



THE NEW HEADQUARTERS BUILDING OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS
THE UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE—CANADA'S NEWEST CAMPUS
A CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS SCHOOL SITE SELECTION STUDY
BUILDINGS TYPES STUDY: ARCHITECTURE FOR INDUSTRY
FULL CONTENTS ON PAGES 4 AND 5

ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

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THE UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE

PROJECT ONE

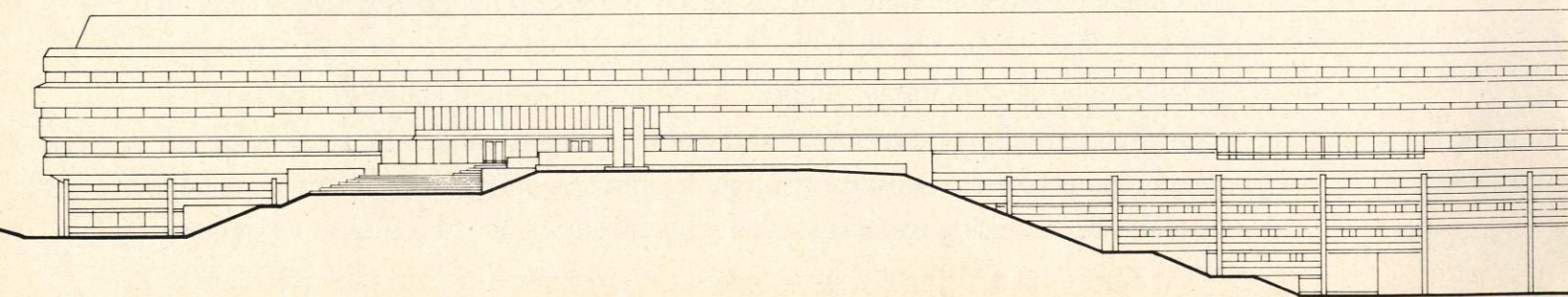


All photos by Simon Scott except as noted

This distinguished building by Canada's eminent architect, Arthur Erickson of Erickson-Massey Architects, is the first to be constructed for the new University of Lethbridge at Lethbridge, Alberta. It is the architectural statement of an often expressed but seldom implemented educational idea—that learning and living are integral parts of the process of learning. Within this building are all the essentials of a university: residence and learning take place under the same roof; students and faculty meet with unexpected ease, and ideas can be exchanged freely. Learning is extended beyond the classroom. It is a bold experiment.

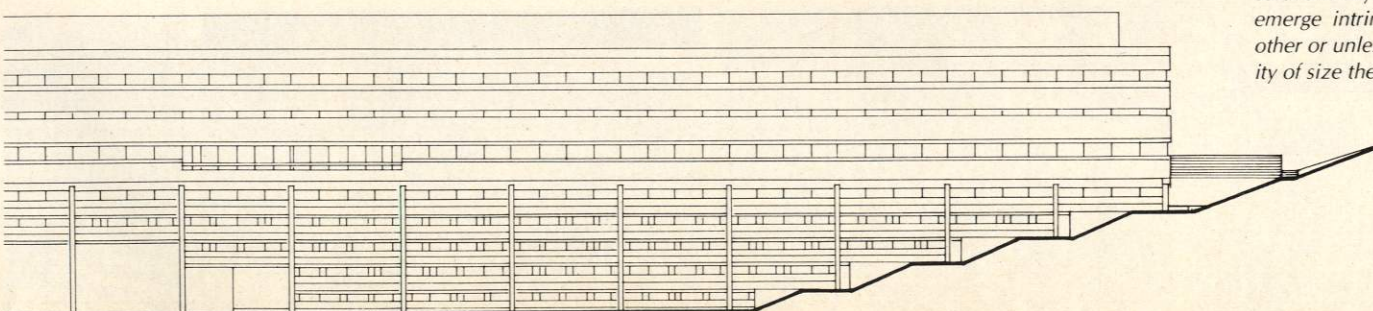
This first building for the University of Lethbridge has a superb location overlooking the valley of the Oldman River and the city of Lethbridge. It fits into the undulations of its site, using the contours to its advantage and for its own purposes, so that its height varies while its roof line remains constant, a flat plane that hardly rises above the line of the horizon. The best over-all view of the building is from the east, from Lethbridge, and it is the only view of it that can be had on the nine-mile drive from city to campus. The road climbs from the river valley to the high prairie and then turns down toward the coulees (a western word for gully) for a sudden and dramatic change in scale which the siting of the building reflects. Gradually the roof comes into view as you reach the campus, but not until you stand on the brink of the coulee is the whole immensity of the complex visible and comprehensible for the first time. It is a breathtaking moment, for this is a very large building—912 feet long, nine stories high—and it stands, for the moment at least, in the midst of an almost barren landscape. In such a setting, the building had to be bold and, because of its program, it could not be other than large. Even when development takes place around it—the university itself will grow, and the city expects to grow to the west of the campus—its “generosity of size,” to borrow an Erickson phrase, will be right for its site.

Within this one building are contained all the parts that make up a university: student residences, classrooms, laboratories, offices for administration, faculty and student activities, library, bookstore, dining room, snack bar—everything except Fine Arts and Physical Education which have their own building (Project 1A, Robins Mitchell Watson, architects). So complete an integration of residential and learning



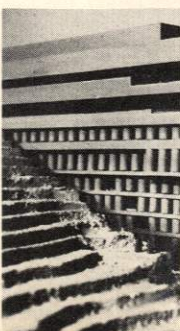
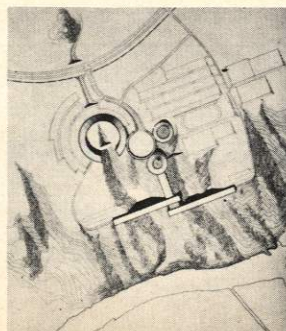
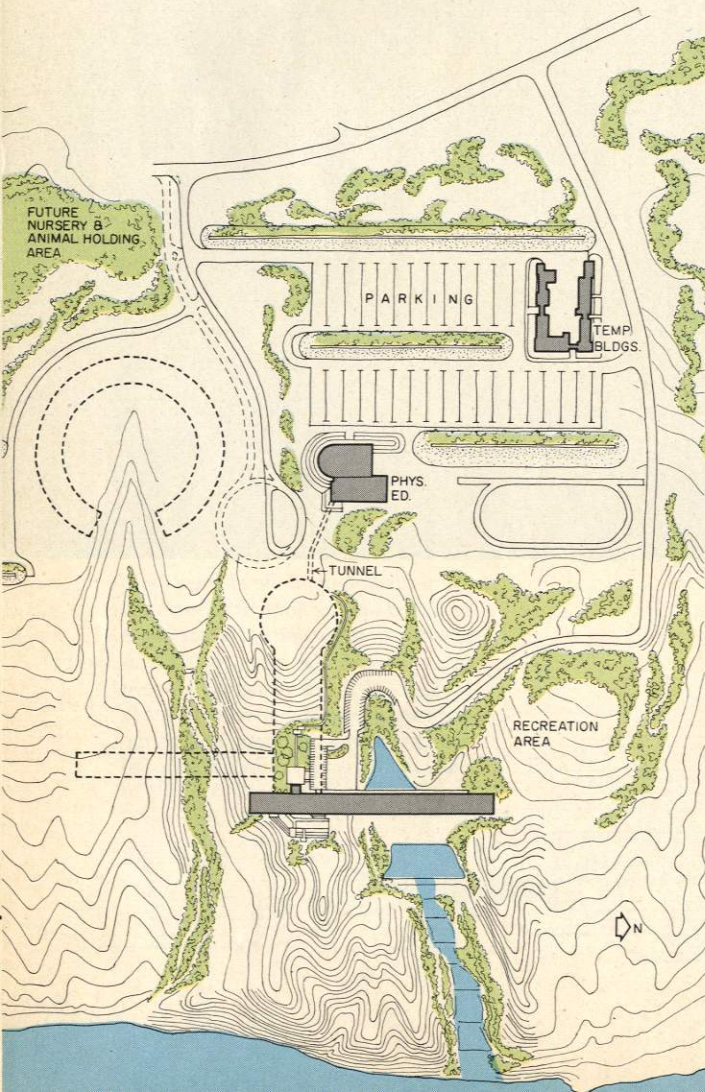
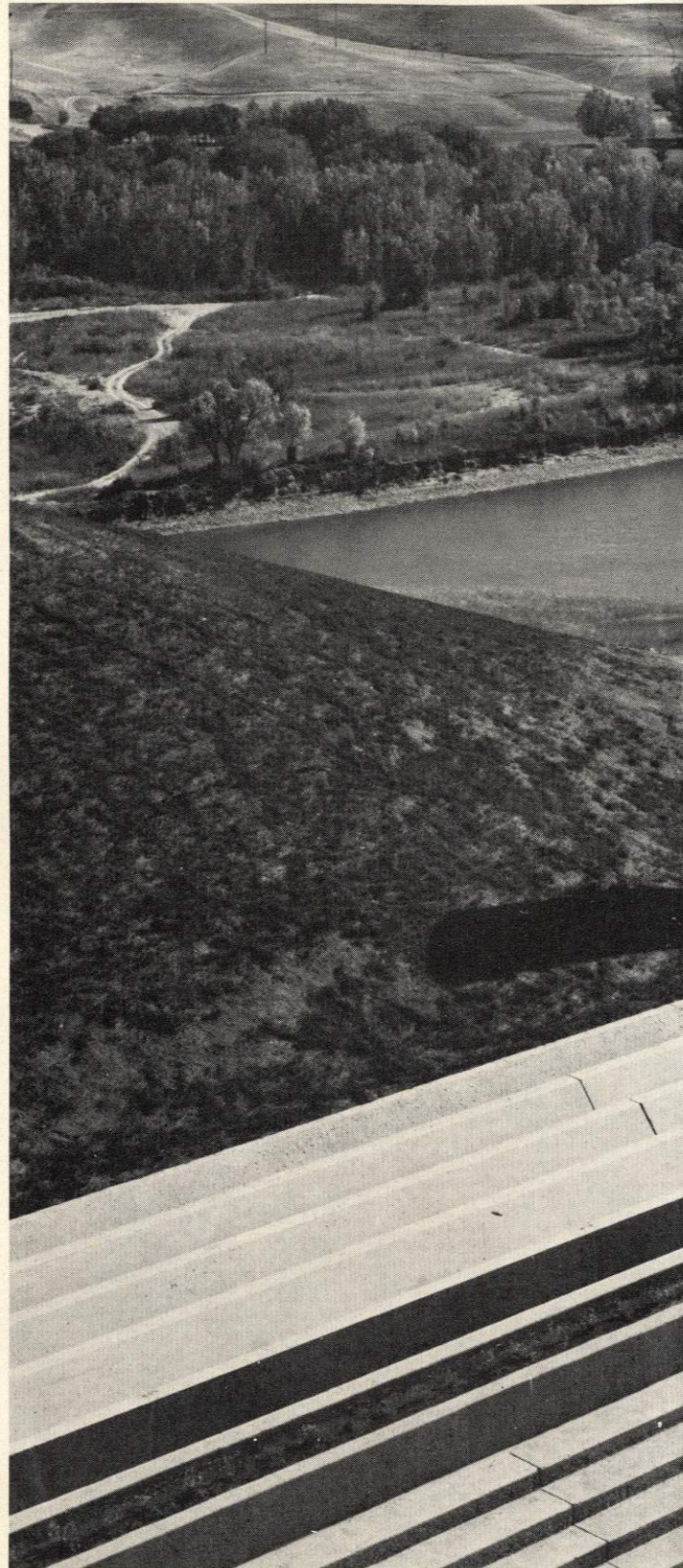


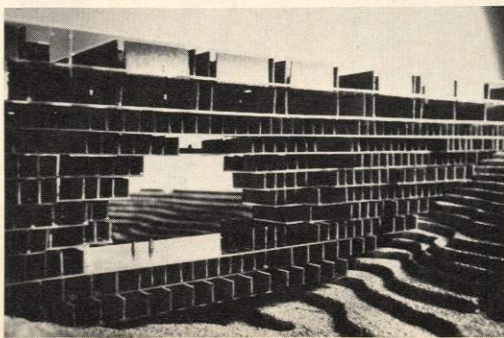
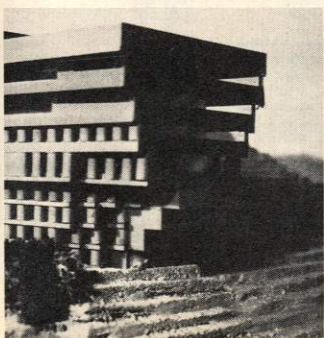
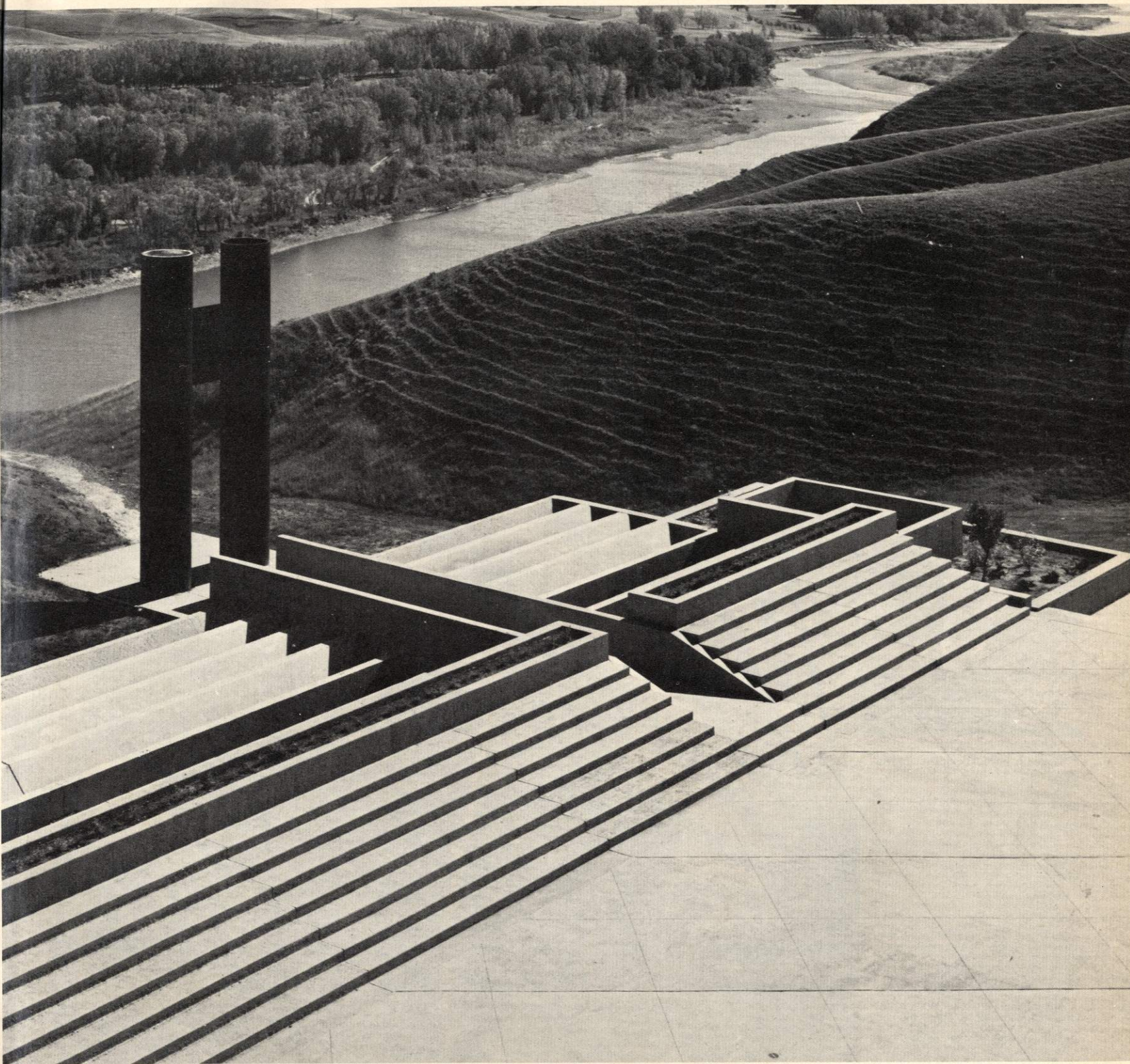
"A distillation of all the elements into earth and sky," is Arthur Erickson's description of the prairie landscape at the edge of which the new University is situated. "Objects caught between earth and sky appear trivial unless they emerge intrinsically from one or the other or unless they reflect in generosity of size the prairie scale."





spaces in one structure is rare if not unique, but here it represents an architectural response to the academic goals set up in 1967 by the University Planning Committee which include "flexibility and openness to innovation; encouragement to the highest degree of interaction between students and faculty; fostering the spirit of free inquiry and the critical interpretation of ideas." The essential character of the University was that it was to be a place where, as its first president, Sam Smith, said, "everything can happen at once" and where there would be "a chance to make the whole person," and much of this intent has been realized. But not all of it, and not exactly in the way it was first envisioned. The ideal toward which everyone—Planning Committee and architects — worked was splendid but, in the end and in very human terms, unrealistic. It was an ideal embodied in accounts of El Azhar, the 9th century center of Islamic teaching, a sort of "educational marketplace" where students, merchants, scholars and beggars gathered to hear and take part in discussions of law, medicine, philosophy, and through which they moved freely. Lethbridge was to be as open, as interchangeable and flexible as El Azhar, with neither walls nor partitions to impede interchange and interaction. The faculty's offices and the student residences were to be intermingled and interchangeable; everything that could be done physically to promote and facilitate interaction was to be done. But the sublimation of individual privacy—a professorial right manifest in the classroom and private office—to the ideal of openness was too much to expect, and the building as built provides a whole floor (the eighth) for faculty offices, and for the most part classes take place in classrooms with walls. Nevertheless, in what it does do, Lethbridge is a milestone.



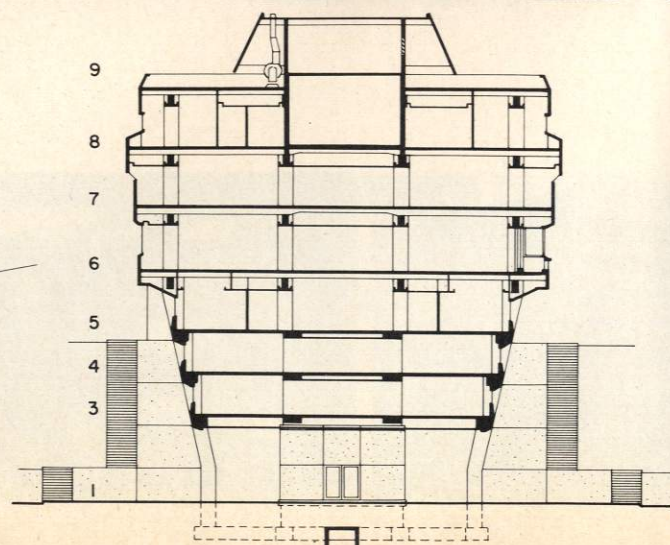
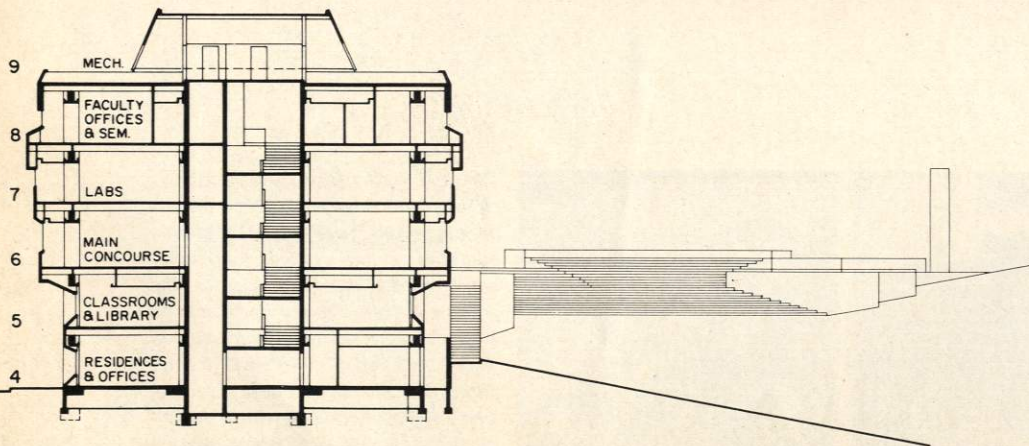
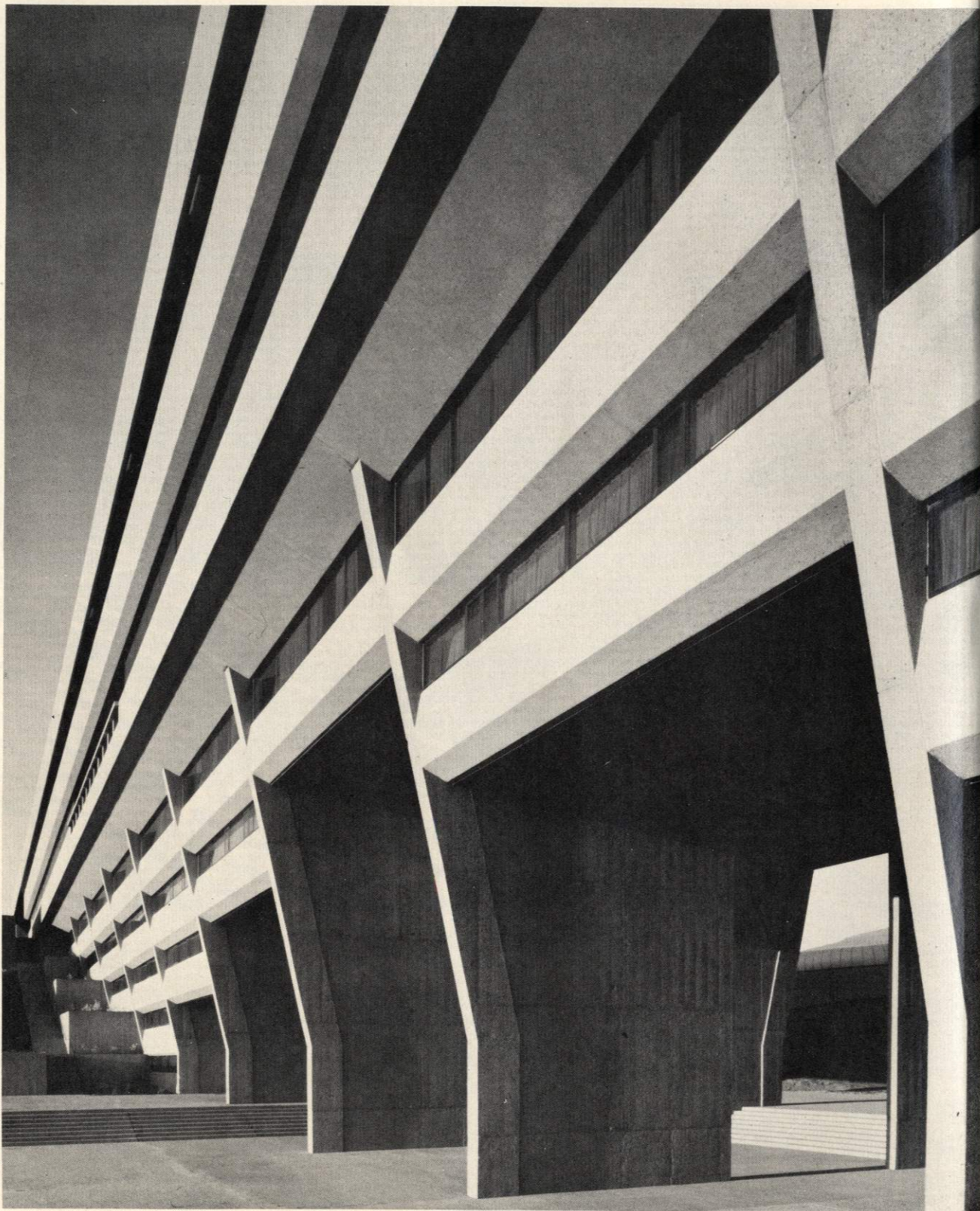


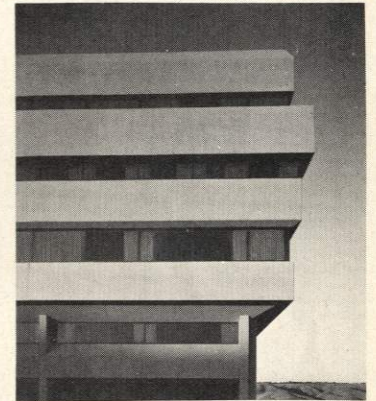
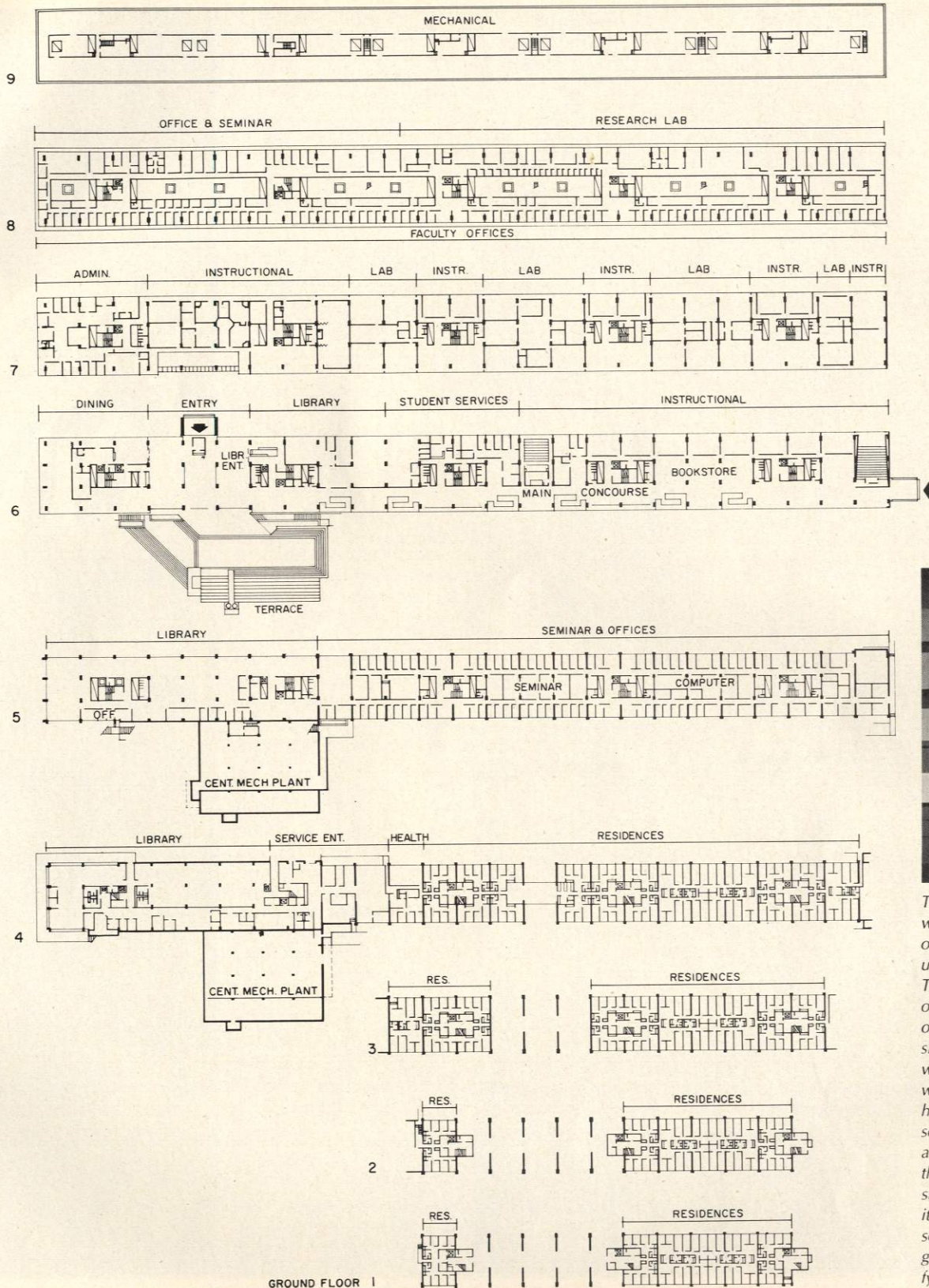
The final master plan (far left) follows closely the early studies (model photos), with overlapped academic buildings on the coulees, and other buildings on the slope up to the prairies. Initially, Project One was to be a brick-faced building with curved walls and small windows (center photos) for the lower floors. Eventual landscaping of coulees will be lush—its micro-climate is different—with a cascade flowing under the building.

How do the Lethbridge students like living, sleeping, and eating, playing, studying and learning in the same building? Do they find the interaction, so much sought today, a real ingredient of university life as a result of having it all happen in the same place? Do they like the building?

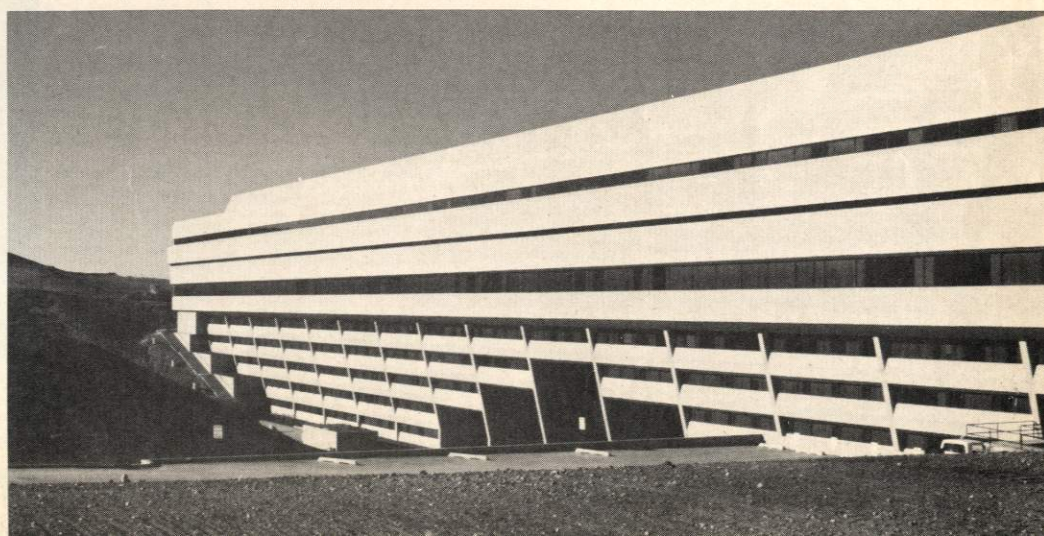
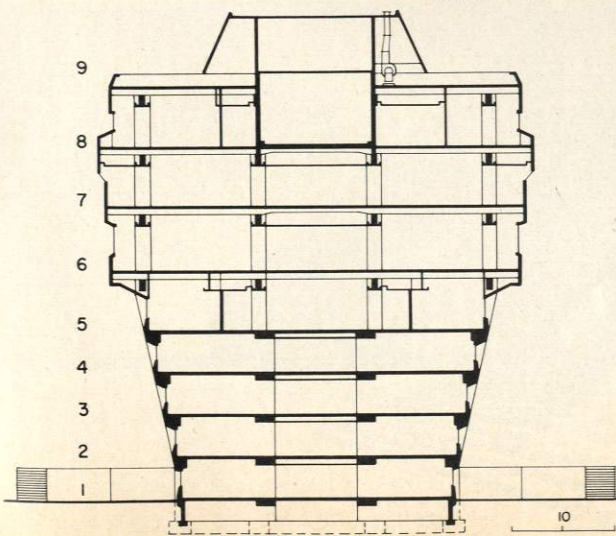
The answer to all these questions is a strong Yes. For one thing, they are not entirely confined to one building. There is now a Physical Education-Fine Arts building which attracts most students at one time or another, for athletics, art shows or classes, or drama. Also, a temporary building, moved from the community college site where the University began its existence, has been made into a pub. To reach these other buildings and the parking areas, a fiberglass tunnel from the Academic building winds up the hill to the Phys Ed building. Thus, students have reason and opportunity to leave the building. But there is academic, social and climatic convenience in "having it all happen" in one place: faculty members are easy to see and to meet; there is always someone to talk to and be with on the Concourse; and in Lethbridge's fairly rigorous climate—windy, snowy winters moderated by occasional warm Chinook winds, and quite hot summers—not to have to leave a weatherproof building is a real pleasure.

There are problems, of course, in the present isolation of the campus from the city, but these are not architectural, and the university will not always be so isolated. For the present, students without cars use the city bus service for transportation, and gradually are finding varieties of entertainment and stimulus on campus. As for the building, the students like it and are proud of it, whether or not they understand or are sensitive to the subtleties of its design and the grandeur of its concept.





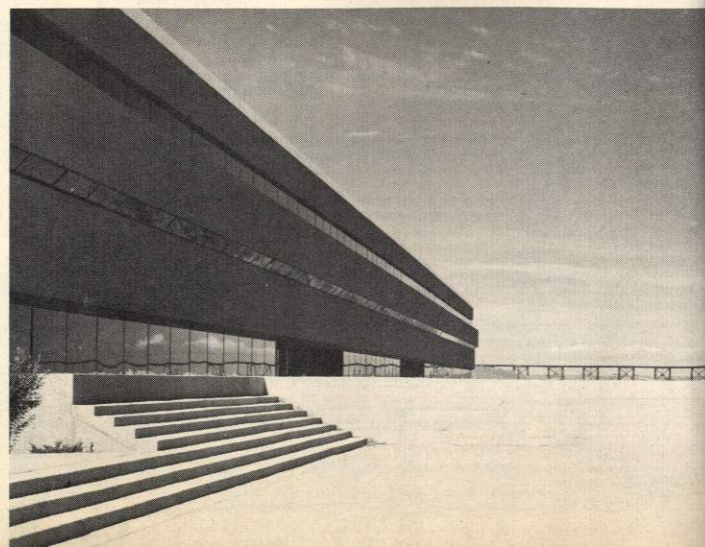
The exterior of the building clearly and with great subtlety expresses the variety of functions that take place inside, using broad terms, not details, to do so. The long bands of concrete and glass on the upper levels vary in depth as the over-all function of each floor varies: sixth floor, Main Concourse, with large windows; seventh floor, laboratories with only a narrow band of glass set high on the wall and slanting outward so that it counts as slightly more than a line; eighth floor, faculty offices. On the lower floors, the vertical line of the structural supports breaks the continuity of the glass bands to effect a smaller scale. Architect Erickson's "concise geometry" achieves drama and a satisfying esthetic solution.

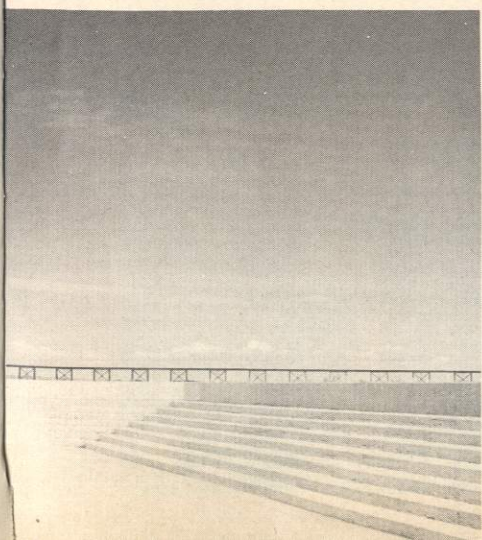




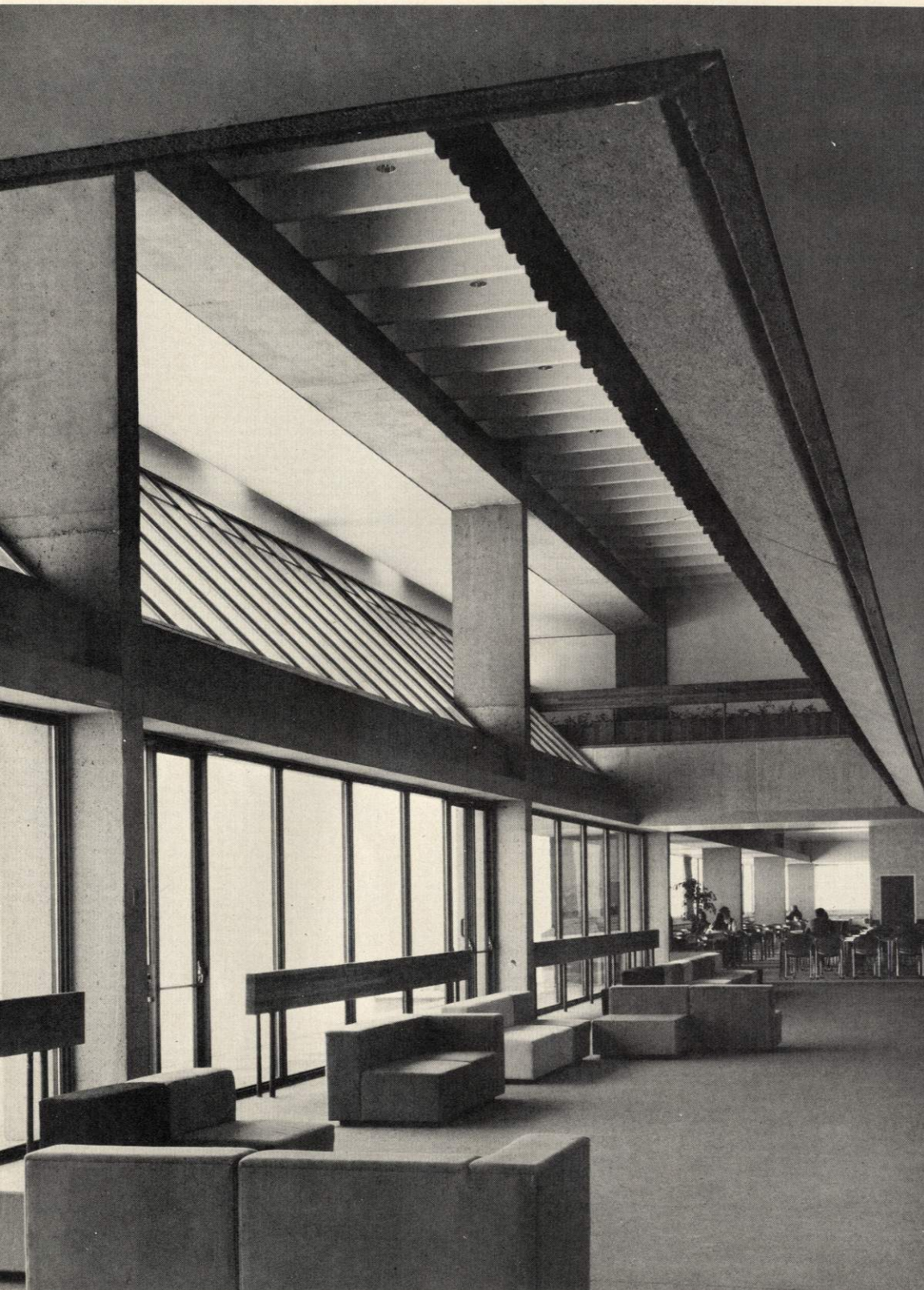
The main Concourse on the sixth floor is a main street for the whole university. It is the architectural statement of the "free exchange of ideas," the implementation of the goal of learning in places other than classrooms. There are always people on the Concourse, even in quiet periods. At class changes, and in the evening, it is even more like a street, full of students and faculty. Casual talk and informal meetings also happen on the Concourse, using the "platoonic couches" (left and right: upholstered forms left from precasting of concrete for the building) which occur midway along the 912-foot long "street." Lighting throughout the building is indirect from recesses in the double-Tee beams. Nowhere is this more welcome than in the unbroken length of the concourse where fixtures would have been an interruption to the clear view from end to end. The floor is alternately concrete and carpet in gold with lines of yellow, tan and brown. Couches are yellow, chairs are upholstered in five colors coded to direct circulation, needed on so long a mall.

THE UNIVERSITY OF LETHBRIDGE PROJECT ONE. Architects: Erickson-Massey Architects—Arthur Erickson, designer; Ron Bain, associate-in-charge; Gary Hanson, project architect; Robins Mitchell Watson, associated architects. Engineers: Bogue Babicki & Associates (structural); Ripley Klohn & Leonoff International Ltd. (foundation); Reid, Crowther & Partners Ltd. (mechanical/electrical). Consultants: Barron & Strachan (acoustical), William M.C. Lam & Associates (lighting), Erickson-Massey Architects (interiors), F.S. Dubin (mechanical), Poole Construction Ltd. (cost). Landscape architects: Erickson-Massey Architects. General contractor & construction manager: Poole Construction Ltd.





From every window on the east side of the building, and especially from the terrace, there is a view of the old Lethbridge Railway Bridge, a unique structure whose gossamer tracery makes a delicate web across the river valley. It stretches its flat length across the Oldman River like a horizon line and fits its supports into the banks and bed of the river. Visiting the site for the University for the first time, Arthur Erickson was struck by the way in which the bridge used the terrain it had to cross and was deeply influenced in his design for the first building.



Opposite the main entrance is a two story lounge (above) which opens out to the large terrace with its sculptural boiler stacks and spectacular view of the river valley (page 118). At one end of the lounge is the cafeteria (photo, right); at the other, the lounge flows into the Concourse. The laboratory plan (below) is based on the plan worked out for Scarborough College by Dr. W. E. Beckel, then dean of the College and now president of Lethbridge. These labs are more open than other instructional space: the corridor which is the seventh floor circulation runs along one side, a sometimes distracting but space-adding solution.

