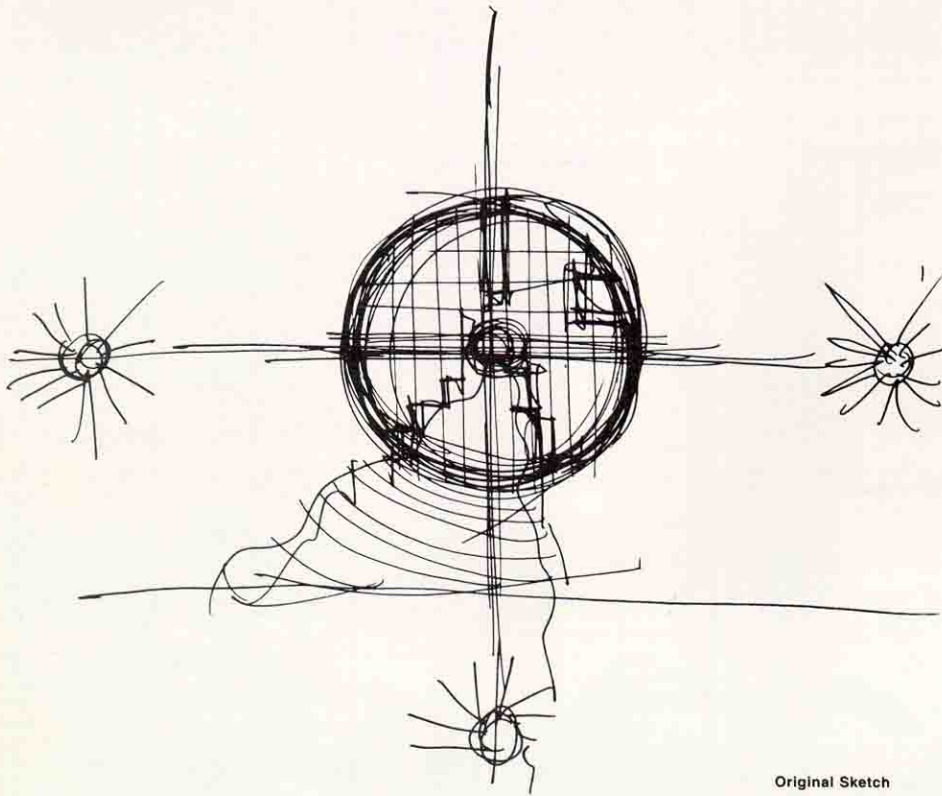


Iowa Architect

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 1988 TWO/FIFTY



College of Law University of Iowa Iowa City



Original Sketch

GB CONCEPT

Project

University of Iowa/College of Law
Iowa City, Iowa

Client

University of Iowa

Architect

Gunnar Birkerts and Associates, Inc.
Birmingham, Michigan

Office Design Team

Gunnar Birkerts
Anthony Gholz, Project Director
Barbara Bos, Interiors
Anthony Duce
Mary Jane Williamson
David Chasco

Associate Architect

Wehner, Nowysz, Pattschull & Pfiffner
Iowa City, Iowa

Interior Designer

Gunnar Birkerts and Associates, Inc.

Photographer

Frederick Charles, New York

General Contractor

PCL Construction, Inc.
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Structural Consulting Engineer

Robertson, Fowler and Associates, P.C.
New York, New York

Mechanical/Electrical Consulting Engineers

Joseph R. Loring & Associates, Inc.
New York, New York

Cost Consultant

Wolf & Company
Pleasantville, New York

Square Footage

195,500 Square Feet

Total Cost

\$18,800,000



It is a popularly held notion that this country needs more lawyers about as much as it needs more litigation. Nevertheless, competition for admission into America's law schools and the pressure to maintain quality faculties within these institutions is at a feverish pitch. The College of Law at the University of Iowa is no different, and for the past several years has had to muddle through in an old, scant, and sorely inadequate facility on the campus' northwest edge. This fall marks the start of classes in the recently completed College of Law building on the southern edge of campus. While some members of the staff and students have expressed nostalgic longings for the character and seclusion of the old facility, all seem optimistic about their new home.

Others, like Dean of Law, N. William Hines, could not be happier. From his office, which looks north and east up the Iowa River, he sees practically all of the university as well as downtown Iowa City. Dean Hines also sees a brighter future for the College of Law. While the program for the new facility does not include any substantial increase in enrollment nor in faculty positions, it does give the Law Library a potential 1,000,000 volume capacity in contrast to the 250,000 volumes of active capacity of the old library. Because the heart of law beats in the library, the staggered, open library design comprises a dominant share of the building area.

The building also houses an obligatory collection of audiovisual equipment along with a sophisticated independent computer system which serves the faculty as well as the library and should make this complex the envy of many other legal facilities. Regardless, the ultimate goal is not to produce more lawyers, just better ones.

The Circle as Metaphor

Architect Gunnar Birkerts' design is a rather large, annular building fashioned in such a way that it nestles inconspicuously into its cramped, contradictory site. While the southern and western perimeters of the site reflect the sol-



COLLEGE OF LAW

itude of a wooded residential area, the north and east must contend with the city's busiest intersection, several dormitories, and the sprawling athletic and medical complexes. Consequently, creating an environment marked by privacy and seclusion became crucial project objectives. The circular design partially resolves these problems by opening out onto the wooded south side while maintaining seclusion by means of the curving limestone wall. This circular theme is, in fact, openly intended as a geometric metaphor of purity. Birkerts writes, "It is a fitting symbol for the profession of law since it expresses perfection, clarity, integrity and geometric purity. It also seeks affinity with astrology and the early architecture of Stonehenge."

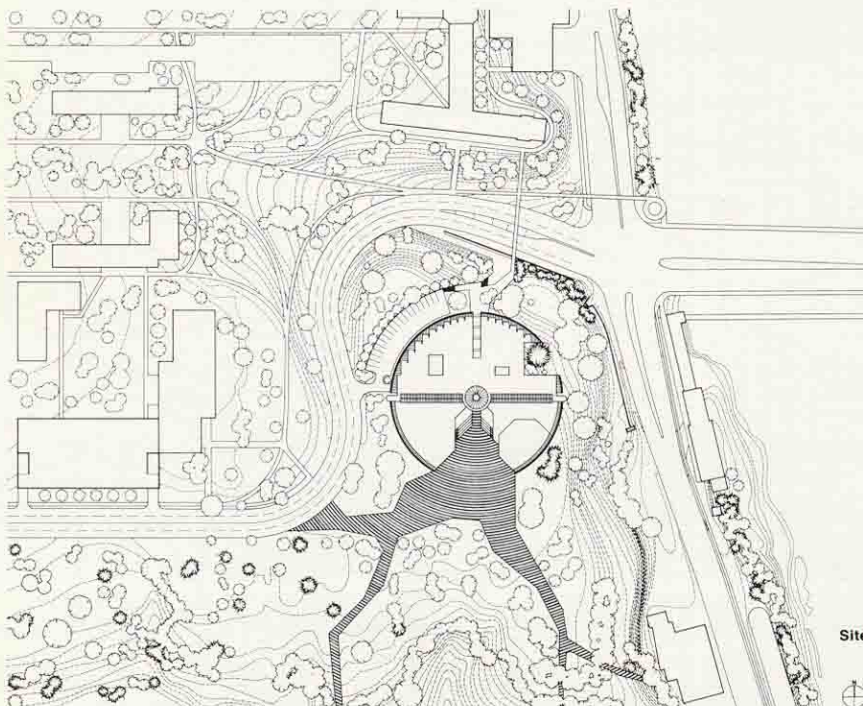
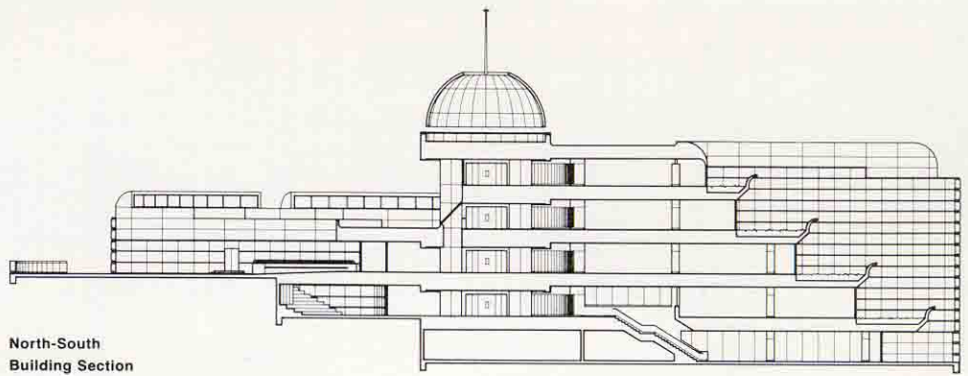
Remote as this sort of aesthetic aspiration may seem to the average law student, Birkerts' high design disposition is obvious throughout. He sees the building as earthbound and by means of expressing this view he has figuratively chosen materials found on the site. The seamless limestone skin and horizontal metal trim appear vaguely as a geological formation. The extensive oak trim and reserved earthen palette inside all affirm the sedate, resolute demeanor that the building exudes. Even the silo dome which houses some of the mechanical systems is a borrowed icon from Iowa's agricultural landscape.

For all of its bucolically inspired materials,

North-South Building Section

the structure stands as an overwhelming example of the intricate and imaginative potential of contemporary modernism. As a mechanistic device, the circular form is defined along a solar axis, utilizing techniques such as an ingenious system of transoms to ensure natural light to virtually all areas of the building. Supplemental materials such as aluminum and reflective glass, along with a masterful fenestration design are indicative of a pure and modern vocabulary.

Birkerts has achieved a style which looks beyond historicism to create truly fascinating human spaces. This is not a building style that inhibits the capricious eccentricities which lend character to space, rather it arouses interest, curiosity and the kind of affection not usually associated with the modern ideal. The fourth floor suite of offices for instance, satisfy a regimen of rudimentary program requirements in



Site Plan

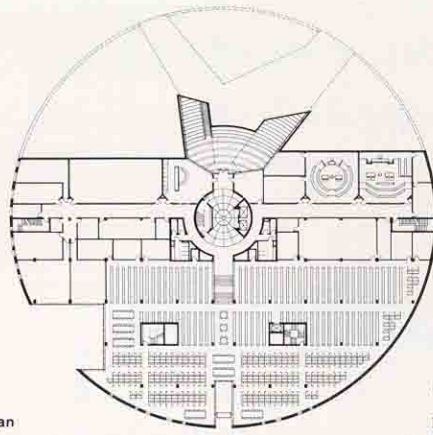
a number of extraordinary ways. Two suncourts are fitted with oversize louvers which filter and define shafts of sunlight. An oddly shaped veranda outside of the student lounge makes the most of the site's spectacular view of the river and its seven bridges. While the offices are linked by a central east-west corridor, a stroll through the meandering secondary corridors will suggest entirely original methods of ordering and animating space.

Settling Into the Cityscape

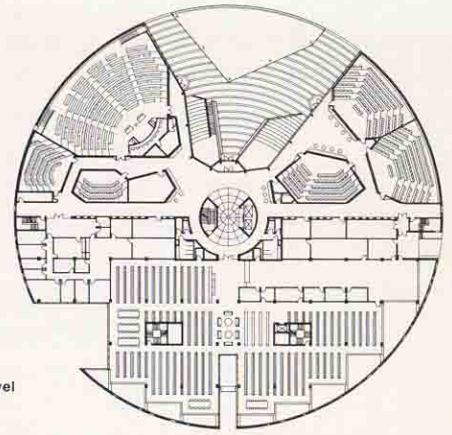
If there is truth in the claim that God is in the details, the new College of Law building becomes somewhat of a shrine. Perhaps due to the artistic influence of the Cranbrook Academy, the architect has endowed the structure with an endless array of subtle design nuances. Too many catalogue furnishings, hardware, and light fixtures undermine this otherwise splendid effort. Still, the building is irresistibly charismatic within its steep wooded site. The bold presence of this new structure

Is it now?
 Or is it past?
 Or is it future?
 Or is it aiming for timelessness?
 If it is so, then it is all three:
 The silo on the farm,
 The Stonehenge,
 The (space) city in universe.

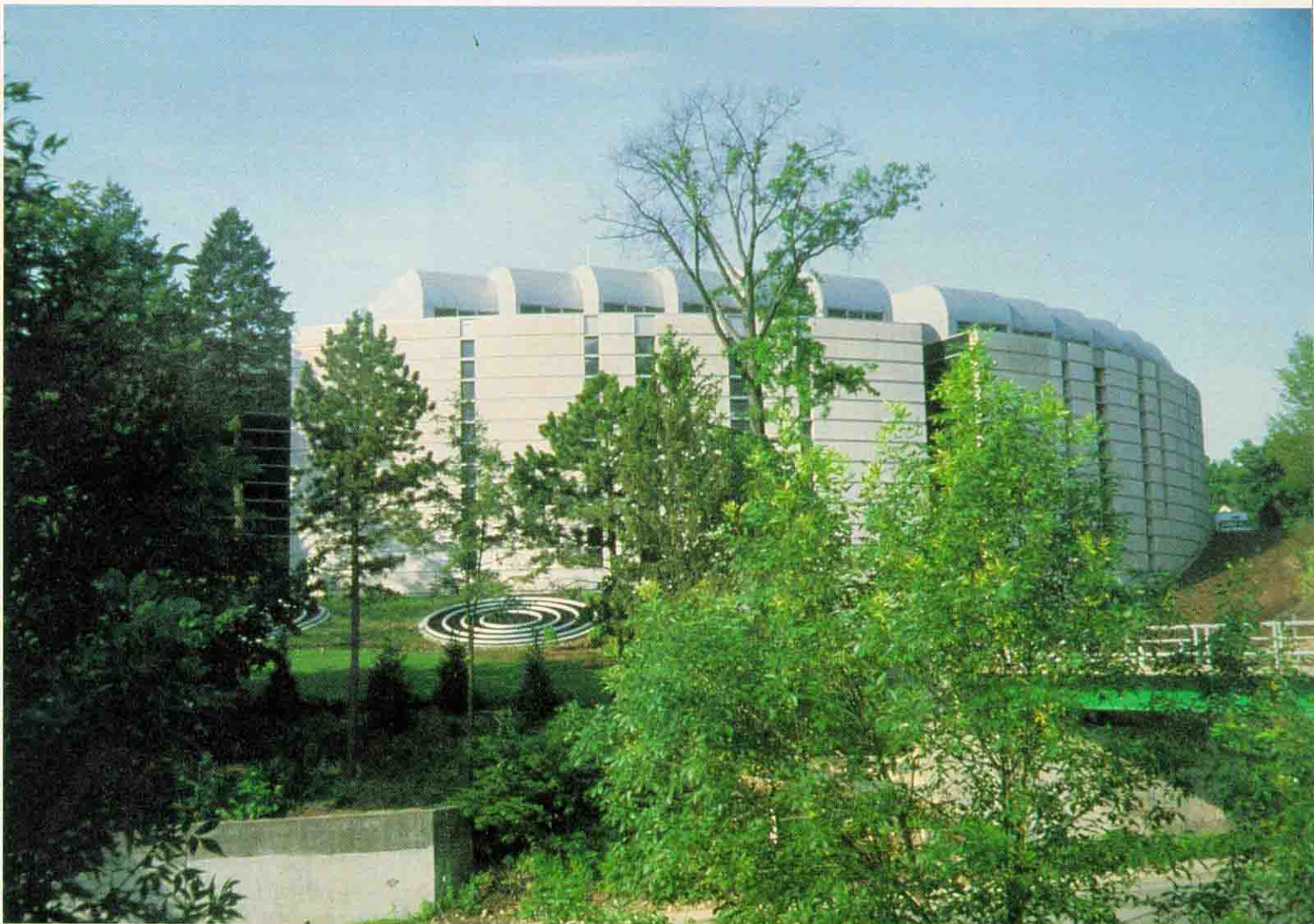
Gunnar Birkerts



Level 1
 Floor Plan



Level 2 - Entry Level
 Floor Plan



juxtaposed against the timeless beauty of gnarled oak, pine and sycamore seems especially stunning in this age of "slash and burn" architecture.

Birkerts was able to integrate most of what the site offered, use it to screen and enhance his design and successfully embrace the lovely wooded ravine to the south by means of a timber footbridge. It is this concern for detail that makes the College of Law building the fine

urban and academic building it is.

The introduction of the Law College into the campus proper could be significant to Iowa City and the University of Iowa alike. While the old school was cloistered and remote, (very few people have ever seen it let alone know where it is), the new facility with its elegantly assertive profile is the type of building that the community has been sorely in need of. Hopefully the level of architecture evident in the new building will

mark the beginning of a renewed, more human approach to design in this city.

At any rate, the building will immediately become one of universities most visible, as the tens of thousands of football fans that descend upon Iowa City each fall will unavoidably drive very, very slowly past the new site. Perhaps even a few will be stirred enough by the excellence of the design to consider academics in the same vein as athletics. ■

Cedar Rapids Public Library Cedar Rapids, Iowa



Project

Cedar Rapids Public Library
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Architects

Brown Healey Bock P.C.,
Architects and Planners
McConnell Steveley Anderson, P.C.
Architects and Planners

Project Personnel

Edward H. Healey, F.A.I.A.,
Principal in Charge
Herber M. Stone, A.I.A.,
Project Architect
Craig A. Anderson, A.I.A.,
Associated Architect
Gary Whitehill, A.I.A.,
Project Manager
David Swain,
Field Representative

Engineers

Shive-Hattery & Associates
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Interior Design Consultant

Saxton Inc.
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Library Consultant

Rogert H. Rohlf
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Project Financial Management

Hiland Consultants Ltd.

General Contractor

Knutson Construction Company
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Mechanical Contractor

Tom Bowker and Son
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Electrical Contractor

E & S Electric
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

The designers of the Cedar Rapids Public Library remember well. They remember great old libraries where the sound of a dropped book would reverberate forever in capacious reading rooms. And they remember that the library is the most public of public buildings. These remembrances have shaped Cedar Rapids' vast new library.

In a structure fairly spilling over with volume and spaciousness, Brown Healey Bock and McConnell Steveley Anderson have fashioned broad reading spaces which open onto equally generous entry spaces. Walking up the wide angled avenue to the main library entrance gives a processional feeling to the entry without creating an overly formalized facade.

Designed with high ceilings and an open plan to avoid an enclosed feeling created by the book stacks, the interior is brought to a human scale through the use of horizontal reference points. A four foot wide band of cedar wood rings the interior at standard ceiling height, softening the effect of the sixteen foot high ceilings and adding warmth to the spaces. The concrete

coffered ceiling is painted white for reflectance and flooded by indirect lighting which, along with the well-used daylighting, gives glare-free illumination to the reading spaces.

Module furnishings and equipment located throughout will support changing needs and future expansion. Virtually all pieces are movable with lighting systems designed to accommodate any future rearrangement.

At the east end of the general collection is the media center housing the library's collection of films, slides, videotapes, records, and cassettes. A central service counter is bordered by fourteen film and video viewing stations.

A variety of individual private study rooms and group study rooms are located around the perimeter of the general collection. A 250 seat auditorium designed for use during and after library hours is located across the broad lobby from the library proper. And a covered drive-up located at the rear of the structure makes it easy for library patrons to return library materials.

Connected to Cedar Rapids' growing network of skywalks, the library makes good use of its second story connection. A well-stocked children's library, the roof terrace, and a large staff area are all located on this level.

Joining the two levels is a beautifully geometric and thoughtfully detailed concrete staircase, its curvilinear forms contrasting sharply with the angularity in the rest of the structure. The rich sandblasted concrete, polished brass, and planter brimming with lush bromeliads help the stair assert an unmistakable architectural presence in the center of the library.

If the measure of a library's success is how well it accomplishes its intended functions, then the Cedar Rapids Public Library is a winner. But the sense of pride it has fostered in the residents of Cedar Rapids makes it a bigger winner. ■