



Progressive Architecture

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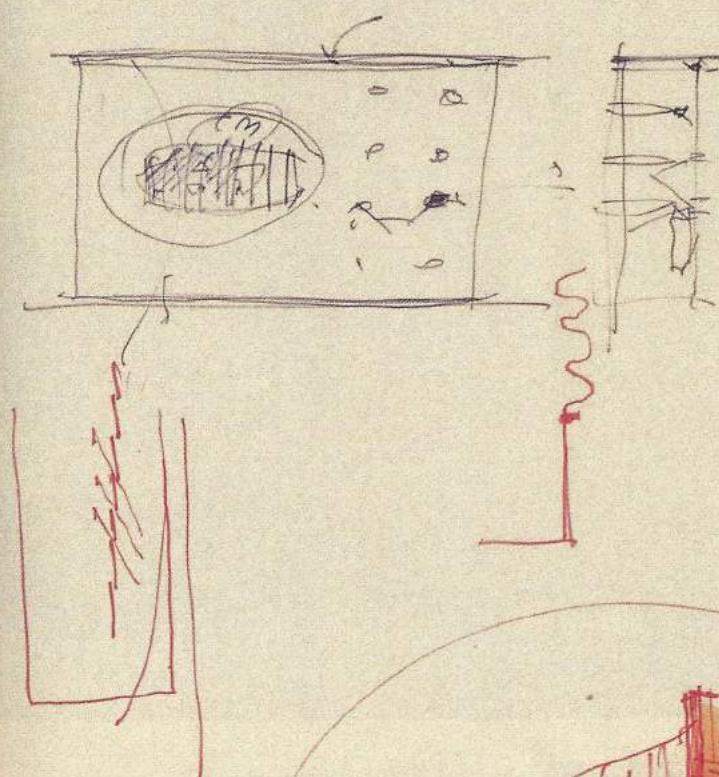
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Architect Will Bruder believes in the importance of placemaking and will fight to the end to ensure its vitality. by Abby Busset

# WILL POWER



Photos this page: Neil Koppes; facing page: © Michael Merz

1  
2  
Sixteen years after he designed and built his own studio (1, 2) in New River, Arizona, Will Bruder takes a well-deserved seat in the Great Reading Room on the top floor of the new Phoenix

Central Library (3). Together, these two projects illustrate the evolution of his work, from the raw Organicism of the studio to the surreal Modernism of the library.

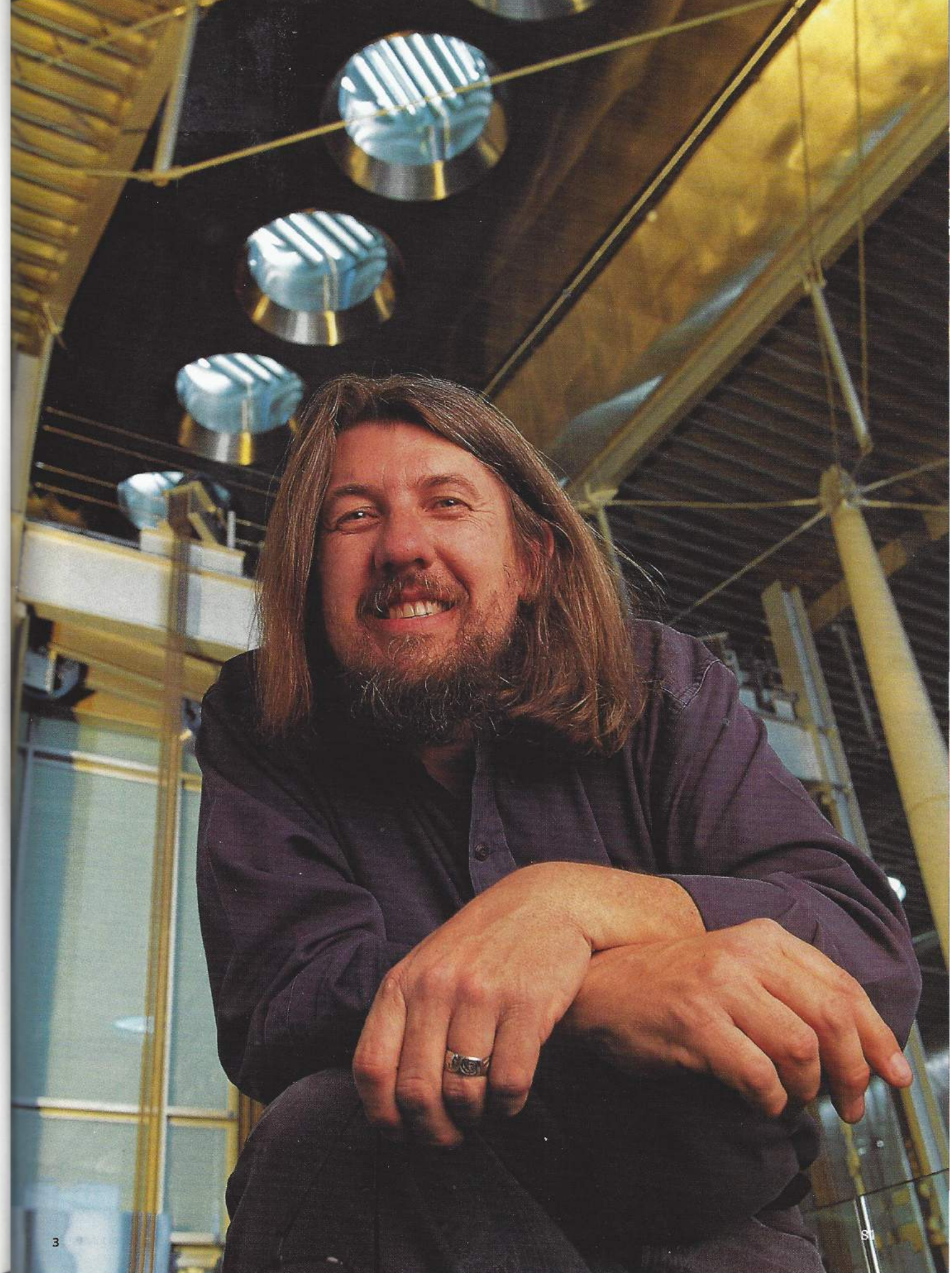
Will Bruder revels in the nuances of everyday places, materials, and conditions, and through his architecture he takes those elements to a higher, often surreal, level. He challenges the client and the public to think about the world around them, both locally and globally. He is an optimist. And, in these days of social pessimism, he offers a welcome vision.

Evolving over more than two decades in the Arizona desert, Bruder's is a unique brand of architecture, a dynamic meshing of basic materials and inventive geometries that straddle the Modern and the Organic; the manipulation of natural light is at the core of his work. A descendant of 20th-Century masters like Wright and Goff, among others, Bruder's anti-establishment bent has flourished among the mesas, canyons, and cacti, where most of his work exists at a safe distance from more heavily populated areas. But he is now getting commissions in high-profile locations. And, like his predecessors', Bruder's buildings are stirring up public debate.

For him, architecture should be a catalyst to public discourse. He defended his ideas at public meetings and battled city officials with the design for the new Central Library in Phoenix, which opened in May to a chorus of oohs, ahs, and ughs. So too, his design for an ad agency in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, also completed this spring, has created a major debate among residents in a town where, according to an article in a local newspaper, "architectural style often seems to mean what size logs you'll choose for your house."

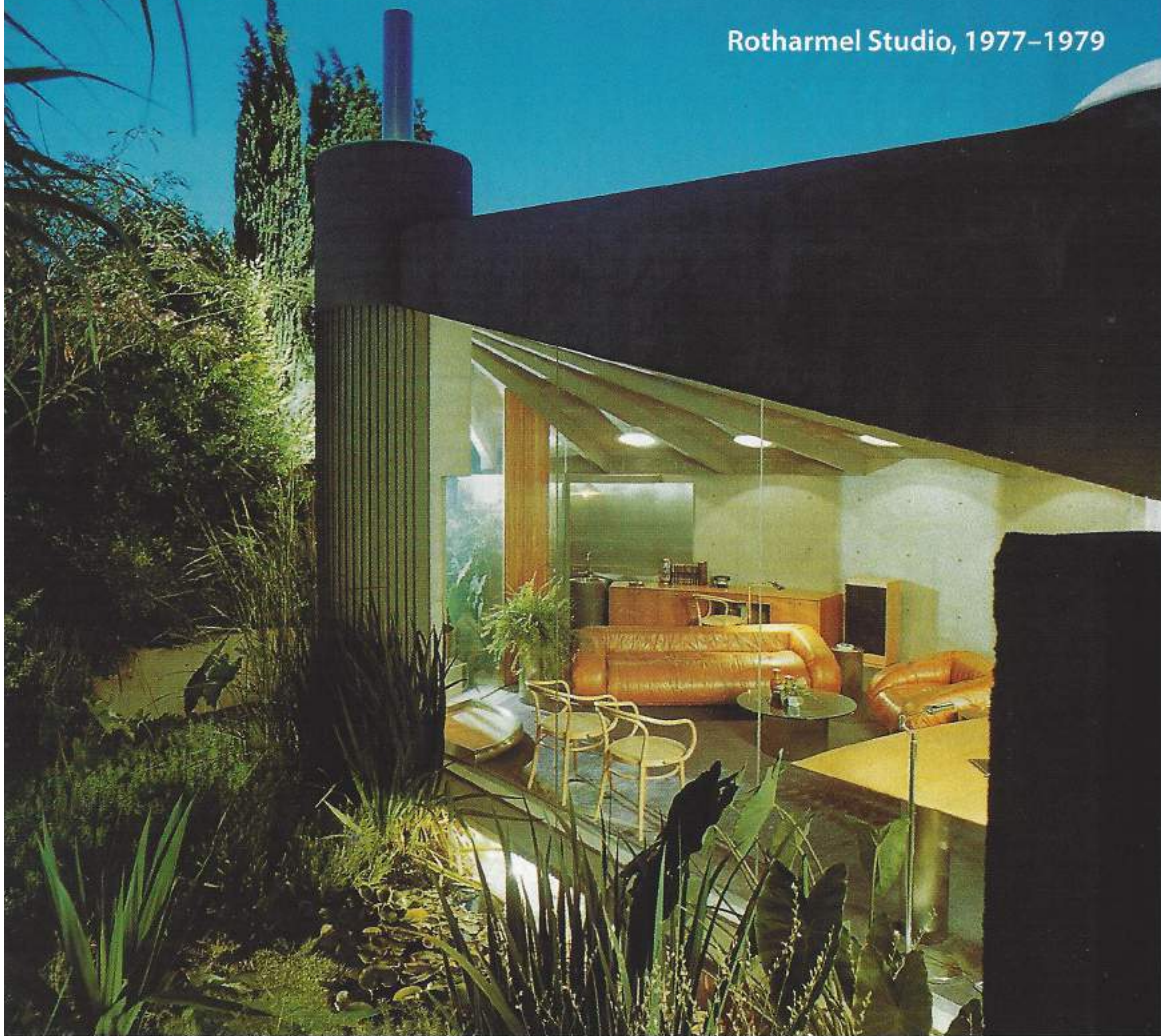
His ability to articulate his ideas, often through the use of metaphor, his willingness to listen to what others have to say, and his infectious passion for his subject make Bruder's relationship with clients and the public less strained than the non-conformity of his architecture might suggest. He will not, however, back down from his beliefs without a fight.

With the completion of the library in Phoenix, Bruder, at age 48, is facing a pivotal moment in his career. He is on the cusp of fame, and the phone is ringing regularly – with the press, book publishers, and potential (continued on page 84)





## Rotharmel Studio, 1977–1979



Set in a lush backyard garden in a Glendale, Arizona, subdivision is the 450-square-foot Rotharmel Studio (4), a sculptural structure of textured concrete and mullionless glass. Its circular geometry radiates off a hollow, skylighted concrete column, which supports the landscaped roof (5) and houses the stainless steel fireplace. The roof, pierced by a series of skylighted concrete tubes that double as light fixtures, is a 4-inch-thick concrete shell with beams in board-cast concrete. The large curved walls, cantilevered window sills, and fascias are of sandblasted concrete.

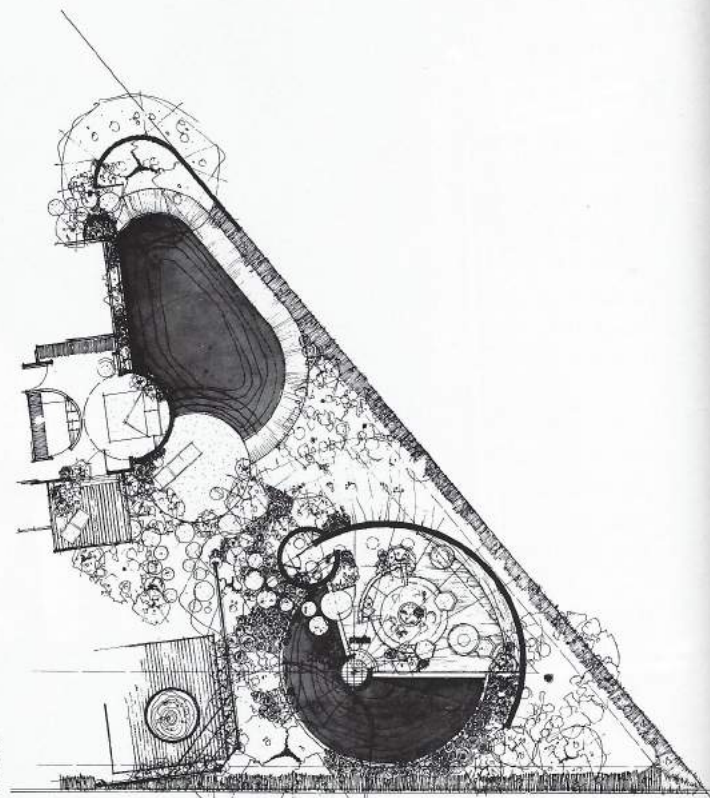
**Project:** Rotharmel Studio, Glendale, Arizona.  
**Architect:** William P. Bruder-Architect, Ltd., New River, Arizona (Will Bruder, designer).  
**Client:** Janet and Rocky Rotharmel.

Neil Koppes

4



5



ROTHARMEL COMPOUND WITH  
GROUND FLOOR STUDIO PLAN

N ↑ 20'/6m

P/A July 1995

## Platt Residence, 1978–1984

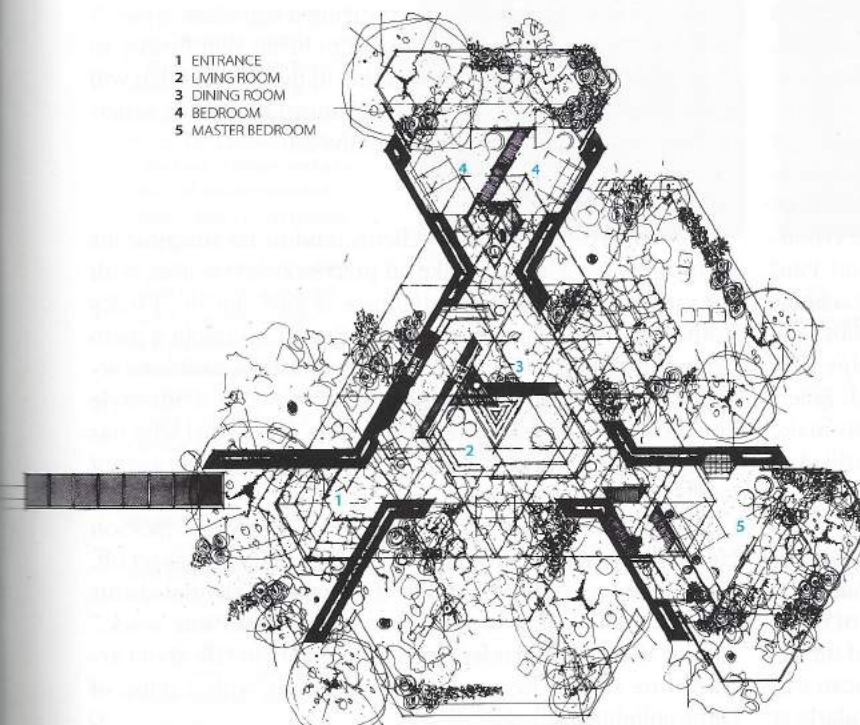
Based on a 30-60-degree grid, the triangular plan geometry of the Platt Residence (7) is used to make entry, living, and sleeping modules, each module formed by three-foot-thick walls of desert stone and concrete. In contrast to the rugged walls, which anchor the house to its site, the "spider-frame" roof structure, made of weathered oil-field drilling pipe, appears to hover above the building. Contrasting materials can also be found inside (6, 8),

where the heavy walls and the relatively delicate members of the exposed roof structure with wood infill meet. The house, including the roof, was constructed by its original metalworker-owner and his friends.

**Project:** Platt Residence, Maricopa County, Arizona.  
**Architect:** William P. Bruder-Architect, Ltd., New River, Arizona (Will Bruder, Tom Andreoli, design team).  
**Client:** David and Valerie Platt.

Photos: this page: Hans Leutner

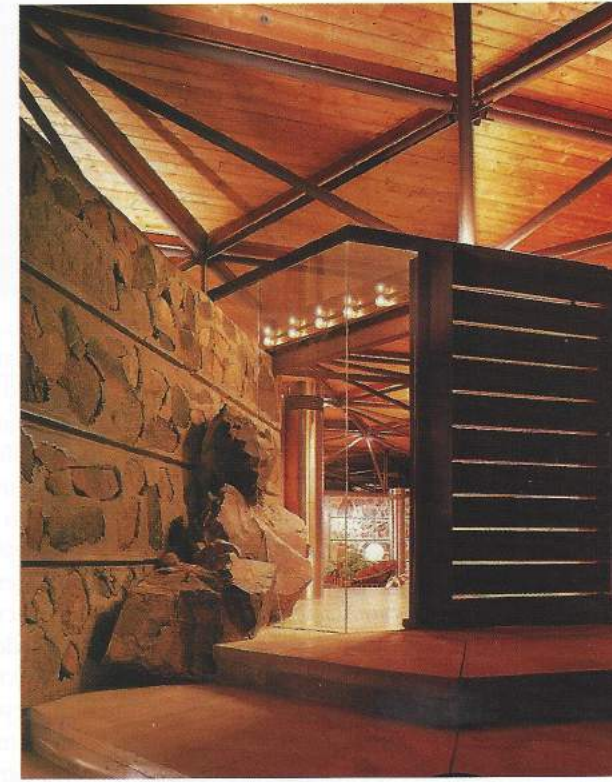
7



FLOOR PLAN

N ↑ 20'/6m

P/A July 1995



8



(continued from page 80) clients on the line. Adamant about personally dealing with every aspect of the building process, Bruder now must confront the pressures of a high-profile practice while maintaining the integrity of his own vision.

#### A Self-Taught Architect: Befriending Heros

Born and raised in Wisconsin in the 1940s, and emotionally and politically formed by the heady 1960s, Bruder cobbled together his architectural education using the same kind of unconventional strategy that guides his designs. After a brief stint at the General Motors Institute, an accredited work/study engineering program, he got a job with architect William Wenzler in Milwaukee, and applied to IIT's architecture school. Wenzler's head draftsman was building his own house, "a Usonian clone," and hired Bruder to do construction work. He later turned down IIT, finding the hands-on experience more useful, and enrolled, instead, at the University of Wisconsin as a sculpture student; there was no architecture school then.

Learning of Paolo Soleri's investigations in Arizona, Bruder traveled south and did a summer workshop with the creator of Arcosanti in 1967. Along the way, he befriended Bruce Goff, and later returned to Wisconsin to get his sculpture degree, hoping to work again for Wenzler. But the architect wouldn't take him back because, says Bruder, "I'd become a rebel with long hair." So he set up interviews with architects in Toronto and in the Northeast, and bought a bus ticket. Eventually, he took a job with Gunnar Birkerts outside Detroit.

But the Sonoran Desert beckoned. Bruder returned to Arizona and got a job with Michael & Kemper Goodwin in Tempe. And he started to moonlight with small jobs – patios, interiors, and renovations, undertaking much of the construction work himself. He got his architecture license in 1974 and opened an office the same year, building his own studio/residence in 1975 in New River, Arizona, where he still lives, and a freestanding studio four years later. Through word-of-mouth and articles in the local press, Bruder got larger commissions, mostly for houses, and later for small offices and branch libraries; to date, he has completed more than 150 projects.

Bruder's self-education involved knocking on doors to visit iconic buildings and to introduce himself to architects whose work he respected. In addition to Goff, he befriended other prominent figures such as John Lautner, the outspoken visionary who apprenticed at Taliesin in the 1930s, and Paul Schweikher, a Modernist who headed the architecture schools at both Yale and Carnegie Mellon in the 1950s and 1960s. The most lasting effect on his work came from friendships with Goff (from whom he learned to listen to the client), Soleri (whose artistry and vision showed Bruder "how to make something from nothing"), and Schweikher (who instilled in Bruder the importance of rigor and delicacy of detail).

One of the defining moments in Bruder's career was a stay at the American Academy in Rome. Studying the craft ethic of Italian Modernism as a Rome Fellow in 1987, Bruder had what could be considered an epiphany on seeing the work of Carlo Scarpa, who became a "godlike figure" to him. Beyond the intricate detailing and the materiality, the young American was taken by the spatial qualities of Scarpa's work, particularly at

the Brion Vega Cemetery. Bruder's pre-Rome work is, as he readily admits, "heavier ... a bit coarser and bigger in scale," while the post-Rome work, increasingly free of his predecessors' stylistic influences, has evolved into an abstraction of Modern forms, "lighter, and more minimalist," as he puts it.

#### Matters of Light and Material

Bruder's pre-Rome work is uneven: too many ideas, good as they may have been, resulted in some horsy forms. But when the ideas coalesced, masterful works were created. The 1979 Rotharmel Studio (p. 82), for example, is a sculptural meshing of variously textured, cast-in-place concrete with large expanses of mullionless glass. Likewise, the 1984 Platt Residence (p. 83) in Phoenix uses basic materials and a triangular geometry to create a surreal presence in the desert. With his more recent projects, the use of materials and the manipulation of light are more subtle, the intentions more focused.

For Wendell Burnette, a talented young architect who has worked in Bruder's studio since 1985, Bruder's influence on others is in the way he uses everyday materials and "how his plan geometry messes with your head as you move through space ... He goes farther than Wright did."

#### You Are Here: The Importance of Place

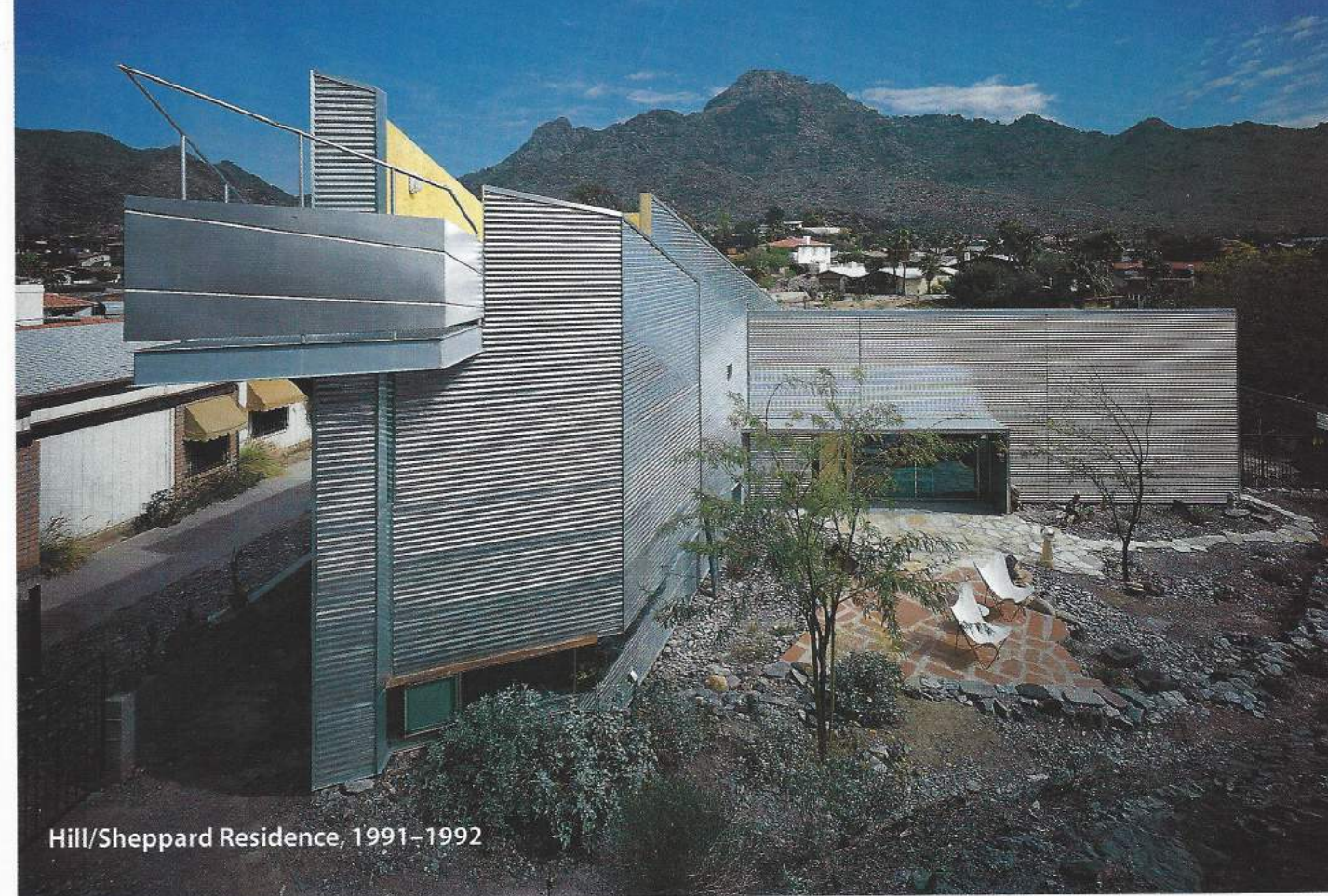
The use of metaphor, a strategy Bruder says he learned from Antoine Predock, has become a constant in his work. The Phoenix Central Library (p. 88), designed with Wendell Burnette as a joint venture of bruderDWLarchitects, was conceived as a mesa transplanted from Monument Valley. Its copper cladding recalls the state's copper mining history. The library's site, Bruder emphasizes, "is not the block it's on, but the city." Similarly, the Riddell Advertising and Design Agency in Jackson Hole, Wyoming (p. 87), which widens as it rises, was inspired by the "muffin" shape of haystacks found on local farmland.

Bruder is not interested in exporting a signature style: "I look forward to the opportunity not to bring Will Bruder to these projects, but to bring something to these places that will make people think about their community," he says, in anticipation of more work outside the Southwest.

#### Client Comments

Not surprisingly, Bruder's clients tend to be adventurous sorts or people who can shake off preconceived notions, with his guidance, of what architecture is and can be. Rocky Rotharmel, who first commissioned Bruder to design a patio behind his house in Glendale in 1973, "wasn't sensitive to architecture at the time ... I wanted one of those Hacienda-style houses before I met Will." As kids, notes Rotharmel who has commissioned Bruder to do a total of five projects, "we are not taught about architecture."

Ed and Lee Riddell, clients for the ad agency in Jackson Hole, are pleased with the uproar Bruder's building has set off. Ed Riddell says of his building: "It signals to potential clients that we aren't going to be conservative about our work." Adding that one of Bruder's gifts is his ability to talk about architecture clearly, he says, "You come away with a sense of being enlightened." □



Hill/Sheppard Residence, 1991–1992

Sited on a sloping parcel of land in a 1970s subdivision in the Phoenix foothills, the Hill/Sheppard Residence (9) was conceived as a "metaphorical hilltown." Its abstract forms are clad in corrugated and galvanized sheet metal (a material used in agricultural buildings in the area since the 19th Century). This multilevel house, for a family of art collectors, is organized as a series of interconnected interior spaces and garden courtyards. The entrance "canyon" (10) is formed by a wall of sandblasted red-cinder concrete blocks, with weeping mortar. The main living space (11) has a polished concrete floor, maple built-ins, and a cantilevered concrete kitchen/dining counter.

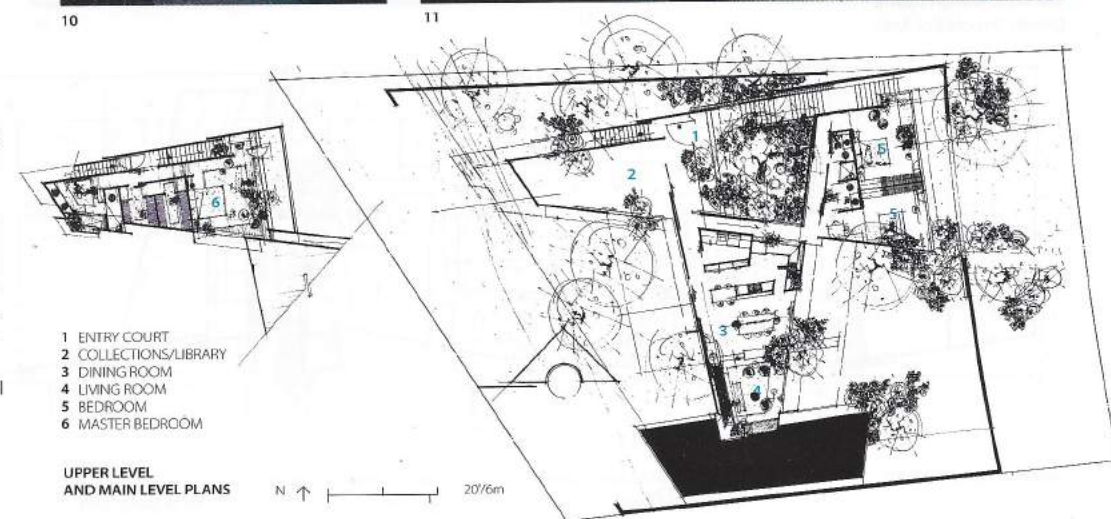
**Project:** Hill/Sheppard Residence, Phoenix, Arizona.  
**Architect:** William P. Bruder-Architect, Ltd., New River, Arizona (Will Bruder, Wendell Burnette, Beau Dromiack, Tyler Green, design team).  
**Client:** John Hill and Linda Sheppard.



10



11



- 1 ENTRY COURT
- 2 COLLECTIONS/LIBRARY
- 3 DINING ROOM
- 4 LIVING ROOM
- 5 BEDROOM
- 6 MASTER BEDROOM

UPPER LEVEL  
AND MAIN LEVEL PLANS

N ↑ 20'/6m





Temple Kol Ami, 1993–1994

Photos this page: Heidi Davis/Riddell Photographic

12

The irregular setting of this temple's block walls (13) evokes the stone of the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Its villagelike street of classrooms (12) is protected from the sun by two continuous canopies. Bruder funnels natural light into the multi-purpose hall/sanctuary (14).

**Project:** Temple Kol Ami, Scottsdale, Arizona.

**Architect:** William P. Bruder-Architect (Will Bruder, Wendell Burnette, Eric Robinson, Beau Dromiack, Maryann Bloomfield, Tim Wert, design team).

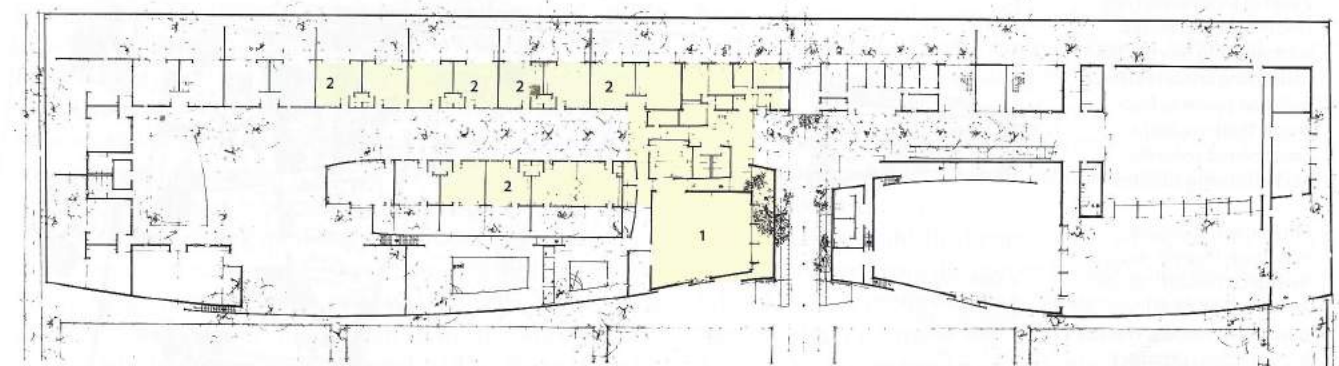
**Client:** Temple Kol Ami.



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14

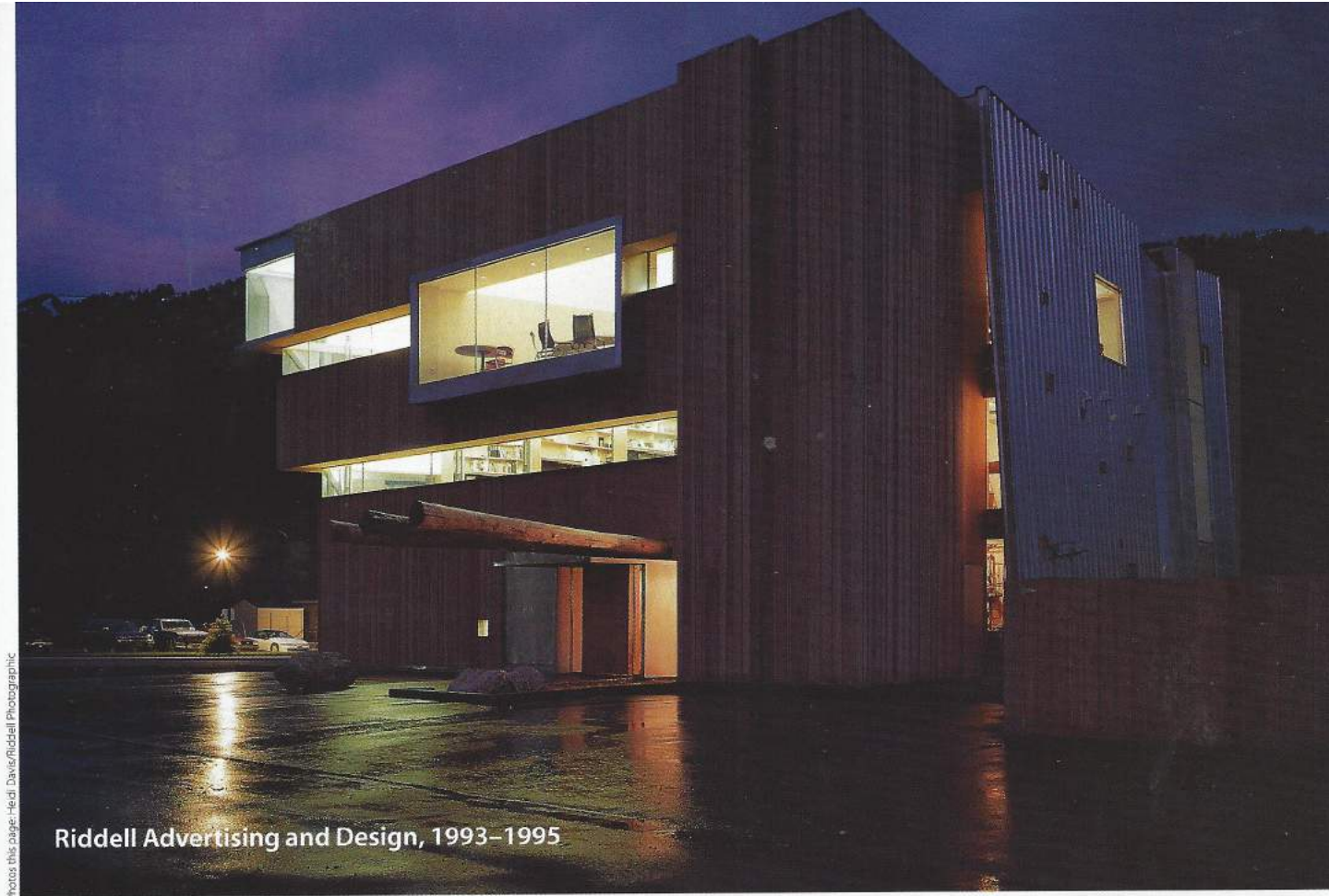


MASTER SITE PLAN STUDY

1 MULTI PURPOSE/SANCTUARY  
2 CLASSROOM

TINTED AREA BUILT TO DATE

N → 40/12m



Riddell Advertising and Design, 1993–1995

Photos this page: Heidi Davis/Riddell Photographic

15

The subject of debate over its appropriateness for Jackson Hole, Wyoming, this three-story ad agency (15) houses 7,500-square-feet of office, studio, and production space. The building does pay respect to the local vernacular, but not in a way typical of other Jackson buildings: its design was inspired by the “muffin” haystacks found on local farms; the entrance canopy's giant logs and the peeled log columns that rise through the atrium (16) and support the roof respond to the local building material, as does the galvanized metal rear wall. When employees are seated, the strip windows (17) shift the view from the immediate context to the surrounding mountains.

**Project:** Riddell Advertising and Design, Jackson Hole, Wyoming.

**Architect:** William P. Bruder-Architect, Ltd., New River, Arizona (Will Bruder, Ed Ewers, Dewayne Smyth, Maryann Bloomfield, design team).

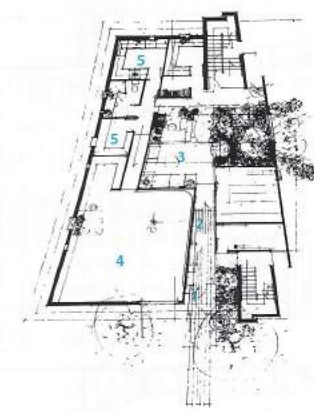
**Client:** Ed and Lee Riddell.



16



17



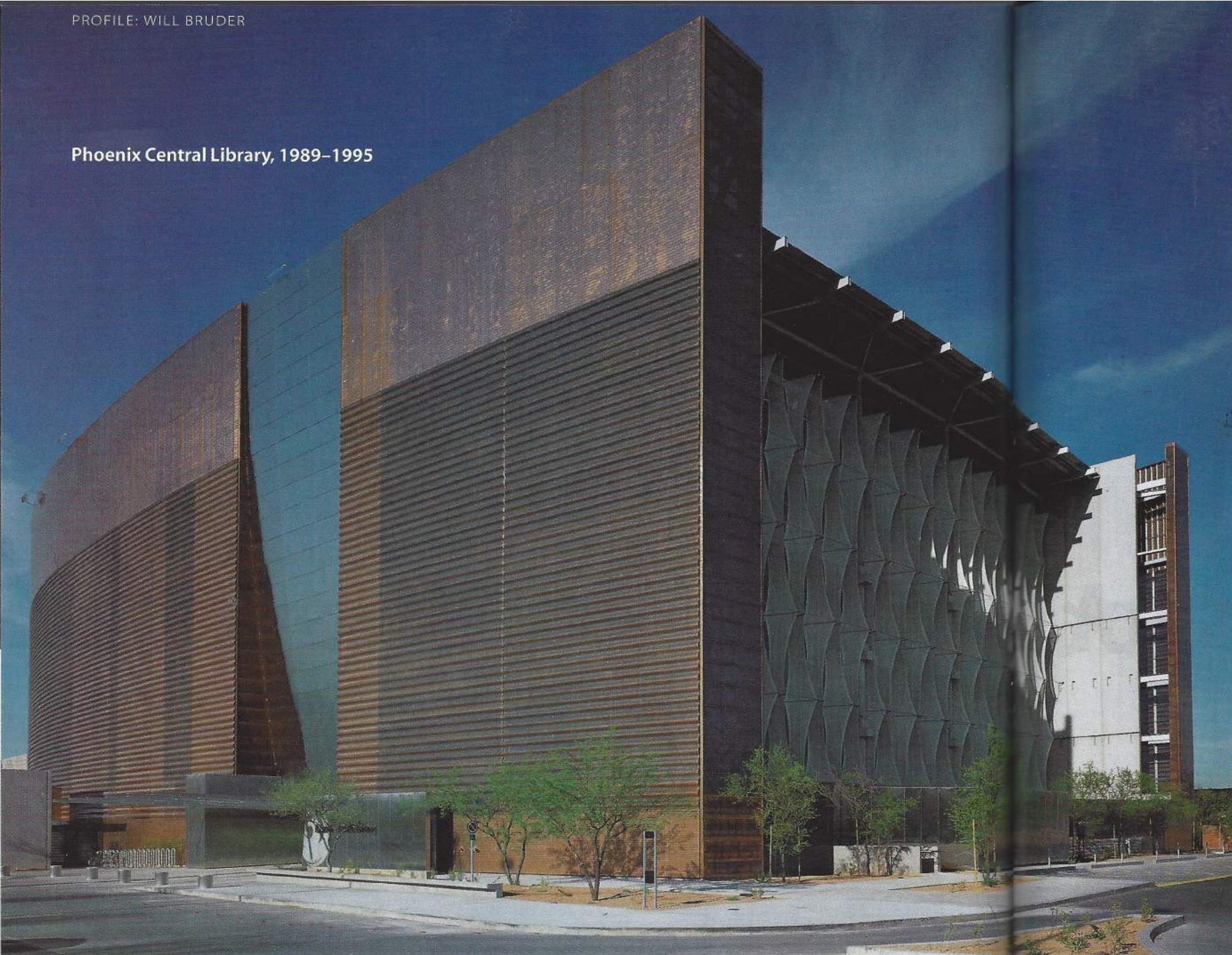
FIRST LEVEL PLAN N ↓ 20/6m



THIRD LEVEL PLAN

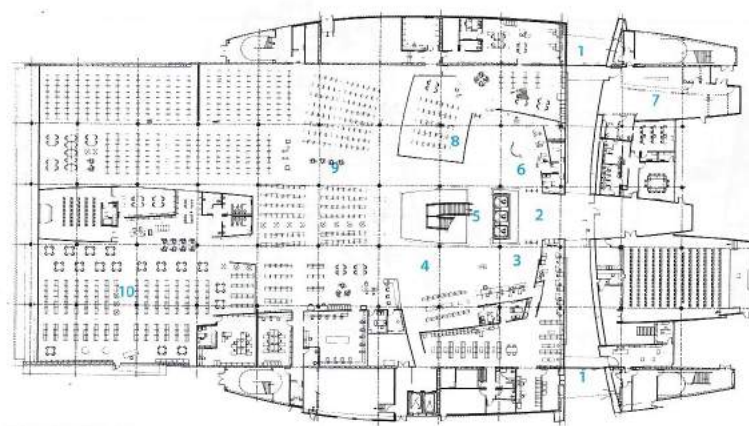


# Phoenix Central Library, 1989–1995



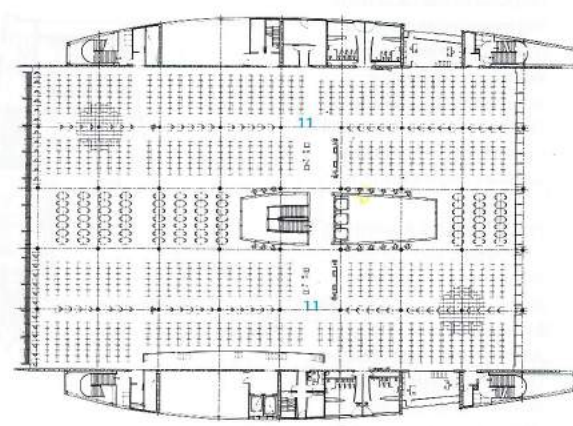
18

© Bob Freund



FIRST FLOOR PLAN

N → 40/12m



FIFTH FLOOR PLAN (GREAT READING ROOM)

- 1 ENTRANCE
- 2 LOBBY
- 3 CHECK-IN
- 4 CIRCULATION
- 5 ATRIUM
- 6 CHECK-OUT
- 7 FUTURE DINING ROOM
- 8 AUDIO/VIDEO
- 9 BIOGRAPHY
- 10 JUVENILE BOOKS
- 11 NONFICTION COLLECTION



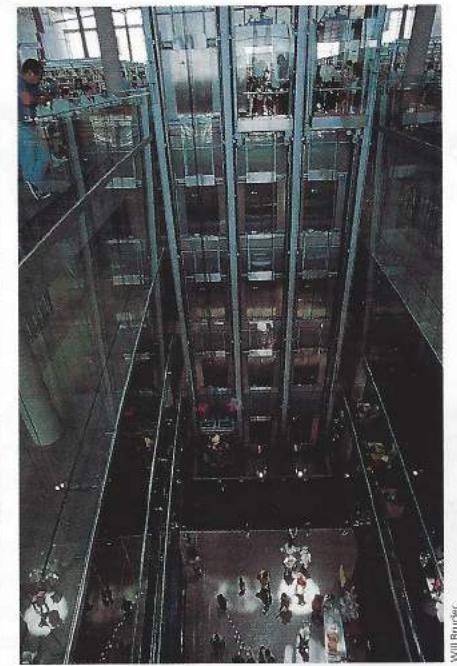
19

Will Bruder



20

Will Bruder



21

Will Bruder

The 280,000-square-foot Central Library (18) on Phoenix's main north-south artery opened in May. Shade sails on the north end of the building control glare and cut the wind, while an automated louver system modulates the sunlight entering the south end of the library. "Saddle bags" to the east and west, clad in strips of opaque and perforated copper, house mechanical systems and services. A five-story atrium (21), dubbed the "Crystal

Canyon" by Bruder to emphasize its extensive use of glass, rises from the ground floor to the Great Reading Room (19) on the top floor, where the nonfiction collection is located. Here, candlestick columns, cables, and struts support the roof, which is perforated with round skylights. At noon, desert light illuminates the walls through continuous skylights at the ceiling's edges, making the roof appear to float (20).

**Project:** Phoenix Central Library, Phoenix, Arizona.  
**Architect:** bruderDWLarchitects, Phoenix (Will Bruder, Wendell Burnette, Carleton Van Deman, Rick Joy, Lauren Clark, Beau Dromiack, Bob Adams, Toni Ann Hindley, Maryann Bloomfield, Peter Pascu, James Lindlan, Frank Henry, John Chupas, Michael Haake, Lito Aquino, Dan Filuk, Dean Olsen, Vicky Ramella, Sharon Kraus, Mark Dee, Marc Arnold, design team).  
**Building engineer:** Ove Arup & Partners, Los Angeles.  
**Client:** City of Phoenix.