

The Architecture of Accommodation

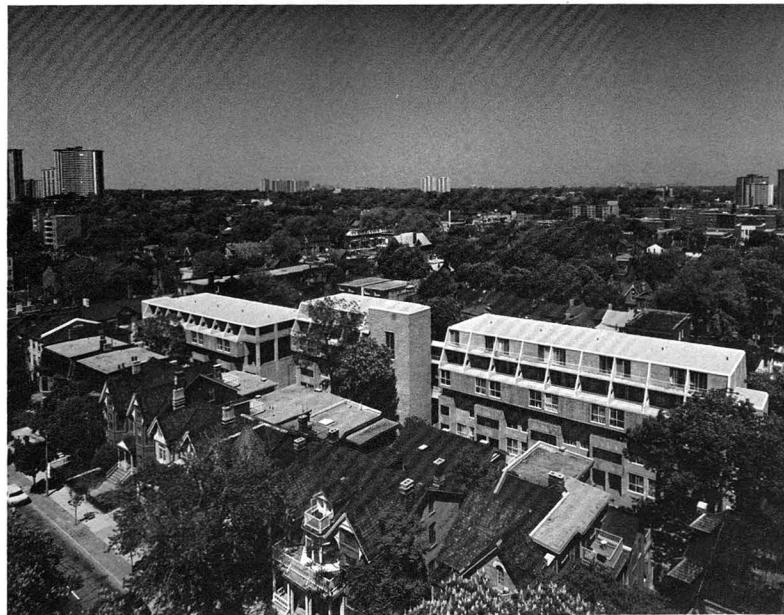
Barton Myers

Part I Vacant Lottery — An urbanist's approach

Paul Goldberger, the architectural critic of the *New York Times*, has written about the emergence of a new common wisdom about the design of cities. This new common wisdom is a collective consciousness about the ways we might build our urban environment, relying less on a single dogma or position about the right approach, and more on a set of shared values about city living based primarily on common sense and experience.

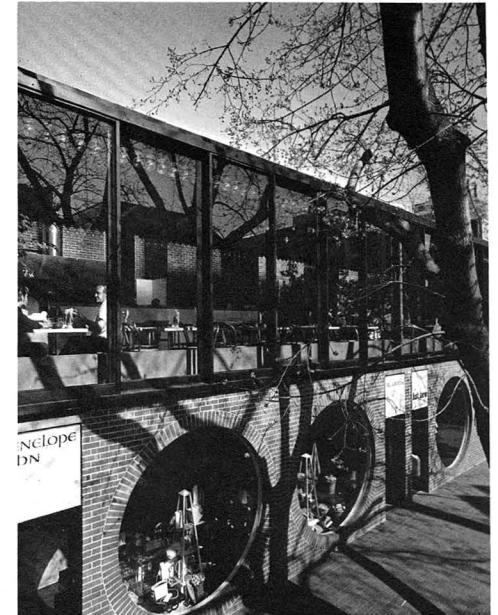
However, in our view, this is not happening. From our Bunker Hill experience, we have found that, although the architects in charge of the four competition proposals may have talked the same game, in reality the urban design attitudes could not have been more diverse. Although I would like to believe Goldberger, I find (after nearly 15 years) that our attitude is still very much a minority interest.

This attitude, which we call Vacant Lottery, describes a philosophy of urban consolidation — an approach of urban development in opposition to the currently pervasive uni-centered, high-density/high-rise North American city with sprawling suburban periphery. This alternative advocates conserving and building on the existing fabric, and filling the vacant lots that create vacuums of holes in the fabric of the city. As an alternative



1. Dundas Sherbourne Infill, Toronto. 1974-76.

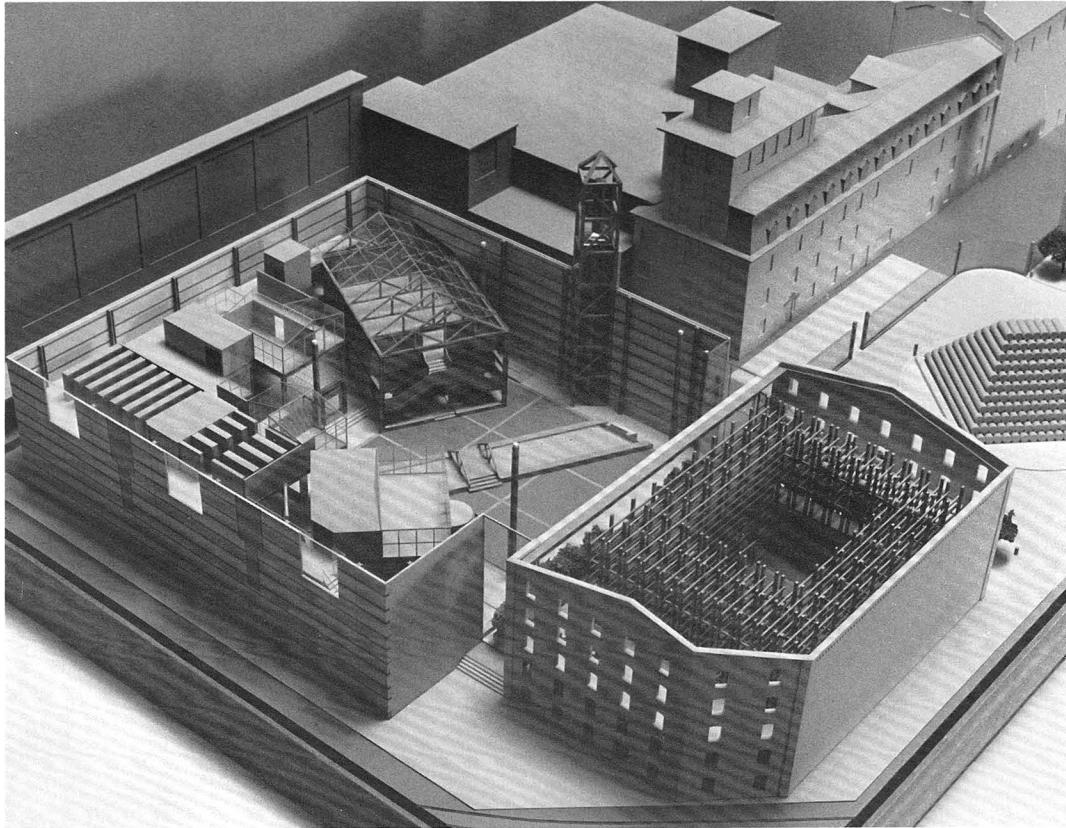
future for the city, the idea of vacant lottery can be illustrated by projects ranging in scale from small urban interventions such as single-family housing to large city planning proposals; two of our projects, Sherbourne Lanes (Photo 1), York Square (Photo 2), attempt this idea. In general, each intervention attempts to consolidate urban growth through even distribution of densities and a respect for particular contexts, physical as well as social. The overall intent is to demonstrate the importance of the context of architecture in the city, an attitude that might return to our cities the coherence and urbanity they once had, reconciling design quality and commitment to the city as a social as well as a spatial organization.



2. York Square, Toronto. 1968.

The urban design strategies that support the idea of urban consolidation can be summarized as follows:

1. Alternatives to high-rise only: low-rise infill development strategies.
2. Alternatives to the bulldozer: preservation and re-use of existing buildings.
3. Alternatives to buildings as isolated objects: connected, additive buildings.
4. Alternatives to erasing of historical traces: combinations of old and new buildings.
5. Alternatives to residual useless open spaces: creation of identifiable urban spaces—streets, squares, “galleria” streets, courtyards.
6. Alternatives to universal International Style modern architecture: reinterpretation of regional building elements and materials.
7. Alternatives to introversion of retail frontage: retail shops address and support public spaces.
8. Alternatives to single-use zoning districts: mixed-use districts and neighborhoods.
9. Alternatives to singular, specialized housing types: development of a range of medium-density urban housing prototypes.
10. Alternatives to the “tower-in-the-park” or “tower-in-a-plaza”: development of tower bases that have a positive, formative relationship to streets, squares, and blocks.



3. Seagram Museum, Waterloo. 1983.



4. Unionville Library, Unionville. 1982-83.

Part 2 Architecture — A framework of attitudes

Our buildings are designed to work at several scales within the existing urban fabric. We believe that the uncentered North American city, with its high-density in a multi-centered way, with more even distribution of development densities, effective public transportation systems, mixed-use zoning reform, and appropriate urban buildings.

Influenced by urbanists such as Jane Jacobs and Ed Bacon, our approach has several practical implications: reinforcing existing urban textures and neighborhoods, maintaining existing housing and building stock through renovation and recycling, and designing buildings that resonate

with, rather than imitate, their contexts. Concern for the context of our work encompasses respect for existing buildings, urban fabric, tradition, historical models, combinations of old and new, popular culture, and climate.

For example, York Square, an early Toronto infill project, creates a small shopping courtyard behind renovated Victorian houses. The Dundas-Sherbourne housing project, also in Toronto, integrates new low-rise terrace housing with rehabilitated houses of historical value, removing the threat of high-rise development and preserving the physical and social fabric of an inner city neighborhood.

Our concern for context, along with client usage, influences the shape the work will take and what its design will

communicate. Each project, although characterized by a strong underlying order, is adjusted to the particularities of the real situation to give complexity, richness, and individuality. The facade of our Ghent Square townhouses, for example, combine a bay window and a fireplace chimney while recollecting traditional precedents.

Buildings within Buildings

Infilling—placing things within things, rooms within rooms, buildings within buildings—is a continuing theme in our built work. This strategy enables us to use smaller spatial elements to create identifiable places within much larger building organizations. We have worked with two variations of this theme. They are represented in the buildings and projects that follow.

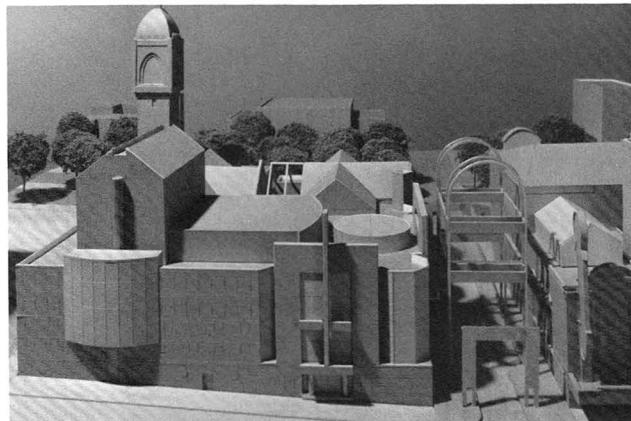
1. Large Simple Building Shells

Initially a response to the Canadian climate, the first variation proposes a large building enclosure—a big shed with smaller pavilions and rooms within. The increasing cost of heating made us question the idea of designing buildings with highly articulated exteriors composed of separated building elements. Habitat in Montreal, with four or more surfaces of each dwelling unit exposed to the cold Canadian winter, and the Royal Bank of Canada building in Toronto, with its highly-faceted curtain wall, are examples of buildings with unusually high ratios of exterior wall surface to usable floor space. They are expensive to build, and their highly modulated surfaces act as radiators, losing their heat in cold weather.

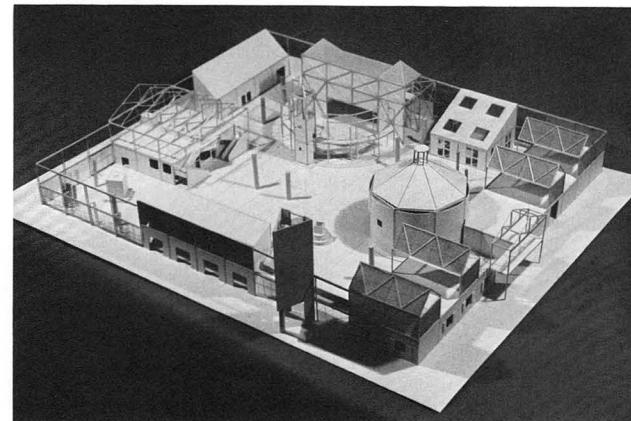
For the Seagram Museum (Photo 3) and the Unionville Library (Photo 4) we have created large simple building shells with relatively flat, unarticulated exterior surfaces. They are constructed using contemporary shed assemblies—steel frames, insulated metal roofs with rainscreen, and curtain wall construction. Pavilion buildings and smaller architectural elements are organized within the large building envelopes, generally around open common areas. The smaller buildings within the building qualify the scale and character of interior space. Program components of the respective “large buildings” are accommodated within the “interior buildings.” At the Seagram Museum, thematic exhibits—wine, products, film champagne—are housed in four major pavilions, while at the Unionville Library, eight pavilions house bookstacks and a meeting room.

In the Seagram exhibition building, the placement of the interior industrial pavilions is influenced by Doxiadis’ thesis about the siting of buildings on Greek religious sites. The Seagram pavilions extend a ritual journey through the museum of industrial archaeology and across time, offering visitors a choice of routes and, therefore, a choice of ways to experience the building and its contents. The focus is on an open court through which a symbolic creek runs, representing the real creek buried below which provided the source, literally speaking, of the distilleries. At Unionville, the placement of the book pavilions defines a central area that resembles a town square. A set of smaller, freestanding common elements are arranged within the central area much like informal public amenities in an outdoor square.

2. Smaller Buildings/Dense Composition
The second variation on the theme of buildings within buildings uses a number of separate smaller buildings to produce a relatively dense com-



5. Portland Performing Arts Center, Portland, Oregon. 1984-85.



6. California Multicultural Centre and State Mall, Los Angeles. 1984.



7. 19 Berryman Street, Toronto. 1970.



8. Housing Union Building (HUB), Edmonton. 1969-72.

position. Major elements of the building program are contained in smaller buildings whose relative position in the plan creates a large unified ensemble.

The Portland Performing Arts Center (Photo 5) and our proposal for the National Gallery of Canada are large, complex institutions whose programs have been accommodated using this approach of combining several discrete parts into a larger whole. In both cases, the generic architectural elements remain legible within the larger composition with adjacencies and connections assuming critical importance.

The Multicultural Center in Los Angeles (Photo 6) draws on both variations of “buildings within buildings” by having several smaller buildings share a common enclosure. Given the California climate, a shed is unnecessary. A looser, more scenographic arrangement of pavilions creates a series of outdoor courts. Mature trees on the site are preserved to create a unifying canopy over the courts and pavilions and to provide shade for outdoor activity.

“Galleries” and Courtyards

In earlier projects, we developed the courtyard and “galleria” as ap-

propriate organizing spaces for cold-weather buildings. In my own urban townhouse, 19 Berryman Street (Photo 7), all parts of the house are brought together by the skylit central courtyard. On a large scale, the long-range plan for the University of Alberta involved a consolidation program for a cold-weather campus, based on a climate-controlled pedestrian movement system. The HUB building provides on-campus living accommodation of 1,000 students and is one of six galleria-type buildings that the university has constructed to date. Both the 19 Berryman Street courtyard and the HUB Galleria (Photo 8) are covered by steel and fiberglass or



9. Wolf Residence, Roxborough Street, Toronto. 1974.



10. Citadel Theatre, Edmonton. 1974-76.



11. Bellair Cafe, Cumberland Street, Toronto. 1980-81.

by acrylic greenhouse roof structures that permit natural lighting and direct sunlight during the long winter months, and solar heating by day. Moveable horizontal curtains can be adjusted under the greenhouse roofs to create a zone of trapped air space that helps reduce nocturnal heat loss and provides shading during the summer season.

In the Seagram Museum and the Unionville Library, we have

developed another design strategy for covering the large central interior courts: a grid of standard-size skylights evenly distributed over the entire roof.

Fabric shades are positioned as ceiling elements within the depth of the steel roof trusses to create light coffers which diffuse the spread of natural light like giant lampshades, producing an even level of illumination.

Adjustable Architecture

Responding to climate, in regard to our designs, has led us to the use and reinterpretation of traditional elements such as porches and a wide array of devices such as canvas shades, awnings, shutters, and roller-blinds. These allow for modification of the environment by the user and have been reinterpreted within a contemporary idiom at 19 Berryman Street, the HUB building, and the Wolf House (Photo 9). The use of heavy curtains as an insulating device was proposed for the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton (Photo 10). The main auditorium is a free-standing building wrapped by a large glass porch. An insulated quilted curtain system (unfortunately never realized) was devised, which when closed would have created a heated layer of air space between the double-glazed curtain wall and the lobby interior.

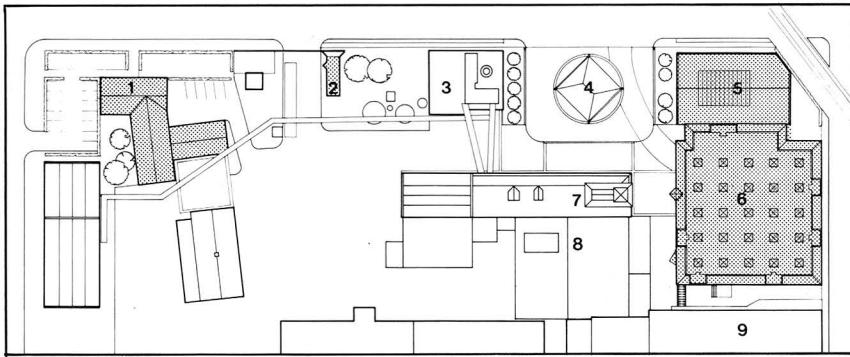
In two Toronto restaurants that we designed, Griffin's and the Bellair Cafe (Photo 11), interior eating areas are connected to the street. At Griffin's, upward-sliding aluminum and glass garage doors were used; at the Bellair, large door-size aluminum and glass windows were used. The temperate northern climate of Toronto, while severe during the winter, gives a large number of days during which interiors can be opened to the outside.

Elemental Construction

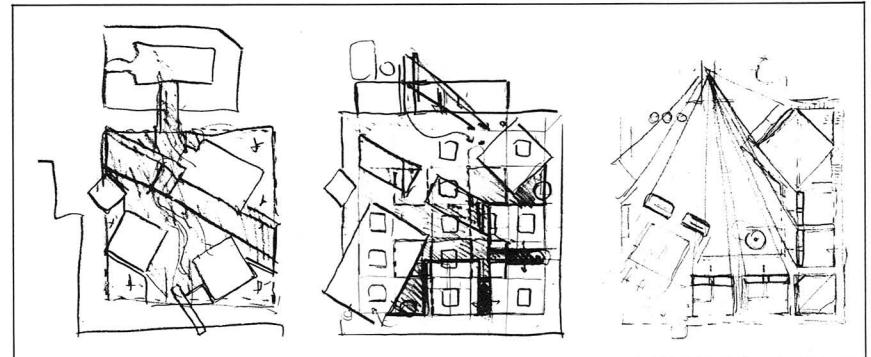
Because of our interest in how things work and how things are made and because our belief that this interest is shared by the user and builder, we try to design buildings expressive of their construction. Common component parts, industrial systems, and composite structures can be selected, controlled, and modified to meet particular building situations. Also, they are economically practical in North American construction.

We have used exposed steel construction for a diverse range of buildings types and programs. Steel framing can be erected quickly to make both large-scale sheds, like the Seagram Museum and the Unionville Library, and specific architectural figures, such as the pavilions of the Los Angeles Multicultural Center. Besides being competitive in terms of costs, the use of exposed steel is appealing because all the parts—columns, beams, open-web steel joists, decking, brackets and their connective elements—can be controlled and made visible.

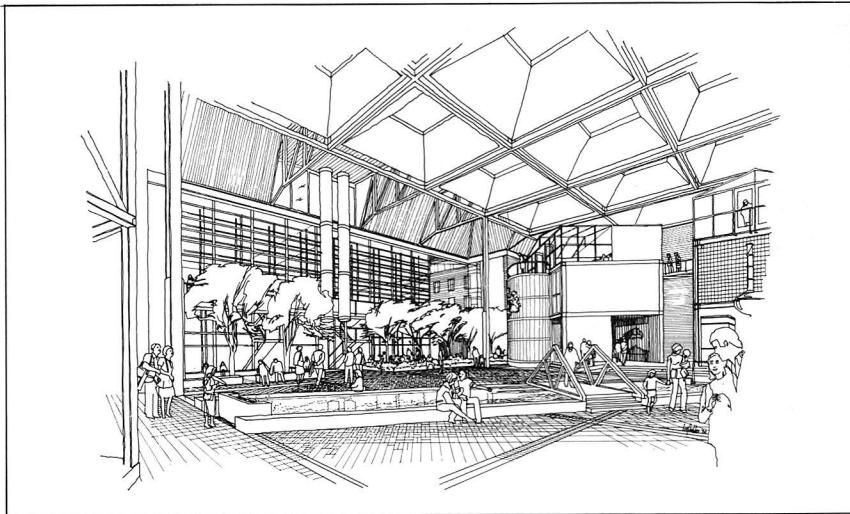
Standard "off-the-shelf" and customized building components are selected and arranged to service, light outfit, and finish interior spaces. A common building material like brick is used in many of the projects to make contextual references to local masonry traditions through the use of brick type, color, and patterning.



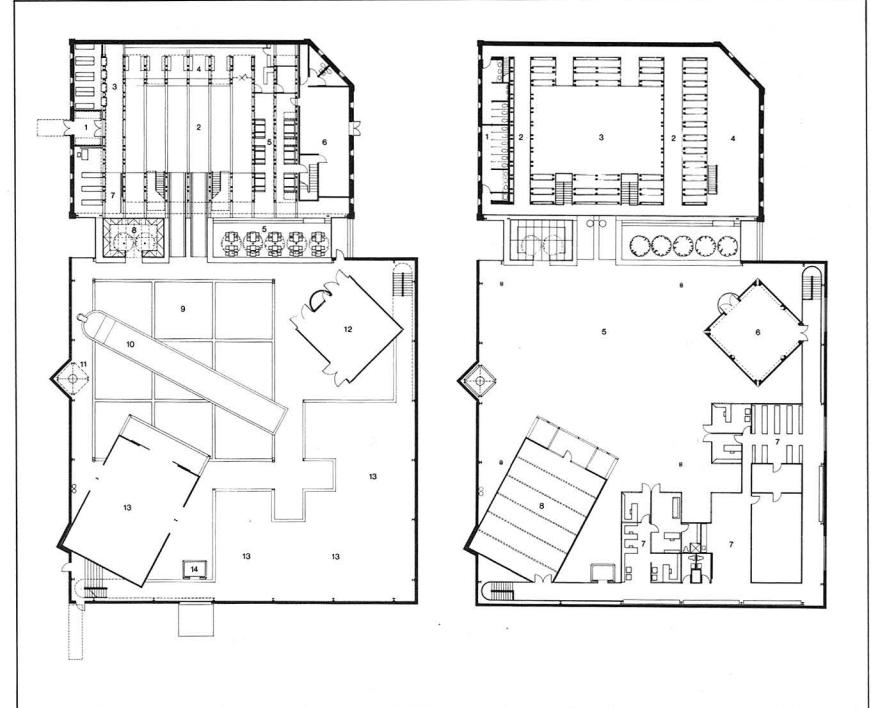
Site Plan



Conceptual Sketches, Barton Myers.



Museum Court, looking towards the renovated warehouse.



Ground Floor Plan, Second Floor Plan

Part 3 Case Study — *Seagram Museum* Waterloo, Ontario

Background:

Under the personal leadership of Charles Bronfman, Chairman of the Board, and Dr. Peter Swann as Museum Director, Joseph E. Seagram & Sons Ltd. took the initiative to develop a museum at their active and prestigious nineteenth century distillery at Waterloo, Ontario. The Museum was opened in 1983 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the first bottling of the now famous Seagram's spirits. Although not large (36,000 sq. ft.), the museum is complex and represents an almost entirely new museum type which is sometimes referred to in Europe as a "museum of industrial archeology"; in

the office it is referred to as the "Museum of the Spirits."

The craft and products of the Seagram company form a major part of the museum exhibits, while the history of the distillation industry and aspects of regional development, together with the history of the Seagram and Bronfman families, constitute other significant areas of interest.

The Seagram company has major international holdings. These include the Stirling Winery and Paul Mason Winery in California, Barton &

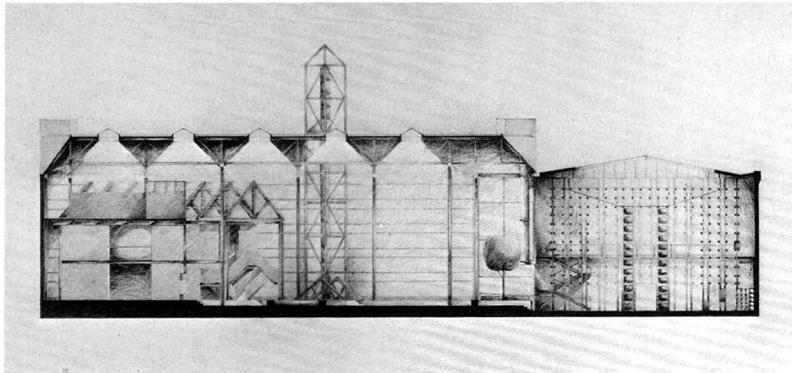
Guestier and Mumms in France, Sandeman in Spain, and the Chivas Regal and Glenlivet Distilleries in Scotland. The potential of the displays dealing with the history, tradition, and products of the Seagram Company alone are enormous. A museum of this type was perceived to have an equally important role as a community facility.

Emphasis is on the existing Warehouse #5, the still house with its tower, and the 1857 Seagram's door. The mass of the new building is carefully considered to modulate between the scale of the old Warehouse

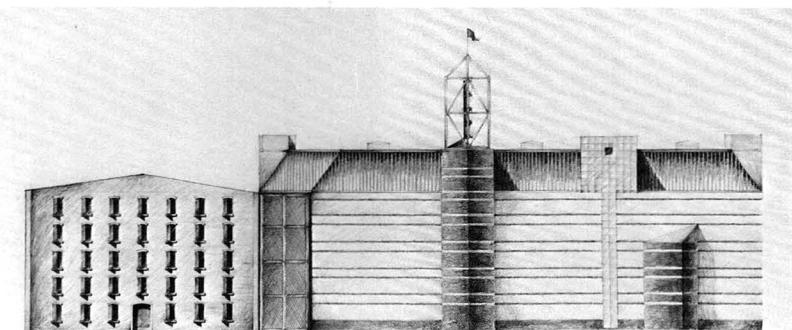
#5 and the newer, large and volumetrically impressive warehouses and bottling building. Two brick colors, Ontario red and buff stock, continue the game of integration with the striped coursing reflecting the window scale of Warehouse #5.

1. Context

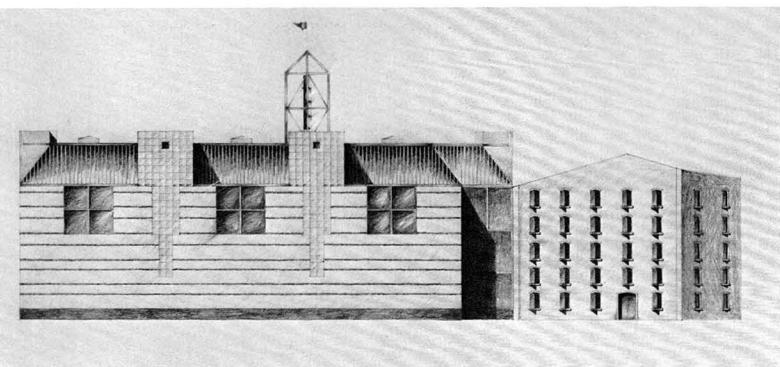
The 19th Century Seagram distillery at Waterloo is a notable Canadian example of late Victorian industrial architecture. The earliest buildings in this complex date from 1857, and while they are as interesting and as



North-South Section



Caroline Street Elevation



West Elevation

important as some Scottish distilleries, they are not yet viewed in North America as historically significant.

The corner site in the plant was made available for the Museum. It included the old Barrel Warehouse #5 and a recently decked-over creek adjacent to it, which served as the original source of power for the distillery. The

plant was to remain as a working facility for continuous production, and controlled access to the site had to be maintained under federal excise tax regulations. The issue was to create a convincing architectural combination of old and new in a positive manner, in the spirit of the excellent Italian museum work executed by Carlo Scarpa and Ernesto Rogers during the 1960's.

2. Space and Environment

A number of alternatives were carefully considered. They included the notion of interweaving two distinctive architectural ideas which became the basis of the final scheme:

- a) the nineteenth century exhibit hall, exemplified by the large shed exhibition buildings of Chicago (1893), Philadelphia (1876), and London (1851);
- b) the creation of buildings within buildings, each contained inside a larger building envelope.

In addition to creating a controlled circulation plan, we also provided the visitor with a choice of an individual "building" or a collection of buildings which he or she could visit. The existing Laurel Creek which traverses the site influenced the geometry of the resulting plan.

The design concept includes the use of the existing Warehouse #5 as an entrance court with a new large exhibit hall or "shed" which is 120' x 120' x 50' high. From this rack warehouse courtyard one enters a large indoor/outdoor "village" with a number of pavilions defining its edges. Offices, library, and work spaces are situated in glass greenhouse-type structures on the second floor.

3. Climate

The long Canadian winter and high energy costs have made the traditional open courtyard difficult to justify in this country. Therefore, the atrium concept has frequently emerged as a popular alternative.

In our design for the Museum, a grid of large coffered skylights was provided to give a high level of even, natural daylight over the 60' x 60' museum atrium court, resulting in a light and airy outdoors feeling.

4. Technology

Craftmanship and pride are an integral part of the distillation industry and the new Seagram Museum attempts to capture and reflect this rich tradition. The entire building is clad in a polychromatic brick shell designed on the rain-screen principle. The interior structural steel system was left exposed and did not require additional fire protection because the museum was conceived as a tall one-story building with mezzanine, and no vertical or horizontal fire separations were necessary. The exhibit pavilions within the museum court are clad in timber removed from the old rack warehouse, and each pavilion has the potential for its own temperature and humidity control, supplied by a zoned modular roof-mounted HVAC package unit.

5. Tradition

The rich historical and cultural tradition associated with the development of the distillation industry in Canada became the architectural counterpoint for this new museum facility. It enables the visitor to take a ritual journey across time through the museum as he is surrounded by thematic exhibits and buildings which span nearly 150 years of architectural and industrial history.

Conclusion

Ultimately, our work attempts to bring together a number of diverse themes and images rather than to project a single pure style. The resulting architecture—clear, hierarchical, and composite—reflects an energetic interest in achieving design excellence within the marketplace. If urban consolidation offers a positive vision of a future North American city, then the theme of "buildings—within buildings" is a paradigm in microcosm for the architecture of this city.