

Community-Wide Practice Offers "Businesslike" Service

the architect and his community

This month in documenting the work of A. G. Odell, Jr., & Associates, of Charlotte, North Carolina, we focus on a practice that is extraordinarily successful and must be typical in size—both of personnel and of population of its "community"—of a great many firms in this country. For Charlotte has a population of approximately 157,000, and the Odell office personnel currently varies from 9 to 12 men.

To say, however, that either the Odell firm or its home base is "typical" of anything is only superficially accurate. While familiar statistical characteristics do exist, a closer look at either "the architect" or "his community," in this instance, reveals that we are considering a remarkable firm and an unusual set of circumstances.

Some readers undoubtedly have never heard of the "Mecklenburg Declaration of Independence" signed in (then) Charlottetown, May 20, 1775, more than a year before the concerted separation from England was underwritten in Philadelphia. "Interesting, if true," was Thomas Jefferson's comment when told of it. Well, it's both interesting *and* true. Nor is it untypical of this forward-looking, precedent-breaking crossroads of the South—a community that rose in population from 80,000 in 1930 to nearly twice that total in 1955. Within a 75-mile radius, there is a population of 2 million—more (on the same basis) than that of any other city in the Southeast.

Consistently, ever since the Odell firm really began to go ahead in 1946 (actually established in 1940, it was soon slowed by Odell's five years with the U. S. Army), anyone who follows architectural progress has been increasingly aware of first-rate, nonconformist work coming out of the Charlotte area and bearing the Odell label.

The efficiency that is a hallmark of the firm's practice is unquestionably a reflection of the nature of Arthur Gould Odell, Jr., himself—urbane, keen-eyed, forthright. "We feel that it is of great importance to give our clients the most businesslike service possible," he tells you succinctly. "With few exceptions, all correspondence is answered the same day the office receives it." Fred Severud, of the New York engineering firm of Severud-Elstad-Krueger, which has consulted with countless firms both here and abroad, says



Bull's-eyes on aerial view of downtown Charlotte mark Odell commissions.

Double Oaks elementary school (left) is built at either side of a ravine, the two parts connected by a covered walk.

Auditorium and coliseum (below) were presented in September 1956 P/A.

Aerial photo: Charlotte Chamber of Commerce



G. Odell, Jr. & Associates, Charlotte, North Carolina

G. Odell, Jr., with Associates Albert B. Cameron and James C. Hemphill, Jr.

Photo: Tom Franklin, Jr.



Odell early decided on architecture as a career. After civil-engineering study at Duke University, he earned his B.Arch. degree at Cornell and studied for a year at *L'Ecole des Beaux Arts* in Paris. For two years he worked in New York offices but "after considerable investigation" decided to return to the South. "I was satisfied that Charlotte had the most rapidly expanding economy in the Southeast," he explains.

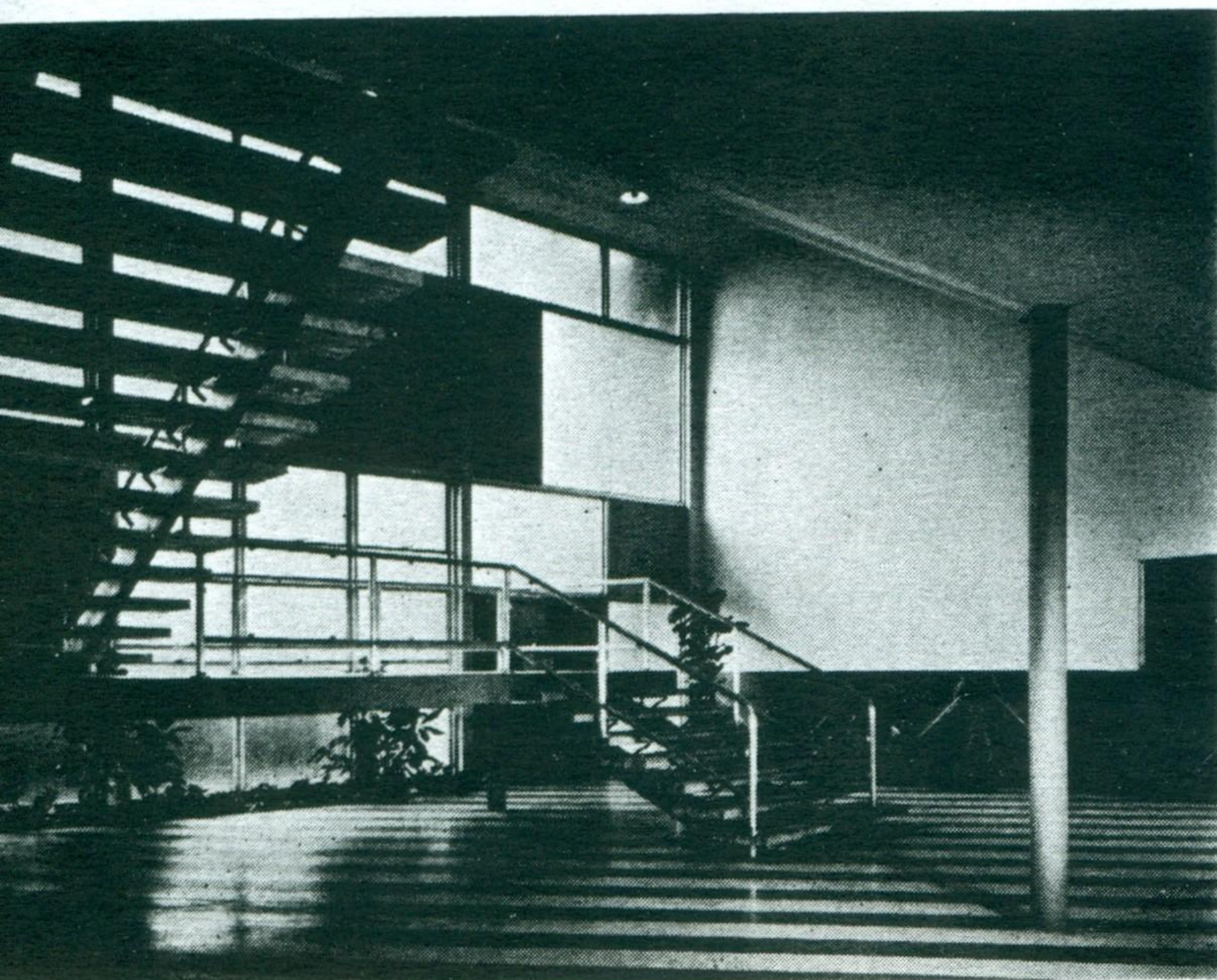
office setup and procedures

In recent years, the Odell staff has ranged from 9 to 12 men, about half of them registered architects. Their usual consulting engineers are located in the same building and connected by inter-com. But Odell prefers not to have consulting engineers as an integral part of the staff, since "we would naturally feel a compulsion to use these men instead of considering the field in the best interests of the job and the client."

After obtaining a commission, one designer accompanies Odell in all preliminary conferences and, under his direction, is in charge of developing preliminaries, though he may be assisted by other designers, depending on the scope of the problem. The designer may or may not be in charge of execution of working drawings or specifications, but he invariably is in close touch with the project throughout production. Field supervision is seldom conducted by the designer; usually by the architect or draftsman who was in charge of the working drawings.

"We spend a great deal of time and effort on preliminary drawings," Odell reports. "Consequently, this phase of our operation is seldom profitable. We use perspective sketches in color, models, or both, all of these prepared here in our office."

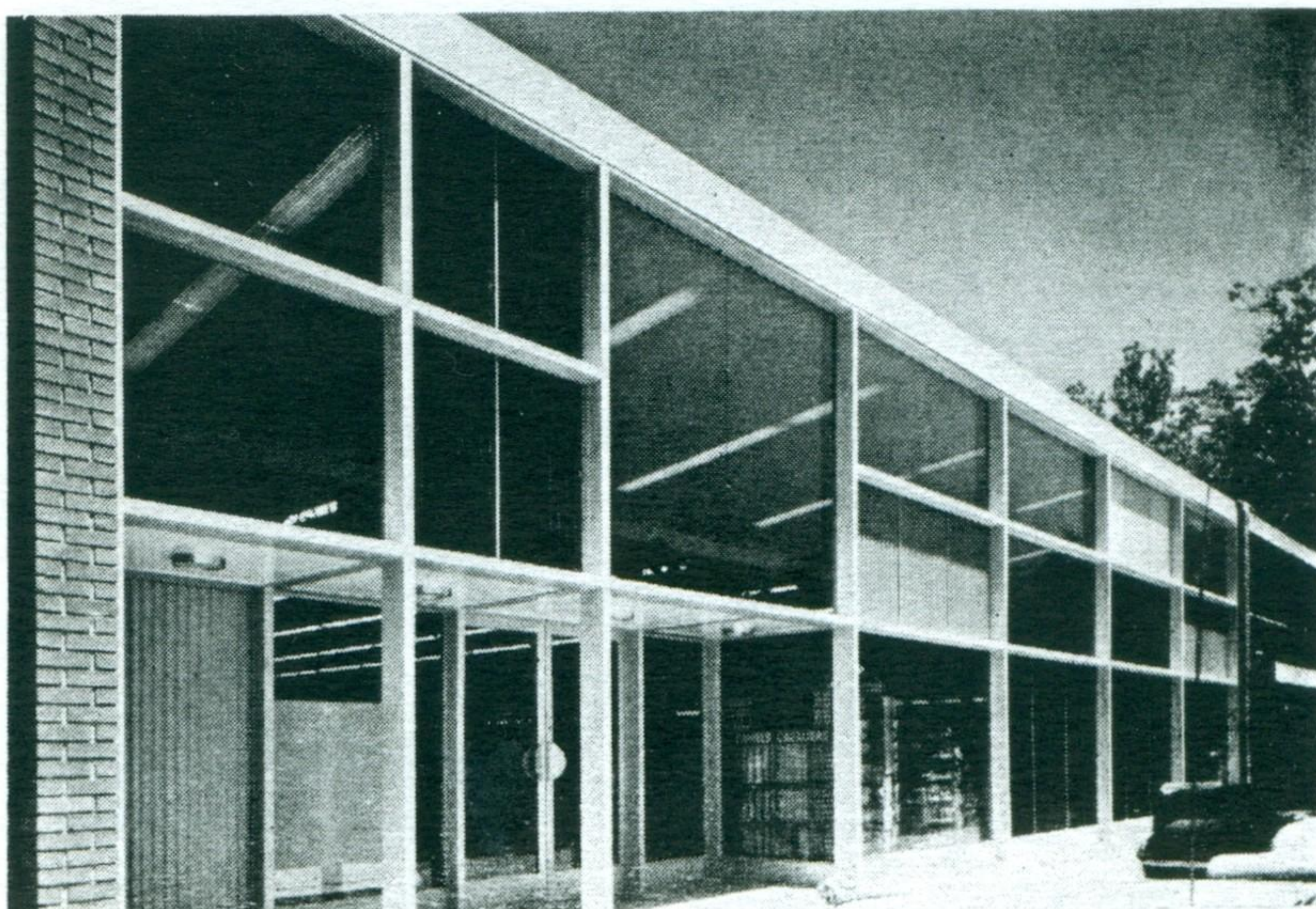
The \$6- to \$9-millions of work a year that the



the freestanding stair is in the 221 South Church Street Building.

Eckerd's Drug Store (right).

Photos (except as noted): Joseph Molitor



office turns out is just about the size practice that Odell prefers. "As a designer myself, I wish to maintain continuous personal control of all design and the resultant finished product." On the boards currently are a regional shopping center to be built in Charlotte; a large hospital; several schools; residences; and churches. Recently, Odell received a fabulous new commission to design a \$6 millions Civic Center for the City of Baltimore, Maryland, which will include a 10,000-seat coliseum and 100,000 sq ft of exhibition space.

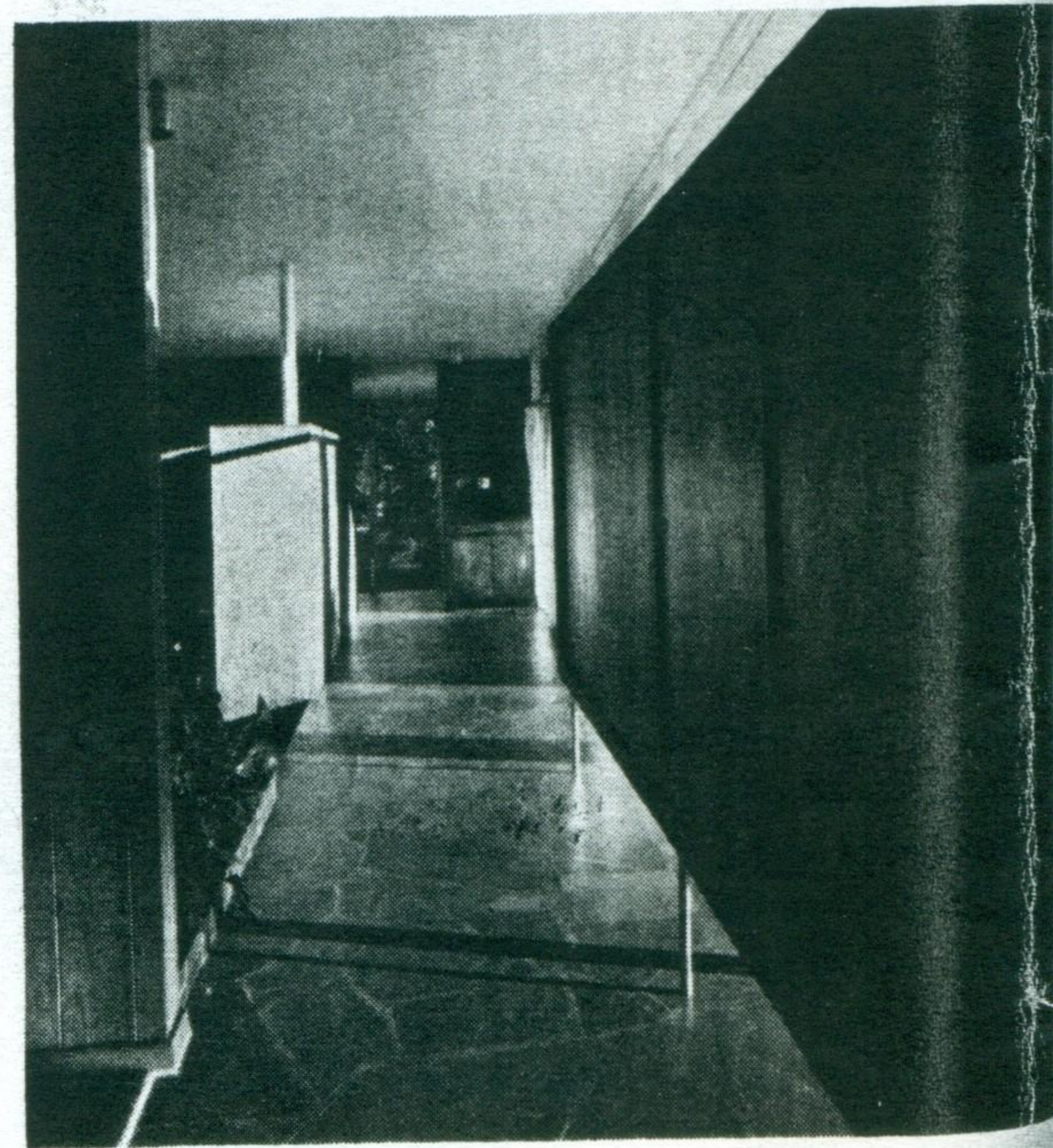
In working with associates, Odell makes every effort to give the men well rounded training and experience that will enable them to be better architects. "In the last five years, four new architectural firms have been organized in Charlotte by personnel trained by our office. This, in turn, leaves room for the employment of young men who proved themselves skilled designers in the architectural college from which they were graduated. I consider it a great advantage to have the continuing benefit of the enthusiasm and stimulation of young designers."

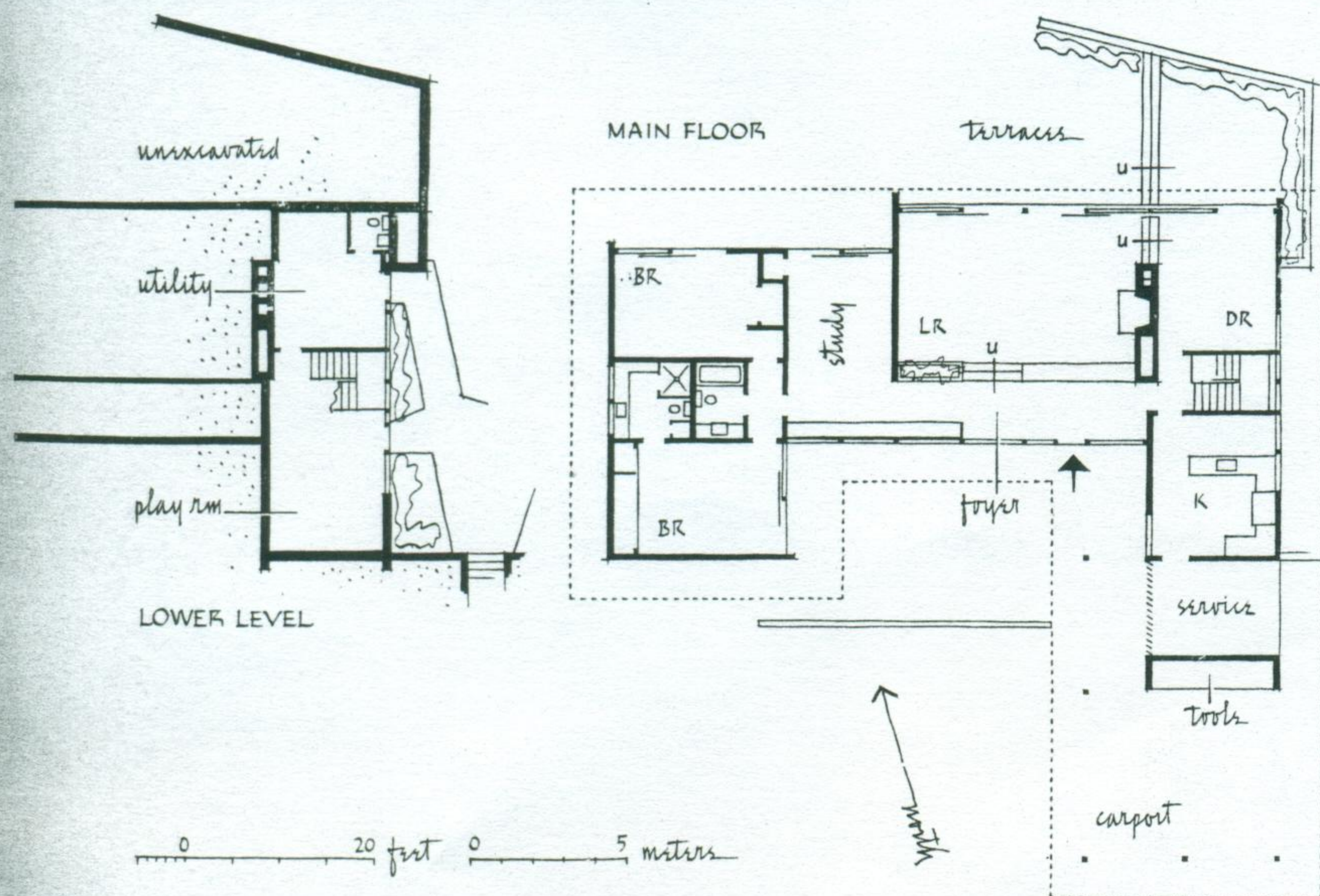
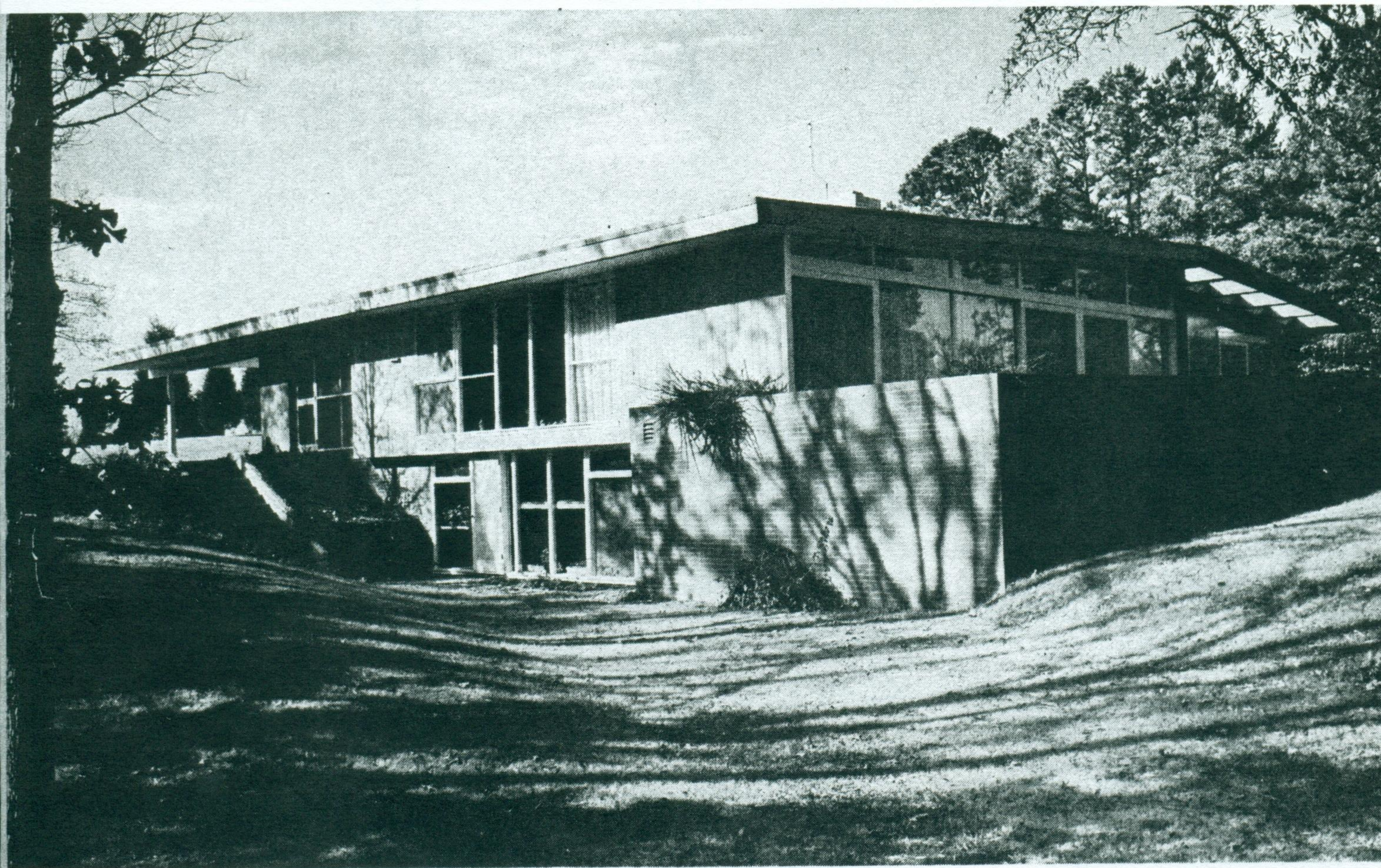
extra-curricular

Odell's professional activities extend well beyond the office's practice. In 1953, he was one of eight architects invited to be guests of the German Federal Republic for the month of August. In the winter of 1955-56, he was visiting critic at the College of Architecture, at Cornell. And, in general, he tells us: "I participate whenever possible in various community activities. I have been a member of the Planning Board of Charlotte and president of the Charlotte Community Concert Association, and I am a member of the Kiwanis Club and several country and city clubs. . . . I seldom turn down invitations to speak on architecture and have been on brief television and radio broadcasts. I have spoken before civic clubs, book clubs, women's auxiliaries, and high-school and college groups. Work of my office is always represented in local or state architectural exhibits. I have served two terms as president of the North Carolina State Chapter, AIA."

Odell believes that there is still much to be done in educating the public on the value and function of an architect: "I feel that it is of prime importance initially to impress every client with the realization that I, as architect, first, last, and always, represent his own interest," he says, "and that my reputation and future success as an architect depends upon his appreciation of and satisfaction with my services."

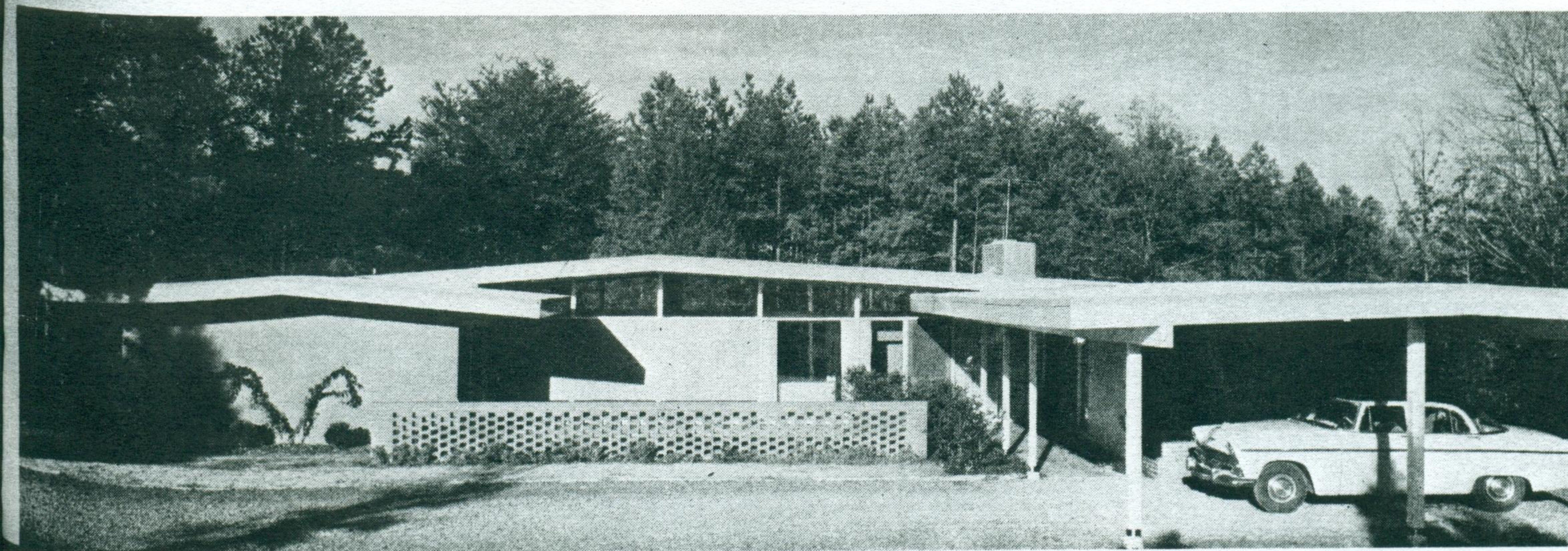
house

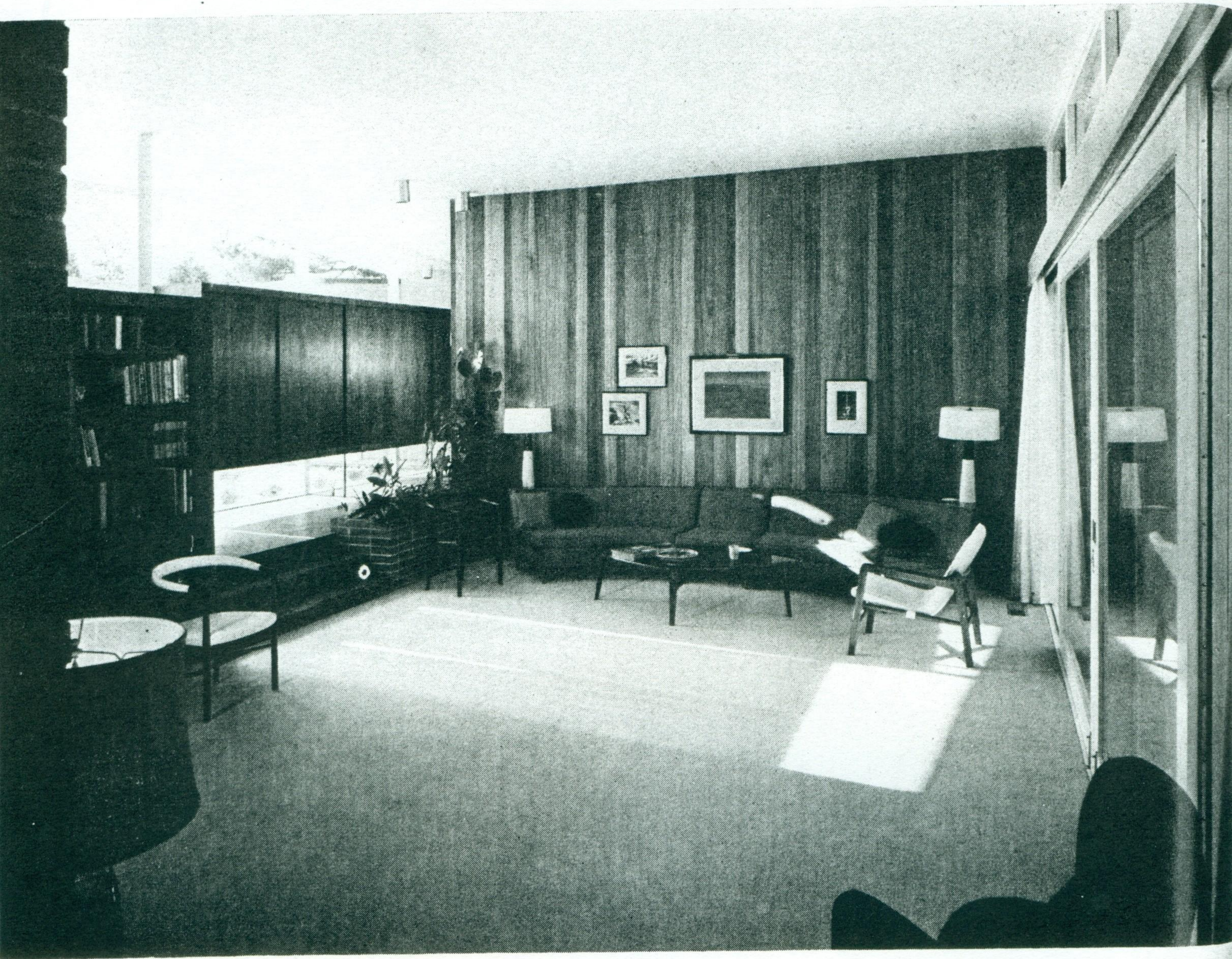




Owner requirements for this home on the outskirts of Charlotte were for separated hobby, sleeping, and entertaining zones, each to extend to outdoors and command a view of the wooded slopes of the five-acre site. Since there are no children, a relatively open plan scheme was feasible, using freestanding bookcases and storage elements (acrosspage) as area dividers.

East elevation spans a natural gulley, allowing access at grade to lower-level play and hobby room. The frame house has both wood-joint and concrete slab floors; roofing is built up with marble-chip surface. Sash are intermediate, steel projected, with bronze hardware; glass is $\frac{1}{4}$ -in. plate.

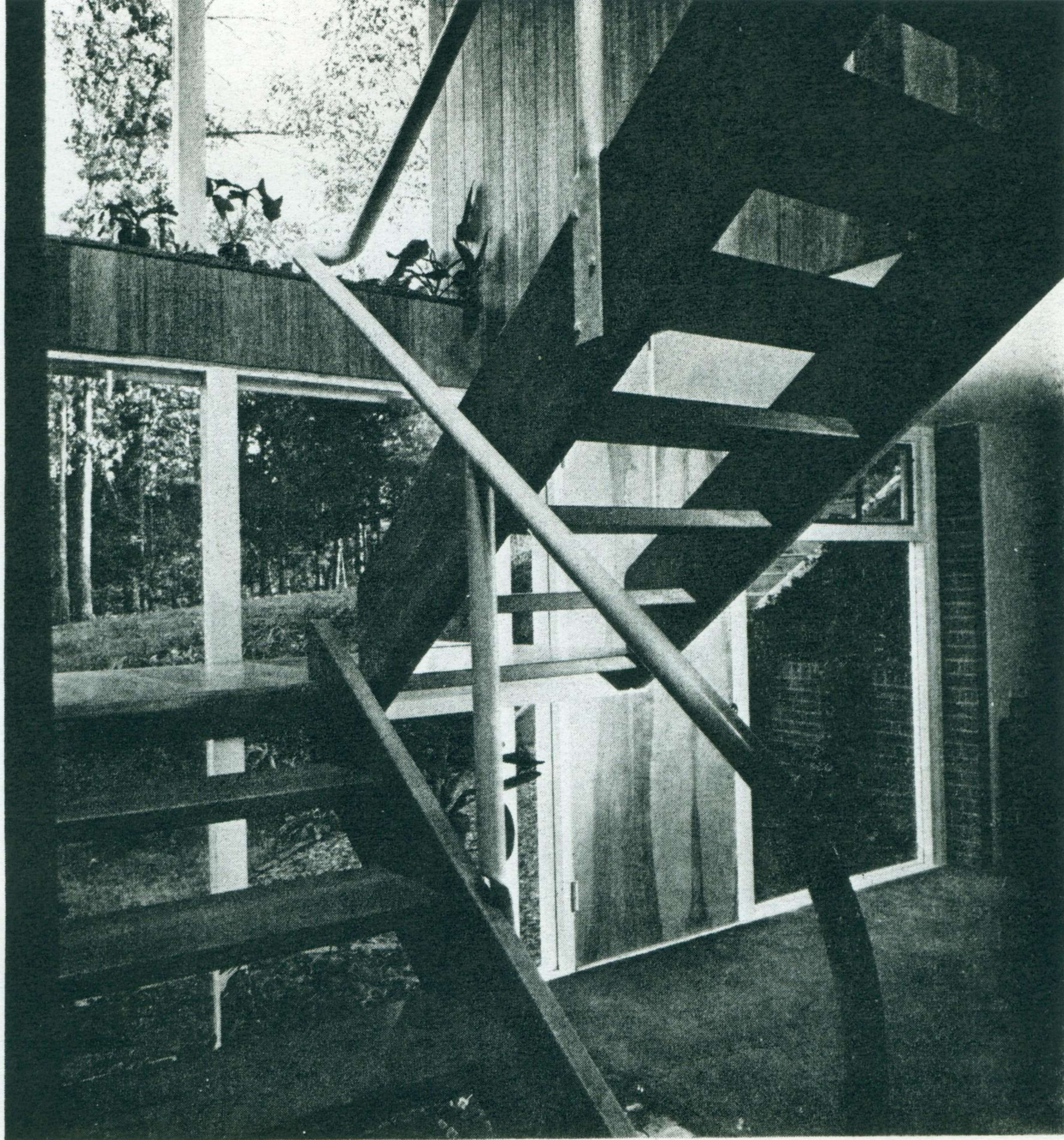




The carpeted living room is three steps below other rooms on the main floor; adjoining flagstone terrace is similarly organized on two levels.

The compact, vinyl-tile-floored kitchen-breakfast room faces east for maximum morning light; service porch and carport adjoin.

An open-riser stair leads down to the hobby-room level (SELECTED DETAIL).



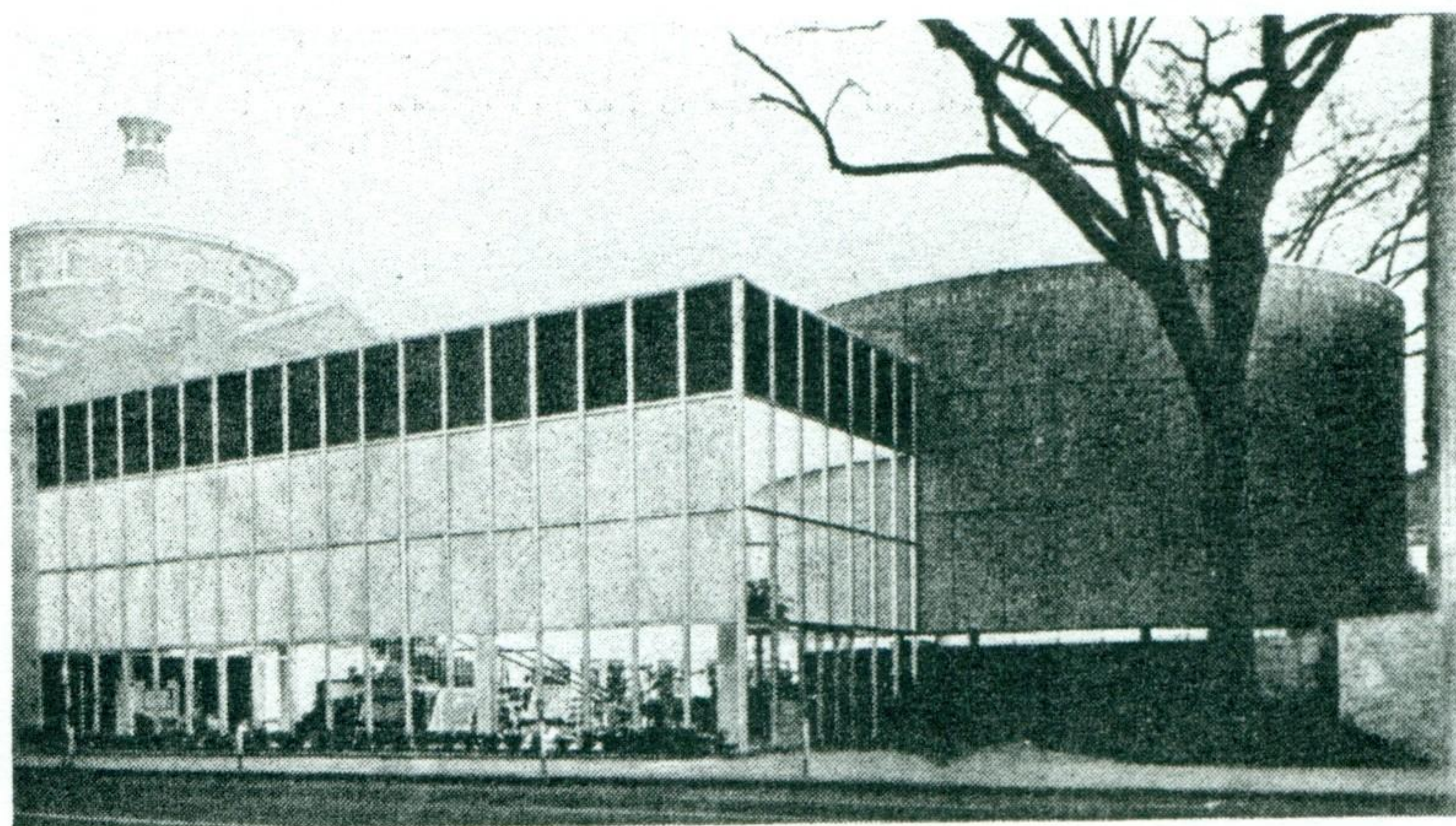
The L-shaped site for the Public Library of Charlotte and Mecklenberg County borders a downtown, corner property that the Library was unable to acquire. It is hoped that eventually the City will purchase it and convert it into a landscaped-park approach to this important public building. In addition to the customary facilities, this central library services and controls nine branch libraries and several bookmobiles.

Much of the plan form derives not only from the site shape but also from the architect's wish to preserve two fine old trees on the property. To do this, a recessed, landscaped area is provided at the main entrance (*above* and *across-page*), and a peaceful interior court is introduced (*below*). The main entrance front, facing North Tryon Street (opened and glazed so that the entire main floor becomes a showcase), is bordered by an alleyway that leads back to connect with a covered and heated bookmobile-service dock, tunneling through the entire structure from the alley to the Sixth Street front of the building. This latter front also contains a secondary entrance to the air-conditioned building, with off-street vehicular drive, where issuance of projectors, record players, motion-picture screens, etc., is handled—"a type of drive-in window service," as Odell describes it. Both here and at the main entrance are slots for after-hours return of books.

Requirements for the present were to house 500,000 volumes, with provision made for later construction to accommodate an additional 350,000 books. Solution consists of two levels of stacks below grade for storing 400,000 volumes, with approximately 75,000 volumes accommodated on the main floor and another 25,000 on the second floor. When further space is needed, a second, two-level stack unit will be added—on the rear two-thirds of the roof. Charging and control desk (SELECTED DETAIL) is placed near the main entrance and so related to the stair that the library operates efficiently, even with limited staff. An adjacent elevator is provided for the occasional use of the elderly or infirm to reach the second floor. The upstairs lobby is used for continuing exhibitions and is bordered by the small auditorium and various specialized book rooms, conference and storage rooms, technical-processing facilities, and library offices.

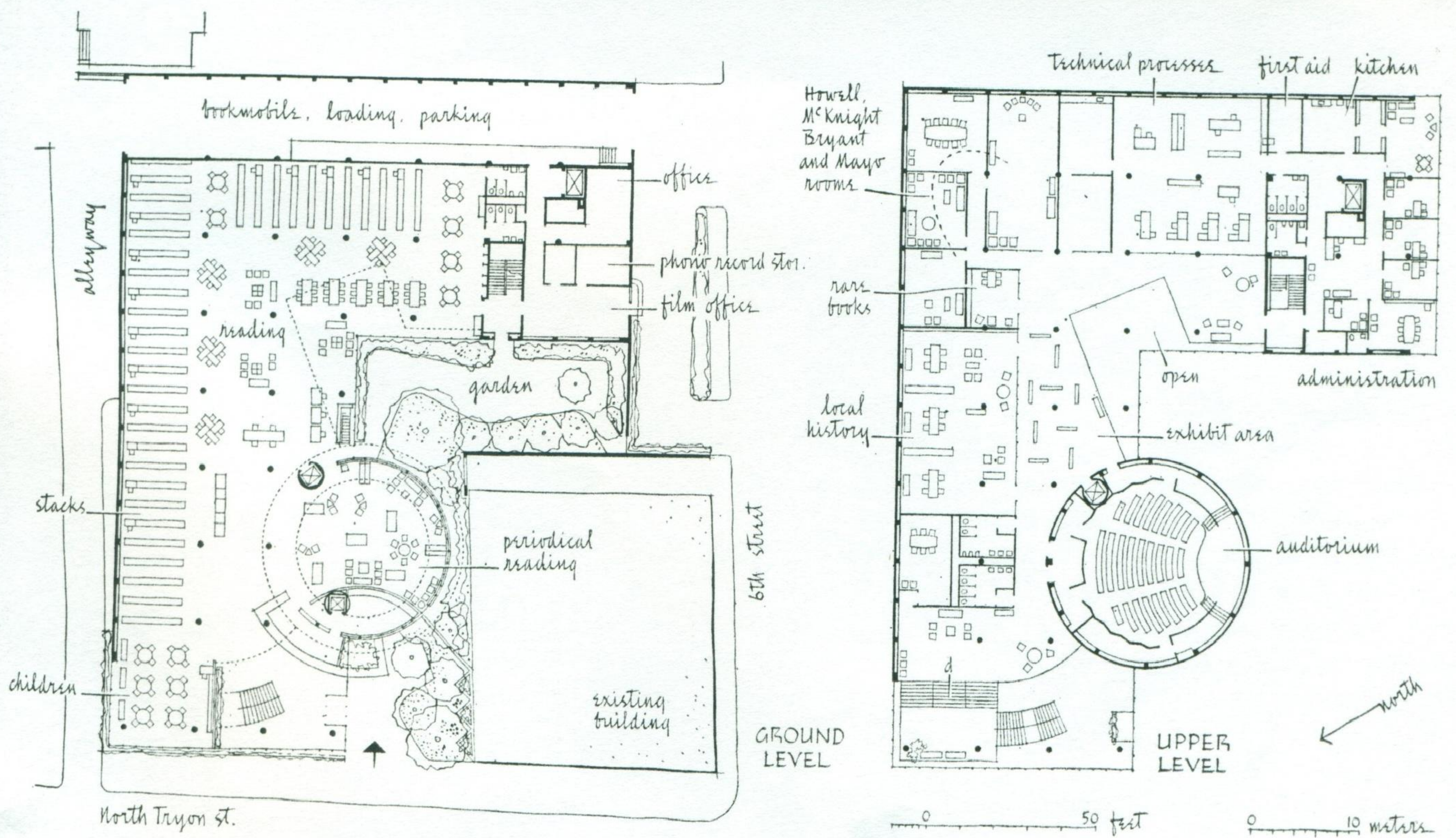
Gardner & Meir were Structural Engineers; W. P. Wells, Mechanical Engineer; John Bolen, Electrical Engineer; General Contractor: J. A. Jones Construction Co.

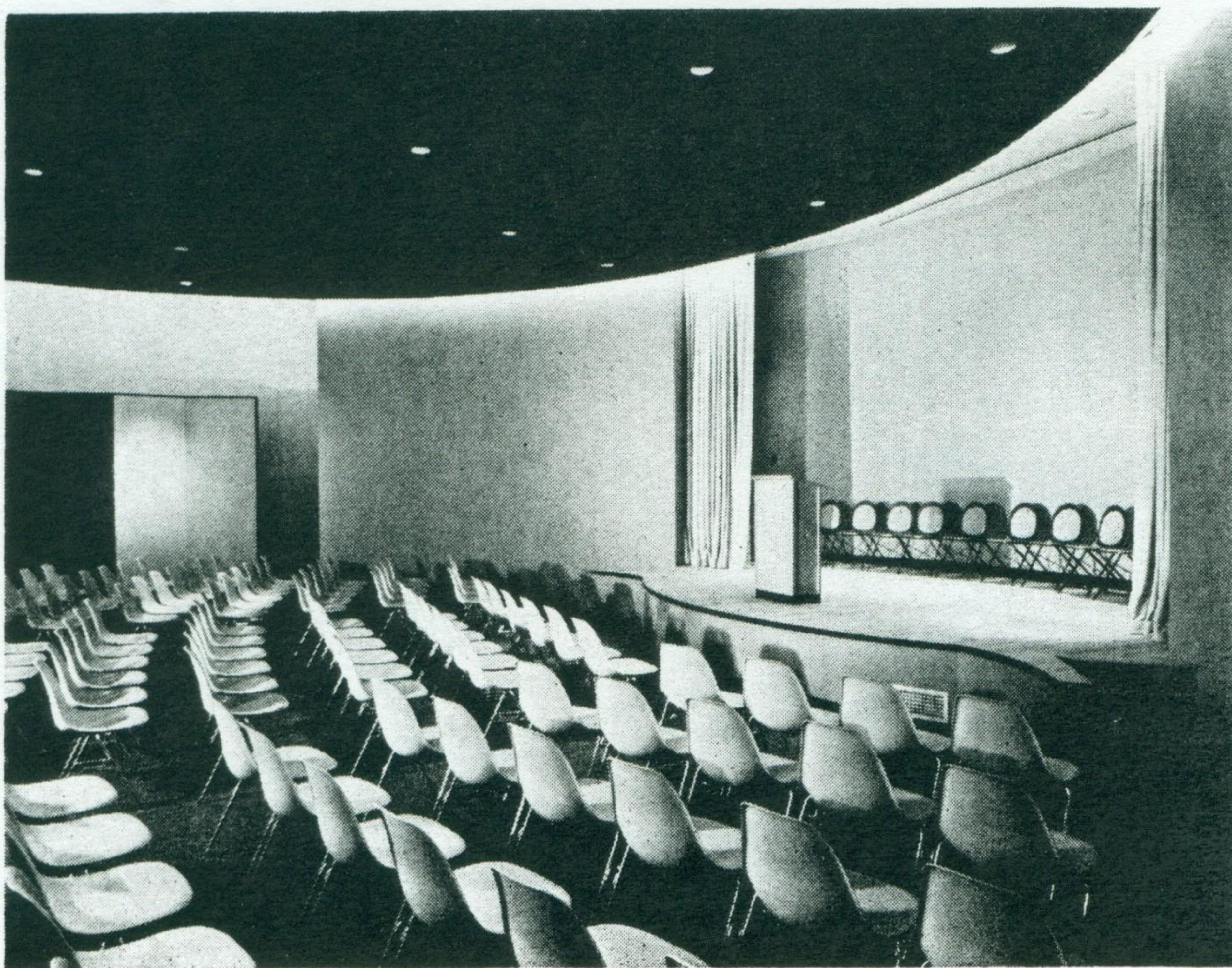
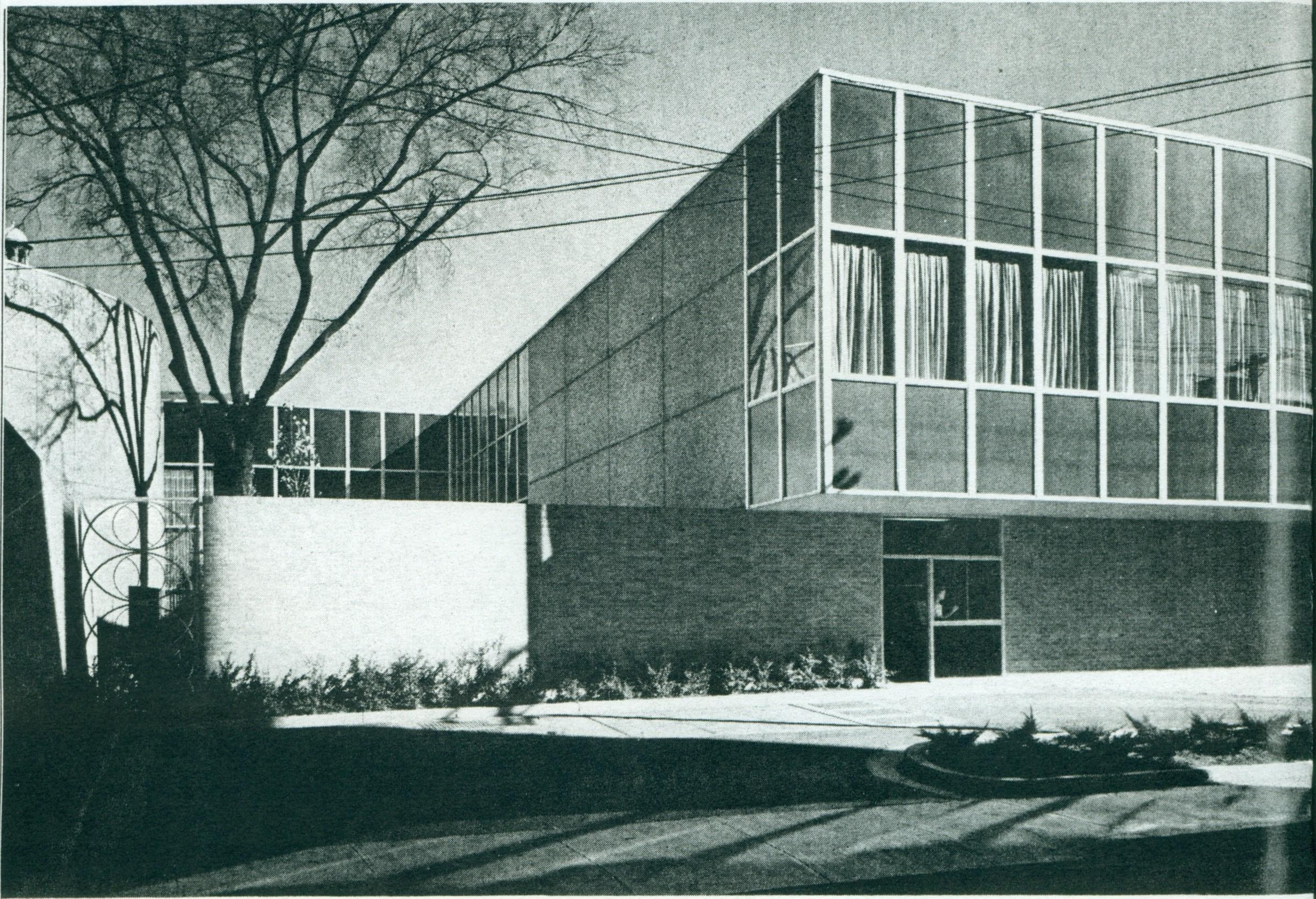
Photos: Joseph Molitor



library



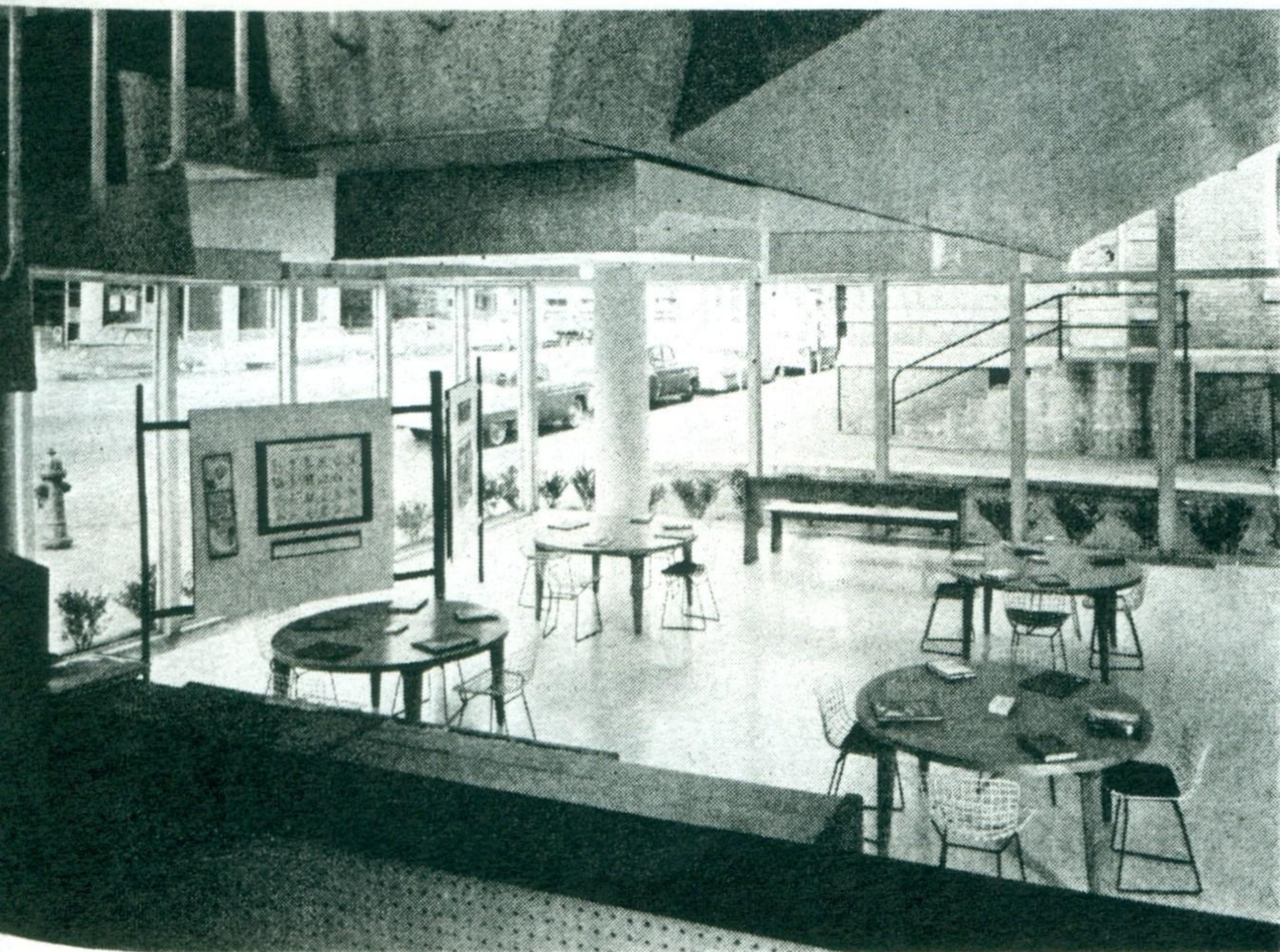
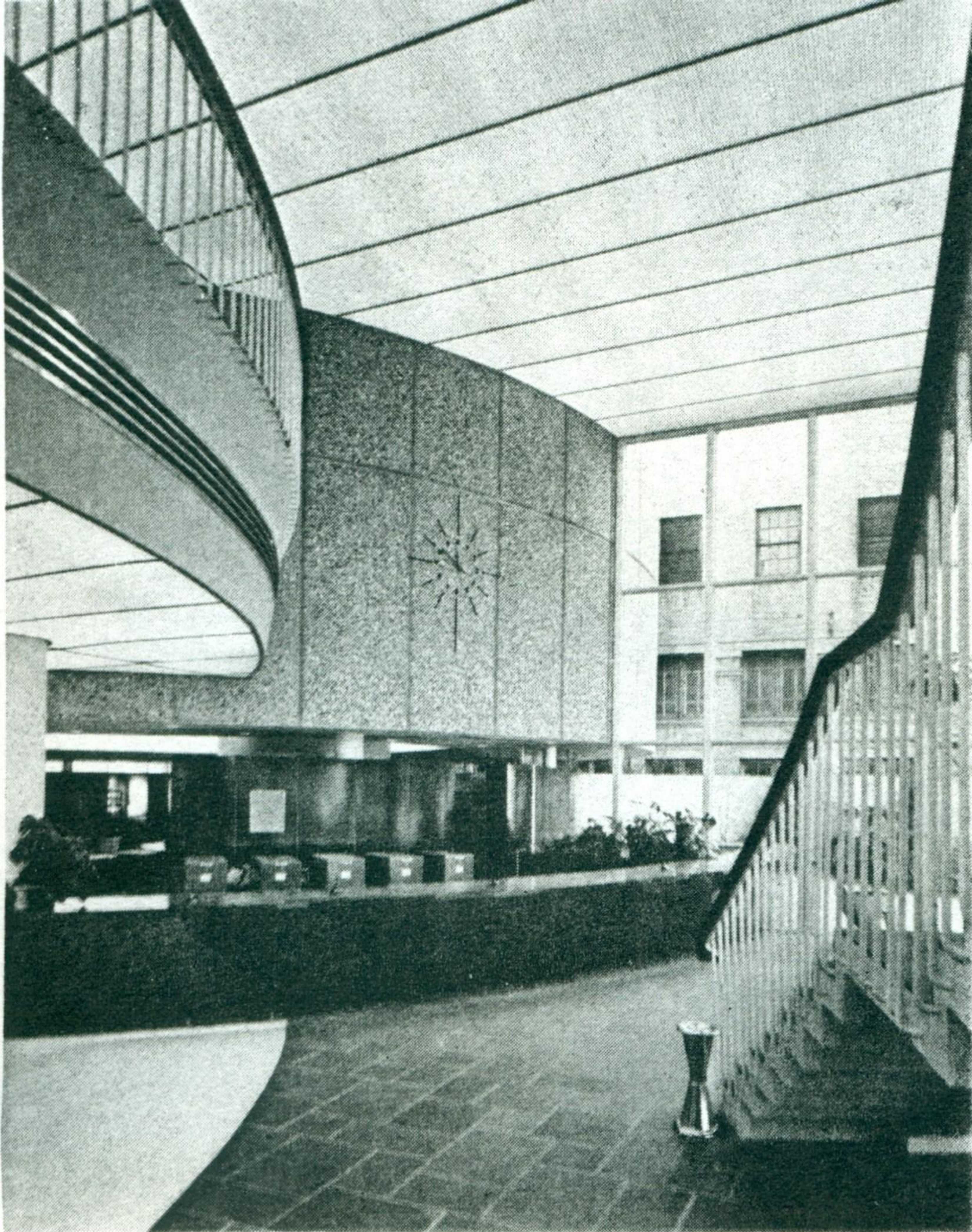




A high wall shields the library courtyard on the Sixth Street front (above).

The small auditorium is in the upstairs portion of the "drum."

Both main entrance and stair adjoin the control and charging desk (acrosspage top); children have a streetfront area of their own (bottom). For sun control on the street façade, wall areas above the glass panels are filled with translucent marble, which provides luminescence but excludes direct sunlight.

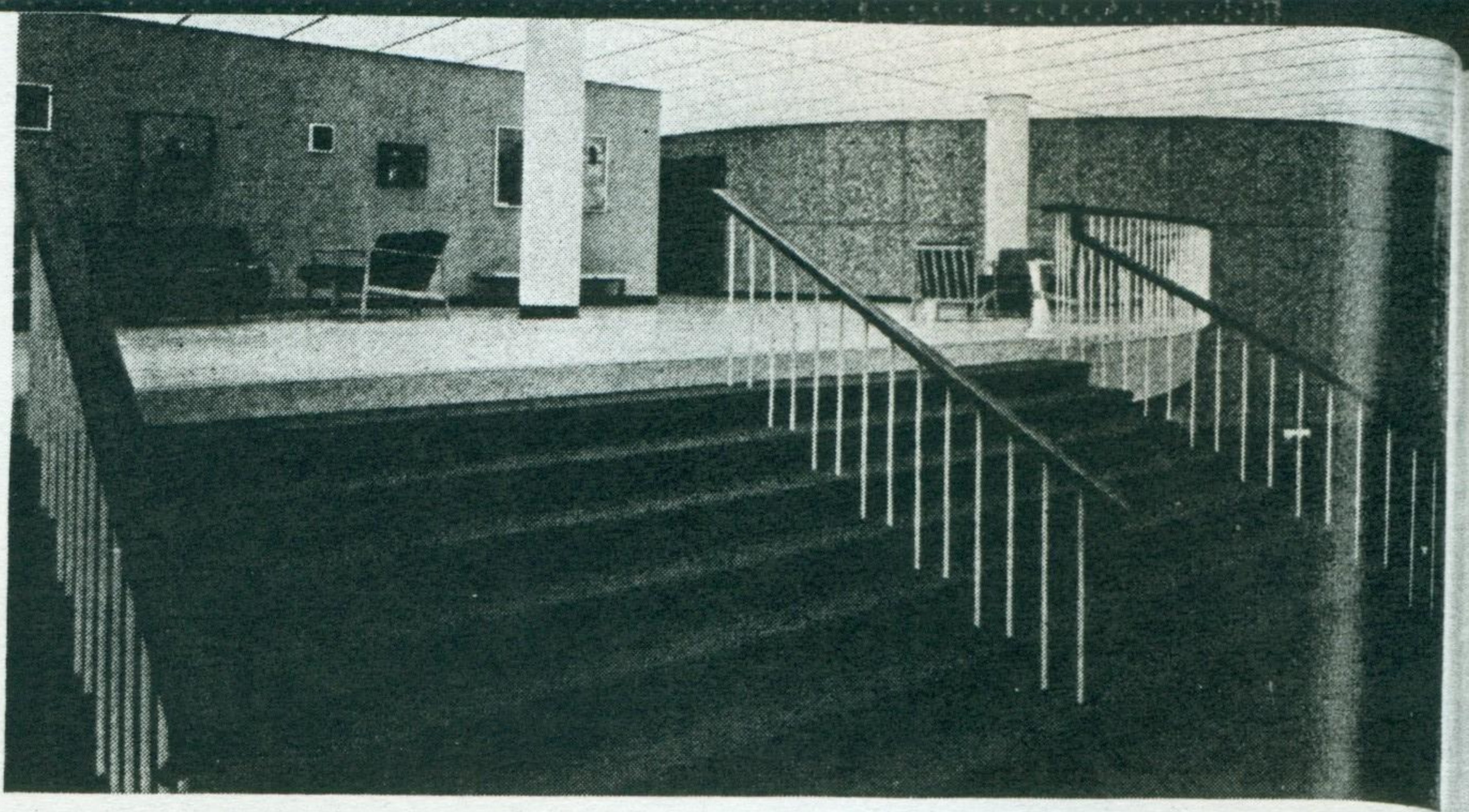


Foundation: reinforced concrete; sub-over concrete piling—Raymond Concrete Pile Company. **Structure:** frame, walls, floors, roof: reinforced concrete; frame for round drum: structural steel—Marko Engineering Company. **Wall Surfacing:** precast-concrete panels, colored-aggregate face—Concrete Materials, Inc.; translucent white marble panels—Georgia Marble Company; porcelain-enamel panels—Davidson Enamel Products, Inc.; plaster; rest rooms, toilets: ceramic tile—Mosaic Tile Company. **Floor Surfacing:** public areas: vinyl tile—American Biltrite Rubber Company; office areas: asphalt tile; main stair: terrazzo; main entrance: flagstone—Jacobs Creek Flagstone Company. **Ceiling Surfacing:** public areas: luminous plastic ceiling—Pittsburgh Reflector Company; office areas: acoustical tile—Johns-Manville Corporation; auditorium and reading rooms: plaster. **Roof Surfacing:** built-up roof—Barrett Division of Allied Chemical & Dye Corporation. **Waterproofing & dampproofing:** masonry waterproofing—Western Waterproofing Company. **Insulation:** acoustical: sprayed asbestos-bonding material—Keasbey & Mattison Company; thermal: rigid type for roof—F. E. Schundler & Company, Inc. **Roof Drainage:** interior drains—Josam Manufacturing Company. **Partitions:** interior: movable—Johns-Manville Corporation; toilet: ceiling hung—Milwaukee Stamping Company. **Windows:** heat-absorbing glass—Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company; window walls—Valley Metal Products Company. **Doors:** interior: wood, flush, solid core—U. S. Plywood Corporation; overhead: steel-slat rolling doors; entrance: aluminum—Pittsburgh Steel Company. **Hardware:** lock sets: cylindrical, heavy-duty—Schlage Lock Company; concealed door closers—Corbin Division of American Hardware Corporation; hinges: solid-bronze ball bearing—Lawrence Brothers; stainless-steel push and pulls—CIPCO Corporation. **Paint & Stain:** exterior: enamel; interior: flat—Benjamin Moore & Company.

equipment

Specialized Equipment: private phone system; conventional console and outlying speaker system—Stromberg-Carlson Company. **Elevators:** hoisting equipment: hydraulic—Rotary Lift Company; cabs and doors: metal panel—Williamsburg Steel Products Company. **Lighting Fixtures:** office area: recessed fluorescent troffers; public areas: luminous ceiling—Pittsburgh Reflector Company; auditorium and stage: coves and recessed incandescent; bookstack: continuous fluorescent strip—Garden City Plating & Manufacturing Company. **Electric Distribution:** General Electric Company. **Plumbing & Sanitary:** wall-hung water closets & lavatories—Crane Company; plastic toilet seats—Sperzel Company; water heater: electric—A. O. Smith Corporation; flush valves: diaphragm type—Coyne & Delany; pipe: galvanized wrought-iron and steel, cast iron—Charlotte Pipe & Foundry; shower controls—Crane Company; drinking fountain—Filtrine Manufacturing Company; fixture carriers—Zurn Industries, Inc.; sump pump—Weil Pump Company. **Heating:** type: low pressure steam; package steam generator—Cyclotherm Corporation; steam coils in ductwork; radiant panels on first floor—Taco Heater, Inc.; pneumatic controls—Minneapolis-Honeywell Regulator Company. **Air Conditioning:** reciprocating compressor, centrifugal blowers—The Trane Company; shell and tube-type condenser—Acme Industries, Inc.; cooling tower: induced draft—The Marley Company, Inc.; ceiling grills, diffusers, and slotted outlets above luminous ceiling—Barber-Coleman Company; filters: electronic—American Air Filter Company; cooling coils—Aerofin Corporation; controls: pneumatic—Minneapolis-Honeywell Regulator Company.

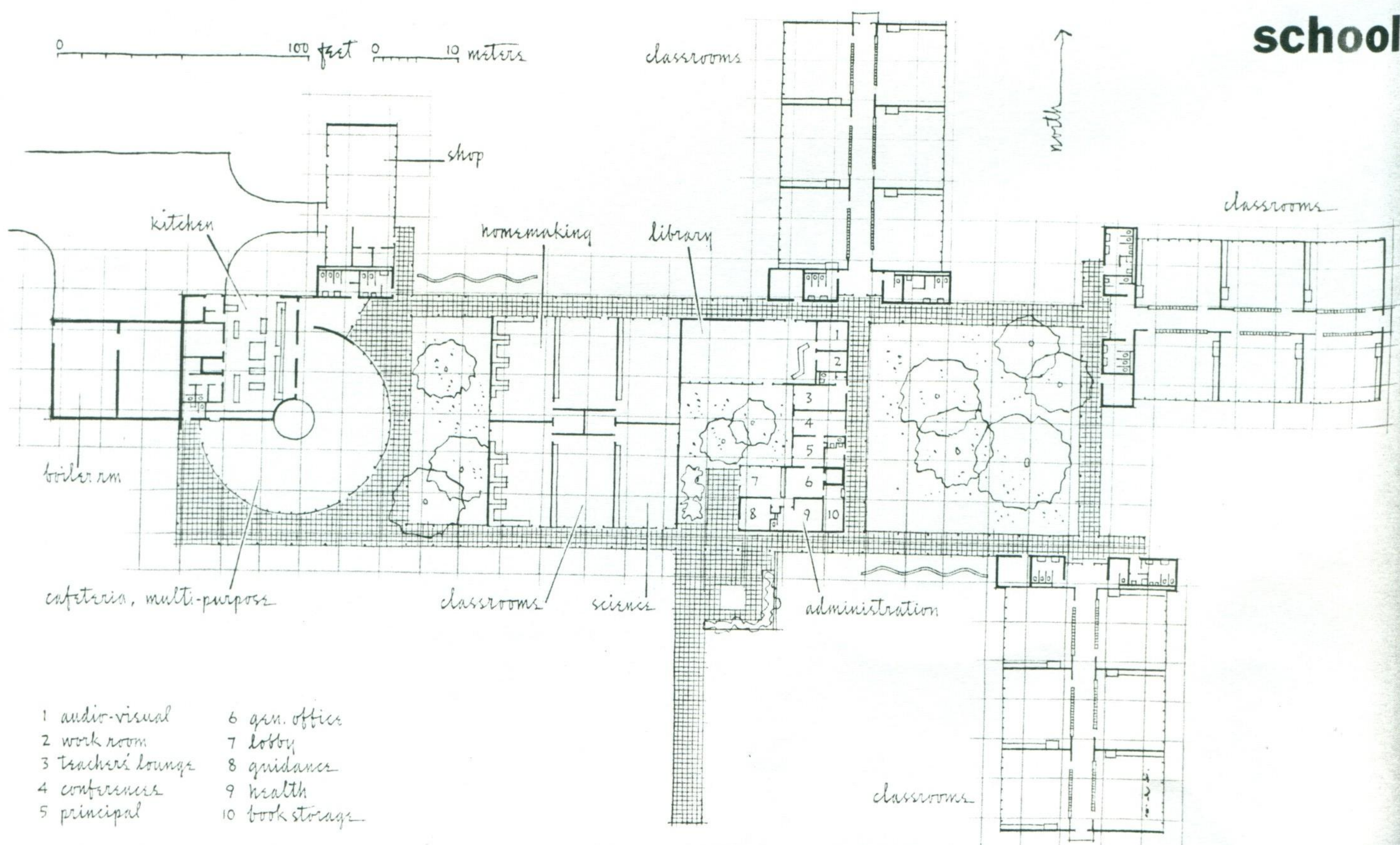
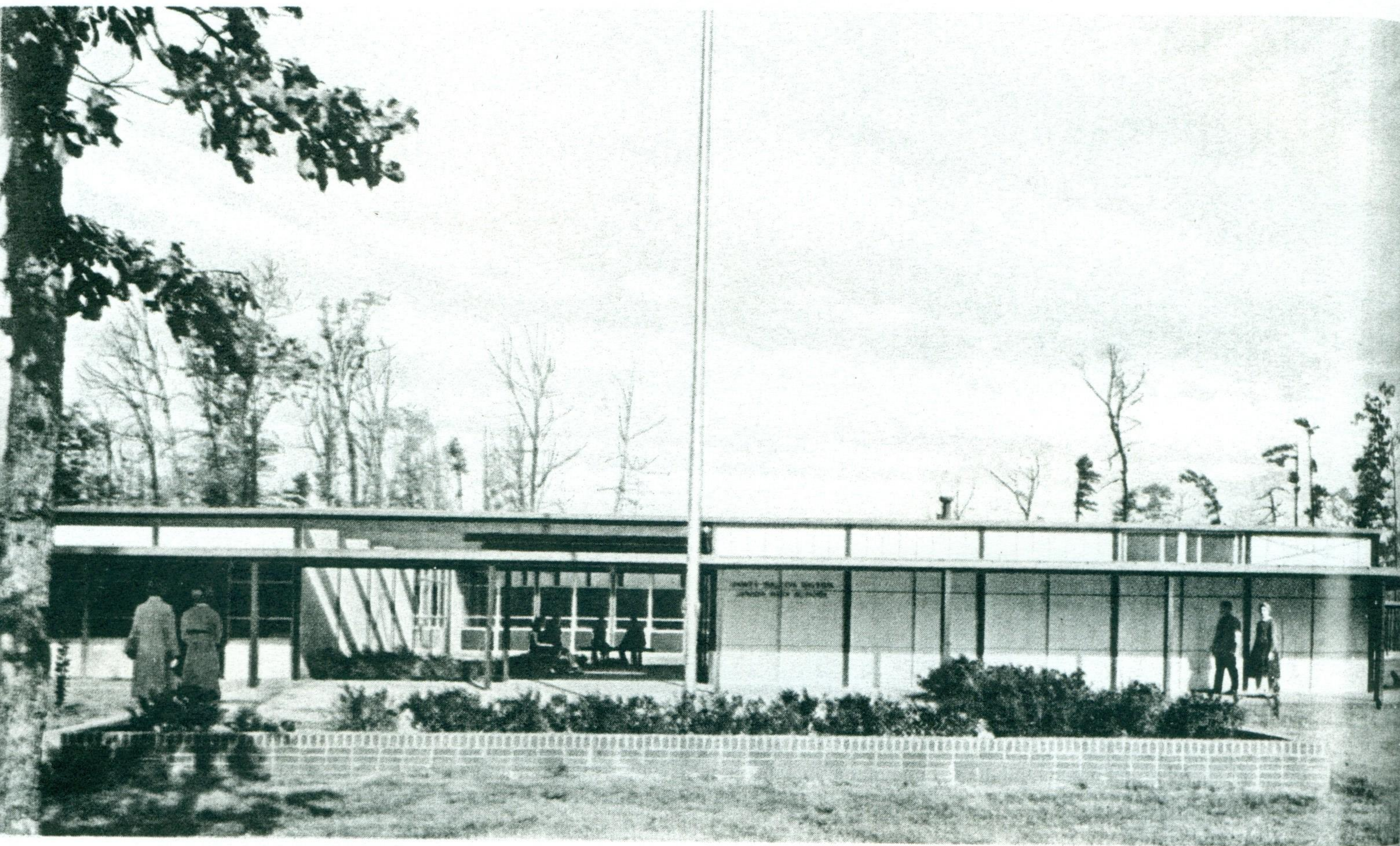
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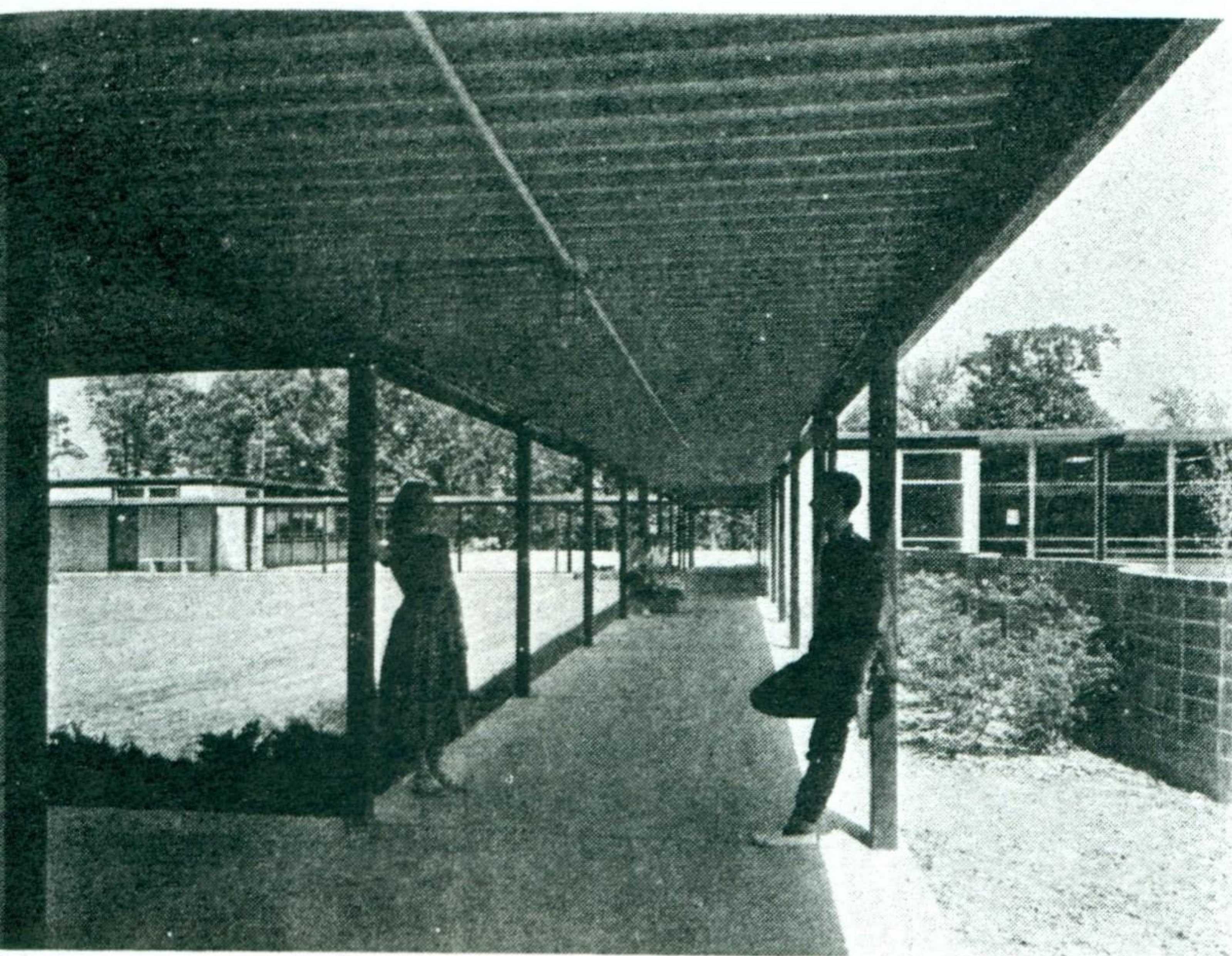


The upstairs gallery (acrosspage top) overlooks the colorful main-floor reading rooms which, in turn, have a restful view of the courtyard. To lend spaciousness to otherwise minimum-ceiling-height rooms, portions of the second floor are cut away, and the main-level areas gain the full two-story height. Ceilings in these areas are continuous luminous plastic panels, which supplement the basic acoustical control provided by sprayed-on asbestos fiber on the structural floor slabs. Interior furnishings for the library, by Martin Van Buren, Inc.; Landscape Architect: John Lippard.



the architect and his community: A. G. Odell, Jr. & Associates

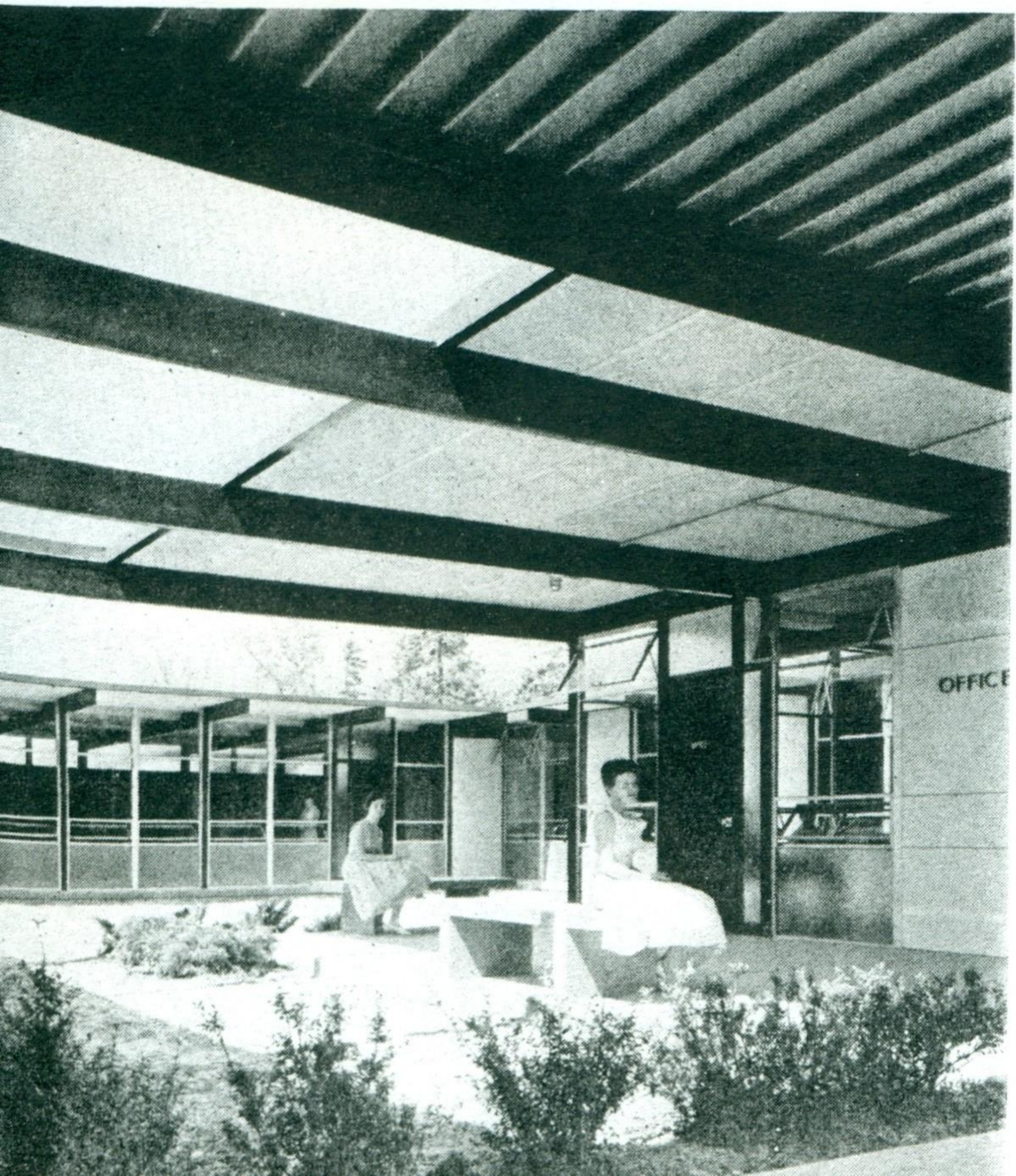




great sense of spaciousness is provided by both large and small landscaped courts, with the bordering walkways giving them definition and the bright porcelain-enamel spandrel panels further emphasizing their gardenlike character.

Collaborating were W. P. Wells, Mechanical Engineer; John Bolen, Electrical Engineer; and Southern Construction Co., General Contractor.

Photos: Joseph W. Molitor



It is difficult to know which of several factors is the most contributory to the design of Wilson Junior High School, Mecklenburg County—the siting; the cluster organization in separate wings for separate age groups; the basic disposition of elements; its colorful finished design; or the extraordinary fact that the building was almost totally shop-fabricated for speedy site assembly. The school received an Award of Merit in this year's AIA Honor Awards judgment.

Choice of the gracious 40-acre site was made largely because most students live to the east of the school. There is a senior high school to the west, and an elementary school is planned to the east. Thus, central placement of the Junior High allows rural-school buses to proceed first to the planned elementary school, then here, and on to be parked at the senior high, without doubling back over the same roads.

Need was for general classrooms for seventh, eighth, and ninth grades (6 rooms each), plus six special classrooms, including homemaking, and an administrative unit. In addition, a multipurpose room and a shop were needed. Since the senior high school has a large auditorium, none is contemplated for the Wilson School.

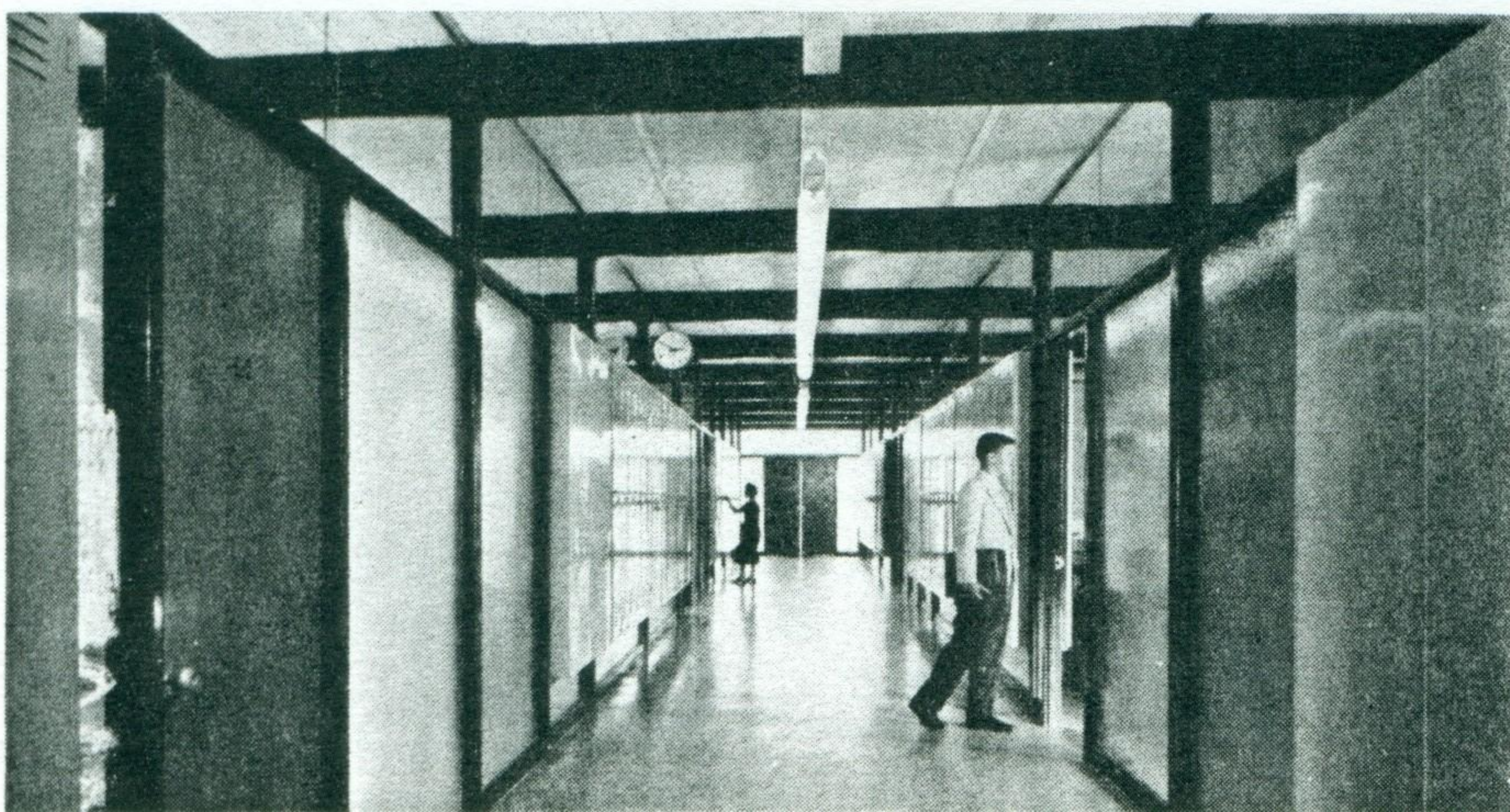
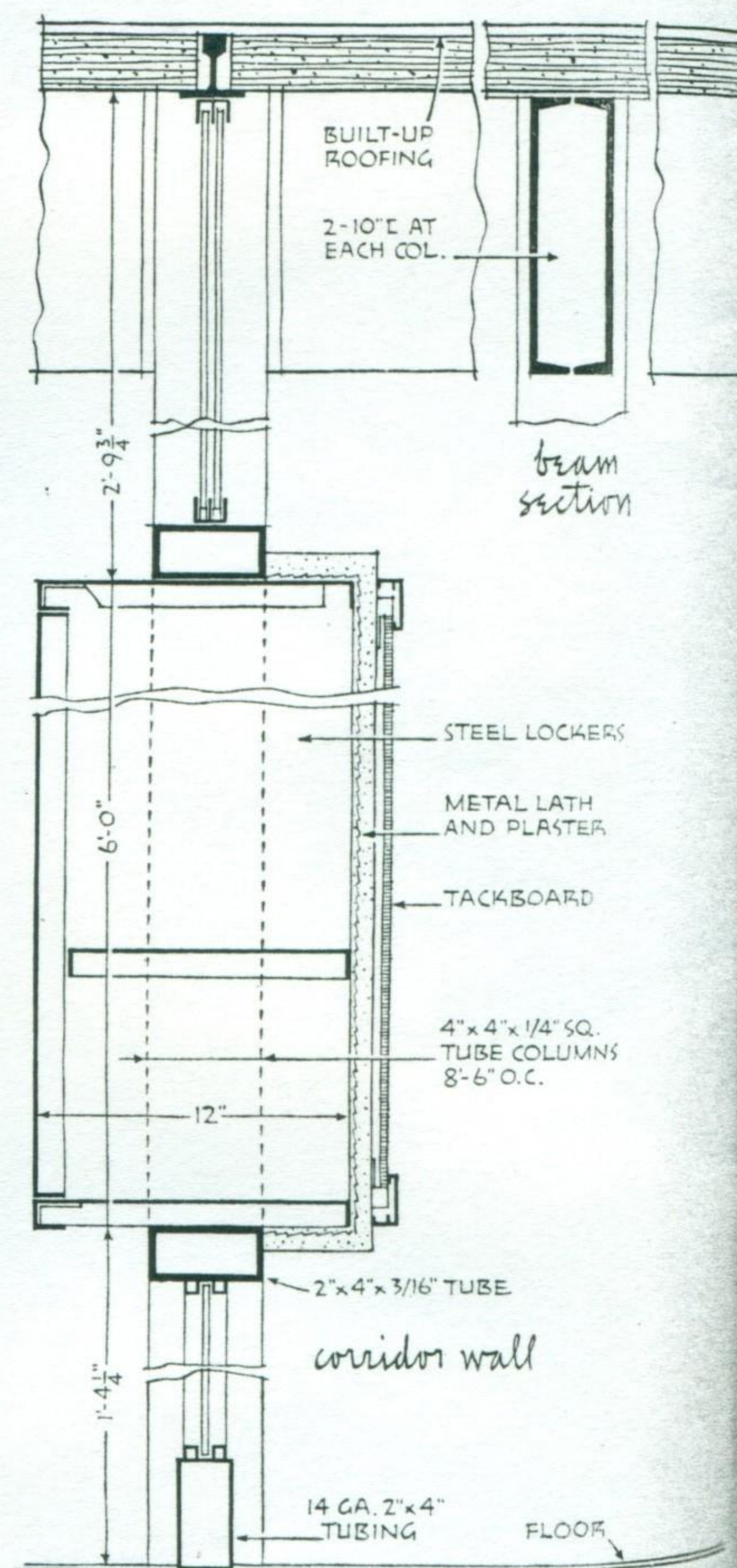
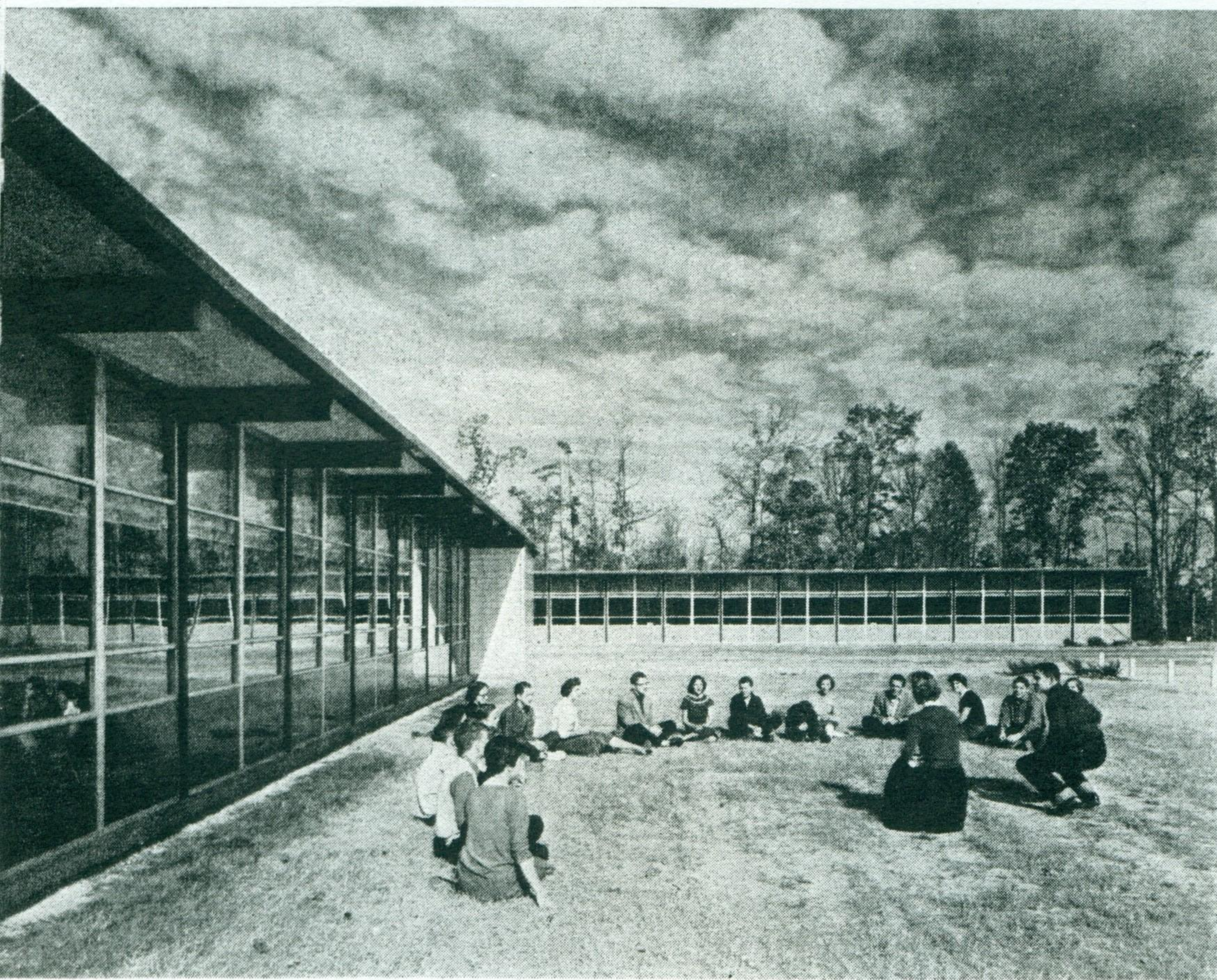
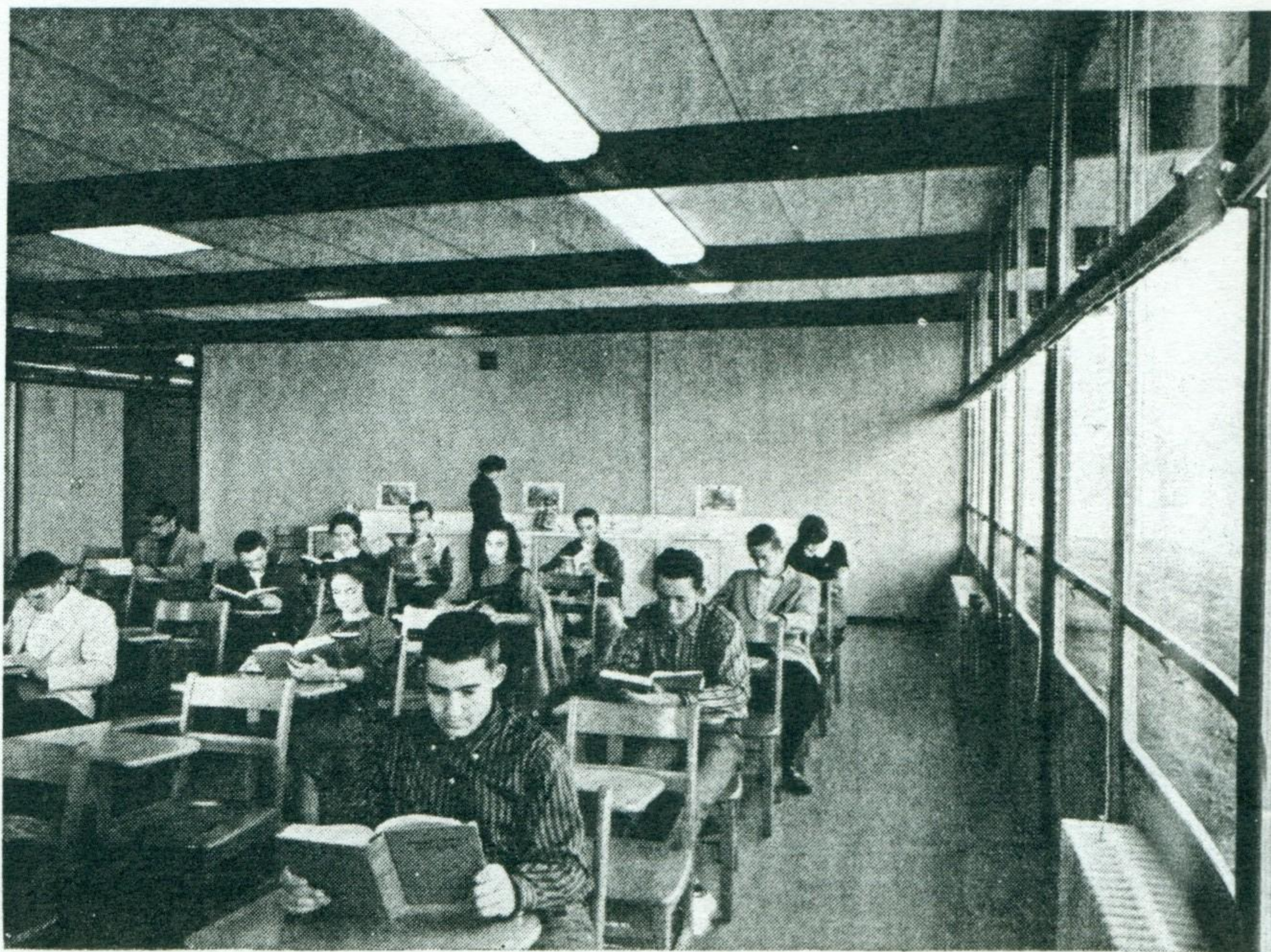
The three grades are accommodated in three separate wings (each extendable, as demand requires), and joined by covered walks around a large open court, on the fourth side of which is the administrative unit (with its own courtyard) and the special classrooms used by all age groups; farther to the west are the relatively “noisy” areas—cafeteria/multipurpose room; shop; boiler room.

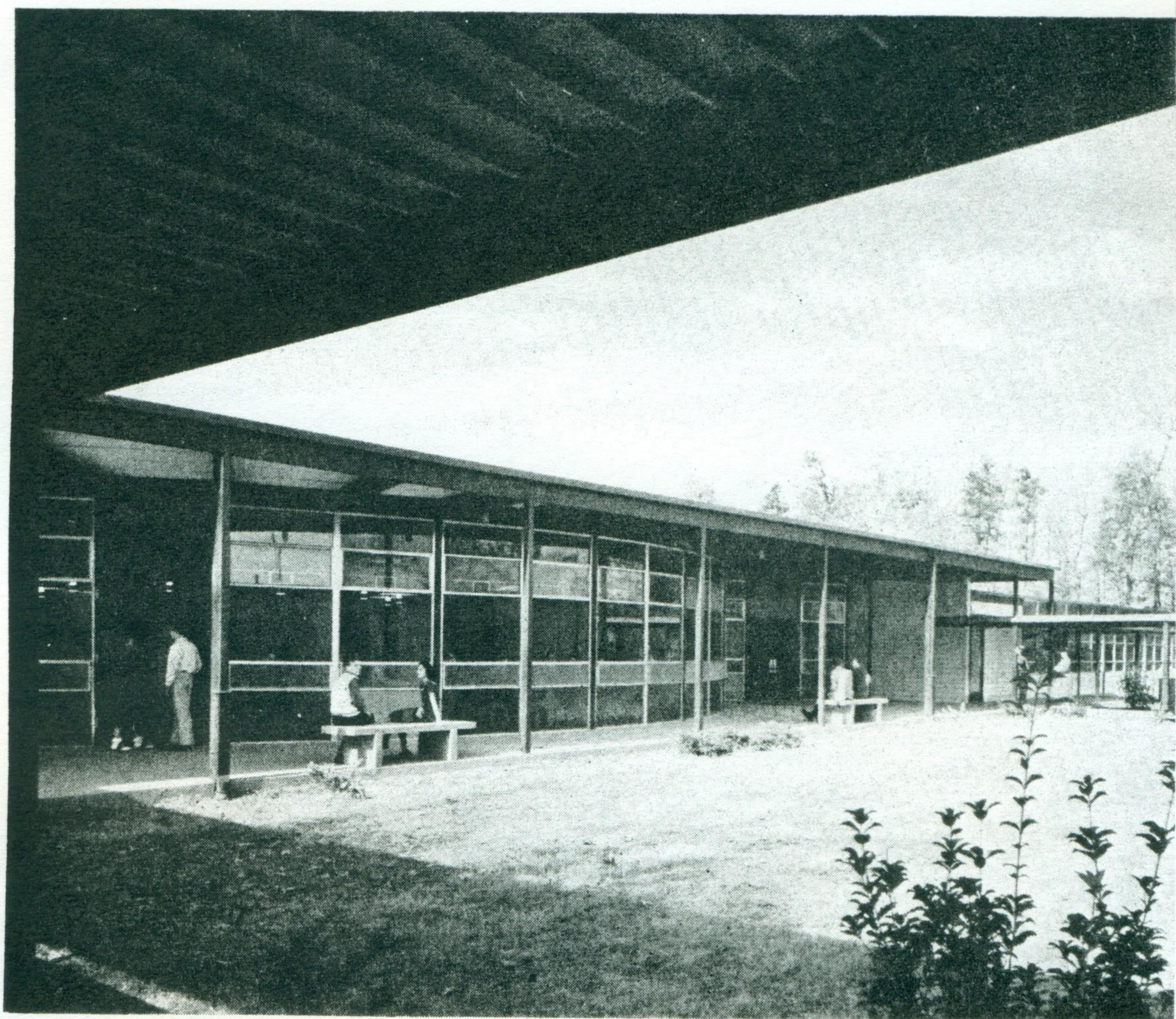
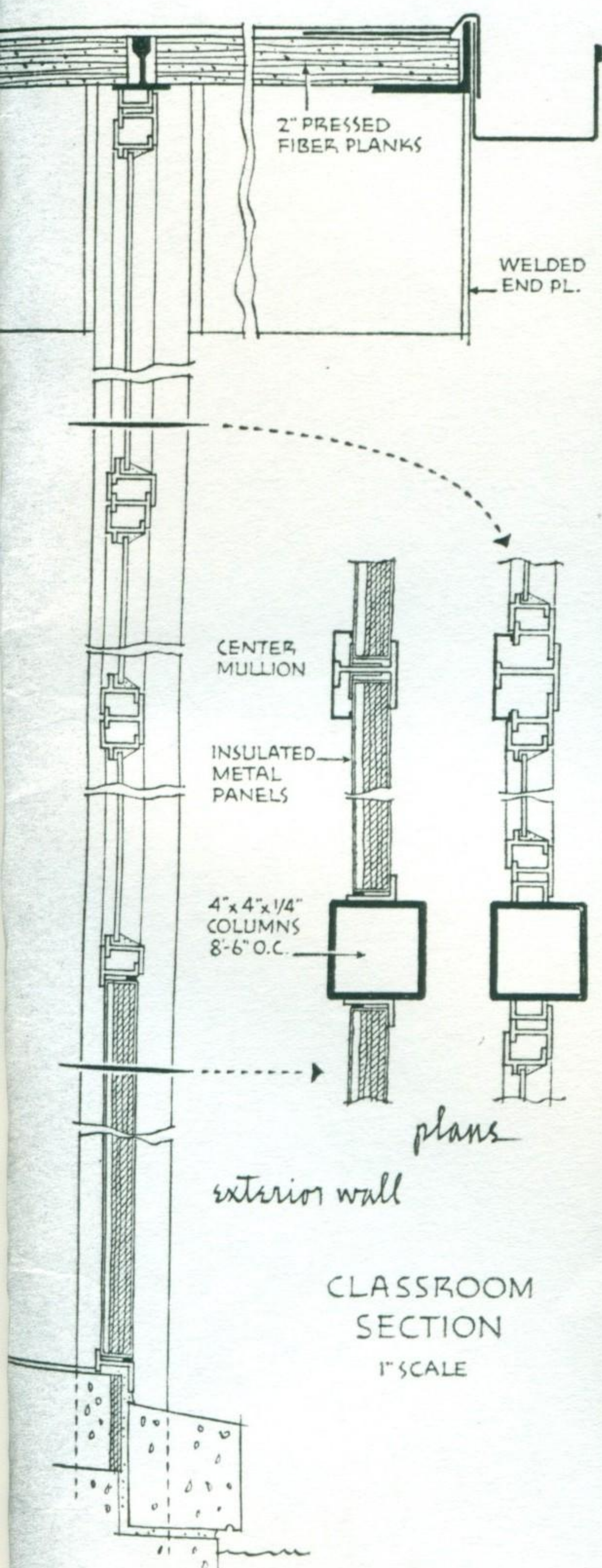
Except for small wall areas in service portions, structure consists of 4-in.-square columns of welded steel tubing and welded box beams made up of two lightweight stair string channels; in the multipurpose unit, the box beams radiate from a central bearing drum to columns along the perimeter of the circular space, continuing out to columns at the edge of the rectangular roof. Structural columns (with only four exceptions) are spaced 8'-4" o.c. All windows (aluminum projected sash), lighting fixtures (8-ft fluorescent tubes), purlins, 1-ft-wide building panels, lockers (in groupings of 8) etc., go with the basic module. Interior light for rooms comes from plastic skylights. Exterior walls are either insulated metal panels or (in spandrel areas) insulated porcelain-enamel panels, a different color used in each wing. Toilet units at ends of classroom wings are wholly of glazed, structural, fac-

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The roof deck, of compressed, wood-fiber planking, is laid on bulb tees, which, in turn, are supported on steel beams. This system not only provides the finished roof decking for receipt of built-up roofing, but also the finished ceiling (unpainted) and the required acoustical and insulating values.

Sectional drawings echo structure at central corridor and exterior wall, including suspended lockers, with pinboard-backup surface on classroom side.





The curved multipurpose room (top) is in a wing along with the shop unit and boiler room, separated from the special classroom block by yet another garden court (above).

In addition to winning an Award Citation in P/A's Second Annual Design Awards Program, the Wilson Junior High School also was given an Award of Merit with Special Commendation, in the AIA, South Atlantic District, Honor Awards Exhibit, 1956.