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CHRYSLER DESIGN AWARDS

A DECADE OF DESIGN

## A suburban Atlanta library by MACK SCOGIN and MERRILL ELAM has an exterior wall that appears

formed out of the surrounding red clay hills. At a key moment in the building's construction, local children were assembled to imprint their hands into the fresh stucco and use boughs of pine straw, abundant locally, to brush the wall and give it a weathered character. It was an emblematic Scogin and Elam gesture—architecture fashioned not from the hubris of the designers but from the imperatives of the site and the wishes and actions of the users.

This Atlanta-based architectural couple and their eponymous firm defy categorization. They live and work in a city of endless commercial strips and mirrored-glass office buildings, but their body of work is composed largely of modest private homes, academic buildings and libraries. Their honey-laced draws hint at a casual and approachable demeanor, but both actively teach at some of the country's best architecture schools—he at Harvard (since 1990; department chair 1990–1995), she at Harvard, SCI-Arc, Yale and elsewhere. Their work can evoke the crisp planar geometry of early-20th-century modernism and the free forms of deconstructivism, but they eschew the rigid doctrine



of the early modernists and decline to join the more recent tendency of celebrity architects to establish a "signature style."

Scogin and Elam also resist any notion that their buildings reflect a "southern" sensibility. Scogin does, however, aver that "being southern has taught us to look at things more carefully." So just as the southern writer listens to language, Scogin and Elam observe their surroundings, and the resulting buildings are suffused with memory—a university chapel's simple white forms recall a rural church and a library's corrugated roof looks like fluted Doric columns laid on their sides, as if to represent a regional culture at once vanquished and defiantly different.

Of late, Scogin and Elam's work is becoming broader geographically—commissions in the Southwest and New England and the potential for work in Europe. Wherever they build buildings, they will surely continue to make more quintessentially local gestures and evoke more culturally specific memories.

—JAMES MCCOWN

- 1984 Founded Parker and Scogin, later changed to Scogin Elam and Bray.
- 1987 Received National AIA Honor Award for High Museum at Georgia-Pacific Center.
- 1988 National AIA Award for High Museum at Georgia-Pacific Center.
- 1989 National AIA Honor Award for Clayton County Headquarters Library
- 1991 National AIA/ALA Award for Excellence for Buckhead Branch Library.
- 1992 National AIA Honor Award for House Chmar.
- 1995 Academy of Arts and Letters in Architecture. Willow Street Student Housing, Tulane University.
- 1997 *Architectural Record* Houses Award for Mountain House. Wellesley College master plan.
- 1998 *Architectural Record* Houses Award for 64 Wakefield. Austin E. Knowlton School of Architecture, Ohio State University.
- 1999 National AIA Honor Award for Excellence for Nomentana Residence. Included in "The Un-Private House" at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
- 2001 Wellesley Campus Center, Wellesley College.



LEFT Turner Village at Chandler School of Theology, Emory University, Atlanta, completed fall 1989.

BOTTOM LEFT Nomentana Residence, Lubell, Maine, completed spring 1997.

BELOW Interior, second-floor lap pool and master bedroom, Wakefield, Atlanta, completed spring 1998.

"There are no rooms, just situations," says Scogin of the Atlanta home he and Elam designed for themselves.

Photo: Karen D. '04 Wakefield Drive, *Architectural Record*, April 1998.





**LEFT** House Chmar, private residence, Atlanta, completed 1989.

**OPPOSITE** Model for "White Mini with Trees," Wolfsburg, Georgia, Science Center, winter 1999.

**MAJOR EARLY INFLUENCES?**

The people around us whose ideas, attitudes and work habits leave an imprint on the world and who, like us, are mesmerized by our patrons/clients and their situation in the world.

**ADMIRE ANYONE OUTSIDE YOUR FIELD?**

Anyone who is talented, serious, thinking structurally about design, contributing to the visual richness of the world and making us chuckle along the way.

**KEY COMPONENTS OF A DESIGNER'S EDUCATION?**

Everything. The world at large!

**MOST DIFFICULT DESIGN PROJECT?**

The project of architecture.

**WHEN IS A DESIGN FINISHED?**

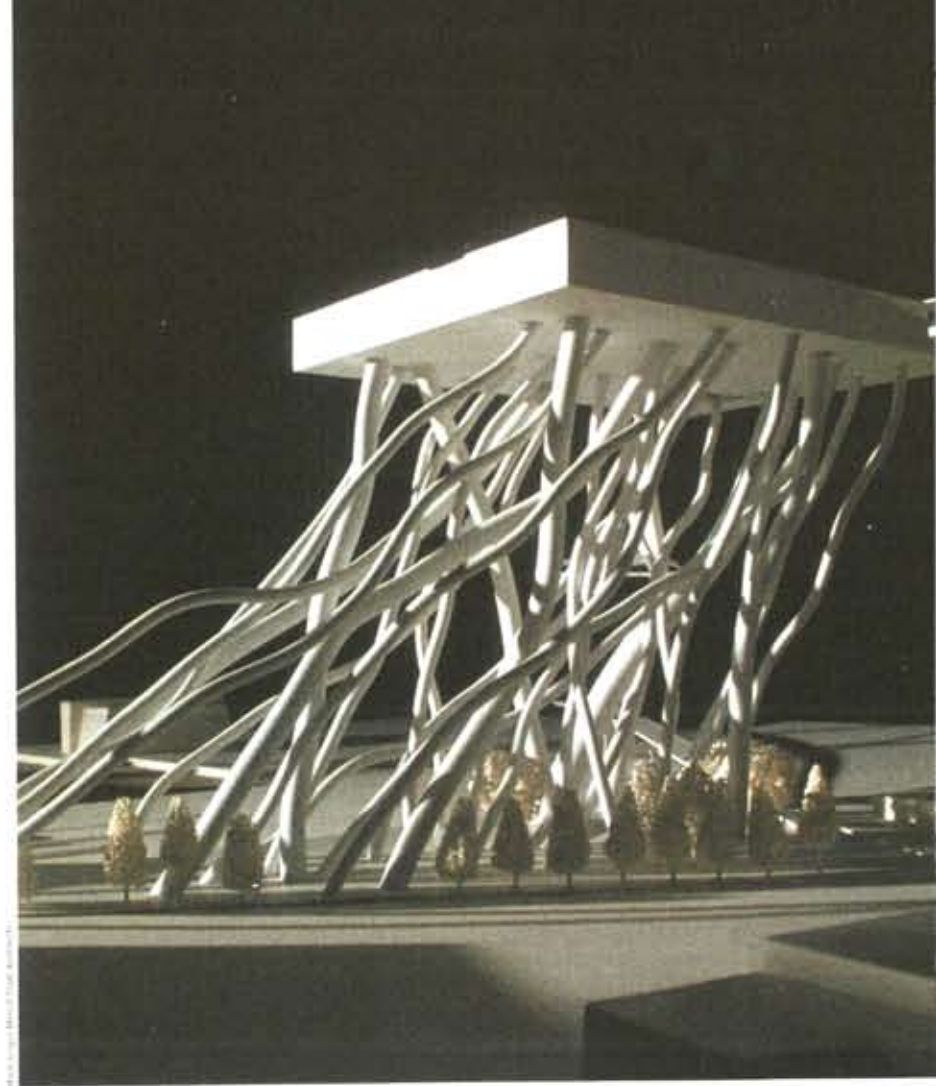
When an intuitive restlessness begins to relax. (This could come many years after a work is realized.)

**ACHIEVEMENTS THAT GIVE YOU THE MOST SATISFACTION?**

The space of the High Museum at Georgia-Pacific Center (now the Folk Art and Photography Galleries) is a calming, healing kind of space. A place of restoration dug into the sidewalks of the city. It is a space of quietude—an architectural massage of sorts. One goes in agitated and comes out calm.

**UNDERRATED OR OVERLOOKED DESIGN?**

We work in a place that perseveres, flourishes in cycles, endures but lacks confidence in the autochthonous.



**BY SCOGIN AND ELAM**

Scogin, Mack, and Merrill Elam. *Map 7: Mack and Merrill (The Michigan Architecture Papers)*, edited by Jason Young. The 1999 Charles and Ray Eames Leslie Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, College of Architecture and Business, 2000.

Saunders, William S., Peter G. Rowe and Mack Scogin, eds. *Reflections on Architectural Practice in the Nineties*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996.

Scogin, Mack, and Joseph Eskewick. *The Architecture of Billie Cywinski Jackson*. Gloucester, MA: Rockport, 1996.

**ABOUT SCOGIN AND ELAM**

McGuigan, Cathleen. "Burning Down the House." *Newsweek*, July 19, 1999.

Riley, Terence. *The Un-Private House*. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1999.

Ibane, Jelis. "Design Notebook: Return to Innovation: a House That Dares." *The New York Times*, July 2, 1999.

Stein, Karen. "Record Houses." *Architectural Record*, April 1998.

Pearson, Clifford A., ed. *Modern American Houses: Four Decades of Award-Winning Design in Architectural Record*. New York: Abrams, 1996.

Linder, Mark, ed. *Scogin Elam and Bray: Critical Architecture/Architectural Criticism*. New York: Rizzoli, 1992.