

Cleveland Rocks

*I.M. Pei's latest museum is,
ironically, a symbol of his own
power as a brand name.*



*Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum
Cleveland, Ohio
Pei Cobb Freed & Partners, Architect
Robert P. Madison International,
Associate Architect
The Burdick Group, Exhibition Planning
and Design*



M. Pei says he wrestled with the implications of the decision to move the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum from its original site. Intended for a downtown Cleveland parcel adjacent to Tower City, the project was relocated to the shores of Lake Erie. When a building site changes and the design is only slightly modified, we are given a rare insight into the architectural equivalent of the nature-versus-nurture debate. Rather than being a product of its environment, this building has emerged from a unique gene pool: the architect's personal vision.

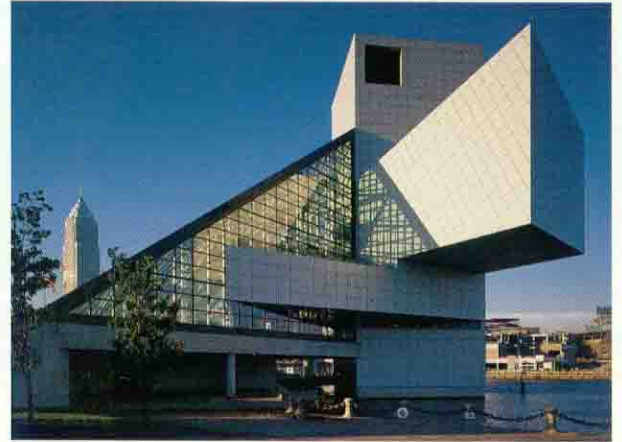
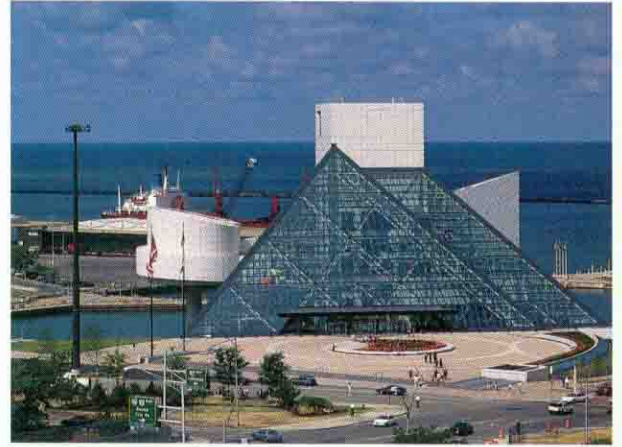
As a music form, rock and roll long ago achieved mass credibility—even the notoriously rock-shy Pei says he recently “got used to the Beatles”—but as the stuff of museums it needed the leap of faith that only someone of Pei's architectural stature and highly recognizable style could provide. At the dedication, Atlantic Records' Ahmet Ertegun, a major benefactor of the project, listed Pei's impressive building credentials and declared: “Pei was the only choice.”

At the Louvre [RECORD, May 1988, pages 142-149], Pei made a triangle of glass and steel—a pure geometric shape to contrast with the historic Cour Napoléon. The crystalline pyramid is now Pei's signature. Though he calls the form that fronts his Cleveland building a “glass tent” (at a dedication press conference he seemed surprised by one reporter's comparison of the Paris and Cleveland projects), it's a significant slice of the now-famous form. Pei, in fact, was hired not only for the instant symbols he makes, but also for the symbol he has become. Architect also of the Kennedy Library in Boston and the East Wing of the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., he gave the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame Foundation what it wanted most: an imprimatur of high culture.

Rather than explore rock music's improvisational or rebellious side, Pei went straight for its commercial heart: the main space, a grand, multi-level lobby dominated by a museum shop and criss-crossed by people-watching escalators, is perhaps a fitting tribute to the current state of the music industry. The architectural space that Pei has provided displays little more than cars from a U-2 tour. Instead, a team of curators has assembled a mind-boggling array of memorabilia and rock-related artifacts—ranging in scale and importance from Jim Morrison's Cub Scout uniform to original lyric manuscripts of Neil Young songs—and displayed them in dimly lit, enclosed “black box” spaces a world away from Pei's elegantly crafted shell.

This twilight world, mostly beneath the main lobby, was the responsibility of Susan and Bruce Burdick, of The Burdick Group, exhibition planners and designers, and their multi-disciplinary team. Their goal was to frame changing content, which they did with a steel, aluminum, and glass kit of display parts, and energize spaces with sound, light, and bold graphics. Responding to an observation that the building is in fact two museums—one light, one dark—Susan Burdick says the split personality was “an opportunity, not a conflict.” A dominant feature is rock-star regalia shown on mannequins, a discordant wax-museum-like choice favored by curators for convenience—but a stodgy display method for an institution that invested heavily in richly layered interactive computer displays.

All this came at a hefty price: \$92 million in public and private funds, including a \$39-million loan from the state to be repaid by a surcharge on museum admission and a hotel tax (city estimates predict that out-of-town visitors to the complex will generate over \$70 million annually in additional spending). What did Cleveland get besides a welcome boost to its tourist trade? A photogenic symbol that flashes like a corporate logo on the city's skyline. *Karen D. Stein*



When asked about the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum's resemblance to a giant record player—with its round turntable plaza of brick pavers (top) and its stylus-like aluminum-clad auditorium suspended over Lake Erie (middle and bottom), Pei said the effect “was not intentional.” The south-facing “tent” lobby has low-E glass. “Frankly, the tent will be warm [on bright days], but people will be moving,” says Pei.



Structural steel and concrete slabs support six stories above grade and one below (section below), for a total of 143,000 square feet. Exhibits by the San Francisco-based Burdick Group were inserted into a 25-foot column grid. Included in the 30,000-square-foot main exhibit area below the lobby is the graphic/video "Don't Knock the Rock" (1), video and clothing excerpts from various Rolling Stones tours (2), music and rock history on CD-ROM (3), steel "platforms" devoted to individual artists (4), and the "Mystery Train" theater (5).

The material palette is mostly neutral grays with copper and purple fabric panels as accents. Ductwork is left exposed. The luminescent Hall of Fame (6) on the top floor has edge-lit glass panels carved with the signatures of inductees and tiny video screens inset into the glass that project their images. The wall will fill up with signatures as new members are added. The "video tree" (below), meant to highlight the influence of music video, consists of 25 stripped-down monitors.

Credits

Rock and Roll Hall of Fame and Museum
Cleveland, Ohio

Architect: Pei Cobb Freed &

Partners—*I.M. Pei, Leonard Jacobson, Michael D. Flynn, Richard Diamond, Jennifer Sage, Winslow Kosior, Richard Gorman, Marianne Lau, Hope Dana, Steven Derasmo, David Dwight, Mahasti Fakourbayat, Kevin Johns, Sandra Lutes, Christine Mahoney, Gianni Neri, Krista Williams, project team*

Associate Architect:

Robert P. Madison International—Robert Madison, Khai Lim, Richard Franta, project team

Exhibition Planning/Design:

The Burdick Group—Bruce Burdick, Susan Burdick, Bruce Lightbody, Christian Anthony, Aaron Caplan, Johnson Chow, Jerome Goh, Cameron Imani, Stuart McKee, and Jeff Walker, project team

Engineers:

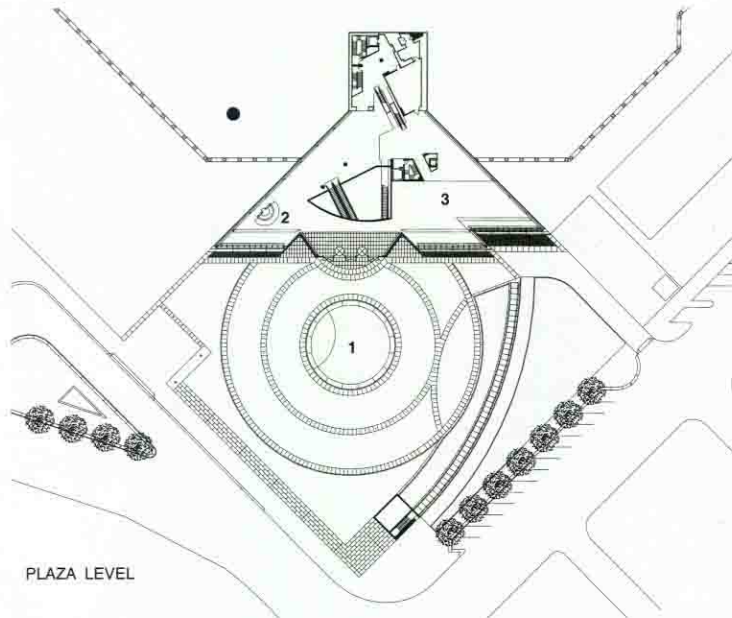
Leslie E. Robertson Associates (structural); Altieri Sebor Wieber Consulting (M/E/P); E.G. Hirsch & Associates (structural/exhibits)

Consultants:

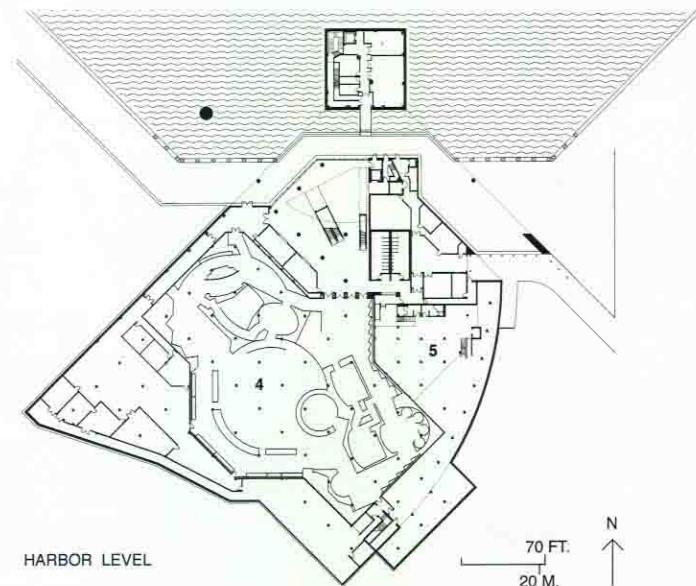
Fisher Marantz Renfro Stone (lighting), Architectural Lighting Design (exhibit lighting); Shen Milsom & Wilke (acoustical); Charles M. Salter Associates (exhibit acoustics); Boyce Nemea (audio visual); Alexander Isley/Calori & Vanden Eynden (graphics)

General Contractor:

Turner Construction Co. in association with Colejon Corp., Choice Construction Co., and Bradley Construction Co.

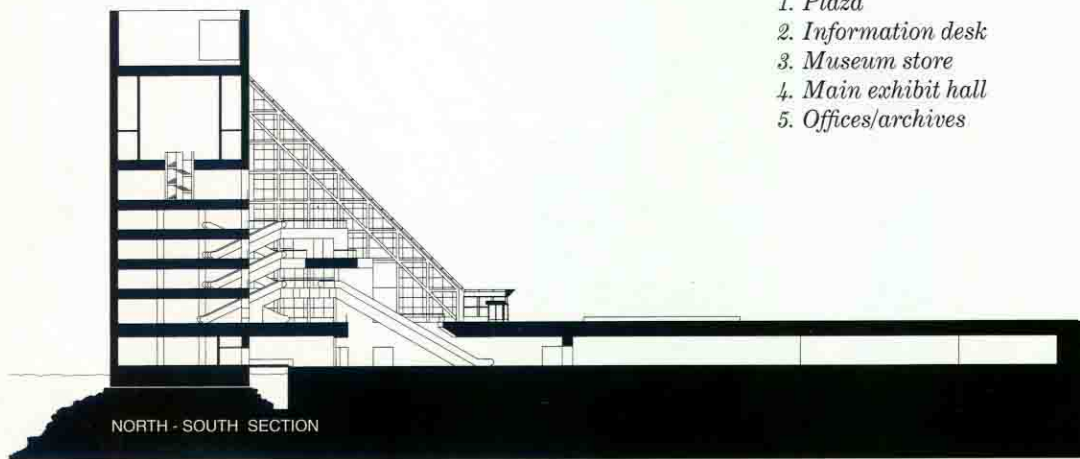
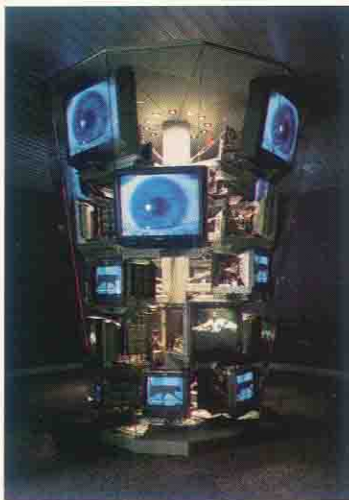


PLAZA LEVEL



HARBOR LEVEL

1. Plaza
2. Information desk
3. Museum store
4. Main exhibit hall
5. Offices/archives





1



2



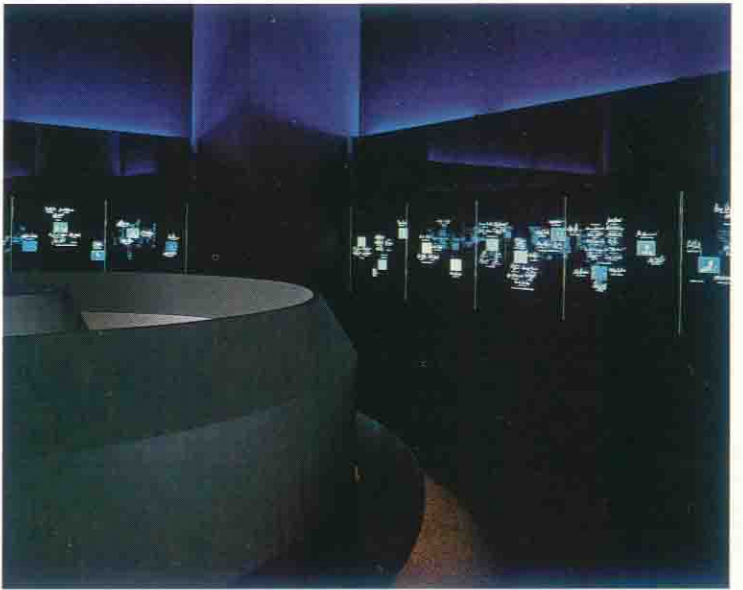
3



4



5



6