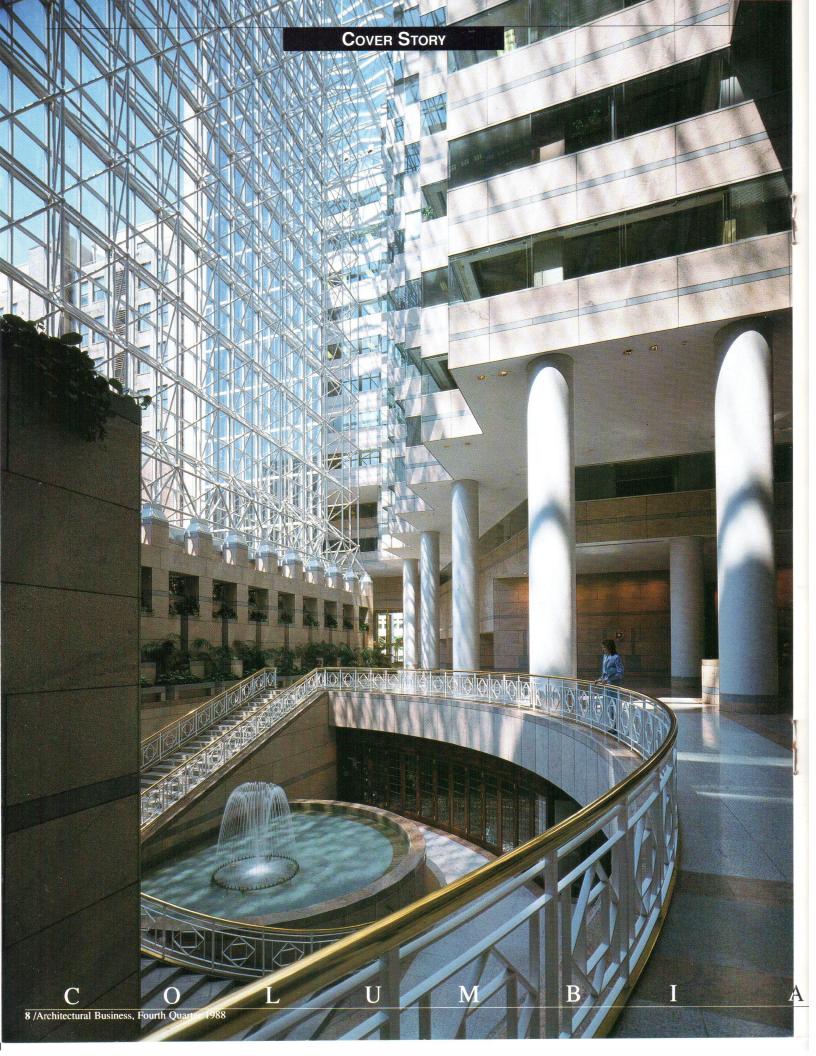
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PLAYING BY THE RULES

by Robert Sawyer

ithout resorting to overblown classical elements, the Columbia Square Investment Office Building by I.M.

Pei & Partners for Gerald D. Hines Interests of Washington stands clearly and resolutely on the modern side of the fence. This is not a monumental building. This is an investment office building which is located on F Street between 12th and 13th Streets in Washington, D.C., and is only interesting when examined as such. There are guidelines which exist for the development of buildings in the Washington corridor. These guidelines or "ground rules" substantially limit the floor area ratio and the height of the buildings located therein. In effect, Columbia Square, including other buildings of recent Washington, was shaped by its location and the architect's interpretation of these ground rules.

The terms of the ground rules are the only way to look at the project. Under these rules a developer must extract from the

Left: Interior view of atrium and west tower. Right: view of atrium and spaceframe from secondary entrance Far right: sculptural plantered wall plan the maximum floor area allowed under law and must do so under the height limits. Of the terms Senior Design Partner Henry N. Cobb says, "In order to utilize a site of this proportion, produce marketable office space, and produce the maximum allowable space you must use the available cubage very efficiently. You essentially have to have a building with an atrium in it or a building which is carved out on the inside as ours is."

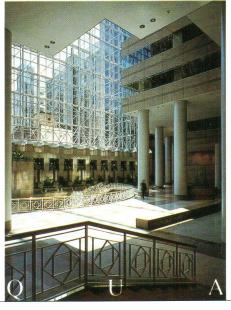
According to the ground rules the building had to come to the edge of the street along its entire length, which made it difficult to avoid having a long, boring mass of wall. The Washington ground rules allowed for no setbacks of any kind. But in this wall lies the beauty and integrity of the design. Cobb has subtly shaped the plane of the building and created a patterning by using two different kinds of granite which aid in the introduction of a rhythm and animation. This pattern is composed of solids and voids with windows in two planes and an ornamental element in every unit of the facade. The design strategy was to combine all of these elements into a format which would create a visually interesting facade in what may have otherwise been an impending 350' foot wall of great boring mass. The almost light-hearted treatment of the facade is a relief from the great perpetuation of classical themes which dominate many Washington buildings.

"It is rather a light building compared to most other Washington buildings. It's not heavy, and even though it's very large, it's not extremely massive. It's rather planar in its expression," explains Cobb. "Columbia Square was built to be a good citizen of Washington. But otherwise it's simply a building that has both a certain dignity and a certain animation in the treatment of the surface," he says. Even though the facade stands apart from other traditional Washington buildings with classical elements, it still maintains in common a 5 foot on center module. This unit is carried throughout the facade and reflects the interior module which is common in many Washington buildings of similar size.

The project's overall size also contributed greatly to the strategy of the design. For example, the interior consists of two large, separate but connected, towers which surround an interior atrium that has been sculpted out of the middle. The sheer size of the building presented other problems as well. This building is a full city block in one direction and a half-block in the other direction. "An important factor in the genesis of the design was to shape the interior space in such a way so that the

The interior consists of two large, separate but connected, towers

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COVER STORY

tenants would feel that it is a priveledge rather than a drag to walk some 300 feet from the entrance on 15th Street to their elevator," notes Cobb.

Also a sort of informal geometry was integrated into the interior design which creates a variety in the atmosphere. The geometry of the plan is essentially the diagonal of a double square. It steps back in increments of fifteen feet every thirty feet. The geometrical discipline is rather freely played with within the atrium itself and results in an enjoyable space. The variety of the space is enhanced by the spaceframe and skylight as well as the creative use of granite pavers.

The atrium is paved with light and darker gray granite stones. The theme of the exterior facade is brought into the interior where the walls are spandrel bands of pink granite with gray granite feature strips alternating with clear glass bands. Overlooking the landscaped spaciousness and a semi-circular pool, the walls step inward at the third, fourth, and fifth levels where a daylit shaft rises vertically to the skylight. Rising above a twenty foot high sculptural plantered wall, the exterior north wall and skylight are insulating glass supported by extruded aluminum frames painted an off-white color.

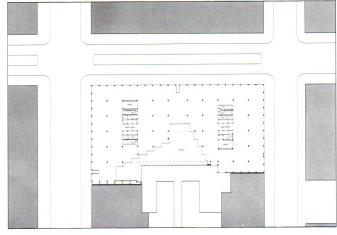
The typical office floor starts at the third level with commercial or retail space on the lobby and second levels as well as the first basement level. As F Street is principally a retail street, not an office street, I.M. Pei & Partners wanted to make it an enjoyable experience for the pedestrian at street level. This has been accomplished with the creative use of two kinds of granite, a 5' on center module, and a unique patterning effect in the facade.

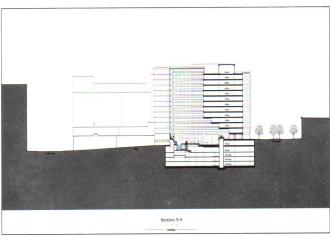
Construction Cost: \$50 million
Building Height: 130 Feet (F Street)
Site Areas: 59,337 Square feeet
Parking Capacity: 394 cars (3 levels below grade)
Planning Began: August 1981
Construction Start: March 1985
Construction Completion: June 1987
Foundation: Cast-in-place reinforced

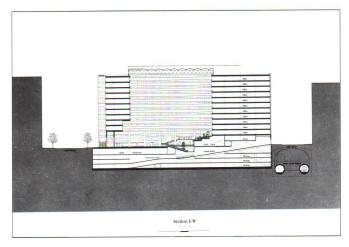
Right: Typical floor plan (Drawings by I.M. Pei & Partners)

Right: Section along North-South showing secondary entrance, sculpted atrium, west office tower

Right: Section along East-West showing main entrance and East and West office towers







STRUCTURE: Cast-in-place reinforced concrete in 30' by 30' bays/flat slab with drop heads at columns

Facade: Flame-finish pink granite and honed-finish gray granite with decorative gray glass panels and off-white painted aluminum frames

EXTERIOR PAVING: Gray Granite with light granite bands

PROJECT TEAM: Henry N. Cobb, Design Partner, Eason H. Leonard, Administrative Partner, James P. Morris Associate Partner/Administration, Theodore H. Musho, Design Architect, Michael Flynn, Curtain Wall, Dennis Egan, Project Manager.

Associate Architects: Richard Fitzgerald& Partners, Houston, Tex. (CD's) Smith, Segreti, Tepper, Washington, DC

concrete mat

