

GYO OBATA AND THE WORK OF HOK: Renowned Designer to Address Design Conference

by Steven C. Yesner, AIA



Gyo Obata, founder, CEO and design leader of Hellmuth Obata Kassabaum. Below left: King Khaled Airport, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Below right: King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

HELLMUTH, OBATA & KASSABAUM, familiarly known as HOK, is one of the five largest architectural design firms in the U.S., headquartered in St. Louis, with offices in Dallas, Houston, Kansas City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, New York, Washington, D.C., Tampa, Denver, London and Hong Kong. It is recognized internationally for the scope of its projects and diversity of its practice, which includes architecture, engineering, interior design, landscape architecture, graphic design, facility programming and computer-aided design.

Gyo Obata, FAIA, is chairman, president and chief executive officer of HOK, Inc. Beyond his administrative duties, he establishes the fundamental design direction for the firm, working closely with the designers of each office to develop and refine projects to their final form.

Obata will give the keynote address at the 1988 Santa Fe Design Conference. While he is in New Mexico, he will undoubtedly take the opportunity to visit HOK's current project in Albuquerque, the BetaWest mixed-use development next to Civic Plaza.

Growth of a Corporate Giant

Obata comes from a long line of Japanese classical artists. His father, who was a professor of art at the University of California in Berkeley, introduced the traditional *sumi-e* style of painting to the West Coast. His mother did the same thing for *ikebana*, the Japanese art of flower arranging.

Obata studied at Berkeley, Washington University in St. Louis and Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, completing degrees in architecture and urban design. After serving in the U.S. Army in World War II, he worked in the Chicago office of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill and as an assistant to Minoru Yamasaki in Detroit before joining George Hellmuth's firm in the early 1950s. In 1955, he helped found HOK as Principal-in-Charge of Design.

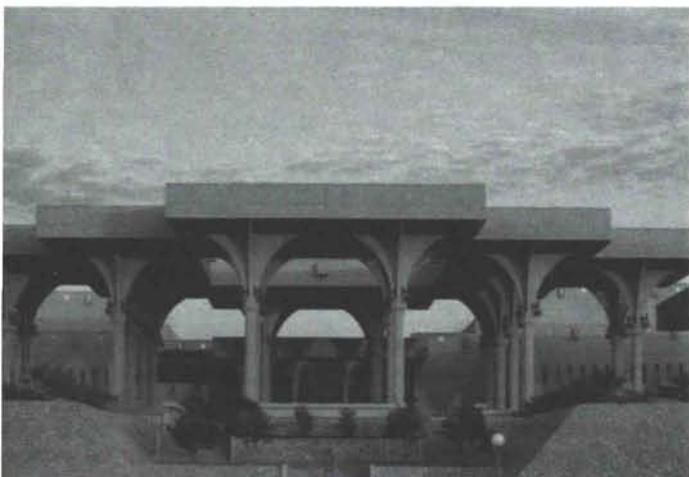
From a staff of 26 and projects once concentrated in the Midwest, HOK has grown to an organization of about 800 employees with commissions all over the world, including office buildings and corporate headquarters, criminal justice facilities, mixed-use and retail complexes, research and development laboratories, transportation facilities, education complexes, health care facilities, athletic facilities, hotels and conference centers.

HOK also has several historic property rehabilitation projects to its credit, such as St. Louis Union Station designed by Link and Millet in 1891, New York City's Murphy Center (formerly the Municipal Asphalt Plant) designed by Kahn and Jacobs in 1944, and an addition to the Dulles Airport Terminal Building designed by Saarinen in 1960. In addition, HOK now markets its own copyrighted CADD software through a subsidiary service corporation to other A/E firms.

Along the way, Obata and HOK have developed an affinity for superlatives, particularly in terms of size, boasting design of the largest data processing facility (McDonnell Douglas Automation Co.), the largest column-free exhibit space (Moscone Convention Center), the largest construction project (King Saud University), and the most popular museum (National Air and Space Museum).

HOK's Philosophy of Design

And yet Obata's designs are widely recognized for their human-scaled detailing. His design philosophy is to "solve prob-



lems posed by the space needs of people, and go beyond pure function to provide spaces which will enhance the lives of their occupants." He does this by considering the needs of people first, then designing "from the inside out". His multi-disciplinary approach is directly related to the micro-to-macro philosophy espoused by Eliel Saarinen, with whom he studied at Cranbrook.

Obata's best known projects include the National Air and Space Museum for the Smithsonian Institution (1976), the low-rise Levi's Plaza corporate headquarters in San Francisco (1982), the 2400-acre campus of King Saud University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (1984) and the mammoth St. Louis Union Station renovation (1985). Other notable projects designed under his direction include the Dallas Galleria (1977), the underground Moscone Convention Center in San Francisco (1981), the Houston Galleria (1983), King Khaled Airport in Riyadh (1983), Kellogg Co. headquarters in Battle Creek (1985), BP America /SOHIO headquarters in Cleveland (1986) and the Taipei World Trade Center in Taiwan (1988).

Obata has received hundred of design awards, including citations from the American Institute of Architects and the General Service Administration, the Institute of Business Designers, the Urban Land Institute and the Federal Design Council.

At age 65, he is a grandfather and passionate gardener as well as globe-trotting architect and corporate executive. His drive seems undiminished. "I do a lot of designing on airplanes," he says, "because there are no disturbances and you can become totally immersed in a project and work on an idea."



National Air & Space Museum, on the Mall, Washington, D. C.

DEVELOPERS AND ARCHITECTS: A CASE STUDY

Interview by Steven C. Yesner, AIA

Trammell Crow: "Value for the Long Term"

From its beginning in Texas forty years ago, Trammell Crow Company has become one of the most successful developers of office buildings, shopping centers and industrial parks in the U.S. today, with over 60 companies nationwide and 7 billion dollars in assets.

Paul Silverman, Area Partner for the New Mexico/West Texas division, characterizes the company as investment builders who develop and manage properties to hold for the long term rather than resale. "We consider ourselves a marketing company more than a real estate company," Silverman says. "We're not looking for cheapest, but most efficient, functional and pleasant; to provide the greatest value for the long term."

He points to the company's first warehouse property at 101 Cole Street in Dallas, which Trammell Crow built in 1948 and still owns, as an example. "Trammell installed windows, planted trees and put the docks behind the building," explains Silverman. "At the time, these things were unheard of."

Trammell Crow first attracted national attention for the Embarcadero development in San Francisco, designed in association with John Portman. The project used an atrium design which Portman had previously reintroduced into the lexicon of commercial buildings, but more importantly, began Trammell Crow's involvement with "big name" architecture. The affair was consummated in the mid 1980s with Trammell Crow Center (formerly LTV Center) in Dallas, designed by Skidmore Owings and Merrill, which Silverman calls the company's "first building with great architecture."

