

Silent Narrative

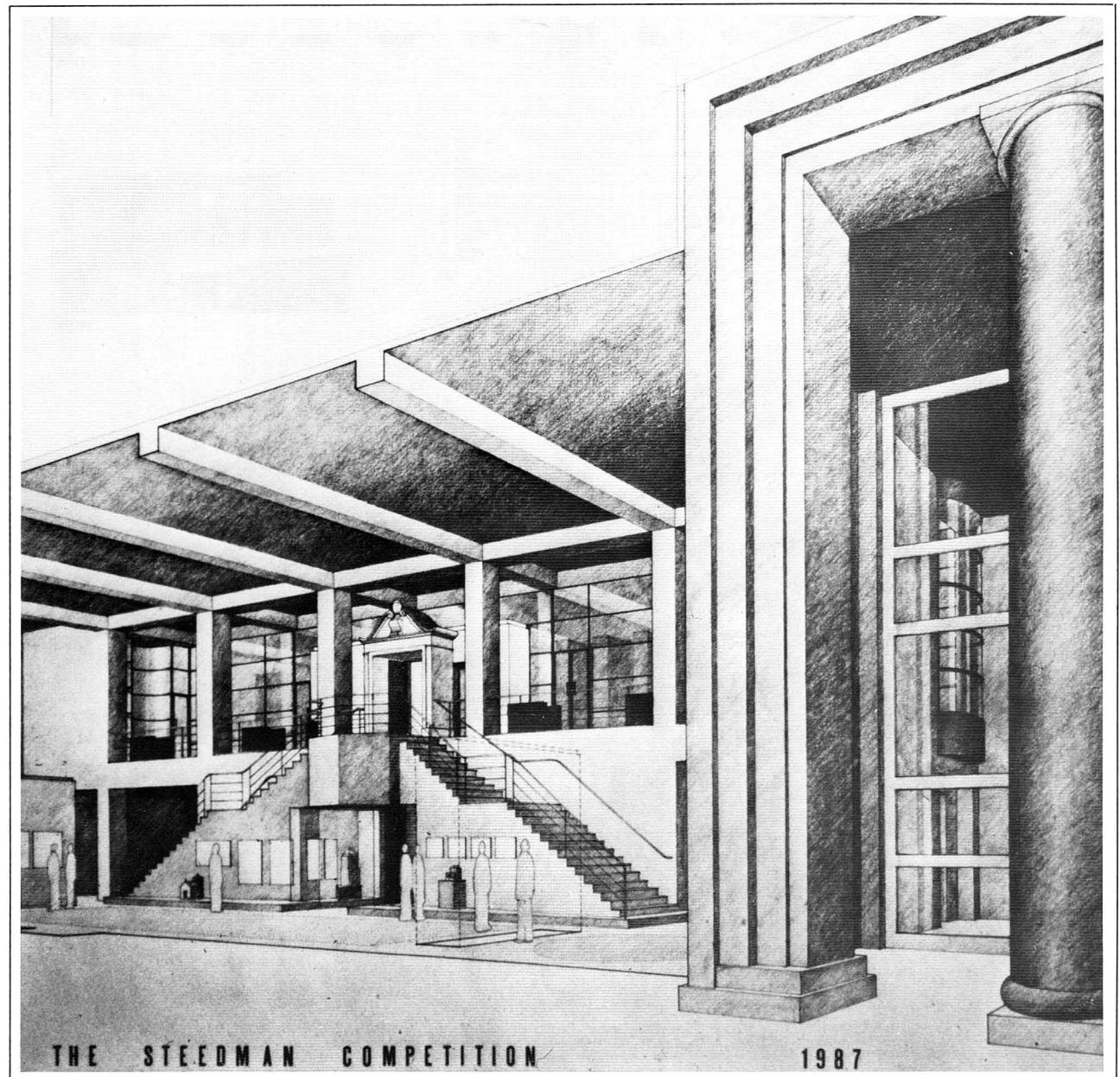
An Entry to the 1987 Steedman Competition

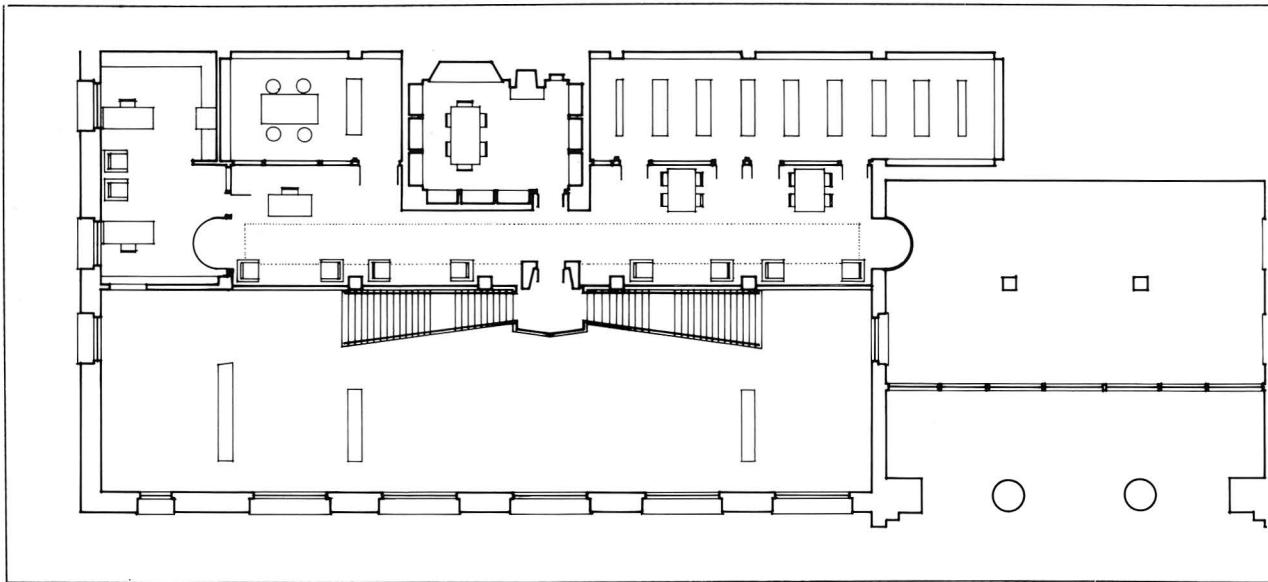
Raymond A. Streeter

The setting for this project is a large, 20th Century mercantile building in a major American city. A society of architects has acquired a corner space on the ground floor where they wish to accommodate lecture facilities, a gallery and a library. The desire is to provide a center for the Society for greater influence through education and example. The design attempts to meet this end by simple spatial organization and rich detail development.

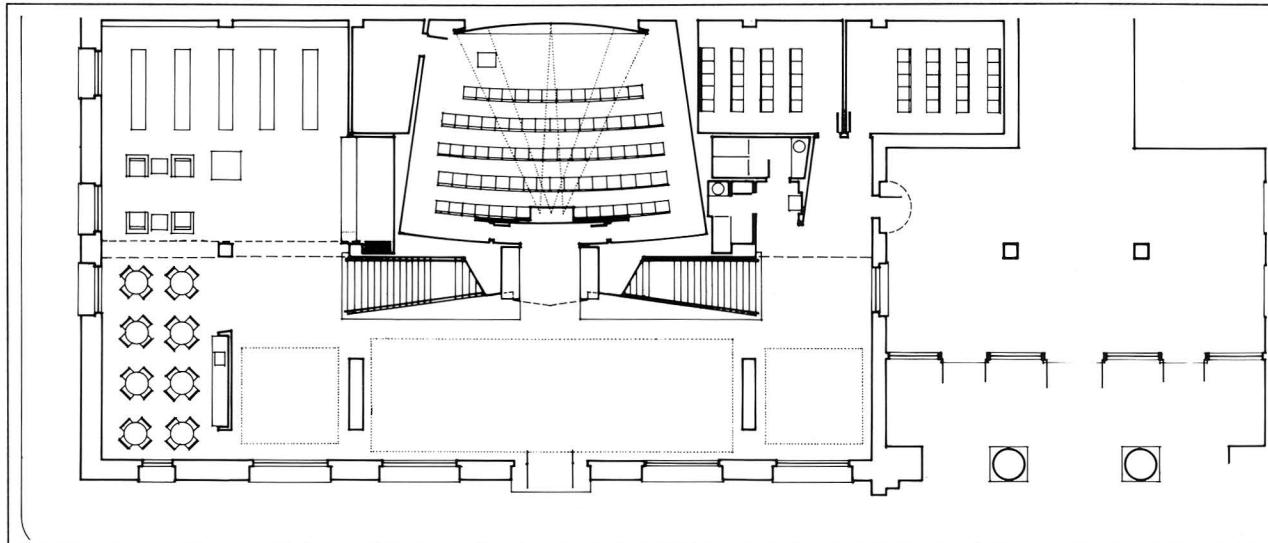
Spaces have been organized along an axis running through the center bay of the existing space. The exhibition gallery, the lecture hall and the library are located here. The portal to an important private architecture collection contained in its own specimen room (bequeathed to the Society) is also located on this axis, surmounting a monumental stairway. These spaces and objects attempt to create a mass/void tension and serve as the thematic basis for elaboration and architectural development.

The gallery occupies half of the existing space. It is a large, two-story volume located along the sidewalk. Simple and unarticulated, it is intended to remain a background element in the design, providing a place for changing display of a variety of architectural works. It serves as a fore court to the library and as a focus for passers-by on the sidewalk.

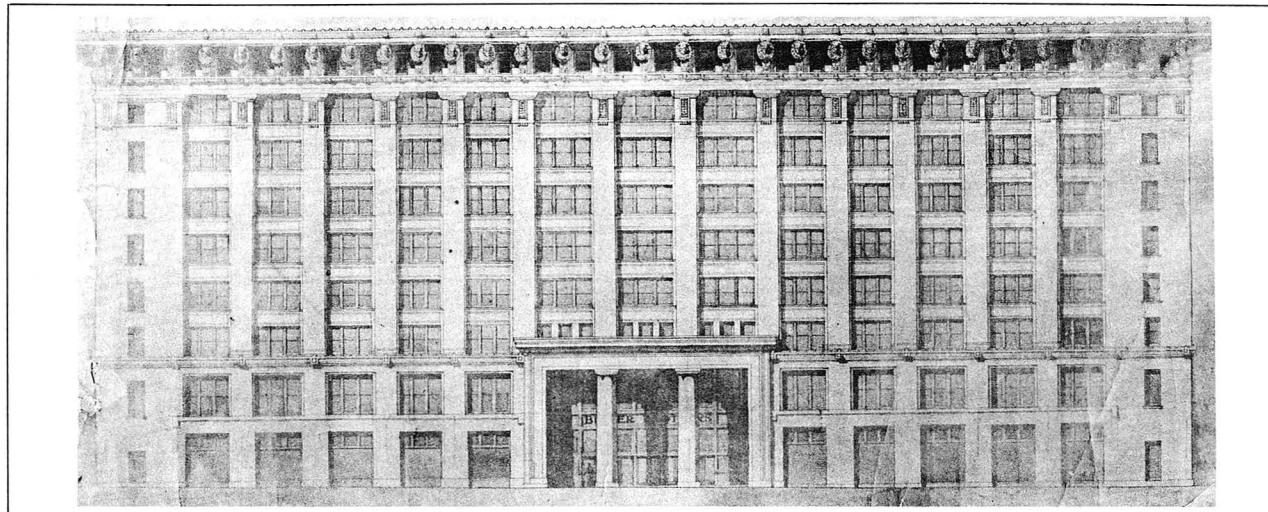




First Floor Plan



Second Floor Plan



Elevation

stairway. An existing room containing the bequest collection is to be dismantled and reassembled opposite the entrance to the library. The door to the room will be used as a freestanding portal to the entire library.

The new reading room parallels the gallery and the stair. Its long and narrow shape creates frequent opportunities for viewing from above to below and vice versa. The glass curtain wall defining its edges creates a visual termination to the space and allows views beyond to the more quotidian functions — the stacks and offices.

The stair acts as the connection between the library and the gallery spaces. It sits as an object in the exhibit gallery — its center gently inflecting to the axis that links the important elements of the design. In addition, it serves as an entrance to the lecture hall and as a display case for drawings and models.

Spaces not requiring light have been positioned on the first floor below the library. This allows the use and manipulation of light in the more important spaces of the Society. The gallery receives direct light from the two stories of windows along the street edge. The library reading room borrows light from the gallery while the stacks borrow light from the reading room (through a highly polished glass curtain wall).

Finally, it is hoped that the design will serve as a viewing place for looking at the city as well as its architecture. Designs exhibited in the gallery will be seen against the real city of which they are proposed to become a part. The openness of the plan and section couple with the generous fenestration to insure such juxtapositions.

The simplicity of this design is deliberate. To speak more might risk the didactic. The strategy was to make a space where the objects within created their own narrative, and where this narrative could readily be shared by the Architects' Society and the city.