

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill

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LEVER HOUSE (see page 10)

Photo: Louis Checkman

# SKIDMORE, OWINGS & MERRILL

*This issue of the Bulletin appears in conjunction with the Exhibition of Recent Buildings by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, at the Museum of Modern Art, from September 26 to November 5, 1950. The Exhibition was directed by the Department of Architecture and Design. Cover design by Eric Nitsche. All models by Theodore Conrad.*

When a museum exhibits a painting, a piece of sculpture, an architectural drawing or a model, the first question in the minds of both the staff and the public is "who is the painter, the sculptor, or the architect who designed it?" In the past, all of the architectural shows the Museum of Modern Art has exhibited have been designer's shows—the work of individuals like Le Corbusier, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Frank Lloyd Wright, or the work of collaborating partners, like Adler & Sullivan, or Howe & Lescaze.

When the Museum invited Skidmore, Owings and Merrill to exhibit its recent buildings, it did so because this firm, composed of a group of single designers working exclusively in the modern idiom, produces imaginative, serviceable and sophisticated architecture deserving of special attention. The single designers who function within this organization have no fear of a loss of individuality. They are able to work within their corporate framework because they understand and employ the vocabulary and grammar which developed from the esthetic conceptions of the twenties. They work together animated by two disciplines which they all share—the discipline of modern architecture and the discipline of American organizational methods.

We are now rounding out the revolutionary cycle begun by the chief pioneers of the International Style—Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Gropius, Oud, and others. Their pioneering work is over but the concepts and principles which they introduced are today being employed by them as well as by architects throughout the world. As Henry-Russell Hitchcock said twenty years ago, "there is now a single body of discipline fixed enough to integrate contemporary style as a reality and yet esthetic enough to permit individual interpretation and to encourage general growth." (*The International Style*, W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York.)



Photo: Torkel Korling

# **NORTHERN INDIANA HOSPITAL FOR CRIPPLED CHILDREN** **South Bend, Indiana (1950)**

A one story hospital for children, 395 x 429 feet. No vertical communication is required in this building whose total area is 53,000 square feet.

The great wall at the right encloses a court and offers privacy as well as a feeling of space by continuing the interior wall. This feature was introduced by Mies van der Rohe in the Barcelona Pavilion in 1929.

The respect for engineering purity which emphasizes regularity as opposed to baroque rhythmical symmetry, the desire for pure geometric forms, the striking use of materials, especially glass and steel, which modern technology has made possible, and avoidance of applied decoration, are the underlying general principles of modern architecture. These principles are so well understood today, that a group of three or four designers can work together on one building and achieve a cohesive and well integrated design. None of the great pioneers working alone, without the benefits of the American organizational methods, could have built such an edifice as the Lever House, for example, but a project such as this could not have been accomplished today without reference to the concepts, drawings, projects and executed buildings of those early creators of contemporary architecture.

Large groups of architects working successfully within the discipline of the contemporary style are imbuing the public with an awareness and an acceptance of the modern idiom. The firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, the largest organized group of architects dedicated exclusively to the cause of modern architecture, produces work of great merit and contributes to the development of our cities. Thus, they gain for themselves and for their clients the goodwill of the public.



Formed in 1936 by Louis Skidmore and Nathaniel A. Owings, the firm bears its name almost as a trademark. It is like a brand name identifying its work which is persistently characterized by the idiom of the firm rather than that of any individual within the firm. As one of the partners said, "it could even be called the ABC Company." This is an important fact considering its staff of nine partners, Louis Skidmore, Nathaniel A. Owings, John O. Merrill, William S. Brown, Gordon Bunshaft, Robert W. Cutler, John L. King, John B. Rodgers, and J. Walter Severinghaus, in addition to 322 other personnel including architects, engineers, city planners, designers, researchers and economists.

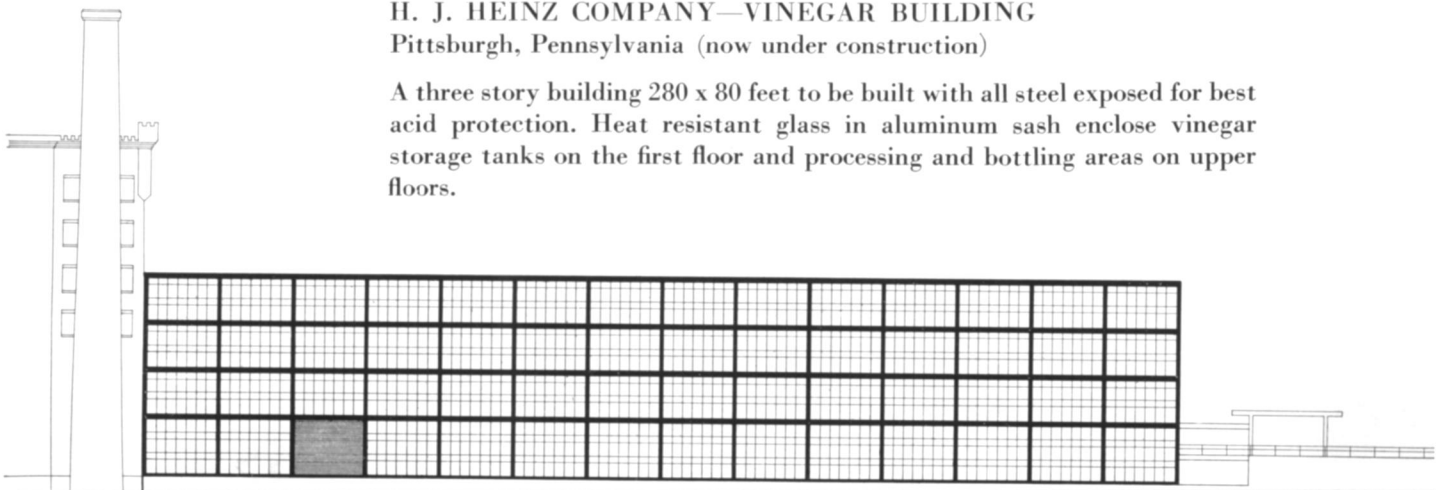
The great foresight and courageous planning of the two top men, Louis Skidmore and Nathaniel A. Owings, in inviting young architects into the firm, and the fluid manner in which this personnel is used, give the firm its unified power. The elasticity of its organization permits shifting of personnel within and among the three offices in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, as well as the shifting of responsibilities among the staff by balancing experience and availability. For example, Gordon Bunshaft is in charge of design for the New York office, but has at times worked with Ambrose M. Richardson in charge of design for the Chicago office. In the same way, Robert W. Cutler's long experience in hospital planning brings him into the picture of hospitals produced by the firm whether in San Francisco or in New York. John G. Rodgers and John Lord King originally from the Chicago office, went west to open the San Francisco office.

Because there exists a clear pattern of modern architecture the team of architects in the firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, produces with originality, efficiency and craftsmanship, visually exciting architecture which records the esthetic and technological experience of our civilization.

The buildings illustrated in this bulletin are selected by the Museum as the best works of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, and as such are among the most successful produced by either an individual or a firm in this country today.

#### H. J. HEINZ COMPANY—VINEGAR BUILDING Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (now under construction)

A three story building 280 x 80 feet to be built with all steel exposed for best acid protection. Heat resistant glass in aluminum sash enclose vinegar storage tanks on the first floor and processing and bottling areas on upper floors.



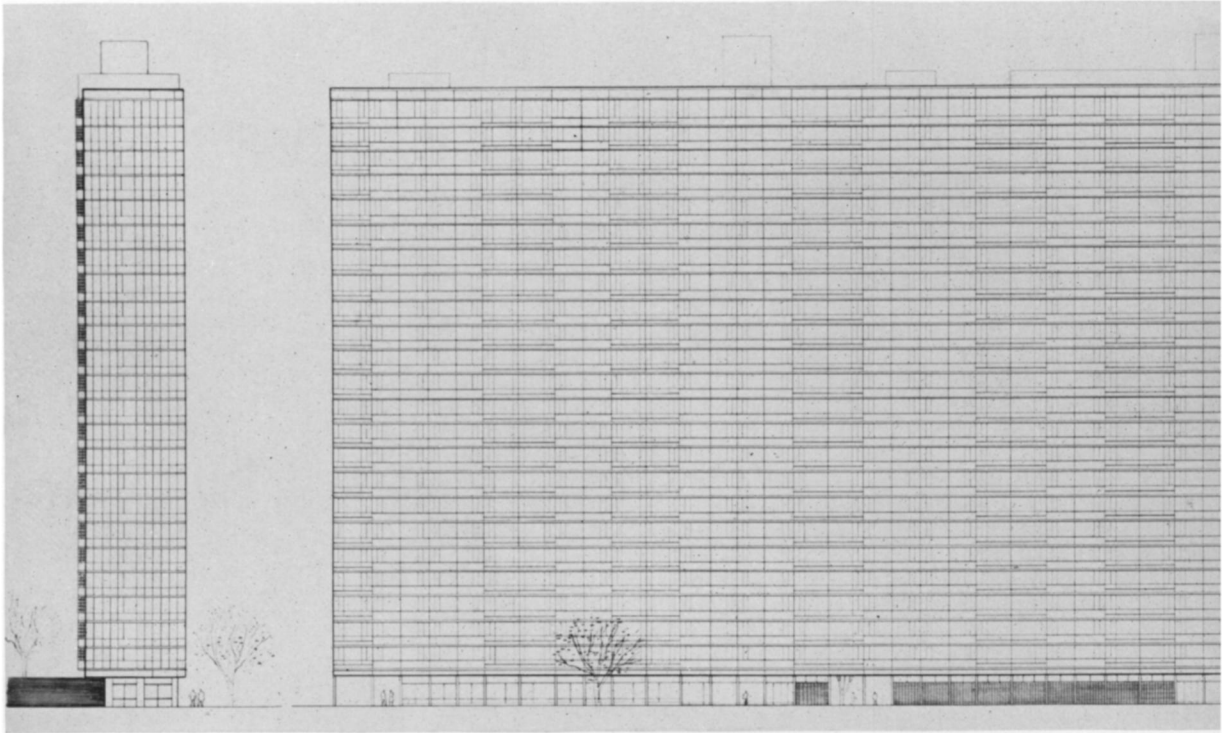
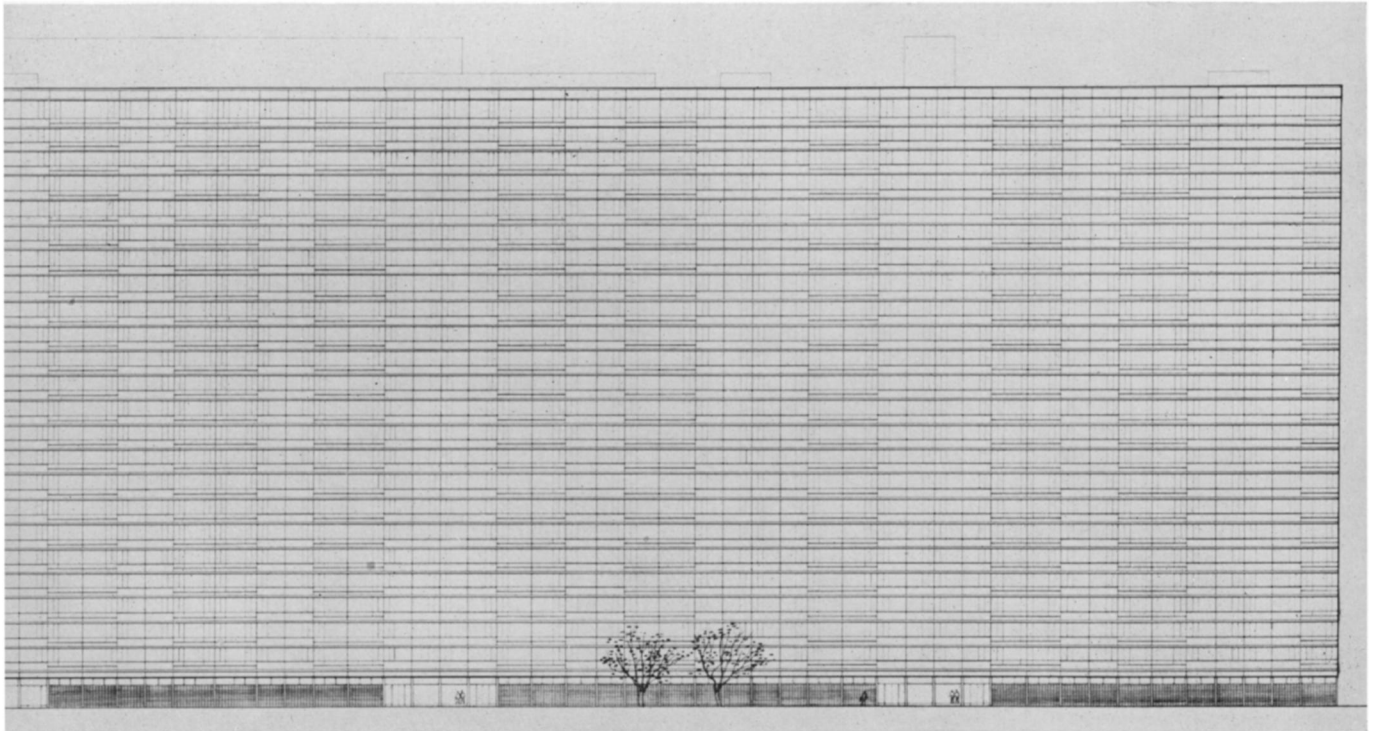


Photo: Chicago Aerial Survey Company

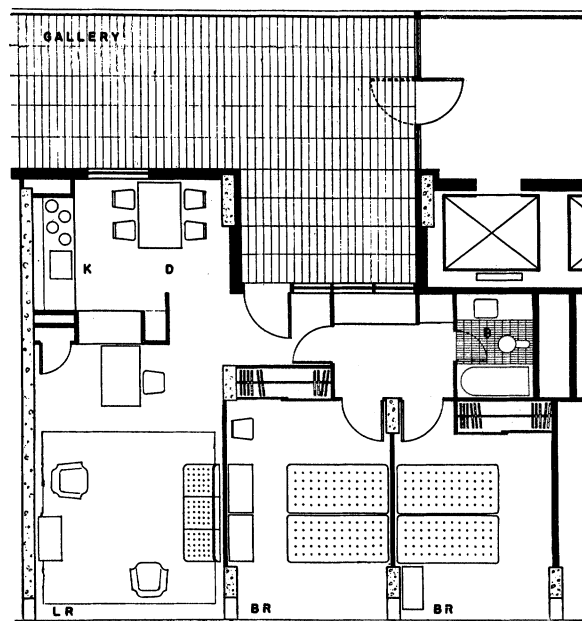






**LAKE MEADOWS—CHICAGO**  
(See page 16)

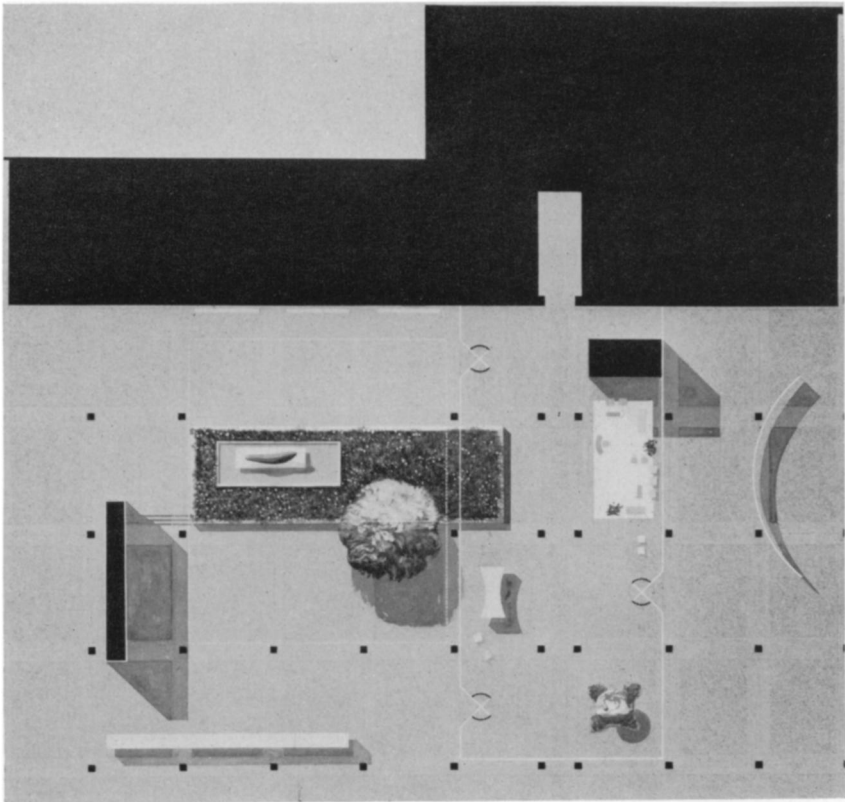
Two Bedroom Unit, Multi-Story Building



## LEVER HOUSE

Office Building for Lever Brothers Company  
New York, N. Y. (now under construction)

This office building of blue heat resistant glass and stainless steel will front on Park Avenue between 53rd and 54th Streets, occupying one third of a city block. The street floor is an outdoor concourse with clear open space from 53rd through to 54th Streets, interrupted only by the columns which support the building, and a glass enclosed lobby. In the rendering below of the street floor the columns are indicated by the black dots while the dimensions of the lobby can be traced by means of the white lines forming an oblong on the right side of the rendering. A single office floor on the second floor provides 22,000 square feet of office space and forms the base for the 21 story tower which occupies 25% of the site area. Each floor of the tower provides 8700 square feet of space. The third floor, enclosed in glass from floor to ceiling, will hold the employees cafeteria looking out on the terrace gardens.



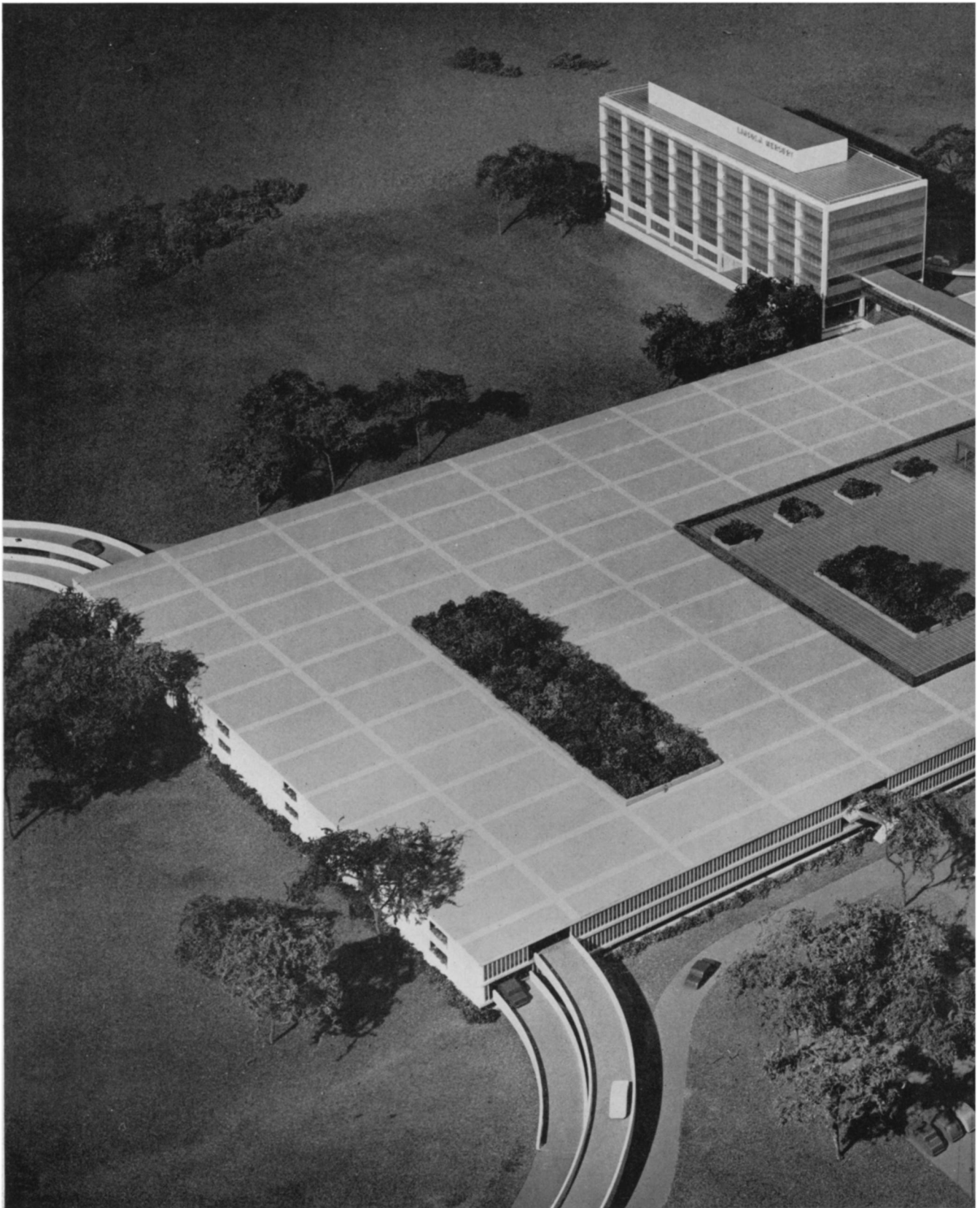


Like Rockefeller Center, Lever House will become a civic monument. It stands free of other buildings. Its tower, a single geometric mass, becomes isolated and therefore can be appreciated as a single building. It goes one step further than Rockefeller Center in opening the city: by giving up rentable areas on the ground floor it creates a through concourse open to the public. This building expresses the striving of all modern architects to make visible pure geometric shapes so unlike earlier skyscrapers with their street-to-street mass and their ziggurat-like setbacks.

LEVER HOUSE

Photo: Ezra Stoller, Pictor





CENTRAL STAFF OFFICES FOR THE FORD MOTOR COMPANY (see page 14)





Photo: Ezra Stoller, Pictor



## LAKE MEADOWS

Chicago, Illinois

A redevelopment project of the New York Life Insurance Company to house 1404 families. Two 23 story apartment buildings are designed for small families and eleven 2 story garden apartment buildings for large family groups. Each of the two apartment blocks, 830 x 40 feet, will house 644 families. The two skyscrapers are separated by an intervening park. There are no enclosed hallways in the slabs which are essentially row houses stacked on top of one another and served by elevators. Instead of halls, open air galleries will run down the north sides, opening up every apartment and almost every room to through ventilation and providing shaded terraces and play areas.

This spectacular architectural concept will do much to change the face of the city. To realize the daring arrangement and overwhelming scale of the skyscrapers, try to imagine a single building rising 23 stories straight above a typical New York City street from Fifth to Sixth Avenues. The Chicago skyscraper is almost 200 feet longer than the distance of this city street.

Over twenty years ago, Walter Gropius predicted that the practicality and desirability of the development side by side of skyscrapers and low story buildings would eventually be realized, and that this organization of housing would gain support for its sociological and economic advantages.

## CENTRAL STAFF OFFICES FOR THE FORD MOTOR COMPANY

Dearborn, Michigan

An administrative center composed of three units: an eleven story office unit for the Ford Motor Company Central Staff which is 450 x 80 feet; a six story office unit for the Lincoln-Mercury Division which is 220 x 80 feet.

The three story service unit contains parking facilities for 2000 cars and common service facilities for the office units, such as cafeteria, auditorium, photographic and reproduction sections, etc. An interior pedestrian concourse connects all units at the lobby level.

This is the largest building built in the Detroit area since the twenties. It carries out the dream of the pioneers, most succinctly expressed by Le Corbusier's phrase *Ville Verte* which looked forward to the time when tall buildings entirely surrounded by green in an open country site would take the place of megalopolitan growth.

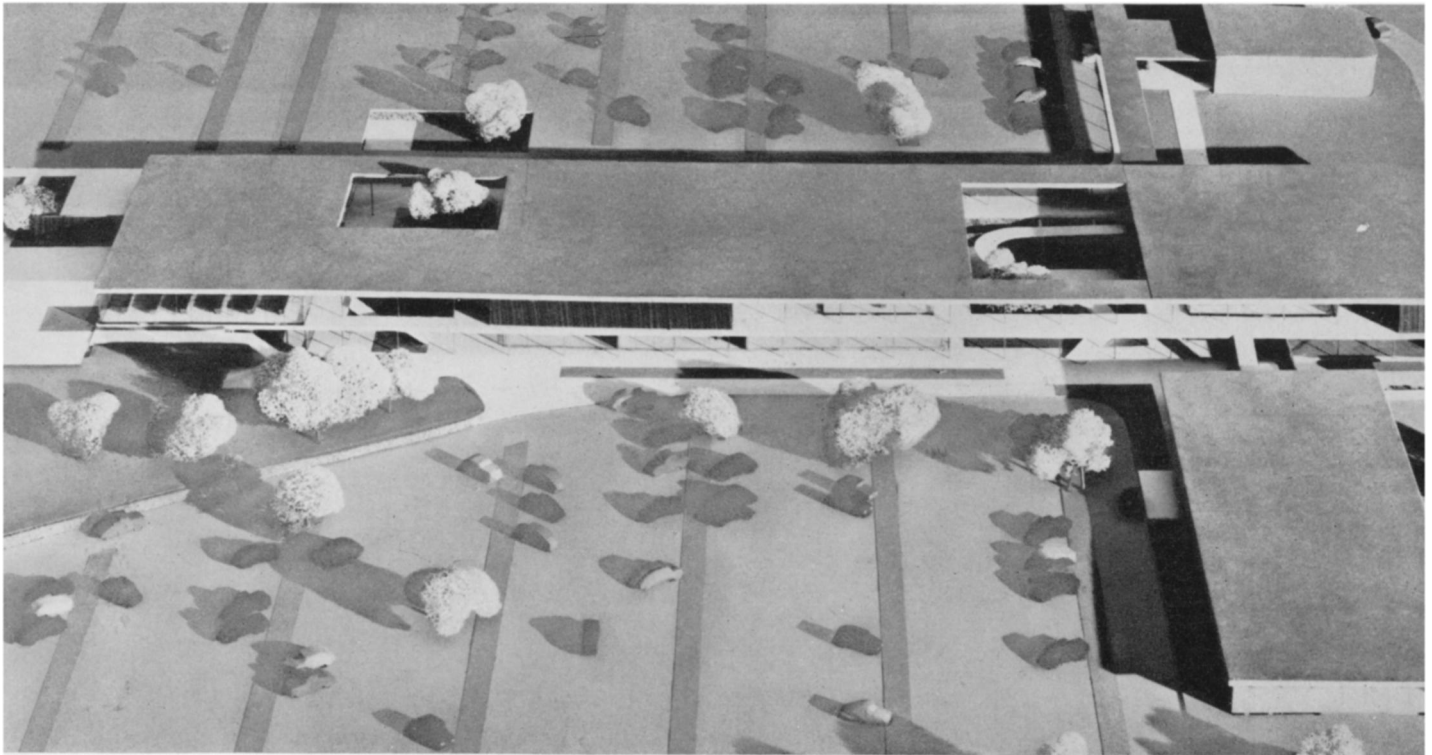
There is good relationship of pure cubic rectangular shapes in the three buildings; the long low flat form uniting and at the same time setting off the two disparate forms of the verticals.

## **DEL MONTE SHOPPING CENTER**

**Del Monte, California**

**The total area of the shopping center, which includes streets, parking lots and landscape area, is approximately 10 acres. There are two levels with direct access to stores from either upper or lower parking areas.**

**The concept of a single volume to house complex functions is unique in shopping centers and a great advantage for esthetic purposes.**



## NEW YORK UNIVERSITY—BELLEVUE MEDICAL CENTER New York, N. Y.

This Medical Center will contain the College of Medicine and Post Graduate Medical School; the Institute of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, and University Clinic; Hall of Residence; University Hospital and Alumni Hall. The Center covers approximately 11 acres, from 30th to 34th Streets and from 1st Avenue to the East River in New York City. The University Hospital will be 20 stories high and contain 600 beds; the Hall of Residence will house 300 people; there will be a medical library for 150,000 volumes. One unit is now under construction.

This asymmetric arrangement of functionally disparate units which is spread over four city blocks is a precedent-creating plan. The open areas and separate buildings will do away with the tedium of the gridiron pattern of stone and brick.

In the concern for the geometric shape and in relating these functionally separated units to the New York City scene, the architects have made a practical contribution as well as a contribution to the dream of all modern architects to change the monotony of the 19th century city pattern.

Photo: Ezra Stoller, Pictor







Photo: Ezra Stoller, Pictor

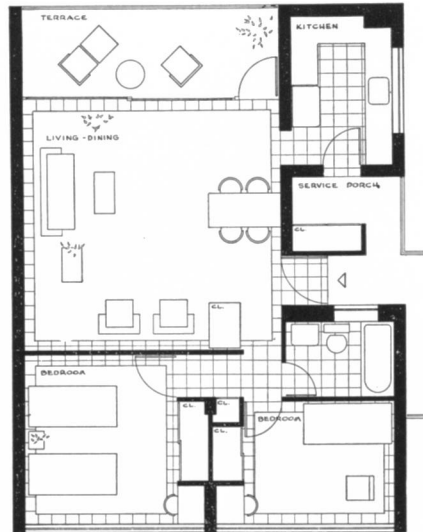
## **GARDEN APARTMENTS**

**Oak Ridge, Tennessee (1950)**

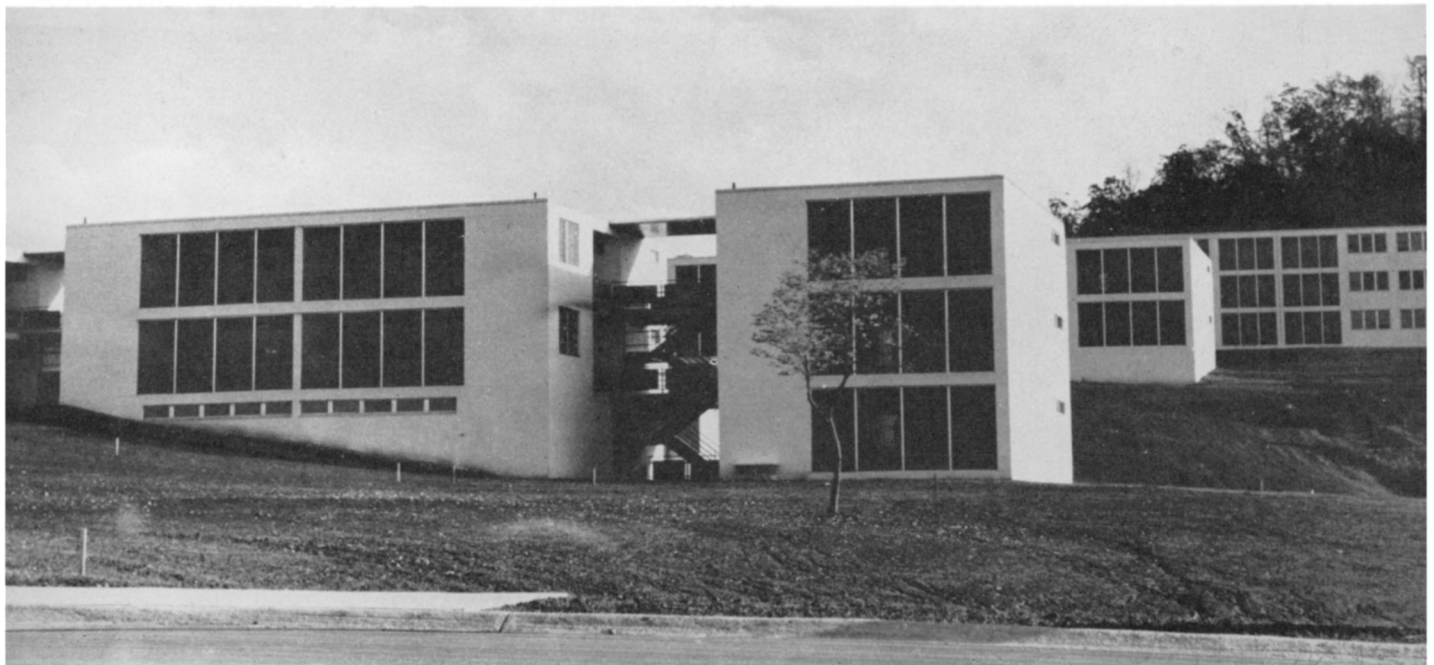
**Four hundred and fifteen housing units of which 24 are one-bedroom apartments, and the remainder, two-bedroom apartments (see plan).**

**The design of these buildings is uncompromising in its severity when compared with the "cottagey" approach of most low story housing developments. Its attractiveness depends upon the felicity of fenestration and the purity of proportion. The landscaping is not as yet completed.**





Two Bedroom Apartment

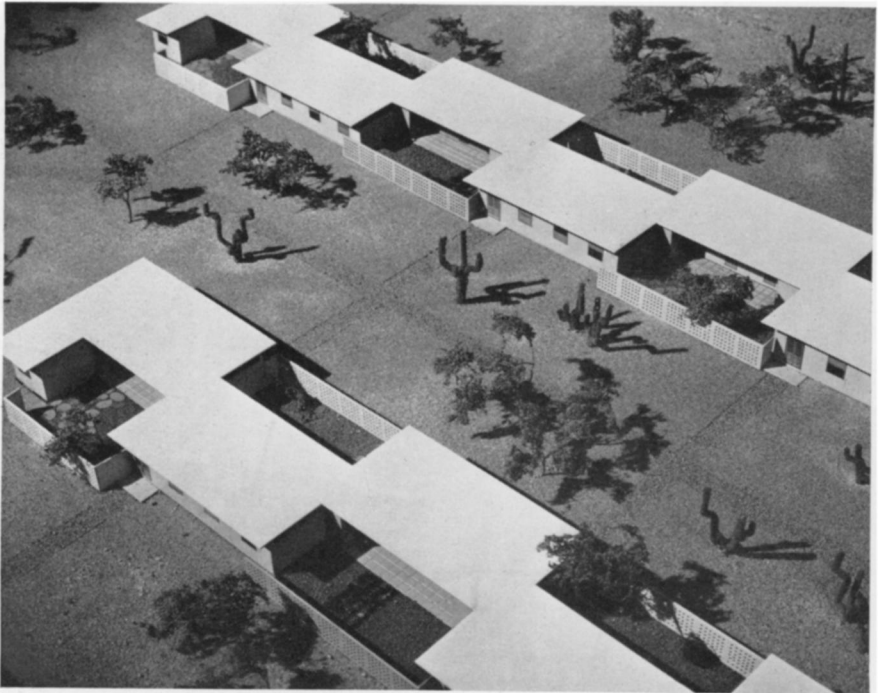




## OIL REFINING TOWN

Amuay Bay, Venezuela

Low-cost workers' houses for the employees in a town being built adjacent to a large oil refinery and pipe line terminal. Master plan includes housing facilities, schools, shops, etc. Note the use of alternating patios which relieves the monotony of the low buildings.



**BROOKLYN VETERAN'S ADMINISTRATION HOSPITAL**  
Brooklyn, New York (1950)

The site of this 1000 bed general hospital is approximately 17 acres at the southern end of Brooklyn. This provides an ocean view on the southern exposure. The elongated main structure which is 506 feet takes full advantage of sun and view. There are 2 nursing units of 40 beds each on each floor, which locates 95% of the beds in rooms with southern exposure. The Hospital portion is 17 stories high.

Photo: Ezra Stoller, Pictor

