

Variations On A Theme By Koetter

The Promenade at Miller Park

Kem Hinton

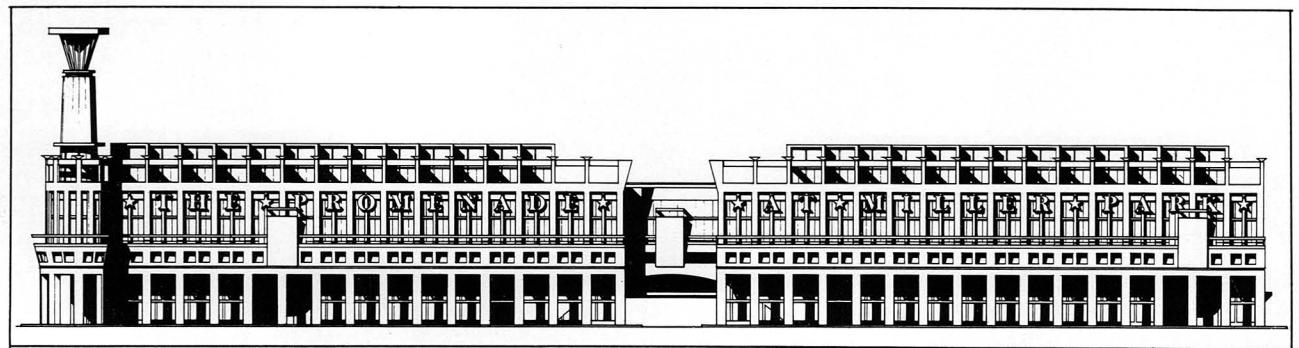
“Stroud,

This is, indeed, an interesting request. I don't know just how to respond. I've known for some time that you've been in Chattanooga working as the Mayor's Urban Design Advisor, and from the dithyrambs that I've heard about your work there, I've looked forward to an opportunity such as this. Enclosed is a description of the situation as I understand it. Is this correct?”

Guidelines For A New District

The Miller Park Urban Design and Development Guidelines were prepared to establish the planning of a new environment around downtown Chattanooga's southern-most outdoor amenity, Miller Park. Under the direction of J. Stroud Watson, the guidelines were prepared at the request of Gene Roberts, Mayor of the City of Chattanooga, by Koetter, Kim and Associates in collaboration with the Urban Design Consultancy. Funding for the research and development of the guidelines was provided by the Lyndhurst Foundation, a local philanthropic organization.

The issues of the guidelines are reasonably straightforward. Around the repositful Miller Park, four large, adjacent parcels of prime downtown property are undeveloped, the result of over two decades of urban renewal. Through the careful planning of these separate properties, the creation of an authentic



civic environment is possible due to an opportunity available to few contemporary American cities. The topics addressed in the guidelines, therefore, concentrate on the introduction of those elements necessary to establish a cohesive environment around the park while providing developers and architects flexibility in the design of each of the four individual tracts.

The guidelines establish a very specific plan for the new district. Of the four parcels, two along the west side of Market Street are to be developed as mixed-use facilities combining retail, commercial office, and residential activities. The remaining west parcel on Market Street is to be developed as a mixture of retail and office, and the final undeveloped parcel on the east side of the street will form a retail and office backdrop to a new outdoor public space, Miller Park Plaza. This new plaza, containing entertainment and public event areas, will provide a pleasant, active juxtaposition to the existing passive nature of the original park directly across Martin Luther King Boulevard.

Six goals constitute the foundation of the guidelines for the new district. These objectives are: 1) acknowledgement and intensification of existing civic activities in and around Miller Park (including not only the public park, but also the Post Office, Public Library, and nearby City Hall); 2) continuation of commercial and retail activities already established north of the district along Market Street; 3) establishment of Class A commercial office space within the district to provide economic stability; 4) inclusion of residential activities to provide a 24-hour urban authenticity; 5) provision of substantial parking facilities within the new buildings, providing convenient public and private parking within the district; and 6) highlighting available public transportation, including the consideration of a new trolley system on Market Street to link the new district with the unique recreational activities at the riverfront area directly north.¹

There are no significant existing structures on the four undeveloped sites, and the stated requirements for large,

multiple-use buildings deny the resurrection of previous structures long since demolished. Rather than requiring a direct relationship with nearby historic structures (Read, Dome, Patton, and Volunteer buildings), the guidelines instead specify an exterior organization which is based on the historic, architectural expression of base, wall, and top. The resulting compositions will, therefore, contain a modified reference to the context of neighboring structures, hopefully avoiding future urban design "mistakes" as exemplified by the autonomous massing and brutal street-level alienation of the nearby gargantuan Tennessee Valley Authority complex. A compatible relationship is required, but substantial flexibility is allowed, even encouraged, by the Koetter guidelines.

When first distributed, the thorough guidelines met resistance from local developers, architects, and public officials who questioned whether a realistic solution could be designed under the comprehensive restrictions. These groups also expressed a concern that no in-

dividual design freedom remained due to the stringent aesthetic specifications contained in the document. The Urban Design Consultancy responded to this criticism by inviting five separate design groups to develop a speculative mixed-use complex which would occupy two of the four undeveloped sites.² Funding for this design charrette would be provided by the Lyndhurst Foundation. Each invited firm would have the opportunity to question the guidelines, but the objective of the exercise would be to demonstrate that a realistic *and* creative solution would not be squelched by the restrictions. In essence, the task was to prove that the Koetter "text" was, indeed workable.

"Stroud,

So, you are asking us to design a hypothetical mixed-use facility for two of the four parcels in the district? We are certainly flattered to be in the company of the other

charrette participants, particularly Peterson-Littenburg, architects of an outstanding 1980 proposal for Les Halles in Paris. We have reviewed the thorough documents, and our initial reaction is probably the same: too restrictive. This will take some time.

The thoughts and background for the plan seem to make complete sense, but what is the model for these guidelines? You are introducing a loggia; is there a precedent? Is an Haussmannian rule system appropriate? What is it that you wish us to contribute; test the restrictions or invent a new interpretation? We will begin the process. Is this a palimpsest?"

The Miller Park Guidelines

The guidelines establish footprint and massing requirements for the four vacant parcels in the district. When completed, the structures erected under the rule

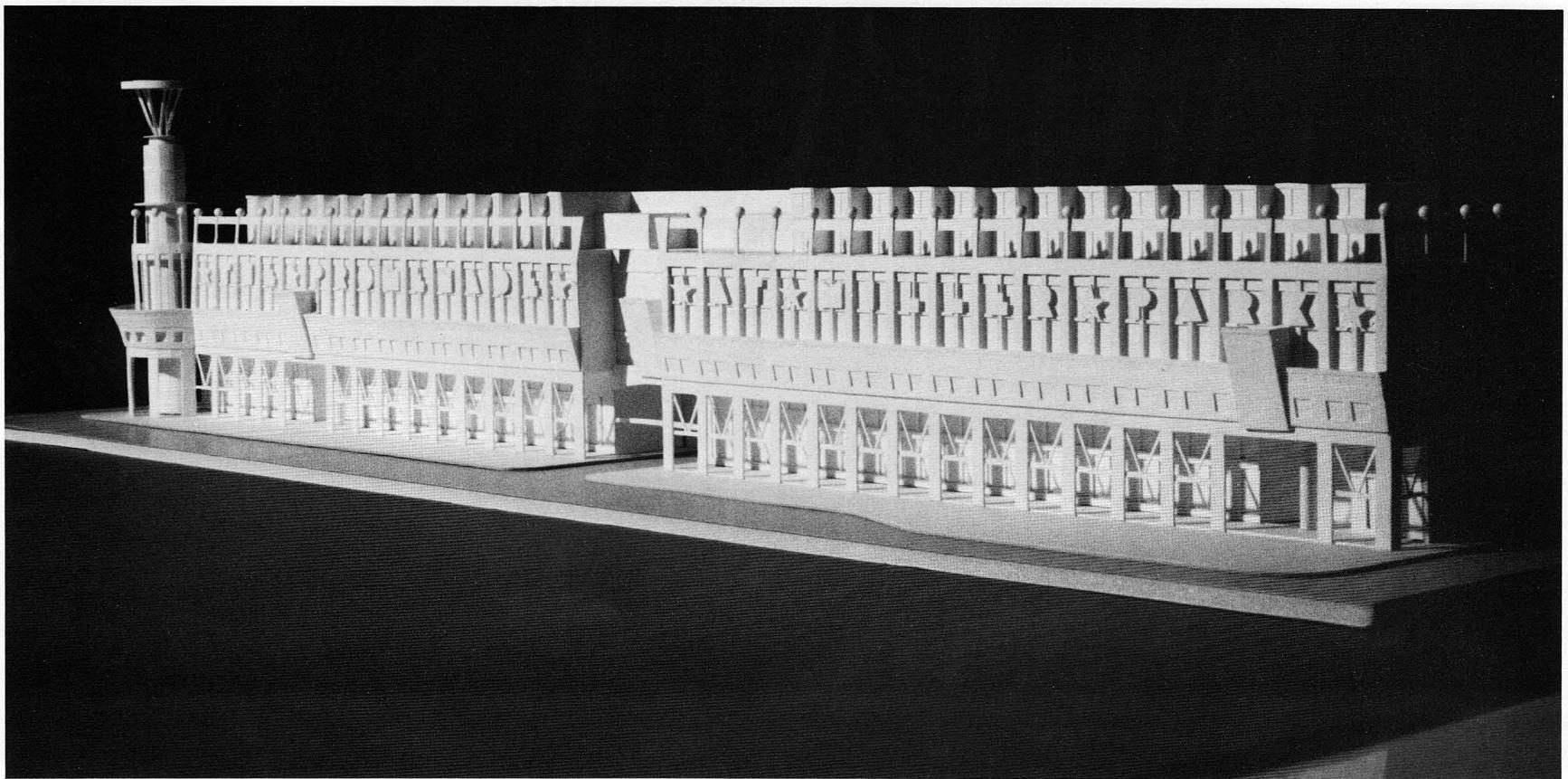
system will create a gigantic, L-shaped backdrop to the park and new plaza. The form will resemble an incomplete courtyard or parvis, however, the space will accentuate not a church but rather a civic object, a new glass pavilion in the proposed Miller Park Plaza.

Massing requirements dictate that the four parcels achieve a solid block configuration, with facades erected at predetermined positions and aligned with one another. "By maintaining a continuity of edge condition, each development parcel positively relates to the next such that sight lines remain unbroken."³ Plazas or forecourts are not allowed in the individual sites, and the resulting compositions must literally fill the required profile to create the desired edge. The footprint requirements mandate a strict plan alignment while height and profile restrictions create a cohesive three-dimensional character.

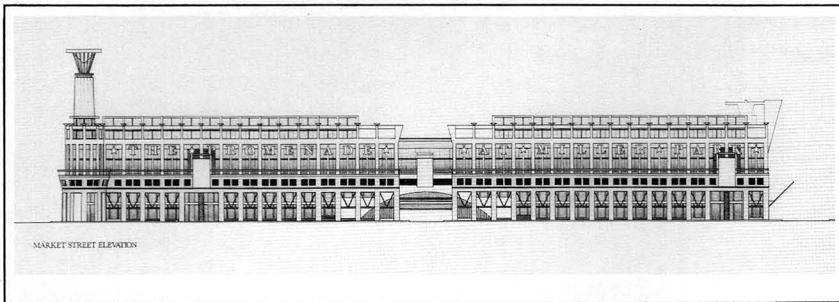
To emphasize the backdrop character of the aligned structures, a continuous edge is required along the west side of Market Street, the historic north-south vehicular artery. From curbside, a gracious 24-foot setback is reinforced by a two-level loggia and building wall above, creating a continuous pedestrian promenade for retail areas at street level. Generous landscaping in this zone and at the new plaza will extend the presence of the existing park and provide the district with a recognized identity as an oasis within the city.

The guidelines contain a strict system for the development of acceptable facade designs. Koetter notes that, "exterior building walls should be designed to perform as space-defining elements," and it is clear from the text that the prescribed facade organizations are included to create the desired urban backdrop to the existing park.⁴

"The urban wall must also reflect a distinction between the floor of the city,



View of Market Street Elevation



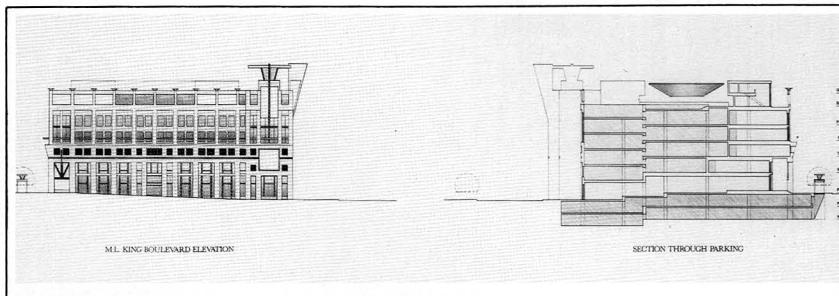
Market Street Elevation

the walls of the city, and the silhouette of the city — how the city meets the sky. The traditional tripartite distinction of base, shaft and capital — bottom, middle and top — is, in this way, important to the makeup and organization of the urban wall.⁵ This three-part system also permits a direct expression of the proposed internal occupancies: retail within the base, office behind the wall, and residential on top.

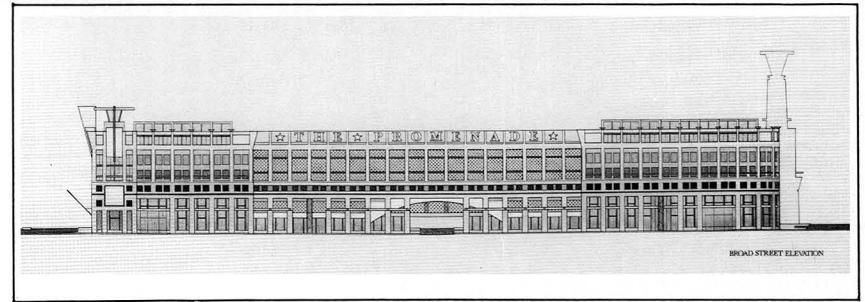
Facade types are cataloged in the document, illustrating acceptable compositions and combinations for each major section. The base is proposed as a two-story expression to align with nearby historic buildings, and this area becomes an open loggia along Market Street. The middle section, the “wall” containing office activities on the third through fifth floors, is a relatively flat surface composed of punched or framed vertical openings. Because they do not properly define an urban edge, horizontal strip windows are prohibited. The uppermost section, a residential zone of townhouse-like configuration, is placed at least twelve feet behind the face of the office wall. Recessed from the continuous horizontal parapet of the fifth floor, the profile restrictions for this residential area are greatly reduced, and to further pronounce the top

edge of the dominant office wall, the vertical rhythm of structural columns is extended to form a freestanding colonnade in front of the apartment units. Repetitive vertical elements — columns, window size and pattern, colonnade, and extensive area of non-figural wall surface — are counterbalanced and enriched by a system of horizontal stratification — aligned floor levels, continuous loggia, string courses at third and fourth floor, massing setbacks, and height restrictions.

The extensive effort to create a relatively neutral urban backdrop to Miller Park does not preclude Koetter from the introduction of dramatic elements within the new district. In the new outdoor amenity of Miller Park Plaza, the crystalline pavilion will become the civic focus of the revitalized district, while a nearby metallic gateway arch over Market Street will define the northern edge of the district.⁶ In addition to the pavilion and gateway, three other new “landmarks” are superimposed to establish a new sense of identity. At Martin Luther King Boulevard, two large square towers are required on opposite sides of the wide street. These gigantic seven-story portals frame the point at which this main roadway from the nearby interstate highway enters the northwest corner of the district.



M.L. King Boulevard Elevation



Broad Street Elevation

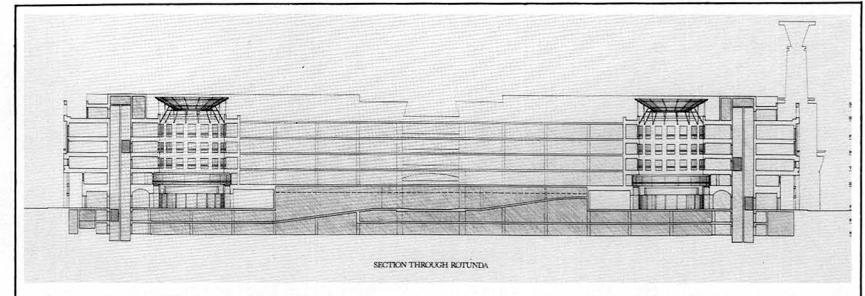
The final and most conspicuous landmark is a large round tower to be placed at the corner of Market and 11th Streets. Positioned at the geometric collision of the two primary orthogonal street grids, this element will mark the southern tip of the development and acknowledge the intersection of three busy thoroughfares.

Although thorough attention is given to the profile of the development on the four parcels, substantial internal flexibility is allowed within the massing outlines. The restrictions promote a prescribed layering of internal functions, with retail on the street level followed by four levels of office and capped with residential units on the uppermost levels; the facade rule system promotes this interior scheme. However, with the exception of the two required through-block pedestrian connectors — walkways which link civic activities within the district — the guidelines actually permit the development of interior functions to be at the discretion of individualistic developers and their architects. The recipe for the urban filling is only suggested, but the size and shape of the piecrust is dictated. “Thus, vistas are enhanced and particular focal pieces (the landmarks) stand out as public buildings.”⁷ Due to these extensive requirements, the role of the owner,

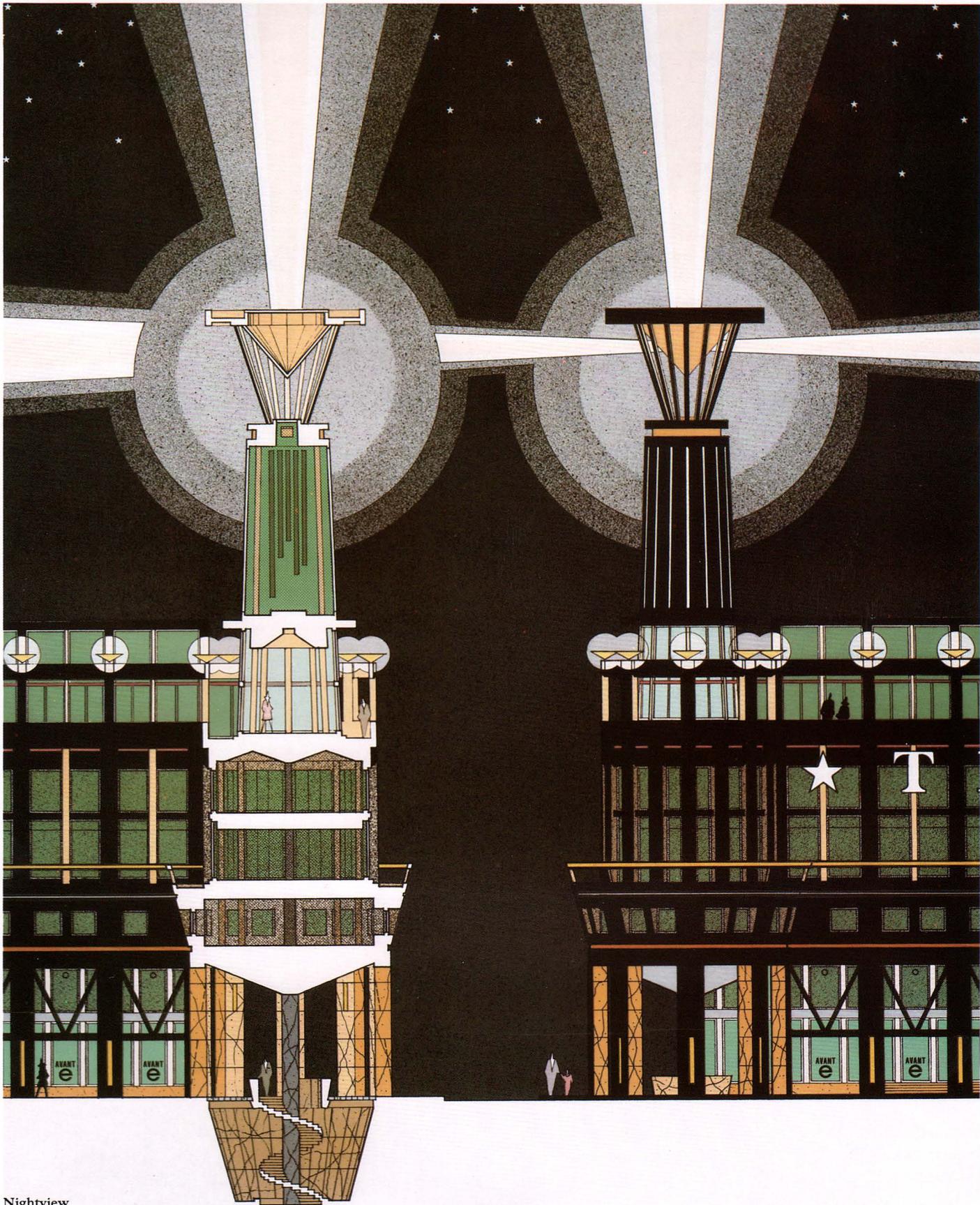
developer, and architect is elevated; the responsibility for a civic-level architecture responding to the urban and visual needs of a new district has now been placed in private hands.⁸

“Stroud, The guidelines are superb. During the development of our scheme for the “900” and Civic Form blocks, we have been amazed at the cohesive flexibility within the stringent restrictions. Curiosity has not escaped this exercise, and in our search for the foundation of our urban design stratagem, we devoted a considerable amount of time investigating the undisclosed sources for the richness of the document. Obviously, it’s a combination of many successful urban environments.

We see the need for visual exuberance to compliment the spatial quality established in the guidelines. Night lighting and signage was not addressed, so our inspiration was expanded to include work by not only Sansovino and Percier, but also Luckhardt and Venturi.⁹ Perhaps we’ve stretched



Section Through Rotunda



Nightview

the issue. We did stretch the tower; it's now a physical exclamation point for the district. From Koetter's marvelous original theme, we hope that we have elucidated a valid variation. Our proposal is enclosed."

The Proposal

"The Promenade at Miller Park" consists of multiple-use activities layered across the "900" and Civic Forum city blocks in an almost symmetrical configuration. The locations of specific activities within the project follow the directives of the guideline, and the resulting development contains the requested richness of occupancies and uses.

The first floor street level is devoted entirely to commercial retail activities, with penetrations into the flexible layout as necessary to provide pedestrian, vehicular, and service access into the development. These retail areas at the street will offer a wide variety of storefront shop arrangements along the busy thoroughfares, while separate entrances and elevator lobbies at 10th Street and Martin Luther King Boulevard will provide controlled access to the upper levels.

The requirement to provide public parking is resolved by the introduction of a two-level underground garage located directly below the massive composition. Vehicular entrances from 11th Street ramp down to this substantial parking area, with access to the street provided by the building elevators and stairs, and by areaway shafts which contain stairs leading directly to small kiosks positioned along Market Street.

Above the retail activities of the main floor, the second through fifth levels contain commercial office space. For these leased areas — essentially two separate buildings divided by a giant hyphen above 11th Street — great flexibility exists in potential office configuration. These upper-level commercial activities are supported by designated private parking

levels, with alternating parking floor slabs facilitating direct same-level access from nearly half of the reserved spaces. Due to the positioning of the parking garage in the center of the development, the resulting C-shaped floorplate provides extensive office frontage on the eastern facade overlooking both Miller Park and the Plaza.

Thirty-two apartments are located on the sixth level to complete the physical configuration of the proposal. Relatively small units, with a proportional share of the reversed parking spaces, these loft apartments have access to individual roof gardens behind the continuous post-and-beam periphery of the facade wall. The sawtooth massing profile acknowledges the adjacent street grid, and gigantic picture windows offer residents views of the revitalized southern section of the city and the spectacular mountain scenery beyond.

To break apart the mammoth bulk of the development, the two required pedestrian through-block connections from Market to Broad are established, not as interior hallways, but rather as exterior, quasi-conditioned public walkways bisecting each major urban block. To further invite pedestrian usage of these internal paths, dual cylindrical voids are introduced, exterior openings bringing natural illumination into the lower levels and reducing the overwhelming mass of each full-block composition. These rotundae, open to the sky as opposed to the all-too-familiar office atrium, become the major spatial and organizational elements in the proposal. Reminiscent of the interior space of Ledoux's *Rotonde de la Villette*, these spacious cylinders are capped by movable sunscreens, giant ring parasols which permit optional control of intensive illumination and rainfall.

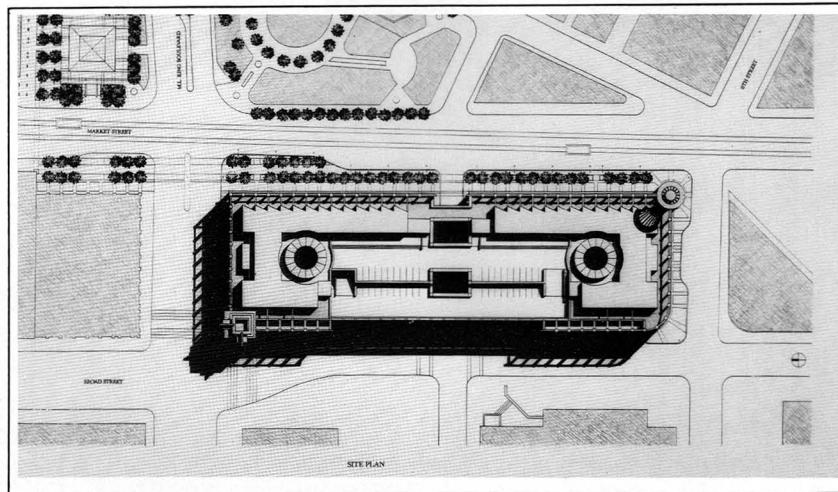
Although the rotundae organize the interior, there is a direct emphasis on the building's exterior to promote the required landmarks. The facades of the proposal, although highly articulated, are intentionally recessive in relationship to the

visual presence of the dramatic landmark forms. Complicated and flavorful at an immediate scale, these urban walls are repetitive and passive at an urban scale, serving as an effective visual background for activities in and around the existing park and new plaza.

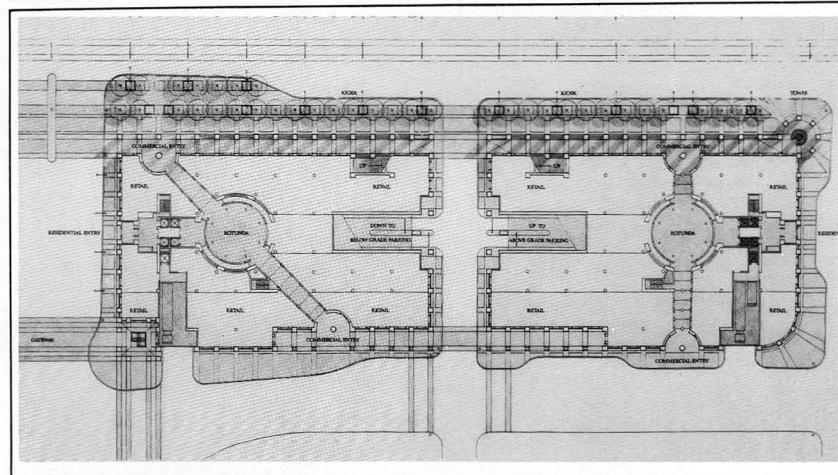
In addition to a vertical repetition established by framed fenestration patterns, the requested string course

facade also exploits the spanning of 10th Street by the addition of an archway recessed within the framework of the repetitious exterior loggia, acting as a symbolic bridge and stairway, yet seen only when approached directly from 10th Street.

The search for the historic precedents upon which the required base-wall-top configuration was based led to a slight



Site Plan

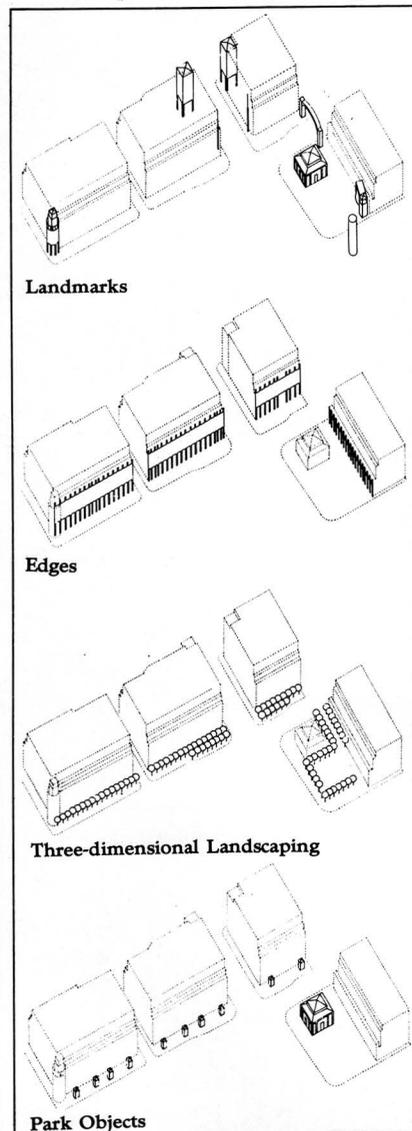


First Plan

stratification of the third and fourth levels is achieved by a separate facade expression, a tilted edge of punched openings which functions as a cornice for the retail loggia. Above this dominant line, the horizontality is continued by the incorporation of an elongated skyline message across the rhythmic wall; the name of the original outdoor amenity is positioned on the facade directly across from its actual location. The continuous Market Street

revision of this accepted genre. In the design, we propose an urban edge that conveys not only aesthetic but also commercial concerns, combining architecturally "correct" images with less-recognized but highly successful populist examples. Consequently, our inspirations for the proposed facades ranged from the "pleasing" (the *Procuratie Vecchie* and Library, Venice, and the *Palais Royal*, Paris) to the "commercial" (the Park

Crescent, London and the *Rue de Rivoli*, Paris), and beyond to the "vibrant" (New York's Times Square, the Strip in Las Vegas, and the Tennessee-Alabama Fireworks World on Interstate 24).¹⁰ These sources inspired a composition that contains signals (keystone panels at major entrances), symbols (archway at 10th Street), and signs (gigantic letters that announce the development both day and night).



Against the recessive albeit intricate character of the facades, the landmarks become the predominant urban forms. Placed at opposite ends of the project, these large urban objects fulfill the unique needs outlined in the guidelines and provide interesting opportunities for the offices and apartments within the special corner spaces.

At the intersection of Martin Luther King Boulevard and Broad Street, two chunky towers comprise a gigantic portal at the entrance into the district. Although there is no legal restriction requiring that owners on each side of the wide boulevard construct identical towers, the proposal assumes that a similar profile could be mandated by city officials to create the desired urban gateway. These two forms announce, on a grand scale, the vehicular entrance into the district. However, the most noticeable physical element of the mammoth composition is the circular Market Street tower positioned at the intersection of the city's two major orthogonal grids. Stretched in this proposal to become a gigantic lantern with colossal internal chimes, this highly visible element will become the visual (and acoustical) monument requested in the guidelines.

"The Promenade" provides the desired backdrop to Miller Park through the integration of an architectural consonance stipulated by the comprehensive guidelines. To enliven the composition, dissonance in form is introduced only to reinforce the regulated composition; the rigidity of the loggia, pilastered wall, and skyline graphic message is interrupted only by the landmarks and the unarticulated cartouche-like panels, single indicators of the entrance exedrae which lead to the illuminated rotundae within. The resulting composition, therefore, has not only the scale, proportion, and similarity mandated by Koetter's text but also the visual glamour, compositional richness, and nighttime excitement necessary to create a vibrant atmosphere for the new district.

"Stroud,"
What's your reaction? I must confess that we have been intrigued by the variety of images contained within this proposal, although many of these comparisons have surfaced after the design was completed. The tower is our favorite object, a dynamic vertical element placed against an intricate though

rather boxy composition; the resulting image of a raised observation platform is not altogether inappropriate for a city below Lookout Mountain.

Perhaps the hidden images also possess a narrative on Chattanooga's transportation heritage. Does the Market Street elevation resemble a locomotive hauling a second car of equal size? Or does one read a river steamboat, its paddle wheel suggested by the arch at 10th Street? An image of movement is present.

Thank you again for the opportunity to participate in the charrette. Once the process was underway, the restrictive factors of Koetter's text in no way limited our enthusiasm. Stravinsky discovered the power of restraint some years ago. Perhaps he was right."

"The more art is controlled, limited, worked over, the more it is free ... I shall go even further: my freedom will be so much the greater and more meaningful the more narrowly I limit my field of action and the more I surround myself with obstacles. Whatever diminishes constraint, diminishes strength. The more constraints one imposes, the more one frees one's self of the chains that shackle the spirit."¹¹

—Igor Stravinsky

NOTES

1. The goals are clearly explained in the early pages of the guidelines: Koetter, Kim and Associates, *Miller Park District Urban Design Studies*, 1985, Volume 1, pages 5 & 6.
2. Four other groups were invited to participate in the design charrette: Peterson-Littenburg Architects, New York; Robert Seals Architects, Chattanooga; Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, Washington office; and Koetter, Kim and Associates. The resulting proposals were featured in the March 1987 and July 1987 issues of *Architectural Record* and presented at an exhibition in Chattanooga.

3. Koetter et al., Volume 2, page 3.
4. *Ibid*, page 11.
5. *Ibid*.
6. The Miller Park Plaza, including the "landmark" civic pavilion and outdoor stage area, is a joint venture project of Koetter, Kim and Associates, and Derthick, Henley and Wilkerson Architects.
7. Koetter et al., Volume 2, page 11.
8. Leon Krier and others have advocated an urban design philosophy whereby civic or public buildings receive a planned spatial priority over structures for private or corporate concerns. See *Oppositions 14*, (Cambridge, M.I.T. Press, 1978) page 53. Such an approach is in direct contrast with the prevailing theme of most cities in the United States. See Dallas.
9. Jacopo Sansovino for the Library in Venice (1553); Charles Percier for the model facades on the *Rue de Rivoli* in Paris (1801); H & W Luckhardt for their *Potsdamerplatz* project in Berlin (1931); and Venturi, Rauch and Scott Brown for their bold usage of large graphics in several projects during the past twenty years.
10. These "sources" were not verified by Koetter or the Urban Design Consultancy as actual precedents for the rule system.
11. Igor Stravinsky, *The Poetics of Music*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1942) pages 63 and 65.

Although our project is described as a "Variation on a Theme by Koetter," it should be clarified that the Miller Park Guidelines were prepared by Koetter, Kim and Associates of Boston, Massachusetts. Among those responsible for this excellent document were Fred Koetter, Suzy Kim and Kent Knight.

We would like to extend our appreciation to Koetter, Kim and Associates and to the Urban Design Consultancy of Chattanooga for their permission to present this interpretation of the guidelines.

The presented project, "The Promenade at Miller Park," was designed by Tuck Hinton Everton Architects. I would like to thank my two partners, Seab a. Tuck, III, and Gary L. Everton, for their assistance, design ideas, and support. Although I have the privilege of presenting this project, the design and presentation of our ideas are collective and involve the input of many creative individuals in the firm. I would also like to thank Chris Ramke, whose knowledge of urban design issues in Chattanooga assisted in the development of a realistic proposal, and Professor Leonard Folgarait, Vanderbilt University, for his observations and astute insights into our work.

Drawings: Kem Hinton, Chris Remke, and Margaret Butler.

Model: Chris Remke and Terri Winters.