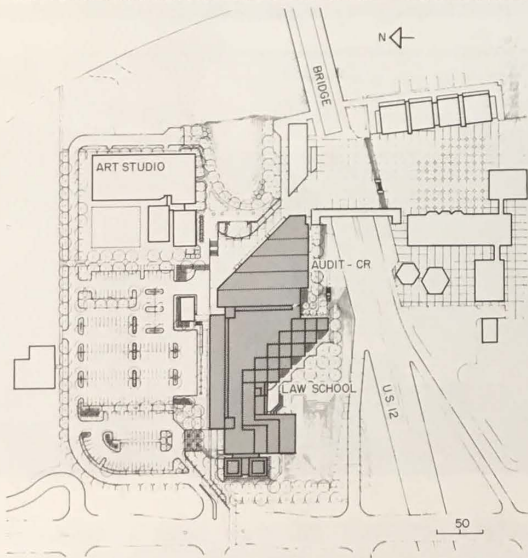




Shin Koyama photos

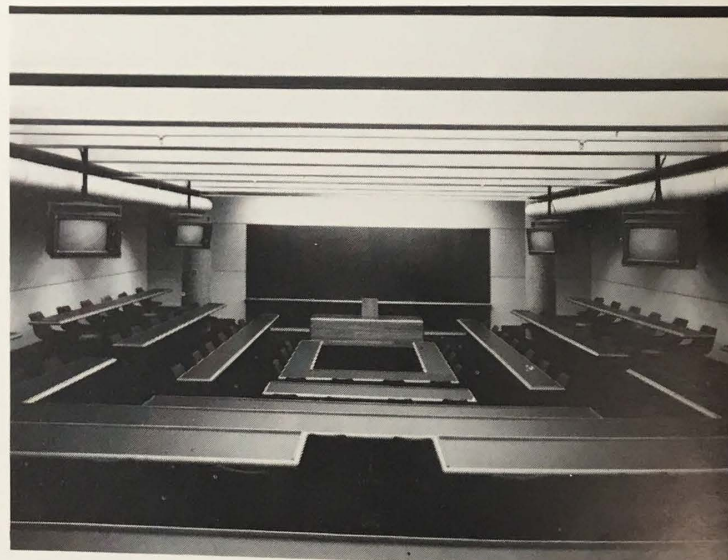
Bldg: Law School

# A JUST DESIGN DECISION



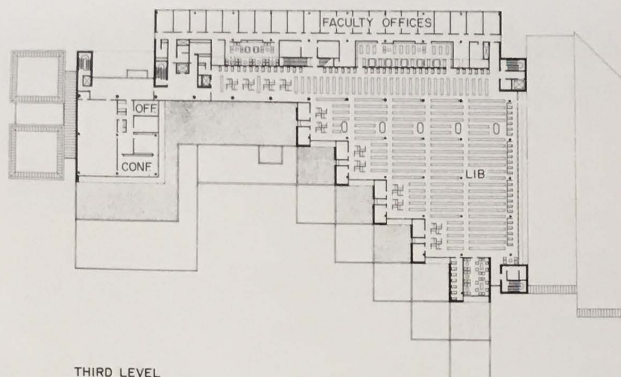
The stepped massing and spatial order of the Law School of the University of Minnesota, by Leonard Parker Associates, comprise a serious architectural opinion about the relationship between the law, learning, and life.



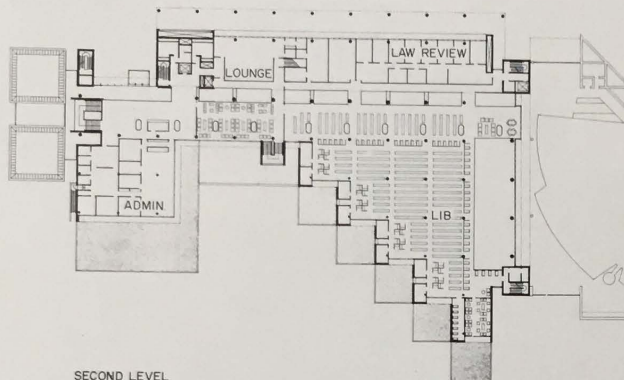


The new Law School of the University of Minnesota, designed by Leonard Parker Associates, is impeccably detailed throughout, handsomely finished, and brings together an array of functional and philosophical elements in a superbly organized plan. Approaching from the south, where the site is bordered by a busy highway, one passes through a plaza embellished with landscaping and sculpture (see previous page). This approach leads into the subplaza level of the building where most of the classrooms are located, the typical type being square in plan (photo above),

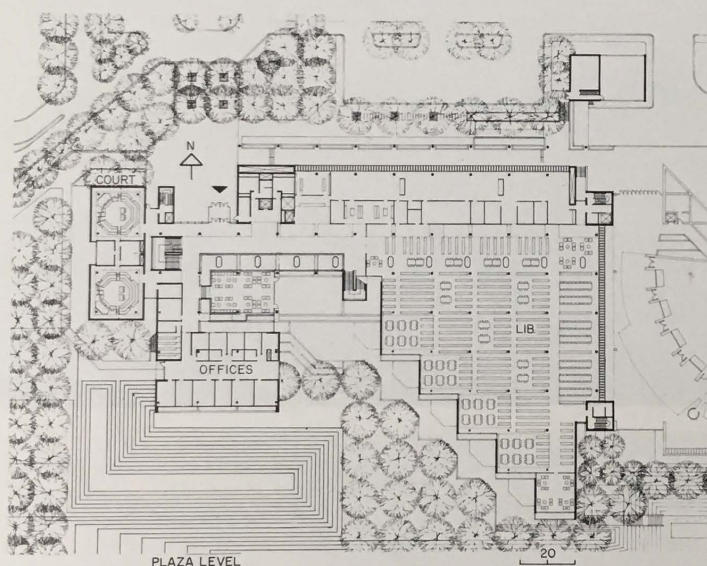
the larger being a triangle, with sophisticated multi-media equipment, set into the center (above, middle photo). On the main plaza level, one enters from the north into the more formal lobby (upper photo, left), which rises to take in views to and from the second level. Two court rooms (top photo, above) are off the lobby, both with octagonal layouts set into basic square spaces. Lounge areas (near left), with varying degrees of casualness about them, are sprinkled throughout the building. The relationship between floors and functions is punctuated by skylit openings.



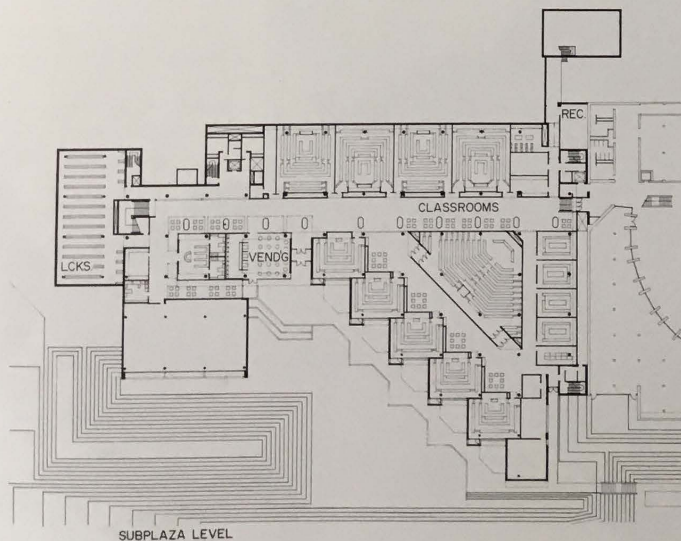
THIRD LEVEL



SECOND LEVEL



PLAZA LEVEL



SUBPLAZA LEVEL

Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., like his father, the famous poet, thought that stately mansions are what society needs more of. His own mansion was the logic and experience of the law, and because the Justice set about making it a warm and roomy place, people of every sort felt warmer and roomier themselves. This is because he explained things in a way that was never intimidating, but graciously plain and practical.

One can cite a similar motivation in the design for the new Law School of the University of Minnesota. The architect, Leonard Parker Associates, has accommodated both abstract ideals and actual needs, just as the more thoughtful jurists have responded to specific problems, referring to precedent for philosophical guidance and practical justification. Their opinions, while addressing immediate issues, have also dealt with the historical underpinnings and the future implications of how a problem has been addressed.

This analogy is pertinent to the Law School, here on the West Bank Campus of the University—and to the larger body of architectural thinking today. Much of a useful nature can be learned about the interpretation of precedent by studying, not just the great architects, the great judicial essays.

This building is judicial, indeed—and jumping. More exactly, it steps lively. The reason, besides the some 1,000 students coursing through, is that certain abstract ideals of the law are interpreted as building blocks. And organized around a luminous, lofty area for student activities, these blocks represent the courts (being instruments of justice), the functions of administration, public defender, and legal aid (being instruments of service), and the 600,000-volume law library, with faculty offices edging up around it (being instruments of education).

The massing literally steps up, from the southern facade, which angularly banks a landscaped approachway to an entry plaza. This plaza contains a sculpture by the late John Rood. The configuration of these smaller building blocks, clustering upward, allows a maximum number of law books to be placed on the main plaza level where the main reading room is situated. The stepping up, along with the set-backs of the facade along the approachway, create quiet, room-like areas for reading along the edge of the building. All of which, in turn, helps cut off views to, and noise from, the highway which raucously runs past this side of the site.

The northern facade where the nominal major entry is located, is comparatively simple and flat, facing out on a parking lot—an area where more buildings are planned later on. And the eastern facade is simple and flat too, because there had to be an easy juncture with an existing auditorium and classroom building on that side.

With all the difficulties of the site—that highway, that parking lot—the architects have nevertheless managed to create an enjoyable quality in both entry areas—the tree- and berm-embellished approach from the south giving way to the plaza with its

sculpture; and the dramatic depth of shadow offered by the arcade and recessed entry on the north, except that the northern one is more formally and ceremoniously scaled, whereas the southern one gives directly into a subplaza level packed with classrooms off commodious linear lounges. Like one of those big precedent laden books in the stacks, one delves into this building at that point most proximate to the purpose at hand.

Cracking this volume, one discovers that the brick outside, with its tawny and ebony hues, has been taken inside. The basic concrete structure, with its soaring circular columns, emboldens runs of space that range from the higher entry areas to plentiful patches of seating, where intensive but informal dialogue occurs. Where it is symbolically apt—or otherwise just plain convenient—to have spatial and visual connection between the floors, these openings are enlivened by skylights and stirring views, up or down or both. Such connections occur, for example, between various areas of student activity, between the reading room and stacks, and between the faculty offices and the faculty reading room. There is not a boring staircase or dull passage in here. It is impossible to sit in this place, or walk through it, without having intriguing glimpses into some other area, such as the stacks and carrels that overlook each other, or the promenade-style expanse which introduces the new building to the existing auditorium. Even the most sequestered seating area overlooks, or looks out toward, some other space—so there is a constant sense of motion gathered together in an atmosphere of remarkable calm.

As remarkable, and perhaps contributing to this calm, is the detailing. Outside, the reflective insulating glass ranges between the planes of brick, and beneath the crisply framed overhangs, secured by spare frames; inside, even the fire sprinklers are of the nicest sort. The reason for this is that the sprinklers themselves are not obvious. In terms of energy conservation, the building is frank in its tactics, from the deep overhangs to the nature of the glass to every last roof surface, all of them covered over with earth and planted with evergreens.

Finally, after having reconnoitered the stacks and students, one comes upon the two court rooms, each octagonally configured within a square space. Instruments of justice, indeed—elegantly, perfectly done. And their dignity doesn't depend upon the word justice having been carved into the handsome woodwork behind the bench, which (hurray!) it isn't. Like the building as a whole, these courts express a civility of spirit, a quality of conduct, that people would readily get on their feet for, whether a judge was coming in or not. That impulse is what this stately mansion brings out. —*William Marlin*

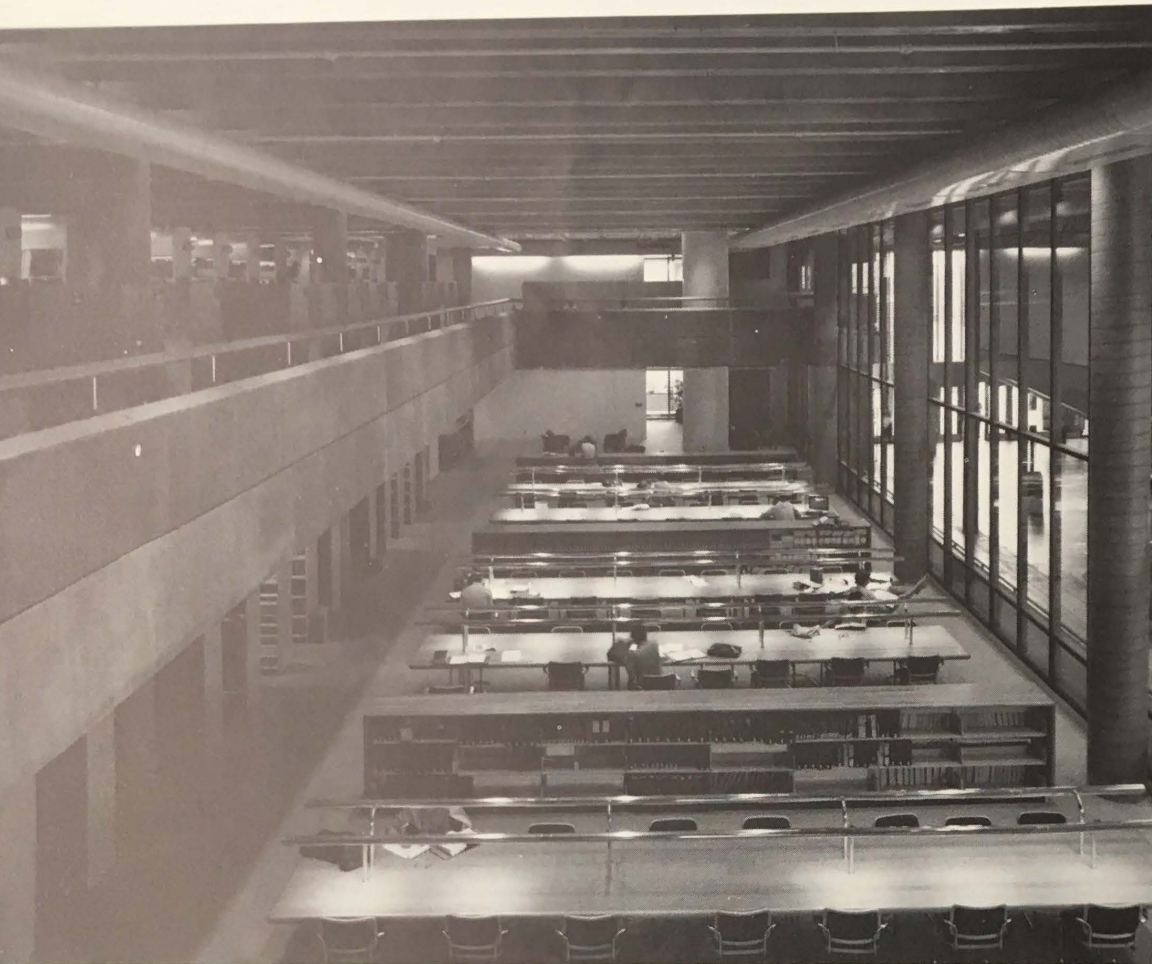
LAW SCHOOL, UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, Minneapolis. Architects: *Leonard Parker Associates*. Engineers: *Bakke Kopp Ballou & McFarlin* (structural); *Erickson Ellison & Associates* (mechanical/electrical). Landscape architects: *Bailey & Associates*. Contractor: *Bor-Son Construction, Inc.*





The Law School rises from the site like a series of brick river bluffs, which is natural enough considering that the Mississippi runs just to the east. Looking from the southern entry area (left), or to it, down the landscaped approachway (right), the stepped-up massing makes for a richly tactile presence while also expressing the interior arrangement of functions. Looking at the photo above, administrative functions are housed in the section to the left; lounge areas, including one with an outdoor terrace overlooking the entry plaza, rise in the middle; and the law library clusters up toward the right. Taking an honorable mention in the Owens-Corning Fiberglas Corporation's Energy Conservation Awards Program, the building's orientation, overhangs, and careful use of glass yield an annual savings of 3.35 billion BTUs below state requirements.





The stacks and carrels of the 600,000-volume law library range up from and overlook the main reading room (upper photo), and running along the eastern edge of the new building, this area in turn overlooks an expansive lobby area connecting the new building with an existing auditorium. Smaller reading areas, arranged in the setbacks around the edge of the library section, afford options for even more quiet and intense study. The skill with which such vertical connections are handled is dramatized in the main northern lobby (lower photo) where, once more, the spaces prove to be as tactile as the building's adroit interplay of concrete and brick.



The University of Minnesota Law School has been cited for design excellence by numerous regional, national and international organizations and publications.

### **Awards**

Creative Design Achievement Award, 1981  
Concrete Reinforcing Steel Institute  
Award of Excellence, 1980  
American Institute of Architects and  
American Library Association  
Energy Conservation Award, 1978  
Owens-Corning Fiberglas Corporation  
Honor Award, 1978  
Minnesota Society American Institute of Architects  
Committee on Urban Environment Award, 1978  
City of Minneapolis  
Edwin F. Guth Memorial Lighting Design Award, 1978  
Illuminating Society of North America  
Highest Honors Award, 1977  
American School and University Magazine

### **Published Articles**

Architectural Culture (Korean) . . . . . March 1983  
Architecture Minnesota . . . . . April/May 1981  
architektur + wettbewerb (German) . . . . . December 1980  
informes de la construccion 313 (Spanish) . . . . . 1979  
Architectural Record . . . . . April 1979  
Architecture Minnesota . . . . . November/December 1978  
University of Minnesota Report . . . . . April 1978  
Minneapolis Tribune . . . . . April 1978  
American School & University . . . . . May 1977  
Building Design & Construction . . . . . August 1976  
The Hennepin Lawyer . . . . . March/April 1976  
Brochure: Law School Teaching Clinics . . . . . 1977  
Northwest Architect . . . . . July/August 1971

