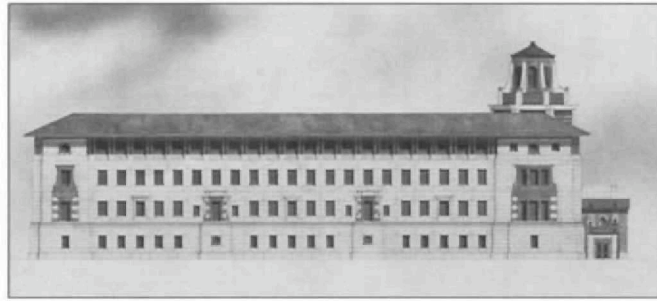
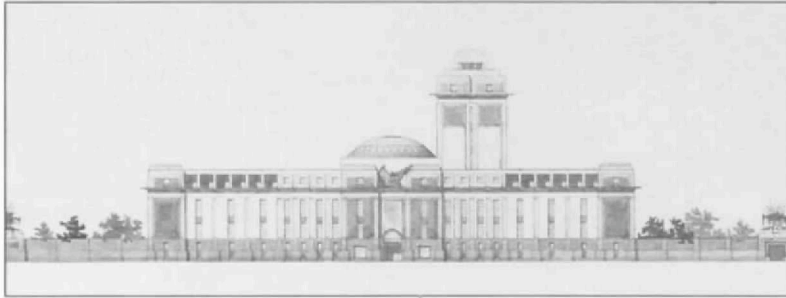




JonesKell Architects/Reitzer Cruz with William Curtis. Soledad Street elevation (left) and Navarro Street elevation.

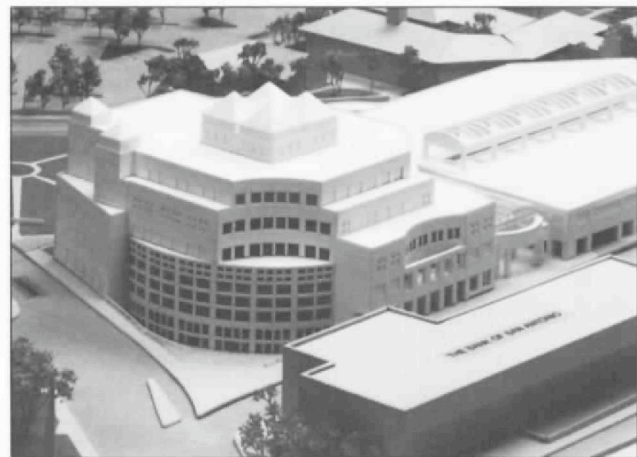


Rehler Vaughn Beaty & Koone/Hammond Beeby & Babka. Soledad Street elevation (left) and Navarro Street elevation.



arrival stems from the long axis of the parking garage; this point is reached by nonmotorists via a midblock passage connecting Soledad and Augusta streets. A two-story parallelogram-shaped podium extends out from the library's six-story central cubic mass to establish a corner-post-prow at the intersection of Navarro and Soledad. The central cube is cut away on all faces, forming giant loggia terraces at the third level that merge with the roof terrace of the lower parallelogram; the loggias fashioned within the cube are shaded by a canopylike top floor that frames the loggia in a manner suggesting the garden elevation of Le Corbusier's Villa Stein, greatly enlarged. The nine-story second-phase tower to be added on the Augusta Street side will form the third increment of a staircase progression toward downtown. Cooling towers and roof penthouses are employed for skyline effects at two opposite corners of the cube, together with a cluster of four pyramidal skylights that illuminate a generous atrium rising through the core of the building. Sparingly fenestrated and colorized with a deep-hued palette, Legorreta's pulled-and-stretched picturesque geometry will be embellished by several modest water features and a piece of public art now being selected.

What seems remarkable, aside from the self-evident authority of Legorreta's design, is that San Antonio will at last be the recipient of the work of a leading Mexican architect of this century. That the agent of this reconnection has been the state's first competition of international scope for a public building is also significant. But in hindsight, it is also possible to wonder whether in this most preservation-minded and tradition-conscious Texas city the new library might have been accommodated to better advantage nearer the heart of the city, on the vacant River Walk site across from the Hertzberg. So positioned, it might have provided the impetus to relieve the Hertzberg of its awkward circusana, perhaps to house the library's Texana and local history collections and serve as friendly, experienced counsel to a new, much larger neighbor.



Competition models looking southeast from the corner of Soledad and Navarro streets. Top to bottom: JonesKell et al., Rehler Vaughn et al., and Saldaña Associates/CRSS Architects.

Besides forsaking the special pleasure of a River Walk site and the mutually beneficial companionship of the Hertzberg, the new Main Library, while serviceable and requisitely showy, manifests little in the way of "foreignness." Only the special coloring of its stuccoed walls seems somewhat exotic, reclaiming the strategy of enrichment Olmsted noted locally in 1853, whereby "buildings are converted by trowel [and] paintbrush." As such, it promises a traditionally sanctioned chromatic respite from the tawdriness that has settled over San Antonio's "jumble of races, costumes, languages and . . . religious ruins" in the intervening years. ■

Trial by Jury

In July 1991 a jury appointed by the San Antonio City Council unanimously selected the architectural association of Johnson-Dempsey & Associates, Inc., Davis Sprinkle Architects (both of San Antonio) and Legorreta Arquitectos (Mexico City) to design the new San Antonio Main Library.

In reflecting on the competition, jury chairman Barton Phelps, an architect practicing in Los Angeles and teaching at UCLA who was himself involved in efforts to assure the preservation of Bertram Goodhue's Los Angeles Public Library of 1925, observed that "the problem with civic architecture today is a real estate problem. We get the leftover site, . . . the fractured zone out of the orderly core where the city shifts to less clear forms. Site selection is among the most critical issues associated with civic buildings. After that, architects are responding to conditions."

In addition to Phelps, the members of the jury included Linda Allmand, director of the Fort Worth Public Library; Anders C. Dahlgren, a consultant to the Wisconsin state government's division of library services; Peter G. Rowe, professor of architecture and urban design at the Graduate School of Design, Harvard University; and Michael Underhill, director of the School of Architecture at Arizona State University.

Legorreta's design appealed to Underhill as being "fresh and adventurous in a modernist sense," in keeping with the city's vision of the library as a welcoming public facility. "This design," Underhill said, "is open like the stacks." In comparison, "the classical designs in the competition may have been impressive in a frontal way, but they didn't let you into the stack areas as well."

Noting that the classical designs seemed out of context in terms of the site, Phelps said that the jury was inclined to be "critical of schemes that pretended to maintain formal axial symmetry when there was a convoluted path from the garage to the front door on the street."

Stuart Brodsky