



PA

PROGRESSIVE
ARCHITECTURE

12:90

Meaning From Chaos



1 Scogin Elam & Bray overcome political and economic pressures,

site and budget limitations, and a lack of real context in an Atlanta branch library.

From Buckhead Avenue, the north façade (1) is largely dominated by the canopy and porte-cochère that connects the east parking with the entry and west parking. The west wall (2) is minimally fenestrated and has one of the largest sections of slate shingles, each individually installed by one man. Downtown Atlanta is in the distance. Sunshades on the south façade (3) cut solar glare and penetration in the reading room.

Buckhead is not Georgetown. Yet in designing a new branch library for the Atlanta-Fulton County Library System, Atlanta architects Scogin Elam & Bray were confronted with local objections that the proposed design was antithetical to the "Georgetown character" of the area. Once developed with a small town core, the Buckhead neighborhood has undergone an almost continuous metamorphosis from an upscale residential character to a growing commercial/residential/entertainment sector. It is increasingly, as the architects characterize it, "a really dynamic situation of open parking lots, nightclubs, highrise office buildings, highrise condominiums, churches, boutiques, Yuppie housing, and multimillion-dollar homes."

It is this dynamism to which the design is

addressed, along with very strong site influences. The square footage and parking requirements of the program literally consumed all buildable areas of the site. At the north end is Buckhead Avenue with more pedestrian activity, compared with the downhill south side, which is primarily automobile-oriented. However, the most important asset of the property is a rare view from its location at the top of a hill back toward downtown Atlanta. As Mack Scogin points out, "That played a huge role in the design, because it is a rare opportunity for a view – a public view – of the downtown part of the city. There are lots of private views from tall buildings, but rarely can you find a public view." That prompted the county to back the architects in their position that it was the public's right to control this rare site, not that of private developers.

The building's organization is a fairly simple linear one. A public meeting room located near the entry can be used separately, after library hours. The entry leads to the circulation desk cone, and from there the progression is directly to the main reading room, with children's reading area, browsing and conference spaces, and work-

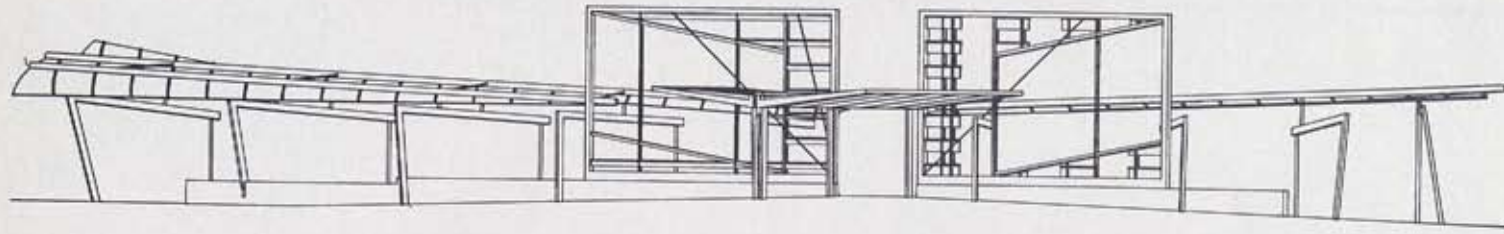
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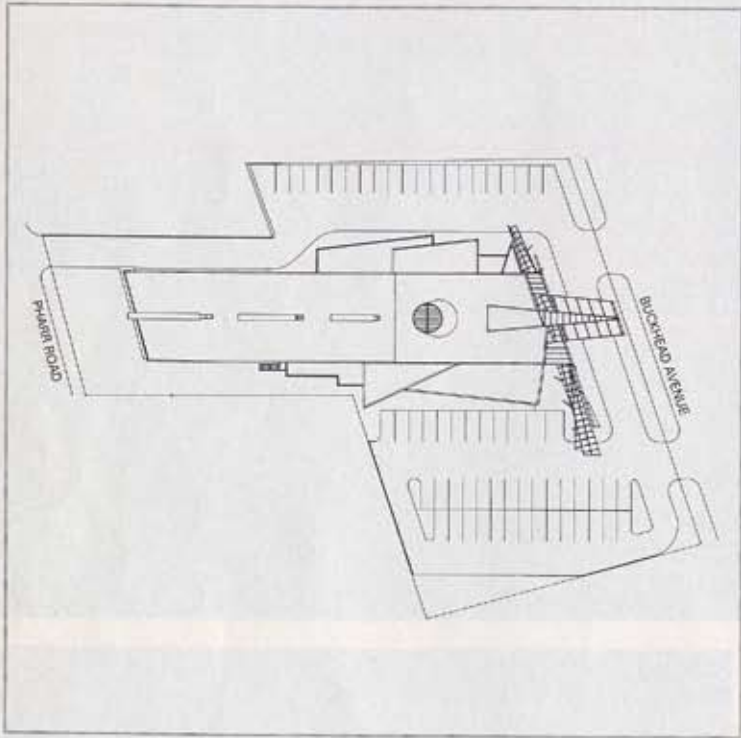


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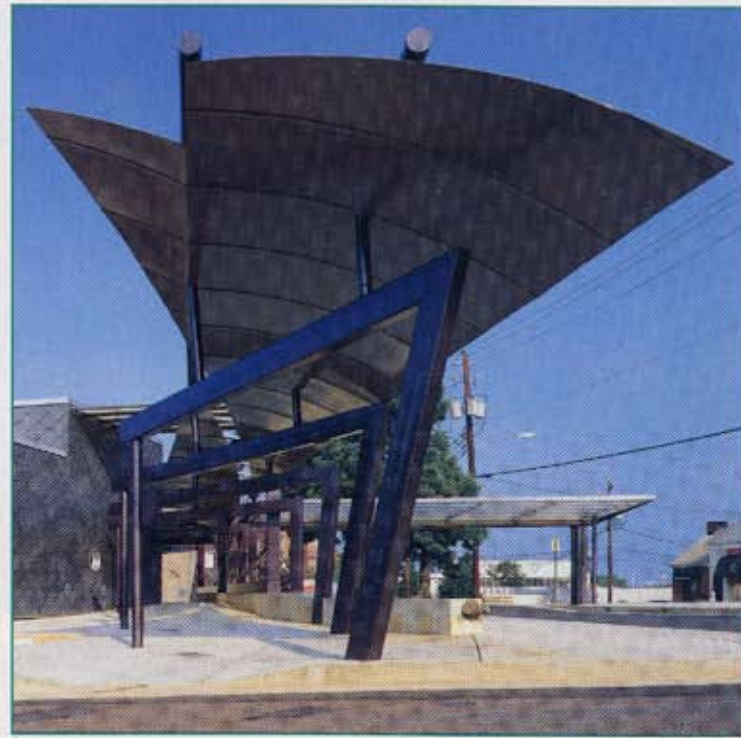
NORTH ELEVATION SCREEN WALL, CANOPY AND PORTE-COCHÈRE

20/6m



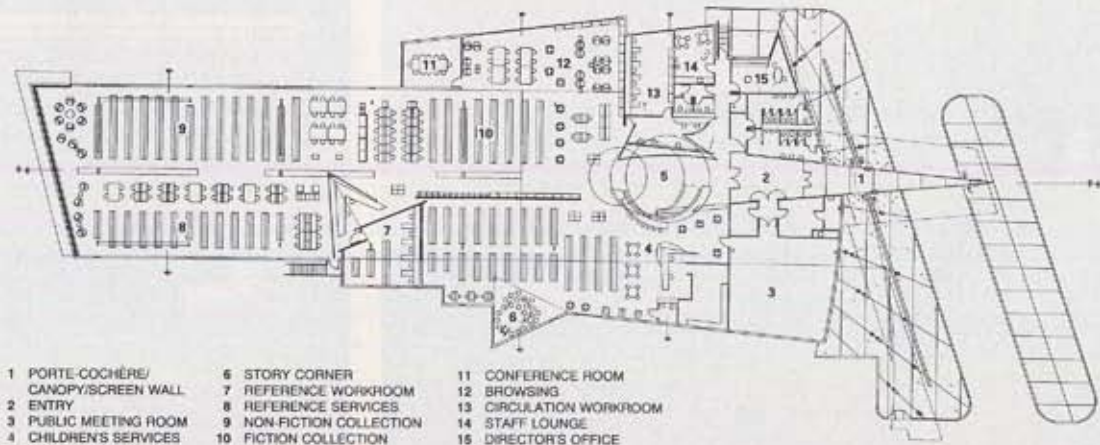
SITE PLAN

100/30m



4

Curved rolled steel plate forms the canopy from the east parking area (4) to the porte-cochère and entry. The librarian's office forms a prominent wedgelike prow at the west end of the curved front facade (5). Comprising steel, corrugated translucent fiberglass, and laminated glass, the porte cochere, canopy, and screen wall form a complex collage of pieces that brings pedestrian scale to the front entry. Steel members are painted in an automotive deep gray that adds a richness, and artfully placed glass partial infill panels complete the composition.



- 1 PORTE-COCHÈRE/CANOPY/SCREEN WALL
- 2 ENTRY
- 3 PUBLIC MEETING ROOM
- 4 CHILDREN'S SERVICES
- 5 CIRCULATION DESK
- 6 STORY CORNER
- 7 REFERENCE WORKROOM
- 8 REFERENCE SERVICES
- 9 NON-FICTION COLLECTION
- 10 FICTION COLLECTION
- 11 CONFERENCE ROOM
- 12 BROWSING
- 13 CIRCULATION WORKROOM
- 14 STAFF LOUNGE
- 15 DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

40'/12m

5



The main reading and stack area (6) is dominated by full-height glazing toward the view back to downtown, and punctuated by three skylighted slots on the north-south axis. Diagonal steel framing members accomplish lateral structural bracing. The interior focal point is the circulation desk area (7), housed within the slant-walled conical space. At the far side of the cone (8), a pink acrylic window at a child's sitting height connects with the children's collection area beyond. A typical steel bar joist continues through the tapered space, which is truncated by a domed skylight at the top, beyond the roof plane.

Project: Buckhead Branch Library, Atlanta.

Architects: Scogin Elam & Bray, Atlanta (Mack Scogin with Merrill Elam and Lloyd Bray; Susan Desko, John Lauer, Chriss Mills, Carlos Tardio, Shawn Evans, Patricia Kerlin, Ellen Hooker, Ron Mitchell, and Leslee Hare, team).

Client: Fulton County, Atlanta-Fulton County Library System; James Brooks, library planner. **Site:** t-shaped through-block parcel in a mostly low scale (but changing) light urban area; boundary streets are Buckhead Avenue and Pharr Road.

Program: replacement branch library to contain reading and browsing spaces and stacks, a children's collection and reading area, staff offices, circulation area, and public meeting room.

Structure: steel bar joists and steel frame on concrete foundations.

Major materials: slate shingles, rolled steel plate and steel frame, translucent fiberglass sheet, painted gypsum board (see *Building Materials*, p. 110)

Mechanical system: gas heating, electric cooling, six constant volume single-zone rooftop units.

Consultants: Browder + LeGuizamon, structural; Jones Nall & Davis, mechanical; Doug Allen, landscape; Heery Program Managers, construction program management.

General contractor: Wilkerson Construction.

Costs: \$1.8 million; \$90/sq ft.

Photos: Timothy Hursley.



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rooms on either side of the north-south axis. The exterior expression of the facility's long dimension is that of a projection rising up from the pedestrian scale of the Buckhead Avenue entry to the more lofty reading room volume. Scogin says the intention was to employ traditional elements of architectural organization, a porte-cochère and colonnade leading to a definitive front entry, then to an arrival area, and on to the main functional element. The porte-cochère canopy construction is purposely complex and visually active to make the front elements sympathetic to pedestrian activity; the assemblage connects both parking lots and provides street access in front.

Across the south façade, sun shades act to cut down sky glare and direct sun in the reading room, enhancing the downtown view. A major focus is the truncated, slanted, skylighted cone at and above the circulation desk, which projects through the roof, resembling the smokestack on a large gray ship.

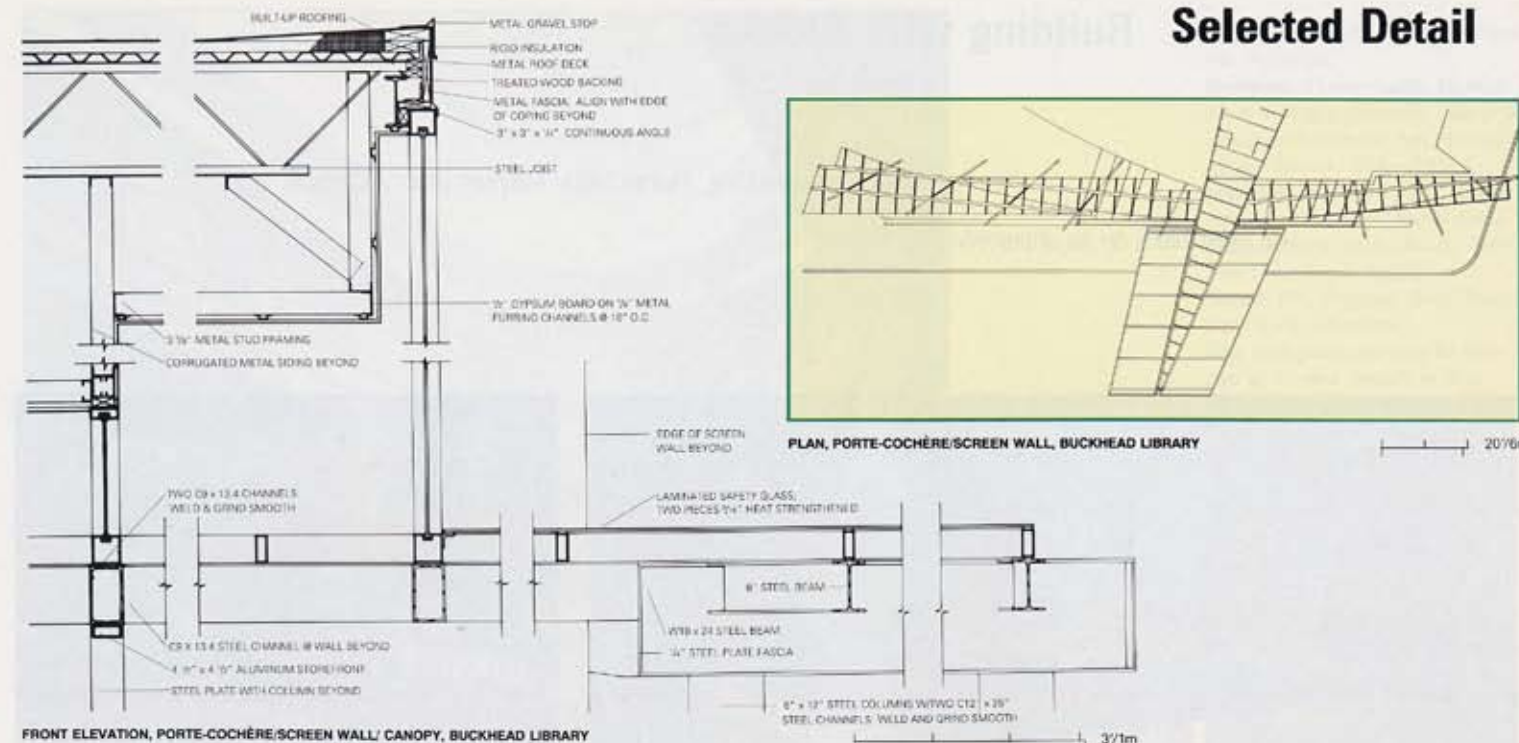
The gray slate was chosen, Scogin says, to deal with two issues, the most obvious was how to wrap a building shaped like the library. The other

divides into two more or less conflicting goals, to signify something that has no apparent rational organization or directional implications, yet to represent a permanence usually characterizing a civic building. Scogin sees the slate as being a very traditional material used in a "new, dynamic way," more a collection of systems than one uniform surface treatment.

Given the wildly disparate elements that comprise Buckhead and the streetscapes directly around the library, a description would be more apt to include the term "chaos" than "Georgetown." Mack Scogin attributes much of the success of the library project and the ultimate defeat of the would-be "design sheriffs" to "tremendous support" from the community as a whole, the library administration, and the county administration. The facility is a skillful and inspired addition to an area in constant flux. The fact that some members of the earlier negative factions have come around to support the resulting building is gratifying, and appropriate. Buckhead now has one of the best buildings not only in the city-county library system, but in the city as a whole. **Jim Murphy**

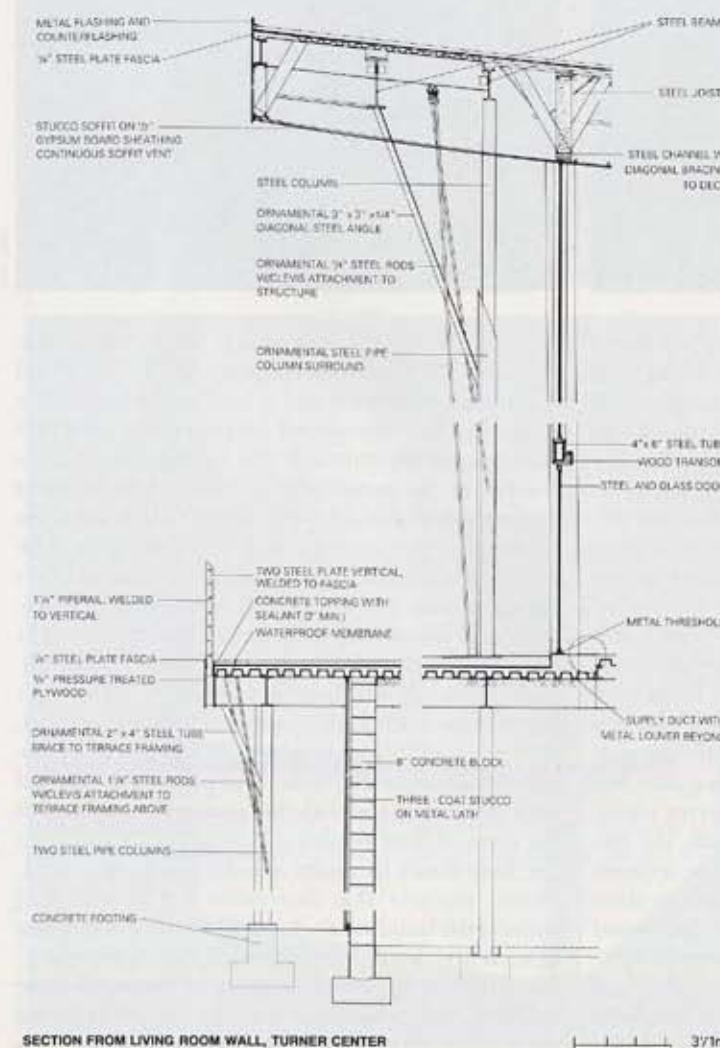


Selected Detail



FRONT ELEVATION, PORTE-COCHÈRE/SCREEN WALL/ CANOPY, BUCKHEAD LIBRARY

PLAN, PORTE-COCHÈRE/SCREEN WALL, BUCKHEAD LIBRARY



SECTION FROM LIVING ROOM WALL, TURNER CENTER

Details on this page, representing both the Buckhead Library and the D. Abbott Turner Center, are only a minor indication of the thought process that goes into the work of Scogin Elam & Bray. The Living Room wall section of the Turner Center, relatively straightforward and unremarkable at a glance, embodies the upward turn of the roof and the diagonal non-structural angles at the columns, both enriching the expression of the overall to a great degree.

Probably the first thing a visitor notices at the Buckhead Library, the complicated canopy/porte-cochère/screen wall assembly at the entry required a large number of details for the understanding of the client, the builder, and probably the architects as well. It is a masterful collage of pieces that pull together to make a very functional design element and association with pedestrian scale.

The very high level of design quality in both the Buckhead library and the Turner Center and Village is hardly surprising, coming from the same group of principals that created the Clayton County, Georgia, library (P/A, November 1988, p.82), the unbuilt ra-

dio station for Atlanta's WQXI (P/A, January 1988, p.99), and the Atlanta Herman Miller showroom, not to mention the downtown branch of the High Museum in the Georgia Pacific Building, and the small bridge/ folly for an office building grouping near the perimeter. All of these projects involved clients willing to take the risk of building unorthodox and brilliant designs, to one degree or another. They represent the further development of a talent evident in much of the work the principals had begun while Mack Scogin was president and head of design at Heery & Heery Architects. Their design for the new Coca Cola headquarters in Atlanta, while not completed entirely as Scogin intended, is a clear forerunner of the Buckhead and Emory projects, a level of skill that ranks the work among the best being done anywhere. The challenge, now that Scogin is chairman at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, is clearly to keep the work flowing, a condition of which he, Merrill Elam, and Lloyd Bray are quite aware.