

Harvard calls, but Scogin has designs on Atlanta

By Jacqueline Bueno
Staff Writer

Firm will open Boston office; HQ stays here

The plain, black Peachtree Road mid-rise that houses the architectural office of Scogin Elam and Bray is hardly the kind of place where you'd expect to find one of Atlanta's least simplistic designers.

But there, in a seventh-floor office encased in windows that frame Atlanta's skyline, sits Mack Scogin, who recently was named chairman of Harvard University's Graduate School of Design. Scogin will take the reins at Harvard in July, when the present chairman steps down. But, he says, the move won't mean he'll be any less involved in his Atlanta practice, which has received countless honors and awards from the architectural community.

"I guess I'll be doing a lot of traveling," Scogin says. "But I've been teaching up there for a number of years. It won't be so different."

The difference may come in more subtle ways. Although the firm has received professional recognition since its founders departed from Heery International six years ago, the 12-person firm is still relatively unknown to the general public. And it's still unable to attract the large projects that often include a large commission. The general perception, says Scogin, is that a small firm can't work on a large project.

The trio that heads the firm — Scogin, Merrill Elam and Lloyd Bray — knows plenty about working on major projects. Before creating the firm in

1984, the three worked at Heery International. There they worked on projects that included the Georgia Power Building, which at its 1978 opening had the world's largest solar power installation.

Heery was only a 35-person firm when Scogin joined in 1969. For 15 years, as Heery grew so did Scogin's knowledge of the business. By 1984, Heery's manpower was well into the hundreds and Scogin was ready to have his own practice. Originally established as Parker and Scogin Architects Inc., the firm changed its name

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in 1986, when partner Ennis Parker left to pursue other interests.

Scogin says he doesn't expect his practice to grow into the kind of powerhouse found at Heery. Nor does he want it to, he says.

"We'll grow to whatever extent feels comfortable," he says. "It's more important that our personalities be viewed in all the work we do. That's

more difficult in a large firm."

Size hasn't stopped the firm and its projects from appearing in professional publications worldwide. From Architectural Record to Art Papers to A+U, Scogin Elam and Bray has captured attention by carving its own niche out of the deconstructivist movement now embracing architecture. The firm's projects include such conspicuous buildings as the new Buckhead branch library and the Turner Village at Emory University.

While some swear by such striking design, others just swear. For example, a handful of prominent Buckhead business leaders unsuccessfully tried to persuade the Atlanta-Fulton Public Library Board to adopt a more traditional design for the Buckhead library.

Scogin Elam and Bray's first high-profile project was the High Museum branch at Georgia-Pacific Center, for which the firm received an American Institute of Architecture award. Later came the design of a bridge at Concourse and the headquarters for WQXI.

Most of the firm's projects are in Atlanta, a city Scogin could probably map out blindly. Born 46 years ago at Crawford Long Hospital, Scogin graduated from Avondale High School and later from Georgia Tech. His father worked at the upholstery department at Rich's; his mother at First Atlanta. His familiarity with the city, he says, gives him a special feeling when designing here.

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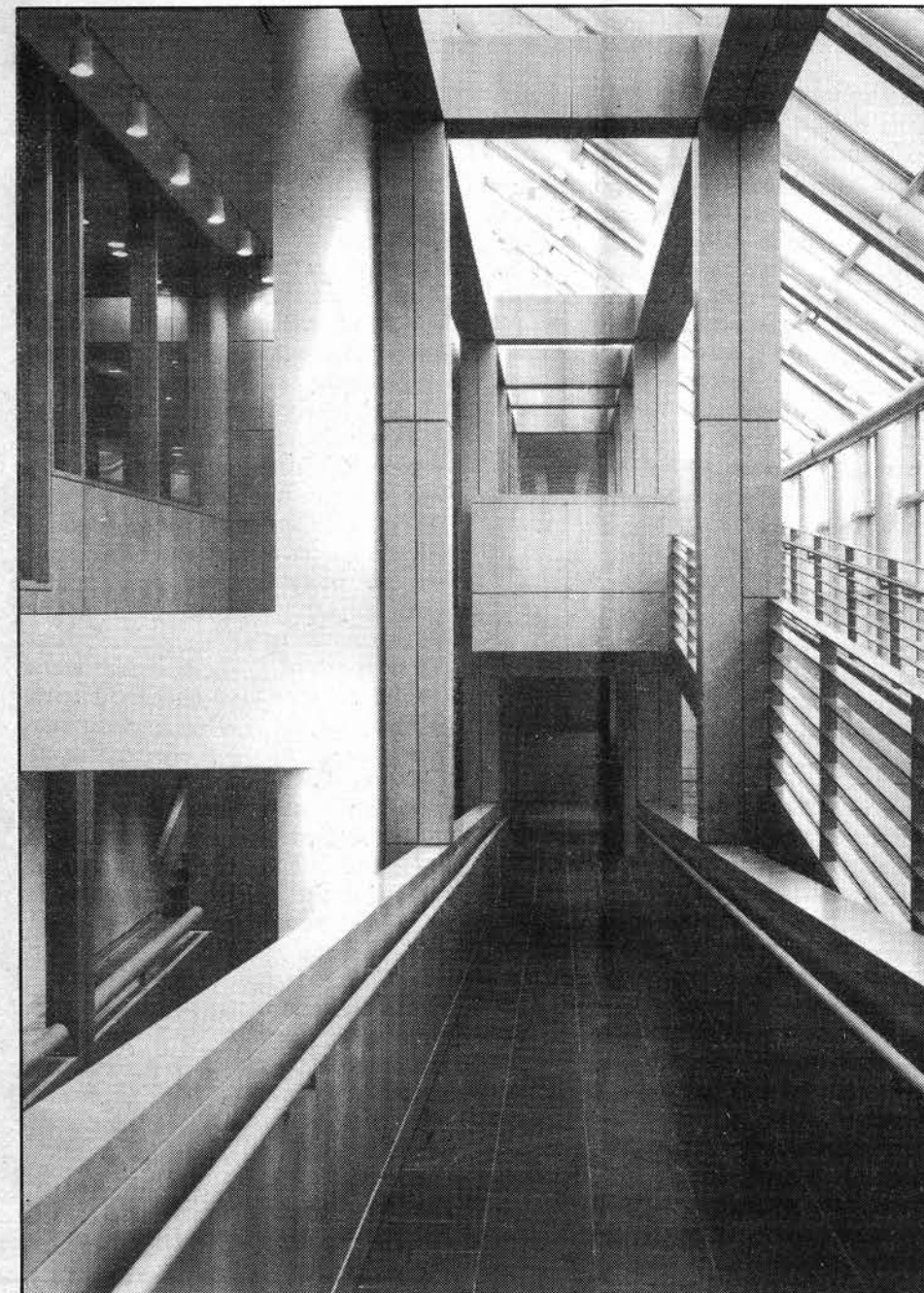
Although Scogin says everyone in the firm has contributed to its success, it is he who seems to have achieved the most individual success. It was Scogin's dedication to the profession that captured the attention of Harvard's design school. The school was looking for someone who could not only contribute in the classroom, but also at the drawing table, says Gerald McCue, Harvard's faculty design dean. In describing Scogin, McCue uses adjectives such as "prolific," "imaginative" and "experimental."

"Because of his background as both designer and principal," McCue says, "Mack brings to the GSD an unusual depth of perspective on contemporary American practice."

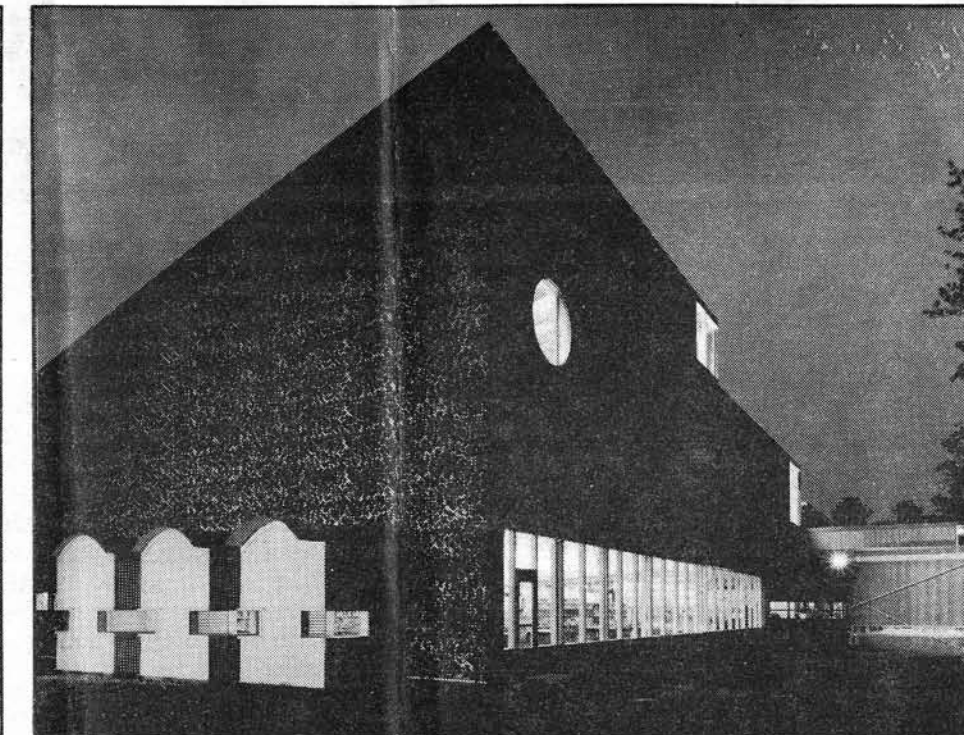
That's not all Scogin will be taking to Cambridge. Although the firm will maintain its Atlanta office, it will open a second office this fall in Boston. Scogin says he can't provide details yet on how that office will operate, but Atlanta will remain the firm's headquarters. A Boston office would not only prove useful to Scogin, but also to Elam, who also teaches at Harvard.

So far, the firm doesn't have any projects in the Boston area, but that doesn't seem to bother Scogin. Opening the new office seems like the right thing to do, he says, adding that the company has no specific growth plans.

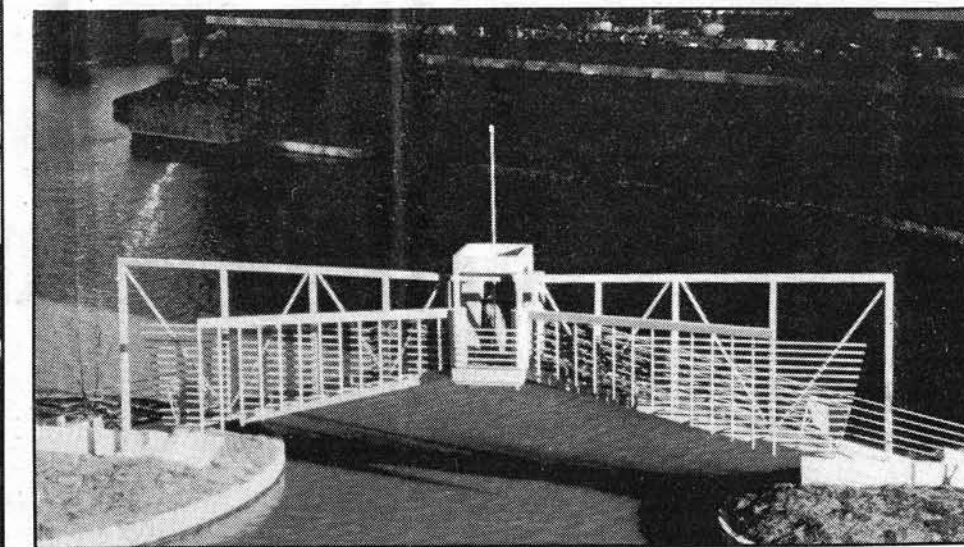
"We don't set goals," he says. "Our intention is just to get the next project and do the job." ■



High Museum branch: inside Georgia-Pacific Center



Clayton County library: striking design grabs attention



The Bridge at Concourse: won 1989 GAAIA Award for Excellence