

Echoes of the Past, Visions for the Present

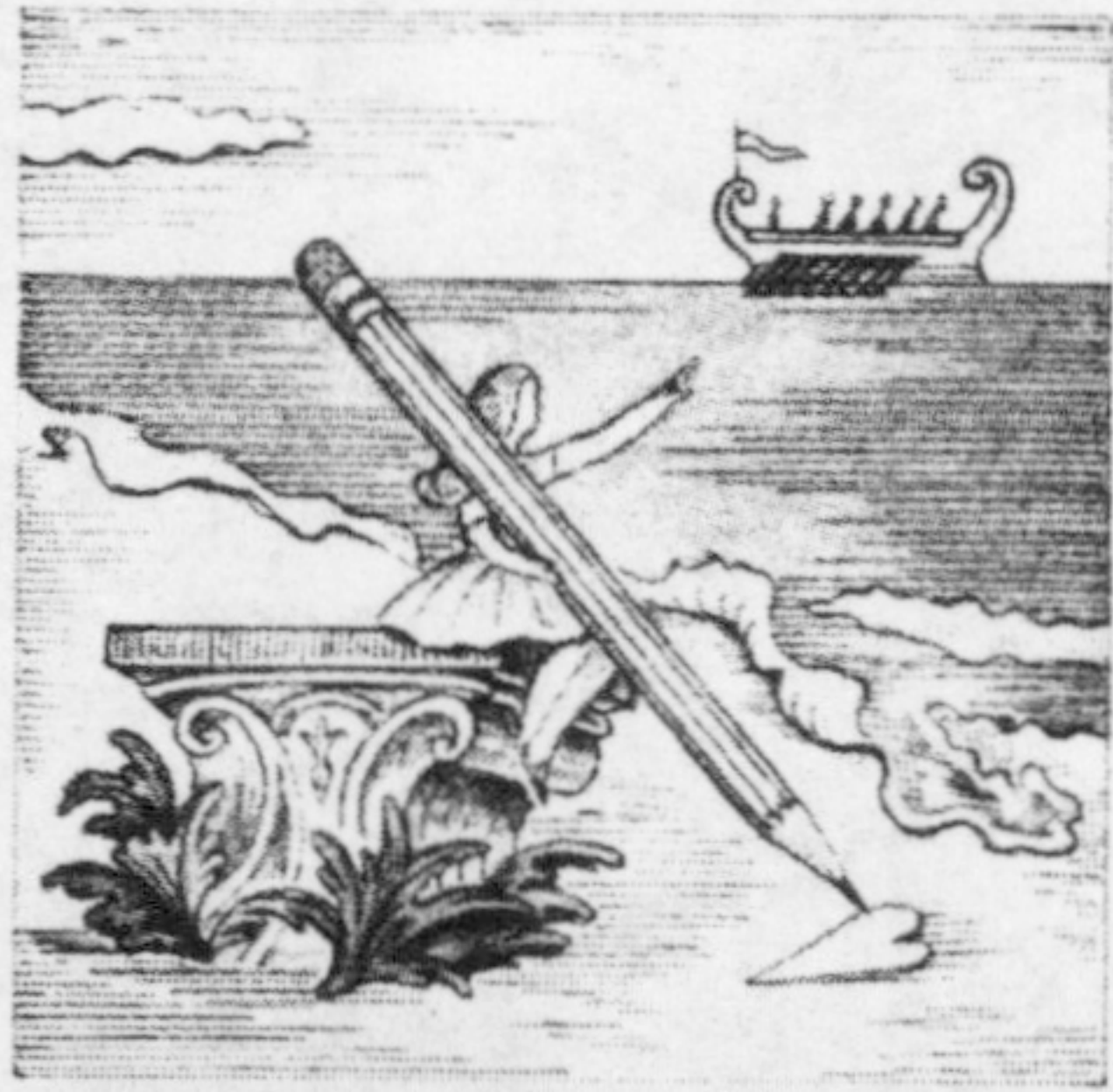
From skyscrapers to bed linens, the year's finest work refines and adapts tradition

Are abstraction and severity coming back? Is postmodernism on the wane? Both and neither. Postmodern quotations of the past have become such an accomplished fact in design that facile bits of pseudo antiquity—a Corinthian capital here, a granite sheathing there—no longer seem inherently interesting or worthy. Designers must now do more.

Of the best work of 1987, the echoes of the past are confident and highly refined, accommodated to idiosyncratic, richly imagined personal visions or the particular circumstances of a project.

Architect Cesar Pelli's firm is among two or three producing consistently fine, thoughtful skyscrapers. The latest are part of Pelli's \$1.5 billion World Financial Center on the southern tip of Manhattan. The two handsome granite-and-glass towers, substantially completed during 1987, with their distinctive copper tops—one a stepped pyramid, the other a dome—give the downtown skyline a neighborly dash and civility that the mean towers of the 1970s never attempted. Pelli's designs are just dramatic enough; bombast, the besetting sin of skyscrapers, is held in check.

The tiny Princeton University site on



BEST OF '87

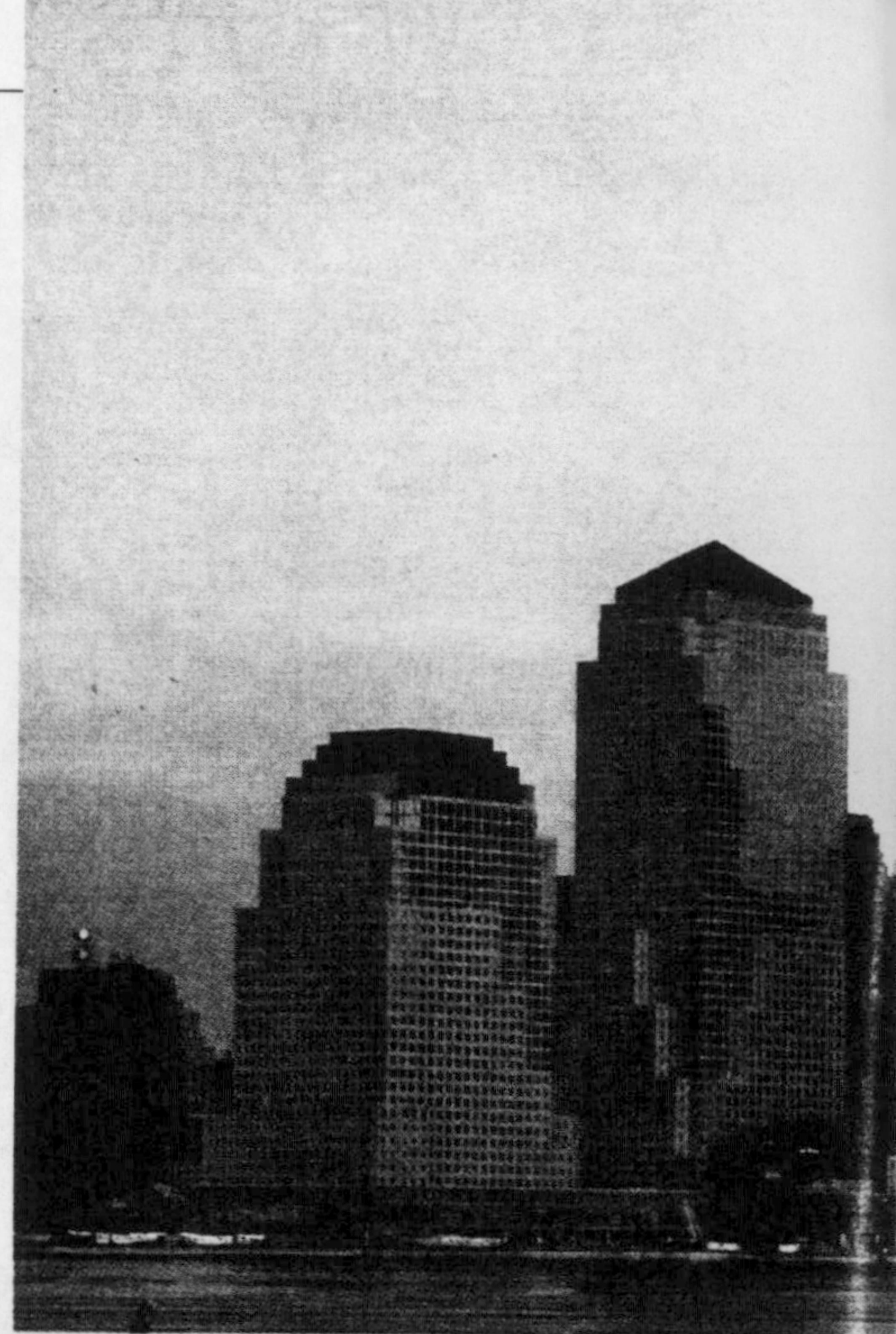
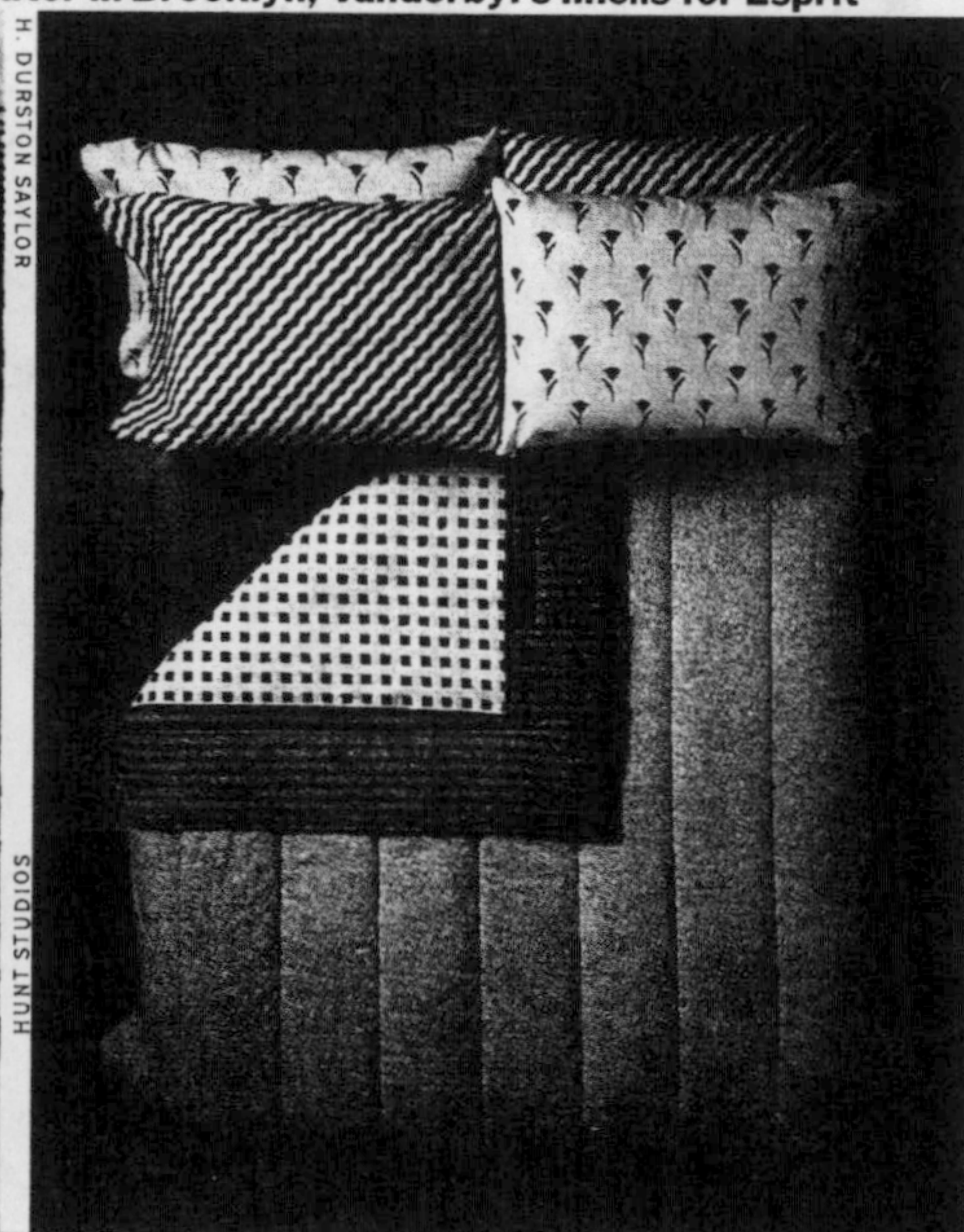
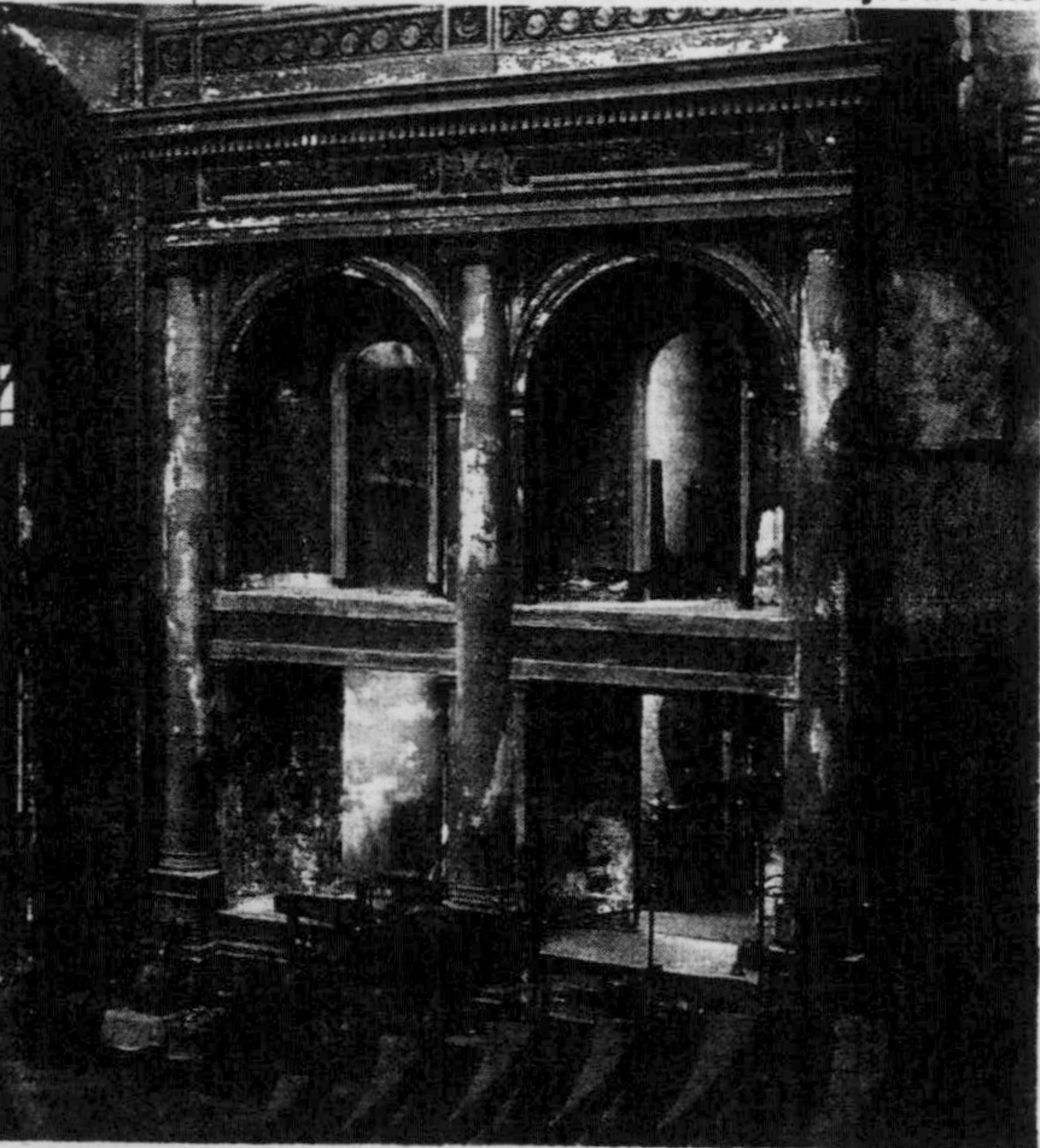
which Architect Tod Williams was required to build hardly allowed for expressive swagger, let alone bombast. His 10,000-sq.-ft. Feinberg Hall, housing for 40 students, is a scrupulously detailed, 80-ft.-high brick tower wedged between a 1950s dormitory and a neo-Gothic building from the 1920s. With economy and formal precision, Williams has proved that a

campus building can be contextual without mimicking its neighbors and dignified without being dull.

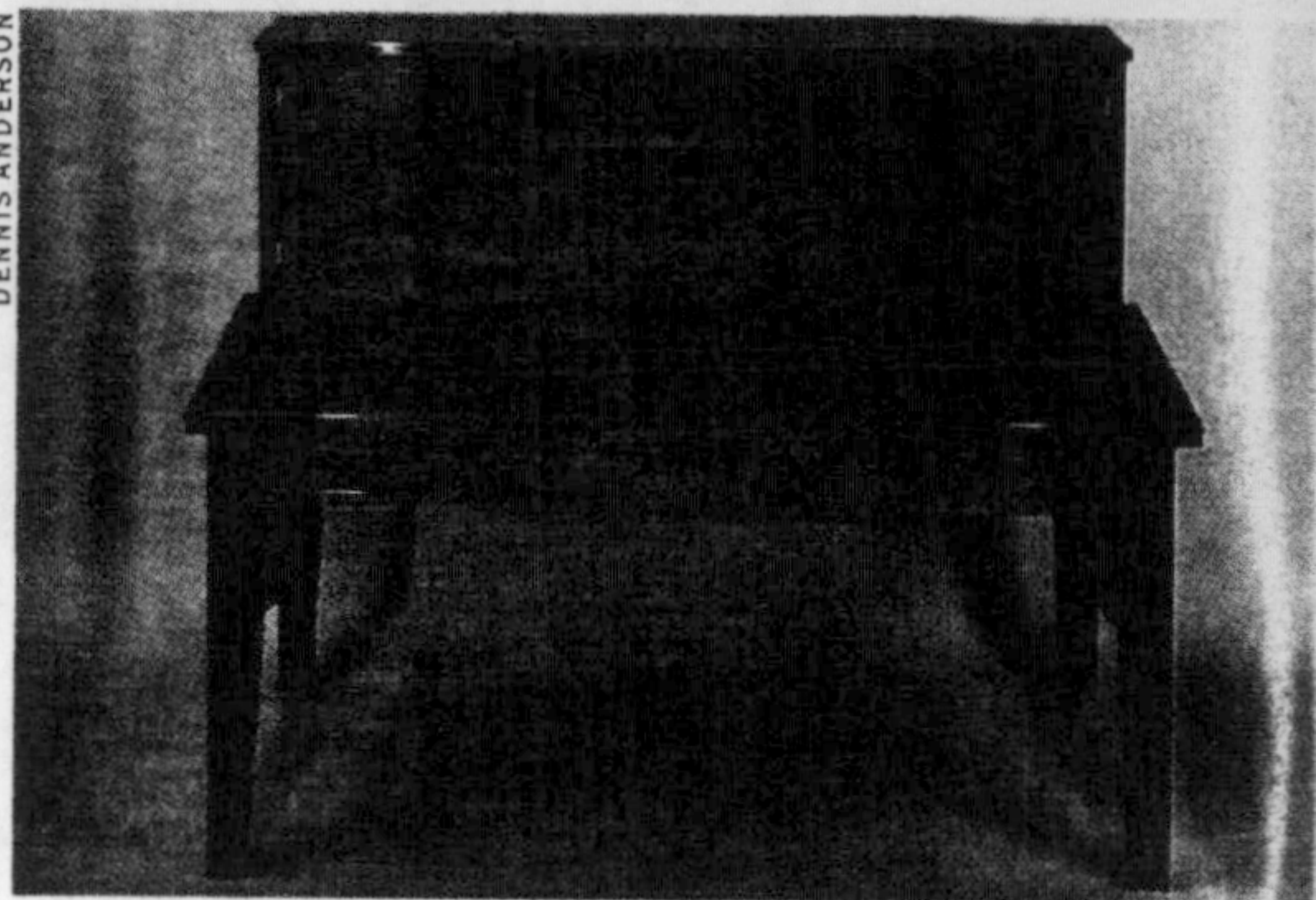
For a new subway station in Boston's 19th century Back Bay neighborhood, the firm of Kallmann McKinnell & Wood had room to soar. The 45-ft.-high wooden arches are structural but also form decorative ribs for the main, vaulted space of the station. With daylight sifting down from the clerestory windows above, the traditional grandeur of railway terminals is convincingly evoked.

Seldom has the theater of travel and technology been so extravagantly expressed, however, as in Helmut Jahn's giddy, glamorous \$500 million passenger terminal for United Airlines at Chicago's O'Hare Airport. The get-a-load-of-this constructivism that Jahn has always favored—steel beams and trusses aggres-

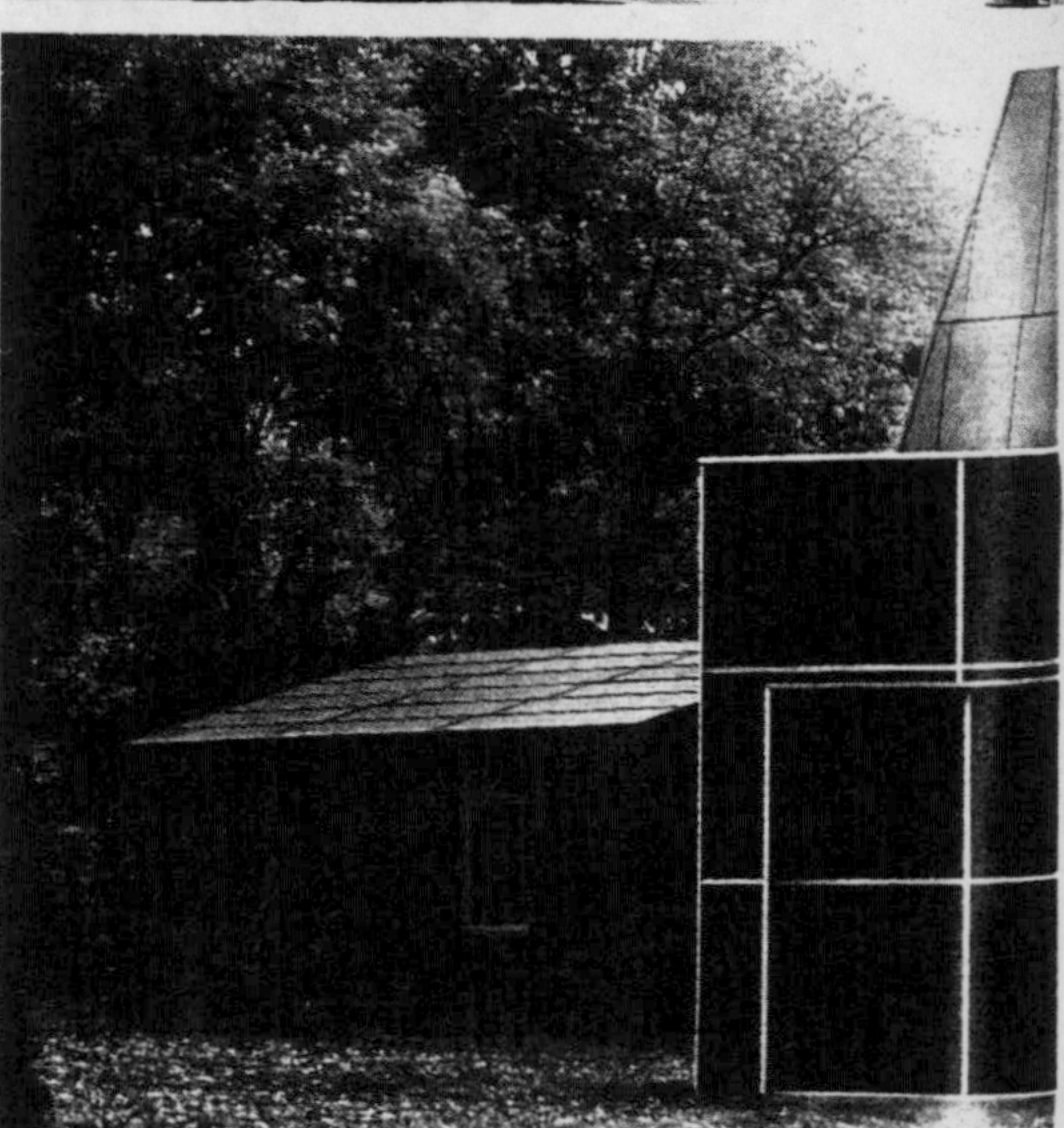
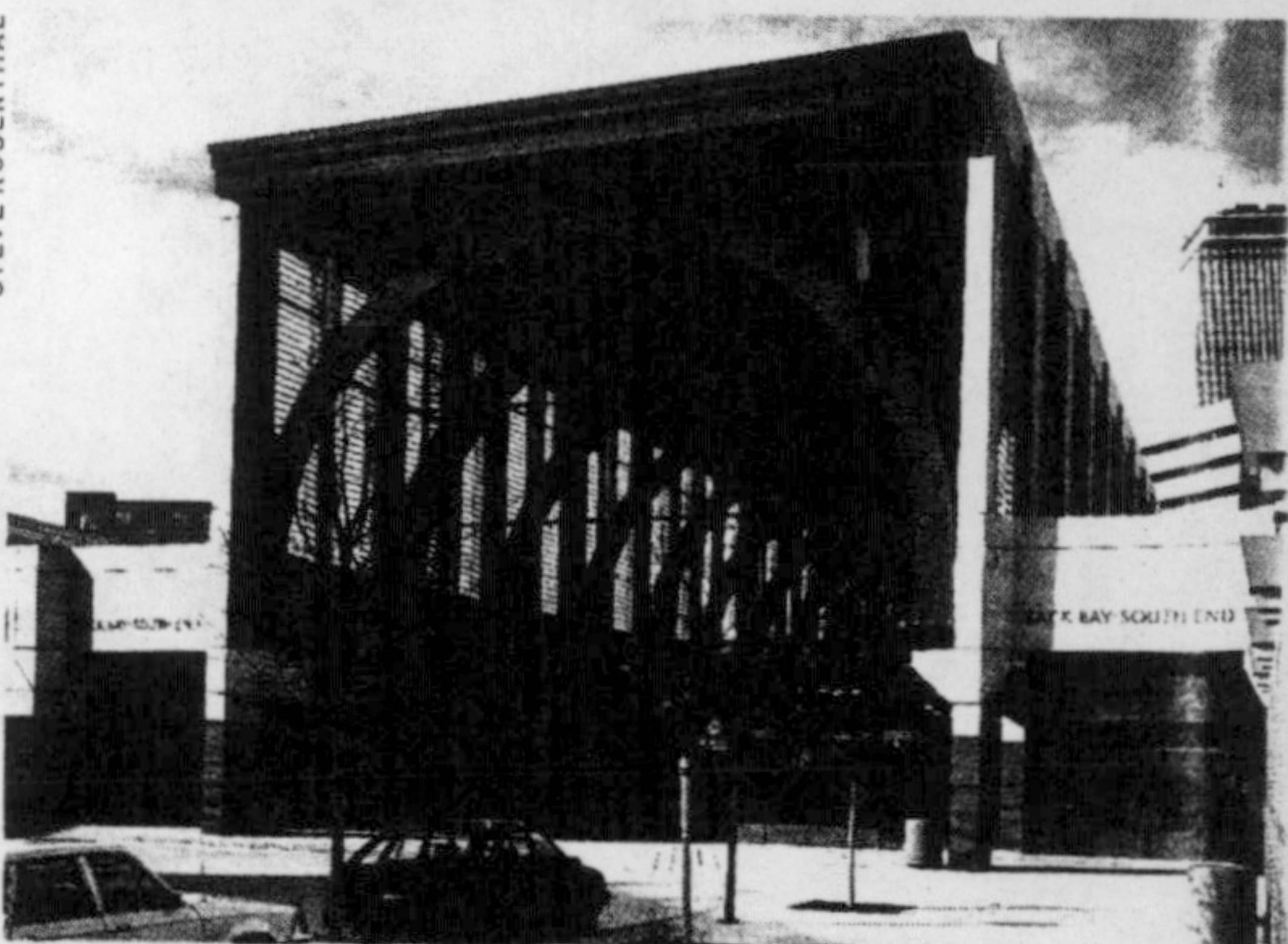
The deliberate desuetude of the Majestic Theater in Brooklyn; Vanderbyl's linens for Esprit

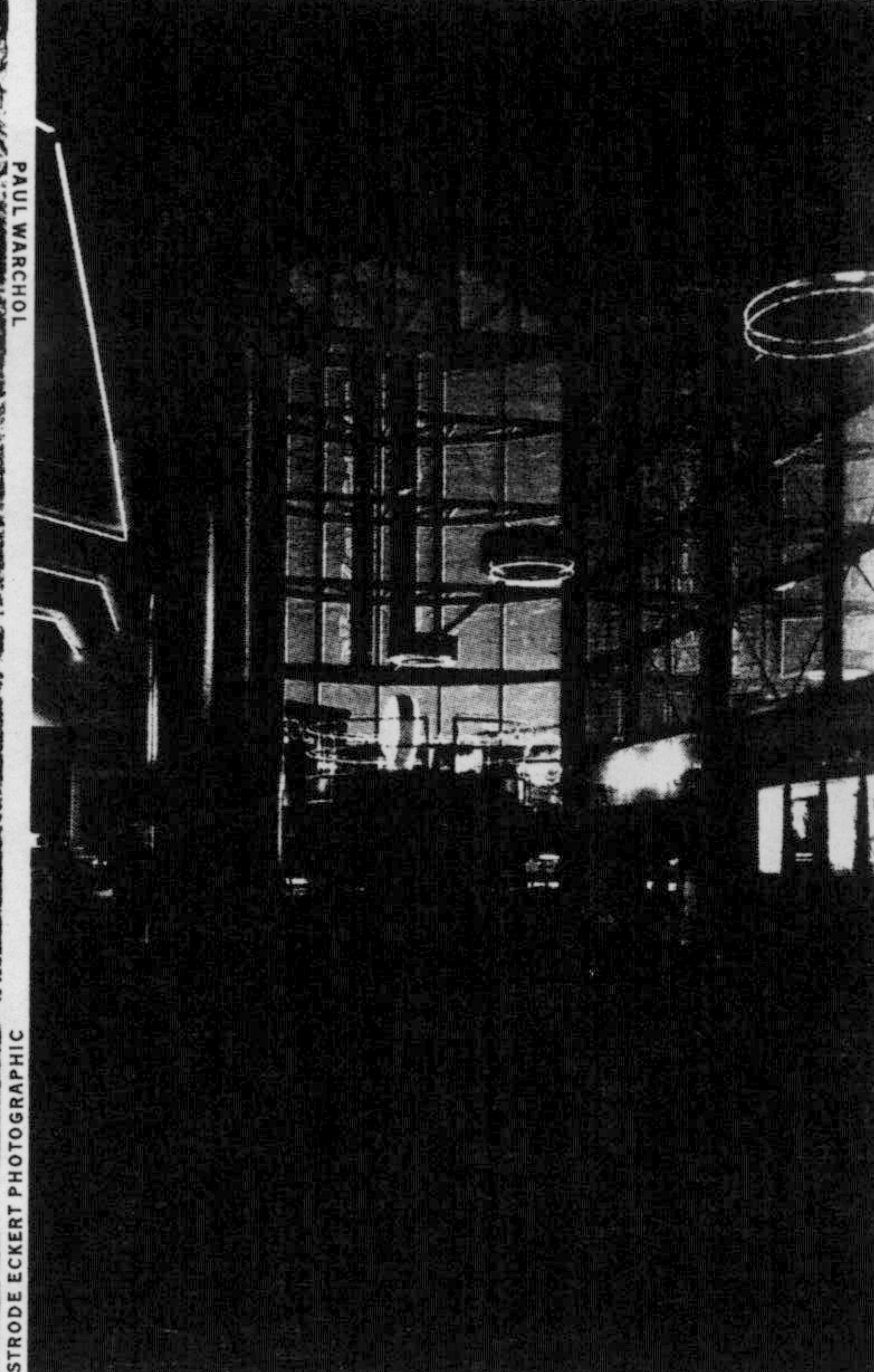
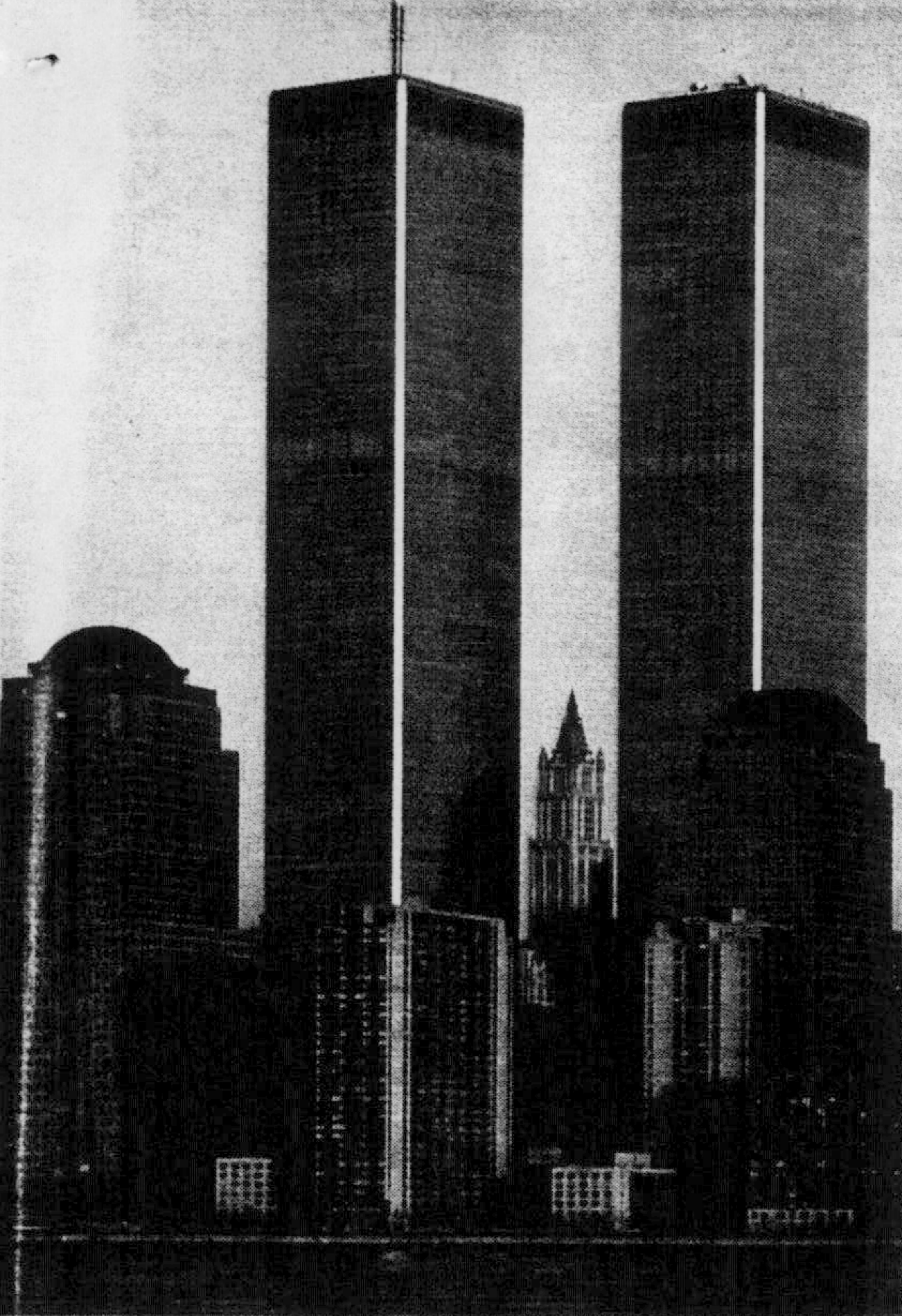


DENNIS ANDERSON



STEVE ROSENTHAL





JAKE RAJIS

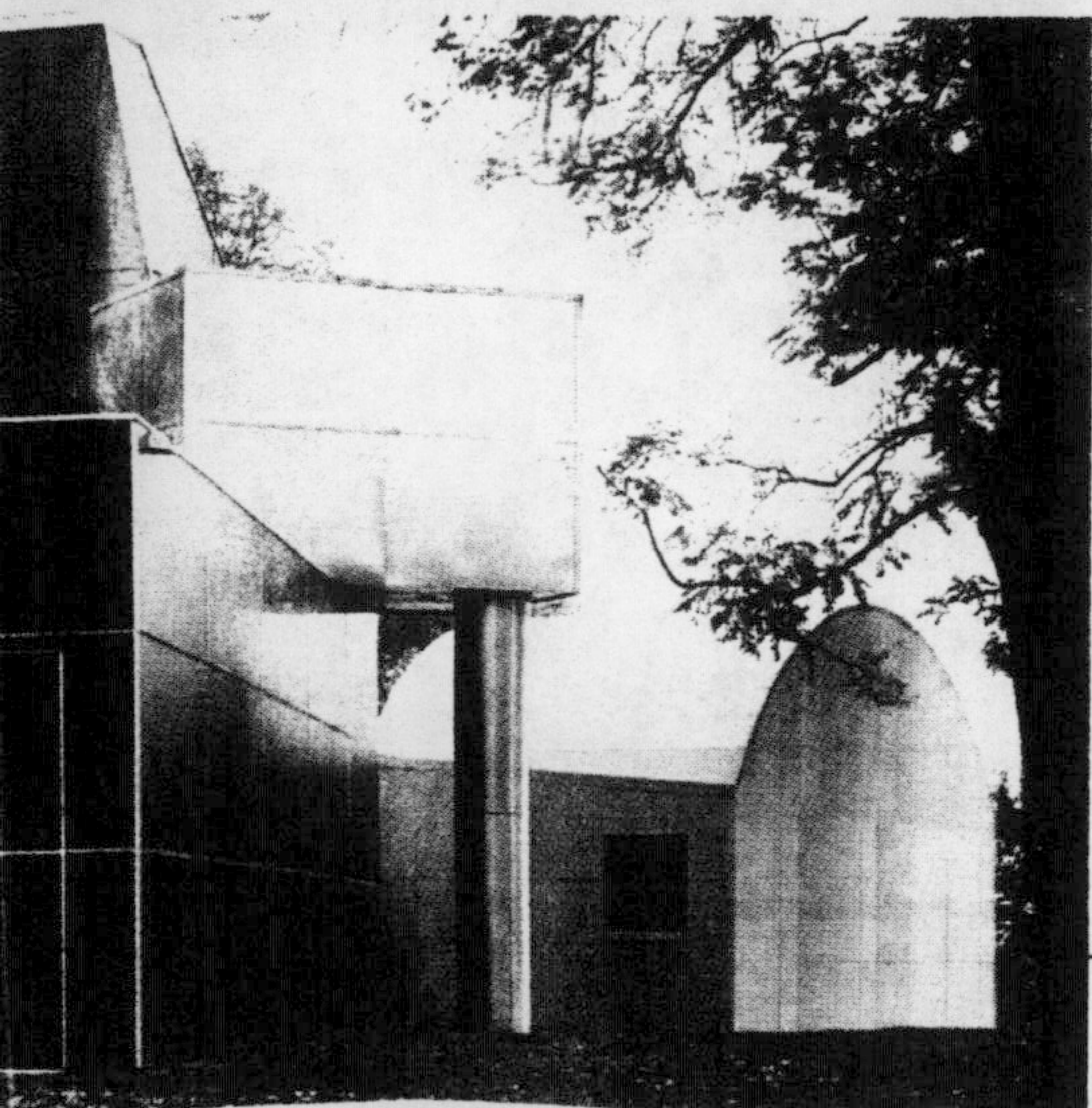
PAUL WARCHOL

STRODE ECKERT PHOTOGRAPHIC

Above, from left: Pell's towers in lower Manhattan, Princeton's Feinberg Hall, the Lloyd Center Cinemas in Portland, Ore. At left, clockwise: Alexander's desk, the United Airlines terminal at O'Hare Airport, lakeside guesthouse in Wayzata, Minn., and Boston's Back Bay subway station



TIMOTHY HURSELEY



MICHAEL MORAN

sively exposed, a riot of glass—is disciplined here by structural simplicity (the main spaces are barrel vaults) and a highly ingenious site plan. Jahn has produced an oxymoron: a fun airline terminal.

A splendid counterexample to typical modern movie theaters—dreary shoe boxes anonymously stuck in shopping malls—is the Lloyd Center Cinemas in Portland, Ore., designed by BOOR/A architects. The exterior is playful and polychrome; the main entrance hall is a larger-than-life glass-and-steel shed; and, for once, a virtue is made of multiplexity: the ten theaters are strung along an interior boulevard, each with its own distinct neon marquee.

Frank Gehry's buildings are still self-conscious and perverse, but they no longer set out to disturb. Tranquillity and polish are now permitted. For a lakeside guesthouse in Wayzata, Minn., Gehry has created a kind of mixed-media outdoor sculpture. Each room is a distinct object: the living-dining room is a central tower, a bedroom is a curve of local stone, and so on. The forms are vaguely toylike (befitting rooms intended to house the visiting children and grandchildren of the owners), or like the extraterrestrial outpost of puckish, inventive earthlings.

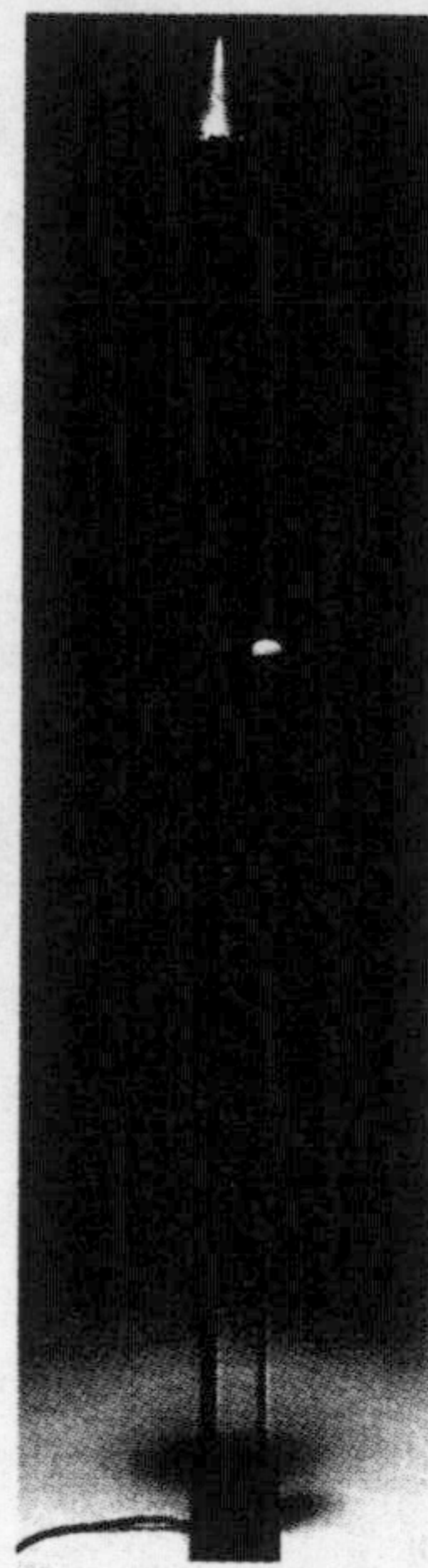
The Majestic Theater of the Brooklyn Academy of Music is puckish too, but in a different

way. An abandoned turn-of-the-century beaux arts vaudeville hall, it has been transformed into a performance space (and folly) in which Avant-Garde Director Peter Brook could present his 9½-hour epic, *The Mahabharata*. The firm of Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer Associates has implanted modern plumbing and electrical systems but otherwise has maintained the look of desuetude: chipped plaster and peeling paint, exposed beams and brickwork. The Piranesianism is a bit coy, maybe, but more affecting than much standard spic-and-span preservation.

San Francisco Graphic Designer Michael Vanderbyl looks to Europe for inspirational rigor. The checkerboard fields and two-tone corded trim of Vanderbyl's bed linens for Esprit recall Josef Hoffmann. The palette (peach, delft, ash) is sober and cool, Wiener Werkstätte monochrome given a pastel California ruddiness. Vanderbyl sheets would go nicely in a Christopher Alexander house. Alexander, a Berkeley architect and urban theorist, has lately turned his militantly humanist attentions to office furniture. No workstations or open plans for him. Instead, Alexander and his colleagues have designed mass-production desks and bookcases that are solid and reassuringly old-fashioned, classic but not hokey.

In the Strala, Scot Laughton and Tom Deacon have created an impossibly pretty, thoroughly thought-out floor lamp. It has steel tubes finished in black epoxy; the conical shade is spun aluminum; the green spherical on-off dimmer switch is patinated brass. The result is a lamp that alludes serenely to light—the moon and the sun—without fuss or frill.

—By Kurt Andersen



WILLIAM DEACON

The Strala lamp