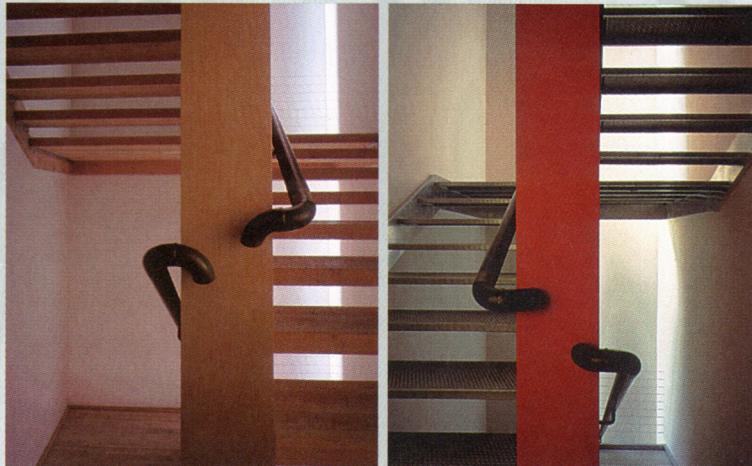


Defining Place : Celebrating Context and Community
William Bruder









The responsibility of the architect is very much about defining and celebrating the pragmatic and poetic needs of the client. A most important component of that charge, which is all too often ignored, overlooked, or insensitively misinterpreted, is searching for the defining markers of context and community from which a project's aesthetic presence will grow. Toward this resolve, it is a simple fact that through curious inquiry and careful listening, the architect will be empowered to create buildings that have that special quality of defining place by becoming "of the place."

The elements of "place" to which I refer are real, natural, historic and mythical, all in the same breath. It forever baffles and frustrates me that so much architecture has been, and is being created in the cities, small towns, and natural landscapes of twentieth century America and has nothing to do with "place." The ever increasing design efforts we are exporting to the rich cultures of the developing third world are also tragic examples of failed modernism, post modernism and late 20th century fashion "isms" which lack any idea of "place." We are given the challenge and opportunity to create structures of habitation, commerce, culture and pleasure. What keeps us from seeing the uniqueness of each given place is the fact that we have lost our ability to be good listeners.

As we venture to new sites, to places we feel we know, it is always wise to claim naiveté and innocence and bravely ask and seek the clues of place making. To study history is to study ruins, to understand ruins as an archeologist of time, and to know the ideas that informed the very myth of the place. To look at the natural aspects of the setting (the geology, the flora and the fauna, the topography, the climate, temperature, winds, humidity, rainfall, seasonal extremes, the sun and its path, the color of its light and intensity of its patterns) and to try to understand the power of those same natural elements to shape the lifestyles and perceptions of a community's residences is to start to know how to create the shelters, pavilions, and civic icons of that "place."

In looking at the indigenous as well as intentional architecture of a place, one is often informed of the common and common sense logic of place. The tectonics of materials, detail and making all tell us something of the potentials and possibilities of a place. The industry and economic reason for a "place" also speaks to the character and ambition of the inhabitants and their community.

To look for the extraordinary in the ordinary, the magical in the mysterious, and sensuous in the simple are ways of discovering the timeless qualities of place. For in the end, it is imperative not that we create merely an architecture of our time, but one of the ages. Every place is unique even in the ever homogenized world of the internet, CNN, MTV, and corner franchises. Let us all have the courage, good sense and respect to listen, to look and create an architecture or place; an architecture that celebrates both common and context.

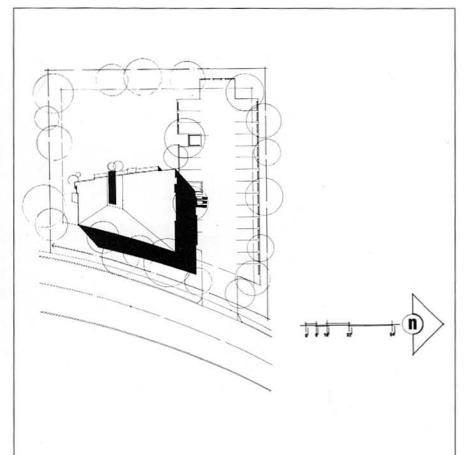
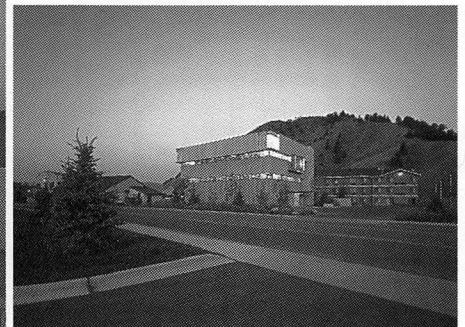


Riddell Advertising Jackson, Wyoming

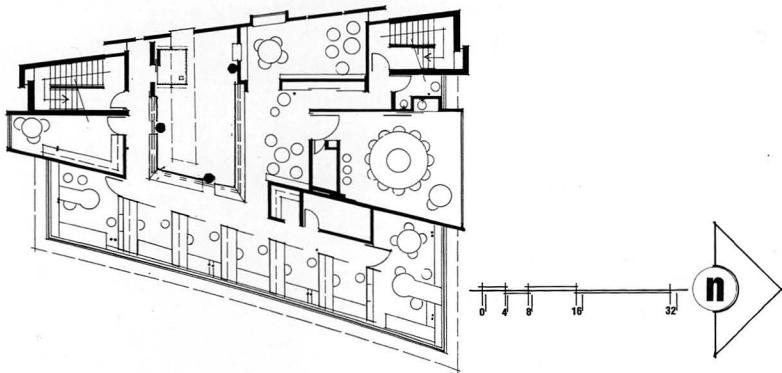
As an example of the idea of place making, I offer the Riddell Advertising and Design Building which was created from 1993–1995 by my studio. This recent insertion into the new commercial fabric of Jackson Hole, Wyoming is an architectural celebration of the region's natural and man-made context. Its sculptured form, responding to the dynamic curve of the street it faces, strives to optimally meet rigorous zoning rules while providing for future expansion.

Anchored to and rising from its naturally landscaped setting, the building's distinctive base and stair towers, clad in random width vertical board and batted weather cedar siding, become scaleless and abstract much like the ranch, barn and haystack architecture that dominates the region's unparalleled landscapes. The masses of the upper two floors each step out to shelter horizontal strips of glazing for the offices within; the building greets the sky with strength. These canted elements are more tailored with their taut skins of ship-lap resawn regular width boards.

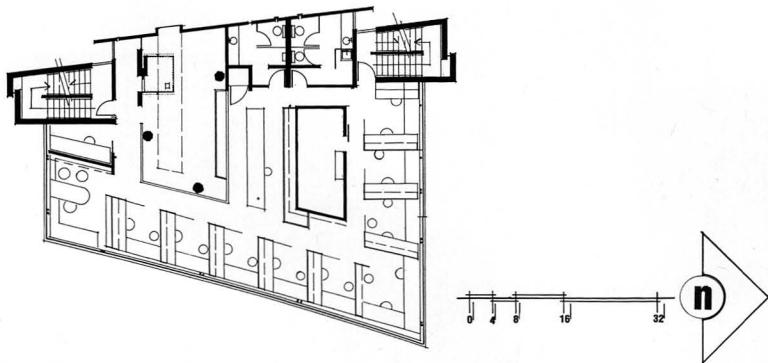
Further, the architecture is terminated at the north and south corners by lanterns of glass and light with random wood lattice working to animate the building's interiors and disperse exterior sun glare as well. A sloped wall of galvanized barn roofing on the rear elevation



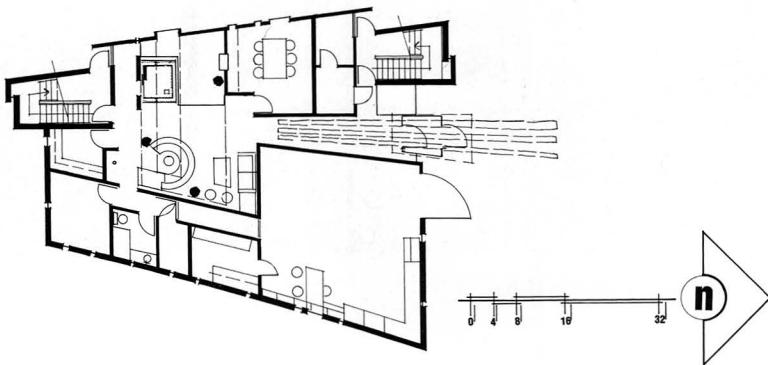
Site plan



Level 3 plan



Level 2 plan



36 *Level 1 plan*

makes the sky come to the ground creating a dynamic backdrop for the staff lunch and meeting garden.

From the parking area the north entry facade fully displays the building's poetic and pragmatic aesthetic rigor. With the stepped logic of the east facade wrapping to the north, the low scaled entry weather vestibule with cantilevered log trellis, large studio delivery door (clad in galvanized metal), conference room bay picture window at level three and the northwest stair tower clad in random board and batten, there is no lack of sculptural interest.

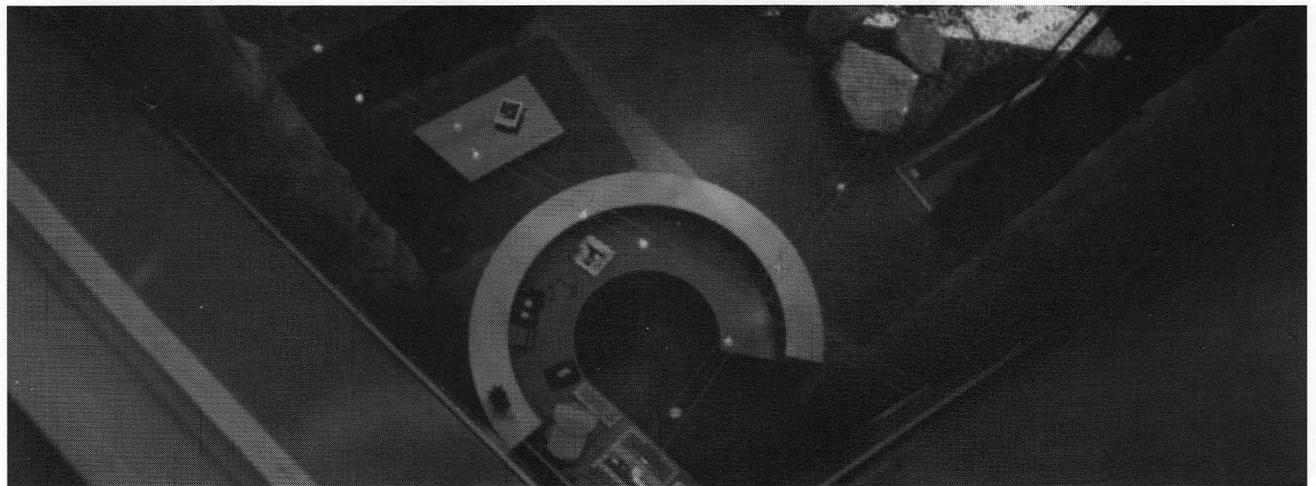
Inside, the building creates a dialogue of space, light, and wood reflective of its exterior form. Moving down a textured concrete ramp guided by the logs of the entry trellis above, the visitor/client is drawn to a virtual "canyon of light." At the hub of the flow, three large logs reach skyward in an atrium over-

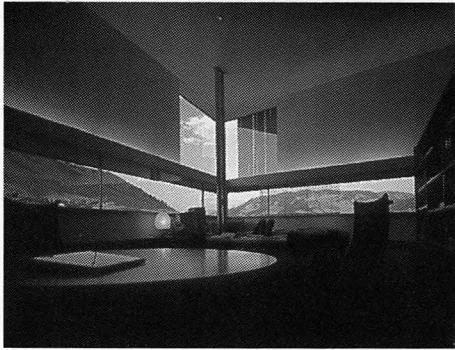
looked by the offices above and capped by a generous "trough" of light which folds down the western edge of the space to the ground. In the southwestern corner of the atrium, a perforated metal shroud engages a simple hydraulic elevator surrounded by a garden of vertical bamboo and on the east a reception lounge and workstation enjoy the verticality of the room. Wrapped in maple veneered paneling, contrasting handsomely with the rustic logs, the space is further energized by two layers of dramatic low voltage cable lighting. It is a space that gains a sense of familiarity from the dynamic energy of the great log lobby of old Faithful Inn.

On level two and three, custom maple veneered and exposed natural particle-board workstations surround the "canyon." These studios for account executives, designers, and copywriters provide private work zones with complete computer and presentation surfaces, which

enjoy fantastic, views to the town's surrounding mountain landscape. The strip windowsill is 4'-0" above the finish floor and window heads are at 6'-2," causing the seated user to lose the view of the townscape and enjoy the mountain vistas. In addition to the workstations, level two has a high-tech production processing room, a paste-up center and staff rest rooms. Level three has a fully equipped kitchen lunchroom looking south, a client reception area/product display area at the atrium edges, a library/think tank, and a grand presentation conference room. The third level gains more three dimensional interest from its sculptured ceiling which is a response to the roof sloped drainage patterns.

Two stair towers, each different, are used with more frequency than the elevator on the short trips between levels. The main south tower has a 35' tall X 3" wide slot of glass set to greet the east light of the morning; open stair treads and land-





ings of galvanized, pan-broken steel and an “intensely” red dividing wall. In the north stair a slash of west light reflects the detail of the south tower, but stair treads are glu-lam beams with a natural OSB clad dividing wall. Simple moves give each stair space a unique experience. Similar pipe and cable railing details as well as a similar indirect night lighting strategy creates a connection of both spaces.

In this architecture, wood is dominant on both macro and micro levels; grand structural ideas and small craftsman-like details. This celebration of “woodness” is most appropriate to issues of aesthetics, constructability, budget, and contextual appropriateness. At every level the Riddell building uses the romance of wood; awareness of historic precedence; a poetic choreography of light and views to create an architectural model for a sensitive new vision of a town searching to define its architectural character; a building of its time striving to touch values of timelessness and “place.”

