

Architectural Forum / the magazine of building / December 1957

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The proposal to replace the million private autos in downtown Paris with 200,000 coin-operated cars may be completely wacky, but such inhibited thinking may help unsnarl city traffic.
 - 144 **Engineering of a monument**
Saarinen's Milwaukee War Memorial Building is a notable blend of architecture, engineering, and lightweight concrete. (For brief accounts of other developments in technology, see p. 147.)

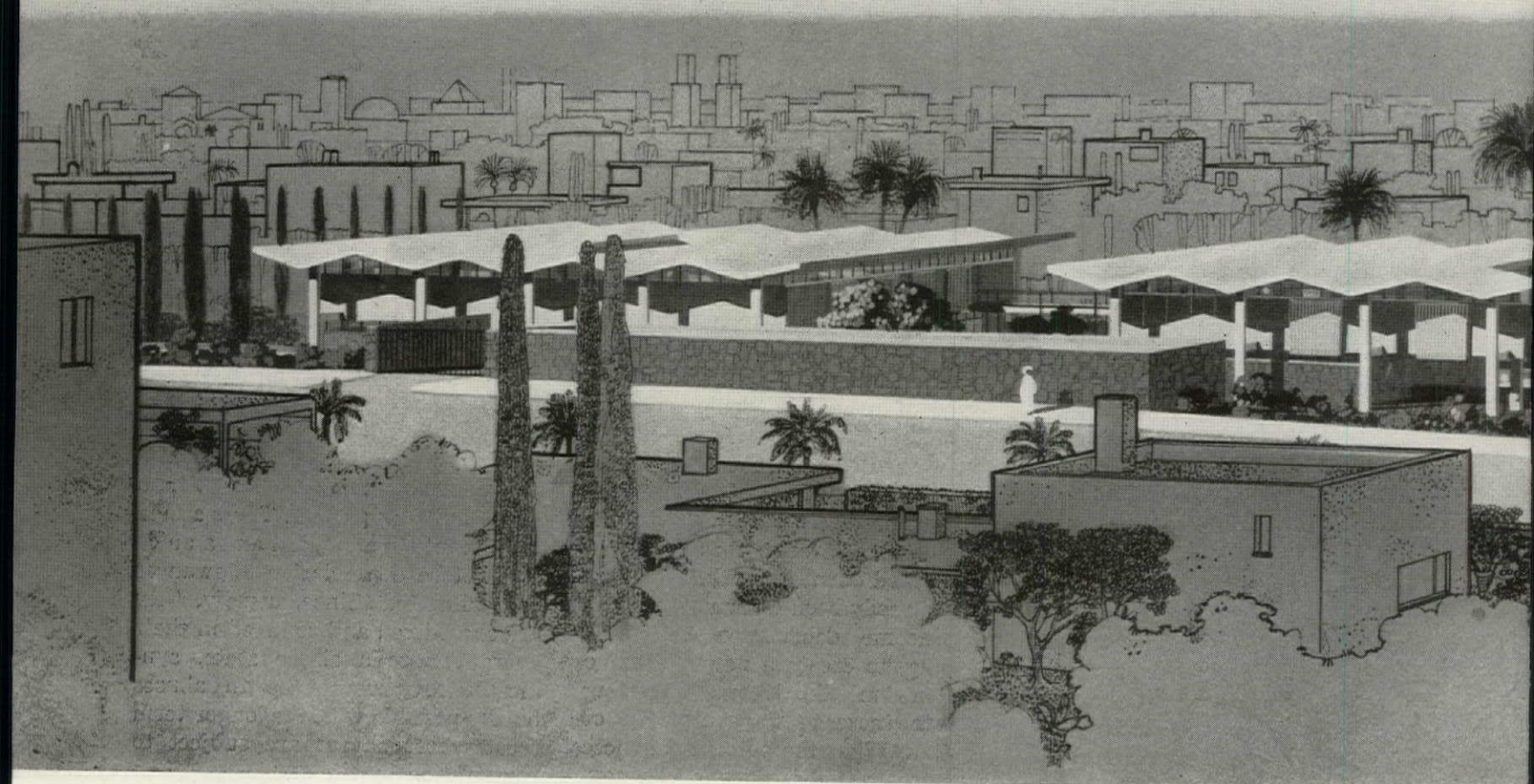
Cover: Design by Ray Komal based on Milwaukee's War Memorial Building (story, p. 90)

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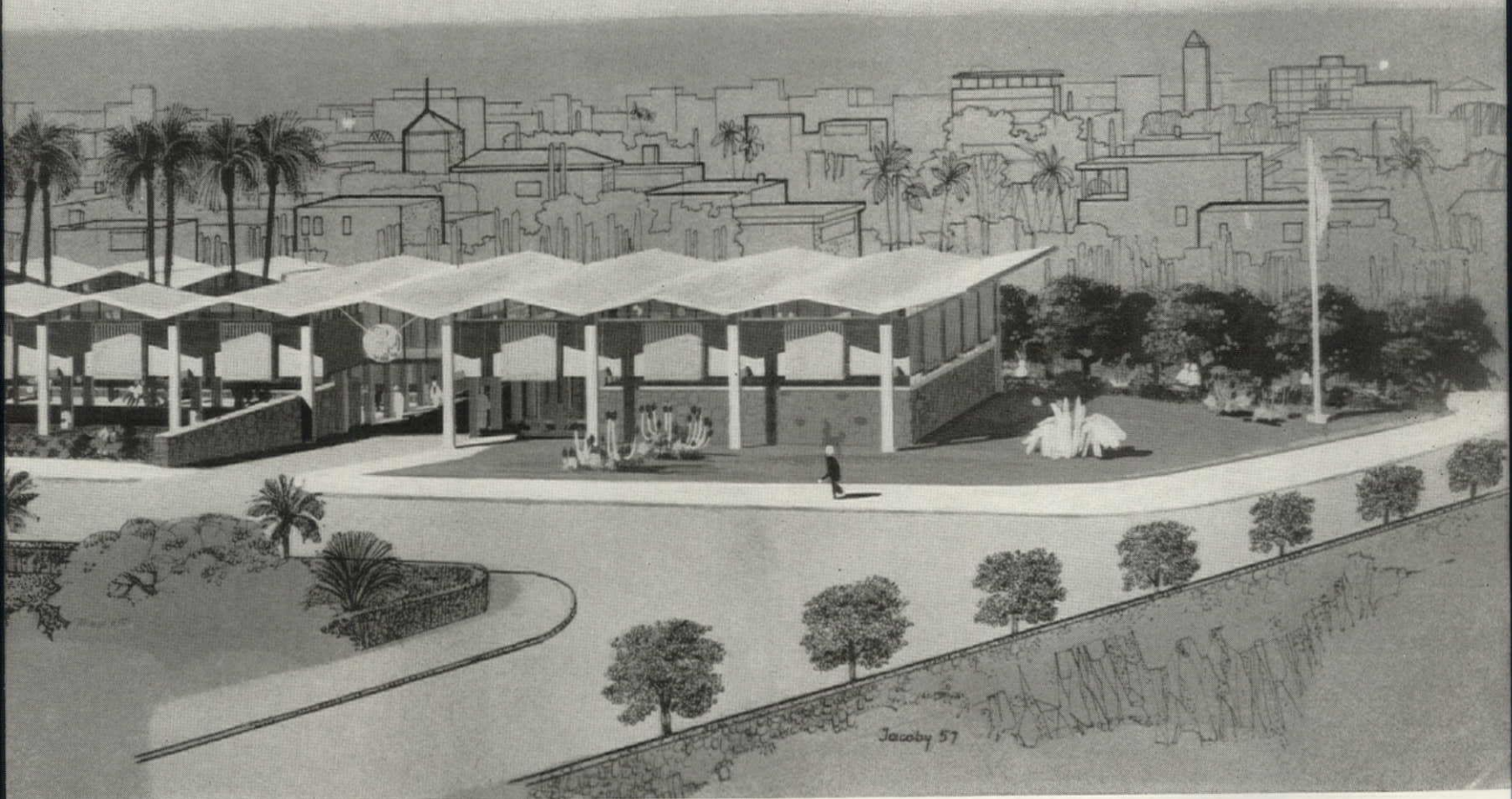


USA abroad

Overseas the State Dept. accepts the proposition that good architecture is good government—an idea too little followed here at home

The 15 embassy and consular buildings shown on the following pages are a sampling of 50-odd current projects in the program of the State Department's Office of Foreign Buildings (FBO). By and large, the overseas face they present for the US is a face of assurance, importance, tact and vitality.

Those last two qualities in particular have been so conspicuously absent from the federal government's architecture at home—and indeed from the official architecture of most modern governments elsewhere too—as to throw doubt on the ability of the contemporary architect to succeed with monumental government buildings. The FBO program, now large enough and solid enough to show it is no fluke, proves one thing: even though the building with governmental symbolic character is still no easy assignment, good government architecture *can* be done by US architects. In most of the examples shown here, the symbolism necessarily has a flavor of the exotic, but to hit this right for Rabat or Accra or Bangkok has been no less



US ambassador's residence and embassy office building for Rabat, Morocco; Ketchum, Giná & Sharp, architects

demanding than it would be to design for midtwentieth-century Washington with vigor and diplomacy.

To get these creative results from its architects, and to raise the standards of its program consistently during four years, as it has, FBO has been pretty creative itself in the administrative realm. It has evolved a technique for operating as an intelligent client that could not only profit other government bodies, but that contains some useful tips for any corporate client.

The key stroke at FBO was the creation in Jan. '54 of an architectural advisory panel, composed of men of real stature* to serve not as a figurehead but as a hard-working, trusted "building committee." Originally the chairman, appointed for a set term, was a former foreign service officer. Now the chairmanship goes to an active top career diplo-

mat while he is on Washington assignment (usually about a year) between foreign posts. FBO has found this combination of fresh field experience with architectural authority the smoothest working arrangement.

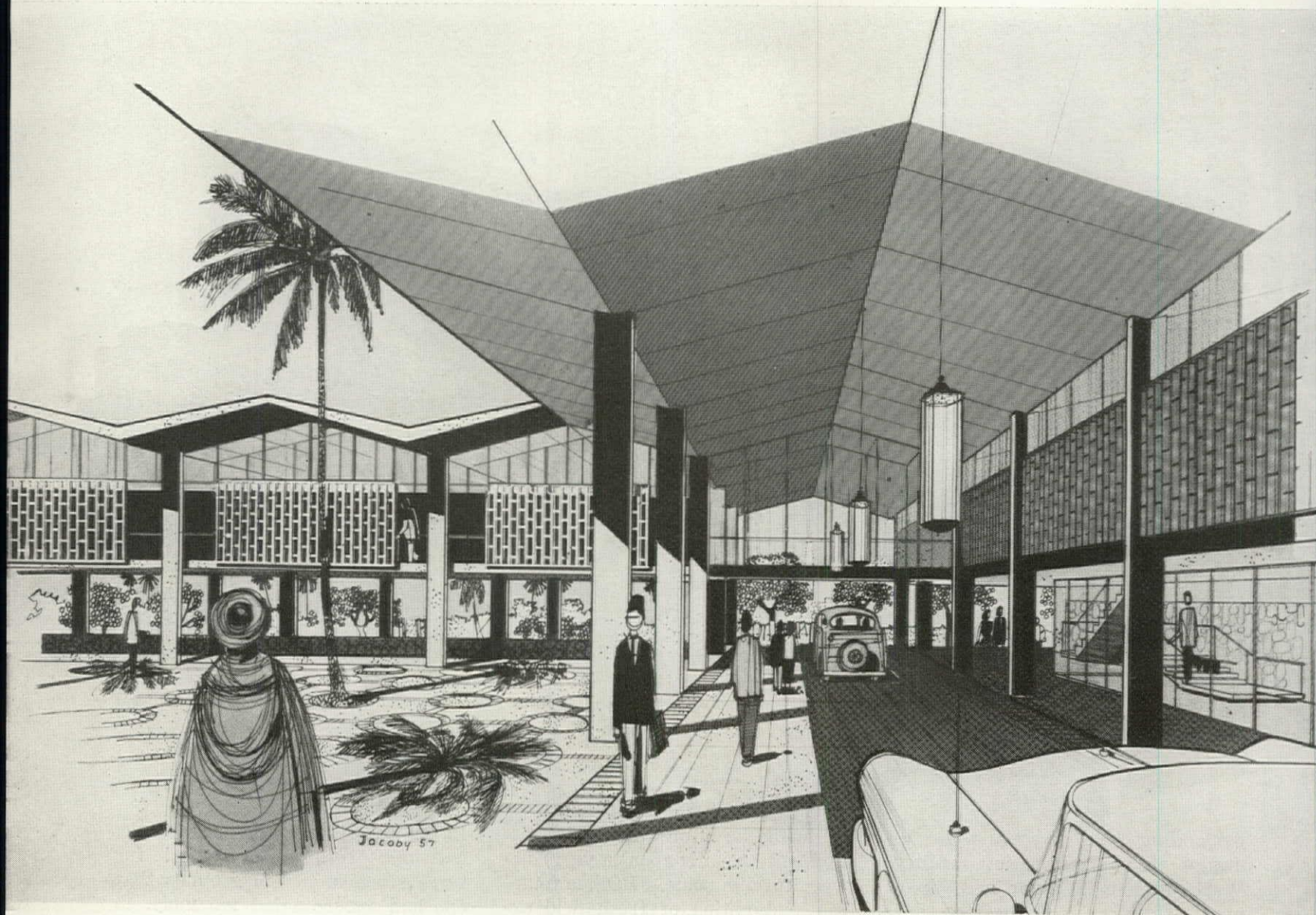
The panel recommends an architect for each project, basing its recommendations on the evidence of brochures which architects who want FBO work must take the initiative of submitting. When congressmen with architect constituents find this apolitical selection hard to understand, FBO's policy and methods are patiently and firmly explained; this has always been accepted and indeed respected. "It is simple to stay unpolitical," says an FBO official, "if you just never, never, never make the first political decision."

The architect gets a full briefing on practical and diplomatic aspects of his project and a trip to the site. Nowadays it is a rare first scheme that does not need revision, perhaps several times, for the advisory panel functions far more as a critical body than in its early experimental days.

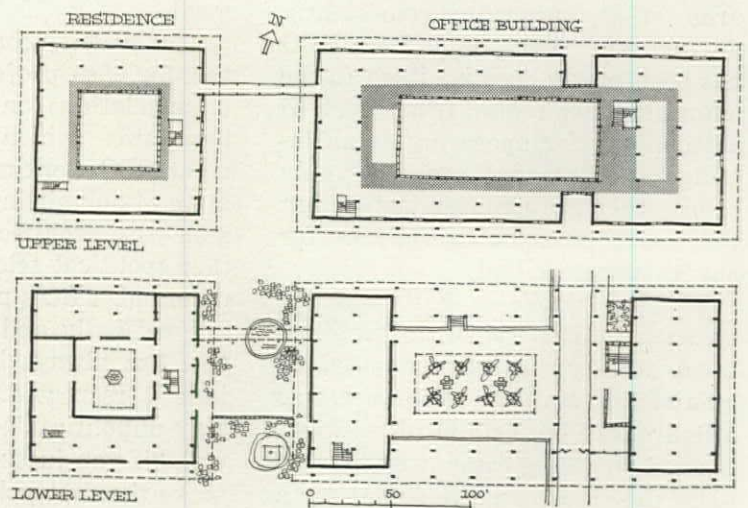
In one round this fall, for example, revisions were recommended for three schemes on the grounds that one had subordinated too much to parking, another had fallen into the temptation of competition with adjacent commercial buildings, the third was considered too overtly exhibitionistic. But the advisory panel steers scrupulously clear of asking for any rubber-stamp solution. After a critical session, the architect is asked to send by letter his understanding of what was said. This is confirmed against the minutes. If he has misunderstood or forgotten a point, he is straightened out at once. This seemingly simple requirement was the fruit of much trial and error and has worked an enormous improvement in the planning process.

Official US building abroad, not many years ago, was a sorry affair. The change came because of foreign criticism sharp enough to worry the State Dept. into the successful solution. Sharp domestic criticism may be the only means that will force similar reforms at home.

* Present members—appointed for two-year terms—are Architects Richard M. Bennett, Edgar I. Williams, and Eero Saarinen. Their predecessors were Pietro Belluschi, Henry R. Shepley, and Ralph T. Walker.



DELINEATOR: HELMUTH JACOBY

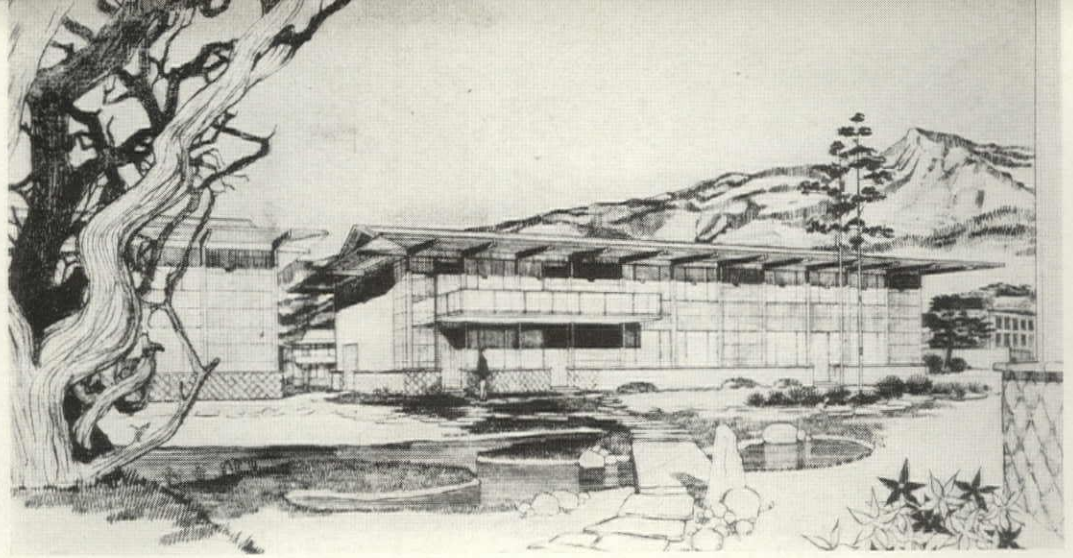


Rabat, Morocco is a city which delights in walled gardens, in intricate play with texture and color, and in surprises around the corner. For it Architects Ketchum, Giná & Sharp have designed an embassy group that overlooks the panorama of the city from an eminence and becomes, itself, a distinctive and harmonious accent in the panorama (p. 114). The embassy office entrance passes alongside a rubble wall, beneath the reinforced concrete roof, and opens into a palm-grove patio (above) with the view of the

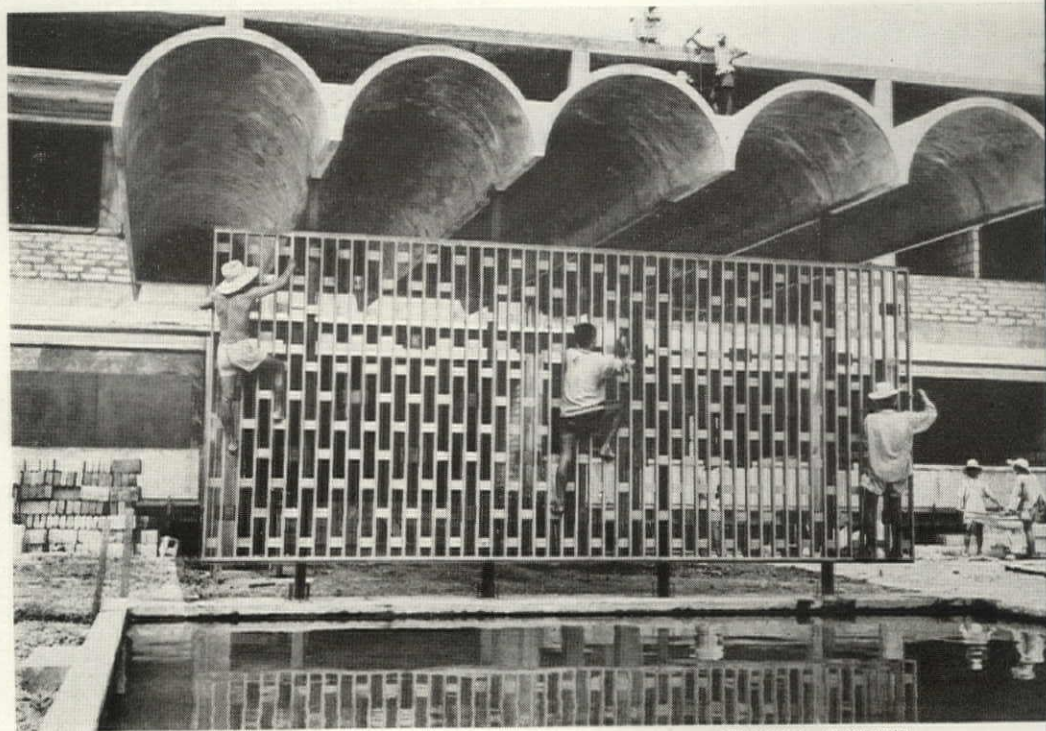
city glimpsed beyond, beneath the open first story. The second-floor office walls ringing the patio are screened with wood grilles set with colored glass inserts. Separated by another garden is the ambassador's residence (left in plan), the center for formal receptions. On the exterior, windows corresponding with the peaked sections of the roof are sun-screened with vertical aluminum louvers. Operating sash (including 40% of transom lights) catch the prevailing Atlantic breeze to make air conditioning unnecessary.

ARCHITECTS: KETCHUM, GINA & SHARP
 PARTNER-IN-CHARGE: MORRIS KETCHUM JR.
 STAFF ARCHITECT: OLIVIER DE MESSIERES
 ENGINEERS: SEVERUD-ELSTAD-KRUGER, ASSOC.
 LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: THOMAS D. CHURCH & ASSOC.

Seoul, Korea: Embassy staff housing by Architect Ernest J. Kump is designed in small units (four apartments to a building) so groupings may accommodate to oriental gardens, some of which, like the one in the rendering, already exist on the site. Kump designed for common local methods and materials: reinforced concrete, masonry, terrazzo, colored tile. The overhangs anticipate equinoctial rains and summer heat.



Djakarta, Indonesia: This construction view of the embassy office building by Architects Raymond & Rado is the view which will greet visitors, who approach beside the pool and turn behind the dark blue painted iron screen, beneath a thin-shell porte-cochere designed by Engineer Paul Weidlinger. The former US consulate here, like all government buildings, was of Dutch influence, now anathema. The architects did not deem as applicable the indigenous architecture (which features astonishing "buffalo horn" roof profiles). The new embassy is an example, instead, of what might be called international-tropical.

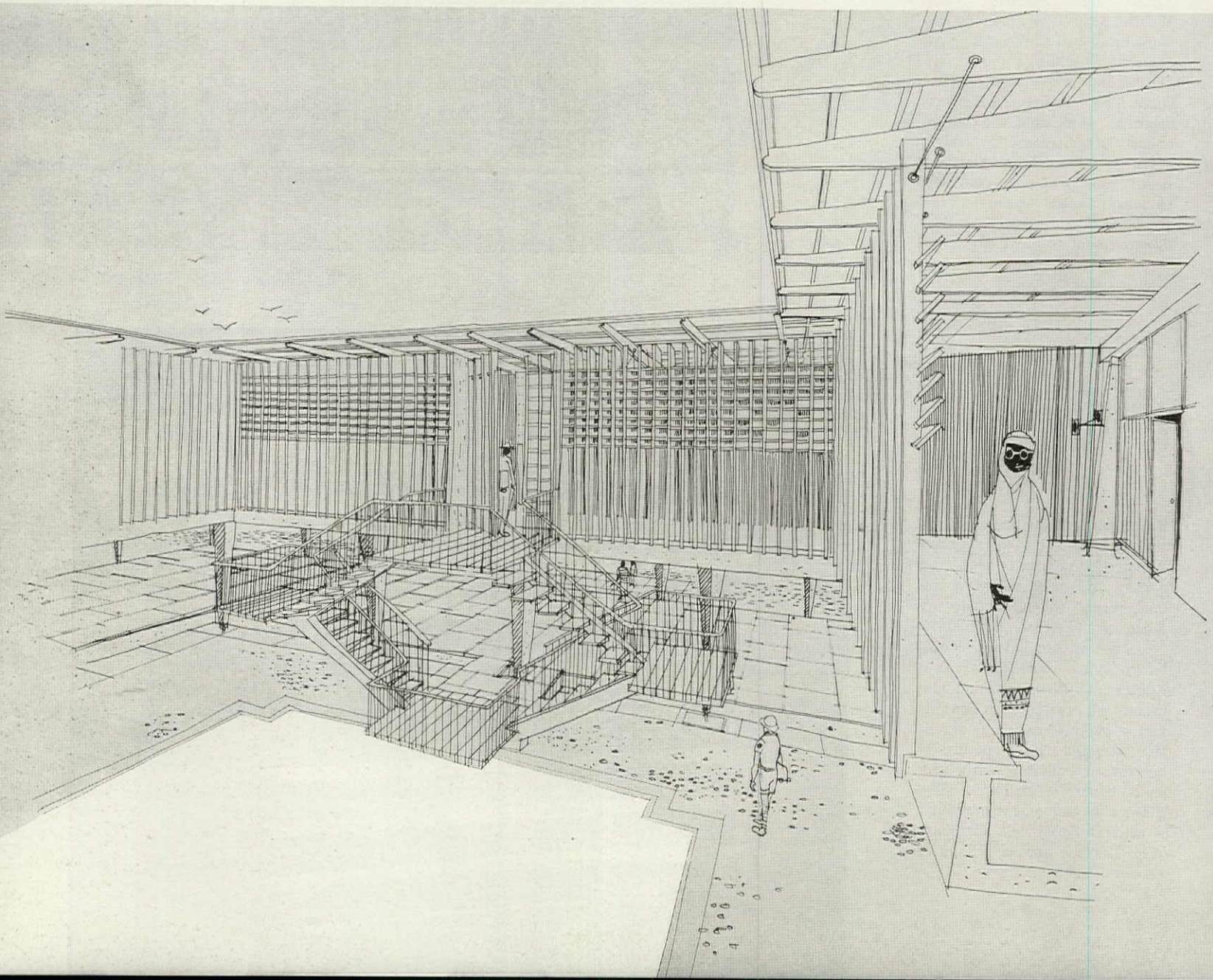
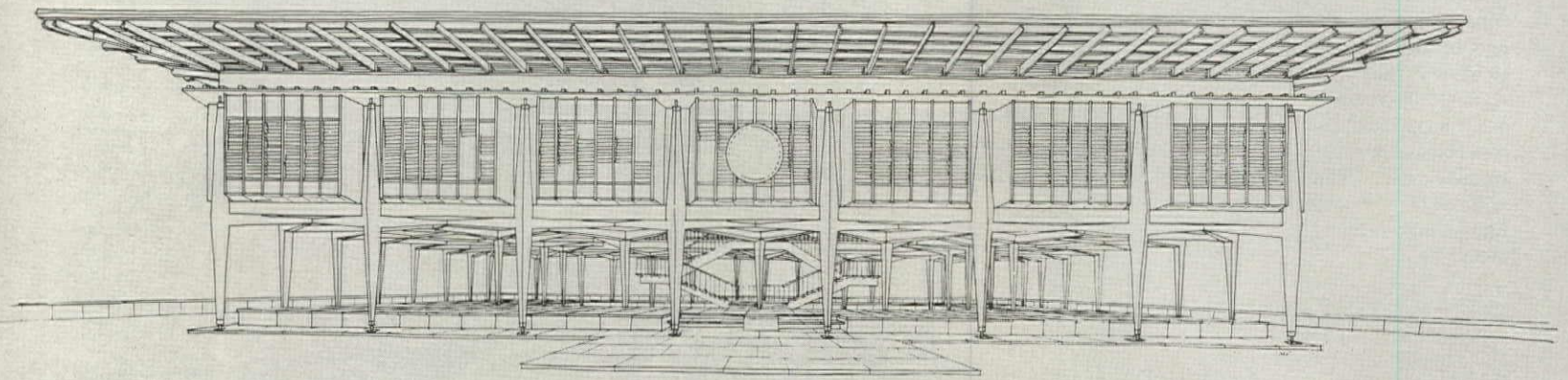


JOHN LAUNOIS—BLACK STAR

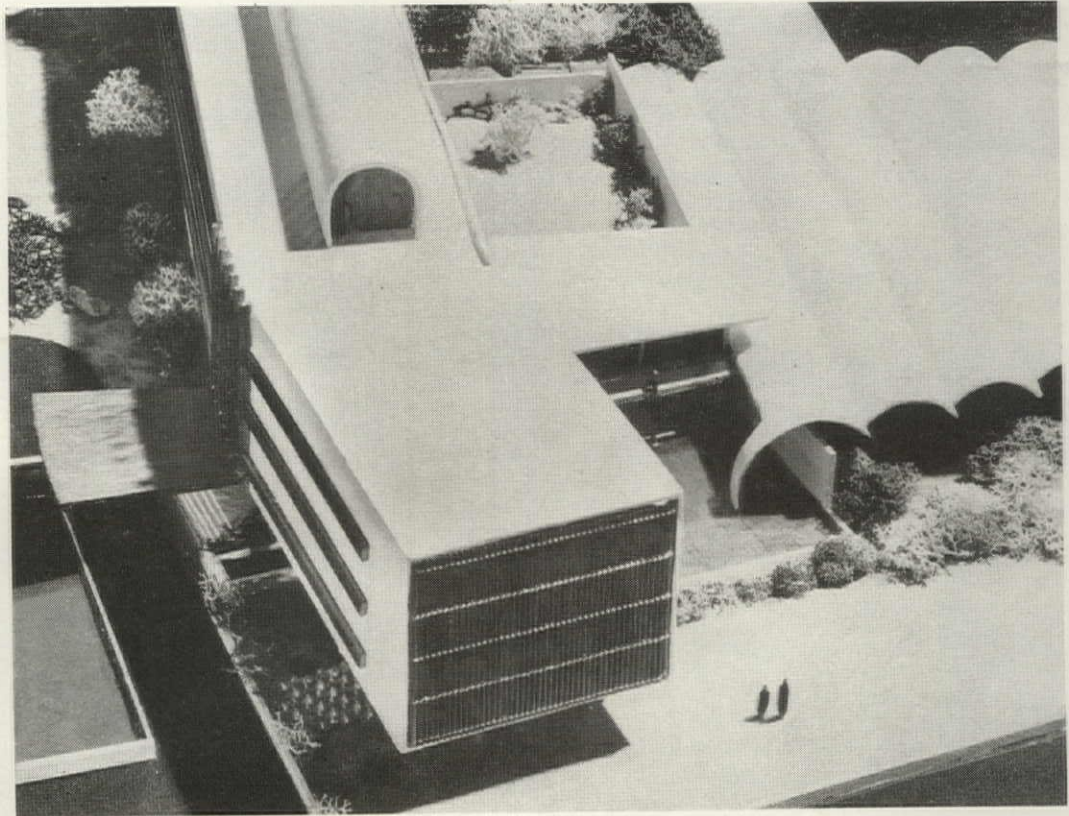
Bangkok, Thailand: Much that Architect John Carl Warnecke admired both for beauty and practicality in the indigenous architecture of Bangkok (FORUM, Sept. '57) is echoed in his balconied embassy office building poised lightly in a *klong* or lake. The result is a distinctly nonimitative, yet sensitively evocative, design. The structure is reinforced concrete with precast concrete railings. The glass enclosed offices surround a central light well. Cars arrive over the arched pilings of causeways.



LOUIS CHECKMAN



Accra, Ghana (left): For this embassy office building, under construction, Architect Harry Weese had to depend on imagination sparked by common sense. Local inspiration was lacking in the monotonous landscape and the architecture, consisting of imported masonry clichés on the one hand, and of tin roofs and mud on the other. Weese became convinced that, termites notwithstanding, a chief Ghana export, mahogany, could be used for building at home if it were raised off the ground and aided by preservatives. His mahogany parasol and richly louvered walls are supported on tapered concrete columns, cantilevered from an earthquake - stable platform. Offices are one room deep for ventilation; the corridor is a patio gallery. The building delights African students who have seen it, as symbolic of a richness found most often in indigenous wood sculpture.

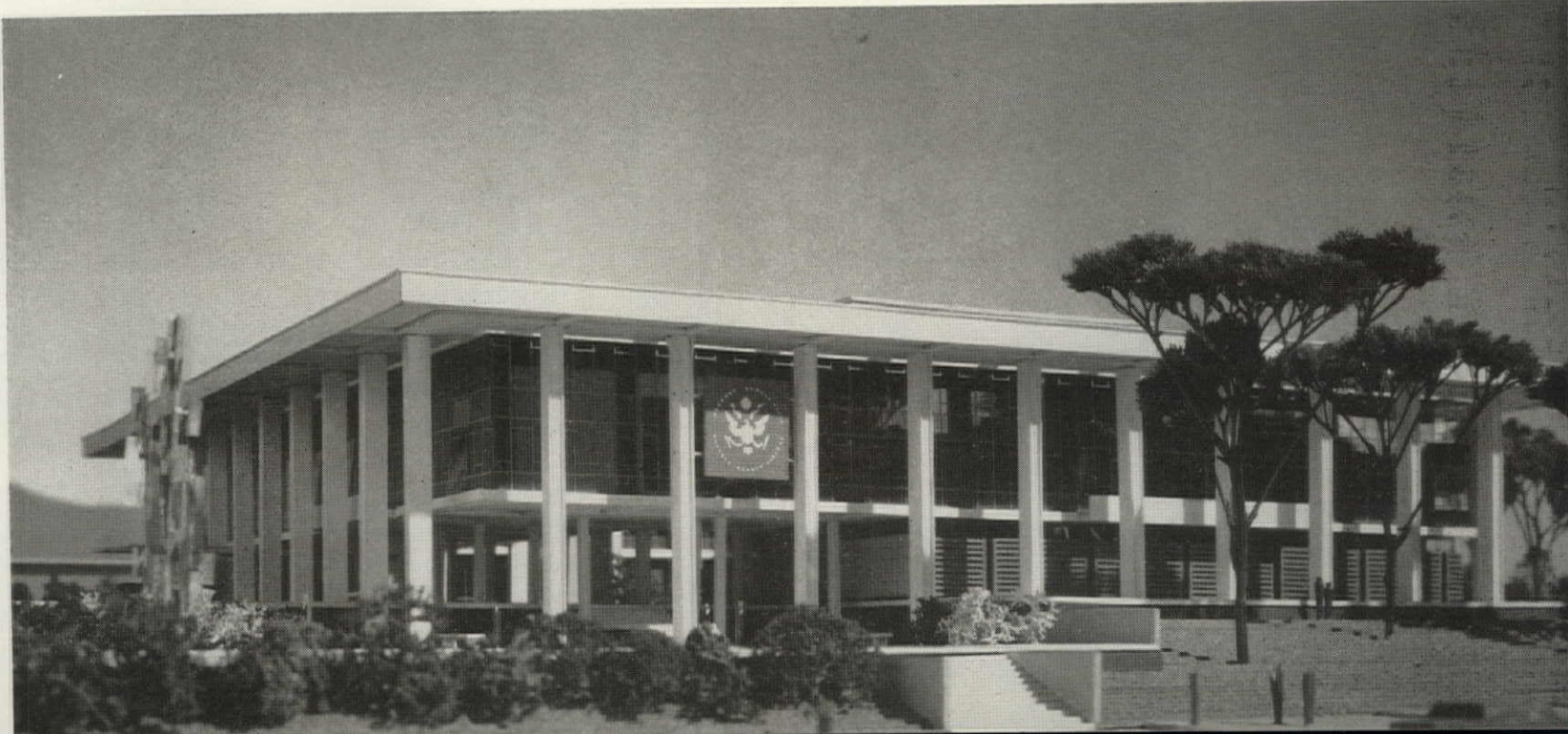


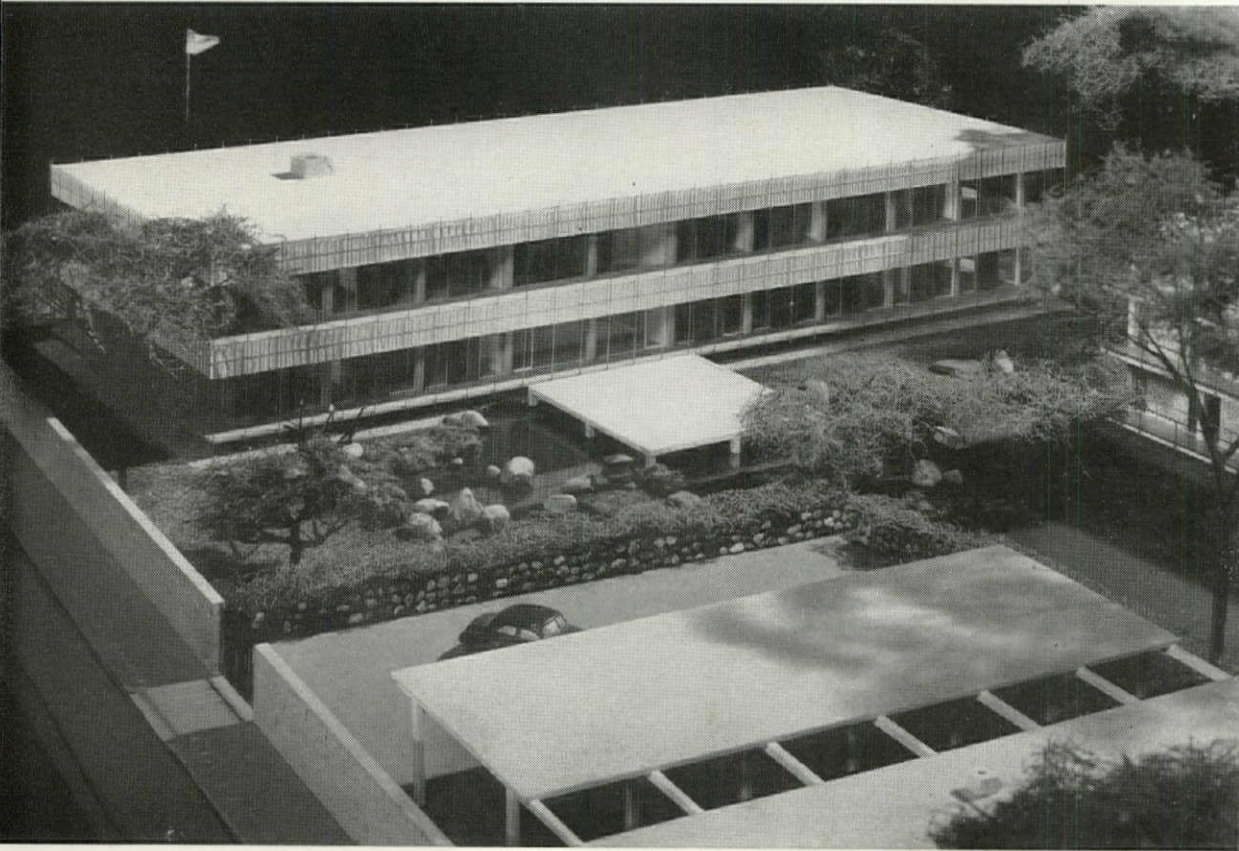
Karachi, Pakistan (above): This embassy office building by Architects Richard Neutra & Robert Alexander is "straight-forward office, stripped for action," to fit the character of a

determinedly modern, young port city. The thin-shell barrel vaults of the adjoining warehouse are echoed by the office penthouse. The warehouse arches into the adjoining pool.

Athens, Greece (below): For an embassy office building in the city of the Acropolis, Architect - Walter Gropius' firm, The Architects' Collaborative, naturally enough chose neoclassic. But aiming at a neoclassic expressing freedom, the architects extended the roof, put the walls in retreat, and permitted the interior court to flow all the way out to the entrance.

ROBERT D. HARVEY STUDIO





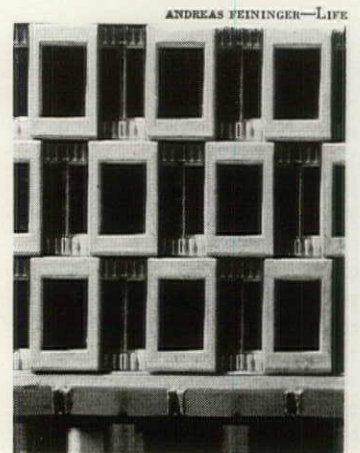
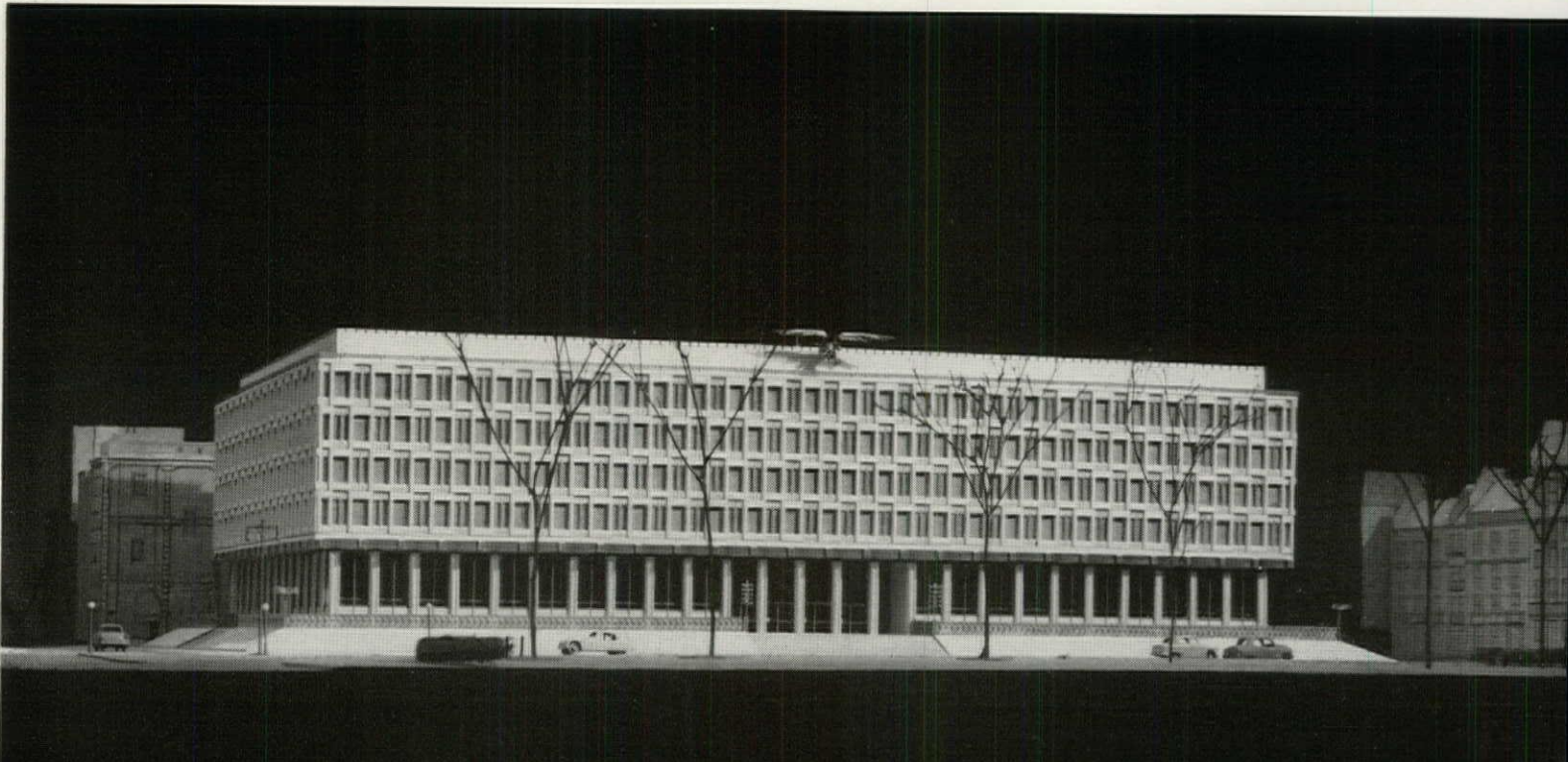
R. SHIRK

Kobe, Japan: In bustling downtown Kobe, this walled compound with garden is a graceful acknowledgment of US appreciation for Japanese culture. Designed by Yamasaki, Leinweber & Associates, the group includes a consulate (center in model photo), servants' quarters (foreground) and staff housing (far right). The completed group will be shown soon in FORUM.

London, England: This is the revised scheme by Architect Eero Saarinen for the embassy project which he won by competition (FORUM, April '56), the only competition, incidentally, which FBO has held or expects to hold. The main change, occasioned both by an 85,000 sq. ft. increase in space needs and Saarinen's discon-

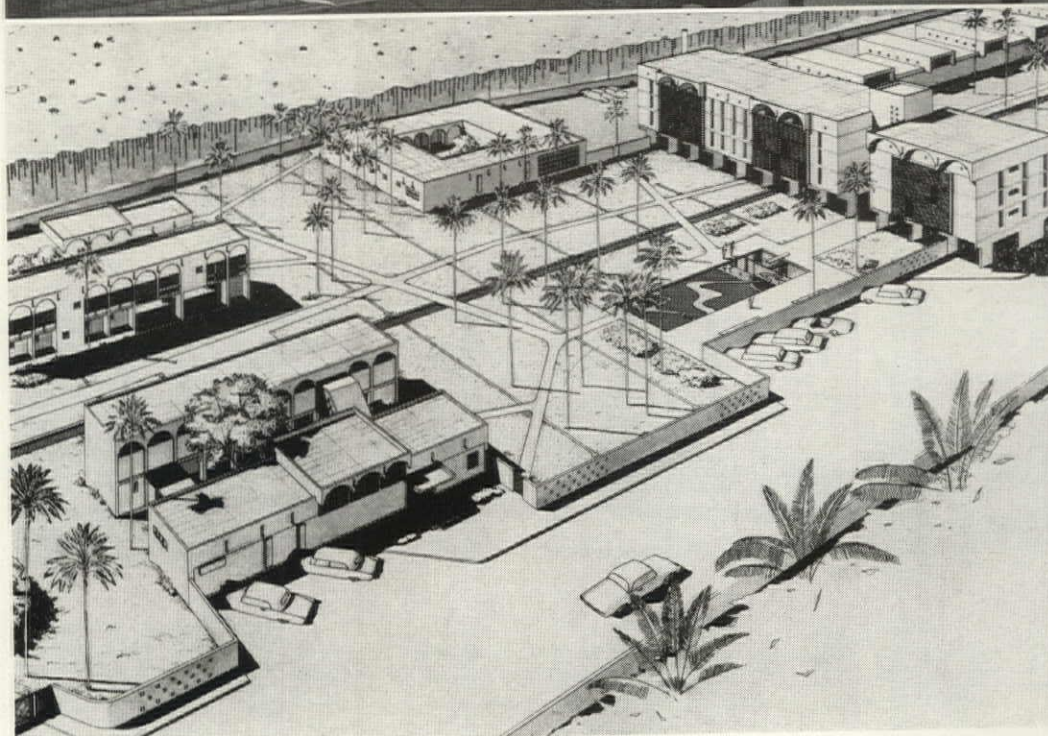
tent with his original proportions, is in the base, which is revised from one projecting story to two recessed stories. Diagonal beams, meeting in points, accent the separation of the base with its public spaces from the office floors above. The original fenestration, staggered precast floor-to-floor box frames, is retained.

R. SHIRK



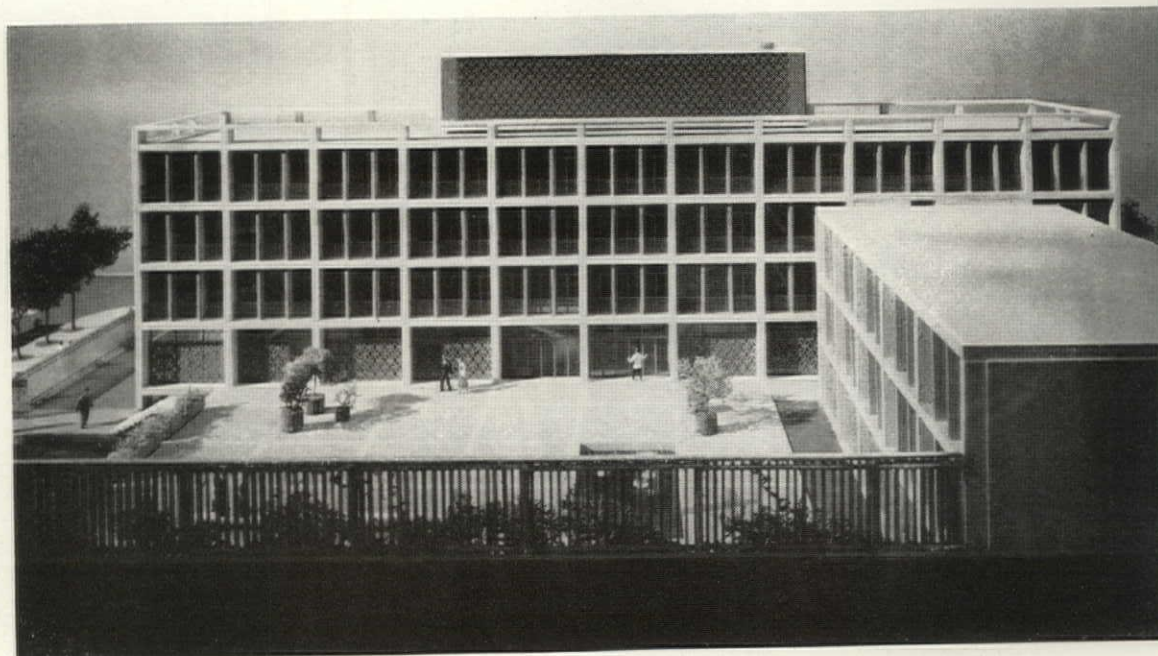
ANDREAS FEININGER—LIFE

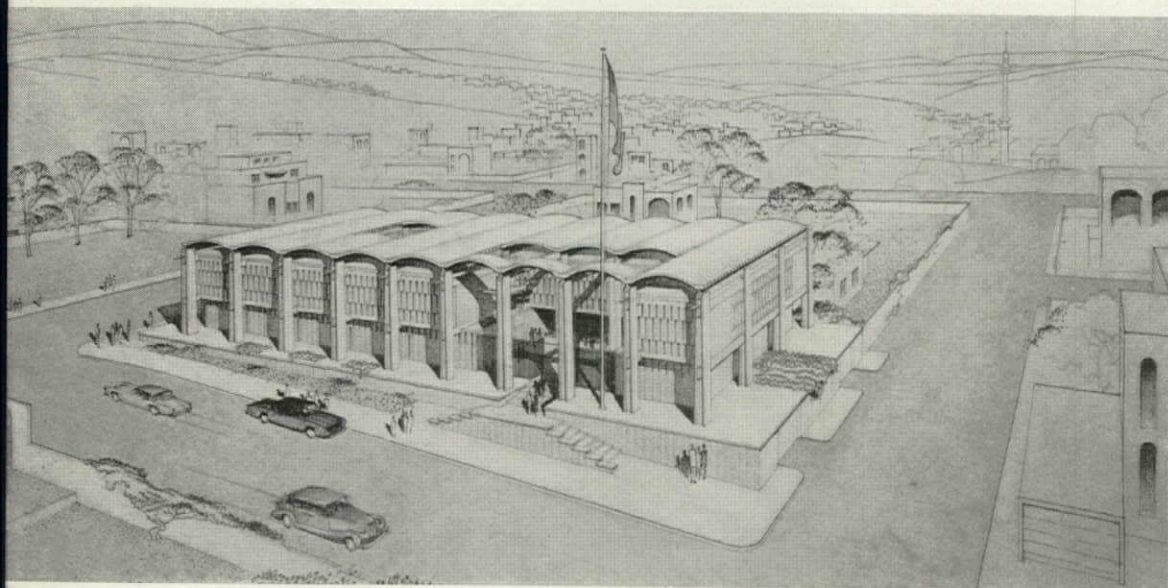
Baghdad, Iraq: Sun control devices create rich, textured east and west walls for an embassy office designed by Architect José Luis Sert. The pierced concrete piers supporting the overhanging third story give vertical shade to the recessed lower stories. White ceramic tile screens and ceramic glazed louvers screen most openings. The double roof consists of troughs of reinforced concrete topped with open joint precast planks; when it rains, which is not often, the troughs become drains. The Baghdad compound is a large project; the site sketch shows its center portion, the recreation court, with two senior officers' villas at left, servants' siesta house at rear, staff apartments at right. The housing has vaulted double roofs. In upper right corner is a portion of the monitor-roofed utility and warehouse building; the embassy office building is beyond this at the narrow head of the compound. At the other end, also not shown, is the ambassador's residence, its gardens running to the Tigris River. The entire site has been conceived by Sert as a series of courts, linked from end to end by the irrigation canal.



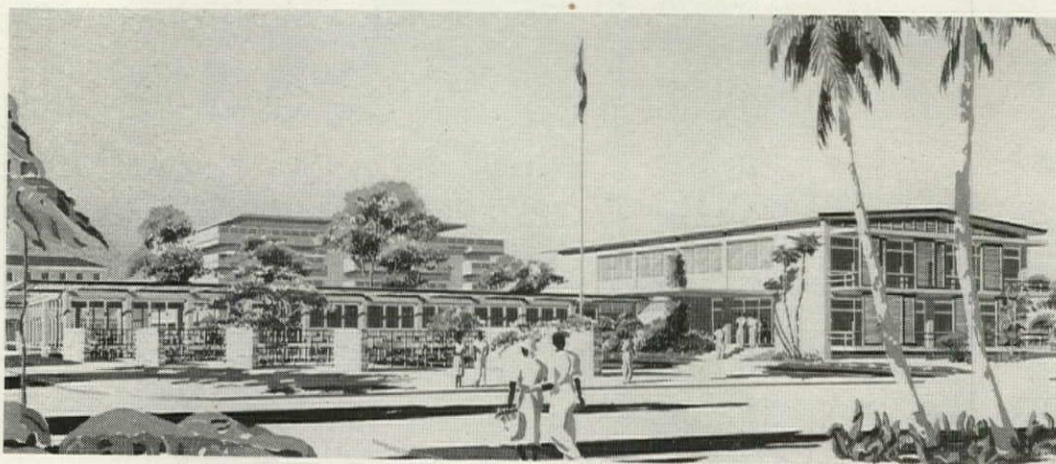
ROBERT C. LAUTMAN

Lima, Peru: Direct and frank-looking, this reinforced concrete embassy office building by Keyes & Lethbridge illustrates the means by which many of these new overseas buildings deal with the troublesome problem of security. Instead of closing up, of becoming a fortress with slits which literal following of security requirements would suggest, these buildings clearly define their public areas and keep them near the ground, then have carefully controlled access to upper security areas, with the whole arrangement unobvious. From the exterior, even the well-guarded areas make no to-do over "Keep Out!"

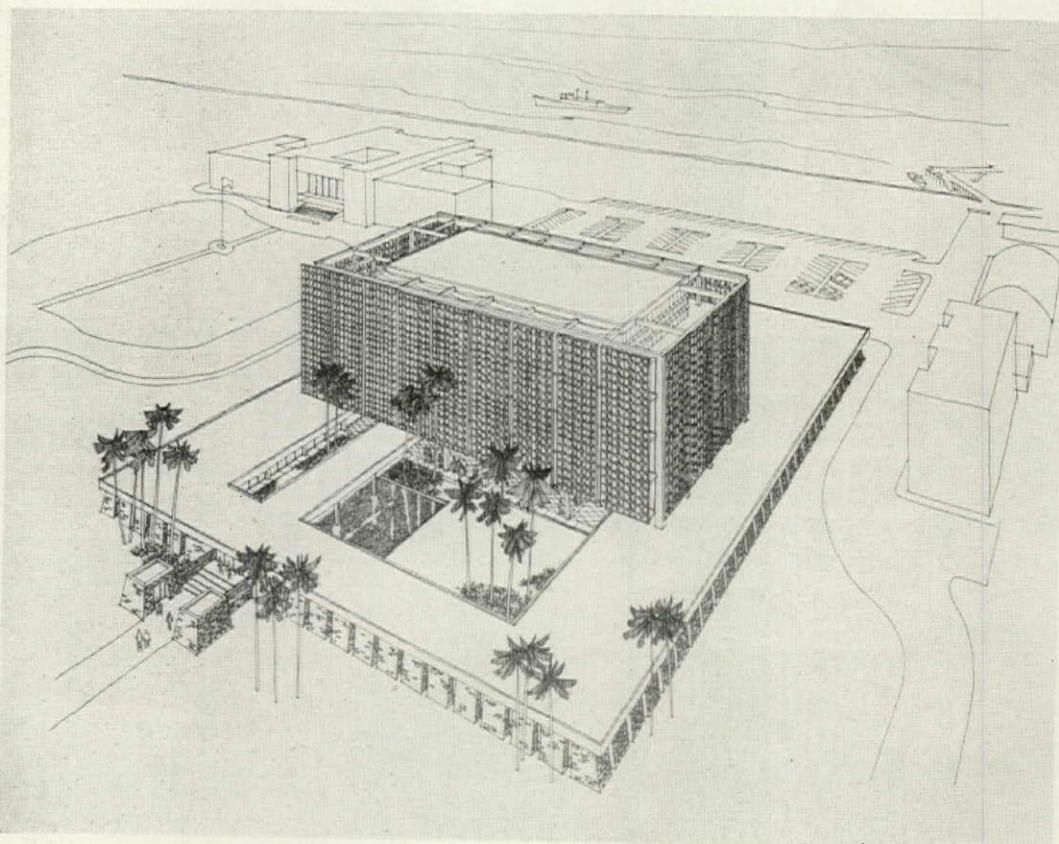




Amman, Jordan: This embassy office project by Architect Paul Rudolph has unfortunately been suspended indefinitely because of Middle East unrest. Security demanded a wall around this site, and Rudolph ingeniously used the wall for a podium, with gated vehicular and service access beneath the platform. The curved precast ribs form a parasol shading the flat roof beneath; the colonnade is calculated also for vertical sun shade.



Lagos, Nigeria: This consular office building by Weed, Russell, Johnson Associates is deliberately relaxed to invite wide use of its library. The climate is much like that of Florida; the favored building material is local stone. Structurally the building is designed for a third story, anticipating the day when Nigeria becomes independent and the consulate is raised to embassy status.



Manila, Philippines: For this supplementary embassy office building (the embassy proper is the existing building at upper left), Architect Alfred Aydelott harked back to the picturesque *Intramuros*, old Spanish-walled Manila. His base is of the same volcanic rock, used in the same rugged fashion. The offices, raised above pools and gardens, are glazed floor to ceiling and screened with precast concrete, inspired by laced bamboo screens which admirably protect huts from the sun.



New Delhi, India: Architect Edward D. Stone's already famed (and already ancestral) embassy office building is now under construction. The almost incredible serenity and grace of its façade is fulfilled within by the magical-shadowed water garden at the building's core. (Photos: © Ezra Stroller.)

