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| THE DOCTORATE-GRANTING INSTITUTION OF THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK             |   | 365 FIFTH AVENUE, NEW YORK CITY   |   |                                  |                         |  |
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## The Campus:

### Interview with the Architects

#### "The Kind of Building You Don't Get to Build anymore..."

An interview with the architects conducted in 1997 during the planning stages of The Graduate Center's then new campus.

Robert Siegel, Principal in Charge, and Jacob Alspector, Senior Associate in Charge of Design, Gwathmey Siegel & Associates Architects, put the New Campus in perspective.

#### Can you point to some highlights of the New Campus?

**RS:** Let's start with scale. The floors are approximately five times larger than at the current Graduate Center, and that makes for flexibility in the academic spaces and grandeur in the public spaces. Overall, there will be more and better space, more of a campus feel, more

### THE CAMPUS

|   |   |   |   |
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opportunity for synergy.

**JA:** Above all, there are the advantages of gathering all of the school's academic and research programs on just five floors, and clustering them by discipline. That consolidation should affect how people relate within and among departments. Also there are numerous adaptable spaces for students to work and relax, and enhanced conference, performance, and dining facilities.

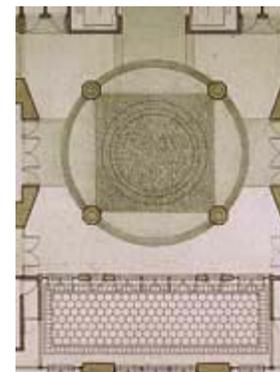
### What's this about synergy?

**RS:** Campuses are places for the exchange of ideas. The building plan will lead faculty and students to mix, through happenstance-in elevators and hallways-and through the sharing of classrooms, labs, and computer facilities. That kind of mingling, formal and informal, makes for an atmosphere in which ideas feed off each other and energy builds.

### Explain the overall plan.

**RS:** It's a nine-story building with public functions at the bottom. From the street-level lobby you can move easily to the art gallery, the recital hall, the library, the auditorium, and the lower-level conference center. The middle of the building, Floors 3 through 7, house the academic programs and research centers, with classrooms and computer hubs in the center, program offices set around the perimeter. The dining room, a second conference center, and administrative offices are found on the top two floors.

The Graduate Center will occupy 375,000 net assignable square feet on nine floors (12 levels). The eighth and ninth floors house administrative offices, the board room, and a conference center, as well as a central



MAIN LOBBY PLAN



ORIGINAL CAST IRON DECORATION  
(DETAIL)



VIEW FROM FIFTH AVENUE AND 34TH  
STREET

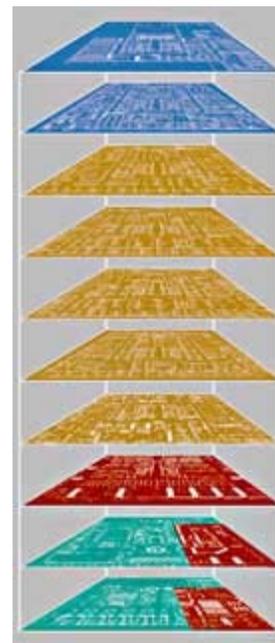
dining facility that reclaims the original skylit B. Altman restaurant and affords commanding views of the Empire State Building.

Academic and research areas, located on the middle five floors, include classrooms, seminar rooms, lecture halls, computer labs, faculty offices and student study areas, a science center, and offices for centers and institutes. The design places public facilities at the lower levels including a 400-seat auditorium, 200-seat recital hall, art gallery, bookstore and coffee bar, conference center, and monumental lobby. The 72,000-square-foot research library is entered from the ground floor and occupies the entire second floor as well as a portion of the lower level.

#### What about the library?

**JA:** It's a 72,000-square-foot facility entered directly from the lobby and clearly visible from the street. On the top floor of the library, corresponding to the entire second floor of the facility, work stations will line the perimeter in an ambulatory of tables and computerized work stations placed in the high arched windows. There students will be studying in the light, with a chance to look out the window during a break; the contrast should be obvious for students used to the current basement library!

Connecting the three library floors will be an ornamental staircase and elevator, separate from the building's main elevator. On the library's bottom floor (on the building's lower level) an "electronic commons" will offer specialized access to databases, the Internet, and other computer-based resources. The reserve and circulation desks will be one floor up, on the building's ground floor.



STACKING DIAGRAM

Convenient access to both printed materials and electronic information-it's a combination that defines the modern research library. There's no question that it's a huge step forward.

**Generations of New Yorkers wistfully remember the elegance of Altman's. What's been done to restore the interior?**

**JA:** We aren't so much restoring in the narrow sense as reimagining the building's historic features, reclaiming and modernizing them to suit the needs of The Graduate Center. In the dining room, for example, we haven't tried to re-create the fabled Charleston Gardens, but rather to use the same monumental skylit space in a new way. In the library, too, we're restoring certain elements, like the staircase and elevator panels, to their original condition, but also modifying their use and adding other elements. Elsewhere, like the main vestibule, we have adhered more strictly to the original: even with upgrades such as handicapped access, people entering from Fifth Avenue will remember Altman's.

**RS:** Entering from Fifth Avenue, passing under the original curvilinear glass canopies, through a beautiful wooden vestibule (really more of a grand foyer), and into the lobby, built from the main floor of B. Altman with a wonderful 18-foot floor height, you feel instantly you're in a grand public space. This is the kind of building you don't get to build from scratch anymore-it would cost too much. But in this case we actually saved money by reclaiming the historic features.

The dining room will be another grand space, at the top of the building. The skylight is being restructured and reglazed, but the volume and the transparency are still

there. It's nice to get to the top of a building and know you're at the top. And to feel the presence of the City.

**How will the New Campus help the City "feel the presence" of The Graduate Center?**

**RS:** From 34th Street, The Graduate Center library, with its large perimeter windows and heights, will project the sense of an active academic center-the same impression you now get looking into SIBL [Science, Industry, and Business Library of The New York Public Library]. This sense will carry through the whole building. There are also some unusual possibilities for publicity: displays in the windows, banners on the flagpoles along the Fifth Avenue facade, maybe awnings-it's a very visible corner.

**JA:** The Graduate Center will unquestionably be more visible in other ways as well. For the first time it will accommodate continuing education, an important way to reach out to the larger community. It will be a venue for all sorts of events-exhibits, concerts, lectures, conferences-bringing increased vitality to the School and the area. Like the Great Hall at Cooper Union, my alma mater, this is going to be one of the places that make art, learning, and culture accessible in New York while enriching the academic experiences of students.

**Could you place this project in a larger historical context?**

**JA:** You know, after B. Altman's closed, there was talk of converting the building to an office-furniture mart. It goes without saying that this use does so much more for New York as a center of culture and learning. It's part of a phenomenon-look at Ladies Mile, Tribeca, and Soho-of the conversion of scenic loft spaces with a grand architectural presence. It's transformed the City in the past two decades. The recovery of this particular

building at an important juncture for an important institution is a wonderful sort of coalescing for New York.

**RS:** Practically, it means that CUNY's Graduate Center will stay in the center of the City, accessible and visible. But the completion, together with SIBL, of roughly one million square feet of public space devoted to learning in a marvelous building in a prime location has powerful symbolic value as well. This beautiful building, beautifully remade, says New York's systems are going strong.

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