Recommissioning Saarinen
Reconsidering The Former US Embassy
In Oslo, Norway
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Photo of the studio group taken from inside the Embassy, November 2013.
Acknowledgments

The studio wishes to thank all of the contributors and critics who greatly enriched this semester’s exploration of the adaptive reuse of Eero Saarinen’s US Embassy in Oslo, Norway. Among these, we must thank Kim Dubois, Public Affairs Officer at the US Embassy, Oslo, who generously hosted the studio during our mid-semester visit to Oslo. We also wish to thank Jane Loeffler, historian and author of *The Architecture of Diplomacy*, for prefacing the project within a broader history of the distinguished fleet of mid-century US embassy buildings. Donald Albrecht and Jayne Merkel provided invaluable references on the history of the life and work of architect Eero Saarinen, and Nina Rappaport walked us through examples of successful adaptations of several of his buildings. The studio also greatly benefitted from a trip to the Saarinen archives at Yale University, numerous architectural office visits in Oslo, as well as from exceptional juries at both our mid-review in Oslo and our final review in New York City. Finally, the studio would like to thank critics Jorge Otero-Pailos and Craig Konyk for their thoughtful guidance and support throughout the semester, as well as the assistance of our studio TA, Zaw Lin Myat.
Year stone on the facade directly next to the front entrance.
Source: Yale University Manuscripts and Archives.
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Unplanned Obsolescence:  
Reconsidering the Former US Embassy in Oslo Norway  
by Craig Konyk

This Studio, jointly taught by Jorge Otero-Pailos and myself, looked at the question of what to do with architecturally significant Embassies designed by important mid-century architects once they have been decommissioned. How do you propose a new use and thus preserve a former US Embassy?

I think we can define what is happening to the US Consular facilities worldwide as a case of Unplanned Obsolescence: the missions that they once were designed for as open symbols of democracy have been severely challenged by recent security concerns.

Eero Saarinen (1910-1961) was a prolific architect. In a short 11-year professional career his office produced some of the most iconic Mid Century American architectural works. He died of a brain tumor at the age of 51. His connection to his Chancellery work began during World War II when Saarinen did a design for FDR’s War Room. This led to the dual commissions of Oslo and London, with its enormous gilded bald eagle sculpted by Theodore Roszak.

The United States Chancellery in Oslo Norway was completed in 1959. A black labradorite-clad triangular form, architecturally it is the older cousin of Saarinen’s 1965 CBS Headquarters Building in New York (nicknamed “The Black Rock”) as well as the limestone clad US Embassy in London, completed by Saarinen in 1960. Sited across from the Royal Palace in Oslo’s central Vika District, it was funded by the Norwegian Government to satisfy Lend Lease obligations to the US from World War II.

The site is a difficult one for a Chancellery Building; it is triangular and with a broad face toward the Royal Palace Gardens. Saarinen’s solution was to embrace the triangle and create a three-sided office building wrapping a four story atrium. The exterior of the building is a precast system of labradorite aggregate concrete frames, assembled into a structural curtain wall.

The central atrium has a small reflecting pool and Saarinen designed benches. Mahogany slats screen the balconies and alternating white
brickwork covers the core wall. In fact, entry was made here into the very heart of the Chancellery. The skylight is a folded pre-parametric faceted plane with light illuminated edges. Free access for Norwegians to an upstairs public library as well as film screenings in a small theater below were offered in the spirit of cultural ambassadorship.

It seems that many of Saarinen’s works have recently experienced “unplanned obsolescence”: his Embassies, Bell Labs, the TWA terminal at JFK. Ironically, with its black coloration and repetitive fenestration, the Chancellery has a somewhat fortress-like quality, which was only reinforced post-9/11 to include the real fortification of bollards, barricades and a 3-meter high perimeter fence. It is now experiencing its unplanned obsolescence.

And so, as is the case with Saarinen’s London Embassy, the Oslo Embassy is likewise being decommissioned, with a replacement Embassy being planned. The Oslo replacement Embassy is designed by EYP Architects and is to be located in the Huseby residential district. Ground was broken for this new building in May of 2012, with a completion expected in 2015. Meanwhile discussions have begun as to what is the most suitable new purpose for the existing Saarinen Embassy Building, with ideas ranging from a new Police Headquarters to a US Cultural Center.

The 22 July 2012 Brievik bombing of the Norwegian Government Office Complex in central Oslo only reinforced the changing landscape of diplomatic missions. The sense is that nowhere now is safe from threat.

So the students where tasked with a brief to propose alternative uses (or perhaps better Re-Adaptive Uses) for the existing Saarinen Embassy that considered the multitude of issues that it exposes: the evolving role of US diplomatic presence, issues of security and surveillance, the projection of values that an architectural artifact embodies. What then should be the new role of this building in the current civic life of Oslo?

The students proposed a variety of alternatives for the Saarinen Embassy Building in Oslo, proving that creative architectural imagination might be the only thing between renewal and obsolescence if one desires to preserve the experimental nature and symbolic power of these structures.
Fifty years after the United States completed its most politically ambitious embassy construction program, designed by America’s best modernist architects, the State Department has embarked upon a new program with equal potential to transform the world’s perception of American architecture. Through its Overseas Building Operations (OBO), the US government is quietly selling off its modernist embassies to the highest bidder, and using the money to build new, larger, and more heavily protected structures. The majority of new buildings built since 2001, having been designed with a single-minded focus on security, aspire to be as impervious as Guantanamo, and indeed the two can also be compared in terms of their lack of architectural distinction.

The decommissioning and sale of the old embassies, many of which are masterpieces of American midcentury modernism, are consistent with the State Department’s general disregard for architectural culture. However, in foreign countries with strong preservation administrations, measures are being put in place to protect decommissioned US embassies from demolition, and to adapt them to new uses. These adaptations offer creative opportunities for architects to redefine American architecture abroad, and to provide a counter-narrative to the over-determined expression of new embassies as strongholds. To read these two narratives side by side requires that we expand the definition of architectural creativity, beyond the normative notion that it requires making new buildings, to include the possibility of creating contemporary architecture from existing buildings.

Save for the brief exceptional period, between 1948 and 1960, when modernist embassies were built, the US has not considered architecture a major diplomatic asset. Today, the Department of State views architecture primarily as a target for terrorism and a diplomatic liability. The US government, under constant public pressure to appear thrifty, has a long record of painting architecture as an unnecessary expense. From the origins of the republic to the early twentieth century, the US did not have a building program abroad. Decisions about where to house embassies and consulates were often left to the personal taste of US diplomats, who were also expected to pay for their own residences and offices. Ambassadors were predictably wealthy individuals who could afford the
Public Architecture after America’s Withdrawal:  
On the Preservation of U.S. Embassies  
by Jorge Otero-Pailos

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U.S. Office

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1. Notable exceptions are the highly refined architectural designs by Kieran Timberlake and Tod Williams Tsien Architects for US embassies in London and Mexico City respectively.
abroad. Decisions about where to house embassies and consulates were often left to the personal taste of U.S. diplomats, who were also expected to pay for their own residences and offices. Ambassadors were predictably wealthy individuals who could afford the honor of representing their country. Their architectural choices were regarded, at least within Government, more as a reflection of their personal refinement than as symbols of America. Lower ranking Consuls, who handled passports, visas, and other such transactions, were often businessmen of more limited means working abroad. They also had to provide their own offices, but were allowed to pay themselves a salary through the collection of fees. The situation changed in the early twentieth century with the passing of Lowden Act (1911), which provided a modest yearly budget of half a million dollars a year for the State Department to purchase or build embassies. The Porter Act (1926) doubled the yearly budget and established the Foreign Service Buildings Commission (FSBC) to select sites, set priorities, and create an architectural policy for diplomatic buildings.2

In general, the FSBC defaulted to buying existing buildings, mostly aristocratic palaces, large enough to house ambassadorial and consular offices under one roof. When new buildings were necessary, the Commission at first tasked architects to design in the local palatial style, following the example of Frank Packard’s U.S. Embassy in Rio de Janeiro (1923), a sober Portuguese neo-Colonial styled palace, or J.E. Campbell’s Spanish Revival Embassy in Mexico City (1925). One of the FSBC’s most prominent construction projects was the U.S. Embassy in Paris (1929-32), designed by the New York firm of Delano & Aldrich. A contextual palace that expressed reverence for the surrounding architecture of the Place de la Concorde and the French Beaux-Arts style, the building lacked any reference to the transformations that the Beaux-Arts underwent in American cities like Chicago, St. Louis or New York.

In other words, when the U.S. started building its embassies, it was not a given that they should appear overtly American in architectural expression. Certainly, buildings had to appear dignified, but government officials did not immediately recognize architecture as an instrument of national representation. In part, this had to do with the fact that, technically speaking (and governmental discourse is particularly technical), an embassy is a group of people, not a building. The word embassy denotes the mission or deputation sent by one state

into another to represent it. An embassy can be theoretically housed anywhere, but in practice the building must meet certain criteria. Its physical location must be aligned with the country’s political ambitions. Historically FSBC typically tried to locate U.S. embassies in the center of cities, next to other embassies, to convey the sense that the U.S. was one among many powerful nations.

The head of the embassy is of course the ambassador, a title that derives from the Latin ambactus, meaning servant. Ambassadors are civil servants whose principal service is to represent their country’s government before foreign governments. They stand at the political threshold between the State’s inside and its outside, transferring messages to and fro. Their mode of representation is verbal, not visual. Ambassadors are trained to think that their words represent the State, not the style of the room in which they happen to be sitting. They don’t conceive of their ability to represent the U.S. as being shaped by whether or not they have an “American-looking” architectural stage or not. So one can understand why building in an American style was not a priority.

**American Architecture**

The fact that U.S. Embassy buildings exist in wide array of architectural styles, from many different periods, suggests that the meaning and historical significance of U.S. embassies cannot be reduced to their mode of architectural expression. Chancery design has mostly followed the architectural styles in vogue. From the 1880s to the late 1920s, it was French Beaux-Arts. Then in the 1930s American architectural discourse became overtly nationalistic. Influential architects and historians, especially Talbot Hamlin and Fiske Kimball, stoked the idea that a distinctly American architecture had unfolded independent from Europe, although in dialogue with it. Suddenly, the French Beaux-Arts appeared foreign and affected, and Neo-Colonial styles came into vogue as autochthonous outgrowths of the first European settlers (thus Neo-Georgian in the East, and Neo-Plateresque or Spanish Revival in Florida and the Southwest). The assertion of Neo-Colonial styles as emblems of American-ness was a deeply political move. It hid deep anxieties among dominant WASP culture about the perceived fracturing social effects of massive immigration. J.D. Rockefeller Jr. experimented with architecture as a didactic instrument of cultural assimilation through his highly acclaimed restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, where he launched

pioneering education programs in the 1930s, to subtly teach visitors about Protestant ethics and values. Neo-Colonial became a common choice in practically every building type from federal post-offices to private residences. In turn, the FSBC adopted what was fashionable domestically as its model for building new embassies. Among the many examples of Neo-Colonial chanceries, Jay Morgan's design for American Consulate in Yokohama, Japan (1932) is one of the most overtly didactic: a replica of the White House. Interestingly, Neo-Colonial became such an over-determined emblem of American architecture that when the Grand Central Art Galleries, a private artists’ cooperative, commissioned Delano & Aldrich to design the U.S. Pavilion at the Venice Biennale (1930), they produced a scaled-down version of a Neo-Georgian plantation mansion.

Embassy construction expanded dramatically in the two decades after WWII due to a peculiar combination of domestic and foreign factors that have been thoroughly documented in Jane Loeffler's canonical history of that period. With decolonization and the Cold War came a struggle to solidify foreign allies and sway new non-aligned countries such as India, Egypt and others. U.S. diplomacy efforts expanded from restricted dialogue between diplomats to persuading the broader public of America's virtues. The United States Information Agency became a separate Agency in 1953 with a mission to engage in "public diplomacy." It exercised soft power through cultural initiatives and broadcasting programs such as the Voice of America. The USIA’s foreign arm, the United States Information Service (USIS) was...
attached to embassy missions, and imposed its own requirements, not only for extra office space, but also for a separate entrance, distinct from the traditional entrances for consular and ambassadorial services. It also demanded public amenities such as libraries and movie theaters where foreigners could come and learn about American culture and business opportunities. Under normal circumstances, the enormous cost of the new building program would have made its approval in Congress difficult. But Fredrick A. Larkin, the Chief of FBO, shrewdly found a way to use war debt to pay for the new construction, thus circumventing the need for tax dollars and Congressional oversight. They set up an independent Architectural Advisory Committee, which initially included Ralph Walker, Henry Shepley and Pietro Belluschi, to identify and select established and emerging architects for the dozens of commissions that had to be quickly awarded and built.

As in the 1930s, architects solved the question of how to represent America by building in the style that was domestically in vogue at the time: modernism. Mid-century chanceries were consistently modernist. Their outward resemblance to the corporate office buildings and State government centers built during the 1950s and 1960s begs the question of what architectural qualities defined mid-century modern U.S. embassies.

**Gates**

One of the defining characteristics of modern embassies was that they expressed a new engagement with the public. It is important not to confuse the change of style from Beaux-Arts to Modernism with this new commitment. Embassies have always been built in the prevalent style and in the postwar that was modernism. The modern style is certainly a common feature of postwar embassies, but their stylistic contemporaneity is actually an element of continuity rather than rupture with pre-war embassies. It is also important not to thoughtlessly assign the adjectives typically associated with modernism, such as openness and transparency, to the embassies. Modernist embassies had indeed more glass than Beaux-Arts designs, but the glass was not used to invite the public in by exhibiting the embassy's interiors to the street in the manner of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill's Manufacturers Hanover Bank (New York, 1953-54). Rather, larger operable windows were used conventionally to create better natural illumination and ventilation in offices that were heated but not cooled mechanically. For instance, Harrison & Abramovitz's US Embassy in Rio de Janeiro (1952) is relatively opaque at the ground level, with the
single repeated module. The entrances would be almost impossible to identify if it were not for the canopies floating in front of the façade. For the main ambassadorial entrance, he put a large white canopy supported by a central flagstaff on the center of the high street façade. The canopy carried the US flag above and a sculpture of the bald eagle below, which were the only outward national symbols in an otherwise anonymous office building. The central entrance led to a ceremonial diamond shaped atrium spanning the top four floors and topped by a faceted plaster roof framed in glass. The obvious solution would have been to put the other two entrances at the center of the other two sides, and to assign a different program to each edge of the building. But Saarinen rightly felt that tucking the other two entrances towards the back of the building would have diminished their symbolic importance. Instead, he moved them to each of the vertices flanking the main façade, so that all three are accessible from the high street. Only the ambassadorial entrance is visible in frontal elevation from the Royal Palace, but the other two are the first thing pedestrians see from the sidewalk approaching the building. Thus the building maintains an official face of ambassadorial diplomacy towards official government institutions, but also creates new openings for the public to enter the embassy. The USIS entrance was open during regular business hours to allow the public to enter and browse the library and it featured an open cafeteria and auditorium where American films would be regularly screened.

The open doors of postwar embassies were literal, not just visual effects. Today, that sort of access is unthinkable. The Oslo embassy is entirely closed off behind a continuous high fence. The two secondary entrances have been closed, and the building now can only be accessed through a single gate, a detached pavilion in front of the building with airport-like security. The plan is to sell the building and to follow OBO's general strategy to build isolated suburban embassies with single point access and on a site of sufficient size to set buildings back from the street beyond a hypothetical blast zone. OBO's argument is that moving US embassies from urban centers to suburban peripheries enables embassies to better keep their employees safe. The diminution in entrance gate requirements signals a profound change in how the State Department conceives its diplomatic office. We are back to a prewar definition of diplomacy as closed-door discussions among government officials. The public is tolerated for quick bureaucratic transactions, but no longer invited.

Eero Saarinen and Associates, USIS entrance to the chancery of the US Embassy in Oslo. Source: Yale University Manuscripts and Archives.

In order to ascertain the common characteristic features that represent the postwar turn towards the public in embassy design, we first must look to the client's brief, and only then turn to the individual solutions that each architect proposed for it. Prosaically, the Department of State required an increase in the number of public entrances, from one to three, in order to expand its connection to the public. Ambassadorial, consular, and USIS programs were each to have independent public access to the building. Each entrance, needless to say, represented separate but related aspects of American diplomacy. The matter-of-factness of the requirement has resulted in its centrality to the significance of postwar embassies to be underplayed, if not go entirely un-noticed. Critics and historians have instead emphasized the style of the buildings as their primary distinction. But as we shall see, embassy entrances are highly symbolic, and even operate as synecdoches for the entire embassy, as gates conceal, reveal and otherwise help negotiate between inside and outside, two realms that in speaking about diplomatic buildings cannot be reduced to interior and exterior, but must be recognized as entirely different political, social and economic realities.

Eero Saarinen’s tiny Oslo Embassy (1955-59), is one of the most
masterful solutions to the Department of State’s new postwar requirements. The required additional two entrances were to be symbolically secondary to the traditional ambassadorial grand entrance. Saarinen was given a triangular site, with one side on a high street across from Norway’s Royal Palace, and the opposing vertex a full story downhill. Saarinen followed the plot, designing a triangular five story building with a relentless precast black concrete and labradorite façade made of a single repeated module. The entrances would be almost impossible to identify if it were not for the canopies floating in front of the façade. For the main ambassadorial entrance, he put a large white canopy supported by a central flagstaff on the center of the high street façade. The canopy carried the US flag above and a sculpture of the bald eagle below—the only outward national symbols in an otherwise anonymous office building. The central entrance led to a ceremonial diamond shaped atrium spanning the top four floors and topped by a faceted plaster roof framed in glass. The obvious solution would have been to put the other two entrances at the center of the other two sides, and to assign a different program to each edge of the building. But Saarinen rightly felt that tucking the other two entrances towards the back of the building would have diminished their symbolic importance. Instead, he moved them to each of the vertices flanking the main façade, so that all three are accessible from the high street. Only the ambassadorial entrance is visible in frontal elevation from the Royal Palace, but the other two are the first thing one sees as pedestrians on the sidewalk approach the building. Thus the building maintains an official face of ambassadorial diplomacy towards official
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Chancery
The number and architectural expression of gates is of central importance in defining the character of an embassy building. Consider the fact that a major aspect of embassy work is to protect the gate. An embassy is a gatekeeping mission. This gate can be understood literally, as in the need to secure access to the building, but it also functions symbolically. An embassy regulates the official information to which foreign governments have access. The U.S. Government makes recourse to a precise architectural term, a chancel, to describe the symbolic gate that embassies must keep. The buildings where embassies conduct their daily office are formally called chanceries. In Christian religious architecture, the chancel is the part of the Church near the altar reserved for the clergy and separated from the public by a screened gate. Chancel comes from the Latin cancelli meaning grate or crossbars, and indeed such gates separated judges from the public in ancient Roman basilicas. The chancel is no ordinary gate. It divides two different orders of things: the sacred and profane, the forensic and the circumstantial, the domestic and the
anonyme

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foreign. In medieval Churches it separated Latin, the priestly language, from the vulgate anonyme—just as in Embassies it separates domestic from foreign languages. Significantly, the chancel had openings through the grating, symbolizing the possibility of communication. But communication was also dangerous, as contact between these two realities could be polluting. Any communication had to be highly mediated through a third party, the chancellor, whose job was to sit at the gate to control the flow and nature of messages, and where appropriate, carry them, that is translate them, from one side to the other. Today, chancellor can be an ecclesiastical, political, academic or institutional title. The chancery is the office of the chancellor, which in the case of U.S. Embassies is the Ambassador.

We can now refine the theory that embassies can be housed anywhere to include a caveat: so long as there are gates that can be guarded, allowing only authorized people and information to cross, and marking a relatively porous threshold between inside and outside. A chancery cannot officiate without a physical and symbolic chancel from which to regulate how outsiders access and perceive institutionalized power. Arguably, it need not look like a door. It could be any object, a canopy as in the Oslo example or an entire building. What matters is that it be recognized and treated like a gate behind which another set of rules applies. The symbolic power of the chancel derives from the privilege that receiving States grant embassies (i.e. the group of people) to be immune from the jurisdiction of local law. This treatment extends to the embassy’s objects: embassy cars are allowed to park illegally without being ticketed; diplomatic pouches are never opened at border crossings; and more importantly for our purposes, chanceries are granted extraterritorial status and are often exempt from certain local building codes. The chancery is a very special type of office: it objectifies, and therefore symbolizes, the possibility of communication across the chancel, between entirely different systems of law and government. How one enters and exits a chancery, who is invited and excluded, and the degree of porosity of the gate, not just visual but physical bodily access, is in sum the core architectural symbolic expression of diplomacy.

Desire
Even modern embassies were visually rather closed off from the street, even if architecturally they symbolized a diplomatic turn towards the
foreign public. Perhaps because they were relatively closed off, and especially because since 2001 they have been entirely off limits, the foreign public desires renewed access to these structures. The threat is that as the US Government vacates its modernist embassies the desire for access will result in attempts to impose our contemporary ideas of what a public-oriented building should be onto these structures. It is not unthinkable that their rather opaque facades will be “contemporanized” (not to use modernized) with transparent glass storefronts that force the interiors upon pedestrians. In most cases, this sort of exhibitionist adaptation will be tantamount to destroying the historic significance of the buildings. But in order to do justice to the old buildings, architects will have to rethink contemporary ideas of how notions of the public can be expressed architecturally—without relying on glass as a default, for being public is not necessarily being transparent, and is in fact often the opposite.

The vulnerable position in which modernist US embassies find themselves today cannot be overstated. When in 2009 the State Department agreed to sell the U.S. Embassy in London, designed by Eero Saarinen between 1956 and 1960, the architectural press expressed its shock, not at the divestment of the US government from an architectural masterpiece, as one would have imagined, but rather at the fact that it was sold to a Qatari developer and not to the London-based developer Chelsfield. Harry Weese’s Embassy in Accra (1955-59) was simply demolished and replaced with a building built (one cannot say designed) by Framaco International Inc., a construction management and procurement company that provides the US Government with “turnkey” solutions, in joint venture with

In one notable compensatory exception, the Department of State, through OBO’s new Excellence in Diplomatic Facilities initiative, seems to have committed to preserving one example of the United States’ modern architectural heritage: in 2013 they entrusted Ann Beha with the rehabilitation of the Athens Embassy by Walter Gropius and The Architect’s Collaborative (1956-61).  

Preservationists in some host countries have stepped in to try to safeguard the embassies that the Department of State is selling off. In anticipation of the sale of the London Embassy, English Heritage listed it as a Grade II building in the UK’s Statutory List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest, which will offer it some measure of protection against demolition, but not against radical alterations. In Oslo, the Byantikvar’s office has begun a dialogue with embassy officials to list Saarinen’s building as protected heritage—the trick being that they cannot offer legal protection to the building while the US remains the owner, as its property is technically not Norway. DoCoMoMo is lobbying to prevent the demolition of Marcel Breuer’s The Hague Embassy (1957-59), and seems to have persuaded at least the city’s Alderman for Culture, who would like to see it turned into a hotel and museum in time for 2018, The Hague’s year as Cultural Capital of Europe. But the fate of other extraordinary buildings such as John Johansen’s Embassy in Dublin (1956-64) is even less certain. What will be preserved, if anything, will be part of the buildings’ facades. The flags and the bald eagles will be removed for sure. The facades will be blamed for being too closed off, too gate-like, and in need of partial demolition to accommodate contemporary notions of public architecture. The interiors will be “adaptively reused,” which means that the buildings will be eviscerated of their characteristic spaces to serve new uses, like a hotel spa (do we really need another one?). All this will be done in the name of preserving the architecture. But what do we mean by architecture? The building and its architecture are related but not identical. Building satisfies need, architecture satisfies desire. Buildings are measured in quantities like square feet and dollars. Architecture is measured in qualities like spatiality, temporality, luminosity, memorability, publicity, diplomacy. For the architecture of U.S. Embassies to endure into their next function requires not just a mode of creativity bent on remaking everything in the image of contemporary taste, but also one that is focused on rekindling desire for alternative forms of public
architecture. The vanishing modernist US embassies can help us shape that new conception of public architecture. But this is a tall order, for in order to grasp their radical potential we need to transcend the contemporary view that the future is to be created in our image, and consider the possibility that some of its defining features are already in existence.
The US Embassy, Oslo
Historical Context

In 1947 the United States Government purchased a lot for its new Embassy at Drammensveien 2. Through a subsequent agreement with the Norwegian Government, however, it was decided to place the building on the triangular lot bounded by Drammensveien, Løkkeveien and Hansteen gate. The official ground breaking ceremony took place on February 10, 1957; the building was “under tak” for the “kranselag” celebration held on April 25, 1958; and the official opening ceremonies were held on June 15, 1959.

Built for the American Government under a contractual agreement with the Government of Norway, the project was planned and supervised by the Office of Foreign Buildings of the Department of State. In Oslo a building committee of representatives of both countries was appointed to oversee the construction of this joint Norwegian-American enterprise, including the then Norwegian Riks Architect and the Director General of the Norwegian Ministry of Finance.

The construction of the Embassy was paid for by the Norwegian Government from funds which accrued to the credit of the United States as a result of the Lend Lease settlement including the military relief program and the adjustment of wartime claims following World War II. A final settlement between the two governments took place with the delivery to the United States Government of title to the property at Drammensveien 18, together with the completed Embassy, in exchange for delivery to the Norwegian Government of the title to the property at Drammensveien 2. The construction costs were estimated to run approximately 9.5 million kroner (roughly $1.3 million at the time).

Source: http://norway.usembassy.gov
Sharp Debate: What Should an Embassy Be?

It should look American, yet suit its foreign setting, which poses a delicate problem.

By ADA LOUISE HUNTABLE

A NEW American embassy is about to open in London, graced by one of two prevailing points of view—by a gilded aluminum eagle with thirty-five-foot wingspan. The London Times considers the eagle in extremely bad taste. In the House of Commons, a Labor Member has demanded that local authorities "give it the bird." The cries, heard clearly overseas, have been anguished and anti-eagle.

The debate has been no more controversial than the building. A huge, 267-foot-long, strikingly modern structure in the internationally known Koenig-Stern manner, the new embassy has been called everything from a "cigarette factory" to a "Hollywood-Broadway influence," to a "wonderful mixture of elegance and guts."

These and other such arguments are making news around the world. For the London embassy is just one example of many state government building programs initiated six years ago, the results of which are now clearly visible abroad. This program has made modern architecture official American policy for all new embassies and consulates.

Under the direction of the State Department's Office of Foreign Buildings, the twenty-seven completed new structures, twenty-two projects in progress and twenty-nine design on the boards, cover more than fifty countries, representing one of the most stimulating and controversial groups of buildings of our time.

At home, however, the program has had its ups and downs. Up for renewal in 1959 (funds were last voted in 1951), it was passed in the Senate but failed to get the approval of the authorizing body in the House, a Foreign Affairs subcommittee headed by Representative Wayne L. Hays (D., Ohio). A man of strong personal tastes, Representative Hays has been increasingly antagonistic to the new ambassador "extreme modernistic design," and to the Foreign Buildings Office's dynamic director, William P. Hughes. At the moment, it seems unlikely that any new project will get past his aesthetic ire.

The debate abroad and the difficulties in Congress have focused attention sharply on the new buildings, and have also raised these two questions: First, what should an embassy be? And second, should the program be continued in its present form? An embassy building must meet two basic requirements. It must have what the State Department calls "a distinguishable American flavor." At the same time, it must take its place gracefully and harmoniously in its surroundings. In a world increasingly sensitive to American power and wealth, this calls for being diplomatic.

Moreover, the practice of modern overseas government buildings are unprecedented. Today, filling out forms taken precedence over giving balls and the modern embassy must be a business building of complete functional efficiency.

H ave these objectives—national character, architectural fact and businesslike efficiency—been met in the new buildings?

There is no doubt that the State Department has attempted to make these considerations the focus of the program. Its architectural policy, its method of selecting designers, its specific recommendations and requirements all are aimed at the fulfillment of these needs. The Foreign Buildings Office has set up a reviewing Architectural Advisory Panel, composed of eminent architects, critics and educators, and headed by a career Foreign Service officer. Commissions are open to all American architects, who need only submit a portfolio to the Foreign Buildings Office to be considered.

In official instructions, the architect is urged to "give serious study to local conditions of climate and site, to understand and sympathize with local customs and people, and to grasp the historical meaning of the particular environment in which the new building must be seen." He is asked to work "with a free mind, without being dictated by obsolete or sterile formulae or cliches, but if they did or now be... to find solutions which are truly creative rather than unimaginatively conventional."

The goals are clear and the policy is bold. What have been the results?

In London, most professional opinion of the new embassy has been favorable. But outside the profession there has been criticism of the structure's startling modernity in its non-Georgian setting. Actually, there is no genuine Georgian architecture in Grosvenor Square. Judged by British standards, it is often called—underrate—of the building is gaudy and overdone.

Does it create an American image? "Too well," say the British. Is Americanism, according to The Observer, is clear in its "new, crisp and glamorous" design, obvious in the "aggressive, staccato modeling of the facade, the perpetually glinting, the costume jewelry that overembled it all." As for the eagle, it is "consistent with the architecture, which in its turn is consistent with the tragedy of Americanism."

Does it fit into its surroundings? Many suspecting critics believe that it does. Home (Continued on Page 45)
Sharp Debate: What Should an Embassy Be?

(Continued from Page 26) newspapers in London have praised the well-proportioned formal design. It is given to one side of Grosvenor Square. There is general appreciation of the architect's attempt to make the outside building with holding to it six stories and using a small window module in keeping with the surrounding structures, and of fixing it with London's traditional Portland stone. The conservative Times is guardedly optimistic: "The stile will weather. London's climate always has that sobering and usually rewarding effect upon even the most pretentious effort of architects." Sir Harold Spence, past president of the Royal Institute of British Architects, even defends the style: "If I were designing an embassy abroad I would give it a whacking good coat of arms to show the flag." The new embassy in Oslo, also by Berth Eriksen, has been favorably received. There has been no notice of controversy, either before or after its completion in 1960. Nine out of ten Oslo residents, questioned by an American publication, Architectural Forum, have praised the building.

The 140-foot-long, unequivocally modern structure, its smooth, sleek facade of greenish-black Norwegian granite, takes its place comfortably among its Renaissance-style neighbors. At the same time, its precise and polished perfection is a representative example of the latest creative design in United States today. In the case of the embassy at The Hague, by Marcel Breuer, the diplomatic-architectural tightrope again needs to have been navigated successfully. A severely plain, massive limestone block, with unconventional, tram- zoidal window and polished granite trim, it is appraised as a "typically American building" of "strong and noble character," its contemporary design judged so harmonious with the traditional surroundings that it is held up as an example to Dutch builders.

The New Delhi embassy, by Edward Durrell Stone, provoked some worry that during construction because of its unusual appearance. Although it has been called a "modern Taj Mahal" and the low, square, windowless pavilion is unmistakably Western and contemporary, at the same time, it pays delicate tribute to its pierced, patterned walls, to traditional Indian architecture.

The occasion of its official opening, in January, 1959, Stehno pronounced it "exciting" and the presence of luminaries, including President Eisenhower, was a matter of great pride. The New Delhi embassy had followed the time-tested formula of government building. But it might have been less disgruntled public opinion if the architects had not come only from the architecture, critic and other professions who believe that the shapes above columns ons even steel and concrete steel beams are a meaninglessness.

The most vociferous non-presidential objections of all have come from Representative Hays' Congressional subcommittee. Presented with a list of accusations and conclusions and asked for comment, Mr. Hays has not familiar with most of them. Nor apparently, has been invited to the government building with its complete exhibition of modern architecture.

Nevertheless, he is adamant and "someone should be held responsible for something." He has no idea how. But he is aware that "we should have some very clear cut building. They have been more about "It's the modern approach, and it's a danger to be sure of this world. There has to be some arrangement whereby it looks like a modernistic mausoleum in a modernistic cemetery."
The US Embassy in London, also designed by Eero Saarinen, opened in 1960.
Promotional graphic depicting the US Embassy in Oslo, Norway.
Source: Yale University Manuscripts and Archives.
Above left: Facade during construction. Source: Yale University Manuscripts and Archives.

The Building’s History

The triangular building consists of four stories and a basement and is 59 meters by 47 meters by 47 meters. The structure was designed so that the exterior walls, the façade, actually help support the weight of the building. This type of construction differed from the contemporary trend of office buildings in which the façade is a more decorative covering or skin of metal, glass or stone. Furthermore, the flat surface has been broken by the in-and-out play of the fenestration effects of the building. There are 577 separate windows.

The material for the exterior walls is a form of crushed concrete and labradorite which has been cast, cut, ground and polished. Though resembling natural labradorite, the artificial stone – which is a Norwegian product – is superior in strength.

Over the main (center) entrance on Drammensveien is a 12-by-9-meter canopy built of steel and concrete. It extends across the sidewalk and projects over the curbing, and provided a cover for persons stepping out of automobiles at this location. The flagpole erected on a stand in the center of the canopy is 13 meters tall.

Source: http://norway.usembassy.gov
Above: Initial design, August 4, 1955. Source: Yale University Manuscripts and Archives.

Left: Visit to Yale University Manuscripts and Archives to view the original Saarinen drawings and documents for the US Embassy in Oslo, Norway. Photo courtesy of Michael Schissel.
Revised design, June 27, 1956.
Source: Yale University Manuscripts and Archives.
The Atrium

A noteworthy feature of the Oslo Embassy is the enclosed, four-storey atrium at the center of the building. Each floor overlooks the atrium, creating the opportunity for social encounters in the otherwise corridor-driven building. In plan, the atrium is a rhombus inscribed within the building’s triangular form. It is covered by a suspended ceiling constructed in a three-dimensional, faceted designs. The lighting from the ceiling consists of a combination of direct daylight and artificial light. The two southern walls of the atrium are constructed in a brick-grill pattern, and covered by white adobe paint. The two northern walls are formed by a scrim of vertical teak wood ribs extending from the second to the fourth floors. In the center of the atrium is a 5-by-5-meter rhomboidal pool. Both the floor of the court and the main entrance lobby are made of Italian travertine, while the wall facings in the main entrance and around the halls are made of stucco marble.

Source: http://norway.usembassy.gov
Tetrahedron ceiling above the atrium.

Source: Yale University Manuscripts and Archives.
She Designs Offices Outside In

Mrs. Knoll Merges Architectural and Decorative Arts

By WILLIAM M. FREEMAN

It is not by chance that United States embassies and the offices of many United States corporations abroad put this nation's best foot forward in design.

At the head of a major concern in this field of combining a designer's experience with a specific problem of a business nature is Mrs. Florence S. Knoll. Mrs. Knoll, the widow of Hans G. Knoll, joined with her husband a decade ago in forming Knoll Associates, Inc.

The two pioneered in an operation that has grown into an international organization with three factories here and a large number of showrooms and sales offices abroad.

When Mr. Knoll died in an automobile accident in Cuba two years ago, Mrs. Knoll took over active direction of the concern.

She deals now in all phases of the work except, as she puts it, "the figures." These she leaves to W. Cornell Deichert, vice president and treasurer.

Thus continues the arrangement under which she had joined Hans G. Knoll Associates, prede-

Continued on Page 50, Column 7

Mrs. Florence S. Knoll, the head of Knoll Associates, Inc., discusses design of new chair with Eero Saarinen.
The Furniture

Eero Saarinen had a close working relationship with furniture designer and maker, Florence Knoll, who was commissioned to provide furnishings for the American embassy program at large. Saarinen's own furniture designs for Knoll were dispersed across the globe, populating not only the buildings he designed in London and Oslo, but American embassies around the world. This idea of furniture as a common language of diplomacy – and a recognizable image of American culture – was explored in this studio.

The original furniture in the Oslo Embassy building was made in Norway, from designs of Knoll Associated and constructed by the Norwegian firm, Tanum.
Above: Library with Knoll furniture, 1959.

Right: Atrium view, with custom Saarinen benches, 1959.

Statement of Significance

While the definition of significance is often subjective, the studio narrowed down and identified four major aspects of the physical building that played an integral role in the students’ projects:

1. Triangular form of the building;
2. The material and construction of the prefabricated facade;
3. The enclosed atrium and its furniture and materials;
4. The tetrahedron ceiling above the atrium.

Each project addressed these key aspects of the building. Nontangible heritage was addressed case by case, with each design acknowledging to varying degrees the legacy of United States diplomacy, international security issues, Eero Saarinen’s relationship to the building, and/or Norwegian national identity in relationship to the Embassy context or history.
Obsolescence

“The American Embassy in Oslo intends to vacate its current building on Henrik Ibsens Gate in central Oslo and relocate to a site at the corner of Sorkedalsveien and Morgedalsvegen, in Huseby. The current embassy building has become too small for the size of the Oslo mission, and its site cannot accommodate the features required for a modern American embassy. Einhorn Yaffee Prescott Architecture & Engineering, PC (EYP) has been working with the United States Department of State, Bureau of Overseas Building Operations (OBO) since 2005 to design new facilities for the Huseby site. Carol R. Johnson Associates (CRJA) has been working with EYP as landscape architect for the project and Spor Arkitekter, of Oslo, is local consulting architect.”
Source: http://norway.usembassy.gov

The task of this studio was therefore to repurpose the Saarinen embassy in a manner that considers the multitude of issues that an obsolete building exposes: the evolving role of US diplomatic presence, issues of security and surveillance, the projection of values that an architectural artifact embodies, Norwegian identity as it relates to diplomatic architecture, and the legacy of Saarinen.
Student Projects
Program

In devising a new program for the former US Embassy in Oslo, it is important to note that in 1959, when the Embassy first opened, it had a strong cultural component for the public; a Library, Film Screening Room, Reception Area and Exhibition Hall were all part of its original planning and mission, for the benefit of the citizens of Oslo and to serve as an envoy of American culture and values. Today, with US Embassies increasingly viewed as potential terrorist targets, layers of defensive armor have reduced the ability for public outreach.

The departure of chancellor and legation functions from the Oslo Embassy building presents a new quandary for architects and preservationists alike; what is the best and most appropriate use for this symbolic projection of American diplomacy circa 1959, by one of America’s preeminent architects?

The challenge of the studio is to propose a suitable next use for this building, intervening architecturally and yet maintaining its unique Saarinen strength. Current proposals for new programs range from a new HQ for the Oslo Police Force to a Cultural Center. Thought should be given to ideas that might bridge the diplomatic origin of the building while grafting upon it a program that addresses some contemporary concern, be it wiki-leaks & cyber-security, extensions of the Nobel Peace Prize legacy, or even a Film Festival. The success of this new program will be the ultimate judgment upon the original 1959 structure. For the purposes of the Studio, the program & building area should be increased by 50%.
Addition Strategies

Each student developed a specific formal strategy for the addition to the US Embassy Oslo, each striving to tease out the building’s potential as former ambassador. The proposals are ordered according to how the new massing is situated in relationship to the existing building.

**OVER**
- Whitney Boykin
- Chelsea Brandt
- Jung Hwa Lim

**AROUND**
- Saovanee (Annie) Sethiwan
- Talene Montgomery
- Monica Rhee

**UNDER**
- Lindsey Barker
- Beth Miller
- Susan Bopp

**WITHIN**
- Michael Schissel
The proposal preserves the historical significance of the original Saarinen Architecture: the atrium; the precast concrete modular load-bearing facade; the triangular and enfilade circulation pattern; and the subtle segregation of user groups entering the building. These traits are preserved and adapted to perpetuate the volumetric facade and circulation logic throughout the building and into the addition.

The triangular Saarinen stair that circulated USIS visitors and Visa applicants to the basement and second floor now conducts visitors to the Center for Modern Norway from the entrance at the basement level to the restored library on the second floor. The logic of this stair is continued through the building focusing the attention of visitors to locations of both historical and architectural importance as well as sites of importance in the activities of the adjacent spaces of the Norwegian Energy Exchange.
The stair is a narrative instrument that focuses the interest of visitors to places that they have never before had access to; in both the sense that the building was formerly a high-security American Embassy, as well as the sense that the activities of the Norwegian Energy Exchange would normally be conducted out of the public view. The perforation of the opacity between these two users facilitates education without compromising physical security.
The new sixth and seventh floors are occupied by the Center for Modern Norway and utilize a structurally glazed facade that is functionally flat, juxtaposing Saarinen’s faceted facade. This facade preserves the directional volumetric play of the original with the delicate canting of the glass mullions behind. Whereas Saarinen’s facade shifts from perforated to solid as one’s viewing angle skews oblique, the facade of the addition will transition from transparent to “invisible” as viewers move from the planar face of the glass mullion to the narrow edge of those mullions. These new floors invert the space planning of Saarinen’s enfilade to be more sympathetic with the open plan organization associated with the transparency of a public educational institution. In homage to the man himself, the new, eponymous cafe looking out over the fjord from the seventh floor borrows from some of the more iconic design tropes in Eero’s portfolio.
This proposal for the adaptive reuse of the U.S. Embassy in Oslo, Norway provides a new, welcoming community center for immigrants in the society. Since the function of embassies is to be a safe haven and a resource for foreigners, this continued programming for the embassy will continue to reach out to those foreign to the country. As an immigrant first arriving to Norway, the existing facade of the building may seem foreboding and unwelcoming with its use of dark labrodite and mirror-like windows. To overcome this feeling, this design proposal breaks through that tough exterior, removing all of the existing glass and pulling the floor plates through the front facade.
The Ford Foundation is a globally oriented private foundation with the mission of advancing human welfare. The grants support projects that focus on reducing poverty and injustice; promoting democratic values; and advancing human knowledge, creativity and achievement. Also, the site of the US Embassy, which is facing the Royal Palace, is enough to empower the position of the Ford foundation in Oslo.

From US Embassy, people cannot recognize its atrium space from outside because it is fully enclosed like a fortress and difficult to access to inside. However, in Ford foundation, not only the portion of the atrium becoming bigger, but also it permits people to get into there partially during the office hours. Also, here we can see how Saarinen concerned about view toward outside space and the visual relationship between people who are in atrium and office space, office space and office space, outside and atrium and upper level floors and atrium. In this consequence, I wanted to propose what is the Ford foundation in 2013 would be, if Saarinen alive now.

The site of the Embassy is facing the Royal palace, which is maintaining old road system, different from recent entire Oslo road map and huge green space. I tried to expand this green space into the new atrium space, inside space of the building and the entire site and connect to the station near by and tried to engage with Saarinen’s own design intent and the geometry idea and develop it more in advance. For preserving important part of the Embassy, I began to convert the brick wall into staircase, and the shape of window frame into balcony, expand the skylight and the geometry of the atrium and ceiling into the site plan. Also, make this triangular stair as a symbolic object in the center of the building. I added up five floors on the top of the original building and one floor under the building to increase 50% more area.
My new thoughts on this building and the way to make it as a new Ford foundation is open more of this building into the public. In contrast to the Ford foundation from 1968, people can stay in and around this courtyard for every time and access to this place from every direction. The location of the lobby let people to experience green atrium since they should pass the place to access to the main core. Also, they can access to library on fifth floor, cafeteria and gallery on ninth floor, rooftop garden on the top and auditorium and extra facilities on sub basement floor.

The idea of maintaining the façade of the original building and flexibility of the boundary and openness of the building makes it possible. Void space on the fifth and seventh floor allow people to connect to the outside area.
United Artic Policy Organization
Monica Rhee
AAD
Basement
- Lobby: 353.17m²
- Conference Room: 517.88m²
- Seminar Room: 196.44m²
- Cafeteria: 264.90m²
- Kitchen: 151.61m²
- Control Room: 52.53m²
- Storage/Garbage: 140.56m²
- Lounge: 80.88m²
- W.C.: 56.42m²
- Stair: 15.41m²
- Total: 1860.30m²

1st Floor
- Exhibition Hall: 784.91m²
- Office Lobby: 254.86m²
- Office: 51.25m²
- Service Room: 19.27m²
- Hallway: 89.65m²
- W.C.: 48.23m²
- Stair: 15.41m²
- Total: 1278.78m²

2nd Floor
- Library: 413.92m²
- Departments of Polar Institute of United States and Norway: 194.75m²
- Lounge: 200.48m²
- Meeting Room: 58.77m²
- Hallway: 285.63m²
- W.C.: 48.23m²
- Stair: 15.41m²
- Total: 1257.54m²

3rd Floor
- Research Lab: 320.42m²
- Arctic Council Working Groups: 283.09m²
- Lounge: 113.35m²
- Meeting Room: 112.67m²
- Service Room: 44.17m²
- Hallway: 320.2m²
- W.C.: 48.23m²
- Stair: 15.41m²
- Total: 1257.54m²

4th Floor
- Research Lab: 781.88m²
- Archive: 97.58m²
- Lounge: 48.79m²
- Meeting Room: 58.77m²
- Hallway: 164.73m²
- W.C.: 48.23m²
- Stair: 15.41m²
- Total: 1215.39m²

5th Floor
- Cafe/Lounge: 244.18m²
- Archive: 39.37m²
- Hallway: 69.36m²
- W.C.: 13.60m²
- Total: 366.51m²

6th Floor
- Director’s Office: 132.73m²
- Conference Room: 54.50m²
- Reception&Secretaries: 70.38m²
- Hallway: 80.93m²
- W.C.: 13.60m²
- Total: 352.14m²

6th Floor
- Multipurpose Hall: 311.80m²
- Hallway: 26.74m²
- W.C.: 13.60m²
- Total: 352.14m²

Gross Total: 7940.34m²
The Paley Center for Media is an American cultural institution dedicated to the archive and cultural discussion of television and other media. Its founder, William S. Paley, commissioned Eero Saarinen to design his own CBS headquarters in New York in the 1960s. Paley had flown to Oslo to look at the 1959 US embassy as precedent for his own building’s black facade. These historic ties pose a unique opportunity for Paley as a potential collector of this Saarinen building.

A major concept in this proposal is to respect the frontal integrity of Saarinen’s design. Plan and sectional studies were conducted to determine optic angles from various locations in order to add volume that would not be seen by onlookers from the front. While remaining hidden from the front view, the addition breaks free of this optical boundary toward the southeast and the southwest.

The elongated form of the addition was partially informed by an unrealized isoceles scheme found in the Saarinen archives.
While respecting the original façade from the front, the addition announces the new program and identity that has inhabited the building with superimposed graphics of famous television and media moments wrapped over the exiting building.

The museum inside is programmed towards both the past and the future. Its archives contain past television footages and radio clips. Meanwhile, its current mission has shifted to include digitization and collection of newer forms of media. The center also regularly provides venues for hosting functions, interviews, and screening events.
When it comes to diplomacy, food matters. America’s use of food as a form of soft power has been a subtle, but effective, way of asserting American culture, in contrast to the increasingly hardened, militarized image of the US that is broadcast through contemporary embassy design. The current functional obsolescence of the US’s old fleet of midcentury, urban American embassy buildings, due to their lack of adequate security for current embassy needs, presents a renewed opportunity for the concentration of just such a ‘soft’, food-based programming.

The US embassy in Oslo is a particularly potent site for such a program. With the establishment of the Svalbard Global Seed Vault (SGSV) in 2005 - a joint venture between the UN, Global Crop Diversity Trust, and numerous nations and corporate sponsors - Norway has assumed the role of protector the future of global agricultural diversity.

**World Heritage Foods**

Talene Montgomery
Dual MArch - MSHP
Echoing the World Heritage List’s anticipatory attitude towards cultural loss, the central atrium takes on the new program of hosting “The Last Supper” for foodways newly inscribed to the List.
“World Heritage Foods,” as the future of the former US embassy, Oslo, will focus its energies on the celebration of foodways to complement the SGSV’s preservation agenda. Several foodways have already been inscribed as “Sites of Intangible Cultural Heritage,” by the WHO, including the Japanese Washoku tradition, the Turkish keskek tradition, the French gastronomic meal, and traditional Michoacan cooking. The dining rooms, labs and exhibition spaces will be housed within the existing building, while spaces of production will be located in the additions wrapping the existing structure, rendering visible the inner function of the formerly opaque building.
The United States Embassy in Oslo, Norway, designed by Eero Saarinen, is scheduled to be decommissioned as an embassy within the upcoming years, so the purpose of this project is to propose an alternative programmatic use that will preserve the existing building as well as satisfy a given spatial increase requirement of +50%. This semester-long research, preservation, and design project began with thorough documentation of Saarinen’s original construction drawings and was complemented by a visit to Oslo, Norway to experience this building and the city in person.

Oslo University College is the largest university in Norway and due to major growth within the last few years, it is beginning to expand beyond the original campus area. The college is beginning to purchase other buildings throughout the city, and relocate departments. With the site of the US Embassy only a 10-15 minute walk from the center of campus, my proposal is for the International Studies department to relocate the student facilities, classrooms, lecture halls, and faculty offices here.

As a preservation strategy, the concept is to house the classrooms, seminar rooms, offices, and administration spaces in the existing Saarinen building. This preserves many of the interior spaces and requires minimal demolition. Additionally, the building will expand with a new construction at the lowest level to connect to a new building located in the open lot across the street that contains the larger auditorium and supportive spaces. There will be a “tunnel” connection at the lowest level, allowing guests and students to pass under the heavy traffic of the street above.

Architecturally, the goal of the new addition is to create a dialect between the buildings by incorporating a light, transparent envelope system to contrast the black labradorite precast system that is used on the original Saarinen building. The facade of the Saarinen building provides the structure for the floors, while the new addition will contain a structural grid within. The modules for the new facade derived from the strict geometry of the precast panels of the Saarinen building, but then transform to accommodate the new form. This idea of having a
transparent envelope system presents many opportunities for aesthetic experimentation.
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SECTION A - THROUGH TUNNEL

SECTION B - THROUGH AUDITORIUM

3'-4" SPACING OF MODULES
MINIMAL 2" FRITTING
FOR MORE TRANSPARENT
ZONES BEHIND FACADE
MINIMAL 6" FRITTING
FOR MORE PRIVATE
ZONES BEHIND FACADE

3'-4" PAVERS,
SPACED 2" APART
Alice Trowbridge Strong
Center for the Arts
Beth Miller
MSHP
STRATEGY OF INTERVENTION
ADAPTING BUILDING MINIMALLY TO ACCOMMODATE NEEDS OF NEW PROGRAM

EXISTING EMBASSY BUILDING
LIMITATIONS & OPPORTUNITIES

DISTRIBUTION OF PROGRAM

EXHIBITION

CONSERVATION

DOUBLE-HEIGHT WITH NORTH-FACING SKYLIGHTS

OPEN PLAN

CONTROL OF DAYLIGHT

AMPLE ROOM FOR MECHANICAL & STORAGE

TYPICAL OF ALL FLOORS

20' WIDE X 10'-6" HIGH OFFICES

DIRECT PUBLIC VISIBILITY AND ACCESS FROM STREET

SINKS BELOW SITE LINES AT MAIN ENTRANCES

EXTERIOR PARKING AREA AT BACK OF SLOPED SITE
EMBASSY is a new addition to Eero Saarinen’s United States Embassy in Oslo, Norway, completed in 1959, scheduled to be vacated by the US in 2015. An awkward site in an important, expensive part of downtown Oslo, the proposed intervention to the historic triangular building includes a complete restoration of the still-intact 1950s interior, with a seemingly subtle pedestal-like addition in the southern, sloped portion of the site. EMBASSY is a commercial enterprise that uses the restored Saarinen building as a rentable business space, capitalizing on the cultural exclusivity of the historic embassy. The addition, which includes a total renovation of the basement level, is a discotheque; the flashing lights of which act to distort the existing facade during the evening hours by means of strategic skylights along the perimeter of the old embassy. The project utilizes the economic advantage of physically preserving the unique original office space of Saarinen’s embassy, while simultaneously taking advantage of the non-physical manipulation of the historic facade through the addition of a new commercial program (the discotheque). The two disparate programs work in tandem to revitalize and invigorate the historic building while challenging the notion of adaptively reusing a politically charged site.
Symbolic representation is a central function of embassy architecture. Power without a face is “terror” and embassies serve to legitimate foreign presence through public announcement. This embassy is one of many around the world whose existence opens the question of its future use-value as an ex-US embassy. The Embassy has a deeply embedded identity as a symbolically charged building that has known only one use and that identity will persist in public perception despite its abandonment.

Saarrinen’s Embassy is essentially a single loaded corridor building, folded to fill the triangular form of its site. To make a new form of exchange possible the corridor is deployed again, but as a field condition. This combination of multiple, singular corridors generates a non-hierarchical hypostyle hall, a nomadic space constituted by multiple, simultaneous
possibilities of navigation, not a multiplicity, but multiple coexisting singularities. This field is translated vertically throughout the building to create a heterogenous network of trajectories.

One of the two structural cores and one of the brick screen walls defining the atrium are preserved and the rest of the building is gutted. The previous floors spanned from the load-bearing labradorite/concrete facade to the atrium walls and cores and their removal requires a new strategy for lateral reinforcement of the facade.

Structural glass fins, arranged at 45 degree angles and coated with a two-way mirror film effectively reinforce the load bearing facade while experientially tying the structure into the renovation strategy. These reflective structural devices create a doubling and a visual translation of objects in space: simultaneously confronting you with your own presence in the space, while multiplying and distorting the location of your reflection. The roof on this side of the building must be replaced as well, as its load bearing members have been removed, and a field of columns supports the system of ramps and takes the loads of the new roof.
LABRADORITE - CONCRETE STRUCTURAL MODULES

STRUCTURAL GLASS WITH TWO WAY MIRROR COATING - BOLTED, CHROMED STEEL SPANDREL JOINT

REFLECTION DISPLACEMENT

CASEMENT WINDOWS CHROME TRIM

STRUCTURAL GLASS FIN - REINFORCE LOAD BEARING FACADE AND PREVENT BUCKLING

EXISTING FLOORS TO BE REMOVED

STRUCTURAL RAMPS SPAN FROM COLUMN TO LOAD BEARING FACADE

COLUMNS INTRODUCED TO SUPPORT RAMP SYSTEM AND SUPPORT THE NEW NEW HALF OF THE ROOF
Evaluation

The student proposals are evaluated here according to the degree of physical transformation to the existing building (y-axis) as well as their fulfillment of the additional square footage requirements of the brief (x-axis).