

# Art: The Road to Xanadu

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Though the Pavilion was devoted to showing modern science, it looked as if it could have been the setting from a poem by Coleridge. From any angle it cast a spell. It had reflecting pools, stage-set lighting, delicate bridges, six buildings decorated with Gothic tracery. Inside, it subtly lured visitors along, stopped them just where the designer intended that they should pause and look. Probably no building put up in 1962 caused

such a world of comment or brought into action so many cameras. Professional critics found dreadful flaws, but to almost everyone else the U.S. Science Pavilion, that pleasure dome of the Space Age at Seattle's Century "21" Exposition, was a modern Xanadu, built for their delight, a declaration of independence from the machine-made monotony of so much of modern architecture.

The creator of this pleasant pavilion is Architect Minoru Yamasaki, a wiry, 132-lb. Nisei who was born 50 years ago in a slum less than two miles from where the Science Pavilion now stands. In manner, he is the most courteous of men, often humble to a fault. But the core of the man is all steel, tempered not only by the anti-Nisei discrimination he has known, but also by his often lonely fight to reintroduce into architecture the embellishments that many modern architects tend to despise. More Is More. Early in this century, the French architect Auguste Perret declared, "Decoration always hides an error in construction"; later, the great Mies van der Rohe summed up the approach to purity and discipline in the phrase "Less is more." These tenets have to a large degree held sway ever since. But to Yamasaki, this architecture lacks "delight, serenity and surprise," and if he must have decoration to achieve these things, he will have it. Until the Seattle Pavilion opened, the un serene battle over architectural philosophy that Yamasaki stirred up was kept mostly within the profession, but the public reaction to the building brought it into the open. And now Yamasaki has a commission that will soon make him the country's most hotly disputed architect. He has been picked to plan the Port of New York Authority's giant World Trade Center, to be built on Manhattan's Lower West Side, from where it will be a neighbor of that landmark of an earlier decade, the Woolworth Building (1911-13). So vast are the space demands of this project that if they could be met by building one fat skyscraper, it might have to be 300 or more stories high. The \$270 million center will be bigger than the original Rockefeller Center, and because of this vastness alone, the size and shape of the project will keep the profession in suspense for the next two or three years. "Some Real Dogs." Because of excessive ornamentation in his earlier work, Yamasaki's critics have tended to type cast him as an "exterior decorator," or cosmetician. Yamasaki is aware of the criticism — and agrees that much of it is deserved. "In the past few years," he will blandly declare, in one of his frequent moments of self-denigration, "my colleagues and I have built some rather shallow things." To a reporter, he once blurted: "We have built some real dogs!" Yet he confidently sticks to his philosophy; and his buildings have given the public — not to mention a growing band of blissfully contented clients — something it has been hungering for. More important, he seems to have crossed a threshold, or, as he characteristically puts it, "I hope I'm coming to my senses." In his new work, the excesses of decoration are gone; there is a classic discipline about his models, and his emphasis is on structure. But he will continue to occupy his unique place in the public's affection, because his structures still aim to please the eye. He has declared war not only on the glass box that dominates so much new building, but also on the handcraft brutalism of some of the buildings of France's Le Corbusier (TIME cover, May 5, 1961), which have all the force in the world but can also lack

compassion. Indeed, nothing tells more about Yamasaki's approach to architecture than his reaction to two architectural wonders during a trip to India in 1954. The first wonder was the Taj Mahal, with its inlays of marble and its inexhaustible detail. From a distance it was "a vision," but as Yamasaki approached it, the vision seemed to get richer. Finally, "you go through this narrow deep gate, opening in total shadow. You emerge beyond the wall into the sharp contrast of a peaceful and silent setting, and there is the gleaming Taj Mahal in front of you. Then you walk along the fabled pools, then up a dark stairway, so narrow you have to walk sideways. Finally you emerge again into the sunlight, and the Taj is so blinding you can barely see it. But you notice as you get closer the fine details and the wonderful inlays of marble." Some time later, Yamasaki visited Le Corbusier's High Court at Chandigarh, that completely new town built on the hot plains north of New Delhi to provide an Indian capital for the divided state of Punjab (which had lost Lahore to Pakistan). The High Court stands behind a reflection pool, is topped by a massive overhang supported by soaring concrete columns. From a distance, the building seemed "absolutely magnificent," Yamasaki reported. "But as you come closer, it becomes overpowering. Its concrete surfaces are brutally crude." To Yamasaki, such a building was out of place in a democracy, where architecture should serve man, not dominate him. "I had the feeling of a great pagan temple, where man must enter on his knees. A building should not awe but embrace man. Instead of overwhelming grandeur in architecture, we should have gentility. And we should have the wish mentally and physically to touch our buildings." Shikatanagai. Minoru ("bearing fruit") Yamasaki (roughly, "mountain ledge with great view") does not look like a man who would brew up a storm, but he obviously learned to be tough early. His father, the fourth son of a Japanese farmer, came to Seattle in 1908 after the farm was inherited by an older brother, in accordance with traditional Japanese primogeniture. Yamasaki spent the first years of his life in a shabby wooden tenement whose foundation was so eroded that the house had a tilt. The Japanese-American community stayed within itself in those days, and young Yamasaki got only occasional hints of the degree of discrimination that lay beyond. Once, he remembers, his mother came home in tears after a cruel experience on a bus: she had taken a seat next

to a Caucasian woman who rose in indignation and plunked herself down next to an unwashed, unshaven, but indubitably Occidental bum. Yet there was little bitterness among the Japanese-Americans. "A word that I heard over and over again whenever there would be an incident or a slight was shikatanagai, which means 'it can't be helped.'" The Silent Fan. In 1926, when Yamasaki was a sophomore at Garfield High, his mother's brother, Koken Ito, came to stay at the Yamasaki home. Ito had earned an architectural degree at the University of California at Berkeley, and when he began working on some drawings in his room, he found himself with an avid fan. Ito, who now lives and practices his profession in Tokyo, still remembers the silent boy solemnly watching as the drawing progressed. Yamasaki remembers too. "The more my uncle talked about architecture, the more I wanted to become an architect." To save up money for schooling, Yamasaki spent five wretched summers working in Alaskan fish canneries. The pay was \$50 a month; the work week was 66 hours; the pay for an

hour's overtime was 25¢. "And there was plenty of over time," Yamasaki recalls. "During busy periods, we would work from 4 in the morning until midnight." Meals consisted of salmon and rice for lunch and rice and salmon for dinner; but the \$200 earned each summer helped get Yamasaki through five years of studying architecture at the University of Washington. Because of anti-Japanese discrimination (he had seen a local utility company by pass the top man in an engineering class because he was Japanese, pick three lower-ranking men who were all Caucasian), Yamasaki decided to leave Seattle. In September of 1934, he arrived in Manhattan with \$40 to his name. Remembering Pearl Harbor. A depression, he quickly learned, is no time to be an architect. In office after office, he found that the boss was just "sitting around reading the newspapers." So Yamasaki spent that first year in Manhattan wrapping china for an import firm. It was not until 1937 that he got into serious architecture, first with the firm of Githens & Keally, which was planning the main building of the Brooklyn Public Library, and next with Shreve, Lamb & Harmon, who had designed the Empire State Building. In 1941, he fell in love with a pretty Nisei girl, Teruko Hirashiki, who had come from Los Angeles to study piano at the Juilliard School of Music; two months later, they were married. The date was Dec. 5, two days before Pearl Harbor. Yamasaki himself was not fired from his job during the resulting anti-Japanese outburst, even though Shreve, Lamb & Harmon were working on a number of military bases. "You are one of our best men," said Richmond Shreve, "and I'm going to back you all the way." But in Seattle that Dec. 8, Yamasaki's father got the sack from the firm that had employed him for more than 30 years. Then came the chilling news that all Japanese-Americans on the West Coast were to be resettled. Yamasaki sent for his parents, and they moved into his three-room Yorkville apartment. He did not mind the overcrowding, but he has not forgotten the resettling. "Our people had to sell everything for 10¢ to 15¢ on the dollar. The people who bought their businesses and houses knew they had them over a barrel." Up From Eyeshades. As the years passed, Yamasaki worked for Architect Wallace Harrison and later for Designer Raymond Loewy. In 1945, the large (600 employees) Detroit firm of Smith, Hinchman & Grylls hired him to be its chief designer. He was at first appalled by the fusty look of the dark-walled offices: "The men wore eyeshades, and there were spittoons on the floor." But he was delighted with the freedom he was given. Now Detroit got its first touch of Yamasaki's art. For the neoclassic Federal Reserve Bank, he built a modern addition, a Le Corbusier-style building set back 30 ft., forming a small plaza planted with trees. The springboard job of Yamasaki's career came to him in 1951. He and two S. H. & G. colleagues had formed a firm of their own, and they got a commission to do the Lambert-St. Louis Municipal Air Terminal — a work that was to set the standard for a wave of airport buildings by top architects all over the U.S. Yamasaki decided that the terminal should be a great entrance, a reception center for the city that had sent Lindbergh across the Atlantic. An inspection tour of other airports left him unimpressed. Then he took a new long look at Manhattan's vaulted Grand Central Terminal. "Here," he decided, "is an entrance worthy of a city." First Honor. Yamasaki's plan called for three pairs of intersecting barrel vaults (to which others can be added). The concrete forms were sheathed in copper, which made the building

striking not only from the ground but also from the air. It won Yamasaki the American Institute of Architects' First Honor Award, and not even his severest critics can find much fault in that building. But during construction, the frustrations — the arguments and compromises with engineers and client, the insufferable commuting between St. Louis and Detroit — proved overwhelming. In December of 1953, Yamasaki suddenly began bleeding internally; surgeons had to remove two-thirds of his ulcerated stomach. Death hovered so near that Yamasaki remembers overhearing his mother tell his three children that he would not pull through. Two months after the operation, Yamasaki got out of the hospital determined to put his life in better order. He closed the firm's St. Louis office and, with Partner Joseph Leinweber, established himself permanently near Detroit. The Look of Serenity. He was no sooner back at work than he got an assignment that was to crystallize his philosophy of architecture. The assignment came from the State Department, which wanted to build a new consulate general in Kobe, Japan. Yamasaki went to Japan, was enchanted by the traditional architecture he saw. He visited the Katsura Palace and the Goshō (Old Imperial Palace) in Kyoto, spent hours studying the ancient temples in their garden settings. "I was overwhelmed by the serenity that can be achieved by enhancing nature," says he of those gardens. "It was here that I decided that serenity could be an important contribution to our environment, because our cities are so chaotic and full of turmoil." Work on the consulate general — a white structure raised slightly off the ground like a Japanese temple and surrounded by bronze and plastic sun screens — drew him to Japan again, and Yamasaki decided to go the long way and take a look at some of the rest of the world. The great formative experience was comparing the Taj Mahal and Chandigarh, but he also learned a significant lesson from Europe's great Gothic cathedrals, in which the uninterrupted flow of structure did not preclude the use of elaborate detail: "The need for ornamentation and texture in our times was deeply impressed on me." He was equally impressed by the quiet, reflective architecture of Venice and Pisa, the two cities, he says, that were most exposed to the influence of the contemplative East. Decline of the Glass Box. Back in the U.S., Yamasaki proceeded to tell his profession what he had learned. He paid handsome tribute to the glass box of the great Mies van der Rohe, but the glass box, except in the hands of a few highly talented men, had deteriorated into a cliché. He denounced "the dogma of rectangles" and the module system of building — "as monotonous as the Arabian desert." He deplored the "plastering of whole blocks of midtown New York with regimented patterns of glass and porcelain-enamel rectangles." Function, economy and order, said Yamasaki, were no longer enough. "My premise is that delight and reflection are ingredients which must be added. Unquestionably there is delight in our best new buildings, but this delight is in structural clarity, in proportion, and in elegant details and materials, and these characteristics offer but a portion of the delight which we have experienced in the buildings of the past. Sunlight and shadow, form, ornament, the element of surprise are little-explored fields, barely understood by today's architects." Since then, Yamasaki has done his best to achieve "the joy of surprise — the experience of moving from a barren street through a narrow opening in a high wall to find a quiet court with a lovely garden and still water;

or to tiptoe through the mystery and dimness of a Buddhist temple and come upon a court of raked white gravel dazzling in the sunlight ; or to walk a narrow street in Rome and suddenly face an open square with graceful splashing fountains.” To these abstract ingredients, Yamasaki has lately added another one that is quite concrete— namely, concrete. Unimaginative, cost-cutting architects often feel forced to use confining, standardized materials, the metal and glass that show in so many undistinguished buildings. Yamasaki has escaped this tyranny (and yet preserved his reputation for economical construction) by adopting or devising with his favorite engineer, John Skilling of Seattle, up-to-date ways of using concrete, a basically cheap material. Prestressing and precasting strong columns, girders and large wall sections (see diagram) has freed many of his buildings from the limitations of structural steel or poured-on-the-job concrete. The chance to get sun-and-shadow patterns by repeatedly casting structural parts in the same sculptured mold gives Yamasaki’s architecture much of its embellishment. And he uses various devices, typically quartz surfacing, to avoid a raw-concrete look. *Silhouette & Surprise*. The first opportunity to put the ideas from his trip into practice came in August of 1955, when Detroit’s drab Wayne State University commissioned Yamasaki to design the McGregor Memorial Community Conference Center. His concept was that the building should be a gateway between the city and the campus, a sort of open glass gallery lined with conference rooms on each side. He chose concrete folded slabs with triangular ends to provide a dramatic “silhouette against the sky.” He set glass walls behind slender, marble-clad steel columns with ornamental sunshades and grilles to provide “texture.” For “surprise,” he provided a triangular-patterned skylight over the two-story-high central gallery, and for “delight” an el-shaped pool outside with islands of white gravel. When the building opened in 1958, there was a ceremony at which Yamasaki, who is no orator, made a brief speech, thanking the university for the opportunity it had given him. When he finished, he was stunned to find that every person in the audience was on his feet, clapping and cheering, not for the speech but out of sheer gratitude for the building. Architectural magazines hailed McGregor Center as “delightful” and “refreshing,” and the A.I.A. gave Yamasaki another of its First Honor awards. *A Bit Slaphappy*. As Yamasaki’s body of work grew bigger, the autocritical facility of the architectural profession grew harsher — often with Yamasaki leading the pack. Critics declared the soaring interior of the Reynolds Metals Co. Building, which won a third A.I.A. First Honor Award, an impressive success; but they denounced the exterior grille, made of thousands of interlocking aluminum circles, as “costume jewelry.” For Detroit’s Northwest Y.W.C.A., Yamasaki designed a simple and highly practical building around a charming inner court, but then he slapped on looping butterfly canopies that he now says he would never do again. When Yamasaki discovered the enormous versatility and flexibility of concrete, he went, as he says, “a bit slaphappy.” His building for the American Concrete Institute is basically a single passageway whose concrete walls support a roof cantilevered out over the offices on either side. This is ingenious, but Yamasaki turned the roof into a parade of jitterbugging triangles that induce not serenity but instant fatigue. As for the Wayne State University College of Education Building, with its nonstructural facade of 120

faintly Arabian slabs of precast concrete. Yamasaki (who gets carried away by his own jokes) rendered the crudest verdict. When he presented the model to the Wayne board of governors, he pulled out from his pocket a little wedding-cake bride and groom and placed the pair on top. "Twittering Aviary." Because of this obsession with façade effects, Yamasaki has been denounced and defended with increasing vigor. If placed all together, say his critics, his buildings would make a kind of Potemkin village where heaven knows what might be going on behind the lovely surface. What the buildings mainly lack for these men is a sense of force. By splitting the McGregor building down the middle with the glass gallery, says Yale's Art History Professor Vincent Scully Jr., Yamasaki has produced "a twittering aviary." "Just where you want strength," says Philip Johnson, "it isn't there." Snorts Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill: "Yamasaki's as much an architect as I am Napoleon. He was an architect, but now he's nothing but a decorator. Sure, people are getting bored with the glass box — I am too. But now there's this clique that says, 'Let's build a beautiful building,' and there is not even a thought to the architecture." Of the famous Seattle Pavilion, one top Manhattan architect says: "The Pavilion's structure looks as if you could buy it by the section and glue it together." Adds an other Manhattanite, Architect I. M. Pei: "The water in the courtyard is fine, very successful, but the building is not. Yama mass-produced a façade in the Gothic idiom but without the Gothic logic. At best, this building is mere artistic caprice." "What Human Beings Need." But Yamasaki has important support as well as important critics. To Walter Gropius, founder of the Bauhaus and professor emeritus at Harvard's Graduate School of Design, Yamasaki's work may be a bit too playful, "but he is a highly talented man, full of ideas, very able." Pietro Belluschi, dean of M.I.T.'s School of Architecture and Planning, says: "I do not necessarily adhere to all that Yama preaches, but he is not to be devalued at all. We cannot dismiss even his Seattle Fair. It has gaiety and a soaring that appeals to the public." Wallace Harrison praises Yamasaki's "fine sense of plan, of scale and what human beings need in a building," and Los Angeles' William Pereira agrees: "Yamasaki is concerned with the spirit of the place when he's building it. He struggles to do things to people." Japan's Kenzo Tange even disputes the charge that Yamasaki sacrifices structure for façade, arguing that his "strongest characteristic is his persistent habit of treating his structures themselves as design motifs." It is Yamasaki, naturally, who quibbles with that. Without conceding that serenity and delight could possibly be bad, he feels that in the past he "wasn't discriminating enough about structure. The bones, the basic structure of a building, must be evident, and they must be beautiful. You shouldn't put veils over buildings or barrels around them." At 50, Yamasaki feels that his best work is ahead of him, and most likely it is, for he is a man who criticizes himself constantly and never ceases to learn. Soaring Intimacy. The nearly completed Michigan Consolidated Gas Co. Building's steel structure may wear a coat of marble, but this is only "to be polite" to the marble buildings already existing in Detroit's Civic Center. The elongated hexagons that make up the 4,800 floor-to-ceiling windows are no mere gimmick: they provide a sense of soaring on the outside and a comfortable feeling of intimacy on the inside. From anywhere on a floor, a person can get a clear view, and

he can stand right next to a window without that sickening feeling that he will fall out. With Engineer Skilling as his constant consultant, Yamasaki is putting up a gracefully vaulted synagogue in Glencoe, Ill. He has done a master plan for a whole university for Iran, designed an elaborate Japanese Cultural and Trade Center in San Francisco, a dramatic, six-story Northwestern National Life Insurance building for Minneapolis, with 63 quartz-faced columns, each 80 ft. high. Three other projects in the works: > The Behavioral Sciences Building (William James Hall), which will be one of Harvard's first high buildings. To provide maximum interior flexibility for each department's changing needs. Yamasaki decided on a clear-span plan, with no interior columns. The structure has tall, tapered concrete columns with exposed brackets that hold precast, prestressed concrete girders. The girders, 7 ft. high by 34 ft. long, will have designs on them to give them scale and to express their purpose as structural members. > The Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, at Princeton, which Yamasaki designed to express "the nobility of public service." The scheme consists of 60 white precast columns, 28 ft. high, which will provide support for the upper floor. This will enable the lower floor to have nonbearing walls, with majestic spaces for a dining room, library, auditorium and skylighted reception lounge. > A 20-story office building for IBM in Seattle, faced with slender, concrete-clad steel ribs that support the structure and give the building a delicate, almost attenuated upward sweep. The arched colonnade at the bottom daringly omits corner columns. The Outsider. A few years ago, when his income had begun to swell, Yamasaki started looking for a larger house for his family, in either Birmingham or Grosse Pointe. But he soon found that even though he is one of Detroit's most famous citizens, he is also a Nisei and therefore still partly an outsider. His real estate broker told him. "I can't get you a house in either suburb. Yama. But I know of a fine old farmhouse in Troy which you can have." Yamasaki liked the 136-year-old farmhouse, and he lives there to this day with his mother and his blonde second wife Peggy (he and Teruko were divorced two years ago). He has landscaped his 15 acres, surrounded his house with Japanese-style gardens and patios, and supplied it with a deep Japanese-style bathtub. For him, the farmhouse means serenity

The office of Minoru Yamasaki & Associates, which now grosses \$1,000,000 a year, is something else again. Since the Port Authority commission, his staff has grown to 70 associates, engineers, designers, modelmakers and secretaries, who include a Burmese, a Thai, a Filipino, a Chinese, two Japanese, two Latvians and a Briton. Yamasaki knows everyone by his first name, no matter how green or young the employee may be; and he insists on being called Yama in return. The office may be a madhouse, but no detail is ever too minor for Yamasaki's careful attention, whether it be the type of door handle he wants for a new office building or the precise style of lettering that should go on the doors that say MEN and WOMEN. The Generous Spirit. In one room of his office is a model of the Lower West Side of Manhattan with a space representing 15 acres laid bare. In that space will go Yamasaki's new Trade Center. A project worked out by the Governors

of New York and New Jersey, the center will house anyone and anything connected with world trade: U.S. Bureau of Customs, customs brokers, freight forwarders, foreign

consulates, exporters and importers, trade associations, chambers of commerce, banks, insurance firms and finance agencies, now scattered blindly about the city. There will be trade fairs, steamship, air, truck and rail carriers, foreign trade publications, commodity exchanges, a hotel, shops, restaurants, a world trade institute and library, and a bewildering assortment of information agencies. Yamasaki will do the design, while the Manhattan firm of Emery Roth & Sons — an office noted more for its concern for costs than for producing beauty — will turn out the working drawings. If Yamasaki can keep a firm control of the job, it will be one of the greatest opportunities ever presented to an architect, “an opportunity,” says Yamasaki, “for new methods, new systems, new building ideas.” What form the project may be taking in Yamasaki’s inventive mind is his secret, but simple arithmetic shows that the vast space needs and limited site could force him to record heights or bulk. One thing the center will not be is harsh or cold. In taking the road to Xanadu, Yamasaki has turned office buildings, schools, churches and banks into gentle pleasure palaces that are marvelously generous in spirit. He shuns monuments. He is suspicious even of masterpieces, which he feels often better serve the ego of their creators than the well-being of those who use them. He may have committed some architectural heresies, but if he has, it is largely because he is a humanist with enormously appealing aspirations. He wants his buildings to be more than imposing settings for assorted clusters of humanity; they should also recall to man the “gentility of men.” should inspire “man to live a humanitarian, inquisitive, progressive life, beautifully and happily.” However the Trade Center turns out, it will have that ideal— and it will be built with the ultimate degree of loving care.