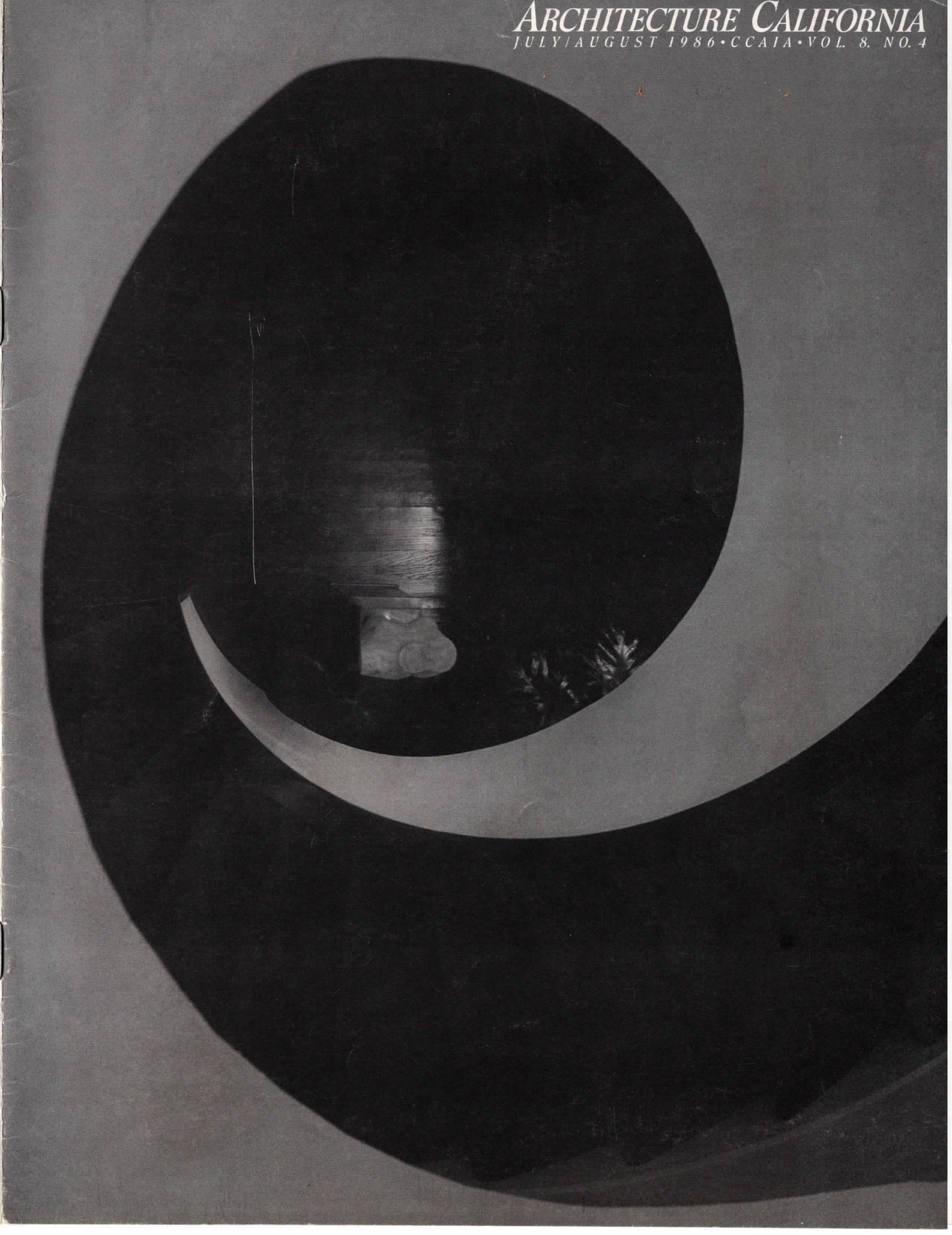
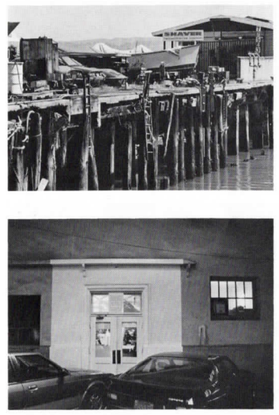
ARCHITECTURE CALIFORNIA
JULY/AUGUST 1986 • CCAIA • VOL. 8. NO. 4

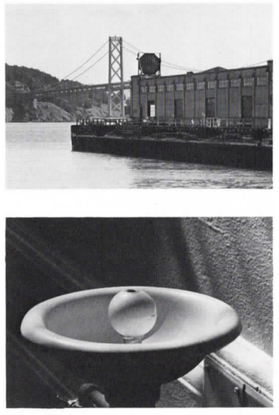


Pier 1½

Sitting on a dock of the San Francisco Bay is a family of design professionals, William Turnbull & Associates, chosen as CCAIA's 1986 Firm of the Year. In conferring the award, the jury said, "Bill Turnbull is a gifted and conceptual architect. The firm's work has a great sense of humanity and reflects an incredible skill. The vocabulary emerges from the nature of the problem to be solved, not from preconceived solutions. Since the office is not specialized, the ideas touch architecture at a variety of levels. We have great expectations that this vital firm will continue to contribute to architectural culture."

"We're very careful to say that we're a nonspecialist firm. You'll have a hard time tagging us with a stylistic label. If you want to hire us, we're happy to answer your problem. And the answer's going to come from you and your site and your budget."



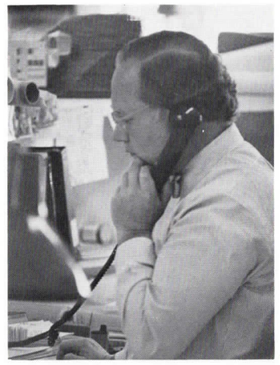


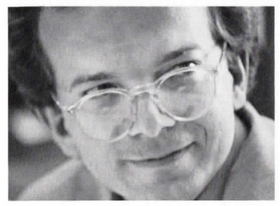
Article photographs by Tom Glass.

"The difficulty is to understand the lessons of the past and not to repeat what the patterns were. You don't want to rebuild the piece—which is the fallacy of postmodernism. You want to understand the lessons and reinterpret them. That's where your insights and your creativity come into play. The problem is to take apart the lessons and understand how to reapply them appropriately."

"You can get bound up in the coils of theory to the point where it chokes you. Palladio had the wisdom to understand that if he wanted to make a grand rural building, he had to take everything he had going for him and put it into the design. That wasn't theory. It was trying to make something special to mark the domain. He did it, then someone theorized it to secure his academic position. I'm not a theoretician."

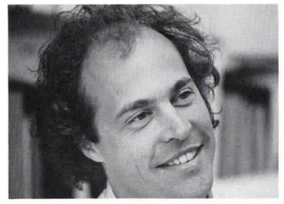
"One could have stayed within the safety net of a big office and, as a designer, done a whole lot more major constructions. But it's much more enjoyable to wrestle with a myriad of different problems, especially in a myriad of different landscapes."



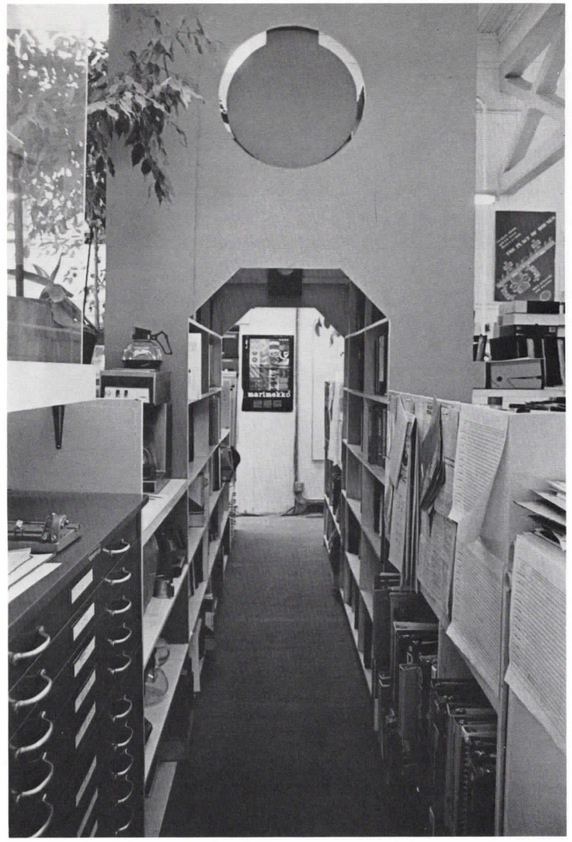


"Architecture has been laughed at as an old man's game. Maybe it's an old man's game because it takes a hell of a long time to learn about the business."

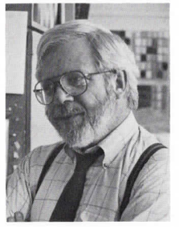
William Turnbull, FAIA



In designing, I set ground rules, then push them. Everything is organized as the tension between the clarity, the order and the break point."



"It takes a long time to train someone, and the managers in the office have to be careful and good to protect the professional quality of what you're putting out."



Members of CCAIA's Firm of the Year are William Turnbull Jr., FAIA; Robert T. Simpson Jr., AIA; Karl G. Smith II, AIA; Paul Lobush, AIA; Tomas Frank; Margaret Simon; Wendy Libby; Eric Haesloop; Stig Bengtsson; Sherry McKibben; Jorg Joppien Nancy DeBruyn; June Goodyear; Caroline Fenton; and Saand.

The Nature of A Responsible Building

By William Turnbull, FAIA

In today's society we are bombarded by a myriad of images from a variety of media. Besides the art world, we are exhorted by the radio, visually assaulted by the televison and wooed by the printed word. All are supported by financial underpinnings of advertising that harp at us to buy or invest in the newest or latest model.

The awards issue of *Progressive Architecture* is an example in our own profession. We are seduced by soft fuzzy works, collages of incomplete pieces somehow supposedly evoking a totality; new rendering techniques to catch the jaundiced jury's eye; new fragments composed in never-before arrangements wittingly to recall erudite academic wisdoms. The question is, what do these yearly essays in architectural extremism have to do with responsible building? The answer is "packaging."

An architectural inheritance from product advertising says "new is better." The supermarket concern of shelf positioning—for product recognition and hence more immediate purchase—is analogous to some of our newer buildings in some of our older environments. But before we take up this issue of packaging, let us consider the nature of what quality architecture has been, and what the lessons from the past and from the landscape actually can offer us as insights into the nature of design, rather than as an encyclopedic lexicon of stylistic fragments.

Our first basic premise is that architecture is territorial. It claims places in the landscape and establishes ethnic domain. Man ritualizes his territory architecturally. The drive to claim places for inhabition runs deep in the prehistoric conscience of both man and beast. The machinery of society codifies these intentions through homesteading laws, deeds of sale, assessors maps, and zoning patterns.

Our task as designers is to find appropriate ways of adding manmade structures to the landscape, for first we have a site before we have a building. To do this we must learn to read and interpret the physical world, as we have learned to listen to our client's needs and understand the limits of their budgets.

Thought of metaphorically, the elements of landscape are not complicated, but the nuances of their relationships and the ideas they express mean the building is a success in its setting or a failure. Any building must respond to its site: and more critically so in the suburban or rural environment.

Vegetation needs to be understood as an extension of a building. Using a house analogy, one can think of landscape as a series of outdoor rooms. Forests can make walls; ground covers serve as floors or carpets; and bushes, clipped or unclipped, inhabit the spaces like furniture or accessories. The combinations of the ideas within a conceptual fabric is limited only in the pragmatic discipline of possibility imposed by sun, wind, temperature and precipitation, plus the fertility of the site itself. At the scale in which we architects normally work, there are also subtleties of microclimate: sun/shade, wet/dry and hot/cold. Each offers a different design opportunity.

We attempt to combine elements of landscape with our client's needs to establish a "sense of place," to create a visible marker for territoriality. But markers can be appropriate or inappropriate, which brings us back to the issue of packaging.

"Sea Ranch was basically Charles Moore, Donlyn Lyndon and I building on the ideas we'd been talking about in school. The coming together of three friends with idiosyncratic strengths made it very special. My memory of the design of the condominiums is of a table with three people sitting around it, with one pencil. You could literally hold the pencil until somebody, filled with energy and insight, felt you weren't keeping pace. Then you would lose the pencil. It was a very freewheeling collaboration."

MORLEY BAER

Condominium, Sea Ranch. The client purchased a 5,000 acre sheep ranch that stretches along 10 spectacular miles of coast three hours north of San Francisco. The weather is cool, moody, often foggy and almost always windy, but the wild beauty of this north coast exercises a powerful hold on its devotees.

The problem was to develop the site for vacation houses without destroying the poetry of the place. We were asked, on an especially rugged, bare, narrow (and magnificent) 35 acres between the road and the sea, to design condominium units (at least four per acre, since California coastland is expensive) that would cluster tightly together, to leave most of the site open, without losing a close connection between each unit, the open land at hand, and the views.

Each unit starts as a 24 foot cube, modified by the single pitch of the roof that covers the cluster. Cars are parked together around a walled compound, and units are closely packed around a courtyard.

Inside the cubes, we struggled for a maximum sense of enclosure, with few openings except for numerous skylights that admit the always welcome sun. Outside the cubes go glass bays, terraces, decks, and walled gardens, more outside than in, even when they are enclosed against the wind.

MORLEY BAER

Swim and Tennis Club, Sea Ranch. The problem was a triple one: first, to design a small and inexpensive facility that would be part of the sweep of the landscape and not an interruption of it; second, to shield the swimming pool and the tennis court from the brisk, strong north wind; and third, in a climate almost always chilly, to create the sensation of warmth necessary to make the outdoor swimming pool an attractive idea.

The solution evolved with a reshaping of the land itself into windfree pockets containing the swimming pool and tennis court. North of the pool a two story unfinished redwood wall with attendant buttresses served as a "wind dam" and sun reflector. Spaces between buttresses, when enclosed and covered with redwood shingles or translucent plastic roofs, form the adjacent storage area.

"The landscape is tremendously important in terms of what you put on it. The answers are generated by the place, not by precedent or history or overseas fashion."

Facadomy

Vincent Scully said in a recent *New York Times* article: "Nothing shows up more definitely in a building than a lack of love, unless it is a love of money."

An attitude of packaging buildings—or at least considering their facades as wrappings—presently predominates the architecture marketplace, and perforce the architectural press. The argument goes something like this: The office building (but it could as well be a house or school or retail building) is a familiar animal at this point in architectural history. The structural engineering problems are worked out with optimum spans and column spacing. Mechanical/electrical systems are refined and computers do life-cycle energy analysis. Buildings have become "smart." What is left to design is the surface, the skin, what it looks like. The Package.

The building is a commodity to be bought and sold in the marts of commerce, much like a pair of designer jeans. The technology of production of the article is well known and the only thing that needs to be added is "style." This is the character that sets one building apart from another and, along with the address, becomes the grist for the leasing agent's soft-shoe sales routine. Design doesn't have much to do with competitive sales price. Convenience (off the shelf or, in our terms, out of the bottom drawer) allows a sufficient margin of return to incorporate the costs of a new face lift. What does facilitate sales is service: getting what you are promised. In architectural terms those expectations are simple: keeping in the heat and keeping out the water, being on budget without change order overruns, and being on time.

The world we see in our daily lives reflects a poverty of the built environment that results in acre after acre of subdivision houses whose unrewarding blandness overcomes us whether they are high- or low-income examples. Environmental deserts are not price proscriptive. The rationale for these built landscapes is that architects need to eat and that developers abhor taking risks and would rather repeat a proven mediocrity that was financially acceptable than address its failings. Fortunately the prescription does not anesthetize the social conscience.

Why search for quality architecture and buildings of integrity? Because stylistic packaging does not satisfy basic human needs.

The architect makes opportunities for people to "inhabit." We are not in the hairdressing business, nor are most of us particularly adept at designing costumes. The limits of inhabitation are the limits of the occupants, be they extrovert or introvert, poet or politician. Our job is creating a conceptual framework for each.

Places serve people. Unlike Peter Eisenman and others who claim their buildings are pure architecture and have nothing to do with client needs, I feel client needs are catalytic: the physical need to be warm and dry; the intellectual need for order and insight; and the emotional need for humor and whimsy.

Our purpose as designers is to help people take possession of the bits and corners of their worlds, and to help organize those worlds into special domains for use and pleasure. A sense of the communal base is important when searching for a new direction. We are all part of a long tradition, the building of manmade

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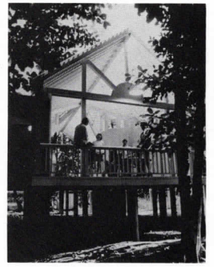
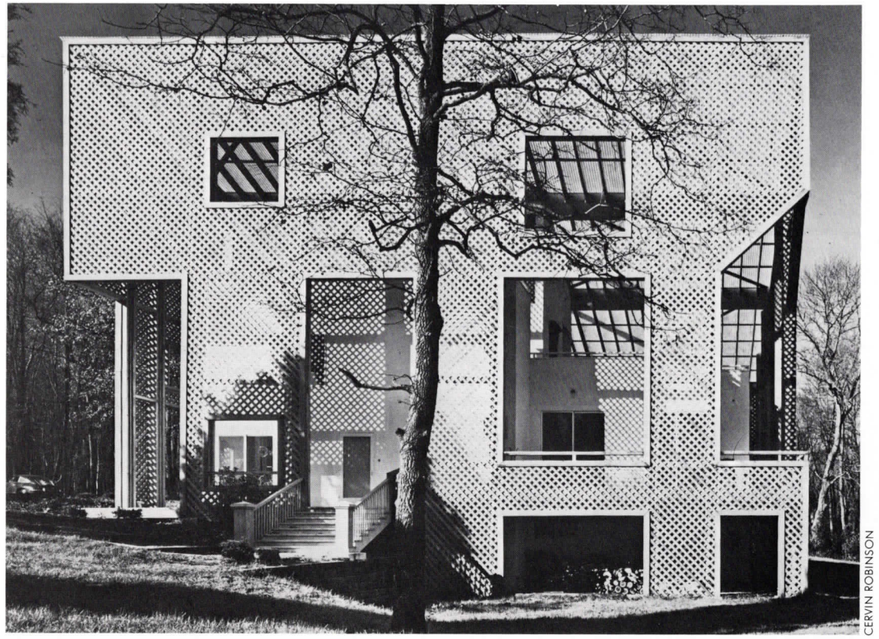
DAVID FRANZEN



Davidow Residence, Kauai, Hawaii. The site is 200 feet from the beach on the northern shore of Kauai. The climate is tropical and extremely wet; the owner's style of living, outdoor-oriented and casual. Both considerations pointed toward an open, informal "porch-like" house. Because this region is susceptible to *tsunami*, or tidal wave action, structures must be elevated above the ground. Thus the house is essentially an airy pavilion supported by wooden poles, floating up amidst tropical foliage, open to cooling sea breezes and ocean and mountain views.

The form is an enormous gabled veranda, sheltering within it an "inner house" that can be further secured as weather and privacy needs dictate. Within this light-filled and airy enclosure, the living spaces of the "inner house" are arranged symmetrically about the north-south axis of the veranda.

Two stairways topped with planters lead up to sleeping/play lofts, which form the roof deck of the two halves of the "inner house" below. The stair receives a swing-down wooden drawbridge that is pulled up when the owners are away. A series of sliding doors around the periphery of the "inner house" allows its living spaces to be enclosed.

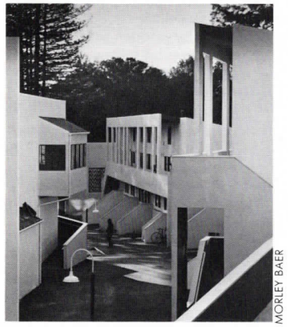


CERVIN ROBINSON

Residence, Fairfax County, Virginia. The owners desired a residence with two distinct qualities: a bright, light-filled house, and a house with lots of porches. Out of this paradox grew the solution of a house that is a porch. Within an outer "porch house" sits an inner house designed for specific functions.

A giant skylight, the translucent roof, fills the inside of the "porch house" with natural light, while a light tower from the inner house projects through the roof to flood the interior with bright light. Under the skylight, the roof surfaces of the inner house are finished with a synthetic decking material and become multileveled porches. Intended for summer living and sleeping, the lattice enclosed porches form an air space to cool the house during the hot summers. Openings cut into the lattice are located to frame views out and are super scaled to emphasize the porch quality of the house.

"We have to add bodies to the rural landscape in ways that don't destroy the magic that brought people to it to begin with."


MORLEY BAER

Kresge College, University of California, Santa Cruz. The site, a heavily wooded knoll on the university campus, overlooks Monterey Bay. The program called for a residential college with accommodations for 325 students and an equal number of off-campus commuters. Besides student rooms, a library, classrooms, and faculty offices, we were asked to provide dining, recreation and common areas.

Within a very tight budget, our user-clients (students and faculty) requested "non-institutional" alternatives to the typical classroom and residential designs found within the university system. Funding came from state, federal and gift sources and the clear separation of spaces variously funded was mandated.

The answer to these rigorous requirements lay in designing small, two story buildings along a pedestrian pathway or street located to respect the trees and terrain. This street created a center for the college—a place where people meet—and establishes a unique character, setting the place apart from its quadrangle-inspired neighbors.

Residential accommodations further reflect a concern with the problems of student living. Instead of double-loaded corridor dormitories, we provided private rooms along open galleries with shared living spaces and kitchen. Provisions were made for an equal number of four-person apartments each with living room, two bedrooms, bath and kitchen. Other more adventuresome students were given a "do-it-yourself" situation in eight-person groups. Walls, roofs, and basic plumbing and cooking facilities were provided, but the students built intermediate floors and walls into their own designs. All rooms were furnished with a modular cube system that allows unlimited personal arrangements.


MORLEY BAER

Biloxi Library and Cultural Center, Biloxi, Mississippi. The historic city of Biloxi decided, as its Bicentennial gesture in 1976, to erect a new library and cultural center. The final design creates a "walled garden" opening to the city hall and providing a landscaped foreground to this important old public structure. The original small Creole library was refurbished and relocated in the garden as an object providing historic continuity. The walls of the garden are symbolically the walls of books, that form under one expansive roof an intimate reading space of light next to the sunny, green interior. Grand stairs, in the traditional southern manner, lead to the second floor meeting space and adjacent areas given over to exhibition and display of historic artifacts.


RUSSELL ABRAHAM

Woodrun Place Condominiums II, Snowmass, Colorado. This project is located on a steep north-facing slope in Snowmass, a year-round resort community north of Aspen. The parcel is restricted on the east by a bend in the ascending mountain access road and to the west by the major Snowmass chairlift. The high density program includes 56 condominium units, a conference center, a recreational spa, and 56 covered parking spaces.

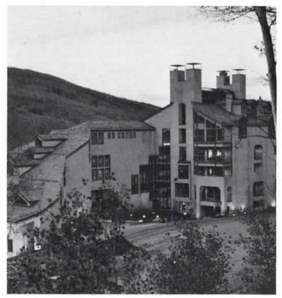
The massing of the building is dictated by highly restrictive height and slope limitations. The buildings are organized to prevent shadows on adjacent roads and homes, and allow southern exposure in all but a few units. The town planning department required that a single uninterrupted building face be not longer than 160 feet. Vehicular entry is determined by the mandated fire access road through the site. The building footprint was fixed by these considerations.


MORLEY BAER

Johnson/Turnbull Winery, Napa. The Johnson Turnbull Winery is the result of reconstructing an 1890 farm. The original lines of the old barn were maintained. By the addition of insulation and cooling facilities, it was remodeled into a winery. Additional screen fermentation tanks were added along the north side.

The house and outbuildings were substantially rebuilt and remodeled for contemporary living. Landscaping was added to shield private outdoor spaces from wind and dust and to provide a comfortable amenity for weekend occupancy.

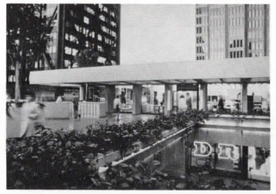
"Our thrust is to merge with the landscape, and protect it. Success is in not being seen."



The Centennial at Beaver Creek, Vail, Colorado. The project consists of 29 large two- and three-bedroom condominium units constructed as part of the first phase development of a new ski area.

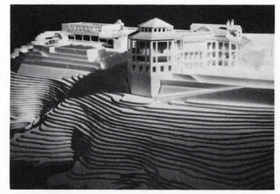
To accommodate the number of units and related facilities on the restricted site, a total of seven stories were required. Of these, the lower three stories, which included storage areas and covered parking for 30 cars, were below grade except at the downhill (western) boundary. To further reduce the apparent building mass, upper stories were tucked under a steeply pitched gable roof that dips to three stories above ground on the south and five on the west.

The main entrance to the building was from the uphill (east) side, through a *porte-cochere* that opens into a four story skylit atrium lobby. From this lobby, crossed by bridges on spaces, corridors and broad open stairs extended north and south to serve the living units on the upper floors.

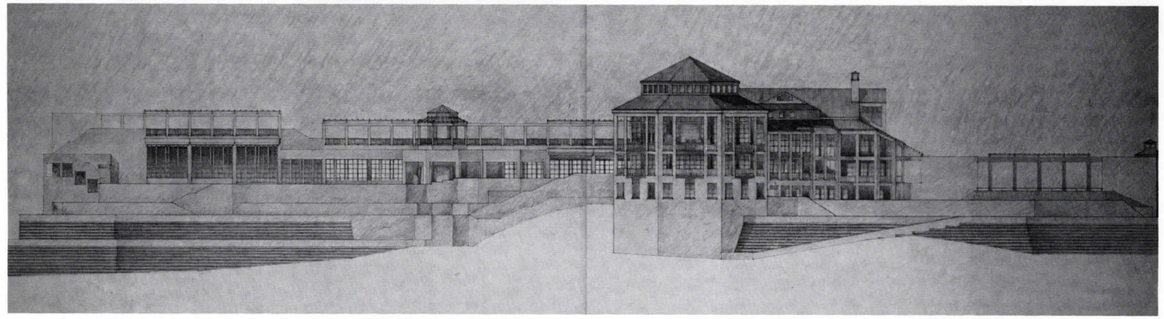

MORLEY BAER

Design Research, San Francisco. The problem was creating a strongly desirable destination for retail buying three floors above the street in the congested downtown area; a memorable "place." The building, being part of John Portman's already constructed Embarcadero Center, offered no opportunity for altering its exterior or visually clarifying access to the space. Problematically there were a host of paradoxes to resolve. The store is known for its bright cheery materials, a character that runs throughout the textiles, furniture and accessories it sells; the Embarcadero Center is a great grey concrete megastructure, a city within a city. The chain's other stores tend to sparkle with sunlight and be softened with green growing things; the space provided us was wide, low and dark with projecting concrete fins containing windows of absorbent bronze solar glass. Lastly, the store wanted its own recognizable identity. The developers naturally wished to maintain the overall exterior character and not emphasize any particular tenant's space. Having ultimate design approval for any changes to the retail space, they graciously allowed us the maximum possible design latitude.

A solution was found in emphasizing the paradoxical conditions. Where no sunlight existed in the deep space, we introduced an 18 x 28 foot skylight. Stair openings bring the sun into the dark lower level. Where the repetitive concrete structure dominated and rigidly organized all the Embarcadero spaces, we ran surface-mounted fluorescent light on a contradictory diagonal. Countering the simple repetitiveness of the exterior concrete fin, new white walls were introduced in the skylight well. They take various sizes and shapes with openings recalling poetically all the idiosyncracies of residential Victorian San Francisco. In keeping with the simple direct spirit of Marimekko textile design, we elected to leave as found all the pipes, ducts, wires, hangers, *etc.* that exist within a large building. Underneath a ceiling grid fabricated with light aluminum walls we hung studs used by tract builders for low cost residential construction (our own paradox of opponent values).



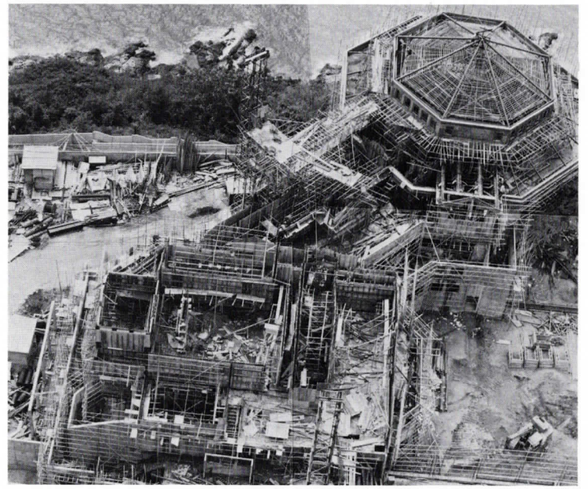
"When we did Hong Kong, we wanted to have a fung shu *man come out and check our siting, but the American client wouldn't go along with it. They considered it superstitious. I was all set to learn something. I thought it would be interesting to see whether eastern tradition would concur or disagree with how we read the ground."*

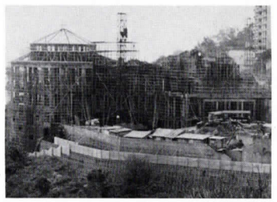


The American Club, Hong Kong. The American Club is located on the site of three old villas overlooking Tai Tam Bay on the south side of Hong Kong Island. The challenge was to fit the myriad of requirements onto a secluded water-oriented cliffside: parking for 150 cars, 4-6 tennis courts, sunning facilities, bowling, boat storage, as well as the normal attributes and facilities of a social club.

We created additional ground by the use of retaining walls, and established a private world by using the multilevel garage topped by tennis courts along the roadway.

The building itself focuses on the formal dining room that projects off the edge of the cliff, much as a lighthouse, to provide spectacular vistas for diners, as well as mark the establishment as a special place on the coastline.





settlements. Lessons of inhabitation learned by previous generations are reinterpreted and redefined by each new one. Insights we hold in common, but answers, designs, are each as individual as fingerprints.

I believe in the potency of visible construction, the security that comes from understanding the fabric of one's own world. An architect's creative arena is the world of space. Unlike the massive medium of the sculptor or the surface manipulation of the painter, we architects deal in the realm of spaces, and the differentiation of outside and inside constructions, and the magical world of the in-between. We understand and make use of layered space. We recognize the paramount importance of light as the revealer of space and an invitation to discovery. We use the nuances of emphasis that come through the manipulation of scale and from movement through space. And we bear the responsibility of respecting and building on what has gone before.

The secret to high quality architecture is in setting up opportunities for people to inhabit and enjoy. This is done by suggesting, but not dictating, how spaces might be used. Intrigue the mind, delight the eye, and seduce the senses, but don't offend the pocketbook, and you stand a good chance of making a wonderful and rewarding building.

William Turnbull, FAIA is a principal at the San Francisco firm of William Turnbull Associates, and a visiting professor at Yale University and occasional critic at the University of California, Berkeley.