

FIT TO PRINT

Comparing Postmodern Classicism to the orthodox Classicism of architect Allan Greenberg is like comparing the 1970s disco version of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony to the original score. Unlike the work of his contemporaries, who throughout the 1980s reduced traditional forms to wallpaper, Greenberg's architectural evocation of ancient sources cannot be dismissed as scenography or pastiche. Although trained as a Modernist and once determined to work for Le Corbusier, Greenberg embraces Classical conventions to mitigate the dehumanizing effects of machine-based esthetics, arguing that his approach is not only Modern, but also the most humane way to design buildings and cities (pages 57-63, this issue).

Greenberg's design for the Athens News Building, completed last year in Athens, Georgia, represents the gravity of his mature work. The building is a canonic, if sober, synthesis of a Greek temple, a modern office building, and a newspaper printing plant. Its Doric portico conveys to Athens the inexorable power of ink, which, nearly 75 years ago, New York City architect Raymond Hood wrought in stone for Chicago's *Tribune*.

Greenberg was commissioned by media tycoon William Morris III, who owns nearly 30 newspapers across the country. Morris sought, as he puts it, "the best Classical architect in America" to collaborate with local architects Moss/Kuhar on the design of a new editorial and production headquarters for the *Athens Banner-Herald*, *Athens Daily News*, and



ABOVE: Greenberg envisioned the editorial offices as a monumental, temple-like frontispiece to the printing plant.
FACING PAGE: Public garden separates News Building from street. Portico screens west-facing main entrance.

Athens Star. A native of Augusta, Georgia, and an alumnus of the University of Georgia in Athens, Morris wanted the building to emulate the historic architecture of both his hometown and alma mater. "I couldn't build a glass palace in one of Georgia's great Classical cities," he explains.

Morris admits that he considered moving his papers' offices to a remote suburban site, saving money not only on land, but on design as well. His commitment to the responsible development of downtown Athens transformed what could have been a drab, concrete-framed box into an urban landmark.

The News Building is clearly distinguished from most new traditional architecture because, without apology, Greenberg conceals the realities of modern construction. For him, the image of a building's stability and permanence is more important than the expression of its structural frame. Like Renaissance architects who scored stucco veneer to look like stone blocks, or like John Russell Pope, who concealed a structural-steel frame with limestone facing at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C., Greenberg detailed the News Building's brick cladding to look loadbearing: Expansion joints are hidden where pilasters meet the wall; jack arches above windows are self-supporting; and the massive, cast-concrete columns and entablatures resemble quarried stone.

The News Building's straight-faced wrapper of virtual structure is rooted in the Greek Classical orders and may excite only the most





FACING PAGE, TOP LEFT: Portico and wall entablatures are cast in concrete.

FACING PAGE, TOP RIGHT: Steel-supported canopies shade loading dock.

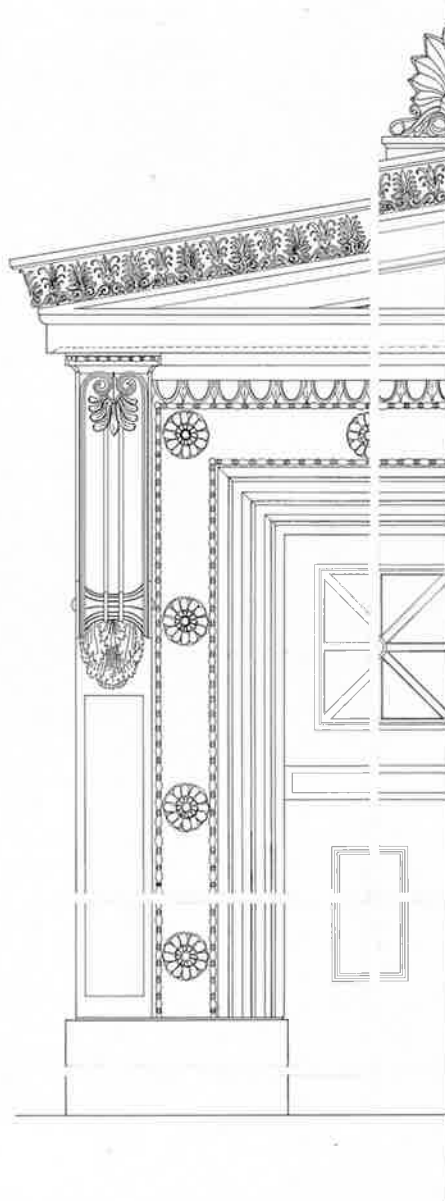
FACING PAGE, BOTTOM LEFT: Pedimented door surround and spandrels at main entrance are cast in iron.

FACING PAGE, BOTTOM RIGHT: Tower on south facade encloses fire stair.

DRAWING: Greenberg's design for main entrance incorporates brackets, pediment, and rosettes in door surround.

perspicacious observers. But it succeeds by the very restraint of its detail, which recognizes the existing hierarchy of Greek Revival civic buildings in the South. The architect's massing and materials tap the heft and simplicity of 19th-century commercial buildings surrounding the site. With a modest palette of brick, cast concrete, painted wood, and plaster, Greenberg refines the local precedent, reinventing Classical orders that would be stone in the Greek model. His design for the News Building's monumental portico and lobby assumes the role of the press as America's Fourth Estate, elevating an otherwise ordinary office and industrial building to the status of civic architecture.

Given the contemporary predilection for quick, cheap, and easy construction, many architects who lavish such time and expense on the design of a formal public facade often treat the other elevations as merely secondary, with banal results. One would therefore expect to round the corner of the News Building and see a glass curtain wall and perhaps a standard parking ramp or loading dock. The trabeation of the News Building's temple front, however, extends to the north and south facades. Greenberg ennobled the south-facing entrance to the lower level printing plant, too, with elegantly detailed steel canopies and cast-iron rosettes. "The backs of modern buildings are always so grotesque," the architect deplures. "Service areas should dignify the work going on inside and around the building."



Unfortunately, the News Building's facades were compromised by locating the windows nearly flush with the exterior brick cladding, thus creating a deep sill inside the perimeter editorial offices. While this detail reduces the amount of surface area where water could penetrate the 2-inch-wide cavity behind the facade, it suggests the very expression of thinness that Greenberg aims to avoid. The typical thickness of each wall, measuring 1 foot, 6 inches from the face of the brick to the interior finish, would have allowed for deep shadows in the window openings, conspiring with the building's portico and cornice to exaggerate the overall sense of mass. By choosing instead to express the depth of the wall from inside, Greenberg reduced the plasticity of the facades.

In contrast to the News Building's serious, monolithic exterior, the banklike public lobby was meticulously detailed and painted to recall the vivid coloration of temples in ancient Greece. A false skylight transforms this double-height volume into an atrium, with a grand, theatrical staircase ascending from its center to the newspapers' executive offices. Despite the ongoing development of computer technology, which proponents of electronic-age architecture insist will wipe out traditional building types, the activity in the Doric and Ionic colonnades surrounding the staircase contradicts the theory that cyberspace will eliminate the conventional public realm: Framed by wood columns with hand-carved bases and capitals, visitors conduct



FACING PAGE: Staircase in public lobby ascends to executive offices. Concealed fluorescent lights illuminate glass-paneled ceiling to suggest atrium skylight.

PLANS: Symmetrically located fire stairs at center of building mark boundary between office and industrial areas. Mail room opens from lower level onto loading dock (bottom plan, right).

advertising- and editorial-related business at tellerlike windows.

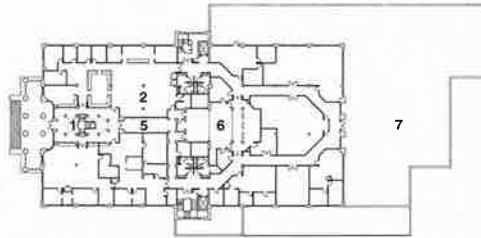
On both sides of the lobby, where glass-enclosed perimeter offices surround a loftlike bullpen of editorial cubicles, Greenberg demonstrates that, indeed, computers and modern printing presses are as adaptable to the esthetics of an expanded Greek temple as they are to the slick contours of a contemporary office building. However, there remains a disturbing dichotomy between the brilliant ornamentation of the lobby and the expected neutrality of the office interiors. The grand, axial procession into the building culminates at an abrupt threshold between public and private, where the comforting echo of footsteps on marble floors defers to the hum of air conditioning and computers.

San Francisco-based Gordon Williams designed the News Building's workspaces to complement Greenberg's work on the lobby and exterior, achieving a neutral but disappointing contrast. Amidst the open cubicles, the building's concrete structural columns are encased in sheetrock, painted beige, and adorned with wainscoting. For all of this traditional detail, each column's exactly profiled cornice and baseboard collides with acoustical-tiled ceilings and carpeted floors. This juxtaposition of fine woodwork and generic appointments has the same discordant visual effect as a modern facade that has been promiscuously decorated with traditional details to fit into an historical context.

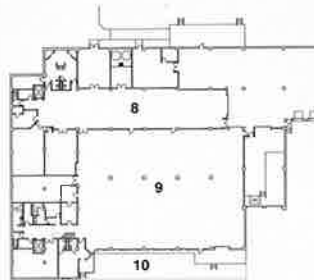
Banal office fixtures, however, are not Greenberg's style, and the generous budgets



UPPER LEVEL



ENTRY LEVEL



LOWER LEVEL

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1 LOBBY | 6 CONFERENCE ROOM |
| 2 EDITORIAL OFFICE | 7 ROOF TERRACE |
| 3 EXECUTIVE OFFICE | 8 PRESS ROOM |
| 4 FUTURE OFFICE | 9 MAIL ROOM |
| 5 ART GALLERY | 10 LOADING DOCK |

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he commands for his work most often preclude such disparities. His design for various offices of the U.S. Department of State (1983-1989), for example, are painstakingly crafted and lavishly detailed.

To say that the Athens News Building impresses but does not awe is a compliment to Greenberg. In a Classical city, only the most important public buildings should stir great emotion. The primacy of courts, capitols, and schools is well established in the South, where historic examples include numerous courthouses in South Carolina, designed by Robert Mills throughout the 1820s; North Carolina's State Capitol, by Ithiel Town and Alexander Jackson Davis (1840); and the austere Medical College of Georgia in Augusta, by Charles B. Cluskey (1835). In Athens, sadly, few buildings command more attention than the commercial slabs erected in the 1960s, when urban renewal destroyed much of the city's Greek Revival architectural legacy. The News Building, therefore, reasserts the ancient urban ideal for which Athens was named.

The News Building's local acclaim and the success of Greenberg's progeny from the emerging schools of Classical architecture (see article in this issue) demonstrate that conventional buildings are still meaningful to a wide audience. For Greenberg, Classicism poses an intellectual challenge. Pointing to the base of an Ionic column in the News Building's lobby, the architect snaps: "There's more architecture in that detail than in most new buildings."—*M. Lindsay Bierman*

BELOW: Greenberg chose colors for column bases and capitals to evoke coloration of temples in ancient Greece. Doric and Ionic capitals were hand-carved in wood. Triglyphs and guttae were cast in plaster.

FACING PAGE: Walls are painted to resemble stone blocks. Wood door surrounds frame entrances to newspapers' executive editorial offices.



**THE NEWS BUILDING
ATHENS, GEORGIA**

DESIGN ARCHITECT: Allan Greenberg, Architect, Washington, D.C.—Allan Greenberg (principal-in-charge of design); Daniel E. Lee, Robert Shatler (project architects); Morgan Conolly, Michael Imber, Debra Johnson, Michael Mesko, Thomas Noble, Duncan Stroik (project team)

ARCHITECT OF RECORD: Moss/Kuhar Architects, Augusta, Georgia—Ronald Moss, Robert Kuhar (principals-in-

charge); Ronald Moss (project architect); Marilyn Adams, Donald Donaudy, Michael Green (project team)

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Ashley, Hughes, Good and Associates

ENGINEERS: Johnson, Laschober & Associates (structural); Adams Davis & Partners (mechanical/electrical); W.L. Thompson Consulting Engineers (civil)

GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Batson Cook Company

COST: \$16 million; \$154/square foot

PHOTOGRAPHER: Tim Buchman

