

MINORU YAMASAKI'S RECENT BUILDINGS

PRESENTED BY ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

To achieve serenity we used arches and pools for the Central Court of the U. S. Science Pavilion at Seattle Fair.



Minoru Yamasaki, born in Seattle of Japanese parents and now one of America's most talented younger architects, must also be reckoned as one of the country's most important, because of the personal nature of his work and the number, variety and prestige of his commissions. The latest and very possibly most important of these is the proposed \$270,000,000 World Trade Center for lower Manhattan, for which Yamasaki has been named architect.

If modern architecture may be said to have already established a tradition, Yamasaki is shattering it. He uses structure and the new concrete technology as a starting point for an ornamental style and a conscious historicism that often recall Gothic and Oriental forms with evocative elegance. To a generation of architects trained on doctrines of "ornament is crime," "form follows function," "less is more," this is close to esthetic transgression.

Surprisingly like 19th-century romantic revivalism in 20th-century structural terms, Yamasaki's architecture is deliberately decorative, and among professionals, highly controversial. It is also sensitive, conscientious, exploratory, delicately sensuous and very beautiful. Currently serving on Washington's advisory board of architects for the redevelopment of Pennsylvania Avenue, Yamasaki will have an influential voice in the Government's new official policy of progressive Federal design.

All photos are by Baltazar Korab, except the Air Terminal and Seattle Fair court; the latter photo is by Glenn M. Christiansen.

MINORU YAMASAKI

Frequent visits to the Orient and to Japan have helped to confirm my belief that the understanding of certain qualities in Japanese architecture will help American architects shape the kind of environment necessary to a better life. Being a Nisei probably makes this a logical attitude for me to assume.

Though I jokingly protest that those who contend that my buildings have a distinctly Oriental flavor must have seen my face or name before seeing my work, I am fully aware that my admiration of certain intrinsic qualities in Japanese architecture has had a positive effect on the underlying philosophy on which I try to base my designs.

The reason I believe it is so important to clarify the objectives of this philosophy is because today in America and in the rest of the world there are some very influential architects who sincerely believe that all buildings must be "strong." In explaining the word "strong" in this context, the definition seems to connote "powerful"—that each building should be a monument to the virility of our society. These architects look with some derision upon attempts to build a friendly, more gentle kind of building. I have heard endless discussions on this point in architectural circles in America and Europe, and in Japan.

The basis for their belief is that our culture is derived primarily from Europe, and most of the important traditional examples of

European architecture are monumental ones. Western architectural education has been slanted heavily toward Europe in architectural history, almost completely ignoring the very important periods of architecture of other parts of the world, such as Saracenic, Japanese, Chinese, or Indian. European historical architecture, for the most part, has been based on the quality of monumentality. The need of the state, church or the feudal families, the primary patrons of these buildings, to awe and impress the masses of people is clearly reflected in most of the important historical examples of architecture in Europe. It is inevitable that architects who admire these great monumental buildings of Europe strive for the quality most evident in them—that of grandeur. Deep in the heart of every architect, and I am no exception, is the ambition to erect a Chartres, a San Pietro, for his own time.

The overwhelming uplift and excitement experienced in seeing buildings such as these cannot help but influence our thoughts and our work. Yet we must realize that the buildings we build for our times are for a totally different purpose. The buildings necessary for our society should not be objects to awe and impress us, but should be part of an environment to enhance our way of life and to serve as a thoughtful background for the activities of contemporary man. Attempts to turn commercial buildings, schools, or residences into cathedrals or palaces can only result in buildings completely incongruous to our way of life. The elements of mysticism and power basic to this kind of building have little place in the world of free men.

Such buildings can never be part of an appropriate environment for a democratic society. They are much more appropriate as an image for the totalitarian principles which we abhor. The dogmas of totalitarianism demand buildings powerful and brutal—to impress the masses with the absolute power of the State. We can find evidence of this in our time in the buildings of Mussolini, Hitler, and the Soviet Union.

In the democratic world I question even as great an artistic example as Le Corbusier's High Court at Chandigarh. Though I truly admired its tremendous visual impact, I question whether its power and crudeness are appropriate to the Indian people struggling against tremendous economic obstacles for freedom and for dignity. Though monumentality is without question an important and necessary ingredient for this building, this quality should be defined architecturally so that man can enter such a building with pride and his head high. Instead, I had the feeling of a great pagan temple where man must enter on his knees.

Buildings elsewhere of this category, designed by lesser men and of lesser artistic merit, are infinitely worse. This kind of egocentric reasoning is one of the major causes for the confusion in architectural thinking in America. There is no question about the existence of such confusion. Its evidence is in the explosion of architectural ideas which indiscriminately gush forth to fill the streets of our cities. This flood of experiments in architectural

Early in 1963 work begins on this Japanese Cultural Center, a vast development of gardens, restaurants, halls, shops, museum, theatre, for San Francisco.



design is producing almost every conceivable shape and form, and for the most part without reason. All these shapes, each trying to outdo the other, when placed together, as at Miami Beach, can only result in complete chaos. I literally felt ill when I was there.

Experimentation is vital and necessary to all our fields of endeavor, but experimentation, which is not controlled by the cohesive force of an underlying philosophy, can only produce anarchy. Today we have a kind of anarchy in architecture. The only way to eliminate this anarchy is to examine the essential reasons for the kind of architecture we must have, beyond basic characteristics of structural stability, utility, and compatibility to the economic framework of society. Without the discipline and the inspiration which can be provided by a clear understanding of purpose, we will not be able to accomplish the gigantic job of framing modern man in his proper environment. That such a philosophy must exist today is obvious when we look in retrospect at past ages of architecture.

The Greek architecture which we so admire was the product of the democratic beliefs of Greek civilization. Egyptian architecture reflected the absolute power of the Pharaohs and the enslavement of the people. The pompous, superficial life of the French Renaissance monarchs can be well seen in their palaces. Yet, in England, the Renaissance expressed the beginnings of the dignity, the pride, and the humanity that are the great heritage of the English-speaking peoples today.

We in America are both proud and thankful for our way of life. We rejoice in the great ideas of freedom for the individual and the dignity of man. The qualities of humanity we most cherish to implement these profound beliefs are those such as love, gentility, joy, serenity, beauty, and hope. An architecture which is representative of, and needed to implement, our way of life must recognize these human characteristics which are fundamental to it.

This idea in its essence, I believe, is the philosophy of humanism in architecture—a philosophy dedicated to and consistent with the highest ideals of democracy.

If a building is too strong or brutal, it tends to overpower man. In it he feels insecure and uncomfortable. A monument to the ego of a particular owner or architect is contradictory to the principle that each man who uses the building should be able, through his environment, to have the sense of dignity and individual strength to carry on his hopes and aspirations. The only strength we do need is the strength of our inner convictions in our purpose and our belief.

The concept of an architecture for all people instead of a select few is only possible through adherence to a humanist philosophy—one which is consistent with the ideals we seek. Proportion, elegance of detail and nobility exist in the wonderful European buildings of the past. Though they must be translated into our own idioms, we can be much inspired by the expression of these qualities in great examples of architecture.

The understanding of scale in our buildings which will enable man to live proudly and make him feel that he is in touch with his surroundings is much more difficult to pinpoint. Yet the experience of buildings—such as can sometimes be seen in Japan—where this is realized should assure us that it is possible to achieve this quality in our environment in our own terms.

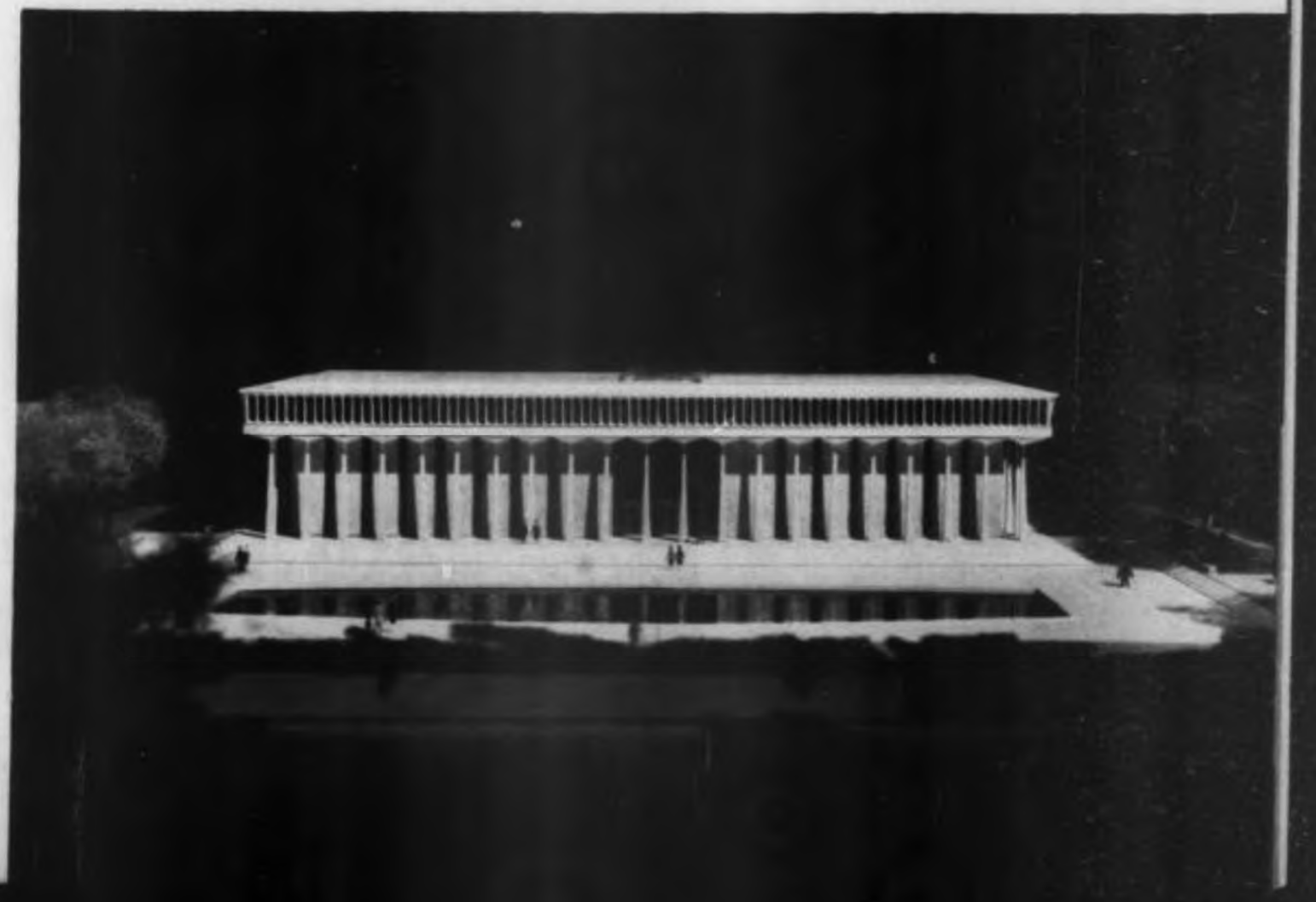
The challenge of our times philosophically and politically is tremendous, and the challenge to architecture is an integral part of the total challenge. Whether we, the architects of this time, are able to meet it remains to be seen.



For the Michigan Consolidated Gas Company building, Detroit, (model shown, scheduled for completion in January, 1963) we were able to take advantage of a superb, view-commanding site in the center of the Detroit Civic Center. Detail shows how precast skin develops a sense of soaring upward.



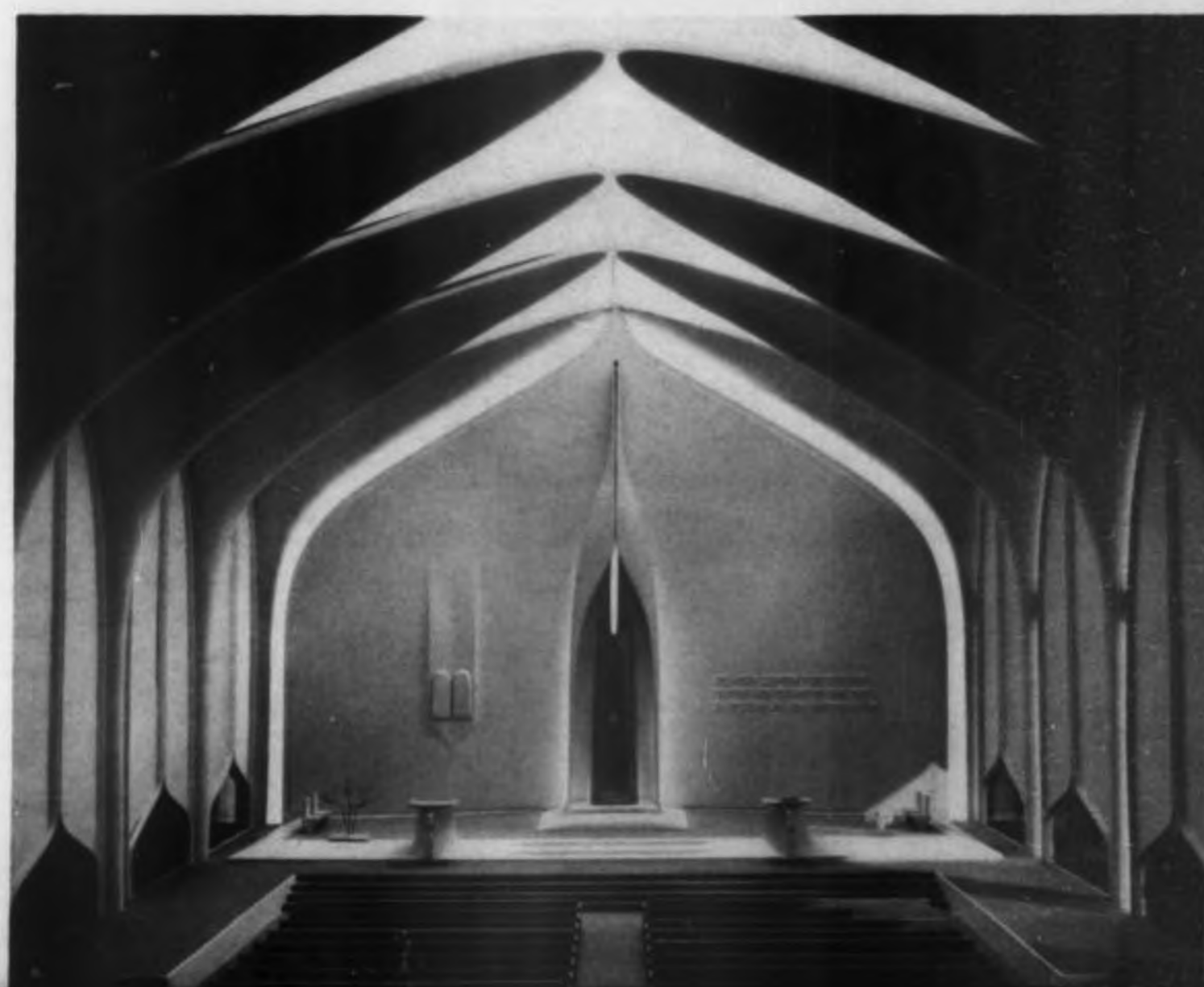
A series of 60 precast columns—28 feet high, 10 feet square and with a kind of mushroom head—is the primary support for the upper floors of the Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs (shown in models) at Princeton University. Topped by a skylight, the central hall of the main floor will serve as a lounge-reception area, and a library, auditorium and a dining room are also planned for the 28-foot-high main floor. Faculty offices are on the upper floor, and on the lower floor are additional auditoriums, conference rooms, and the service areas. Construction begins in 1963 and completion is now scheduled for the fall of 1964.



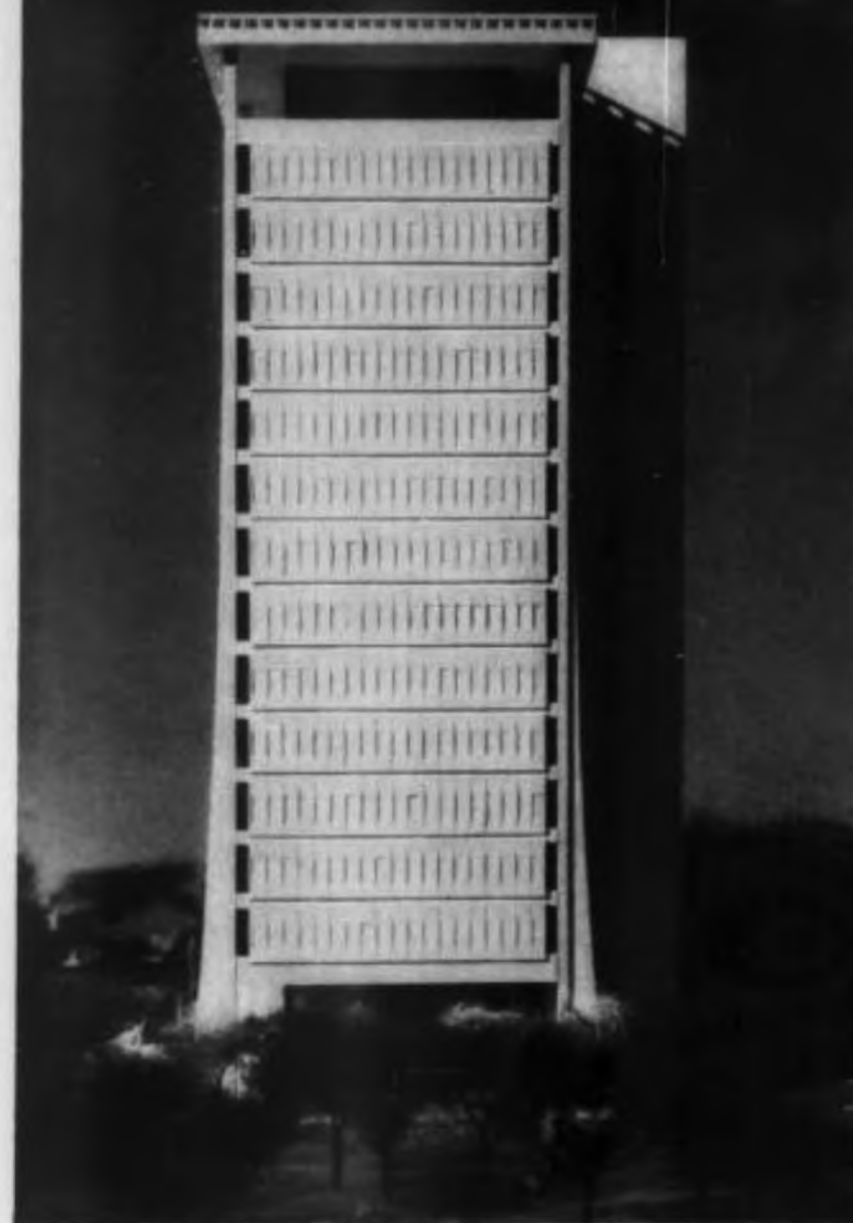
For this six-story Northwestern National Life Insurance Company building (models shown) we are using 63 white quartz-faced columns culminating in flared columns to form graceful arched openings, and an 80-foot-high portico that terminates Nicollet Avenue, the principal business street of downtown Minneapolis. The portico also provides a transition to the park and river area beyond. Within the arches and enclosing the building proper are faceted dark-green stone panels flanked by slender ribbons of grey glass; as a concession to the often-severe Minnesota climate, the minimum amount of glass was used. The construction will begin early next year.



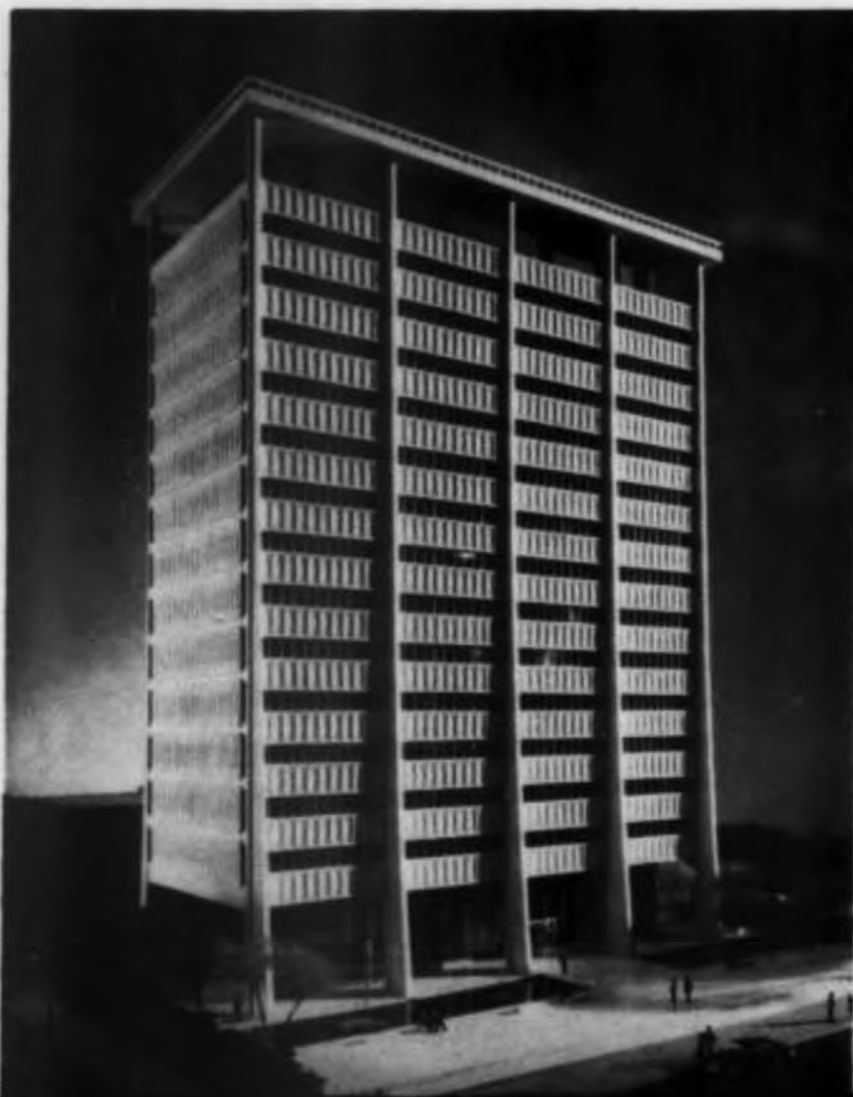
To attain a sense of great height and the interlacing of daylight with the interior, 16 fan vault shells were used for the main Sanctuary of the North Shore Congregation Israel (shown in models) in Glencoe, Ill. These shells are locked together at the outside walls and at the peak of the roof; in the interstices between are iodine-colored skylights, double layered and artificially-lit between layers. Windows are set low so as to afford a glimpse of quiet gardens. Provision for the great expansion of seating arrangements necessary during the High Holy Days services is made by platforms on either side of the main seating which tie in with the Bimah platform at front, and by utilization of the adjacent Memorial Hall. The entire complex is scheduled for completion in 1963.



Designed to fit into the University of Washington's plans for a plaza-type development for downtown Seattle—much like New York City's Rockefeller Center—this is the University Properties Office Building, with its strong sense of verticality. The structure (shown in model form) is a key building since it's at the entrance to the Seattle business area from a new freeway being built. Structurally, the first floor columns had to be so arranged as to accommodate a garage below; steel arches covered with marble were used. To give the utmost in column-free office room, we designed a concrete stud system in which a central core is surrounded by open, flexible office space. It will be completed in 1964. The associated architects are Naramore Bain Brady and Johanson.



The Behavioral Science building in Cambridge, Mass., (models show the end elevation and a frontal view, below, facing Kirkland Avenue) is one of Harvard's first high-rise buildings. The decision to expand vertically was made because of the mounting difficulty in increasing land area for the University. Considerably distant from the Yard and traditional Harvard structures, the rectangular 60 x 144-foot tower will provide column-free floors for offices and classrooms. A pool and fountain will give privacy to the ground floor, and a private walled garden is planned for the east side of the building. Construction will start early in 1963 and completion of the structure is scheduled for the fall of 1964.



Moslem influence dominates the new Civil Air Terminal building in Dhahran—the chief gateway to Saudi Arabia, a base for Aramco, and the major transit stop between Europe and the East. The main structural elements, which suggest

the Arabian character, were pre-cast on the site—a technique which, though original to the area, proved extremely sound structurally and provided a refinement seldom seen in this primitive country. Some of the problems encountered during

construction: 130-degree heat, sand, such rapid evaporation of water that concrete had to be poured at night. The building was finished in 1961 with The Ralph M. Parsons Company as architects and engineers and myself as the consulting architect.