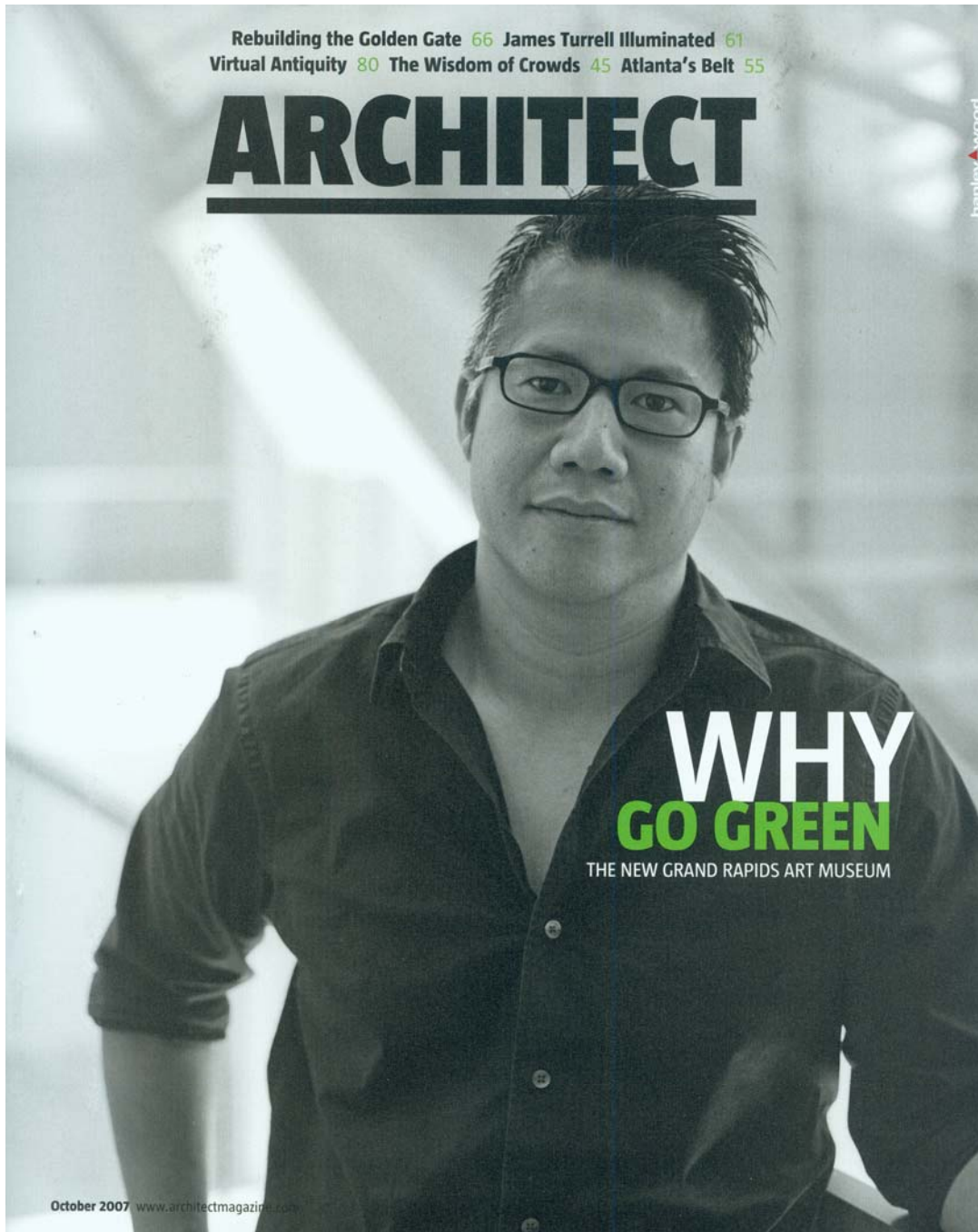
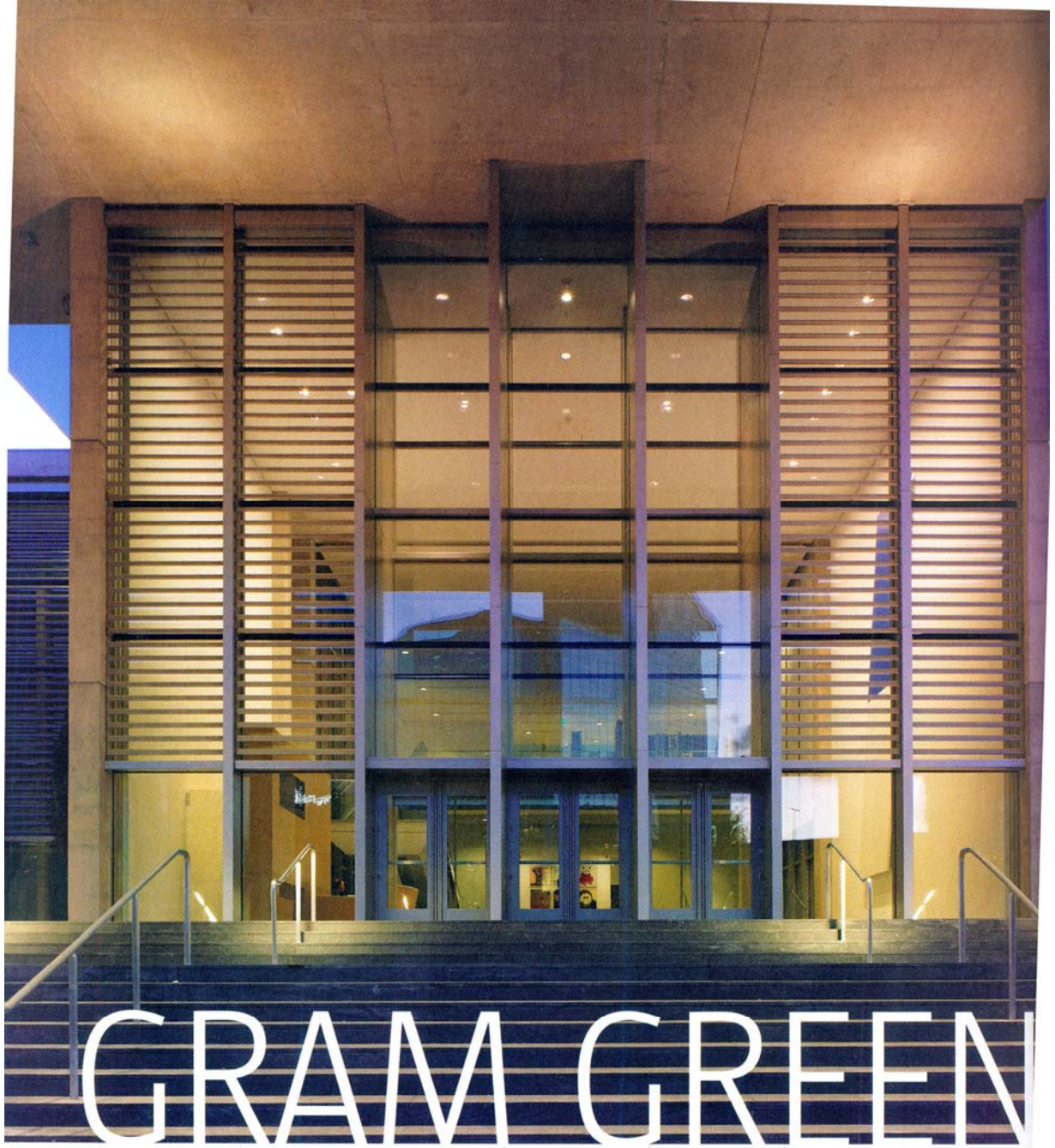


RESNICO W  
SCHROEDER

# ARCHITECT

October 2007





GRAM GREEN



Visitors approaching the Grand Rapids Art Museum from the adjacent park ascend a broad, gentle stair to the entrance pavilion; its transparent walls offer an inviting glimpse into the 5,000-square-foot lobby. The large front portico—a concrete slab 140 feet wide and 120 feet deep—gives protection from the elements in the harsh winter and shade in the summer.

**FROM THE MOMENT** he penciled his first sketch for the new Grand Rapids Art Museum (GRAM) in Grand Rapids, Mich., architect Kulapat Yantrasast was inspired by more than art. A native of Thailand and a partner in the Los Angeles firm Workshop Hakomori Yantrasast (wHY), Yantrasast, 39, felt compelled to layer the building's primary role—as a place for displaying art—with activities that would naturally attract people. As he explains, "The museum experience has become an urban experience."

Seen in this light, the 125,000-square-foot museum, which celebrates its opening on Oct. 5, is a boon to Grand Rapids, a metropolis of 1.3 million people. Located on a high-profile urban site fronting Monroe Street, a main thoroughfare in the heart of downtown, the monumental concrete-and-glass edifice stakes its claim to respectability with a broad canopy that hovers over the northern edge of Ecliptic Park, a popular urban oasis and wintertime skating rink designed by Maya Lin several years ago.

The building, distinguished by this floating concrete canopy and three articulated towers that announce the presence of galleries, strives in many ways to engage the city. Fundamental to Yantrasast's scheme was to load the front with active spaces that extend like fingers toward the park. The museum lobby, cafe, and art education center occupy separate volumes that are programmed for heavy public use. In contrast, Yantrasast likens the rear portion of the building to a sanctuary, where patrons are allowed the privilege of a quiet encounter with art. To get there, visitors pass through a pavilion of concrete, granite, and glass that is filled with natural light, the glitter from a rooftop reflecting pool, and a striking, 26-foot-tall Ellsworth Kelly diptych.

The new \$60 million GRAM triples the size of the museum's former home in a Beaux Arts federal building, with 18,000 square feet of gallery space for traveling exhibitions and the museum's permanent collection (which is dominated by modern paintings and works on paper). Having learned of Yantrasast through his work as project architect on Texas' Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, GRAM director Celeste Adams came calling on him after running afoul of an earlier design team, whose proposal for a timber-framed building with a glass roof raised concerns in this often-frigid city about 30 miles inland from Lake Michigan.

Yantrasast, a protégé of Tadao Ando, favored concrete construction. "Sand and gravel come from local sources, so [concrete] is sustainable," he notes. "And if you pay close attention, it is an extraordinary material."

The project is a giant leap forward for a practice as young as wHY, which was formed in late 2003 by Yantrasast and partner Yo Hakomori, who gained experience on several large-scale projects while employed by Frank Israel and Arthur Erickson. The two principals, who met while in the Ph.D. program at the University of Tokyo, now manage a staff of 13.

Heralded as the first LEED-certified art museum in the country (a distinction that is hoped for, but not yet confirmed), GRAM received its impetus for sustainability from Peter M. Wege, a local cultural philanthropist and environmental advocate whose Wege Foundation provided the project's \$20 million lead gift. The daylighting strategy for the galleries and public spaces was a starting point, reducing the dependence on artificial light and—by using high-quality insulated glass—also minimizing heating and cooling costs. Particularly where there are large expanses of glass, exterior louvers and interior fabric scrims are added to reduce heat gain and diffuse light.

Yantrasast reports that more than 20 percent of the construction materials came from local sources, and more than 10 percent of materials (including building insulation and carpeting) have recycled content. Rain and snow water that lands on the building is collected in a tank beneath the reflecting pool. From there, it is recycled in various building systems including toilets, plant irrigation, and the pool itself, which aerates the water as it spills down a water wall.

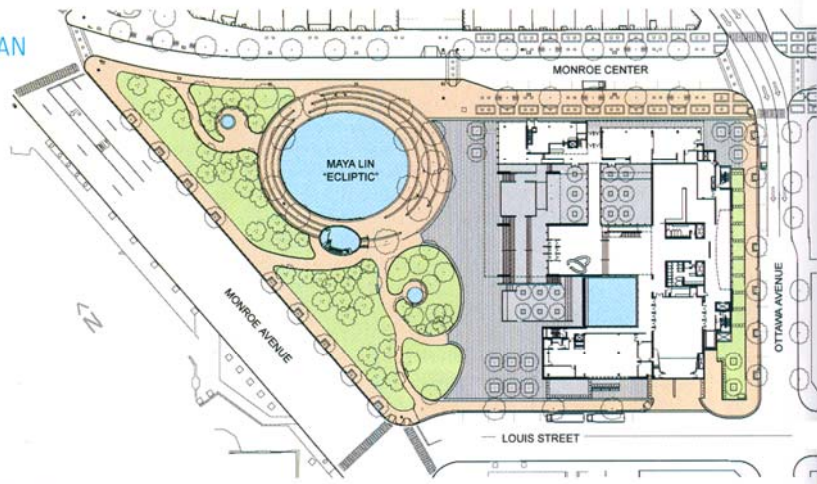
An important aspect of the building's HVAC system is an innovative system of energy wheels. The three 12-foot-diameter wheels, giant blue discs that rotate constantly inside metal housings the size of railroad boxcars, transfer desirable temperature and humidity from conditioned air as it vents out of the building to the fresh air that is continually brought in. "This was the right thing to do, because it didn't seem like we were trying to catch a grasshopper with an elephant," quips Yantrasast. "The investment and the outcome were in balance."

The same equation could be applied to the museum as a whole, in which a fair investment placed in the hands of a responsible architect yielded a landmark that is both respectful of its place and assertive enough to make that place better. Unlike so many recent museums, GRAM, with its restrained materials and simple forms, does not shout for attention. But the museum's appropriate scale, balanced articulation of surfaces, and welcoming programmatic gestures extend an invitation that will likely make art more accessible—and more social—in Grand Rapids.

**IN MICHIGAN, KULAPAT YANTRASAST OF WHY ARCHITECTURE DESIGNS WHAT IS SET TO BE THE NATION'S FIRST LEED-CERTIFIED ART MUSEUM.**



## SITE PLAN



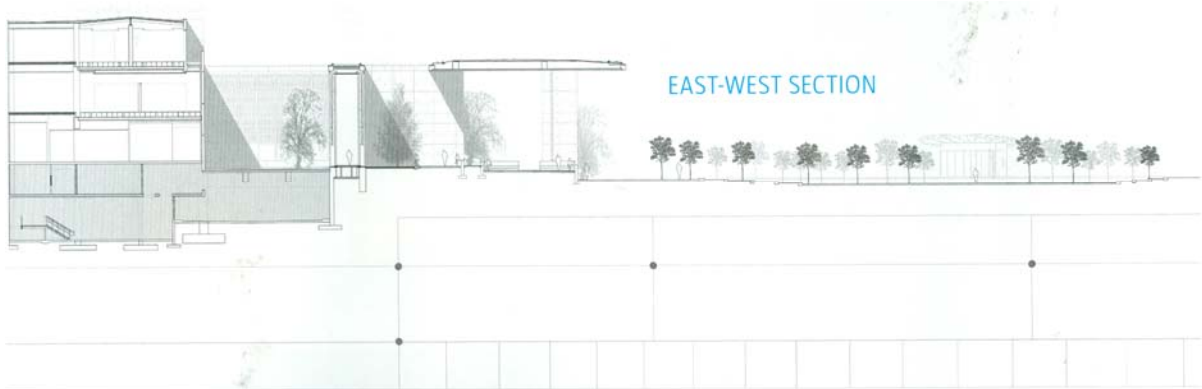
## FACING THE CITY

At night, the gallery lanterns (top) make a striking presence on the skyline—lending the quiet building the quality of a civic landmark. Three layers of insulated glass and a layer of scrim material diffuse the light emitted but protect the artwork within.

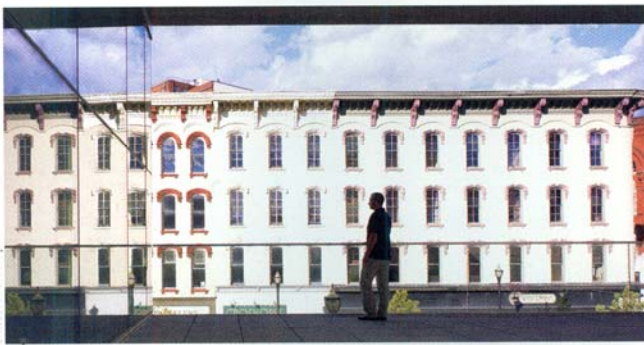
Streets and sidewalks border the museum on three sides, so Yantrasast wanted each building face to nod to its surroundings. Colored spandrel glass softens the building's southern façade, which fronts the administrative offices and classrooms.

A site plan (above) illustrates how the building extends fingerlike projections toward Ecliptic Park. Negative spaces between these wings include a pocket park, outside seating for the museum cafe, and a sculpture court that reaches deep

inside the museum. The project also incorporates small green spaces around the perimeter with a water-efficient landscape design.



EAST-WEST SECTION



BUILDING MODEL



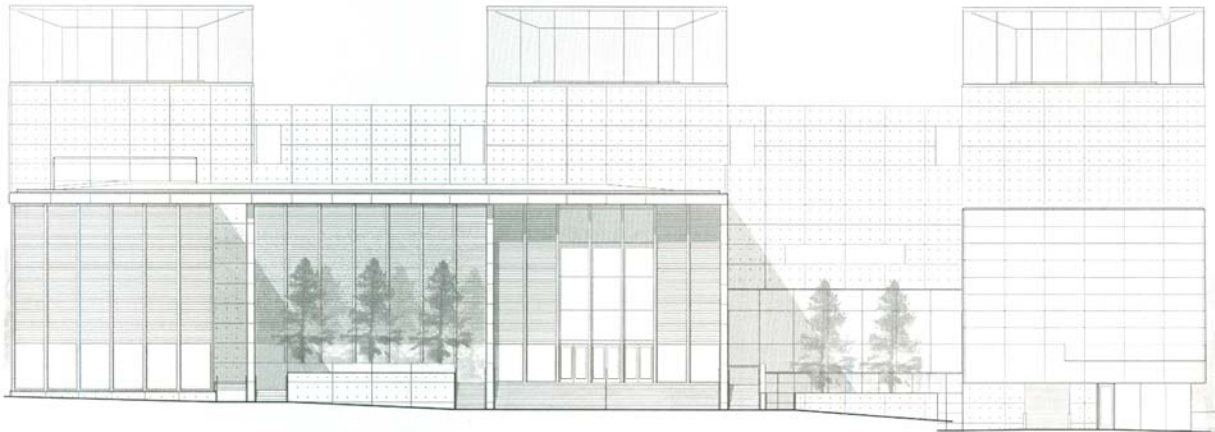
## SOLID AND VOID

The museum's retail, dining, and meeting functions are placed along the north façade (left), which is suited perfectly to pedestrian-oriented Monroe Center (above left), a small-scaled streetscape populated with shops and restaurants. The void pictured, on the second floor, is a covered terrace that can be used for museum functions or rented to outside groups for special events.



FOUR SALVAGED BOXES





## RATIONAL RESTRAINT

As seen in the framed view from the entrance stair (facing page, top), GRAM's exterior is an essay in restraint, with a materials palette of concrete, glass, stone, and aluminum, all kept within a narrow color range.

The inaugural exhibit at GRAM will be "Four Salvaged Boxes" (facing page, bottom), which explores the process of museum design from the

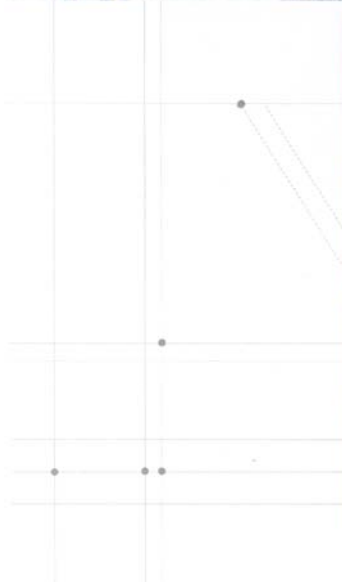
architects' perspective. True to its name, the exhibit takes the form of four boxes, all made out of materials salvaged from the construction of the museum itself. These boxes serve as traveling crates but also as presentation tools, opening up to reveal exhibition items such as models, sketches, and samples of building materials. Each box is devoted to a different concern

inherent to the design process: Earth/Water; Light/Air; Space; and Time.

The museum, positioned on the same city block as Maya Lin's Ecliptic Park (top), projects a sense of openness through its transparent, modulated façade, daylit interior courtyard, and comfortable scale. Yet the variety of spatial experiences and differentiation of light

and shadow occur within a design framework that is highly ordered and rational (see elevation, above).

WEST ELEVATION



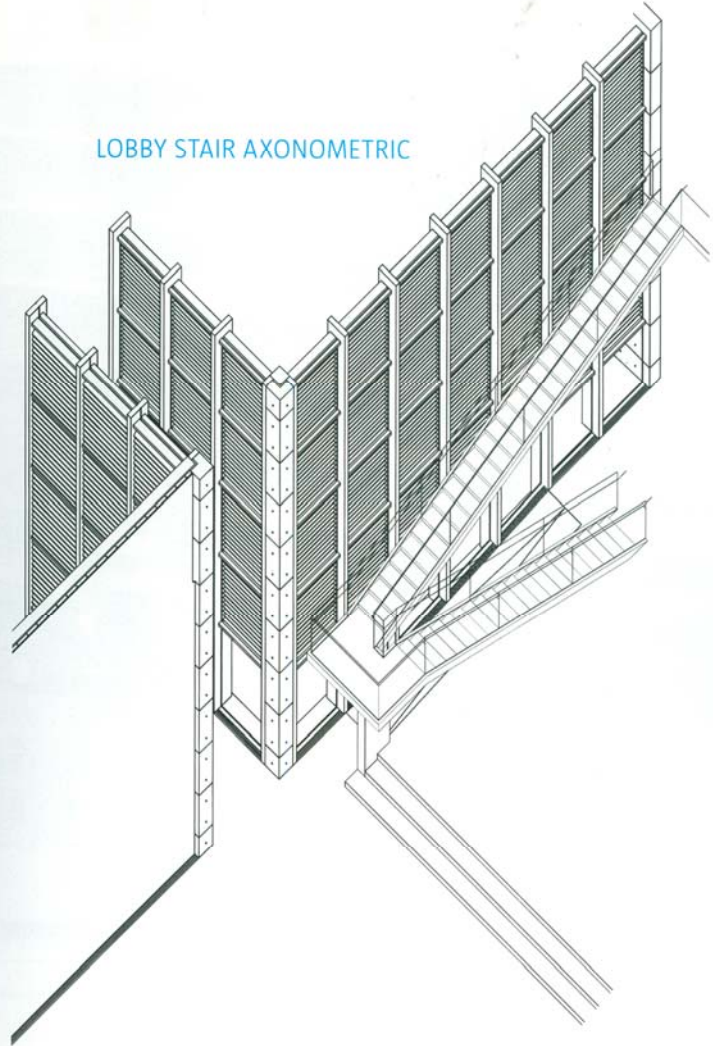


CHRISTOPHER BARRETT/HERDICH BLESSING



CHRISTOPHER BARRETT/HERDICH BLESSING

## LOBBY STAIR AXONOMETRIC



## DETAILS, DETAILS

The museum lobby (above left), floored in dark gray basaltina, frames a view across the park, with downtown Grand Rapids in the background. On one side, louvers and operable shades (at left in photo) control glare from the southern exposure; a narrow, scissorlike stair on the opposite side (drawing, above) provides direct access to the second-floor landing and galleries.

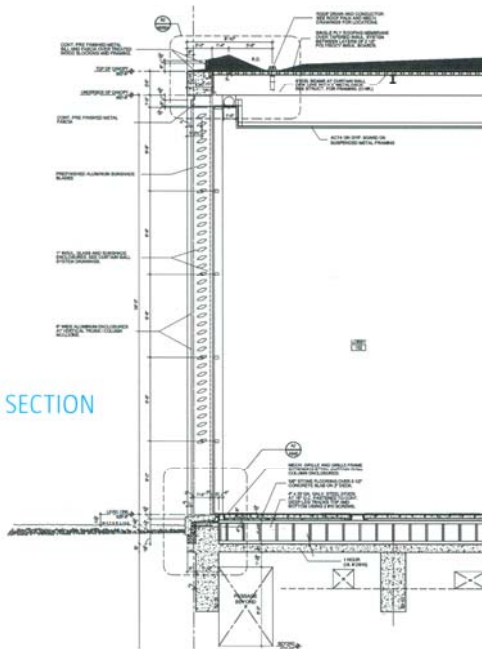
The first-floor landing (far left) mediates between a gallery

for the museum's collection of design and modern craft and a multipurpose auditorium with flexible seating.

Located at the back of the building is the East Court, an interior sculpture gallery and vertical circulation space, where a streamlined stair (left) connects the second- and third-floor galleries.



LOUVER SECTION



## LIGHT SHOW

The generous use of natural light in the museum is essential to its strategy for conserving energy. Soft, reflected light is admitted into many of the public spaces after passing through three filters: exterior louvers (above) with an aerodynamic profile; energy-saving glass insulated with argon gas; and an operable fabric scrim.

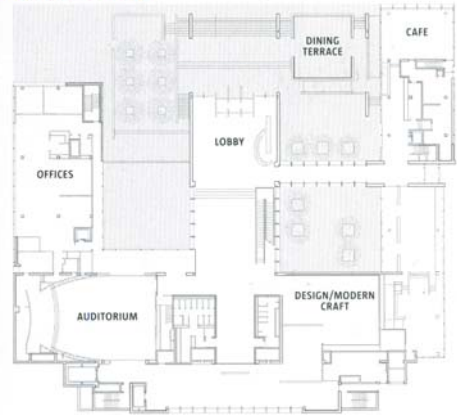
At eye level on the ground floor, louvers are absent (see drawing at left) in order to allow views in and out of the building. The horizontal louvers are made of prefinished aluminum and start several feet above ground level in the triple-height lobby space. They are fixed in place at an angle that provides the most effective shading at all hours and during all seasons.

Finishes and details inside the museum are uncluttered,

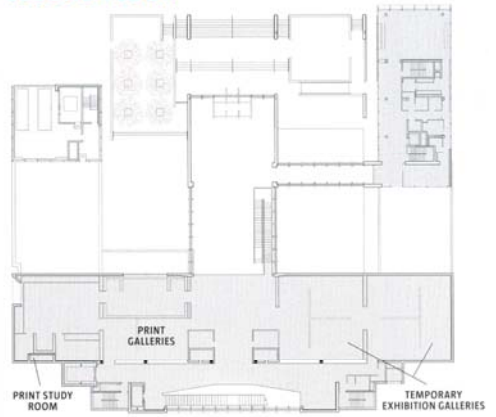
as seen in a circulation space between the museum shop and sculpture courtyard (facing page) that evokes the work of Yantarasast's mentor, Tadao Ando. Floor plans illustrate the clarity of organization, with active public functions located at the front, quiet galleries at the rear.



### FIRST FLOOR



### SECOND FLOOR



### THIRD FLOOR



