

## Tales of the Tower

Combining beauty and safety isn't always easy. But that was the task given architect and artist Lars Stanley last year when he was asked to create a protective crown for the observation deck of the 307-foot tower that rises from the center of the University of Texas campus in Austin.

The tower has a long and conflicted history at the university; designed in 1937 by French architect Paul Cret to be the school's central icon, what he hoped would be "the image carried in our

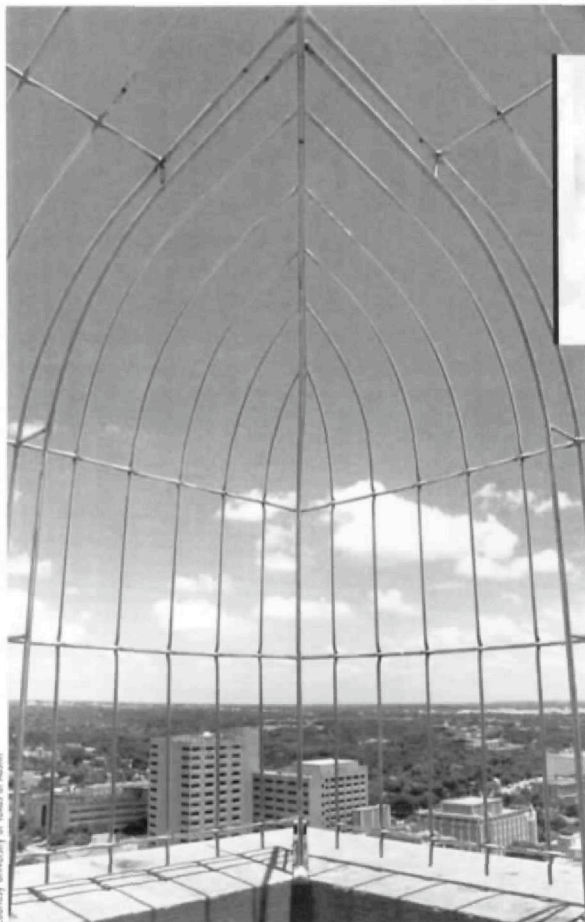
memory when we think of the place," the tower took on a more grim identity in 1966 when gunman Charles Whitman

used its observation deck as a perch from which to rain bullets and terror down on the campus. The tower's conflicted place in the UT landscape continued through the early 1970s, as people bent on suicide took to jumping from it. In October 1974, following the seventh such death, the tower's observation deck was closed to the public, and it stayed closed for the next quarter century.

Then in the fall of 1998 UT students began pushing for the tower to be reintegrated back into campus life and the observation deck reopened. The university administration agreed to the request, with the caveat that something be done to prevent the tower from again becoming a site for suicides. The solution chosen was to enclose the observation deck; the question was how to do so and retain both the tower's architectural integrity and the clarity of the

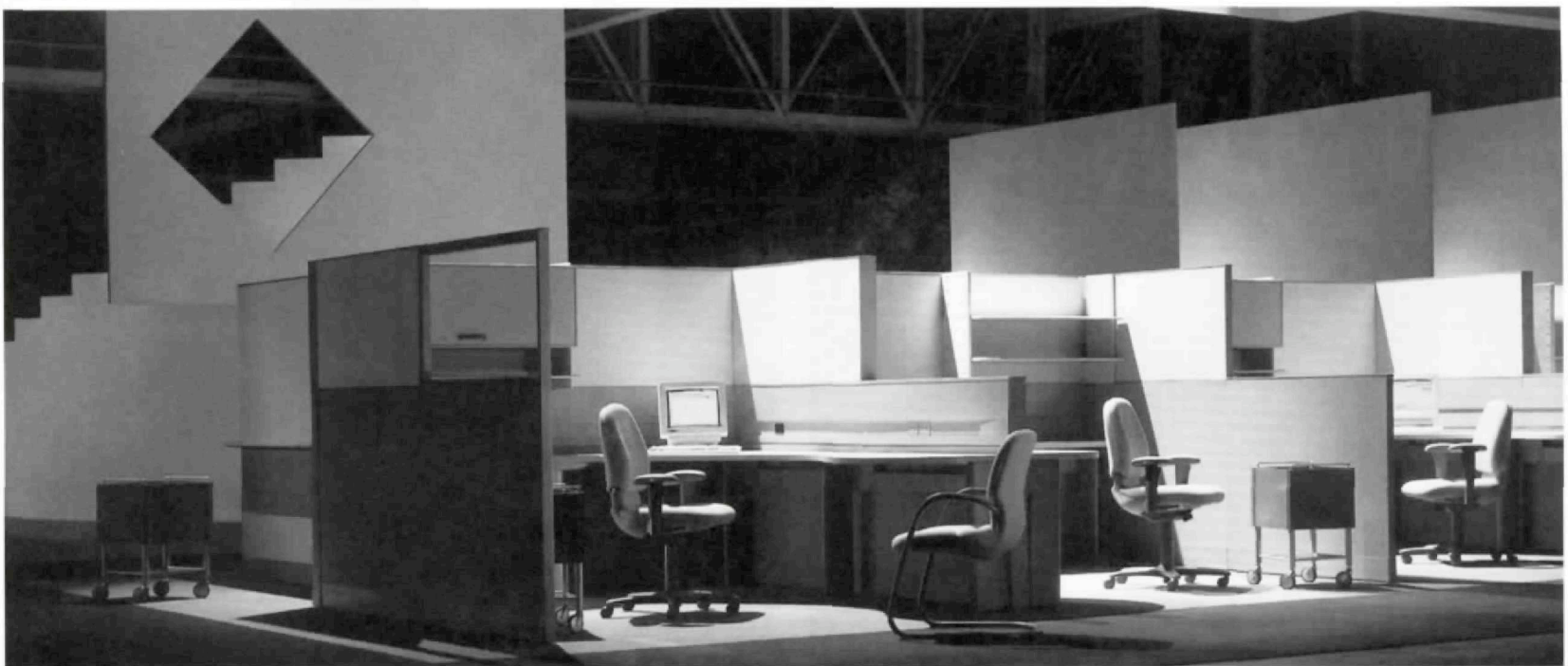
view it offers of Austin.

Stanley, who graduated from Texas A&M with a degree in architecture and later studied under well-known architect Charles Moore at UT before becoming a blacksmith and sculptor, was chosen for the job. In an effort to avoid making the deck seem like a cage, Stanley created a seemingly delicate stainless-steel lattice curtain that curves over the 27-floor high platform; to avoid damaging the tower's historic limestone, he installed brackets to attach the lattice to the building at existing masonry joints. The intent was to contain while still providing a sense of openness. The work was finished by late summer, and on September 15 the observation deck had its grand reopening. The following day public tours began, and a sky-high view of the Texas capital shuttered for nearly 25 years was made available once more. — MJS



View of the University of Texas campus through the protective crown that now encloses the UT Tower's observation deck.

Courtesy University of Texas at Austin



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