

# METROPOLIS

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look  
in

read...

# library renewal

## features

**46 library science** With society becoming ever more enamored of high-tech, electronic eye candy, the physical act of reading a book was supposed to have become passé. But judging by a new trend in public architecture, more libraries are being built to feed the voracious appetites of the reading public. These new libraries, says ROBERT NEUWIRTH, must now figure out how to keep up, and sometimes even collaborate, with mega-bookstores like Barnes & Noble, which offer all the comforts of a cozy library.

**50 the trouble with frank** Frank Gehry may be Los Angeles's most acclaimed contemporary architect, with impressive commissions all over Europe and two new projects for the Walt Disney Company right nearby. But, as MICHAEL WEBB reports, when it comes to building an enduring masterwork in his own hometown, nobody seems willing to foot the bill.

**54 open house** With its amalgam of Caribbean, Spanish, Mediterranean, and other influences, Miami is a city with great cultural complexity, as well as a confused identity. TOM DE KAY visits Caribbean-born architects there who are creating a new architectural vernacular by designing eclectic houses that embrace this very diversity.

**55 salvaging shangri-la** DONNA MITCHELL explores the fringes of Gainesville, Florida, where a one-time drifter has renovated several run-down, indigenous shacks—including his own—in hopes of creating a hip, low-cost neighborhood.

**56 public space in a private city** In part IV of her series on public, private, and electronic space in America's cities, KARRIE JACOBS travels to Phoenix, where the new public library by local architect Will Bruder is creating a place, and helping to center a city otherwise defined by provisional architecture, privacy, and sprawl.

## departments

**21 the metropolis observed** How are changes in technology and the economy affecting our cities?; two new books reveal some surprising common ground between small towns and urban ghettos; the beautiful yet vulnerable murals and window paintings of a prolific artist accentuate the Latin American pulse of San Francisco's Mission District; a slice of New York's riverfront is converted from an eyesore to a pleasant public place.

**26 visible city** St. Petersburg is a striking example of a city born of the Enlightenment. PATRICIA GOLDSTONE visits the great capital of the Russian tsars and discovers the trials—and small successes—encountered by preservationists while the city seeks to remodel itself as a tourist destination.

**32 insites** A design-conscious bakery combines a passion for architecture with a love of sweets; a cool community in Florida holds out hope to those left homeless by Hurricane Andrew; the Museum of Television and Radio becomes bicoastal as it takes up residence in a renovated Beverly Hills facility designed by Richard Meier; a Bay Area designer fashions furniture from pieces of the Golden Gate Bridge; the former Temple Beth Jacob is newly incarnated as the Jewish Museum of Florida.

**36 by design** 'Tis the season for snowboarding in the Sierras and ANDREW COCKE pays a visit to a San Francisco industrial designer whose work is about to revolutionize the wild and crazy sport.

**42 mixed media** In our 15th year, we look back while looking forward in a series of articles that examine the shift from being analog to becoming digital. This month, ANDREA MOED reflects on how the public library is dealing with old, new, and developing technologies in the organization of information, and the techniques we'll need to access it most effectively.

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**96 signs + relics** SYLVIA PLACHY ponders the infinite possibilities of the written word.

**98 endline** You can't judge a book by its cover, suggests AKIKO BUSCH, as she considers the rampant objectification of books.

march 1996

# METROPOLIS

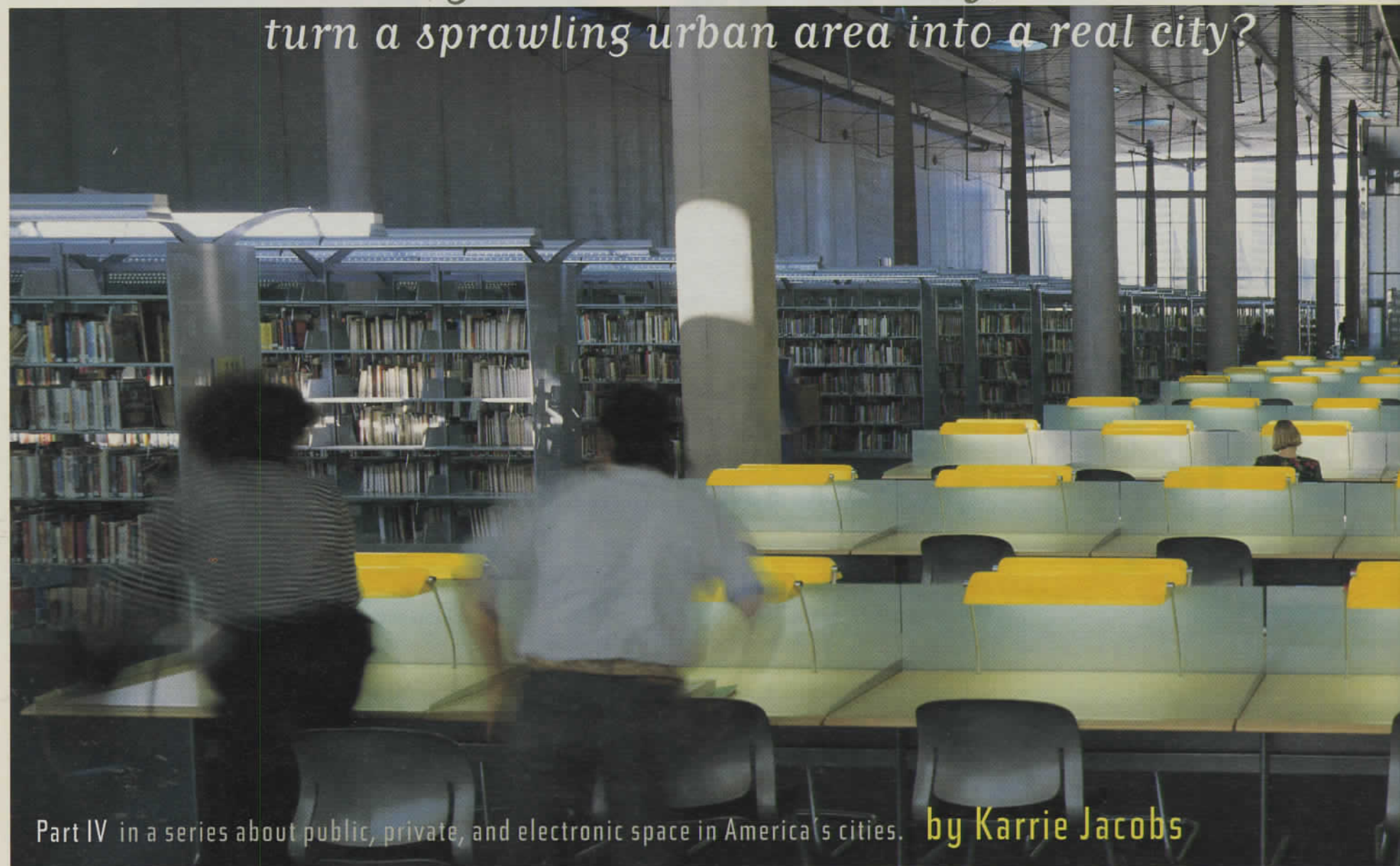
Cover: As familiar as the Dewey decimal system and card catalogue numbers are, technology is rapidly changing the nature and function of the library. It remains to be seen who will have the greatest access to the most information. See pages 38, 46, and 56 for more details. This page: Frank Gehry's vibrant Team Disney building, designed to house some 1,200 Disney employees, is a true adventure in space. See page 50.





# public space

Can an ambitious program of public buildings, including a dramatic new library, turn a sprawling urban area into a real city?



Part IV in a series about public, private, and electronic space in America's cities. **by Karrie Jacobs**



The new Phoenix Central Library offers two dramatic spaces: the ground floor atrium, right, dubbed "the Crystal Canyon" by architect Will Bruder, and the Great Reading Room, above, which offers panoramic views of the city, top.

From the fifth-floor reading room of the new **Phoenix** Central Library, you can look south toward downtown, where a handful of office towers cling together under the hard light of the desert sun. Or you can look north, up Central Avenue, where the impassive facades of bland 1980s office buildings are arranged in a line a mile or two long. Whichever way you direct your gaze, you'll notice that the tall buildings quickly give way to the ground-hugging structures that typify Phoenix, a seemingly endless expanse of development that is neither city nor suburb.

Five stories above Central Avenue, visitors to the reading room that tops this great carton-shaped building, whether they are schoolchildren or adults, head first to the 30-foot-high, floor-to-ceiling windows and look out. From the reading room, one sees pretty much all the monumental architecture the city has to offer, plus the masses of South Mountain and Camelback and Squaw peaks, scat-



# in a private city



photography by Timothy Archibald

tered across the landscape as haphazardly as throw pillows. From up here one sees the city at its best because it's partially hidden by the tops of palm trees; the broad leaves obscure the little buildings, and imagination fills in the blanks with structures prettier than the ones that are really there.

This is a landscape composed mostly of small buildings painted creamy white, yellow, or pink, their facades bleached by the sun, their architectural style provisional, catch-as-catch-can. From the top floor of Phoenix's most successful public building, you look out on a landscape almost entirely devoted to private life. Most buildings are entered from the parking lot rather than from the public road or sidewalk. Most embrace a courtyard or a swimming pool, shutting out unwanted visitors and shading the sun, keeping a hostile environment at bay.

Today's best-known desert architect, Antoine Predock, has molded this tendency into a style. His

art museum in Tempe, a neighboring university town, is a concrete and cinder-block edifice that burrows into the ground like an air-raid shelter. One enters it as if it were a subway station, climbing down stairs into a cool outdoor anteroom, a space well hidden from the sun. The science museum Predock has designed for downtown Phoenix is also built around a sunken, shaded plaza.

In Phoenix you drive along wide streets past homely buildings that look temporary and, in fact, are temporary—in Phoenix they bulldoze as casually as other towns sweep streets—and wonder where the real city is, where the ticky-tacky ends and the solid urban place begins. When I lived in Phoenix in the early 1980s, I once met a visitor at Sky Harbor, the airport, and drove him up 24th Street past the Kon Tiki Motel and a giant statue of an insect wearing a top hat and wielding a hammer (a sign for an exterminator's shop), past fast-food restaurants and stores that installed

The library's roof, top, is a tensegrity structure supported by a lattice of steel cables anchored to concrete columns. Above each column is an automated skylight programmed to track sunlight and direct it into the room.



A typical Phoenix landscape, 24th Street near Sky Harbor Airport.

The Great Reading Room of the Phoenix Public Library lends you a bit of its grandeur and importance every time you enter

The new Phoenix City Hall decorated with a symbolic sun, right; one of downtown's vaguely Egyptian street lamps, far right; and the palm-filled oasis at Arizona Center, bottom.



Some 15 miles north of downtown, the planned community of Desert Ridge is under construction. Locals refer to this type of development as "DisneyDesert."

window shades on automobiles. "This is like the Yellow Pages come to life," he observed.

As you become familiar with Phoenix, you come to understand that the tacky-tacky is the city. Behind one unexceptional building there is usually a parking lot, a courtyard, and another unexceptional building; and somewhere inside, in space that is private, the real life of the city takes place.

One of my problems when I first moved to Phoenix was that I could never find anything. I was accustomed to cities where the buildings are oriented toward the street, where facades and signage tell you at a glance what you need to know. In Phoenix, I used to drive around shopping malls in circles trying to find some sign of the movie theater within. I would meander through resorts too tasteful to have signage, in search of a restaurant or conference facility, and cruise cul-de-sac subdivisions desperately hunting an address. Now, returning to Phoenix for the first time in over 10

years, I go to meet an old friend at a bar and I find myself walking around the whole building before I locate the entrance, which is directly off the parking lot.

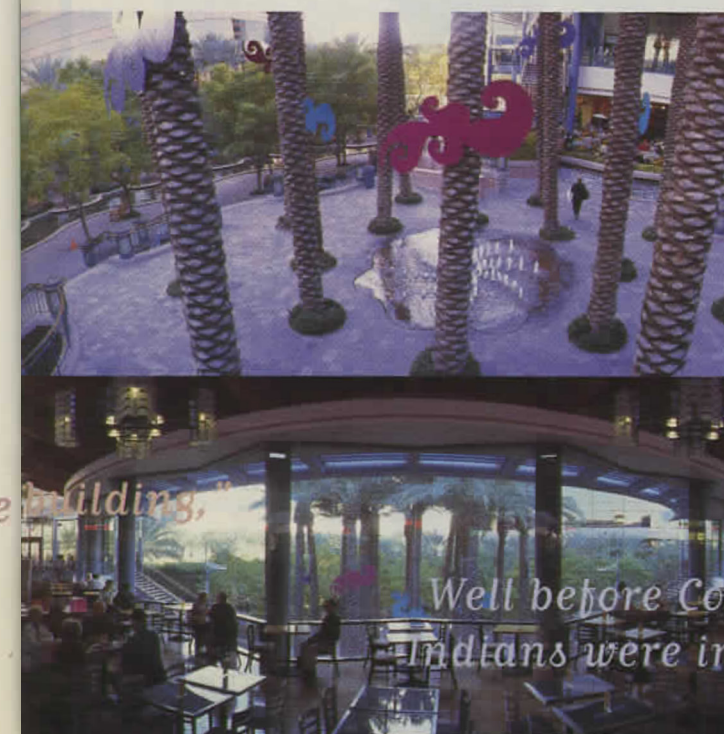
When you turn away from the view at the library and look inward, what you see is a great, open room with plain concrete walls and a dramatic corrugated metal ceiling that appears to hover. The ceiling is supported by a tensegrity structure, a lattice of bars and cables anchored to tapered concrete pillars. Above each smooth pillar is a round skylight covered with a nearly opaque aqua lens ("the color of Alaskan glaciers," claims a promotional brochure). Each lens has one clear spot, referred to as the "solstice hole" by architect Will Bruder (who designed the building with Wendell Burnette, DWL Architects & Planners, and the engineering firm of Ove Arup & Partners).

The skylights are covered by computer-controlled, mirrored louvers that direct sunlight into

the building and block out the harshest rays. On the summer solstice, sunlight shines directly through the skylights' clear spots, causing the tops of the columns to light up, in theory, like candles.

Most of the library's nonfiction books are housed on this floor, lined up on standard-issue shelves adorned with curved sheets of perforated steel, and topped with softly glowing fluorescent lights. Because the light fixtures are attached to the shelves, the light shines directly on the books, and as the room grows dimmer at dusk, the spines of the books radiate color. "The books are the ornament of the building," architect Bruder tells me one evening, as we stand together by the south windows, the ruby sky of a desert sunset behind us.

The Great Reading Room of the Phoenix Central Library does not bear even a passing resemblance to the famous reading room of New York's main library. But this room feels like that



room. Like the New York Public Library's reading room, this is a place that makes you want to take a book off the shelf and sit down with it. It is a room that lends you a bit of its grandeur and importance every time you enter, and confers it on anything you choose to read.

On my first visit to the Great Reading Room, I've come just to look but wind up doing research. I pull a book off a shelf, *Arizona: Its People and Resources* (University of Arizona Press, 1972), and read about the Hohokam, the Indians who cultivated the Sonoran Desert long before the white man came, traces of whose houses and ball courts were found when crews began excavations for the freeway that now runs just south of the library:

"By developing such an intricate system of canals, the Hohokam accomplished [an] important objective: They had freedom of choice for the location of their villages. Ordinarily the village or townsite was picked because of the existence of

natural water. But canals going far from streams opened new possibilities of mobility and location—the kind of emancipation from the environment achieved in modern society often only by digging wells. The classic example of this mobility of location, dating from the canal period, was the large settlement of Los Muertos, six miles south of Tempe. . . . There, hundreds of people lived in the desert six miles from the Salt River, sustained by the thin lifeline of the canal."

The Hohokam built hundreds of miles of canals, which allowed them to grow corn, beans, squash, and cotton across an unusually wide area. Their network was at its grandest sometime between the years 1000 and 1400. **Well before Columbus, while the Europeans were off crusading, a group of Indians were inventing a style of living that we today would label sprawl.**

A few blocks west of the library, in a cottage-size building surrounded by a parking lot and ► 61

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hidden from the street by a large, seemingly abandoned apartment complex, is Terry Goddard's law office. Goddard served as mayor of Phoenix from 1984 to 1990; he then ran for governor and lost to a real estate developer named Fife Symington.

I left Phoenix in 1984, shortly before Goddard was elected, and come back long after he's left office. The Phoenix I see now—an agglomeration of almost a million people that is finally trying to behave like a city—is, to a great degree, Goddard's invention. The new library is just one of a collection of public buildings funded by a 1988 bond issue that was intended to transform Phoenix into a real city.

If Phoenix were an old Hollywood movie, Goddard, 49, would be played by Gregory Peck: the solid, reliable type. He is thoughtful, articulate, a man of obvious intellect, and one who had a vision of his city as a coherent, urban place. When I comment that there isn't all that much notable architecture in Phoenix, Goddard counters, "It's just that there's a lot of space in between."

Unlike Haussmann or L'Enfant, Goddard didn't try to impose a unifying vision on Phoenix. Rather, he proposed something much more in keeping with contemporary ideas of how cities should be allowed and encouraged to develop. He commissioned a number of important public buildings by great architects. He wanted to "put [their] statements and buildings close enough together to get synergy." Goddard's aim was to build a "cultural infrastructure and physical infrastructure appropriate to the size of the city."

To this end, his administration floated a \$1.2 billion bond issue in 1988. It was intended to cover the building of a new public library, the renovation of the art museum, new history and science museums, a new city hall, the overhaul of the historic Orpheum Theater downtown, and expand the public parks and plazas. The cultural initiative was paired with one that would pay for airport improvements, storm sewers, and streets. "Make Phoenix Great, Vote Five and Eight," was the campaign slogan.

No one believed that this, the city's first cultural bond issue, would pass, Goddard recalls. Even his city council didn't think it had a prayer. He attributes its surprising success to the backing of mainstream civic organizations like the Junior League. "Mothers with small children thought that this vote would be the thing that would make their community into a good place," he theorizes.

In 1988 the city also passed a "Public Art Master Plan," which dedicated 1 percent of the budget for new public buildings and infrastructure to art. The passage of the bond issue gave the Phoenix Arts Commission a variety of high-visibility projects. The result was that Phoenix, a city of provisional buildings, quietly became a patron of arts and architecture second only to the Disney Corporation. Many of the projects were slowed by the sour economy of the late 1980s, so it is only now, in the mid-1990s, that Terry Goddard's vision has begun to gel.

Goddard decides that the easiest way to show me how Phoenix has changed is to

head downtown. It is almost five o'clock on Columbus Day and the center of Phoenix is largely empty (exactly as it was a decade ago). We park directly in front of the storefront office of the Downtown Phoenix Partnership Inc., an organization funded by property owners devoted to the redevelopment and promotion of the central business district. Goddard wants to introduce me to Margaret Mullen, the executive director, who was responsible for making downtown streets "pedestrian friendly" by providing the sidewalks with new streetlights, benches, and shade. She hired an artist to design ornate streetlights, vaguely Egyptian in style, that allude to the shape of palm trees. These lights line Second Street near the Symphony Hall. Standard streetlights were painted pur-

ple, the color of the Phoenix Suns' basketball jerseys and the polo shirts worn, neatly tucked into khaki shorts, by the partnership's "security guides."

To make downtown, long reputed to be a dangerous, crime-ridden place, as snug as the shopping malls to which Phoenix-area residents are accustomed, the partnership instituted a foot and bike patrol. "Downtown Phoenix: It's safe and easy to get around!" announces the headline in the directory of stores and services published by the partnership. "Downtown's team of Security Guides can help you find the closest ATM, cup of coffee, slice of pizza, or gift shop. They can escort you to your car or let you know about the events planned for that evening. And they assist the Phoenix Police Bike Patrol in keeping

Downtown safe. In fact, Downtown Phoenix is one of the safest downtowns in the nation."

Still, on the street outside Mullen's office, there isn't a soul in sight. Goddard keeps reminding me that it's a Monday and a holiday. No office workers to celebrate happy hour this evening, no symphony performance or sporting events. We stroll to Heritage Square, a block of turn-of-the-century houses, including the Rosson House, the city's only extant Victorian, and a mail-order bungalow. Older cities, or those less fond of bulldozing, might have entire neighborhoods of such houses. But not Phoenix.

"This is what we built from," Goddard tells me. We are standing in the shade of a "lathe house," a big wooden trellis ► 63

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covered with greenery, with a garden at one end. What Goddard means is that this shady spot, built in the mid-1970s, was the first usable outdoor public space downtown.

Now, on city-owned land all around Heritage Square, new buildings are going up. Directly to the south stands a cluster of poured-concrete forms, as irregularly shaped as the native rock formations. This is Predock's new Arizona Science Center. Just west of Heritage Square is the History Museum, designed by Langdon Wilson (also architect of the new city hall), a low-lying series of concrete terraces. The space between the square and the two new museums might be used as a parking lot or a public plaza. But right now, it's just an empty lot covered with dust. As we peer through the chain-link fence at the concrete tableau, Goddard laments the fact that even in these new downtown projects, there will still be buffer zones between car traffic, foot traffic, and entrances. "We've lost the street," he complains.

Then we cross Monroe Street to the Mercado, a pink plaster replica of a Spanish adobe town. Developed in 1990 by Governor Symington, the Mercado was supposed to rejuvenate downtown as a shopping center and showcase the area's Hispanic culture. It's a cute little mall, a downscale rendition of Santa Fe. I notice a fashion boutique called "Going Places" that's clearly no longer in business. "Going Places is gone," I say to Goddard. "Everything is gone," he points out.

Indeed, the Mercado is very nearly a dead mall. Part of the development is kept alive by a downtown campus of Arizona State University, and there is still a Western-wear shop doing business. But the Mercado, built for \$13 million, mostly borrowed from pension funds, is at the heart of Governor Symington's recent declaration of bankruptcy.

By contrast, Arizona Center, an office complex and mall developed by the Rouse Corporation, is thriving. We enter via a palm-shaded path that leads to a lovely circular sunken garden. As we walk from street level down, into the little oasis of flowering plants, succulents, and vine-covered trellises, I can feel the temperature drop. The garden was designed with the help of Tucson-based botanist Carl Hodges, who was also instrumental to the development of Biosphere II. Beyond is a shopping mall featuring restaurants, nightclubs, and stores arranged in semicircular levels, oriented inward, toward the garden. It is, as Rouse developments go, likable. And it has become a magnet for the kind of nightlife—singles bars, a sports bar with its own volleyball court—that, in the past, one could find only in Tempe, Scottsdale, or one the many outlying malls. Goddard points out that there is still no connection between the activities within the center and the street. In fact, most people arrive by car and emerge from the parking garage below.

Goddard leads me to a spot where, with the cooperation of Hodges, he planned to construct a "solar oasis." In front of the symphony there was supposed to be another sunken plaza, this one built around a 10-story cooling tower, a giant "swamp cooler." Swamp coolers, officially called

evaporative coolers, are the cheap, energy-efficient form of air-conditioning that used to be a standard fixture in desert homes. This swamp cooler would have delivered a stream of cool air into an outdoor public space.

"This is what they built instead of a solar oasis," says Goddard as we stand across the street looking at the central location he regards as "the navel of downtown." Here a big, homely, pavilion-like structure covers the better part of a square-block plaza. I look at it hard, trying to understand what it is that I'm seeing. Finally I ask, "Is that a tent?" "Yes ma'am," replies Goddard. "It's a tent. It's a \$10 million tent."

Goddard leads me through a few more plazas, each one representing a different

theory of how to cultivate a sense of the public in a stubbornly private town. And, as the sun begins to set, we arrive at a construction site at the west end of downtown, near one of those buildings that telephone companies build to house computers and electronic switches rather than employees. We pick our way around a cinder-block apartment building erected by one of his clients, the nonprofit Housing Opportunity Center, that will provide 15 units of low-income housing. Then we wander through the burnt-out remains of what was once the First Baptist Church. Goddard and his clients rescued the hull of this handsome building from demolition. The plan is to use part of it to house social services for the residents of the building next door and the rest of it as an open-air

shopping and cultural arcade. Goddard alternates between satisfaction at seeing the results of his initiatives, at seeing downtown finally develop, and vexation at the projects that have been abandoned, mistreated, or simply done differently by his successors. At one point we are standing at the edge of a plaza, Patriot's Park, gazing down a tranquil stretch of Washington Street at the new city hall, completed in 1994. The 20-story building designed by Langdon Wilson looks like a second cousin of Michael Graves' Humana Tower. With its gleaming steel columns and Cadillac fins, it is Art Deco viewed through a Post-Modern filter. This is not the friendly civic village envisioned by Barton Myers, who won the international architectural competition Goddard held ► 64

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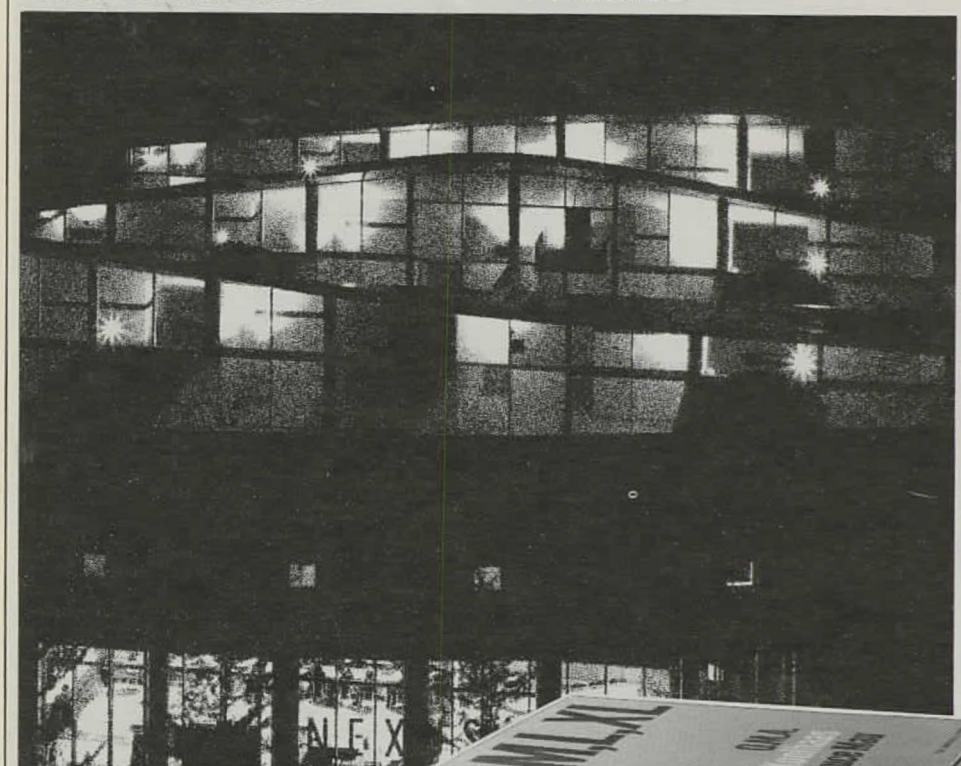
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for a new city hall. This city hall represents a battle the former mayor lost.

We stare at the city hall and discuss the ways in which architects choose to express themselves. I point to the stainless steel sun affixed to the building as an example of an architect being too exuberant. Goddard informs me that the sun and the crown atop the building were the two details that his successor, former mayor Paul Johnson, insisted on. "You can go take a look at city hall," says Goddard, "but I won't go in there with you."

Phoenix, population just shy of 1 million, occupies over 450 square miles (New York's five boroughs, population over 7 million, take up 323). Even though the city's seemingly unstoppable spread has finally begun to run into obstacles—mountains, Indian reservations, the borders of other cities and towns—Phoenix is still planning expansion, mostly to the north, where there is still unincorporated land available for development.

I used to picture Phoenix as a tree trunk, with concentric rings of newer and newer development pushing ever outward. I am reminded of this image when I meet with Frederick Steiner, head of Arizona State University's School of Planning and Landscape Architecture. He envisions the Phoenix metropolitan area, a.k.a. the Valley of the Sun, as the "Saturn Desert."

First of all, Steiner contrasts his Saturn Desert with author Marc Reisner's *Cadillac Desert*, which symbolizes the waste of water, land, and resources. The Saturn Desert, Steiner says, represents efficient, enlightened sprawl. Then he points out that "you can't talk about the planet Saturn without rings." The rings around Phoenix are the ripples of development moving outward from the center and the circle formed by the surrounding mountains that collect rainwater, and, further out, the areas of still undeveloped public land around the city.

Steiner, author of the article, "Sprawl Can Be Good" (*Planning*, July 1994), believes just that. He cites Frank Lloyd Wright's Broadacre City, and Thomas Jefferson. And he points to a charrette that his students conducted in cooperation with local planners, in which they tried to come up with a rational way of developing one of Phoenix's outermost rings.

The current residents of land north of the Central Arizona Project Canal—which delivers water from the Colorado River—an area once remote from the city and the threat of urbanization, are understandably disturbed by the idea that city planners picture 340,000 people living in their slice of desert.

Out of the charrette came proposals to have houses close to the street with big backyards running down to washes, to preserve big tracts of open land. Another idea was the "inhabited preserve," land that is very minimally developed. The conclusion of the exercise was a plan involving open land, particularly on the desert peaks, then a ring of minimal development adjacent to a ring of denser development. The Saturn Desert. Steiner shows me sketches of rugged terrain dotted with clusters of development so sensitively planned that they are hardly visible. He is convinced that this is the sort of development the city government wants.

While the city government has made some gestures toward encouraging sorely needed infill development (such as waiving building permit fees for much of central Phoenix), city planning still promotes growth in the remaining undeveloped areas north and south of Phoenix. Officials seem entirely willing to accommodate newcomers' fantasies about living in the desert, even if the "impact fee" that buyers of new homes pay doesn't begin to cover the monetary or social costs of extending the infrastructure and paving over open spaces. If Phoenix didn't allow it, the new taxpayers would just take up residence in neighboring Mesa or Chandler.

Drive north on Tatum Boulevard through Paradise Valley, the wealthy suburb sandwiched between Phoenix and Scottsdale, past the gated communities of low, tile-roofed houses blasted into the sides of rust-colored peaks, past Paradise Valley Mall and dozens of strip malls, and eventually you'll hit Bell Road. Ten or 15 years ago, Bell marked the northern edge of Phoenix. It was where the city finally ended, some 15 miles from

*By the time Desert Ridge is built, the desert won't really be out here anymore, just a lot of houses like this one.*

downtown, and the desert began. Now, along Tatum, on what was until quite recently state-owned land, the city has jumped Bell as a wind-fanned brushfire might jump a highway. On the west side of the street, a vast apartment complex is rising. Further up, there are still horses in stables. Then, straddling the right-of-way for the Pima Freeway (scheduled for completion in 2003), is a master-planned community that will someday boast upward of 25,000 homes, a major commercial center, and an industrial area. Sumitomo, a Japanese company, has committed to building a silicon wafer plant that will employ 400 workers. Model homes such as the 2,043-square-foot Prescott (\$141,000) and the 3,050-square-foot Silver Creek (\$197,000) stand on brand-new streets where landscape gardeners plant desert shrubs in the morning sun, singing songs in Spanish, and where tiny green flags sprout from the ground indicating the locations of future sprinkler heads.

This is Desert Ridge, what its developers hope will resemble a self-contained city, on land that the city of Phoenix has annexed. One morning, I meet publicist Denise Resnik and J. Michael Martin, a partner in the Viehmann, Martin Companies, the project's developer. We rendezvous near the "entrance monuments" on Tatum Road, two boulders with the words "Desert Ridge" spelled out in blue letters that remind me of a signature—Walt Disney's.

When I mention Desert Ridge to a

friend who grew up in Paradise Valley, she says, "We call it Disney Desert." It's the local term for developments where the natural desert flora and fauna are scraped away to build houses that are later surrounded with "desert" landscape.

Martin, whose background is in commercial real estate development, began eyeing the 5,700 acres on which Desert Ridge is rising in 1981. That same year, Arizona's state legislature passed the "urban lands act," which called for the state to divest its land holdings in urban areas for the purpose of development. His group finally acquired the land at an auction in 1993.

Desert Ridge is a respectable attempt to build a new community without some of the problems that have characterized other developments in the area. Desert Ridge is divided into residential superblocks. Each of these will contain its own elementary school, neighborhood park, and convenience shopping area, including a day-care center. Running through the neighborhoods will be wash corridors where water can collect after storms (sewers are a rarity in desert developments). The washes will be bordered by pedestrian and bicycle paths, allowing residents to travel through the whole area without having to deal with car traffic.

The whole scheme is a little utopian, reminiscent in some ways of Eastern Europe's model socialist cities, which also distributed the elementary school, the day-care center, and the little shopping areas evenly and symmetrically. It also calls to mind Wright's famous master-planned community, Broadacre City.

Martin and I visit model homes, drifting from cathedral-ceilinged living rooms, through the spacious kitchens with the adjacent family rooms furnished with couches and comfy chairs. ("I think they call these 'great rooms' now," Martin informs me.) Walking through these perfectly decorated homes, these stage sets for family life, listening to the piped-in light jazz, I am almost seduced. I can understand why someone would want to live here, where you can look out the glass doors of the tiled kitchen, beyond the patio and pool to the desert. I am ready to give up on the planet Saturn and move to one of the rings. Then I remember that by the time Desert Ridge is built, the desert won't really be out here anymore, just a lot of houses like this one.

The glass doors slide open and I plunge gratefully into the cool air of the Central Library's interior. I move down a ramp between a wall of white light on my right and a violet wall on my left emblazoned with the names of donors to the library and inspirational sayings from famous writers. At the guard's station at the end of the ramp, in an area that Will Bruder calls the Crystal Canyon, I wait for the architect.

Before Bruder arrives, the guard is telling another man that if the city building inspectors looked hard at the library, it would never pass muster. I hope that he'll say more, but he's interrupted by the appearance of a man wearing a hunting knife on his belt. The guard, pointing to a sign that says deadly weapons are not permitted in the building, insists that the man check his knife before he goes any further. I am almost disappointed when Bruder turns up because I want to stand by the guard station and watch

more little dramas unfold.

Once Bruder arrives, he becomes the center of attention and all the drama revolves around him. He's easy to recognize—a big, 49-year-old hippie with lank brown hair, thick glasses, and an untrimmed beard. I know him immediately from his photos. So does everyone else: guards, librarians, patrons. They all say hello to him as we walk to the elevators with all their mechanical parts exposed at the center of the five-story atrium. As we sit talking in the Great Reading Room, a trio of clean-cut young men, students of computer-aided design, approach and ask Bruder what inspired his design for the building.

The sun is setting and as the room grows darker, we watch the light change outside. Bruder talks about the four years he spent working on the building as a "stealth performance," a period of trying to stay out of the public eye and avoid controversy. After the library opened in May and the newspaper's art critic bestowed his blessing, Bruder says, "it was the first time I felt safe from talk radio."

Bruder describes the process of getting approval for his design from the mayor and city council as a complicated lobbying effort. With the backing of head librarian Ralph Edwards, he struggled for a way to persuade Mayor Johnson, whose idea of "vision," according to Bruder, was looking 14 months ahead to the next election. Bruder's other public buildings in Phoenix were not universally loved. His Cholla branch library near the MetroCenter shopping mall, in the northwestern part of town, was criticized for its harsh color scheme and its exposed ducts. "There were letters to the editor," he recalls, "saying I should have my license revoked, that I should be given a color wheel."

Getting approval for the Central Library was an uphill battle. "There were so many challenges to the building's integrity. At one point they [the city engineers] wanted to take all the skylights out of the roof. They said, 'This is just a public building. Why do you need to do this?'"

An early version of the building featured a parking garage, which Bruder made the mistake of referring to as "a kinetically energized arrival garden." This did not go over with the mayor or the city council. At one crucial meeting, Bruder remembers watching a council member doze through his presentation.

"I went to talk radio," Bruder says. "I was being carved up badly, so I defended the cause and had a nice dialogue with the public." Realizing he couldn't fight these battles after every design change and still have the energy to get the building built, he adopted the stealth approach.

Bruder also began to understand the power of language. He became the building's "spin doctor." He asked himself, "What are the sound bites for this building? What will be its metaphors?"

In a town where the Cowboy Artists of America exhibition is still the biggest cultural event of the year, Bruder had to learn to talk the talk. He was no longer at Paolo Soleri's Arcosanti, where his life as an architect began. And so he gave up using phrases like "kinetically energized arrival garden" and learned to refer to the library with its copper cladding as a "mesa." The sides of the building where all the mechanical equipment is housed ▶ 67

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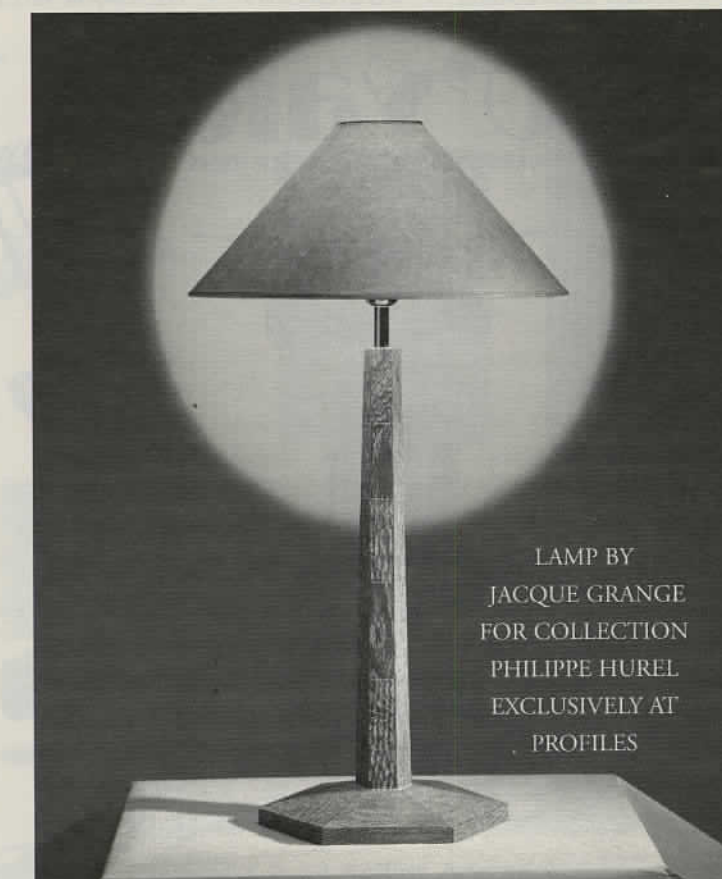
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## phoenix

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became "saddlebags." The five-story atrium was dubbed "the Crystal Canyon."

The building, supremely popular, is not without its critics. Most of the sniping has to do with the fact that several people have fallen into the reflecting pool in which the elevator shafts stand. Since the building opened, the pool has been encircled by progressively sturdier ropes and stanchions. There is also the matter of patrons, mostly children, leaning over the fifth-floor railings and spitting or dropping items into the pool below. Building manager Rosemary Nelson has her own benign label for these occurrences. She calls them "science experiments."

For Bruder, this building marks a turning point in his career. He has entered not just the local pantheon but the ranks of hero architects. His library has been on the cover of every major architecture magazine. While trying to land another major library in a western state, Bruder is working on a much smaller library in Jackson Hole, Wyoming; a clinic for homeopathic medicine in Mesa, Arizona; and a number of residential commissions.

For Phoenix, the building marks a transition into urbanity. The new library is a magnet, drawing people to the center from the city's 450-square-mile area and from beyond its borders. It is the focal point of an elaborate fantasy spelled out in "Downtown Phoenix: A 25 Year Vision." Issued in 1991 by the Central Phoenix Committee in cooperation with the city planning commission, this booklet presents scenarios for the future, including the "Arts District South Vision":

"The area south of McDowell Road contains two of the major jewels of the Arts District: the new Central Library and the nationally famous Margaret T. Hance Park above the Papago Freeway. The park . . . is the point of beginning for the First Street Art Promenade which connects [it and the library] to the northern portion of the district with the Heard Museum, the Art Museum, and the Little Theater. The promenade provides a safe pedestrian crossing at McDowell Road. It is a wonderful people place with a human scale, alive with cafés, art shops, galleries, and a cluster of craft stores. . . ."

Bruder doesn't think much of the plan to turn First Street into a little slice of a Scottsdale-style gallery district. He offers an even more ambitious counterproposal: to build a "canyon of culture," a long, submerged mall and parking garage—"a cool passageway, if you will"—open to the sky, that would lead from the library to the art museum and the Heard Museum.

Today, First Street is just an unexceptional residential area. However, a few blocks north of the library, the Phoenix Art Museum is being remade by Tod Williams and Billie Tsien. Like Bruder, the New York-based architects are using inexpensive materials to great effect. Their museum addition is clad in panels of precast concrete with a green gravelly surface, and, in a radical departure for Phoenix, the main entrance faces Central Avenue, not the parking lot.

"It's been a very hard project," says Williams, "wildly underfunded, with big ambitions." A spectacular sculpture garden under a towering fiberglass resin dome is in the plans, but not in the bud-

get. Similarly, the library needs to raise at least \$1 million more from private donors to complete the unfinished fourth floor and the ground-floor auditorium. Bruder's "culture canyon" would require intensive public and private development in the area around the arts institutions. Without the leadership of someone like Terry Goddard, this isn't likely to happen.

Downtown, the America West Arena (where the Phoenix Suns play), Symphony Hall, and the Herberger Theater draw nighttime crowds. Coming in the next couple of years are the history and science museums and a baseball stadium, where a new major league team, the Diamondbacks, will play.

It's an amazing thing to see a city that was once a city only by virtue of its population acquire urban institutions and amenities, to see a place that since the 1950s has used shopping malls as its landmarks and anchors, neglecting the downtown to an extent that is unusual even in the Southwest, begin to value its central business district.

I'm not thrilled with all the changes. Portions of the old downtown have been demolished since I was last in Phoenix. There was a block of buildings that housed a Woolworth's and another block where there were a couple of classic Mexican restaurants. Those blocks have vanished, eaten up by new office towers or part of the Phoenix Civic Plaza, a convention center.

Still, I am surprised by the vitality of the city's center. On a Friday night, I go downtown to a party hosted by a local radio station at Coyote Springs Brewing Co., a new "brew pub." I'm forced to drive in circles, not looking for my destination—a conventional storefront right on the street—but a parking space. I finally pay \$3 for parking—at night, in downtown Phoenix, in a lot that's almost full.

After the radio station party winds down, a deejay and I go around the corner to Majerle's Sports Grill for a light dinner. It's another downtown night spot full of people. And we're not even inside the confines of the Arizona Center. We are in a normal storefront on a normal downtown street with cars, pedestrians, and the occasional costumed performer from the opera dashing in for a quick beer between choruses.

During my stay in Phoenix, I keep returning to the library. I go, in part, because I like the building. But also because I see this public institution as key in giving Phoenix a center. I look at the landmark building and fantasize that it is the home of a well-conceived, innovative, cultural program, the sort of thing I regard as the hallmark of a real city.

We are in the midst of a public library building boom the likes of which has not been seen since Andrew Carnegie endowed some 2,800 of them around the turn of the century. This is happening in direct conflict with predictions about the dematerialization of information. Of course most libraries offer dial-in on-line services and computerized catalogues, but it is clear that the library as a building, as a place to go and read, is still something our society values.

The new library in Phoenix opened around the same time as the San Antonio library by Ricardo Legorreta and the Denver library by Michael Graves and ►69

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the firm of Klipp Colussy Jenks Dubois. San Francisco's new library is under construction, and Seattle would build one if they could get a bond issue passed. Even New York City is getting a major new library, a business and technology branch due to open this spring.

Joey Rodger, president of the Illinois-based Urban Libraries Council, believes that libraries are among the most "popular and successful" government services, and points out that most new buildings are funded through popular elections. Libraries, even in an era of privatization and tax cutting, provide services for which people are willing to pay. "I think it makes a very strong statement in new cities as well as old," says Rodger, "that lifelong learning is at the heart of community life."

While big downtown libraries get their pictures in glossy magazines, the most important developments may be happening in other parts of town. Often, says Rodger, residents of the inner city think the big, new downtown libraries "are not for us." "Libraries say they're for everyone," she observes, but for many city dwellers, "the neighborhood is the extent of their universe."

Rodger says that the trend among libraries is in forming partnerships with other community groups. Currently, urban libraries are working with a HUD program called Hope Six, which has a \$1.6 billion budget and a mandate to overhaul America's worst public housing projects. While 80 percent of the funds will go to rehabilitating (or demolishing and rebuilding) the projects, the rest of the money will go toward improving life in the community. Inner-city branch libraries might get funding to stay open on Sunday afternoons so that children from troubled families will have a quiet place to do their schoolwork, or they might place computers in each apartment and deliver educational services directly to the units. Libraries may be the institutions in our society that have the best understanding of what is invaluable about the old way of doing things, and what is most promising in the new. As Seattle's head librarian, Liz Stroup, puts it, you want to be able to provide both Internet access and story hours.

Ralph Edwards, Phoenix's head librarian, was a staunch supporter of the innovative building, but he is seemingly uninterested in carving out any adventurous new role for the institution itself. "Our role is access to information, no matter what form," says Edwards, shrugging off the idea that anything besides the building—and the number of parking spaces—has changed. "The electronic part is growing more rapidly than print," he acknowledges, "but we still use both."

To Edwards' way of thinking, the most profound change between the old 140,000-square-foot library built in 1952 and the new 280,000-square-foot library is the way the books are organized. The most popular items—fiction, biographies, and children's books—are on the ground floor. Almost everything else is housed on the fifth floor. Eventually the fourth floor will contain special collections: an Arizona room, music library, and a display of books designed by artists. Edwards' ambitions do not seem to match the ambitions of his new building's architect. Or,

perhaps, he's all too aware of the practical problems the library faces to do much dreaming.

For one thing, the ground-floor auditorium that could be home to special programs is not built yet. Not enough money. Fund-raising by Friends of the Phoenix Library netted pledges of almost \$2 million, but donors are paying on a leisurely five-year schedule. Another million is needed to finish the fourth floor and complete the auditorium.

Rosemary Nelson, the building manager, takes me on a walking tour from the top floor to the bottom. She is tremendously appreciative of the library's details, both functional and aesthetic. In the Great Reading Room she tells me, "We love our pink wall." But she adds that the new building is still being run by the same number of staff that ran the old building, noting that the librarians are exhausted from covering so much more floor space. She points out that only the top floor is completely done with new furniture (because of a \$750,000 donation), and she's clearly embarrassed to show me the staff offices full of clunky old desks.

Circulation is up 37 percent, says Nelson. Walk-in trade is up 75 percent, registration for library cards is up 124 percent among Phoenix residents and 158 percent among those who live in the unincorporated areas of Maricopa County.

The city, so far, has provided only enough money to hire a few temporary clerks and aids. The temps are funded through June. No one in city government will say anything definitive about increasing the budget for permanent staff until May, when the budget is worked out. But Nelson knows the city manager comes to the library on Sundays, when the lines at the checkout desk are very long. The city manager doesn't like to wait; "I think there's hope," she says.

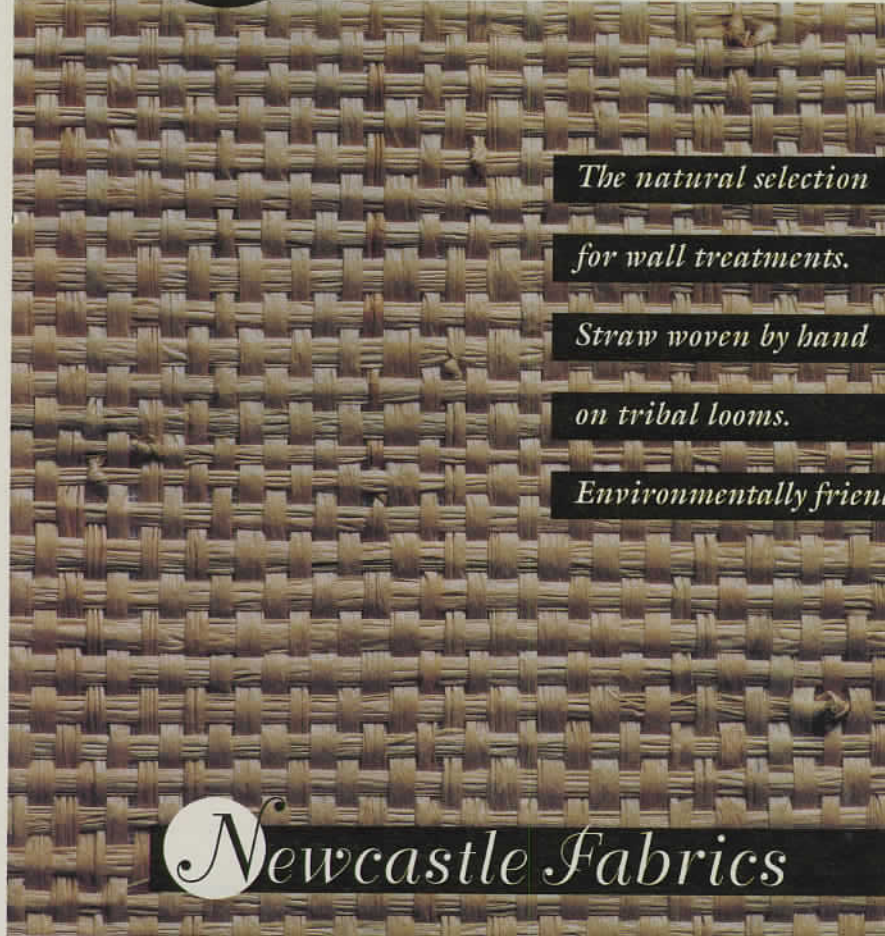
Goddard, when he was mayor, thought that architects, through their buildings, could help Phoenix interpret and define itself as a city. His bond issue promised to "Make Phoenix Great." His \$1.2 billion was a beginning, but true greatness is predicated on what happens after the buildings are built.

Someday, I think, the Phoenix public library will be a cultural institution as powerful as the architecture in which it's housed. Someday, I think, Phoenix's museums and public institutions will grow into their innovative new homes. And then Phoenix will be a real city.

In the meantime, Will Bruder is frustrated. He's unhappy because he's heard rumors that some of the beautiful desks that fill the Great Reading Room might be borrowed to furnish the unfunded fourth floor. He's peeved that the city won't just come up with the \$1 million necessary to complete the library. And he's deeply dismayed that Phoenix doesn't care enough about its new cultural institutions. Suddenly, everyone is preoccupied with the design of the new baseball team's uniforms and the coming of Phoenix's first Superbowl. "Sports is our heart and our pulse," the architect grumbles.

To be honest, this sounds very much like the Phoenix I used to know. I guess, for some of us, a great city is one with a world-class museum or library. For others, a great city is one that can play host to the Superbowl.

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