ARCHITECTURE

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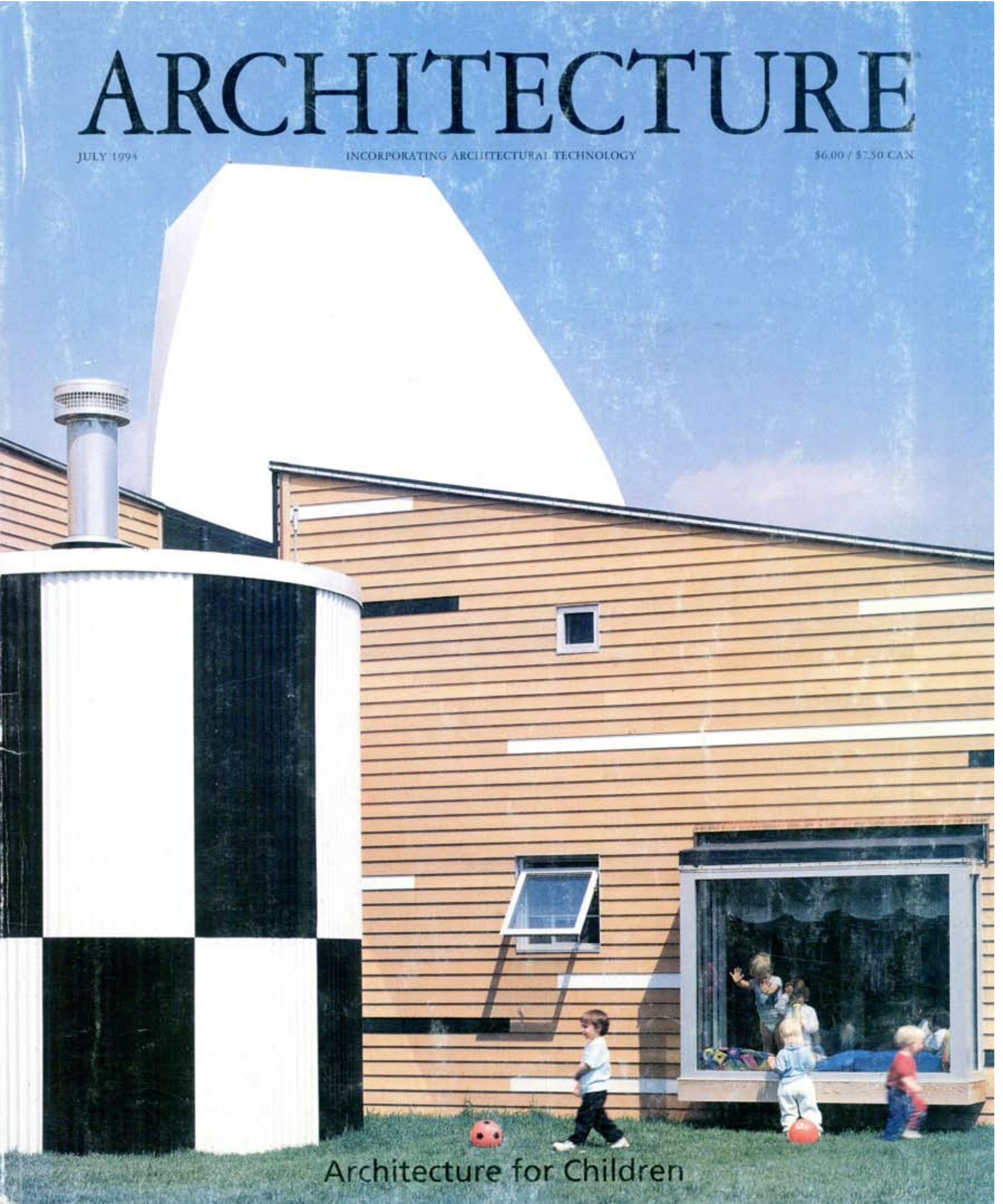
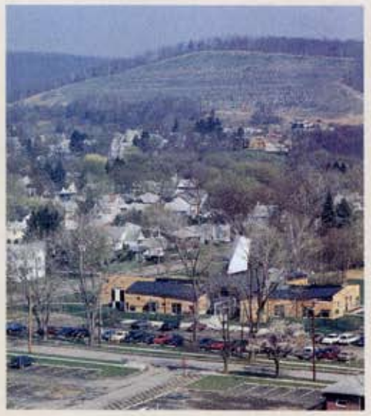
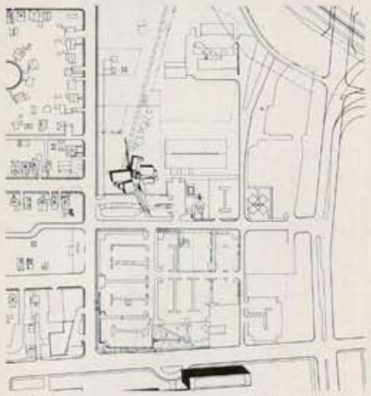


Architecture for Children

Corning Child Development Center
Corning, New York
Scogin Elam and Bray Architects

Children in Motion





SITE PLAN

TOP: Gently inclined and curved roofs of the Corning Child Development Center complement the hills defining Corning's river-valley setting.
SITE PLAN: Child-care center acts as a transitional building between a residential neighborhood (left) and Corning's corporate campus (bottom).
FACING PAGE: Quizzical clapboard facade with disparate windows and "sailing" light scoop consummate the view down a residential street.

Despite their proliferation across the country, day-care centers are often "charity" spaces improvised in warehouses, office buildings, church basements, or houses. Although some day-care providers have developed standardized plans and some corporations have built freestanding structures, remarkably few investigations have been made into day-care centers as a building type. With unusual institutional insight and exemplary patronage, Corning Incorporated, a conglomerate known for its glass products, realized the task could yield special and constructive results, as evidenced in the Corning Child Development Center.

The building's principal clients are infants and preschoolers, and it was for their sensibilities that Scogin Elam and Bray of Atlanta designed the center, financed by Corning for its staff and the community. Mismatched windows, quizzical roofscape, and accidentally patterned clapboard seem to eschew the order architects spend their careers cultivating.

Anthropologists call aboriginal cultures untouched by modern culture "precontact," and in this sense the preschool building is precontact: Like the children who have not yet had their spontaneity trained out of them, the building itself has not been schooled and ruled. Or as one taxicab driver put it, pulling up to the long, low, dynamically shaped, occasionally awkward structure: "It looks like some kid drew it."

Working with Sam Frank, former director of architecture and design for Corning, Mack Scogin and Merrill Elam, partners-in-charge of design, realized that children bring a different point of view to a building. The goal of designing for a child's emotional, perceptual, and physical accessibility proved difficult because few building types are more regulated than day care, with rules and codes for materials, security, life safety, and square footage. "All the regulations push you toward maintenance and surveillance and overlook the unquantifiable ways that children see and learn from the world," points out Scogin, chairman of the architecture department at Harvard. "These buildings should also address the imagination and fantasy—the antithesis of control. In the end, having a little of both is right for a day-care center."

Many centers, including those built from the ground up, assume that teachers and kids will simply slap colors and animal graphics onto a neutral background—that the joy of a center is in the surface finishes. "We went in the other direction, believing the building itself is as much a tool for caregivers as any of the other paraphernalia," explains Scogin. "The overall spatial experience teaches about light, sound, and spatial progression."

The architects state their position immediately at the entry to the Corning Child Development Center, where adults can walk through a tall door, and children, through a short one. The entry leads to a two-and-a-half-story space that is the center of an octopuslike plan with three arms for three "family" groups of children of mixed age.

BELOW: Entrance, with short and tall doors set in trapezoidal aedicula, is located between children's wing (left) and administration wing (right).
BOTTOM: Side elevation of the day-care center, viewed from adjacent residential neighborhood, reveals tall, multipurpose space common to all wings.
FACING PAGE: Center is designed to maximize contact between inside and outside. Checkerboard-patterned turret conceals mechanical systems.

The 11,000-square-foot, $1.2 million center was designed for about 100 children.

The central space is occupied by a translucent cone flaring down from a skylight. Luminous on a sunny day, its corrugated fiberglass materializes light, but it also works as a stall surrounding a wet-play area. An adjacent spiral staircase winds up to an observation balcony leading to one wing; beyond the staircase, a tall, bright, and colorful play space and eating area complements an open kitchen, so children can see food prepared. In a corner, a stairway to nowhere suggests a magical spot, perhaps good for storytelling, and the open space beneath the stairs suggests a space for hiding out.

Each long arm contains a wide corridor—furnished with half-moon booths, carpets, and play areas—which serves as a communal living room for the three classrooms accommodating three age groups: infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. Windows are low, high, and irregular. Shed roofs enclose classrooms that are tall on one side and short on the other; ceiling ducts, joists, and light fixtures are exposed. The interior oscillates between being a clearly planned, three-wing school building and a spatial exploratorium.

The basic issue for Scogin and Elam was how to see through a child's eyes. "Subtle shifts of scale are very important," explains Elam. "The kids are all about growing up, so if you make it all childlike, then you take away that aspirational aspect for them to get taller and become adults. Likewise, if you make

BELOW: As in nearby wood-frame houses, the Corning center boasts a wide variety of windows—some loopy, some proper—that constitute a lesson in geometry and in point of view.
FACING PAGE: Classrooms open directly into the yard; some feature window seats in window boxes scaled to children. Light scoop is constructed of a translucent vinyl laminate stretched over a tubular-aluminum frame.

the building all about children, you worry about grown-ups. You also have to pique the imagination of the child in the adult."

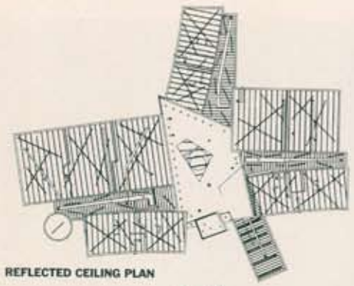
The architects also noticed that children move constantly, which is critical to learning, so they suffused the building with the idea of motion: Not only are there things to climb, but forms shaped with suggestions of movement as well. "We tried to translate the idea of motion as a learning process into the building," remarks Elam.

Though the Corning Child Development Center differs significantly from surrounding structures, it is not estranged. Located between a suburban neighborhood of two-story frame houses and an edge of Corning's corporate campus, the building had to mediate between the two scales (while responding to a nearby hill). "We tried to bump up the forms without resorting to peaked roofs, to make the building slightly larger than the houses, but still related," explains Scogin. "Through its abstraction, the design also acknowledges the old Corning headquarters tower by Harrison and Abramovitz in a Modernist way."

By relating the design to the context, Scogin believes he is teaching children about place, locating them in the specifics of their community. "I can't think of a better place for architects to make a contribution than the critical moment of shaping young lives. Just imagine, if every major corporation in the United States did just one little building that is open to the public. Think of the profound difference."—*Joseph Giovannini*

BELOW LEFT: Children enjoy a built-in banquette in the living room corridor.
BELOW RIGHT: Playful window offers lesson in construction, with exposed studs and window clips.
BOTTOM LEFT: Preschoolers pose for a portrait at their play tables.
BOTTOM RIGHT: Scogin Elam and Bray Architects designed tables for multipurpose uses, such as a window seat.
FACING PAGE: Low and high windows illuminate a room under a ceiling exposed to reveal structure, lights, and vents.

BELOW: Fiberglass tipi carries light into multipurpose room and acts as a shower stall for a wet-play area inside.
PLANS: Children's wings and administration wing wheel off central entrance, adjacent to kitchen and multipurpose room. Second-floor plan indicates elevated observation corridor (center).
FACING PAGE: View of multipurpose room, looking back at kitchen, reveals fiberglass shower stall and skylight, with observation deck.



REFLECTED CEILING PLAN

SECOND FLOOR PLAN

FIRST FLOOR PLAN

1 ENTRY
2 RECEPTION
3 PANTRY
4 WET-PLAY AREA
5 MULTIPURPOSE ROOM
6 CLASSROOM
7 GROUP PLAY AREA
8 OFFICE
9 STAFF LOUNGE
10 CONFERENCE ROOM
11 MECHANICAL/STORAGE
12 OBSERVATION WALKWAY
13 OBSERVATION/PLAY AREA

CORNING CHILD DEVELOPMENT CENTER
CORNING, NEW YORK
SCOGIN ELAM AND BRAY ARCHITECTS

ARCHITECT: Scogin Elam and Bray Architects, Atlanta—Merrill Elam, Mack Scogin, Lloyd Bray (principals-in-charge); Jeff Atwood, Denise Dumais, Martha Henderson, Ingrid Dannecker, Carlos Tardio (design team)
ENGINEERS: Pruitt Eberly Stone (structural); Adams Davis Partners (mechanical/electrical); Hunt Engineers and Architects (civil)
CONSULTANTS: Ramon Luminance Design (lighting); Costing Services Group (cost); Raymond and Raymond Associates (food service); William S. Lucas (graphic design)
GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Wellco
COST: $1.2 million
PHOTOGRAPHER: Timothy Hursley