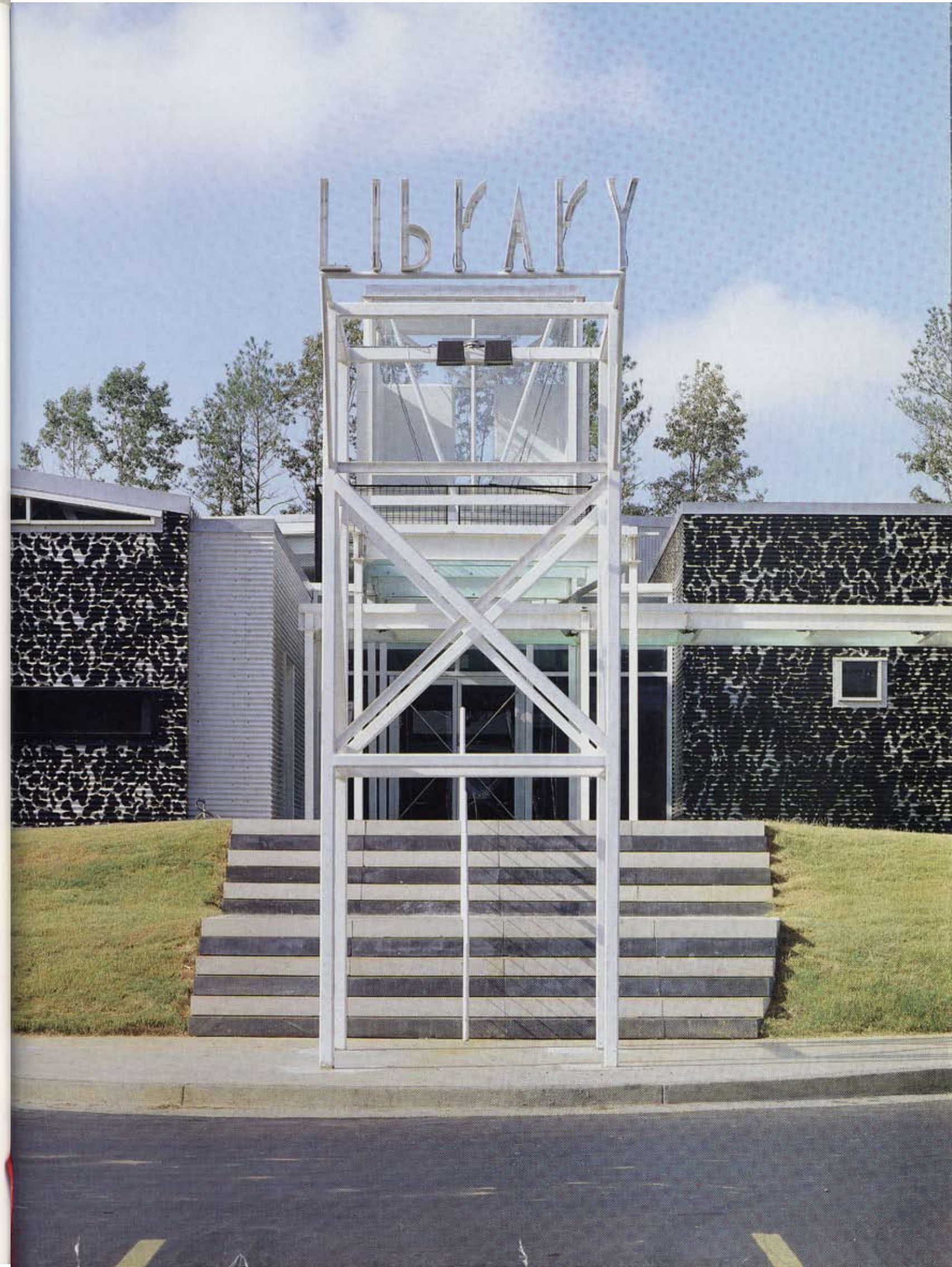
For a community feeling the influences of Atlanta, yet not fully out of its country roots, a new library bridges the gap, delighting some, shocking others.



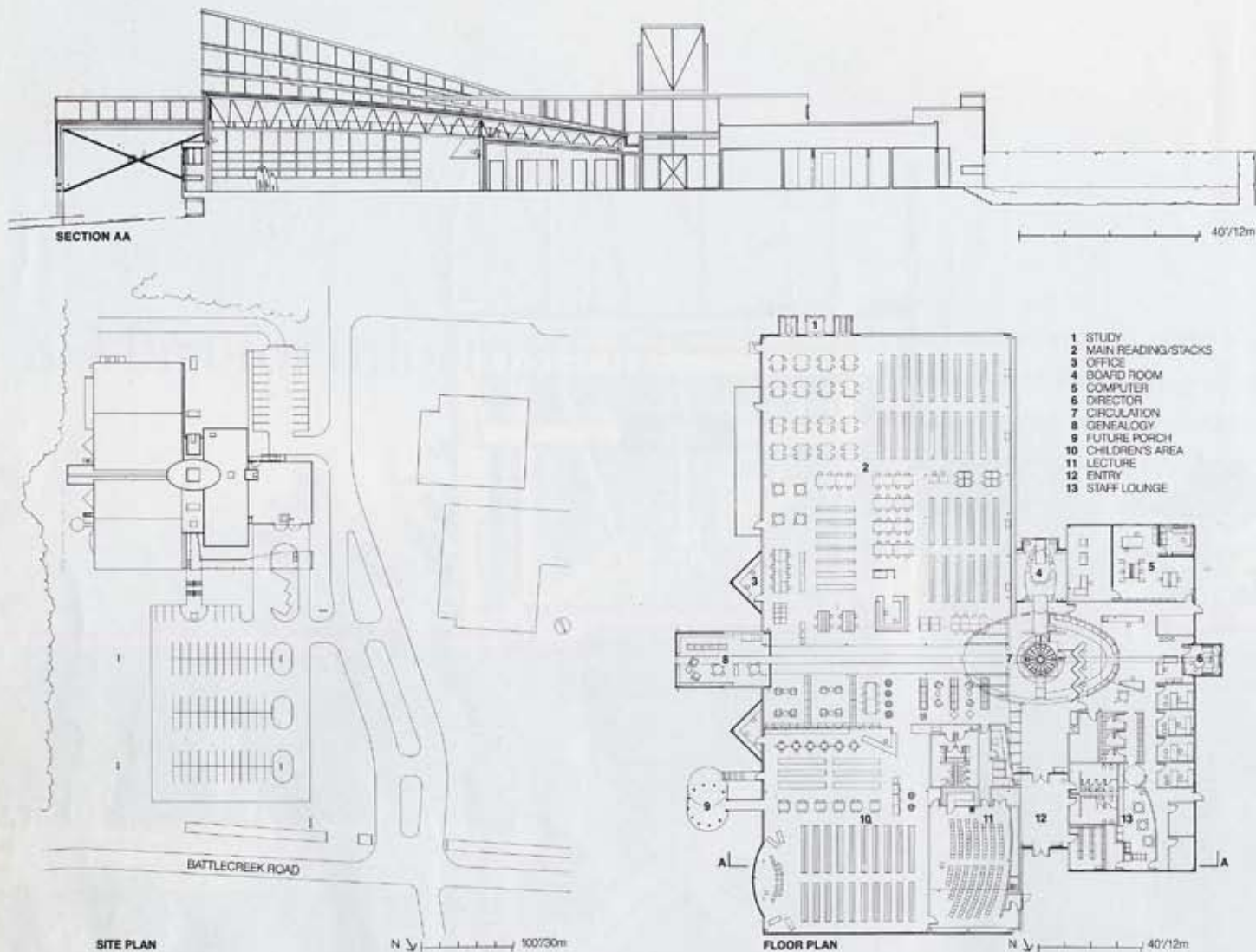
JUST how should a public library behave? Are there rules of aesthetic etiquette for a repository of knowledge? At the headquarters and main branch of the Clayton County Library in Jonesboro, Georgia, architects Scogin Elam & Bray have given their answer, addressing other pertinent cultural and budgetary issues as well. (The original commission was to Parker and Scogin Architects.) Because it is located between Atlanta's Hartsfield International Airport and Scarlet O'Hara's Tara (plus two shopping strips and a creek flood plain), the facility had a particular minicontext to address.

In the architects' words, the area is "folksy, hand-painted, not all mass produced . . . a place where information is sought for practical reasons and history is personal. Easy parking. Come on in. A K-Mart for information. . . ." Still, Atlanta is coming to influence Jonesboro more and more, and the pervasive atmosphere cannot be characterized only by pickup trucks with gun racks. The library is tough enough to stand use, inexpensive enough to

Entry to the library from the parking lot gives the visitor a clearer view of the materials and forms that beckon from the main roadway. The successively rising bowed roof shapes create glazing areas that glow at night (above) over the patterned metal skin. At the front steps, a sign (facing page), sketched in minimally with linear neon, is a statement of the purpose of the building in upper and lower case letters that prompted one resident to declare the sign "all wrong."







get built, and informal enough to welcome local citizens—and maybe even threaten some.

Located on Battlecreek Road, a main connector between the two highway strips, the building site is hardly isolated, but it does have its bucolic aspects. The flood plain of Jester's Creek to the east guarantees the building a lush wooded view in that direction; other new county facilities are being completed south and west of the new library. Future expansion of the building is designed to simply extend the eastern elements, the reading spaces, in a north-south direction.

The building is playful and full of wit, yet according to library director Carol Stewart, it works almost to perfection. Its materials are straightforward, too direct for some of its critics, and its systems are obvious as well. It is undoubtedly the major exterior material, the skin, that provokes the first and strongest reaction. The corrugated steel, with its applied pattern, is unconventional by most standards.

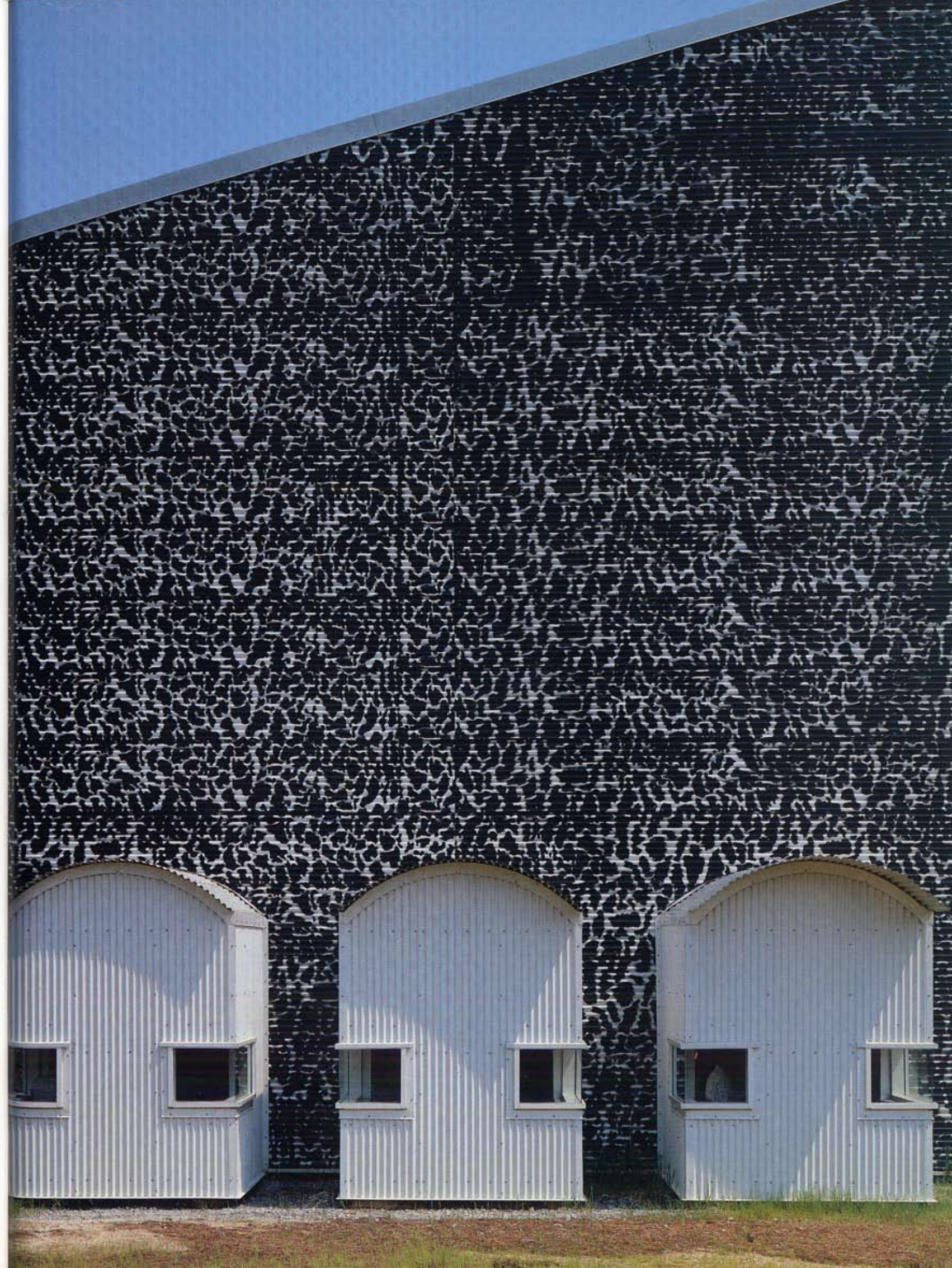
It was the architects' intent to recall in the panels the familiar pattern found on school composition-book covers and on cardboard library file boxes; each, like the library, is a keeper of information. A photograph of just such a file box pattern was projected onto a fiberglass sheet, and the pattern was then cut out of the sheet, forming a stencil the same size as the steel panel. Already base-coated in white fluoropolymer paint, the panels were then stenciled with dark gray paint of the same composition, assuring the finished product of long life. Director Stewart keeps an example file box on the circulation desk to enable her to explain the concept to puzzled patrons.

Once past any apprehensions about the skin, most library users seem to regard the interior spaces of the new facility very highly. Organized around two strong axes, the basic plan comprises two main elements, administration and the reading areas. The entry axis passes through the circulation desk and ends in the Board Room. The east-west axis passes through the circulation desk as well, and marks the division between the children's reading area and the adult. Accentuated by a pair of bold dropped bands incorporating clerestory and strip lighting and air grilles, the axis terminates in the genealogy area at the east end, and the director's office at the west. At the crossing of the axes, a lanternlike clerestory/monitor floods the circulation desk below with light. Under the lantern is a chandelier composed of a mesh television satellite dish and the stadium lighting fixtures typical of the library's lighting equipment.

In cross section, the gently bowed roof forms of the main reading spaces step upward in four segments from north to south. Under the corrugated metal roof, structure is allowed to occur wherever economy and stability require, including occasional subsystems for special conditions and lateral bracing. The wood and galvanized steel truss joists interact with the mechanical and HVAC elements and, with the stadium lighting fixtures, generate an interior expression that is more or less industrial. It is not a harsh composition, yet it is a very straightforward one.

Both the adult and the children's reading areas have large expanses of glazing facing into the wooded area along the creek. This east wall bows out in the children's area to form a story-telling

Of the two main axes in plan, the east/west is the most highly articulated, with one end at the protruding genealogy room, and the other at the smaller element signaling the director's office. The north/south axis crosses the other at the circulation desk, behind which a screen acts as a mild baffle for the board room beyond. Among the other elements extending beyond the asymmetrical H-shape, the three study cubicles (facing page) make an almost comical composition with and on the south wall of the main reading room. They are left white, the second pattern stage having been omitted from the cladding. Repeating similar window heights found in other parts of the building, the eye-level-when-seated glazing shows both concern for the user's comfort and the unmistakable whims of viewing from one of the trainlike forms to the others. Each has its own conditioned air supply.







niche, and two triangular offices also jut out on either side of the genealogy room. Adjacent to the children's area is the lecture area, which includes a puppet stage and a small serving kitchen; the room is divisible to form a lecture hall and a smaller meeting room. This facility can be used by community groups independent of the library's hours.

In addition to one of the protruding offices in the adult reading area, there are three carrel-like accretions at the south end, for individual or small group study. The cozy, arched-roofed cubicles have proven very popular with the young, who like the trainlike feeling of looking or waving through the eye-level glazing between one and the other. Conditioned air supply for these spaces is brought down in a single tube from the ceiling of the main room, branching to separate supply grilles within the cubicles. Other irregularities in the basic H shape of the plan are the genealogy area, the director's office, and a projecting bay in the board room.

One of the specialties in the Jonesboro facility is the extensive genealogy collection, with astoundingly detailed records of towns and counties from many areas of the south. The special area in which the collection is housed features both a clerestory and floor level horizontal glazing, the latter pro-

ducing the effect of floating shelving above. The director's office has bands of glass and a window into the library at eye level when seated, allowing her to see out of her office in all directions from her desk. High glazing also ends at the top in a monitor. Another of the things of which the Clayton County Library system is most proud is its very advanced computer capability, and its heart is located just south of the director's office here.

The library staff credits the semicircular circulation desk with handling crowded checkout conditions and security beautifully, and it is clear that the architects have seriously thought out a whole host of potential problems here. From the various special heights of the vision glass to safety-conscious design of elements that might cause injury to young people, it is apparent that the building design is under the complete control of its designers. It is in some ways a tough building, in many ways a lyrically witty one, and in every way a skillfully detailed statement. This is not a building that fidgets uncomfortably about its identity, nor does it hesitate to welcome its public. To quote one staff member's teenage child, the library in Jonesboro "is awesome." *Jim Murphy*

Along the building's east side (top, left), the genealogy room and the triangular wedge of an office reach out toward wooded areas of the creek flood plain. The elegant light monitor atop the genealogy room leads into a vertical strip window, and just above floor level, a horizontal glazing band partially wraps around three sides.

The southeast and the northeast corners (upper right and lower right) incorporate most of the orthogonal, triangular, or semicircular protrusions. In addition to the genealogy room and study areas, a bowed window marks a storytelling niche in the children's area. Highlighting the crossing of the building's axes, the most prominent of several monitors (lower left) sheds light on circulation functions below.

The articulated director's office (facing page, left) is also lighted by monitor and a vertical strip window series and features more of the eye-level windows. A corrugated translucent fiberglass canopy shades the main staff entry.







The main reading spaces are bright and high, rising to the highest point at the south end (above). The children's reading area (facing page, center) is separated from the adult area by a simple glass screen wall. An even simpler screen defines the area behind the circulation desk (facing page, top) where the director and staff work. The chandelier above the desk is made of a satellite dish and stadium lighting. The major axis, with one end in the genealogy room, is marked by sweeping dropped forms (facing page, bottom) that visually divide the areas.

**Project:** Headquarters Library of the Clayton County Library System, Jonesboro, Georgia.  
**Architects:** Scogin Elam & Bray Architects (originally commissioned as Parker & Scogin Architects), Atlanta, Georgia (Merrill Elam, with Mack Scogin and Lloyd Bray, design principals; Lloyd Bray, project architect; Tom Crosby, Rick Sellers, Dick Spangler, Isabelle Millet, and David Murphree, project team).  
**Client:** Clayton County Library System Board of Trustees.  
**Site:** 3.75 acres of a 25-acre county-owned plot.  
**Program:** headquarters and branch library facility of 32,500 square feet to house children's services, circulation, general and specialized collections and services including genealogy, meeting facilities, administrative functions, technical services, and other support functions.

**Structural system:** steel structure in the administrative wing and steel columns throughout rest on spread concrete footings; curved wood and galvanized steel trusses support roof deck in main spaces.  
**Major materials:** exterior, corrugated steel siding with fluoropolymer coating, corrugated translucent fiberglass canopies; interior, painted gypsum board on steel studs with fiberglass insulation, stadium lighting, wood and steel truss joists, carpet and carpet tiles, television satellite dish and stadium lighting for chandelier (see Building Materials, p. 158).  
**Mechanical system:** gas-fired roof-

top or ground-mounted self-contained air-handling units with economizers.  
**Consultants:** GPWD Consulting Engineers, structural and mechanical; Eberly and Associates, civil; Williamson and Associates, specifications; Costing Services Group, estimating; Ramon Luminance Design, lighting; Doug Allen, landscape; Scogin Elam & Bray with JoAnne DeMilner, interiors consultant.  
**General contractor:** M.G. Engineering and Construction.  
**Costs:** \$2.24 million/\$68 per square foot (construction only).  
**Photos:** Timothy Hursley, The Arkansas Office.