

CESAR PELLI

Buildings and Projects 1965-1990

Introduction by Paul Goldberger



RIZZOLI
NEW YORK

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Introduction by Paul Goldberger

Essays by Mario Gandelsonas and John Pastier

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Introduction

Paul Goldberger

Cesar Pelli is one of the few architects of our time—or of any other, for that matter—whose rhetoric precisely matches his work. When Pelli talks, which he does with some frequency, or writes, which he does more rarely, there is a marvelous sense that the words are in proportion to the architecture, that they promise neither more nor less than the buildings themselves, but instead do the simplest, rarest thing an architect's words can do: offer insight into his buildings. Pelli is a realist: more than almost any other architect practicing today, he can articulate the principles behind his work, and evaluate them in a clear-headed way. Pelli writes and speaks not as a theoretician for whom buildings are but appendages to elaborate dogmas. Yet, neither is he a purely commercial architect, willing to tolerate theory only insofar as this season's theory might yield next season's shapes. One might even say that theorists consider Pelli a pragmatist, while pragmatists view him as an ambitious maker of form—a more successfully wrought balance, surely, than almost anyone else in large-scale commercial practice has managed to achieve.

It is worth listening to Pelli's words for a moment, for they come as a relief to someone who has grown weary of both the high-blown, pretentious phrase-making of some architects, and the disingenuous self-deprecating lines of others. In Pelli's work, the central theme is always that of constraints—the limits of an architectural program, the limits of site, of budget, of the very nature of architecture as an art. "An architect never starts with a blank canvas," Pelli says, implying that he would not consider it an improvement if he were to be handed one. "Architecture is not painting. It is about extraordinary creative responses to specific situations. Most criticism has been dominated by theories based primarily on the nature of painting, and the modern movement in architecture tried to recast architecture to make it more like painting or sculpture—to make the architect a free artist and to assume that clients should free the architect from constraints. But I believe these supposedly nasty constraints are the lifeblood of architecture."

These phrases could be taken as an apologia for an architecture of compromise. Throughout history,

architects have made similar arguments in defense of bad work. But what sets Pelli's words apart from the defensive rhetoric of so many architects in the commercial milieu—and what, in the end, sets Pelli himself apart—is that the critical idea here is not the grudging acceptance of constraints, but the insistence on the notion that constraints actually encourage art. Pelli does not say that the practical demands of site, program, and budget frustrate the making of art: he argues that creatively resolving these restraints *is* the making of art. Art is his goal, as surely as for any architect practicing today.

Here Pelli's debt to Eero Saarinen, with whom he worked for the first decade of his career, becomes clear. Saarinen insisted that a view of architecture as a problem-solving discipline was not inimical to a view of it as art, and he took pride in the dramatically different buildings he produced during his career. Saarinen's architecture tended to be picturesque and highly dependent on image, and in that sense prefigured postmodernism. Theory was vastly less important to him than image and a sense of appropriateness to both program and site—an attitude that appeared radical, if not heretical, in the 1950s when Miesian theory was an all-encompassing and rigid orthodoxy.

But if Saarinen served as a model of an architect who, by temperament and intellect, rejected any all-encompassing theory, Pelli, as a maker of form, has continually moved more and more into his own. After all, his buildings and not his words are the proof of his stature, the tangible evidence that shows us that his words are insightful rather than merely self-justifying. Pelli's first post-Saarinen work, done in association with the Los Angeles firms of Daniel, Mann, Johnson & Mendenhall, and Gruen Associates—projects like the San Bernardino (California) City Hall, the Commons in Columbus, Indiana, and the U.S. Embassy in Tokyo—could all be described as deft essays in late modernism, extending the romantic variations on Miesian form that Saarinen himself introduced in such buildings as the Bell Laboratories in Holmdel, New Jersey, and the IBM Research Center in Yorktown Heights, New York.

The same could be said of much of the work that Pelli did when he first embarked on his own practice in the late 1970s, in buildings like the Pacific Design Center in Los Angeles, the renovation of the Museum of Modern Art and the Museum Tower in New York, the Cleveland Clinic, and the Four Oaks and Four Leaf Towers complexes in Houston. In each case the building was modernist in form, though hardly so in ideology. Pelli's interest lay in creating a visual and sculptural energy that orthodox modernism lacked, and to achieve such results, he was more than willing to indulge in design gestures that a Miesian would have considered unthinkable. The most dramatic involved color. Buildings such as the Pacific Design Center—its first phase, a bloated shed of bright blue glass, its second phase, a somewhat tighter structure of green glass—thrust Pelli into the role of late modernism's most ardent colorist. Similarly, the Museum of Modern Art residential tower (Museum Tower) has a complex skin of blue, gray, and brown glass set in a pattern that could be called Mondrianesque. With these buildings, Pelli was just as interested in form and surface as in color, which the playful shape of the Pacific Design Center or the setback profile and textured skin of the Museum Tower make clear.

In all these buildings, Pelli was attempting to stretch the modernist aesthetic to absorb a visual richness that older buildings possessed. It is as if he were trying to prove that modernism need not be reductivist, that the sensual qualities of the Beaux-Arts style could be coaxed out of modernism, for all that orthodox modernist theory suggested otherwise. This quest was highly successful in some buildings, most particularly in the Pacific Design Center and the Museum of Modern Art's tower, and somewhat less so in the Houston projects, such as Four Leaf Towers, in which experiments in skin color and texture gave the design an odd sense of seeming to be made of plastic.

But it was a bit later, in a series of skyscrapers continuing forward from the World Financial Center at Battery Park City in Manhattan, to a series of academic and institutional buildings such as the Robert R. Herring Hall at the Rice University School of Business, that we might set as the beginning of

the high phase of Pelli's career. At this point—roughly the onset of the 1980s—Pelli seems to have felt the limits of the direction he had been pursuing, not because it had not been successful, but because even success could carry only so much potential. Only so much richness could be brought out of the modernist language; it was as if Pelli felt he had made this mute creature speak as much as it could. And if little more could be done, he was far too ambitious as a designer to spend the next phase of his career merely composing variations on the themes set at the Museum Tower.

And so Pelli's work, like that of more than a few other architects in the 1980s, took steps away from the language of modernism and began inching toward the architecture of the past—in Pelli's case, most emphatically toward the tall urban buildings of the 1920s and 1930s, and also toward the red-brick institutional buildings of the mid-to-late nineteenth century. But the crucial thing here—and this is surely a matter of temperament as much as anything—is the extent to which Pelli chose not to do an abrupt about-face, as architects ranging from Philip Johnson to Michael Graves did in those days, but to seek a marriage between his work from the 1970s and his work from the 1980s. More and more, Pelli came to rely on history, but he never embraced the past unequivocally and, more important still, never rejected the modernist vocabulary with which he had been experimenting throughout his career—if only because he continued to feel a sympathy for modernism's commitment to contemporary materials and technology. Pelli feared sentimental recreations of history, yet was frustrated by the slowly evolving modernist vocabulary. With nowhere else to go, his work became a struggle for synthesis.

The World Financial Center captures this tension: four towers, all echoing the stepped-back forms of the towers of the 1920s, here bow to the economic demands of the 1980s by being far bulkier and squatter in profile than their historic skyscraper antecedents. All four towers reject the flat tops of postwar skyscrapers in favor of sculpted crowns, each of which has a slightly different geometric shape. Like the towers of Rockefeller Center, which served as a spiritual model, the

buildings are identical in their sheathing—in this case, a complicated set of four “skins” that evolve from a granite base into a succession of setbacks, each with a greater proportion of glass until they reach the top, where the towers are exclusively glass.

The use of four skins, each a formal progression from the previous one, is perhaps the most ambitious and least successful aspect of the buildings. It is really a case of too much architecture, of a design trying too hard and ending up with overly busy façades. One skin—perhaps the second from the top, where granite strips create a strong texture on glass—might have been enough, and surely would have allowed the massing to read more clearly. But the buildings still represent one of the most successful syntheses yet between modernist form and postmodernist intention—or, to put it another way, between the desire to create large-scale urban buildings that possess both the sensuous and visually engaging qualities of their predecessors and the mark of our own age.

Pelli is at his most characteristic in the very act of desiring to join past and present. His are not buildings that emerge out of a wish to fool us into believing that they were put up in the 1920s, but neither are they indifferent to the impulses that have motivated postmodernism.

Among these impulses is a concern for the urban context. It is a concern more often honored in the breach, but in Pelli's case, the commitment is genuine. Cesar Pelli is an architect who thinks in terms of whole cities and conceives of buildings in terms of their impact on what is around them. “A building must be both background and foreground,” he has said. “As foreground, it must have some qualities that are exceptional. But it must also try very hard to knit into the fabric. William Butterfield, the nineteenth-century English Gothic revivalist, is the great model of how the two things are not necessarily contradictory—of how you can do great buildings and knit into the fabric.” At another moment Pelli spoke of the city as “a canvas without a frame.” As he asked, “When evaluating a new building, the question is how good is the canvas after this piece is added. Is it better or worse?”

Once again, the words could be self-serving. Happily, the buildings prove otherwise. Pelli is one of the few architects designing tall buildings today who consistently thinks of them in terms of their relationship to an entire skyline, as well as to their immediate surroundings and to the streetscape. His most successful towers—buildings like the Norwest Center in Minneapolis, the World Financial Center, and the as-yet-unfinished Society National Bank tower in Cleveland and the NCNB Tower in Charlotte, North Carolina—may be most notable for the graceful way in which they resolve the conflict between historical form and modernist expression that has daunted so many other architects. But all of these buildings also stand as potent, yet gentle pieces of their cities' skylines, and as active and responsible presences on their cities' sidewalks. It is difficult to be quite so sanguine about Pelli's Canary Wharf tower now rising in the new business district east of London, less because of Prince Charles's skepticism about the appropriateness of a 48-story tower in England, and more because of the tower itself. Despite its handsome stainless-steel skin, it is a bit stouter and less lyrical in profile than Pelli's better skyscrapers. In contrast, Pelli's 750-foot-tall Indiana Tower in White River Park, Indianapolis, a perforated obelisk of arches set in a spiral now under construction, is a compelling image, for all its similarity to the Tower of Babel, capable, one suspects, of giving coherence to a skyline badly in need of it.

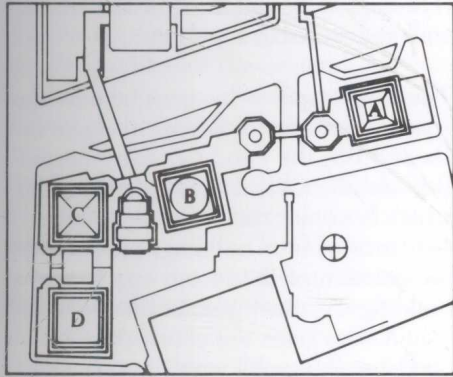
Not as startlingly different, but ultimately more important, is Pelli's newest tall building in New York, the Carnegie Hall office tower, a slender slab of brick on West 57th Street that neatly continues the visual themes of Carnegie Hall without appearing slavish, cute, or sentimental. Indeed, this building tells us everything that his architecture aspires to. Though its brick skin breaks with Pelli's prior preference for glass, it is rigorous and crisp, adhering to no precise precedent. It is as richly textured as a nineteenth-century building. For all its dramatic difference in size and detail, it is capable of standing comfortably beside much older buildings.

The Carnegie Hall tower marks the first time that Pelli has attempted to

accomplish in a skyscraper what he has been doing for a decade in his parallel series of low-rise buildings—that is, to express the depth and texture of nineteenth-century masonry buildings with a thin veneer of patterned brick. This approach is yet another way to create texture by using modern technology, of trying to make thin, modern surfaces resonate with the depth of thick, deep, old ones. The brick patterning began with the business school at Rice, where it took on a quality akin to stenciling. It has evolved in such projects as the Yale Center for Molecular Medicine, now nearing completion in New Haven; the Ley Student Center at Rice (where actual stenciling appears on the inside); and an exquisite little gem, the Mattatuck Museum in Waterbury, Connecticut, that brilliantly resolves a difficult urban site. Still, the Carnegie Hall tower represents a culmination for Pelli. A building of richness and sensuality, it soars, and yet sits comfortably, strongly, on the ground, at once part of the city and part of the sky.

Conditions for a Colossal Architecture

Mario Gandelsonas



World Financial Center, schematic site plan

By the use of inert materials and starting from conditions more or less utilitarian, you have established certain relationships which have aroused our emotions. This is Architecture.

Le Corbusier. "Towards a New Architecture"

The work of Cesar Pelli allows us to explore how modern economic structures shape the modern urban realm and, more specifically, the relationship between economic structures and the realm of architectural ideas. In particular, two of his buildings, the World Financial Center in New York City and the Pacific Design Center in Los Angeles—both prominently located in American “global” cities—serve as paradigms for the type of questions we would like to explore. Each one presents, in microcosm, a number of symptoms concerning the peculiar historical and geographic conditions in which they take place, with their respective urban backgrounds serving as backdrops for the economic structure and urban order of late twentieth-century America.

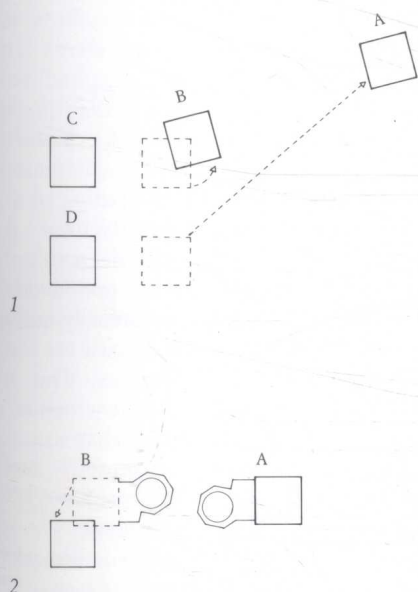
Today, New York City, the financial center of the world, is at a historic juncture at which the service sector is the primary motor for the international economic system. Los Angeles, the late twentieth-century urban model of limitless sprawl, demonstrates the privileged dominance of the car over public transportation, with buildings viewed as objects on a field rather than integrated into an urban fabric, with the strip and shopping mall replacing Main Street as social and economic centers. Here, consumption is the driving force behind the urban experience, pervasive at every level of culture. The World Financial Center and the Pacific Design Center represent two poles of the present American economic structure—production and consumption—the former housing major financial institutions, and the latter functioning as the mecca of the material world, where every conceivable product, old and new, is on exhibit, ready to be visually and actually consumed.

Despite their different geographic locations, there is a strong parallel in the symbolic processes that generate the design of these two very different buildings. Both the World Financial

Center and the Pacific Design Center result from a similar “allegorical impulse.”¹ Both take their point of departure from preexisting buildings. The World Financial Center, a cluster of four buildings and a sequence of public spaces, supplements the twin towers of the World Trade Center. The Pacific Design Center’s second and third buildings supplant the first building to form a collection of “Urban Objects” that frame a public space.

The World Financial Center

In 1978, Pelli designed the World Financial Center for Olympia & York, a Canadian real estate development company. The project occupies the entire commercial sector of Battery Park City, and by doing so reformulates the original master plan by Alexander Cooper and Stan Eckstut. Whereas the original plan called for a grouping of small towers reminiscent of old Wall Street to be designed by different architects, the Olympia & York proposal was based on four massive towers designed by a single architect, Cesar Pelli. The completed project can be read as a series of organized oppositions: public space versus private building, massing versus skin, base versus top. The buildings, both in their base and their “bodies,” suggest different “movements.” The first movement can be read at the level at which the 200 × 200 footprint hits the ground, implying a rotation with respect to the base. The second is suggested by the building B, which has “moved” away from the positions formally defined by the location of the buildings C and D. The buildings C, and D, and the position that B should have occupied, suggest a courtyard organization with a missing tower (fig. 1). The building A, and the position that B should have occupied, suggest a gate (fig. 2). The building B seems to have “moved” away from those positions and thus appears to occupy an undecided place. The four towers produce two urban places that in their arrangement imply a total of six. Two towers define a gate, four towers define a court: The gate and the court imply a total of six. [The “game” that produces the two urban signifiers can be described by the formula 6(required) – 2(missing) = 4(present).] In other words, the World Financial Center’s four towers perform the work



of six: the signified exceeds the signifier. In order for this to happen, one tower assumes a double role, the other one is missing. And the double role is suggested by means of a "movement" that attracts the courtyard tower towards the gate. This formal process produces two types of absences: the tower with dual meaning represents one absence, the missing tower replaced by a public space next to the cove, and by the cove itself, is literally absent.

The buildings' massing suggests known urban datums and types. In the lower buildings, the base expresses the urban morphology and produces street walls. A play of setbacks, or "jackets," as Pelli calls them, perform a number of functions. The first jacket articulates and inflects the towers to indicate the urban syntax of the ensemble. The second jacket stabilizes the buildings and reveals the core. The tops establish a discourse on the skyline while reinforcing the syntax. The round top sits on the building-hinge that belongs to both the court and the gate, while the other three towers present different versions of the pyramidal top, from the literal to the implied. The role of the tops as anchors was described earlier. The tops are also the caps that stop the buildings' vertical movement. Why does the movement need to be stopped? Because the towers inside imply an infinitely high building, they are truncated at different heights and capped with the pure forms of the tops. Known datums define a system of building height differences registered by the side streets, the low buildings, the avenues, the jackets, the early skyscrapers of the 1920s and '30s, and the towers. The buildings are sheathed with a granite and glass "skin" in which the granite dominates the lower levels, while the tops are totally wrapped in glass.

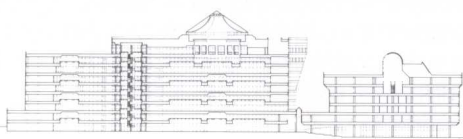
The materials—stone and glass—are related to the vertical distance that separates the spectator from the buildings: stone dominates the buildings at close range while glass dominates the buildings' higher levels, going from the tactile to the visual, from the built form to the drawing. What is paradoxical is that the glass tower is the one that really expresses the building system at work. Exhibiting, undressing: the metaphor of truth. The façades, including the

granite with punched windows, form a curtain wall rather than a loadbearing wall. Unveiling the core reveals the glass grid that is the representation of the basic system implied by all the façades of the building. The façades constitute a play of exchange, in which stone is substituted for glass in order to represent wall, windows, or the curtain wall system itself, the grid.

The public spaces are generated by the spacing between buildings: the gate by Ba and Bb; the Food Court by Bc and Bd; and the Grand Hall by Bb and Bc, which becomes the centerpiece in the sequence of four buildings produced by the deletion of the fourth court building. A fourth public space—what would have been the actual court—overlaps diagonally with the cove that opens up the ensemble to the river and the ocean, the culmination of a sequence of spaces starting at the World Financial Center Center plaza and continuing through the bridge, the Grand Hall, and cove. The four towers of the World Financial Center generate four public spaces. Conceptually the voids—the spaces—are foreground, since they assume the major roles, and the buildings are background—a reversal on the relationship between solids and voids that existed when the World Trade Center's twin towers stood alone.

The Pacific Design Center

The architecture of the World Financial Center is "clear": it immediately provides clues leading to a conceptual analysis. For the Pacific Design Center, however, we need to go beyond the initial fascination produced by the buildings which are literally and conceptually opaque. The Pacific Design Center "hits" our senses. The intense blue opaque glass skin wraps around an immense building that sits like an intruder in an environment filled with little houses. For twelve years, the building stood by itself, gradually becoming a familiar landmark in the Los Angeles landscape. Over time, it became known as the "Blue Whale," a nickname that added a mythical dimension to the building, and today it is a recognized city monument. The addition of two more structures in 1987 presented Pelli with a very difficult problem: how to add to something first proposed as a unique



Pacific Design Center, section through Phases I, II, and III, looking east

object. The solution: to approach the expansion of the first building as a transformation of its character from unique object to unique fragment, one of a sequence of oversized or, perhaps more accurately, “outsized” fragments. Pelli created a collection of heterogeneous shapes, each one with its own character, displayed as a sequence. Color is the first feature that makes an impact: the blue of the original building, the green of the second, and the red of the building still in process.

The first building, the “Blue Whale,” is a section of a crystalline volume that implies infinite length. The design is generated as a horizontal extrusion of a distinctive section responding to the interior organization of the Pacific Design Center: large floor plates in the first four floors and a double-height gallery on the fifth and sixth floors. The sides read as though they have been chiseled away from a rectilinear section. The chamfered corners and curves strengthen the volumetric reading of the object rather than emphasize the planar character of the glass skin. This object does not sit on the ground; it has been placed. The question proposed is: what constitutes bottom, top, and sides, since the four sides offer very little in terms of a base. The curved barrel vault immediately defines top and bottom, and therefore, by implication, the sides. The bottom still needs columns in order to support the “volume.” Thus, the formal manipulation concentrates on the sides, while the two long facades are potentially infinite extrusions.

A “shelf” extended from the first building allows for different modes of connection among fragments: Phase II sits on this shelf, Phase III—which has not yet been built—is interlocked with it. From outside, where the visual “action” takes place, Phase II represents Pelli’s design strategy in the late 1980s vis-a-vis Phase I. The “object” with its central configuration reads as a cubic box. Only the top floor, the ninth floor, has preserved a square plan, since the corners from the eighth floor going down have been chiseled away—transforming the plan into an octagon at the first four floors. In this way the building also acquires a volumetric presence; it is transformed into an object. As in the case of the first building, section also dominates the central composition of the second

structure. The green building is made up of stacked two-story atriums, while a central space under the dome (located in the top three floors) parallels the public space found in the Galleria of the original building.

The shelf or plinth has another function, which is to frame a two-acre public plaza that contains an exhibition gallery as well as a 350-seat amphitheater. This public component expands the commercial program, thus enlarging the Pacific Design Center’s audience beyond the professional community to encompass the general public. In this way, the Center is transformed from an icon to a monumental ensemble. This evolution is definitely related to the political changes that occurred in the period between the construction of the first and the second buildings when West Hollywood became a city. Pelli was brought on to design the second building only after a long search—a circumstance that only illuminates the difficulties posed by a program that asks one architect to add on to the work of another. There is an-Other, Lacanian logic at work in this project, an unconscious energy that generates a formal movement leading from the first building on to the second and third. When facing the buildings, one is induced to drift and displace—rather than attempt to decode—the meanings condensed in the three crystalline structures. There appear, however, several sequential arrangements of metaphors: the three “almost” basic colors; the three fragments (base, capital, and architrave) of an enormous classical column; three huge industrial extrusions; three colossal urban objects formally organized by means of a horizontal, centroidal, and vertical composition. While at the World Financial Center four buildings perform the visual work of six (since two of the buildings are “missing”), at the Pacific Design Center, the two (or soon to be three) buildings are doing the work of one. In the first case, there is an excess of signifier, in the second, there is an excess of the signified.

How Architecture Is Affected by Urban Restructuring

The World Financial Center and the Pacific Design Center visually express the deeper economic and social

changes in American culture of which architectural phenomena such as waterfront developments, central city office complexes, trendy retail and restaurant districts, and deteriorating inner city manufacturing facilities are also symptoms. As opposed to the view that these phenomena represent an “urban renaissance” (implying the return to some previous economic, spatial, and formal order), the massive restructuring of urban space and land use currently underway expresses a major reshaping of the American economic structure and a restructuring of the industrial base. There is a pronounced shift to service employment, with the forces of consumption taking precedence over production.² It is important to point out the impact of these changes in order to understand parallel changes at the architectural level, to analyze new formal architectural strategies—some historically available, some invented. The rise of new cities and the concomitant transformation of old cities from industrial centers into service centers are part of a new hierarchy for which we are witnessing the emergence of global cities that function as international administrative and financial centers³.

How does the process of urban restructuring affect architecture? Not in the form of a unified, singular “international style.” Not as an architecture symbolic of the global economy and the emergent global city. On the contrary, there is a certain resistance to this representational effect, as seen in the tendency of architects to explore “national” or “local” specificities. (The image of the “urban frontier” or the urban “villages” are relevant examples of this inclination.) For instance, the notion of the “urban village” carries a naturalistic connotation, implying—in American history—the westward progress of the frontier, a movement associated with the forging of the national spirit. In a sense, then, the World Financial Center extends the physical frontier of Manhattan. This movement parallels the extension of the borough’s frontier beyond the urban village toward SoHo, Tribeca, NoHo, and the East Village. The Pacific Design Center is similarly representative of this process of urban restructuring, symbolizing the political and social fragmentation of the body of the new global city. The Pacific Design

Center has become part of the center of a new city. The complex evolved from an object to a civic space composed of a collection of fragments. Both the World Financial Center and the Pacific Design Center partake of the new urban space: controlled, fragmented, interiorized, as opposed to the free-flowing public space of the "classical" city or the privatized space of the "classical" suburb. This is not to imply that these spaces exclude one another. Rather, the new paradigm includes both models and they overlap and connect in their physical manifestation. Control, fragmentation, and the accelerating growth of the private realm are three interrelated functions within a service economy in which the consumer is both a "free agent" and someone under surveillance. This activity is made possible by the fact that the consumer can be found within a global interior space: the house, car, office, or shopping mall. The World Financial Center and the Pacific Design Center address precisely these issues. In the World Financial Center, meaning points toward the outside, the global network beyond to which it is connected, while the Pacific Design Center points to itself, to the world of interiors.

The Colossal Gates

By cutting the towers' shafts at different heights, Pelli provides a way to indicate the concept of an infinitely tall tower; these shafts, truncated and fragmented at different lengths, provide measure to the unmeasurable. Through this gesture, Cesar Pelli projects this concept back to the World Trade Center, which similarly could be viewed as fragments of an infinite colossal column, or columns. This same concept of cutting up something infinitely long is present in the colossal length of the Pacific Design Center, a skyscraper on its side.

A sort of semantic and formal affinity exerts an irresistible attraction between the Greek *Kolossus* and the Roman column,⁴ the kind of attraction that perhaps pulls a colossal "capital" as a second term in the Pacific Design Center sequence of enormous columnar fragments. While the column is always of average, moderate, measured size, the colossal is not. The colossal implies the enormous, the immense, the

excessive, the lack of limits: "the infinite is presented in it. It is too big, too large for our grasp, for our apprehension."⁵ Despite the fact that critics talk about the "jackets" in the World Financial Center as an effort to mitigate the disruption provoked by its size, the jackets' formal functions described earlier reinforce the reading of the buildings as too big.

The World Financial Center is an ensemble played at two different registers: the architecture of Manhattan and the colossal riverfront, and the walls of Manhattan, where the theme of the gates announced by the World Trade Center is now repeated, scaled down, and transformed. The colossal is not a thing. It is the qualification of something that is not a thing but a concept.⁶ What is the specific concept being qualified by the immensity and infinite nature of the World Financial Center? The gates of Manhattan, the preexisting notion articulated by the World Trade Center. The World Financial Center reverses the role played by the World Trade Center: here the buildings constitute the gates that open up Manhattan from inside out to the river, to the ocean, and to the infinite. They establish a wall (fragmented into a colonnade) next to the river. Now seen from inside, the "ensemble" is definitely unmeasurable, too big. What about the concept articulated by the colossal nature of the Pacific Design Center? The Pacific Design Center could be seen as a hinge, a moment of passage between two different fabrics in the limitless sprawl and fluidity of Los Angeles: the potentially monumental fabric of the city and the potentially colossal fabric of the megalopolis. In the case of Los Angeles, the one-mile Jeffersonian grid that covers the territory of America can be seen as the measure of a new global landscape, or an attempt to measure the unmeasurable, to act as a ruler in a city so enormous, it is comprehensible only from an airplane or perhaps an automobile, not from a human, pedestrian point of view. A machine, a building, is needed to be able to perceive Los Angeles's dimensions. Los Angeles's limitless fluidity can be stopped only by implied walls suggested by certain streets or boulevards, or at the faults between different grids or urban plates that act as walls or dividers, or buildings that act as conceptual solids, stopping

points that puncture our gaze. These are the "gates" of Los Angeles. The Pacific Design Center is one of these markers and, in the near future, it will be part of a symbolic network of civic monuments that act as the city's visual and symbolic nodes: City Hall, The Performing Arts Center, the Observatory, and the Hollywood Bowl.

The Pacific Design Center and the World Financial Center can be viewed as new tools for mapping the global city. They provide measures much as does another important symbolic marker found in nature. "A tree judged by the height of man gives, at all events, a standard for a mountain, and supposing this is, say a mile high, it can serve as unit for the number expressing the earth's diameter, so as to make it intuitable, similarly the earth's diameter for the known planetary system, this again for the system of the Milky Way, and the immeasurable host of such systems, which go by the name of nebulae and most likely in turn themselves form such a system, holds out no prospect of a limit."⁷

Notes

1. Craig Owens, "The Allegorical Impulse" in "Towards a Theory of Post-Modernism," in *October*, 12 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, Spring 1980), pp. 69, 84.
2. Neil Smith, "Gentrification, The Frontier, and The Restructuring of Urban Space" in *Gentrification of the City*, Neil Smith and Peter Williams, eds. (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986), pp. 24-25.
3. Peter Williams and Neil Smith, "From Renaissance to Restructuring" in *Gentrification of the City*, Neil Smith and Peter Williams, eds. (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986), p. 210.
4. Jacques Derrida, "The Colossal" in *The Truth in Painting* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1987), p. 120.
5. Jacques Derrida, *op cit*, p. 126.
6. Jacques Derrida, *op cit*, p. 125.
7. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Aesthetic Judgement* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911), quoted by Derrida, *op cit*, pp. 146-47.

The Evolution of an Architect

John Pastier

Cesar Pelli Himself

Before examining Cesar Pelli's work, it may be helpful to set the stage by describing the person. One is immediately struck by his politesse and seemingly effortless charm. Born, raised, and educated in Argentina, this slim, six-foot two-inch 62-year-old has an accent, carriage, and courtly manner that would fit nicely into a 1930s film about life on the Riviera. His balanced and civilized exterior accurately reflects his true character. Deep down, most creative architects tend toward the Dionysian, but Pelli is thoroughly Apollonian.

Design architects, no matter how intelligent, operate largely on an intuitive and visual level. Pelli combines those qualities with an articulateness and analytic flair that is rare among nonacademic members of his profession. Had he not become an architect, he very well could have been a scientist, a law professor, an essayist, a corporation head, or a philosopher.

He is in full control of his art, and not only knows what he is doing and why, but is also able to communicate it with limpid clarity. The late Esther McCoy, a critic whose literary abilities were unsurpassed, once confessed that "I had never found it easy to write about him because my notes were stuffed with quotes from him far more provocative and neatly expressed than I could have written. It was exasperating. How could I do my work when he was doing it for me?"

There is nothing of the avant-garde or eccentric in his personal tastes. His dress tends to academic tweeds, but he dons dark pinstripes when business so dictates. His three most recent homes have all been externally unremarkable, with spacious, light-colored, slightly underfurnished interiors whose simplicity would call to mind that of the Shaker tradition if only there were not so many books and magazines in evidence. There is no visible art in the house, and the only things on the walls are windows and well-stocked bookcases.

Pelli has been married to multidisciplinary designer and historian Diana Balmori since 1950, and their sons have become a physicist and an architect. Balmori, who was a partner

in Cesar Pelli & Associates for ten years, maintains a wide range of professional and personal interests. Her husband's pursuits are fewer. Other than reading, he admits to no hobbies: "My recreation is to do as many good buildings as I possibly can," he concedes happily. "In this respect, I am insatiable." Long working hours confirm those statements, yet he never seems driven by his practice. In his life and in his work, he manages to make everything look easy.

Culturally Responsible Building

While his personal characteristics have been consistent for at least the last twenty years, Pelli's professional outlook has been in continuous evolution. During an eventful four-decade career, his designs have embraced a wide and expanding range of architectural expression and intellectual concerns. Particularly in the last dozen years—the period of his independent practice and the second half of his quarter century of full responsibility for his various firm's design decisions—his work has diversified to a degree that resists easy labeling and defies standard historians' taxonomy. Visual consistency and a readily identifiable signature, the two related elements that reassure conventionally inclined chroniclers of architecture, have become less distinct as Pelli's work has progressed.

In large part, this design diversity is due to the course of twentieth-century architectural development and Pelli's formative influences while working with the highly polystylistic Eero Saarinen. But to an even greater degree, it is the product of a flexible rationality that has adapted itself to specific design opportunities and changes in the architectural climate, and has broadened its scope as Pelli has developed a deeper mastery of the complex process of producing buildings in the real world.

Many definitions of architecture go beyond the art historian's fixation on tracing similarities of visual form. An elegantly useful one, recently stated by Montreal architect Adrian Sheppard, is simply that of "culturally responsible building." While it was used in a universal sense, it seems made to order for understanding the evolution of

Pelli's work, and in fact is an uncanny summation of a set of nine rules that Pelli articulated in the mid-1980s.

At the time, he was the dean of Yale's graduate school of architecture, where he continues to teach. As part of his pedagogy he identified nine responsibilities that face architects. In the order that he presented them, the architect's obligations were to the client, to society, to contemporary architectural culture, to architecture's history, to materials and the processes of construction, to users, to place (including region and climate as well as the specific site), to the building's functional and communicative purpose, and finally to one's own ideas and principles.

While some of these tenets will figure more prominently in the ensuing discussion than others, all are important, and as a set, they clearly articulate the idea of culturally responsible building.

The Years With Saarinen

From the very start, Pelli had a heightened awareness of the importance of the contemporary architectural culture. His first U.S. professional experience, after initial education and a brief practice in Tucuman, Argentina and graduate studies at the University of Illinois, was a ten-year sojourn in Eero Saarinen's office. This protean designer was one of the most fascinating and committed of the second-generation modernists who flourished at mid-century.

Through the apprenticeship process, he was also probably the most directly influential of that group.

He was unusually receptive to the opportunity that each new commission represented, and his response to virtually every assignment was a fresh viewpoint and a unique solution. This approach became known as a style for the job, and it may well have been Saarinen who was on the mind of the highly consistent Mies van der Rohe when he aphorized "I do not invent a new architecture every Monday morning." While Mies saw his primary task as one of refining, Saarinen saw his as one of redefining.

As often as not, Saarinen's buildings were

physically and culturally freestanding monuments. Most of those were either curvilinear, neoexpressionistic, structurally exhibitionistic, or some combination of the three. The St. Louis Gateway arch, the TWA Terminal at Kennedy Airport (of which Pelli was a project designer), the Ingalls Hockey Rink at Yale, and Dulles Airport immediately come to mind in this respect. So does Jørn Utzon's Sydney Opera House, which emerged victorious from an architectural competition purely through Saarinen's influence as the dominant juror.

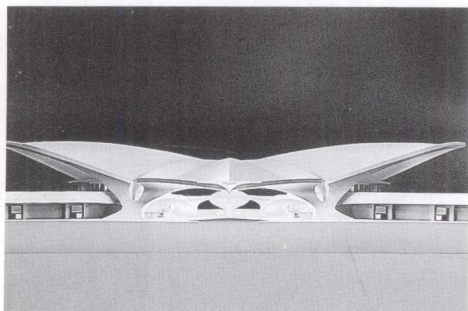
Yet one Saarinen project, the Stiles and Morse residential colleges at Yale, was as responsive to place and tradition as anything that modern architecture had produced up to that point. In a setting of neo-Gothic carved stone buildings that most modernists would have resolutely ignored, Saarinen sought to incorporate the spirit and masonry materials of that context in a non-imitative way. Significantly, Pelli was intimately involved with these buildings as project designer.

Los Angeles: Design Within Multidisciplinary Firms

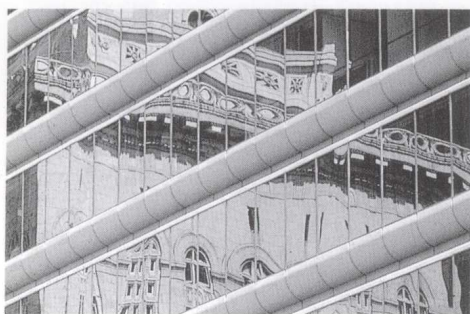
The contextual lessons that Pelli learned from Stiles and Morse were not immediately applied after he left Saarinen's office for Los Angeles to become head of design at Daniel, Mann, Johnson and Mendenhall in 1964. They would only begin to emerge strongly a dozen years or so later.

What he did put to use immediately from his prior experience was another aspect of Saarinen's work. Ironically, it was an element usually associated primarily with Mies—the glass curtain wall. Saarinen too was prolific in its use, employing it successfully in many of the buildings of the General Motors Technical Center, on the Kresge Auditorium at MIT, the IBM headquarters in Armonk, New York, the Bell Laboratories in Holmdel, New Jersey (which pioneered the use of mirror glass), and several other commissions.

Working with budgets far more frugal and schedules far shorter than any encountered by Mies or Saarinen (and aided by Anthony Lumsden, a



TWA Terminal, John F. Kennedy International Airport (Eero Saarinen)



Oakland City Center, curtain wall detail

colleague from the latter's office), Pelli managed to produce interesting variations on the theme in buildings such as the Teledyne Laboratories, the Federal Building, the Century City Medical Plaza, and the COMSAT Laboratories.

Most of these were experiments in perception, dealing with such issues as transparency and reflectivity, and the integration of, or differentiation between, windows and spandrels. At the time, one of Pelli's major concerns was minimizing the frame that held the glass together, thereby producing a skin as taut and seamless as possible.

These explorations persisted after Pelli became partner in charge of design for Gruen Associates in 1968. In the Toronto Dominion Bank, San Bernardino City Hall, Western Electric Building, Columbus Courthouse Center, Niagara Falls Winter Garden, and the unrealized U.N. City project, he continued to refine the properties of enclosing membranes.

Two skin designs in particular broke new ground. The Oakland City Center combined the modelling and shadow-casting properties of traditional masonry walls with the flatness and reflectivity of glass, while the cobalt-blue Pacific Design Center self-confidently inserted saturated color into the urban landscape.

Rationalizing the building plan was another strong theme of the Los Angeles years. Pelli used circulation spines as both physical and conceptual armatures, as social conduits, and as devices to structure future expansion. Where feasible, he provided parallel circulation paths to add choice and richness to the experience of the building. He compared the occupancy of a complex building to that of a city, and argued that redundancy was the key to successful human use.

Perhaps because their own activities relied so heavily on rationality and systemization, research laboratories became well-developed examples of the spine approach. At opposite ends of the country, Teledyne and COMSAT became architectural metaphors for logical planning and orderly growth. In the Urban Nucleus project for the Santa Monica Mountains, radiating spines provided both vertical and

horizontal circulation, and permitted a compact and dramatic building form in difficult topography.

The fullest expression of spine planning was embodied in U.N. City, a competition-winning scheme that went unbuilt due to Byzantine, or rather Viennese, politics. This office and conference center megastructure was a brilliant response to an intricate program and complex expansion requirements. It organized circulation and growth along multiple axes running in three directions, and arranged modular building forms in such a way that the overall entity could grow flexibly and yet appear finished and even dramatic at any point in its evolution. Had this intellectually and formally powerful design been realized, there is little doubt that it would have become one of the definitive buildings of the century.

Even in the original Pacific Design Center, where expansion was never envisioned, the circulatory system was deftly arranged to induce patrons to explore the full extent of large showroom floors, and rewarded them with dramatic escalator rides at each end of the route. At the top, the spine was expressed externally by a long skylight crowning a two-level galleria that was functionally and spatially similar to a shopping mall's central core. In an actual mall at Fox Hills, he created a spine with a brilliant ceiling arrangement that capitalized on the lighting changes taking place over the course of a day. At the Courthouse Center in Columbus Indiana, the requisite mall spine was treated simply in deference to the more important civic space fronting on Main Street.

Materials and the construction process were also given their due. Pelli's many glass and metal skins normally aspired to lightness and a de-emphasis of visible structure. However, the masonry-clad Worldway Postal Center effectively embodied the opposite qualities. The Niagara Falls Winter Garden combined lightness with an intricate and dramatically expressed steel structure.

Due to the nature of DMJM's and Gruen's practices, accountability to the client was never in doubt. Unlike more prestigious firms, these offices did not attract clients seeking architecture for

its own sake. Likewise, users fared well. But of Pelli's subsequently formulated nine obligations, it could be said that the ones dealing with architecture's own concerns were more fully served than the one related to place. That sensibility would undergo full development only after his move to New Haven. Esther McCoy expressed it best: "In the west, his buildings carried 'place' with them; in the east they were fitted to place."

The U.S. Embassy in Tokyo was a major exception to this pattern. Its finely detailed concrete skin paradoxically conveys the lightness and delicacy of Japanese paper walls, and was designed to take advantage of the exemplary construction skills available in that country.

New Haven: Autonomy and New Directions

If the Los Angeles-designed buildings created place more often than deferring to it, that response was arguably place-appropriate. Most of those commissions, even when located outside California, involved suburban building types in less than urban contexts. Change was a major concern; stability and history were not. The asocial Los Angeles professional milieu encouraged independence, if not isolation. The designs largely reflected those forces.

When Pelli went to New Haven in 1977 to become the dean of Yale's graduate school of architecture, all this would change. Physical, historical, and intellectual frames of reference were now more concentrated and interrelated. Simultaneously, architectural values were changing, and his role as an educator made him especially aware of that flux. Issues of place, context, and history were regaining a stature lost under modernism.

They become more important in Pelli's work as well, since he has long believed in swimming with prevailing currents rather than against them. He explains that "there is great energy in the ideas that are common to your own time. . . . There are certain things that each period searches out, and those are the areas where you could do most. . . . Agreement is energy: it allows you to go much farther."