

Adaptive Re-Modulation: Eero Saarinen's United States Embassy in Oslo, Norway



The United States Embassy in Oslo, Norway, designed by Eero Saarinen and completed in 1959, is no longer viable post 9-11 for security reasons and thus is being decommissioned, sold, and is being renovated for contemporary use. Innovation and renovation share the suffix –novation, which means to “make new” or “re-new,” so innovation and renovation are just ways to indicate a doubling of a revitalizing engagement. The studio will engage in a radical renewal of this Saarinen building. We will begin with a visit to the Saarinen archives at Yale University to see first hand the original drawings, models, and documents of the Embassy, and then in October we will travel to Oslo to tour the building and its context, following up with a comparative tour of the political architecture of Berlin. The task of the Studio will be to propose alternative uses for the Saarinen Embassy that consider the multitude of issues it exposes: the evolving role of diplomatic presence, issues of security and surveillance, the projection and adaptive reuse of values that an architectural artifact embodies.

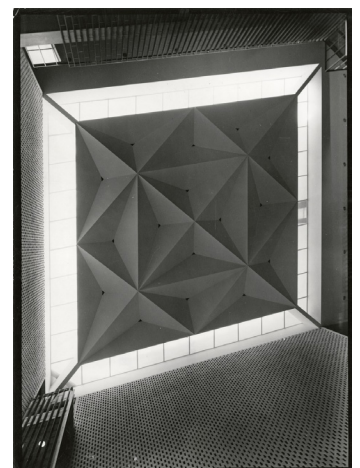
We have been invited by the Riksantikvar, Norway's Directorate for Cultural Heritage, to help them develop principles for the adaptive reuse of the embassy. They will serve as our studio's “clients” and local partners. In considering what program will best convert the former US Embassy in Oslo into a center for another purpose, it is important to note that in 1959, when the Embassy first opened, it had a strong cultural component for the public; some rooms therefore have special public significance, such as the 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. The departure of ambassadorial and legion functions from the Oslo Embassy presents a new quandary for architects and preservationists alike; what is the most engaging use for this symbolic projection of American diplomacy circa 1959, by one of America's preeminent modern architects?



TWA Flight Center, JFK International Airport, New York City

That we are adaptively reusing and renewing this architect's work is in keeping with Saarinen himself, who was restless in constantly renewing his own architecture, creating widely diverse and divergent experiments in form, program, material, and structure, from the elaborated Neo-Miesian IBM Center in Minnesota and John Deere Headquarters in Illinois, to the structural expressionism of the Dulles Airport and Ingalls Hockey Rink at Yale, to the Purism of the Jefferson Memorial Arch in St. Louis and the CBS tower (the "Black Rock") in Manhattan's midtown to the biomorphic TWA Terminal at JFK airport. In the same manner, the firm had one of the most active Research and Development branches, experimenting in new thin-shell and tensile structural systems, innovative molding and casting construction techniques, and inventive material properties, developing such diverse products such as Cor-Ten steel and glazing systems, setting the stage for later R&D offshoots of principal firms along the lines of Gehry Technologies.

Thus, as Reinhold Martin has written, it is necessary "to emphasize the enigmatic character" of Saarinen's work "not only with respect to relations of materiality to image, but also concerning the relation of the modern to the postmodern, since Saarinen's case is also kind of a hybrid, in which such polarities as modern versus postmodern and material versus image intermingle and overlap" ("What is a Material" in Pelkonen and Albrecht, eds., *Eero Saarinen: Shaping the Future* (Yale University Press, 2011)).



US Embassy, Oslo



US Embassy, London



US Embassy, London

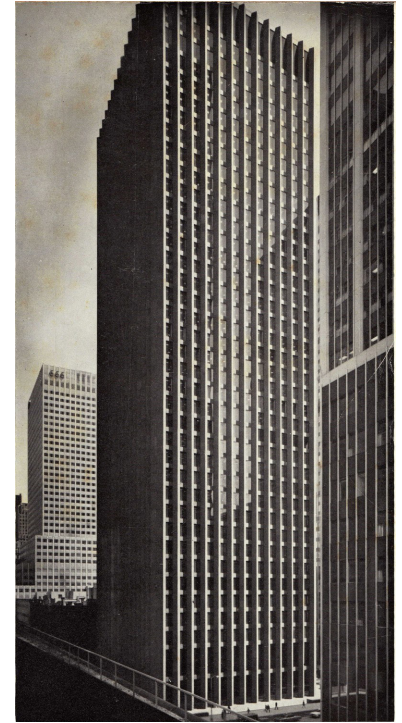
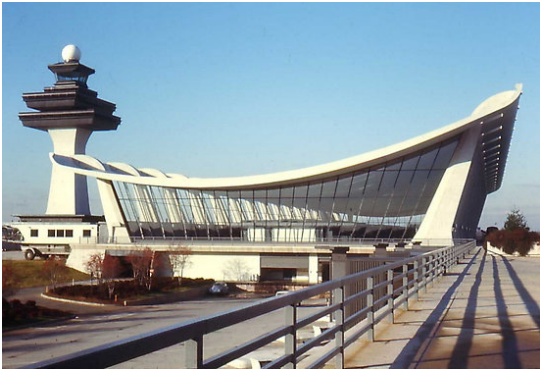


US Embassy, Oslo

The enigmatic character of the Oslo Embassy, sited across from the Royal Palace in Oslo's central Vika District, may be said to be initiated by its hybrid materiality, an innovation of Saarinen's office: precast concrete mixed with Norwegian pearl granite, developed as a black-toned iridescent alternating panels covering all three sides of this triangular building. According to Saarinen: "The precast façade is the most interesting and successful part of this building. Our attempt was to integrate the module, on which the offices are all based, with the structural system, so that one could conceive, all in one, a precast module structural system with an integrated façade material." At a later date Saarinen stated that he had "come to the conviction that once one embarks on a concept for a building, this concept has to be exaggerated and overstated and repeated in every part of its interior so that wherever you are, inside or outside, the building sings with the same message." Yet the inside of the Embassy is covered in different modules of beige travertine, teak wall panels, and white-painted brick. And in his next Embassy design for London, Saarinen was already re-modulating the exterior and interior modules with , as well as differential mixing, layering, compressions, expansions, distributions in materials/colors/textures/tones, and . Considering the renewed interest in innovative adaptive use of modules in architecture today, this studio will explore the dynamic and iterative modulation not only of tectonic modules and structural modules, but the underlying assumptions regarding the modularity of rooms, of programs, of civic identities and urban formations. In other words, we will be rethinking and reworking the underlying assumptions of the politics of the module today and how it may radically evolve.



US Embassy, Oslo



From Left: Washington Dulles International Airport, Loudoun,
Ingalls Hockey Rink, New Haven,
Jefferson Memorial Arch, St. Louis,
CBS tower (the "Black Rock"), New York City

Semester Sequence:

In preparation of your own individual introduction of new revitalizing design modes into the building, we will begin with a series of experiments in hybrid recombinant logics of modules. From this near and far distance of 65 years, from our contemporary moment looking back toward the future, as a way to understand and represent the organizational logics and illogics of this particular building we will begin by exploring, through modeling and dynamic forms of visualization, what might result through recombinant techniques of exaggerating and mutating the diverse forms of organizational logics already in the building. And then develop a series of explorations with recombinant fusions of early Saarinen with later Saarinen, of the Miesian Saarinen with the biomorphic Saarinen or, more closely developed in style and time and program, his U.S. Embassy in London completed in 1961.

At the start of the semester we will have lectures from Saarinen scholars and from Jane Loeffler, author of *The Architecture of Diplomacy: Building America's Embassies* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2010). So by the time we depart for Oslo you'll be deep into the genetics and morphology of the building, already starting to propose your own revitalizing addition and renovation. Our week in Oslo and Berlin will provide first-hand feedback to your initial investigations and proposals as you prepare your project for the midterm October 30, and further to the final December 11. In Oslo, in addition to visiting the building, we will visit some of the crucial post-war and contemporary buildings that set the stage for innovative engagements in architecture and adaptive reuse in Europe, to which your crucial designs will contribute their own renewed staging of these issues.

STUDIO SCHEDULE 2017

WEEK 1 Wednesday Sept 06 Thursday Sept 07	LOTTERY SELECTION FIRST STUDIO SESSION/OSLO Orientation/CONTEXTS Assigned
WEEK 2 Monday Sept 11 Thursday Sept 14	DUE: CONTEXTS Presentations Yale University SAARINEN ARCHIVE Visit
WEEK 3 Monday Sept 18 Thursday Sept 21	DESIGN DESK CRITS LECTURE: Jane Loeffer “Architecture of Diplomacy” + DESIGN DESK CRITS
WEEK 4 Monday Sept 25 Thursday Sept 28	DESIGN DESK CRITS PRE-TRAVEL REHEARSAL PIN UP
WEEK 5 Monday Oct 2 Thursday Oct 5	DESIGN DESK CRITS FINAL TRAVEL PREPARATIONS, FINAL PRE-TRAVEL PIN UP
WEEK 6 Monday Oct 9 Thursday Oct 12	IN OSLO IN BERLIN
WEEK 7 Monday Oct 16 Thursday Oct 19	DESIGN DESK CRITS DESIGN DESK CRITS
WEEK 8 Monday Oct 23 Thursday Oct 26	MIDTERM REVIEW REHEARSAL PIN UP DESIGN DESK CRITS
WEEK 9 Monday Oct 30 Thursday Nov 2	MIDTERM REVIEW DESIGN DESK CRITS
WEEK 10 Monday Nov 6 Thursday Nov 9	NO CLASS — ELECTION DAY HOLIDAY DESIGN DESK CRITS
WEEK 11 Monday Nov 13 Thursday Nov 16	DESIGN DESK CRITS DESIGN DESK CRITS
WEEK 12 Monday Nov 20 Thursday Nov 23	DESIGN DESK CRITS NO CLASS — THANKSGIVING DAY HOLIDAY
WEEK 10 Monday Nov 27 Thursday Nov 30	DESIGN DESK CRITS DESIGN DESK CRITS
WEEK 14 Monday Dec 4 Thursday Dec 7	FINAL REVIEW REHEARSAL PIN UP DESIGN DESK CRITS
WEEK 15 Monday Dec 11	FINAL REVIEW