

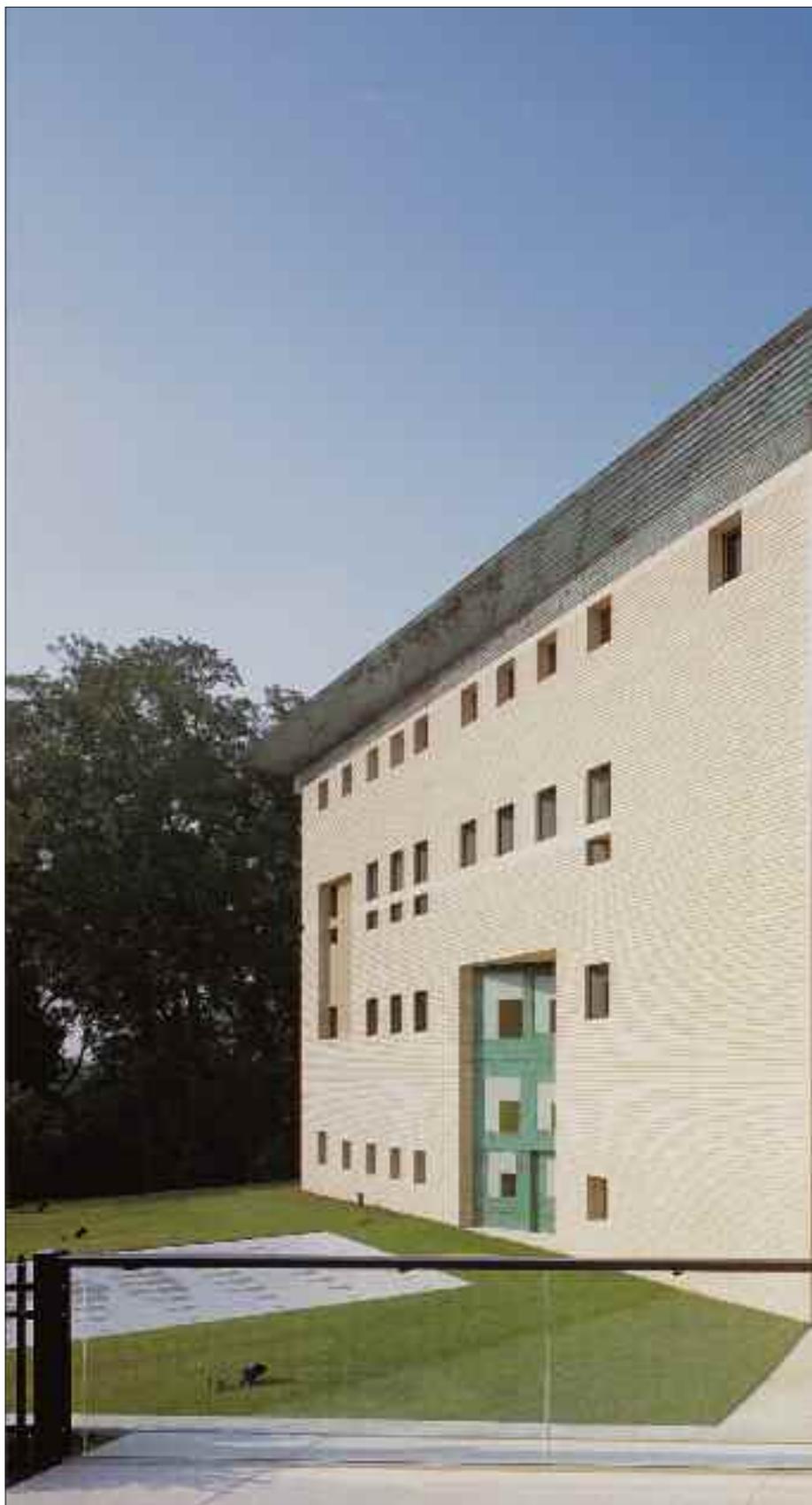
Il Palazzo sul Potomac

The Embassy of Italy
in Washington



Design Architect
PIERO SARTOGO

Design team
Prof. Arch. Piero Sartogo - AIA
Arch. Nathalie Grenon
Arch. Susanna Nobili



1. Entrance on Whitehaven Street: the platform with the glass balustrade is part of the public space overlooking the pathway that crosses the building.





2. The grand design of Washington D.C. by Pierre Charles L'Enfant showing the thirteen main avenues.

3. The project area is a wooded spot next to Rock Creek Park on Whitehaven street not far from the intersection with Massachusetts Avenue. The Avenue has quite a characteristic look, boasting some of the city's finest examples of neo-classical and beaux-arts residential architecture. These impressive buildings, many of which are now diplomatic facilities, owe their charm partially to their homogeneous adherence to criteria of height, arithmetically spaced locations and alignment with the Avenue.

1. British Embassy. 2. Residence of the British Ambassador. 3. Residence of the Brazilian Ambassador. 4. Brazilian Embassy. 5. New Embassy of Italy. 6. Center for Hellenic Studies. 7. Islamic Center.

4. The area, 10 miles on each side, designated by George Washington in 1791 to become the new federal Capital city.

5. The new Embassy's basic footprint – a large square – mirrors George Washington's original ten-by-ten mile square parcel allotted for the creation of the District of Columbia. Its main façade is parallel to Massachusetts Avenue with a ceremonial entry door made of copper and glass.





THE PROJECT

History and architectural design

Piero Sartogo

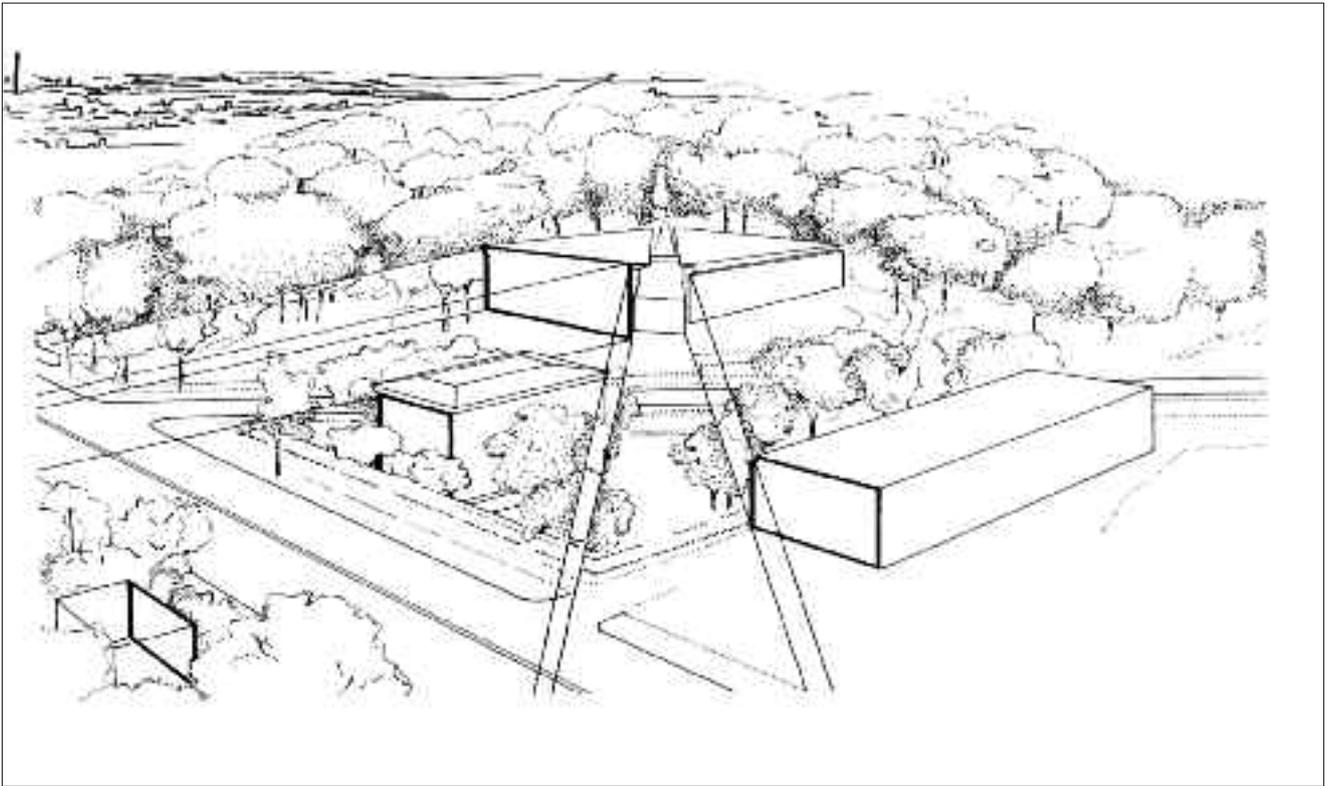


The history of the new Embassy of Italy in the United States begins in 1992 with a competition overseen by Ambassador Boris Biancheri on behalf of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and won by the international architectural firm Sartogo Architetti Associati.

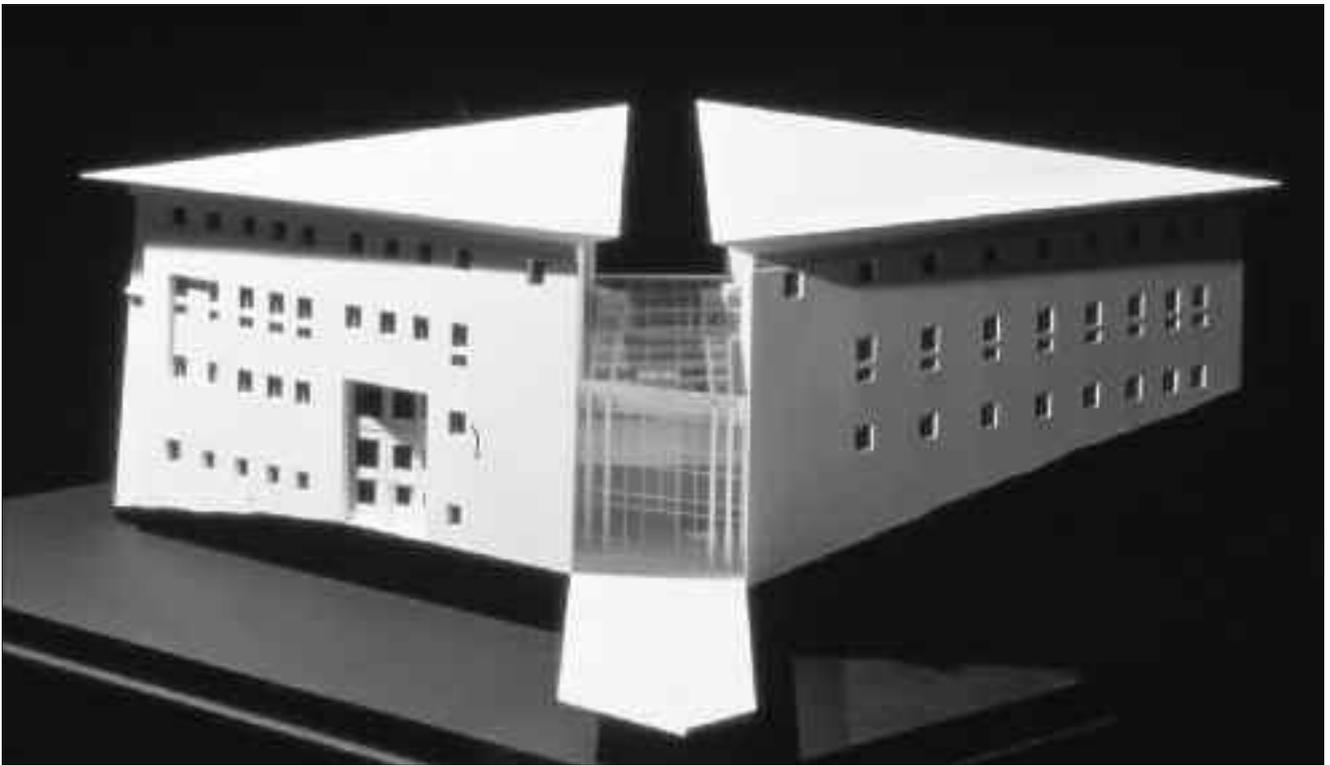
Piero Sartogo recalls: “Ten leading Italian architects including Gae Aulenti, Carlo Aymonino, Guido Canella, Giancarlo De Carlo, Vittorio De Feo, Vittorio Gregotti, Vico Magistretti, Renzo Piano, Aldo Rossi, and myself were invited to submit design ideas which, applied on a prominent site such as Whitehaven Street, while being distinctively Italian, would also complement the surrounding landscape and architecture of Washington, D.C. We were given only 60 days to present a design concept. Our proposal, designed by the team formed of Nathalie Grenon, Susanna Nobili, and myself, was considered by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be the one which best fulfilled the requested symbolic, design, and functional criteria. Our firm, in fact, was awarded the commission because our concept was able to explore and understand the site as well as produce the required Italian building image.

Our rule is that our designs interpret the “genius loci” of the place where the project will be built. Therefore, it is essential for us to have clear knowledge of the area and the physical and cultural context of the setting with which the building will dialogue.

In 1992, when we were developing our project, we wanted to become intimately familiar with the site: about five acres of woodland bordering Rock Creek Park, untouched forests of North American hardwoods,

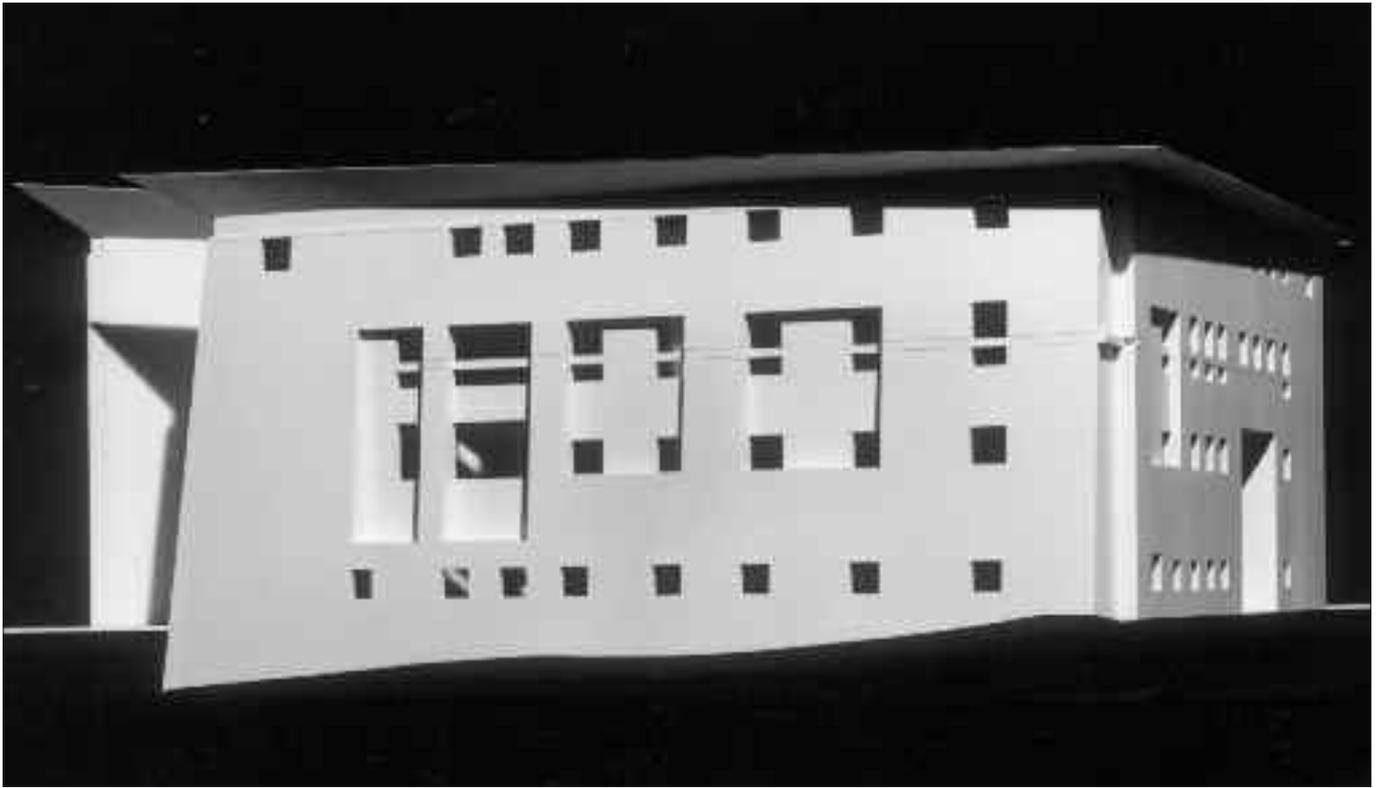


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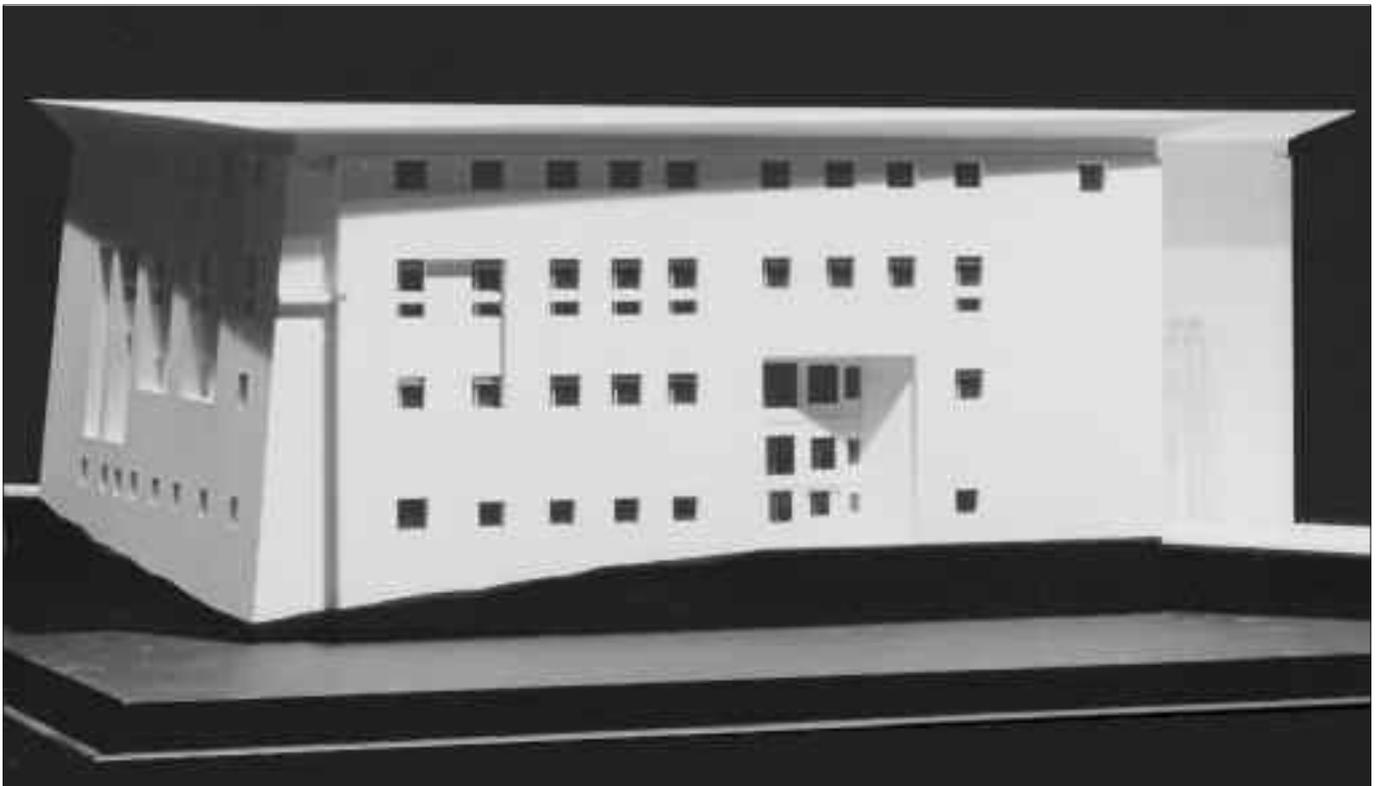


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6-7. The hollowed section, a two level pedestrian circulation system, is a broad path that runs through and beyond the entire structure, opening it up boldly. The cut through in the middle of the Embassy opens the view from Whitehaven Street to Rock Creek Park, highlighting the separation between the Brazilian Chancery designed by Oscar Niemeyer, and the Beaux-Arts style residence.

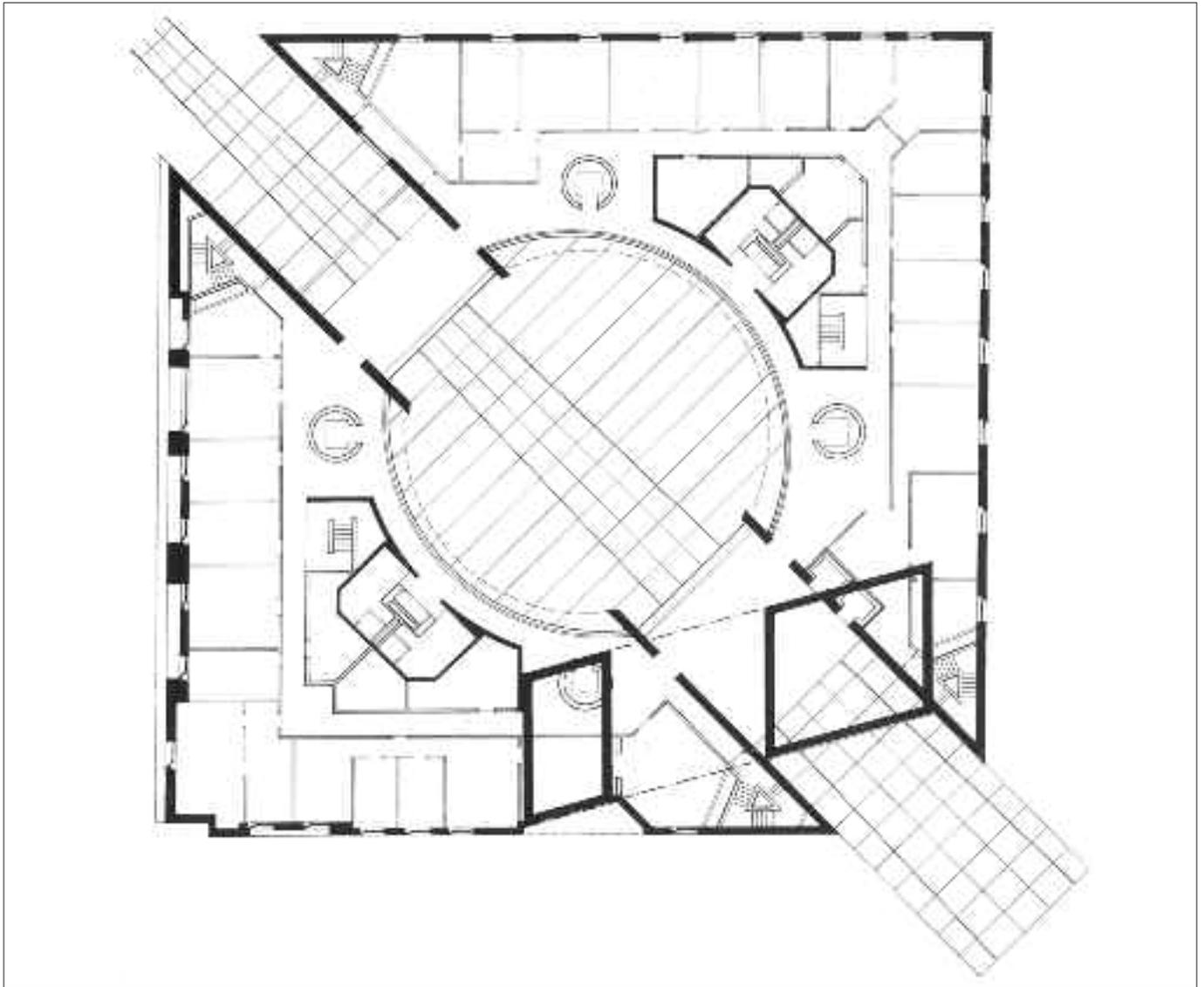


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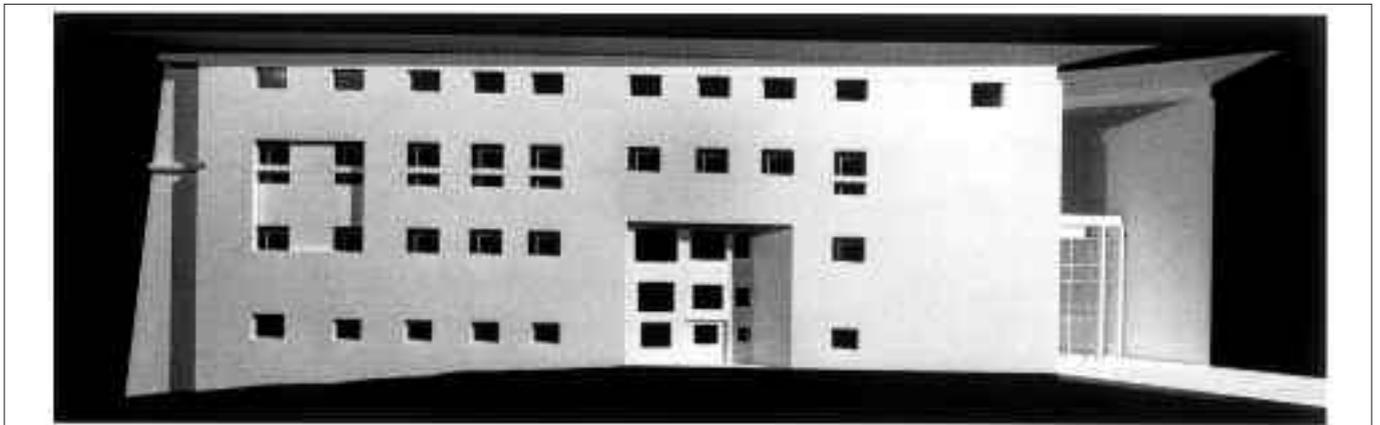
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8-9. Study models of the different configurations and geometries of the façades.



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10. Plan of the ground floor shows the diagonal which generates the two entrances: the glazed public entry and the entry door for dignitaries.



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11. The ceremonial entry door is at the center of the building, but its placement is asymmetrical in the façade facing Massachusetts Avenue.



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12-13. The asymmetry of the copper roofs accentuates the dynamic character of the stone edging.



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totally unlike the manicured Italian countryside. Once we visited the site, we immediately realized that the area chosen for the new Chancery of the Embassy of Italy in Washington D.C. was quite relevant to the city's urban framework, and especially to the strategic area along Massachusetts Avenue where most of the diplomatic chanceries and diplomatic residences are concentrated. We also noted that the Avenue has a strongly representative aura, lined as it is with some of the city's best examples of Neo-classical and Beaux-arts residential architectures.

These imposing buildings owe their allure to their general adherence to norms regarding homogeneous building height, setback from the road and alignment of the façades. In addition to these morphological traits, we also looked at the city plan for the new Federal capital laid out in 1791 by George Washington. The plan takes the form of a large square, 10 miles on each side, cut diagonally by the Potomac River.

The original thirteen colonies of the Union needed a capital: the area of Washington at that time was no more than forests, swamps and snowstorms, but it was at the center of the territory and George Washington could not resist the temptation. More than two centuries later, when the capital is no longer at the center of just the United States, but of the whole world, we decided to revisit the original square on which the *limen* of the city was traced, making it the main inspiration for our concept.

The thought we had was a compact building that evoked the idea of a Palazzo, a "Euclidean" space, pure geometry, that we would "anchor" to the site. Given that Massachusetts Avenue is one of Washington's institutional arteries and the site of many and various diplomatic offices, we were convinced of the need for a prominent façade that would stand parallel to the Avenue as an integral part of the urban scene. However, it was also clear that the entrance had to be off to the side street. When we went to Whitehaven Street there were two things that caught our eye. One was the view through the Brazilian Embassy opening onto Massachusetts Avenue. The other, on the far side of Rock Creek Park, was the Washington Monument,



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14. The main façade, aligned with Massachusetts Avenue, with the ceremonial door positioned asymmetrically.





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15. The façade from the driveway.





16. The appearance of the building at its north-west corner.





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17. In the façade facing Rock Creek, nearly immersed in the woods, the building's mass counters the steeply sloping land by the incorporation of a buttress.





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18-20. Stages of construction (1996-2000).



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19. From left to right: architects N. Grenon, P. Sartogo, S. Nobili.



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standing as a vertical axis with respect to Whitehaven Street.

So we designed a square layout for the Chancery just like the original city plan laid out by George Washington. A diagonal cut divides the square, creating a sort of “pathway” splitting the cubic volume of the building. At one end we have a view onto Massachusetts Avenue, and, at the other, of the Washington Monument. The “pathway” between the two triangles is a space lined by glass walls that traverses the Chancery, bringing it into the park and into the city.

I would point out that we are not dealing with a perfect square that can be inscribed in a circle. If anything, it is a deconstructed figure; the square that was the underlying inspiration for this concept has undergone a number of distortions caused by its placement on the site. This square generates asymmetry. The square assumes the dimension of two triangles and the compact mass of the external perimeter is sliced by a diagonal. Just as the Potomac divides Washington, the glassed-in pathway, a cavity, slices open the building, allowing it to dialogue with its surrounding, making it lighter, brighter and giving order to the street – piazza – courtyard – garden sequence. In short, we can say that the concept is not the squaring of a circle, but the breakdown of a square.

This geometry allowed us to align the main façade in the traditional manner parallel to Massachusetts Avenue while also creating a perceptual transparency, a sort of void that cuts across the building. This geometric layout was then distorted in subtle ways. The entire building is a complex of variations of the rectangle and the square. Notice for example the symmetry and proportions of the ceremonial doorway facing the Avenue, placed symmetrically on the south side of the building and asymmetrically within the façade itself.

In a certain sense, what counts in the Chancery are the anomalies. They are what gives it its enduring allure. For example, each façade is different: each one represents an arrangement of counterbalanced openings dug deep into a flat surface. And not all the façades are perpendicular to the ground. The one facing the woods and the steep slope of Rock Creek Park leans outward as a sort of counterpoint to the natural embankment.



The cubic volume of the building is sliced along a north-south diagonal, forming a gateway that strengthens the connection between Whitehaven Street and Rock Creek Park. A glass enclosed space is created between the two triangular volumes: the linear geometry of the path crossing the building intersects the cylindrical volume of the lobby generating the two semicircular curtain walls that soar above the "lens." Next page: the building overlooking the park with the juxtaposition of the two triangular volumes and the inclined surface of the buttress. The edge of the roof reveals the original cube and the subtracted volume.

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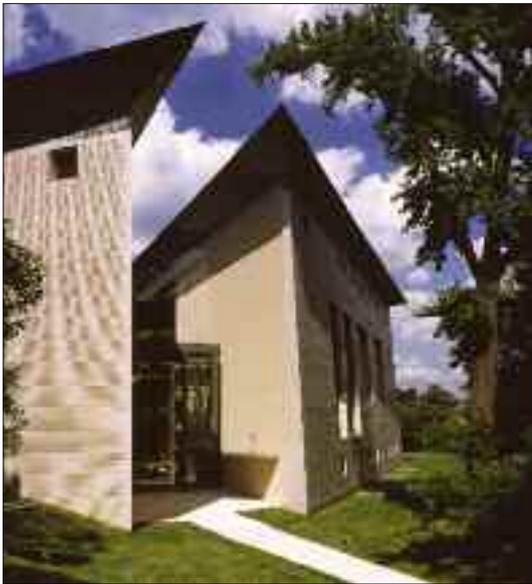


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The broad gash that cuts through the buildings is just a bit off center in order to give a slight sense of instability to the overall *mise en scène*. In order to accentuate the startling effect of the diagonal cut, we introduced a scheme of forced perspectives into the inner courtyard and also, with greater dramatic effect, into the alignment of the rooftops. These prow-shaped roofs, with their gradient copper rain gutters, are also different from one another. They are not all parallel, not all at the same level, but they crown the building in a stunning way with the powerful shadows they cast on the walls and their strong contrast with the sky.



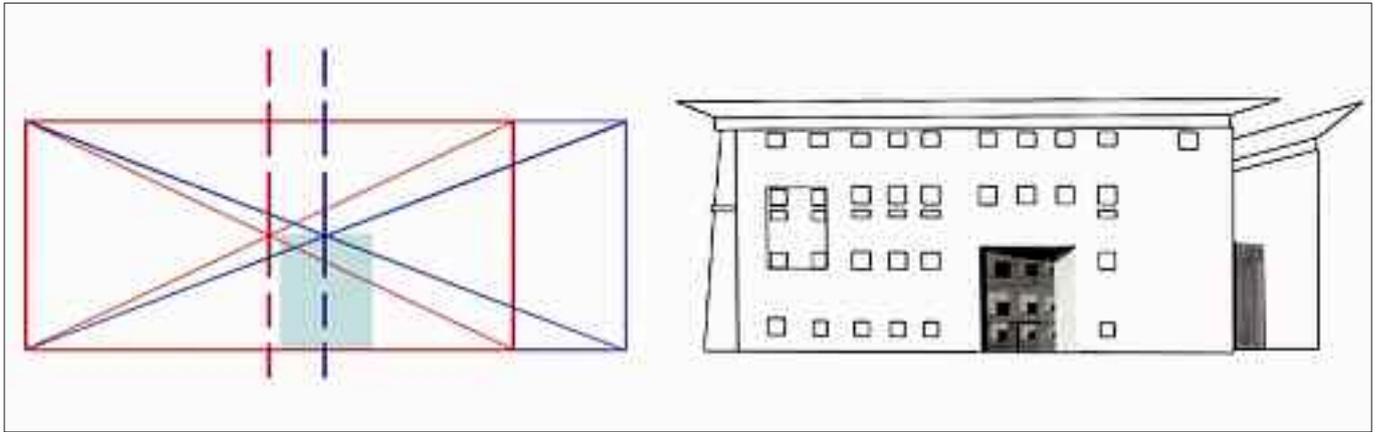
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We felt that the balance between the absolutely unstable primary form of the “cube,” conceived on the original plan of the city designed by George Washington as a Duchamp’s *objet trouvé*, and the distortion imposed through the reference to the area of the project, was the best response to the theme. One of the elements in our approach was the removal of a portion excavated into the theoretical space of the building as a means of connecting it to its urban or landscape context. The cubic volume of the building opens along one of its diagonals; this opening, running north to south, strengthens the connection between Whitehaven Street and Rock Creek Park by forming a gateway to the project and site. The carved-out portion is, in fact, a broad path that runs through and beyond the entire structure, generating two different sized volumes. It is also true that the architectural “invariants”, taught and loved by Bruno Zevi, are somehow respected, though in a less explicit way.



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We admire Filippo Brunelleschi’s anti-classicism: in the Church of Santo Spirito the column placed on the axis of symmetry generates a virtual plan giving birth to an oblique vision through a rotational dynamic of the space. The point is not transgression of the rule, but the idea of connecting the city with the building and vice versa: in Colle Val d’Elsa, the bridge penetrates through the building, overcoming it, and becoming the main roadway of the urban settlement – surprisingly the volume of the building doesn’t change at all! In our case the crossing from the city to the park generates a cut, a gap that divides the volume in two parts.

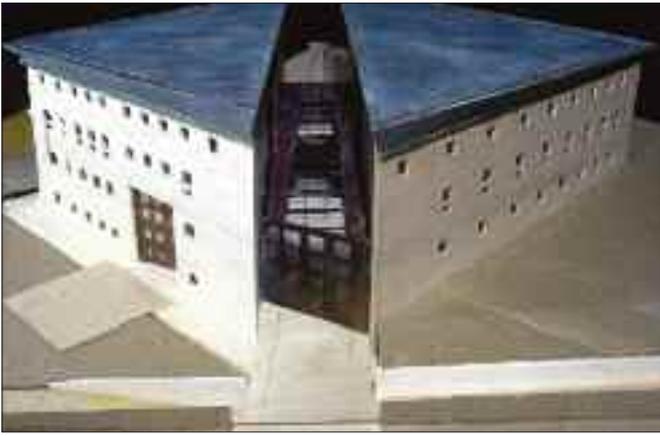


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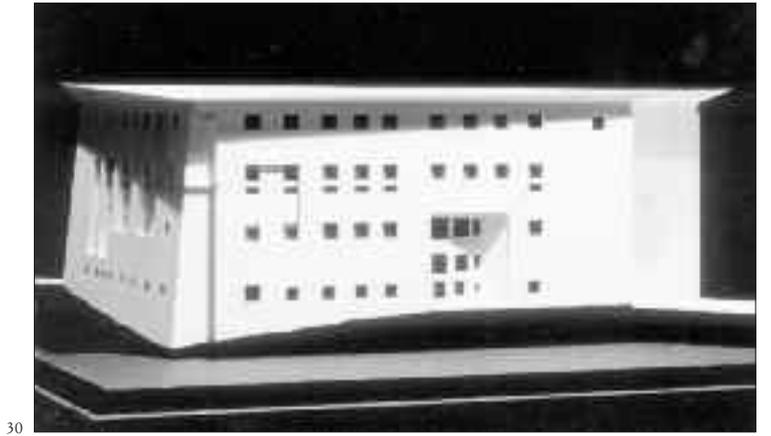
In the façade facing Rock Creek, nearly immersed in the woods, the building's mass counters the steeply sloping land with the incorporation of a buttress. The major façade and the buttress create a node whereby the meeting of the two planes, vertical and inclined, is clearly expressed. Indications of the floor-slab levels and of the vertical planes of the fenestration emerge from these geometries as connecting elements in the composition.



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31. At night, the lighting of the glassed central atrium shows the juxtaposition of the two different parts of the building.





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32. The design of the roof effectively strengthens the diagonal cut of the atrium.

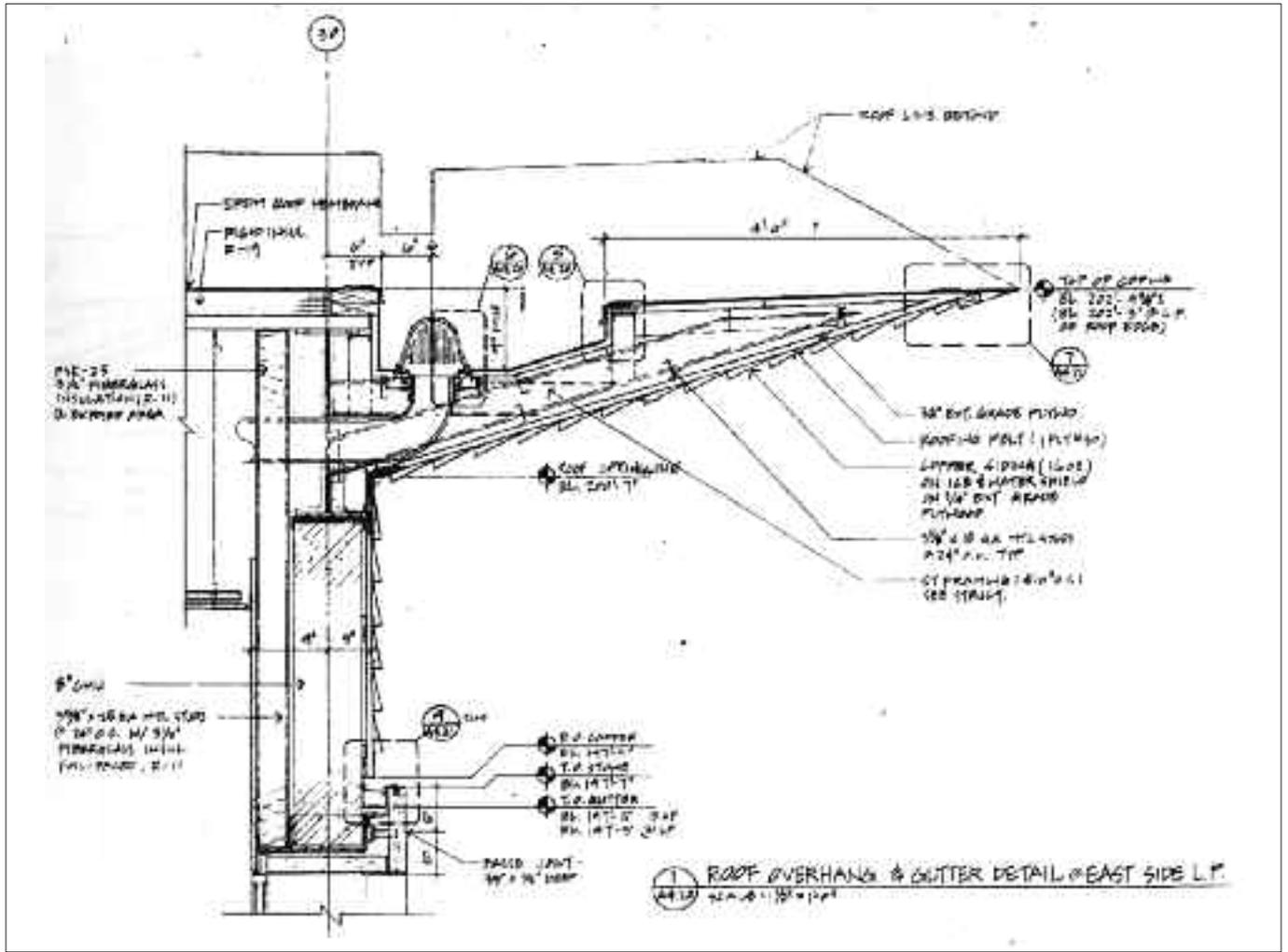
33-34. Stages of construction (1996-2000).



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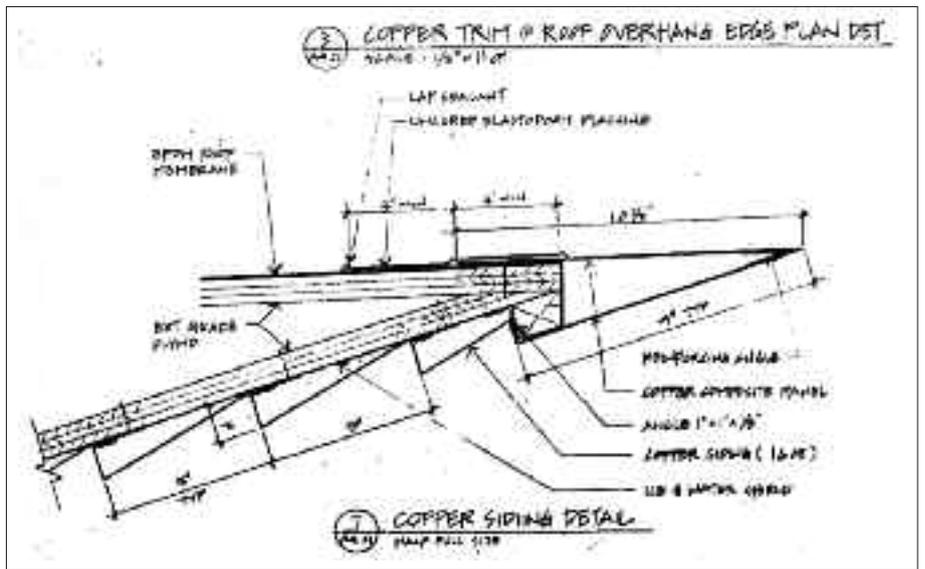


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35. Roof overhang and copper trim details. The gutter and the down pipe are inserted into the corner walls.

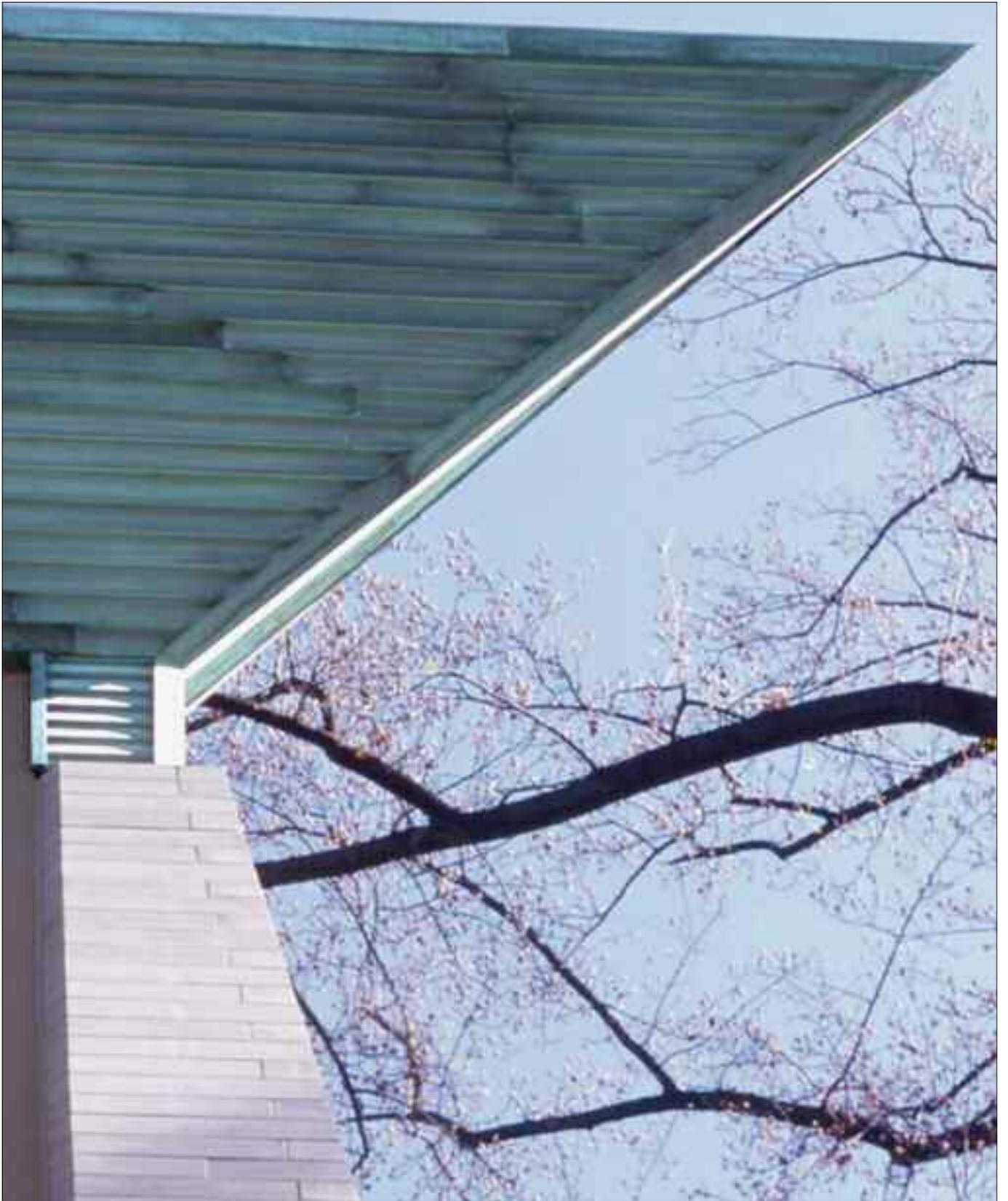


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36-37. Study model of corner solution of the roof showing the connection between the rosa Asiago stone cladding, the ledge and the copper edge of the roof.



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38. Counterpoint between the tectonic corner of rosa Asiago stone cladding and the sharp line of the copper roof.



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39. On the corner between the major façade and the buttress, a stone element clearly shows the interconnection of the two planes, vertical and inclined.





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40. Upper left: representatives of the engineering firm Leo A. Daly, of the construction company Beacon-Dioguardi, M.R. Ciannella, P. Sartogo, S. Nobili e T. Rivolta.



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41. Stage of construction of the rosa Asiago stone cladding of the building.

42. The buttress towards the park shows the juxtaposition between the oblique wall, covered with rosa Asiago stone elements, and the vertical plastered surface with the windows.



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We don't believe that our design experience in Washington should be characterized as "epochal deconstructive modality." Rather it should stand as our specific *modus operandi* which guides us in all our work. Undoubtedly, the Embassy is an anti-classical building because it derives from the assumption of a model that has cultural roots and morphologies alluding to a somatically Italic architectural tradition.

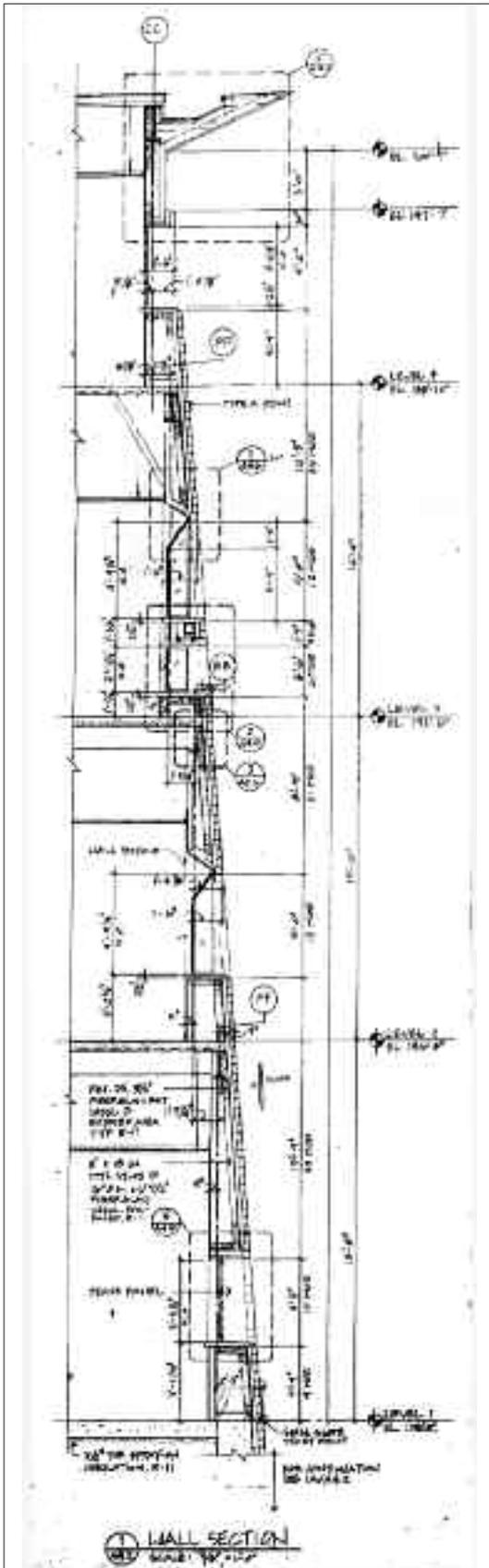
As a matter of fact, I believe it is worth underlining that the masterly and tectonic use of stone cladding is neither a new or an old idea, but you certainly cannot improvise the kind of know-how and knowledge it requires!

The design of the building is based on the golden section, indispensable starting point for an Italian architect. But this geometric and harmonic concept is immediately disrupted by the diagonal cut – with its memory of the Potomac River – that divides the square into two triangles, creating a series of slight asymmetries and a sort of rotation of the central space, which is also not perfectly circular or monocentric. This architecture is made of virtual perceptions. The masonry consistency of the four façades, all of them different, following the example of Le Corbusier and Terragni, is broken by the transparency of the large central glass skylight. The architectural configuration of the building thereby opens a dialogue between the inner space and the natural landscape surrounding the Chancery.

If I have to make a comparison, I would speak of the Chancery as a building conceived to be like the human body: outside it has uniform, monochromatic skin; inside it is very colorful, a metaphor of the system of veins and arteries of the human body.

The volume has no impact on the surroundings: it appears to be set back, a unique exception among the other Embassies. Its position attracts the curiosity of people passing by, in particular at dusk and at night, when the lit atrium draws everyone's attention.

Since in the competition phase, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs required that the building's design had to be recognizable as Italian and contemporary, we decided to focus our attention on the stone: the Italian character is primarily expressed in the craftsmanship





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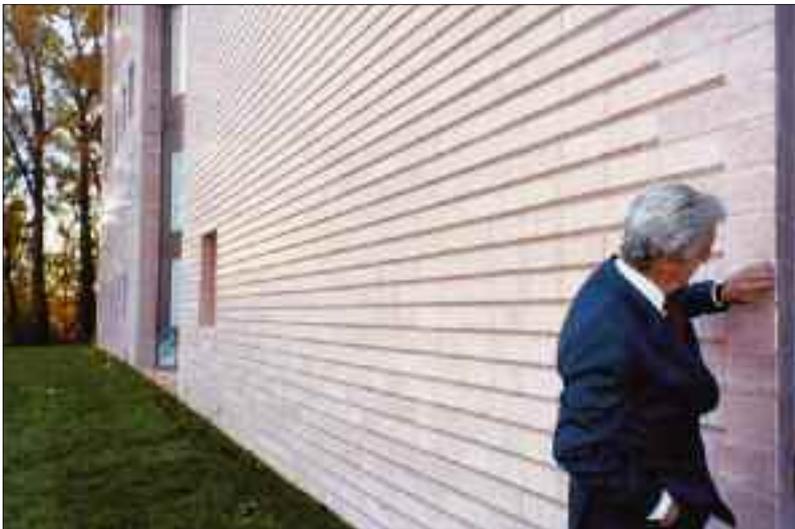
Architect P. Sartogo watching the rosa Asiago stone elements that he conceived as soft skin enfolding the entire building. The stone modules dimensions are 60 cm in length, 12 cm in height and 10 in depth. They have a side cut with an inclination of 45 degrees to outline the horizontal superimposition of layers.

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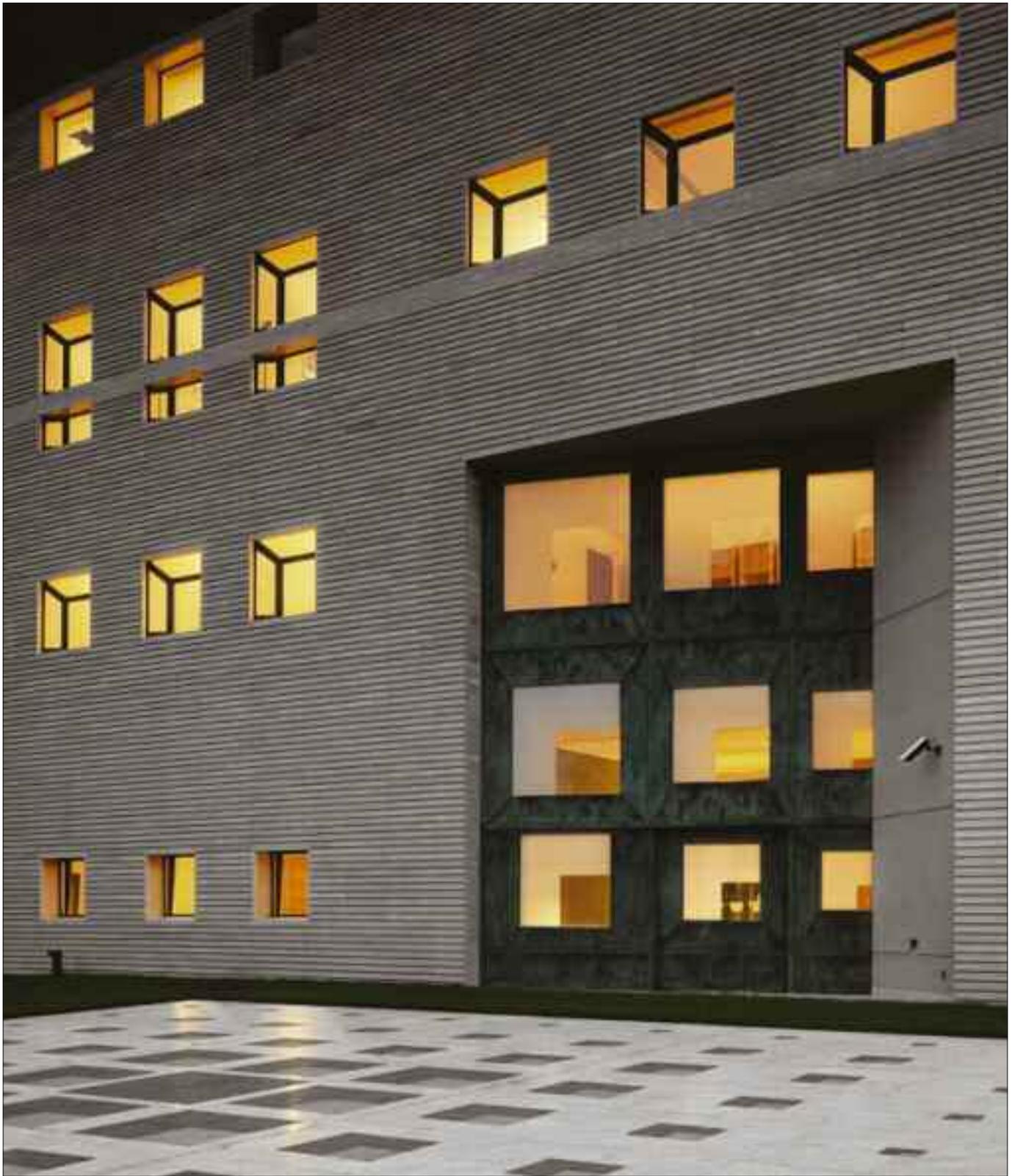
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50. The geometry of the square, conceived in multicolored marble, is taken from the design of the glass surfaces, opaque and transparent, of the ceremonial copper door. The windows have a three dimensional configuration to increase the refraction of natural light; they also give relief to the depth of the masonry mass of the façades.



51. Architects P. Sartogo and N. Grenon analyze some models of windows, doors and nodes of the façades of the building.



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of its tectonic treatment. One of the clearest references to Italy is the use of the stone blocks on the façades, 8 cm thick, creating the image of a *Palazzo*, imposing a majestic presence within the urban context of Washington.

Our most important decision concerned the manufacturing of the horizontal edge of the stone blocks. We aimed to create, for each façade, a stone surface that would most closely resemble a large homogeneous block. The 45° joints presented us with the difficult task of analyzing dozens of samples, looking for the right angle of the edge, to calibrate the shadows among the stone blocks.

The stately building, set somewhat back from Massachusetts Avenue on which the other Embassies are located calls to mind a *Palazzo*. Its view is a moving memory of Tuscan stone villas, of Renaissance courtyards, although it is conceived and realized with a contemporary language, recalling the past while serving the present. The Italian character of the Embassy is further enhanced by its exquisite furnishings, select examples of modern Italian design, from the tables to the carpets. Materials, finishes – everything calls forth Italian style and showcases abroad a piece of Italy and its recent history.

For its role in promoting the image of Italy in the world, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which commissioned the building, won the Prize ALA-Assoarchitetti 2003-2004. It was received by then General Secretary of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Umberto Vattani in conjunction with the inauguration of the traveling exhibition of the International Prize Dedalo Minosse, hosted in the spaces of the Chancery.

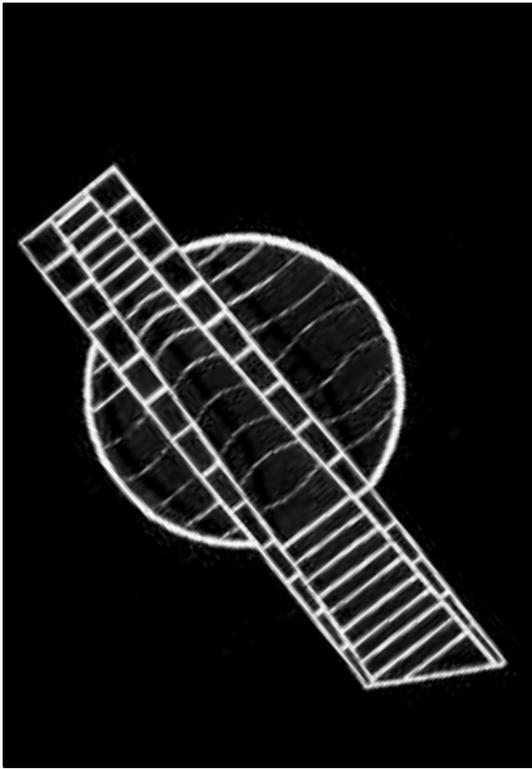
It's interesting to recall the jury's motivation for the award: *The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, as the client of this building, conceived a very efficient method for selecting the project, having previously defined precise and detailed functional and esthetical requirements, then following each step of the construction. Schedules and forecasts were respected and no modifications were required during the construction phase. This award is also intended to promote further dialogue on architecture within institutions.*



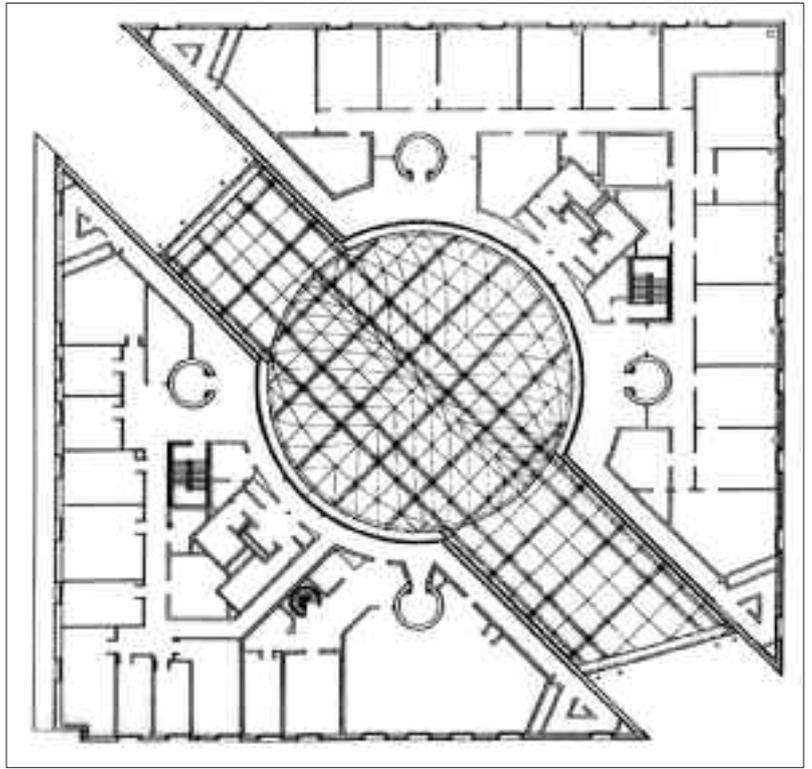
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53. The dome over the atrium: a convex and circular skylight made of steel and glass.

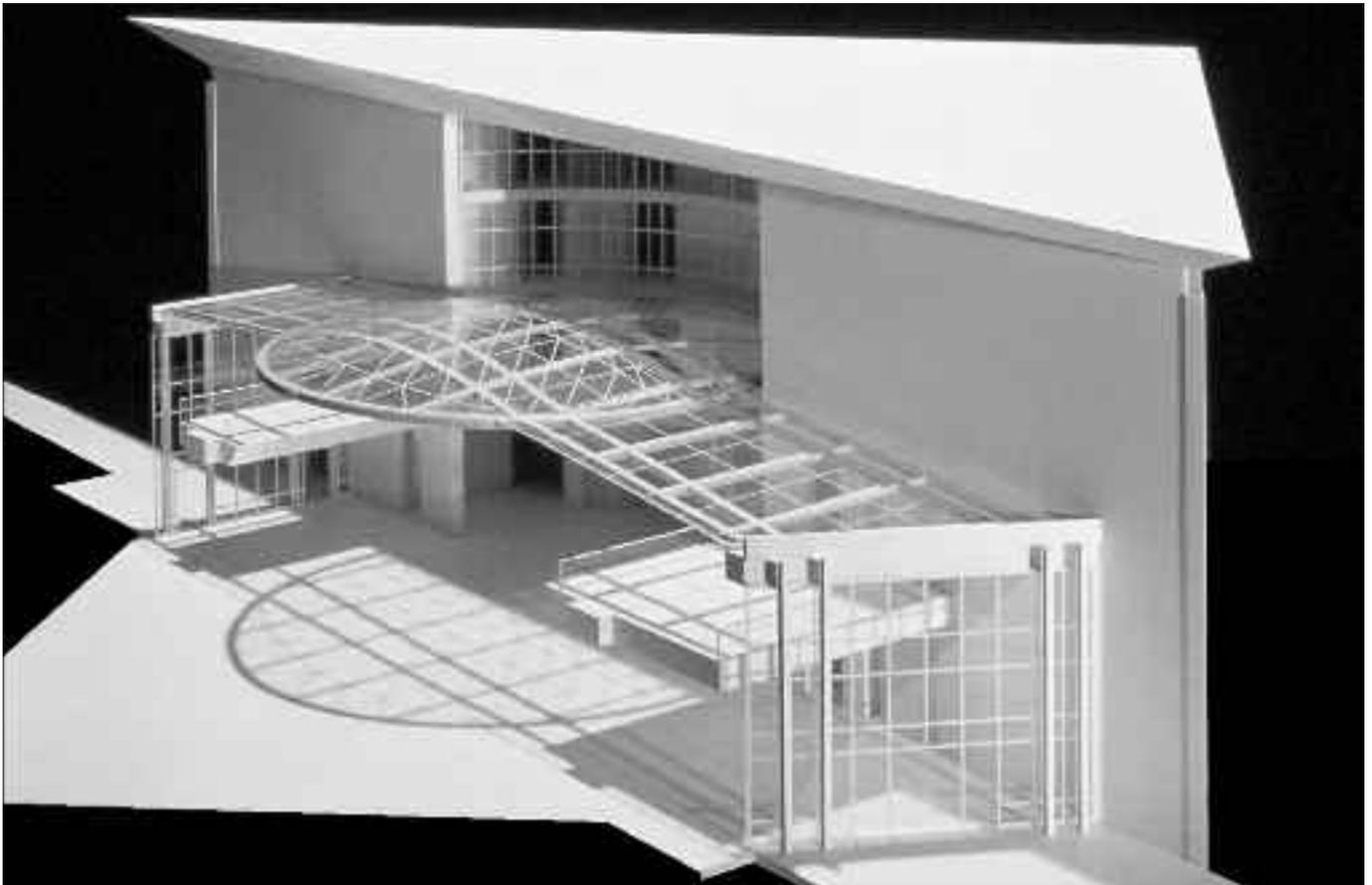
54-56. The linear geometry of the path crossing the building intersects the cylindrical volume of the lobby. The transparent dome is therefore structurally conceived as a system of load-bearing arching girders, which support the transverse beams. The longitudinal girders envelop the whole structure, marking the two fronts with pilasters: one overlooking Whitehaven Street, the other the park.



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57-59. Stages of construction (1996-2000).



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60. The transparent dome is conceived as a system of load-bearing arching girders which support the transverse beams. The longitudinal girders follow the perspective which, starting from the park, projects toward Whitehaven Street.





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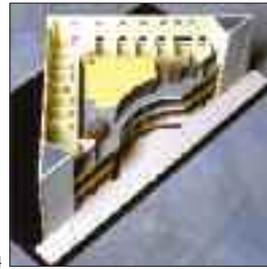
61. Stages of construction: the reticular structure of the central atrium dome with its triangular mesh of steel bars and glass plates.



62. A collection of archaeological finds is located in front of the glass wall facing the park.



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66. Two floors of the building overlook the wide atrium with its transparent dome.

The building's exterior, like the human body, is monochromatic, while the interior is multicolored. Yellow, indigo, gray, and terracotta red give the areas energy and vitality. Upper left n° 63-65: study model of the color scheme for internal spaces and surfaces.



With this building, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave new impetus to its relationship with Architecture, already begun with the construction of the Embassy of Italy in Brasilia, designed by Pierluigi Nervi in the '70s and developed with *Sartogo Architetti Associati* on the occasion of the prominent World Fairs of Tsukuba in 1985 and of Seville in 1992.

Right from the start the client played a key role. Boris Biancheri, Italian Ambassador to the U.S., organized a carefully planned competition and was able to create a net of extraordinary contacts with local authorities, in particular the Fine Arts Commission – which is in charge of architecture in the capital. Mr. Curter Brown, then president of the Fine Arts Commission, became our main cultural reference, giving the project his enthusiastic support. The appointment of Ferdinando Salleo as Italian Ambassador coincided with the beginning of construction, which lasted through his mandate until the year 2000. During those years, we had the opportunity to collaborate with Counselor Stefano Benazzo, who coordinated the functional and security aspects of the Chancery during construction.

Maria Rosa Ciannella was instrumental in the contracting review especially in administrative and accounting matters. All were committed and steadfast also assisting designers in ensuring the quality of construction. Between 1998 and 1999, Ambassador Umberto Vattani was particularly involved in the design of the Embassy's interior, sharing with *Sartogo Architetti* the idea of creating a “state of the art” showcase of Italian modern design.

The idea was to create a veritable collection consisting of pieces by famous Italian designers from the mid 1930s to the present. As an installation in the Chancery, the collection would represent a Washington equivalent of sorts to the MOMA in New York. We are very satisfied by the results of our effort—the new Chancery is home to exclusive pieces of modern Italian design.

I would also like to underline that although the idea seems so basic in view of the status of Italian design, this is the very first time it has been implemented in a public building, either in Italy or abroad.

Our criterion for product selection was aesthetic and technological quality: products at the forefront and rep-



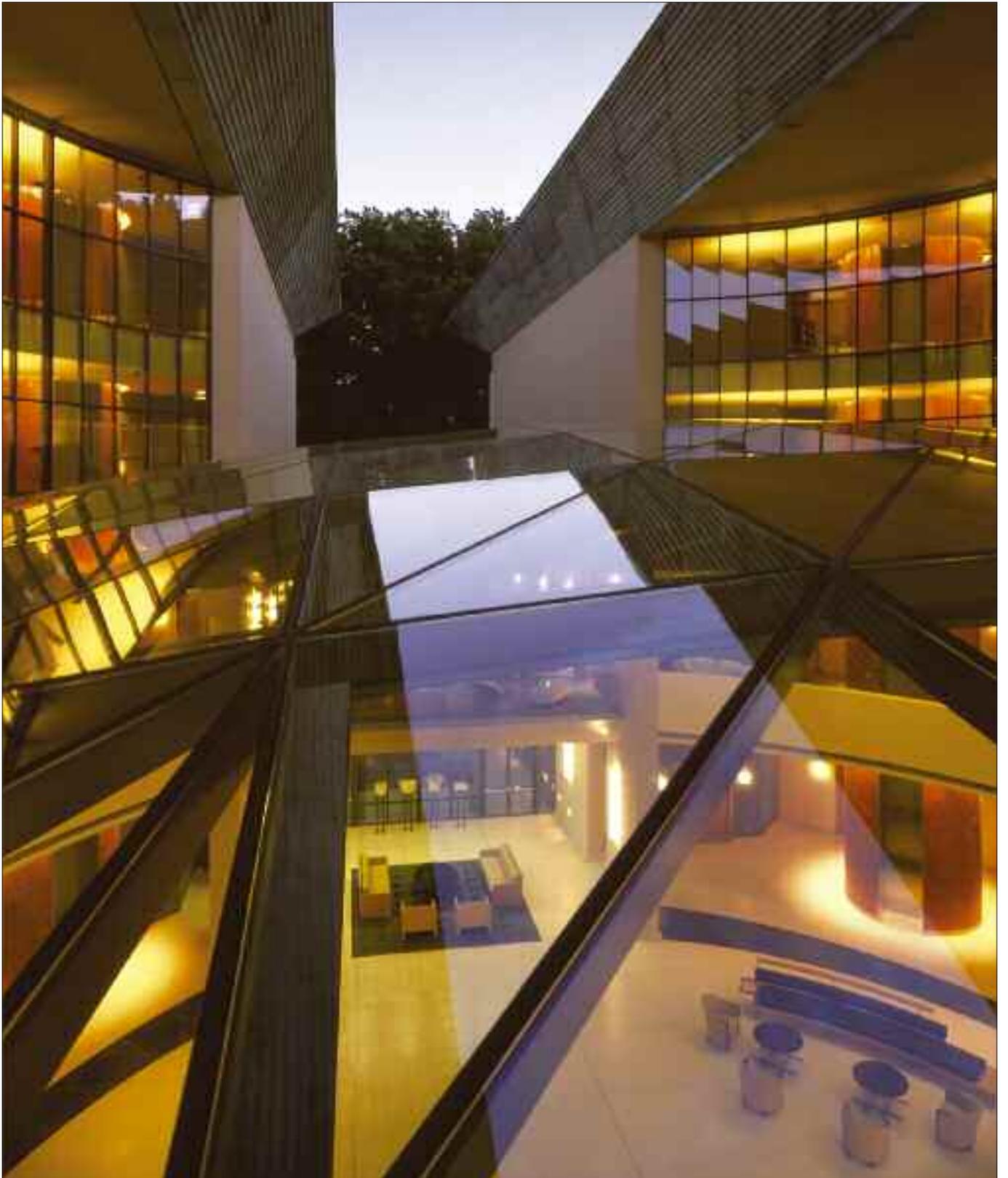


67-69. This page: Ceremonial lobby with the ancient green “cipollino” marble column moved here from the old Chancery located in Fuller street. The space is focused on the cylindrical volume of the elevator. Side page: the public entry with the archaeological ancient column in “cipollino” marble moved here from the old Chancery.

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70. The two semicircular curtain walls, following the geometry dictated by the atrium, emerge above the glass dome.





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72-73. The main atrium gives direct access to the meeting rooms.

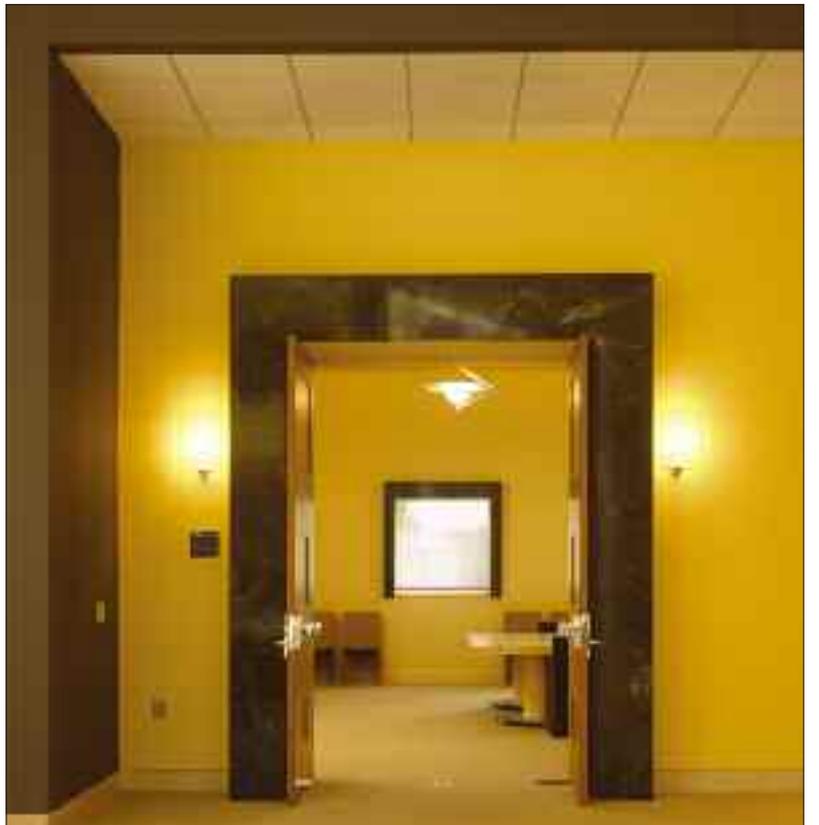
74. The entry door to the meeting rooms is characterized by a green marble frame.



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As required by European Union regulations (legally the Embassy is on Italian soil) all the offices have access to natural light and fresh air through windows which open onto the park. Each room has personalized furnishings.

75. Meeting room.

76-78. The living room. The study model for the color scheme of internal spaces designed by the architects is displayed on the triangular table.



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79-80. The dining room.





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81. The purple wall which leads to the auditorium underlines the dialogue between ancient artifacts and modern design.



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82. The auditorium can accommodate up to 128 guests.



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83 - 84. The bridge on the west side of the building displays a collection of modern Italian design from the 60s to today.





85. The semi-circular walkway overlooking the large central atrium and connecting the two bridges.



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86 - 87. The press room and press briefing room.



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88-90,93. The bridge on the east side of the building displays a collection of modern Italian design from the 60s to today.



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91. In the atrium on the ground floor, in visual and functional connection with Rock Creek Park, the archaeological artifacts, coming from the old chancery dialogue with modern design. 92



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95-97. On the upper floors the cylindrical volume of the elevator creates a joint between the linear corridor and the semi-circular balcony. The ancient encaustic technique, applied on the external surface of the elevator, testifies to the great skills and dedication of Italian artisans. 94: Specially designed pigeon-hole boxes for employee mail.



97



representative of the various trends in Italy's revered history of design, legendary and popular pieces, whether or not still in production. In addition, our team itself designed specific furniture pieces for the offices and reception areas.

This project gave us the opportunity to explore and experiment in new areas: for example, the system of "Quadrifoglio" tables whose variable shapes allow them to be customized for both working meetings and banquets; carpets and carpeting; oversized seating.

It should be noted that the building's configuration lends itself to an innovative use of a diplomatic seat-hosting public events and visitors. In fact, the atrium, with its glass dome and windows that face out onto Rock Creek Park, has been the venue for a variety of events, including a concert conducted by Lorin Maazel, an exhibition of ADI Compasso d'Oro, and a show of Ferrari's after the Indianapolis Gran Prix.

We believe that we have installed a dialogue between a contemporary structure and its stationery and movable furnishings, pieces selected from the very best that Italian design has to offer or that we designed ourselves specifically for certain spaces. We are certain that our decision is being rewarded by the many special events and exhibits hosted at the Chancery, which are clearly a significant contribution to promoting our country's cultural and economic sectors.

The offices, the meeting rooms, the lounges, the reception areas, the auditorium—all are furnished with select examples of Italian design from the 1950s to the present. They were all chosen with the intent to create a collection at the Embassy of Italy in Washington that could converse with the works exposed at the MOMA in New York.

I would like to draw attention to the main concepts defining our work in the Embassy's interior spaces. The Italian expression "good design" is not recent; it is already mentioned in Leonardo da Vinci's writings. It referred to the use of an ideal model, based on the balance and the harmony among the various parts of a figurative and architectural work.

The fascinating concept of juxtaposing contemporary functional designs with traditional and classic artifacts was clearly described by Jean Baudrillard in his book



The natural light filtering through the windows in the offices highlights the various colours of the walls, sunny yellow, cobalt blue and red. The furnishings are either specially designed by the architects or chosen from models of modern Italian design.

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103. Washington D.C., June 21, 2000. Opening of the new Chancery of the Embassy of Italy. From left to right: Ambassador of Italy to the United States, Ferdinando Salleo; Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lamberto Dini, and the architect, Piero Sartogo.



“The System of Objects”. The purpose was to achieve a harmonious relationship between the architectural space and its decorative objects. The result of this combination is the expression “life-style” which has the powerful connotation of genetic creativity.

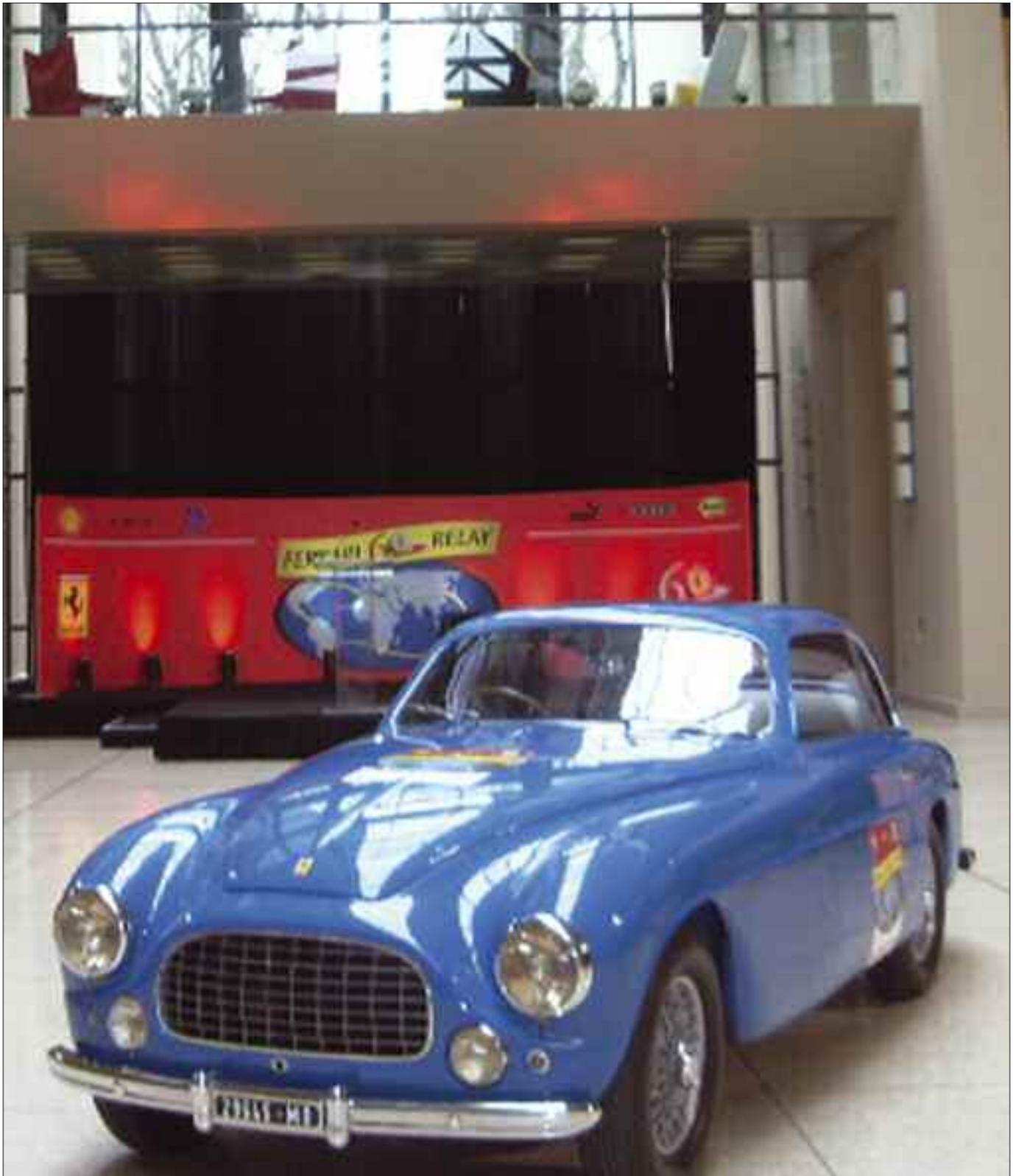
We decided not to choose products from the latest Milano Design Fair (Salone del Mobile), but to create a comprehensive collection formed by icons from the history of “Italian design”. Our idea was to show Italy’s extraordinary versatility, productivity and creativity, exhibiting designs ranging from the 1930s, through post WWII and up to the year 2000.

Our success is also due to the collaboration and availability of Italy’s leading design firms such as Poltrona Frau, B & B, Fontana Arte, Flos, Artemide, Unifor, Cassina, Luce plan, to name a few. They were able to specially reproduce some of their historical designs, even those out of production, such as the lamp “Luminator” designed by Luciano Baldessari and produced by Luce Plan, or the Lamp designed by Paolo Rizzato and produced by Flos, or the “Torso” sofa designed by Paolo Deganello and produced by Cassina, to name some examples.

In this way we achieved the dual goal of giving the U.S. capital a building which would express the excellence of Italian design and which would meet the aspirations of Italian design firms who wished to showcase there.

We chose to use the precious archaeological heritage housed at the previous Chancery in Fuller Street to dialogue with the modern items. The idea was to put those ancient artifacts in the most strategic points of the new building, underlining the design of a space conceived to host public gatherings and official meetings, exhibitions, and special events.

A visitor walking through the atrium leading to the auditorium, to the meeting rooms, and to the living areas, comes across a series of archaeological artifacts, such as the beautiful fragment of an ancient Roman sculpture, two green *cipollino* marble columns displayed in the entrance lobbies, and a set of ancient Roman column capitals, linearly exhibited on metal pedestals along the fenestration with Rock Creek Park as a background.



104

104. On March 31, 2007 in Washington D.C., an exhibition of 80 Ferrari cars (60 privately owned and 20 from Ferrari dealers) was held in the Chancery of the Embassy of Italy, on the 60th anniversary of Ferrari. Among the celebrations in five continents, the one in Washington was the most important, as the United States is Ferrari's major market. Photo courtesy of the Embassy of Italy in Washington.



105

105. Then Ambassador of Italy to Washington Giovanni Castellaneta and the Ferrari North America Marketing Director, Dr. Attilio Ruffo. Photo courtesy of the Embassy of Italy in Washington.



106

106. Baarn, April 17, 2007. Then Ambassador of Italy to the Netherlands Gaetano Cortese at Soestdijk's Palace for an exhibition of Ferrari cars on the 60th anniversary. Photos courtesy of Ambassador Gaetano Cortese.

The principle which was used to position the design collection in the Chancery was based on aesthetic-functional criteria and innovative production techniques, selecting objects characterized by different styles. The stylistic differences, similarities and distances – hand-crafted design versus industrial design – reveal the singularity of the Italian approach.

To better understand our aim, it is sufficient to walk briefly along the inner spaces of the Embassy: over a floor paved with fragments of the same pink stone used on the façades, which create a design that follows the perspective towards the park and the Washington Monument. Two areas for conversation and relax are characterized by long and curvilinear sofas, along with the “Big Diamond” armchair and couch designed by Sartogo Architetti and produced by Poltrona Frau. The extra-large size of the sofas, tables and armchairs respond to the scale of the two story atrium.

A “metaphysical” dialogue between antiquities and modern design is displayed on the cobalt blue wall that leads to the auditorium: on the right, the black lacquer table designed by Carlo Scarpa for Gavina; on the left, the fragment of an ancient Roman statue in white marble. In the large meeting room an expansive table is used for working sessions. The table itself is a modular system of quadrangular elements which can be assembled into variable configurations. The square table is designed to also become circular, thus allowing not only a configuration for meetings but also for banquets.

The carpets, specifically designed by Sartogo Architetti for the Chancery, with their powerful colors, help give a modern/classic allure to the sitting areas and the meeting rooms, defining a progression from public to private, from the atrium to the living room, from the first floor bridges to the offices.

On the first carpet of the atrium we have chosen to place the couches and armchair fabricated with an exposed wood structure, recalling the trees outside and strengthening the visual connection with the park beyond the window.

The idea was to use the carpets to establish a flow through a focal point that interacts with the eclectic collection of modern design. Contrary to museums' exhibi-



107

107. May 25, 2010. President Giorgio Napolitano holds a press conference at the Embassy of Italy in Washington D.C. Photo courtesy of the Embassy of Italy in Washington.



tion criteria, where objects are austere displayed linearly one after another, in our case each piece of furniture is “in use,” so the carpets contribute to contextualizing their functional and aesthetic presence.

We developed a special idea for lighting. Our intent was to create a pleasant and inviting atmosphere using soft lights to determine an overall tone that would set off the full collection of lamps (wall, floor or table). Those lamps should be considered true “light sculptures,” impressive whether on or off. In fact, the Italian design of lamps is characterized by a deep relation between functional and aesthetic aspects, which can transform a lamp into a work of art.

It is possible to extend this concept to the collection of bookshelves that stands along the balcony overlooking the atrium. This series of bookshelves includes the “Cartesio” model designed by Aldo Rossi and produced by Unifor, the “Libera” model designed by Andrea Branzi and produced by Zanotta, and the “2998” model designed by Ettore Sottsass and produced by Fontana Arte. In addition, SAA specifically designed a very large bookshelf, so called “The Pigeon Wall” used to collect and store the various sizes of diplomatic documents and mail.

The first recognition that the building received was in 1999 when the President of the American Institute of Architects who was passing by the work site, asked if he could take a look and then and there decided to hold the Architectural Awards ceremony at the Embassy even though construction had not yet been completed.

We were invited to present the Award before an audience of 400 American architects and, one year later, we received the Award of Excellence for extraordinary Achievements in Architecture. Following this very positive recognition, the Chancery has found a permanent place in Washington’s historic landscape. Included in Washington tourist guides, the Embassy building says something about Italian culture and ingenuity. We have opened usually inaccessible diplomatic spaces to the city, making this building part of Washington’s cultural circuit, and, at the same time, we succeeded in promoting an important sector of Italian creativity.”



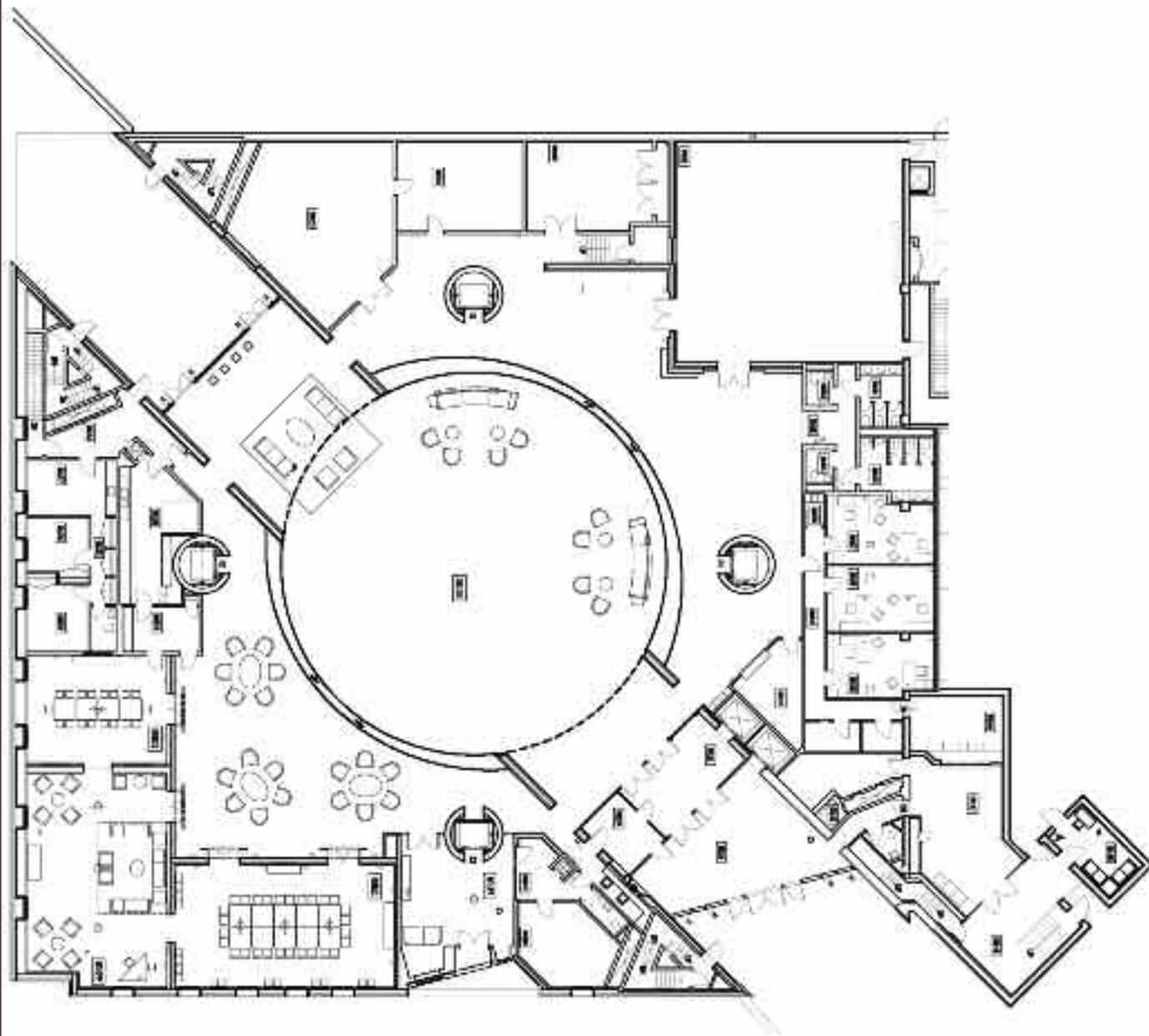
108

108. March 17, 2011. Embassy of Italy. Introductory speech by Giulio Terzi then Ambassador of Italy to the United States at the concert in celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the Unification of Italy conducted by Maestro Lorin Maazel. Photo courtesy of the Embassy of Italy in Washington.



109

109. March 17, 2011. Embassy of Italy. Concert in celebration of the 150th Anniversary of the Unification of Italy conducted by Maestro Loris Maazel. Photo courtesy of the Embassy of Italy in Washington.

FIRST LEVEL



Glass appStone
Design: Sartogo Architects/Associati
Prod. Debusco Arte, 1990



Diamond Big
Design: Sartogo Architects/Associati
Prod. Poltronova Form, 1993



Pace
Design: Sartogo Architects/Associati
Prod. Poltronova Form



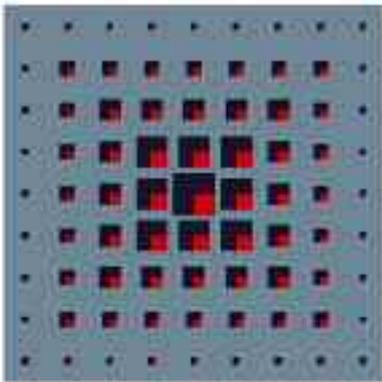
Euclide
Design: Sartogo Architects/Associati
Prod. Poltronova Form



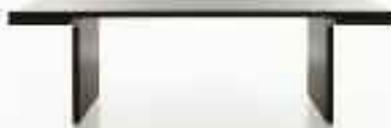
Ala
Design: Sartogo Architects/Associati
Prod. Poltronova Form, 1990



Ala
Design: Sartogo Architects/Associati
Prod. Poltronova Form, 1990



Tappeto Collezione Embassy
Design: Sartogo Architects/Associati
Prod. Koellhoff, 1999



Hyacinth 274
Design: Carlo Scarpa
Prod. Zanussi, 1971



Cerchio
Design: G. Albinetti e P. Castiglioni
Prod. G. Gastoni, 1968



Poltronina TLT
 Design: Poltronina Team B & D.
 Prod.: Poltronina Team, 2000-2001



NOG 2022
 Design: Motta.
 Prod.: Poltronina Team, 1997



Quadrifoglio
 Design: Sottsass Architetto Associati.
 Prod.: Poltronina Team, 1999



Ayco
 Design: Sottsass Architetto Associati.
 Prod.: Poltronina Team, 2000



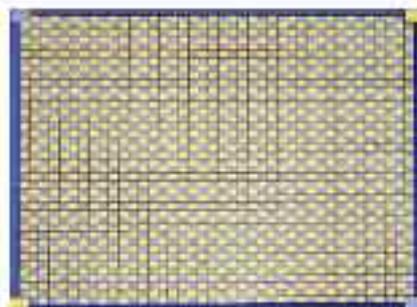
NO 74
 Design: Gino Piretti.
 Prod.: Poltronina Team, 1945



Arcaide
 Design: Sottsass Architetto Associati.
 Prod.: Poltronina Team, 1999



Diagona
 Design: Sottsass Architetto Associati.
 Prod.: Poltronina Team, 1999



Tappeti Collezione Embassy
 Design: Sottsass Architetto Associati.
 Prod.: Koelliker, 1999



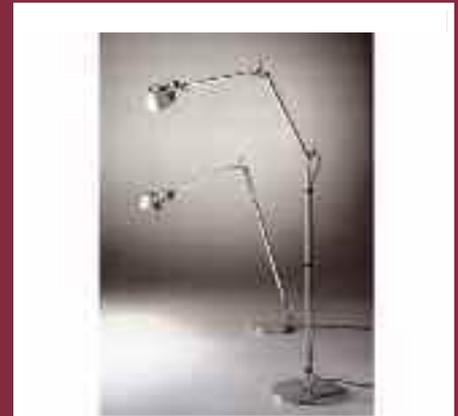
Oratio Lounger
 Design: Vico Magistretti.
 Prod.: Di Poltronina, 1996



Murciopala
Design: Marco Zanuso
Prod. Arflex, 1958



Palosio
Design: Vico Magistretti
Prod. De Padova, 1958



Talento
Design: M. De Lucchi e G. Casella
Prod. Arcoflex, 1957



3703 Olimpia
Design: Daniele Pagani
Prod. FontanaArte, 1964



Vicenza
Design: Sergio Astorini Astorini
Prod. Poliform, 1969



Reale
Design: Marco Helber
Prod. Cassina, 1975



Vela
Design: Franco Raggi
Prod. FontanaArte, 1988

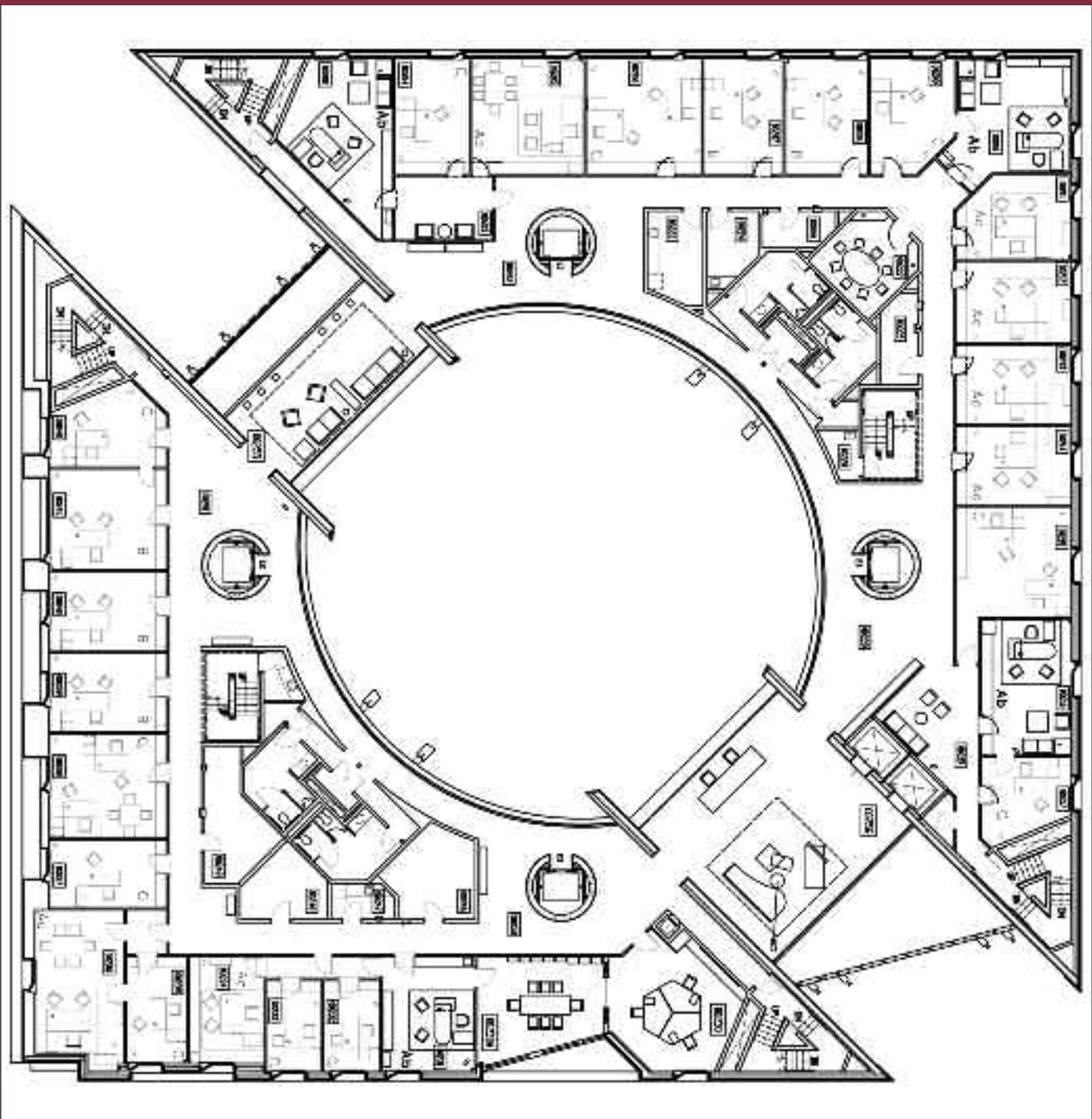


Tirolina Big
Design: Sergio Astorini Astorini
Prod. Loris Tapalano, 1991



2220 Santele torza
Design: Piero Göttsche
Prod. Fontana Arte, 1988

SECOND LEVEL





Chair
Design: Santiago Architectural Associates
Prod. Poltronas Texa, 2002



Table
Design: Carlo Scarpa
Prod. Zanussi, 1969



Desk
Design: Achille Castiglioni
Prod. Zanussi, 1981



Sofo-Gioià
Design: Achille Castiglioni
Prod. S&M, 1966



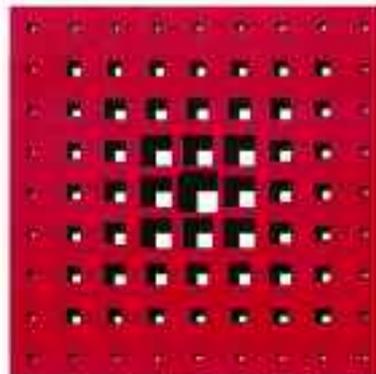
Arco
Design: A. and P. Castiglioni
Prod. Flos, 1962



Luminator
Design: Ettore Sottsass
Prod. Zanussi, 1979



Blind applicator
Design: Santiago Architectural Associates
Prod. The Home Arts, 1999



Tappeto Collezioni Endless
Design: Santiago Architectural Associates
Prod. Koellhoff, 1999



270°LA Libera
Design: Andrea Frare
Prod. Zanussi



Palazzo della Pace
 Design: Enzo Angileri Architetto Associati
 Prod. Poltronova Form, 1989



524 Torino
 Design: Paolo Deganello
 Prod. Cassina, 1982



524 Torino
 Design: Paolo Deganello
 Prod. Cassina, 1982



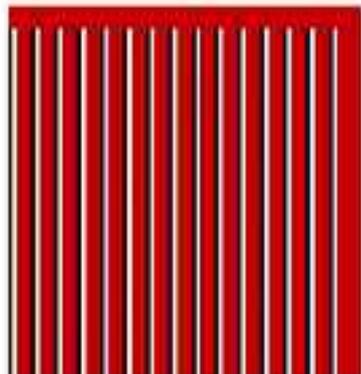
Poltrona
 Design: Gastone Venturi
 Prod. Cassina, 1987



5215
 Design: Heinz Pfann
 Prod. E. Leontina Arte, 1991



Arco
 Design: Paolo Deganello
 Prod. Cassina, 1979



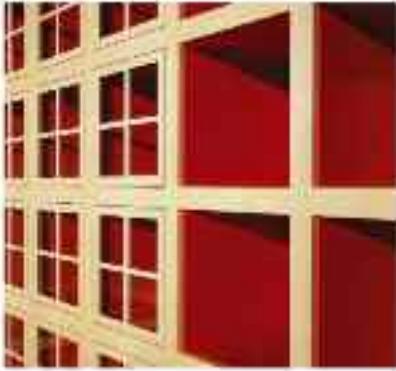
Tappeto Collezioni Embassy
 Design: Enzo Angileri Architetto Associati
 Prod. Koelliker, 1989



Isomac
 Design: Lella e Massimo Vignelli
 Prod. Poltronova Form, 1989



Hydra
 Design: Carlo Foccolini
 Prod. Xroom, 1989



Curvino
Design: Aldo Heed
Prod. Zanussi, 1990



2900
Design: Sergio Asti
Prod. Fineman, 1970



Van Tardo
Design: Susanna Nobili
Prod. Poltronova, 1999



Galler tavolo
Design: Susanna Nobili
Prod. Poltronova, 1999



Galler libreria
Design: Susanna Nobili
Prod. Poltronova, 1999



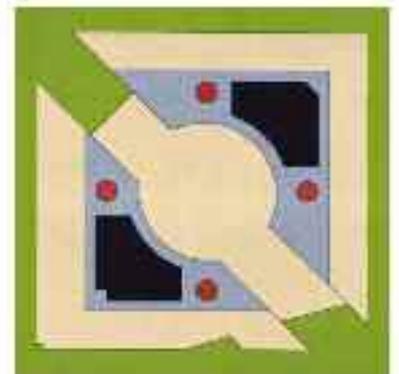
Carola
Design: L. De Zisis, D. D'Urbin, P. Lorenzi
Prod. Zanussi, 1974



Hercules
Design: Paolo Savio
Prod. Zanussi, 1982



Bruck
Design: George Marc Helmer
Prod. Cassina, 1975



Tappeti Collezione Embassy
Design: Sergio Zavatta Associati
Prod. Koelliker, 1998



GADALÀ
Design: Mario Bollandi
Prod. Cassina, 1969



Genè
Design: Achille Castiglioni
Prod. Zanotta, 1977



Claret
Design: Arnaldo Cazzanin
Prod. B&B, 1996



Costanza D111
Design: Paolo Bizzutti
Prod. Encephon, 1988



Kyranon
Design: Akiyo Takeda Serepis
Prod. B&B, 1971



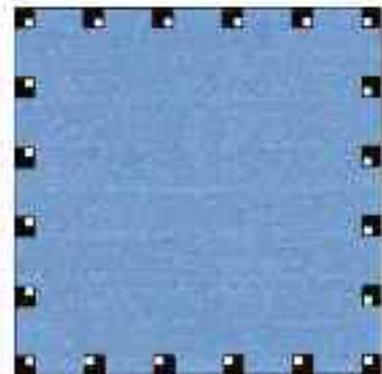
Gliediana
Design: Arnaldo Cazzanin
Prod. B&B, 1996



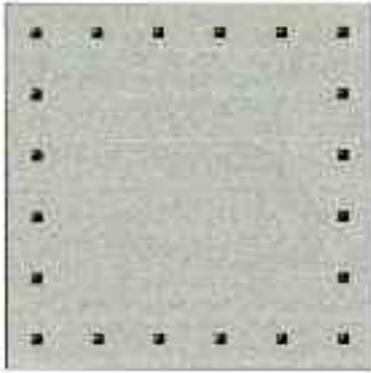
Naon
Design: Pierluigi Cerri
Prod. Cullin, 1994



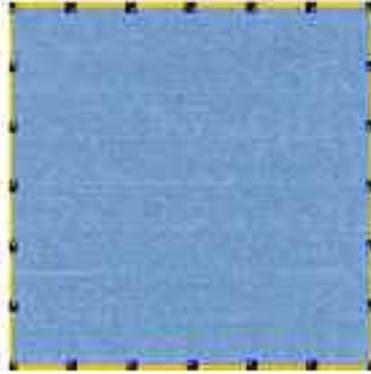
Sant'Elia
Design: Giuseppe Trossello
Prod. Zanotta, 1996



Tappeti Collezione Embassy
Design: Sacho Architect Associati
Prod. Kartell, 1998



Tappeta Collezione Embassy
Design: Sartoga Architetto Associati
Prod. Kartell, 1999

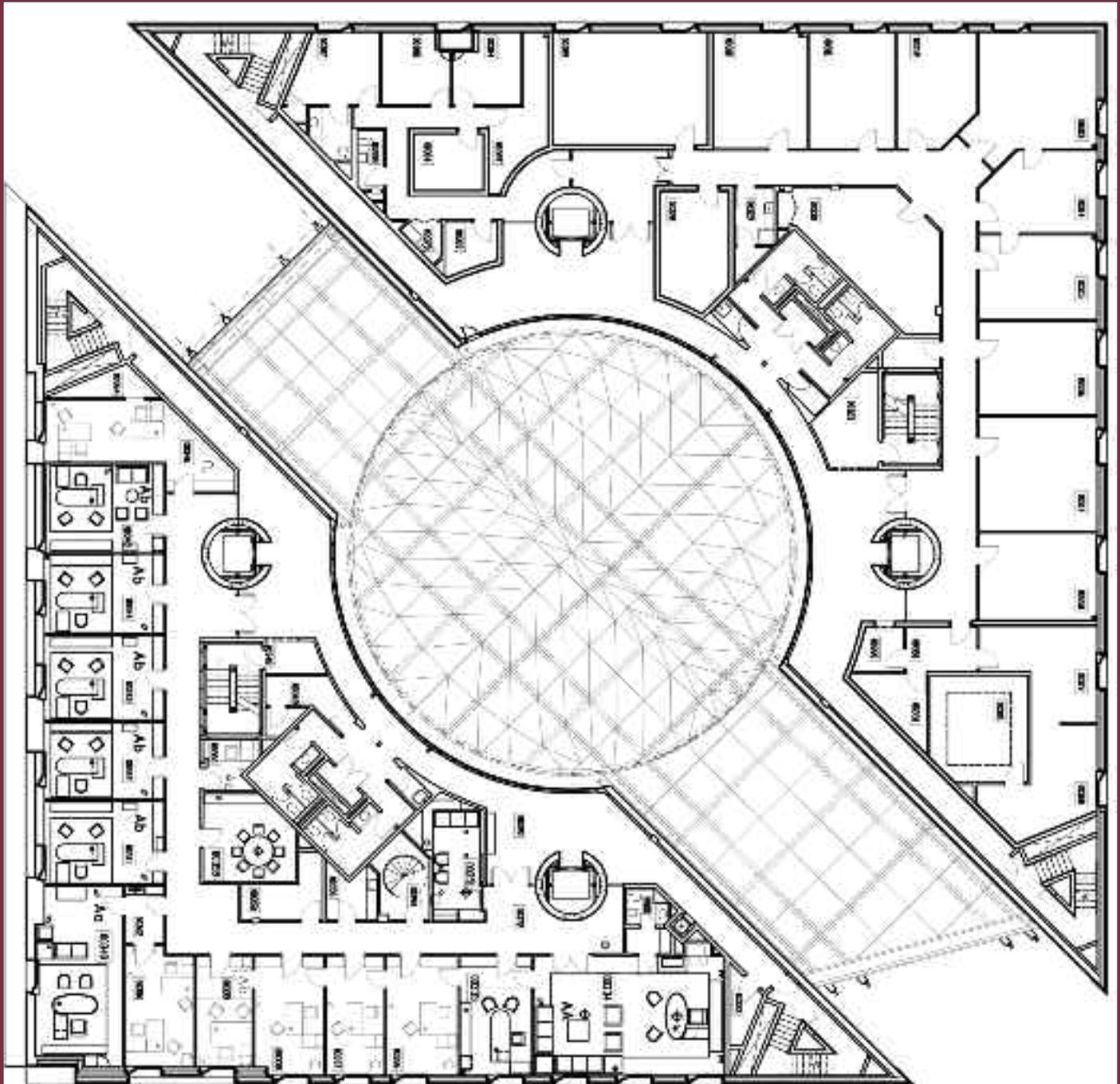


Tappeta Collezione Embassy
Design: Sartoga Architetto Associati
Prod. Kartell, 1999



Tappeta Collezione Embassy
Design: Sartoga Architetto Associati
Prod. Kartell, 1999

THIRD LEVEL





Glass appellone
Design: Sartogo Architetti Associati
Prod. Fontana Arte, 1990



Orbaleca
Design: Arturo Sottsass
Prod. poltronova, 1969



Glas de Luce
Design: Arturo Sottsass
Prod. poltronova, 1969



Edmond
Design: Sartogo Architetti Associati
Prod. Poltronova, 1991



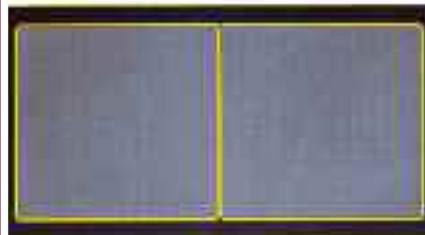
Ubin
Design: Ernesto Gismondi
Prod. Artemide, 1958



Glas 3353
Design: Sartogo Architetti Associati
Prod. Fontana Arte, 1990



Duo
Design: Mario Botta
Prod. Cassina, 1976



Tappeti Collection Embassy
Design: Sartogo Architetti Associati
Prod. Kastlart, 1998



Vela
Design: Franco Ragni
Prod. Fontana Arte, 1998



Nome
 Design: Richard Sapper
 Prod. Arredoside, 1977



ACE
 Design: Antonio Citterio
 Prod. Viton, 1990



Beck
 Design: Mario Dellai
 Prod. Cassino, 1976



Tappeti Collezione Embassy
 Design: Sachgo Architetto Associati
 Prod. Koolhaa, 1998



264
 Design: Paolo Bizzotto
 Prod. Flou, 1978



Nome
 Design: Pierluigi Corvi
 Prod. Unifon, 1988



Programma 1
 Design: E. Miranoff, A. Parigi
 Prod. Girotto



Trigo
 Design: Marco Tullio
 Prod. Viton, 1988



Ala
 Design: Sachgo Architetto Associati
 Prod. Poltronova 75 anni, 1998



Tappeti Collezione Embassy
Design: Sergio Astolfi e Associati
Prod. Kartell, 1999



Costanza H 111
Design: Paola Rivetti
Prod. Lucijan, 1988



A12
Design: Antonio Lavezzi
Prod. Vico, 1996



Foto
Design: Achille Castiglioni
Prod. Flou, 1971



Isotta
Design: Achille e Piergiacomo Castiglioni
Prod. Flou, 1967



Tappeti Collezione Embassy
Design: Sergio Astolfi e Associati
Prod. Kartell, 1999