

# ALBUQUERQUE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Stevens, Mallory, Pearl & Campbell,  
Architects

MacCornack & Burns, Structural Engineers  
Coupland & Moran, Mechanical Engineers  
Uhl & Lopez, Electrical Engineers  
Shirley Hamilton, ASID, Interior Consultant

*"We really have something to  
celebrate on the corner of 6th  
and Copper."*

*--Cathy Robbins*

## The architects statement:

Our design of the main building of the Albuquerque Public Library System began with a great advantage which too many new buildings lack — an architecturally sophisticated client. The Director and staff, keenly aware of their problems, were determined that their architect should solve them. Many new building programs are derived directly from an unconscious remodeling of the inadequate space which the client is using at the time of the formulation of program for the new building. Many other programs are too much influenced by other new buildings which, with a change here and there, could satisfy the client's immediate needs. In both cases the solution to the design problem is damaged by a mixing of program and solution which most often overlooks the rudimentary design issues. These pitfalls were avoided in the derivation of the program for Albuquerque's new library, a collaborative effort between the director of libraries, his staff, and the architect. The main library had been operating in a 1924 building designed for a population of 20,000. No one wanted a revised version of the existing building. Also, although the librarians travel a great deal and examine new library buildings, no one had encountered a new building which they wished to copy or even to be heavily influenced by.

"Everything which we are doing now we will probably be doing differently within ten years. Give us a building which will not get in the way of our need to change . . ."

"We want the busiest urban site which we can get, where we have a chance to relate to the greatest possible number of people. Give us a building which invites these people to come in. Give us the excitement of this urban location where we want it, but protect us from the noise and busyness where it gets in our way . . ."

"Give us a building which the City and the region will be aware of, and which people will want to come to see. Give us a friendly monument without domes or grand stairways — we can't afford them, and they would get in the way of changes which we are sure to need . . ."

"Most of the patrons will feel comfortable with a reasonably high noise level. Some will want as much quiet as possible. Give us as wide a range of reader environments as possible — open lounges, partially secluded carrels, closed study rooms, open courts sheltered from the noise and danger of the street . . ."

"Give us a New Mexico building, but use no false adobe. . . ."

These statements from pre-program conversations with Library Directors Don Reichman and Alan Clark reflect their extraordinary professional excellence as well as their awareness of the responsibility of the public library to the community. They also indicate a rare sophistication in regard to the

nature of architectural programming and the role of the architect in the processes of both program and design. The clients confined themselves to definition goals and requirements, and once the program was complete we confined ourselves to solving these problems.

In addition to their definition of a superb program, the clients gave us another vital advantage. They expected an extraordinary design from us and consistently expressed their confidence in our ability to achieve it. They provided the climate of calm optimism which enabled us to do the best work of which we are capable.

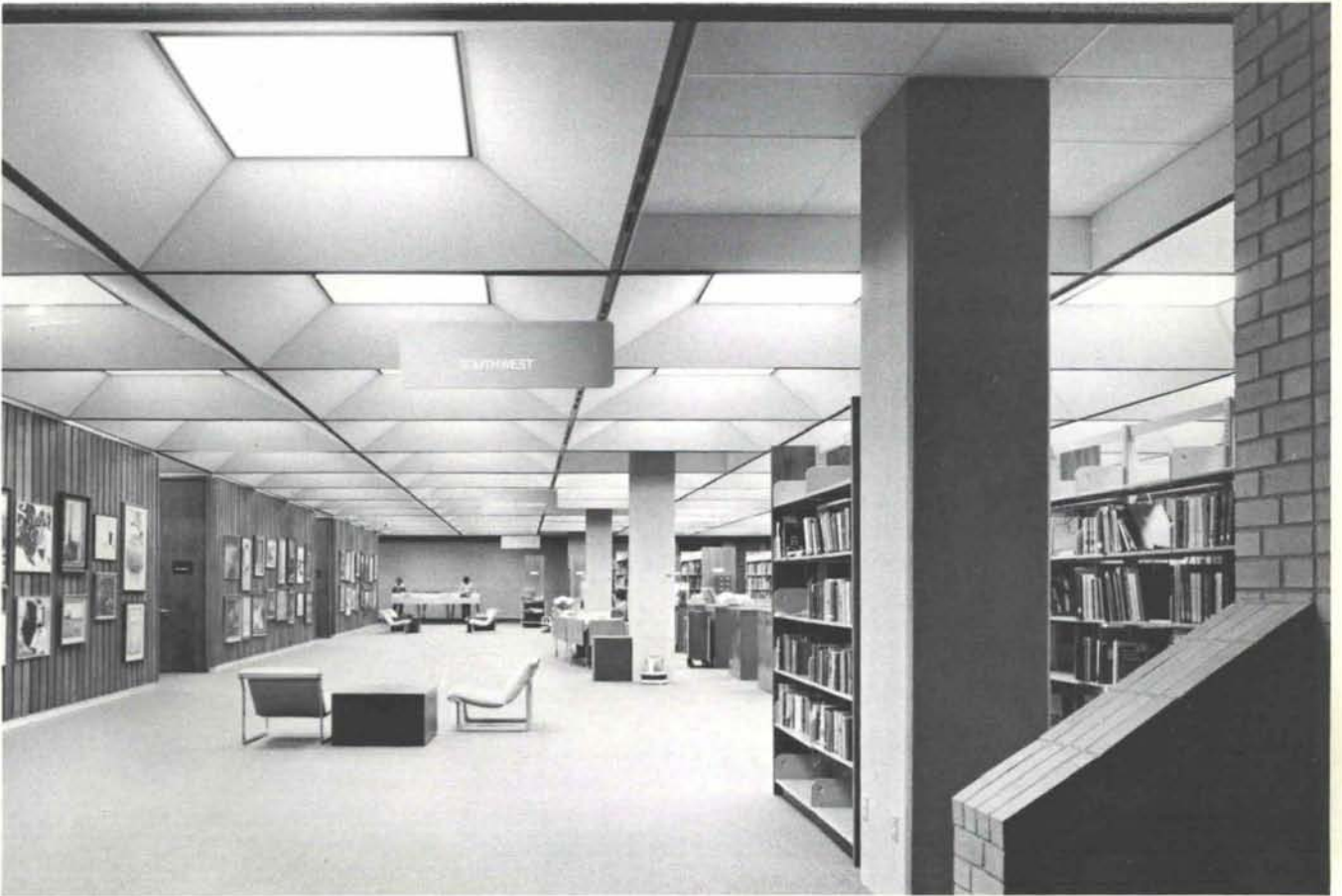
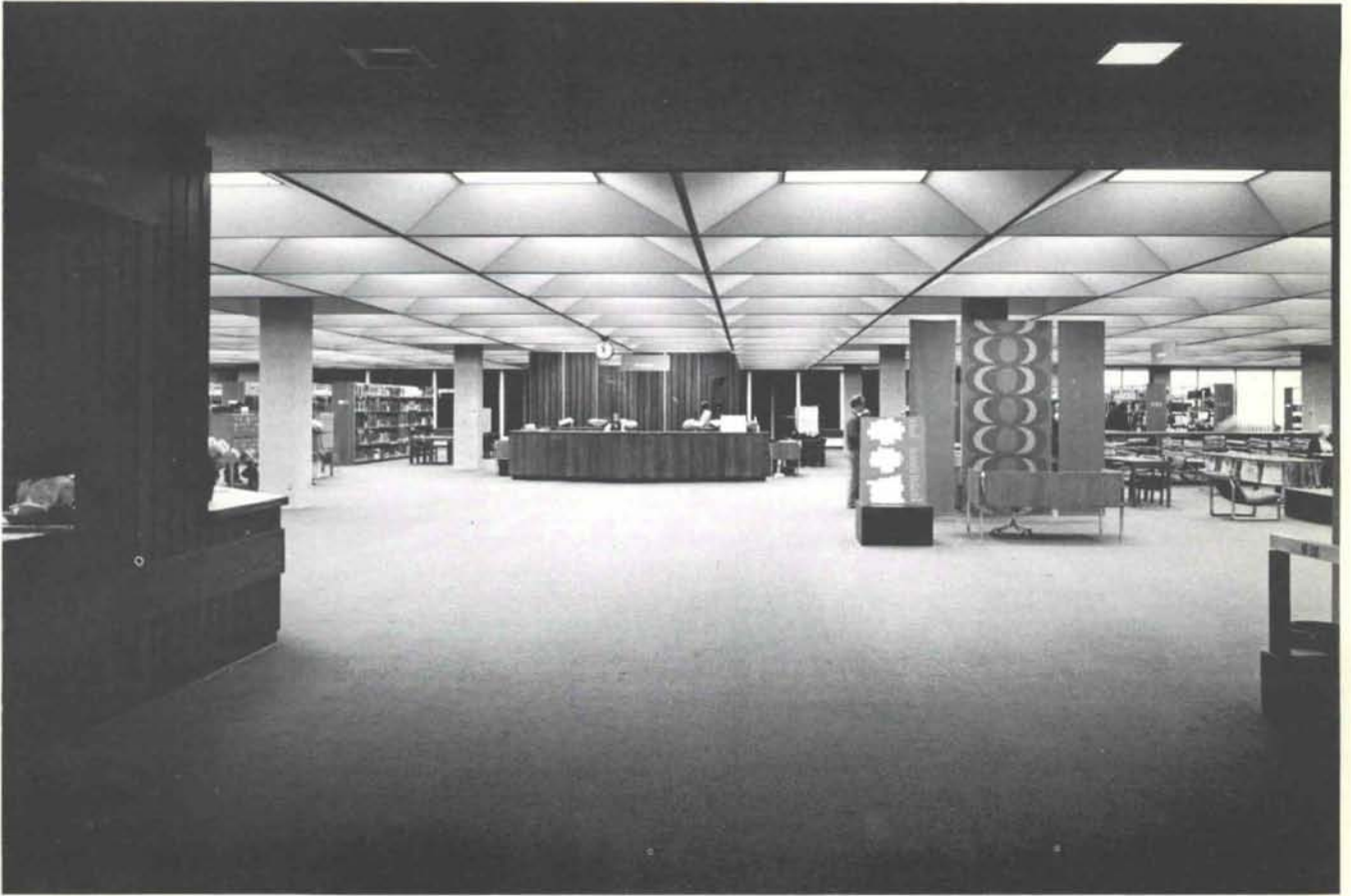
Before the program was finalized, we visited twenty of the most conspicuous new libraries in the country, all close to our program of 500,000 volumes and 500 patrons. We talked to the librarians, the architects, and the library users about the good and the bad aspects of their new buildings. One circumstance became dominant. Changes in library media and methods of handling it are so rapid and omnipresent that flexibility of interior space is the pre-eminent architectural requirement for providing continuously adequate and creative library services. Everywhere, we saw that this requirement had not been met. In every library which we examined there was a mixture of public spaces with fixed building elements. Stairways, monumental multi-story shafts of vertical space, elevators, ducts shafts, toilet rooms, etc., were scattered throughout the building — all logically placed in relation to the way the library was presumed to operate at the time it was programmed, and all based upon the assumption that the functions would remain about the same for the life of the building. We found expensive built-in equipment which had already been abandoned and departments which could not grow or change because of immovable building elements.

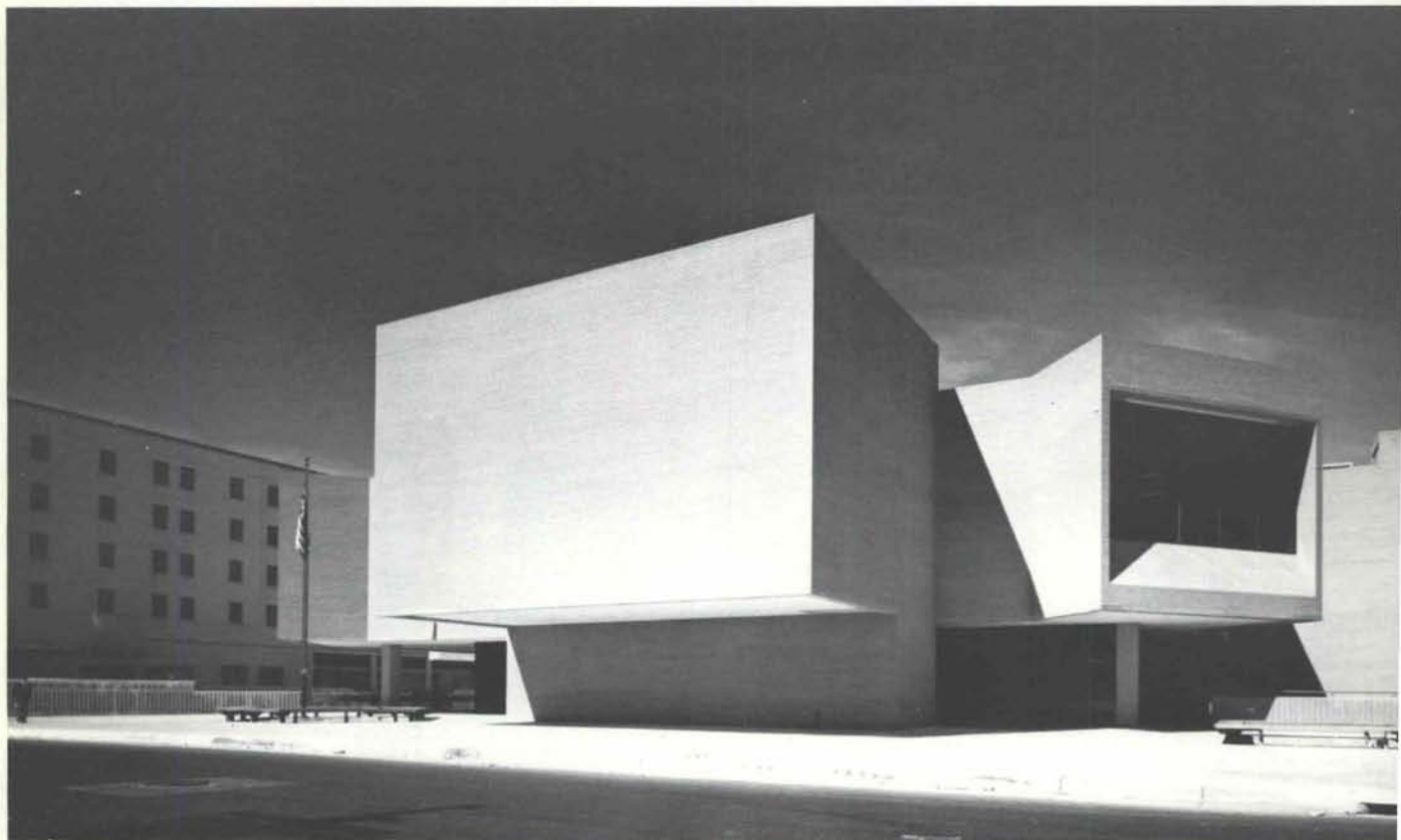
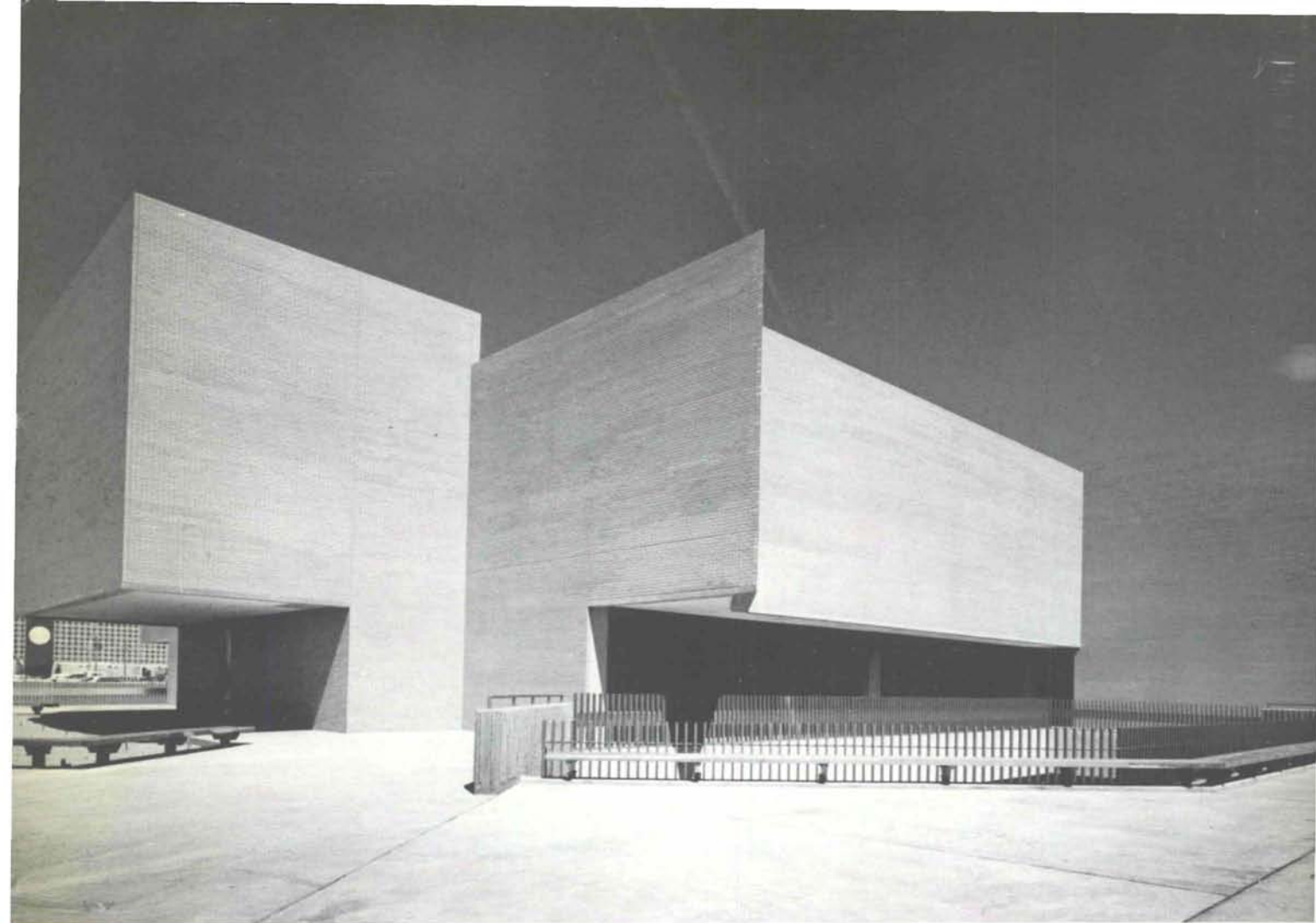
We agreed to strive for the most flexible public library in the country, and we probably have it. All walls in the master spaces are easily movable on 9'-0" coffered ceiling modules, each of which contains its own lighting, air supply and return, and connections to electrical, telephone and video systems.

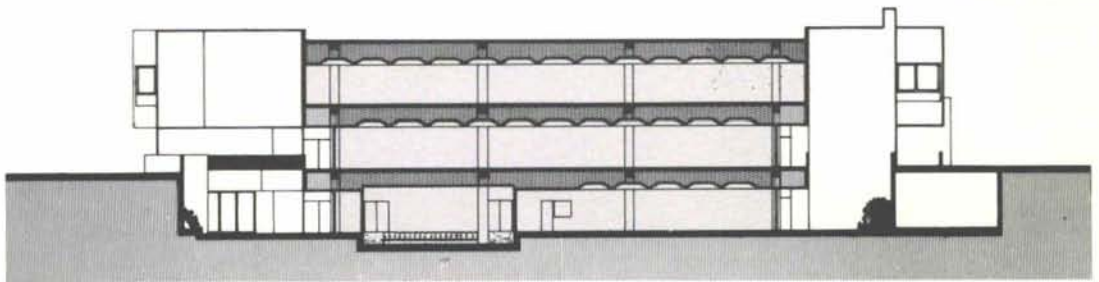
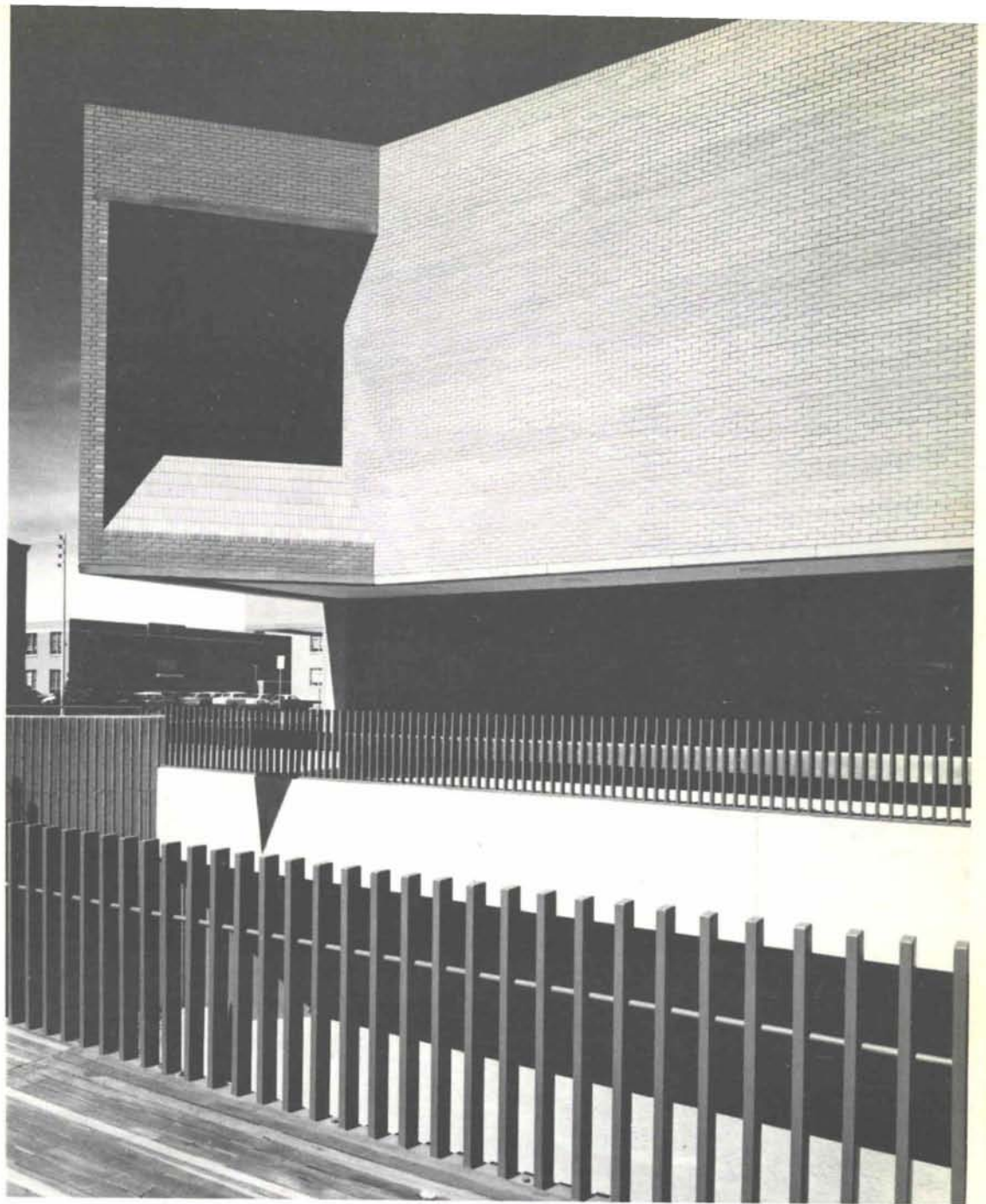
The program was finalized, and the downtown site at Fifth & Copper was acquired. Three levels were dictated by program, site, and budget. We agreed to strive for a rectangular public space on each level as large as the half block site permitted, and interrupted by nothing permanent except the structural columns, 36'-0" o.c. In order to keep the big spaces free we had to place all fixed elements in contiguous but separate buildings. We found ourselves talking in the clichés of *master* and *slave* spaces, coined by the Philadelphia school, but based upon practices at least as old as the earliest high school gymnasium with attached shower and locker rooms.

We allowed these servant buildings to be shaped

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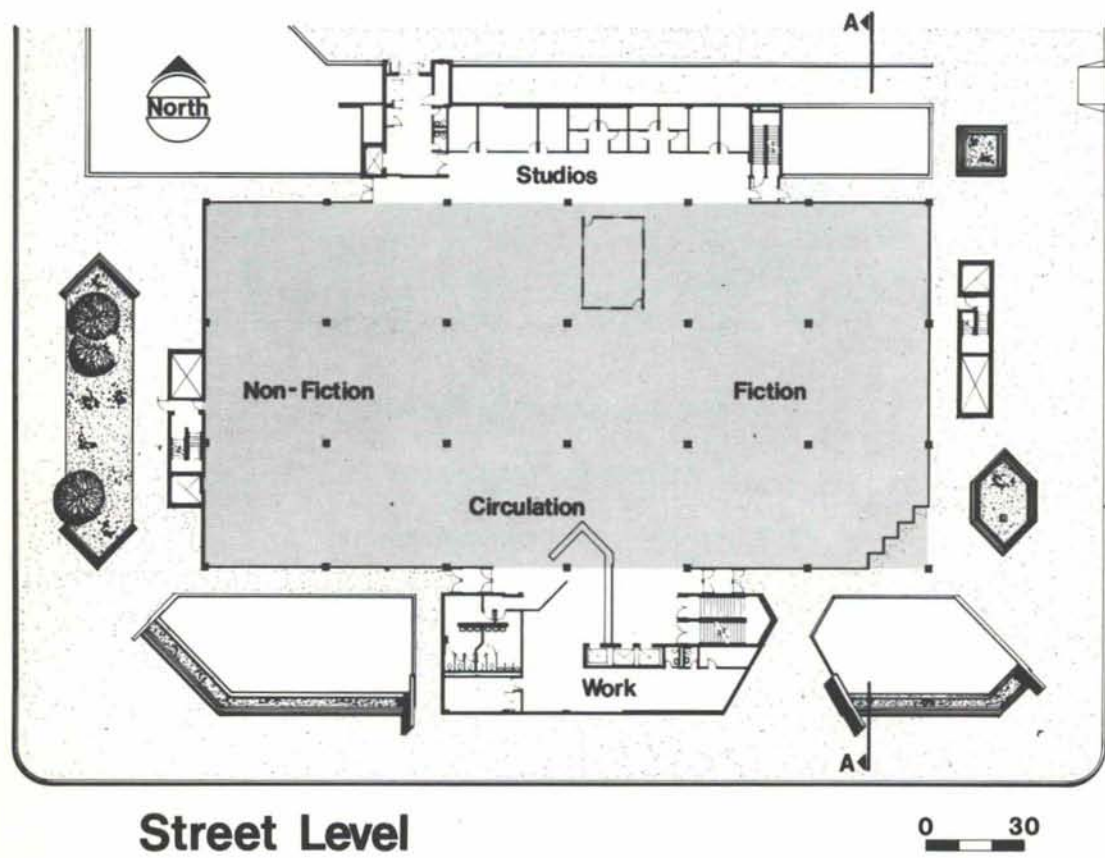
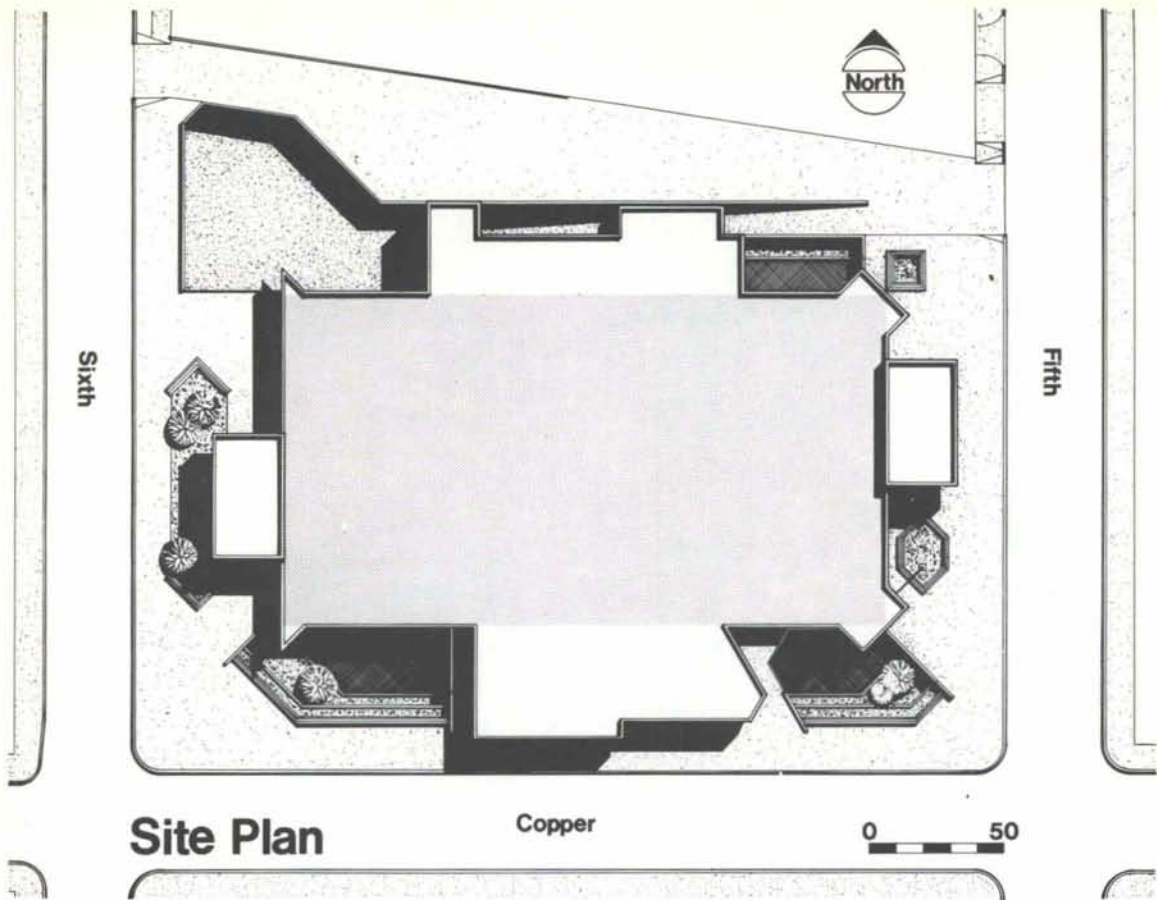


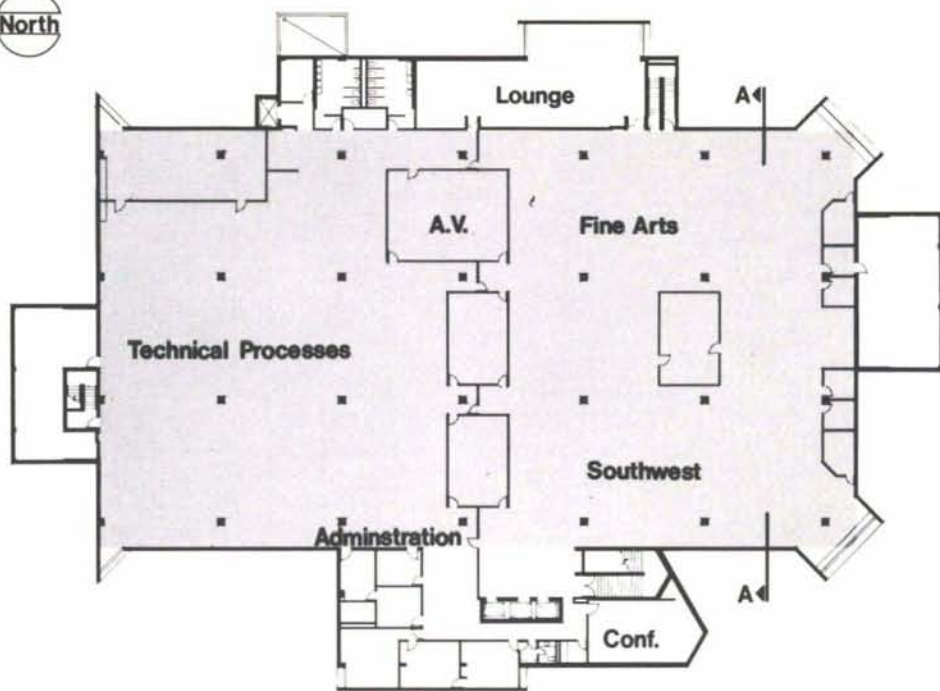




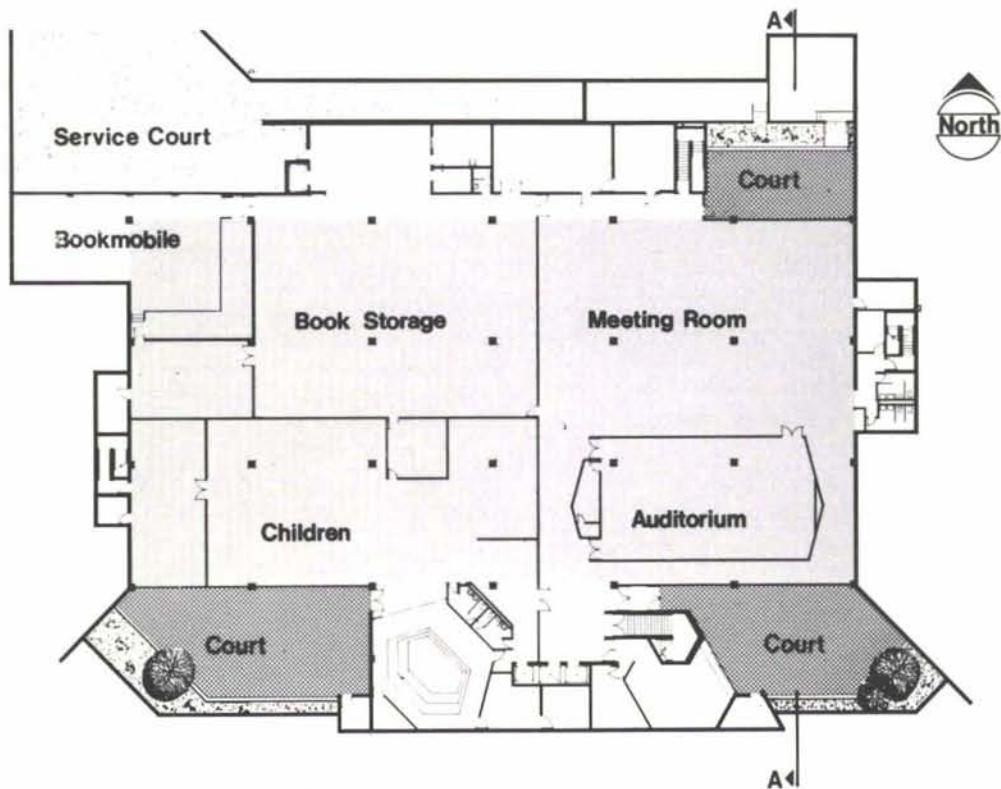
**Section A-A**







**Upper Level**



**Lower Level**



by the functions they housed, and by their relation to the site. The heating and cooling equipment buildings were located at east and west ends with their major volumes carried by cantilevers so that as much open space as possible could be given back to the street. Elevators, stairways, toilet rooms, top administration offices and conference rooms occupy the south projection. This mass was deliberately opposed to the otherwise rigid orthograph of the street pattern and the building's structure in order to emphasize the main entrance and the main public stairways and elevators. Fixed staff and service facilities occupy the north servant building, where the staff lounge is cantilevered over a ramp leading down to a service court at the northwest corner of the site.

In order to preserve the flexibility of the main volume of public space, these servant buildings had to project outside the central rectangle. The master volume was therefore forced back from the property lines. More of the site was thus preserved for public space outside the building and the servant projections added interest to the building's massing. This configuration of large volume set back from the streets as much as thirty feet gave us the opportunity of developing basement level courts around much of the building's periphery. Three of these courts form public reading areas, sheltered from the noise and danger of the busy streets. A fourth basement court at the northwest corner of the building is devoted to all vehicular service to the building, including bookmobiles. A great advantage to these courts, aside from the interest and ambience which they give the complex, is the fact that the public level below the street is not a basement, either in feeling or building code definition. A sprinkler system, more hazardous to books than fire, was not required.

The main volume is set back so far from the street that large glass areas, well protected from the sun by the overhanging upper level, can reveal the most popular library elements to the passing public without the distractions of noise and sun. Glass on the upper level where the main public collections are housed is used sparingly and with maximum concern for providing architectural drama as well as clarification of orientation in the 30,000 square feet of this largely brick enclosed space.

Although landscaping is waiting upon the optimum planting season, maximum consideration was given to planting, both at street level and in the below grade courts, the textured concrete walls of which were designed for evergreen vines. Deciduous native trees will dominate the ample street level planting beds. Wood benches surrounding lower courts at street level are located three feet out and two feet above the required railings so that shrubbery behind the seating safely minimizes the required 42" high railing and provides additional texture and protection for the courts below. Planting



beds within courts provide for ground covers as well as deciduous trees tall enough to relate to the upper level windows, which provide near views of the rapidly changing cityscape and distant views of the Sandia Mountains.

The building is a three story facility having approximately 104,577 sq. ft. of space with provisions for adding an additional floor of 34,000 sq. ft. Cooling is provided by two 150 ton centrifugal chillers having a double bundle condensor to allow heat recovery to heat the building. Heating, in the event the heat recovery from the chillers is inadequate, is provided by a gas fueled steam boiler. Air distribution is provided by two fan systems through a dual duct, medium velocity system. Humidification is provided for the entire building.

The poured in place concrete structure has post tensioned beams and slabs. All outside walls and most permanent interior walls are of smooth surfaced, tan colored brick. S. M. P. C.



## and in the opinion of a user:

I'm no Ada Louise Huxtable, but here goes. With the opening of the new main branch of the Albuquerque Public Library downtown, Albuquerque has entered the big league of public buildings . . .

The Grand Opening on March 8 was a people's affair and, more than that, a children's affair. Our three year old delightedly tailed after Winnie, Eeyore and other Pooh characters who wandered about the children's area, compliments of Sears. Stories, mime, theater, lectures, animals, puppets, crafts demonstrations — all were open to the curiosity and excitement of the hundreds of kids and adults who jammed the library on that Saturday.

But the real star of the day was the building itself. Can a building make you feel good? Yes. We've all had the experience of entering a building and sensing immediately that the building is sharing with us, in a personal way, its soul and its identity. I've felt that way in, for instance, the Hermitage in Leningrad, the Metropolitan Museum in New York (especially when ascending the great staircase) and the New York State Theater in Lincoln Center (notwithstanding the impersonality which some planners and architects ascribe to the Lincoln Center complex.)

Albuquerque's new library, though constructed on a much smaller scale than these buildings, makes me feel good. As I wandered around the three levels in March, I couldn't help but silently compare the library to the Convention Center. (The library is everything the Convention Center is not — human, warm and inviting.)

(It's more than just the familiar look of books on the shelves.) The paintings and lithographs delight the eye. The bright furniture invites sitting and sprawling. (Even the wide staircases are designed with real legs and feet in mind.) Stevens, Mallory, Pearl & Campbell (the architects) must really like people; they've given us a building true to us as well as to their materials and architectural concepts.

The new building gives you differing perspectives of the world and your place in that world. At one moment, you are part of the quiet intensity of intellectual work. At the next moment, as you step into a lounge area, you are figuratively thrust through the giant windows into Albuquerque's busy urban scene.

If you're on the third floor, you get a bird's eye view of the city's ever-changing skyline set dramatically against the New Mexico landscape. If you're on the main level, you have a more mundane and homey view of the auto and pedestrian traffic on the street.

The building keeps you aware of the contrast between the interior and exterior environments, while it imparts to you a sense of yourself in those environments.

—On that rainy Saturday of the Grand Opening, the library was full of people, and that heightened

the excitement about the new building. Everyone was pleased as punch, and not a few citizens, including library director Alan Clark, walked around with silly grins on their faces.

The crowds reminded me that this branch, in the heart of the city, is an urban facility, that this library, with its newly widened range of community services, offers a public experience. The library opening brought home again the idea that the richness of city life derives from happenings and interpersonal relationships which simply are not possible in suburban or rural life and which enlarge one's vision of the world and self.

There are some who worry that "undesirables" from Central Avenue might intrude on the splendor of the downtown branch. But here is one who recalls her college days and the characters who haunted the New York Public and Columbia libraries. Those street scholars included some who actually read in the libraries and many who just used the reading rooms as convenient shelters. They caused no harm and added a bit of variety to the otherwise drab academic types who are often found in libraries. In any case, I hope no one chases out the grandfathers who now sit in the sun on Central Avenue but who just might find the library a more pleasant place to gather.

The new library tells us the direction we should be heading in. It proves that we can have truly exciting and beautiful modern buildings right here in River City — assuming we choose the right architects.

We have done it folks! We really have something to celebrate on the corner of 6th and Copper. All of us lucky people who live and/or work downtown are the chief beneficiaries. To those of you on Albuquerque's frontier — eat your hearts out! Or, better yet, try taking the bus downtown to visit the library. There's a stop just a block away.

**Cathy Robbins**

Executive Secretary, Albuquerque Art League

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