

Buildings across Time

Third Edition

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**An Introduction to
World Architecture**



16.58 Tod Williams and Billie Tsien, Neurosciences Institute, La Jolla, California, 1995.

Being so understated and contemplative in its site development, this monastery-like building ensemble comes close to being unphotographable. In this vignette, looking from the Theory Center to the auditorium, the reference to Louis Kahn's nearby Salk Institute (see Fig. 16.13) is unmistakable. However, Williams and Tsien have downplayed views to the mountains (not the ocean) and have set their pool (not channel) of water at an angle (not on the principal axis), emphasizing the skydome as the enframed feature and creating a metaphor for the complex, nuanced activities of the human brain and its creative powers that are studied here.



16.59 Mack Scogin and Merrill Elam, Wang Campus Center, Wellesley College, Wellesley, Massachusetts, 2006.

As something of a metaphor for the freewheeling and varied student organizations at Wellesley College, this building moves up, in, out, cants, and torques. An appreciation of the diversity of the interior spaces will require a visit.

creating an environment of random episodic incidents and encounters that can be experienced in myriad sequences and combinations and results in a unique, cumulative awareness for each participant.

Their Museum of American Folk Art (2001) stands just west of the entrance to the Museum of Modern Art on 53rd Street in New York City. Almost menacing, with white-bronze panels hanging like giant shields on the outside, its eight stories rise as a narrow canyon on the interior. It is difficult to imagine a better fit between architects and museum contents, which here oscillate between the polarities of hard-edged, sometimes disturbing, reality and romantic longing. It is also difficult to imagine what the construction documents looked like, as the compressed complexity of detailing is as dizzying as the internal spatial manipulation. Materials choices suggest the same kind of indestructibility seen on the exterior, and include iron-like wood from long-submerged Douglas-fir logs, bush-hammered concrete, cold-rolled steel, and aged Italian limestone. The architects have compared the rich and varied experience of moving through their building to that of Sir John Soane's 13 Lincoln's Inn Fields (see Figs. 14.7–14.8), and the comparison is valid, as both contain tall, top-lit spaces and make virtues of their designers' obsessions.

MACK SCOGIN AND MERRILL ELAM

Difficult to characterize—part 1950s drive-in restaurant, part Russian Constructivism, part art installation, part (sometimes by economic necessity) local hardware store—the early work of Atlanta architects Mack Scogin (born 1943) and Merrill Elam (born 1943) speaks with the voice of authenticity in the language of originality. Their eclectic inspirations seemed to know no bounds, be-

they the Mannerist Villa Giulia in Rome or a thrown-together barbecue stand in some forgotten corner of the South, and in the potentially spirit-numbing architectural marketplace, they have somehow retained their sense of wonder about the process of building.

Long before the computer made it possible to more easily define irregular geometries and so to emphasize building enclosure systems, Scogin and Elam moved the selection of external cladding materials outside the realm of the familiar and into that of admirable strangeness. The Branch Library in Clayton County (1989) outside Atlanta looks like a miniature airplane hangar wrapped in the mottled cover of an outlandishly oversized composition book (actually made by camouflage-painting corrugated sheet metal). When the facility opened, patron numbers soared.

In 2000, they completed their design for Knowlton Hall that houses the architectural school at The Ohio State University; the building opened in 2004. The earliest plans looked like collages of overlapping trapezoidal planes, with their lines responding to the campus's pedestrian traffic pattern (a more site-specific take on Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum discussed below). Because of budgetary constraints and concerns for internal orientation, a second scheme became completely orthogonal, with studio spaces and faculty offices to each side of a "system of inclined [circulation] planes" (not unlike Álvaro Siza's museum in Santiago de Compostela; see Fig. 16.44). Eventually, the architects gave their gridded plan dynamism—by exposing it to the original set of pedestrian traffic patterns—and nuance—by expanding it to the limits of the irregularly shaped site. Commensurately, the building's cladding became as aggressive as the site-generated lines of force. Highly textured expanses of marble

shingles (their patterning inspired by quarrying practices but, given the architects' lexicon of Southern inspirations, perhaps comparable to a masonry armadillo) present a hovering curtain in front of set-back glazing. Canyon-like, transparent, landscaped courts and a huge, almost intimidating, carved-out, corner entry and interior spaces where architectural intentions never seem to end, make for a building that demands engagement.

At Wellesley College, southwest of Boston, Scogin and Elam got to take the architectural gloves off, so to speak, with their design for the Wang Campus Center (Fig. 16.59). The Wellesley buildings are strewn across an almost wild landscape that works its way down to a lake. The jaggedly-massed Campus Center looks like something geological, powerfully carved and then deposited here during the last period of glaciation. Wellesley has long prided itself on diversity, before the word became politicized jargon, and on educating students to think for themselves, which means that the right institution and the right architects have met.

The Center stands at the heart of the campus and has a plan outline that looks like a New England decapod crustacean, claws extended and making its way across the landscape. The program called for spaces to support Wellesley's multifarious student organizations as well as a bookstore, pub, café, and a big room for varied events. Consequently, the wildly angular plan contains only a limited number of identifiable rooms, being made up instead of "unowned spaces" and banks of lockers that invite student groups to gather up what they need and appropriate a place of their liking.

Taken to three dimensions, the building becomes

lived-in sculpture, not the Frank Gehry type, where flamboyant exterior form sometimes gives way to conventional interior planning, but a spatial plurality that befits the program and the institution. As for comparable thinking, the work of Hans Scharoun comes to mind, but also Herbert Greene's bird-like prairie houses and the unlikely, fluid-space investigations of Friedrich Kiesler for his "endless house." But comparison could just as easily be made to grown-up-over-time buildings in back-alley Boston or in rural Georgia. All this contextual and historical energy notwithstanding, the Wang Campus Center is artfully composed without being overwrought and, with its "geological" layers of copper-shingle cladding, could even speak coherently to a 1970s Roman-brick subdivision house. It is another building from the minds of Mack Scogin and Merrill Elam that could not have been conceived without modern art, the computer, and steel erectors who appreciate a challenge.

DANIEL LIBESKIND

Daniel Libeskind was born in Poland in 1946 but studied architecture in England and the United States. At one time labeled a Deconstructivist, he is perhaps better described as someone intent upon expressing ideas and happening to use architecture as his means of communication. His working method has involved typography and collage. In urban circumstances, he has explored the palimpsestic nature of the city, as in his winning design for the City-Edge competition in Berlin (1987). He created the plan of his Jewish Museum in Berlin by means of determinants ranging from the geographical plotting and connecting of addresses for notable Jewish Berliners, to a close reading of the texts for Arnold Schoenberg's unfinished opera *Moses and Aaron* and art critic Walter Benjamin's *One Way Street*. Needless to say, connecting the physical reality of the building with such myriad, some would say arcane, inspirations requires perseverance, if not clairvoyance, on the part of an observer. Supporters say that only through such rarefied means can such an extreme circumstance as the Holocaust even be approached, never mind understood, and that Libeskind has accomplished exactly that. His building is an extended, zigzagging, concrete box covered with a metallic skin in which angular openings have been left in a variety of shapes and patterns. The poured-concrete interior has the quality of a three-dimensional maze, more akin to a house of illusions or the set for a Kafka play than a conventional museum.

Libeskind won the international competition for the World Trade Center after Minoru Yamasaki's towers (see Fig. 14.20) were tragically destroyed by terrorist-piloted airliners in 2001. The intensely political and emotional circumstances surrounding this commission and the many overlapping jurisdictions and economic interests on a site at the base of Manhattan have led to co-authorship with David C. Childs and significant revisions in his proposal