

Zeitschrift: Schweizer Ingenieur und Architekt
Herausgeber: Verlags-AG der akademischen technischen Vereine
Band: 116 (1998)
Heft: 7

Artikel: Yoshio Taniguchi selected for the MoMA Expansion
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-79455>

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Nina Rappaport, New York

Yoshio Taniguchi selected for the MoMA Expansion

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York announced on December 8 1997 the much awaited decision to hire the Japanese architect Yoshio Taniguchi for their 650 000-square-foot expansion and renovation project. It has been under elaborate discussions for over eighteen months.

Yoshio Taniguchi was chosen by the museum's board of directors through a competition design exercise. Ten architects were invited to explore ideas for a new direction for the museum. The museum then selected three architects for further studies: Herzog & de Meuron, Bernard Tschumi and Taniguchi. These three projects will be on display at the MoMA in March 1998; at the moment only the winner's final project has been presented and can therefore be shown here.

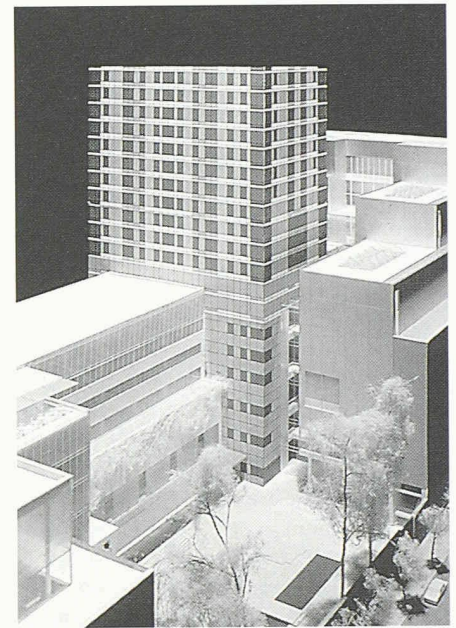
The museum's recent acquisition of an adjacent building - the Dorset Hotel on 54th Street - allows them to expand on an urban site now scattered with disparate buildings. Taniguchi's scheme pulls together the site while maintaining the required individual buildings. His scheme solves MoMA's physical and ideological needs, outlined in the charrette brief that was developed in conjunction with architectural consultants Cooper Robertson & Partners. Taniguchi is an unknown architect in New York, but in Japan he has designed well-conceived museums such as the Higashiyama Kaii Gallery in Nagano City and the Marugame Genichiro Inokuma Museum of Contemporary Art as well as the Toyota Municipal Museum of Art.

MoMA's director Glenn D. Lowry and the board of directors emphasized a new goal to display their contemporary art collection - now mostly in storage - in large spaces. The museum required that the architects create new permanent exhibit spaces, offices, public facilities, a new education center and expanded libraries as well as maintain the historic 1939 Philip Goodwin and Edward Durell Stone facade, the «Bauhaus» staircase and Philip Johnson's 1953 sculpture garden. Taniguchi resolves these elements in his design.

On the west side of the site, now the Dorset Hotel, Taniguchi creates a new steel frame building with a deep grey slate facade

to contain the main entrance and lobby leading from 54th Street through to 53rd Street in a large open space. The sculpture garden will be expanded. Philip Johnson said that Taniguchi «is bringing back what Alfred Barr and I designed; by leaving the circulation system around at the second floor, he is creating a deeper garden in the right shape, instead of a string bean, now it is probably even a golden rectangle.» On the east side of the garden Taniguchi designed an education building with the street facade in slate and the garden facade in glass. The main entrance leads into an atrium for an open circulation system against the side of the 1984 Cesar Pelli Museum Tower. Visitors are brought up the seven stories to the galleries in a progressional ascent. Reversing the norm for the museum which has always focused on its masters, Taniguchi places the larger contemporary galleries on the lower floors and the well-known modern art collection on the upper floors. The galleries are illuminated with natural light from central and perimeter skylights achieved through the setbacks of the zoning.

The existing Goodwin and Stone building, with its canopy restored, will be the entrance to the film center. The Bauhaus



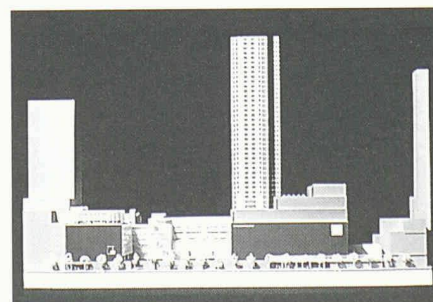
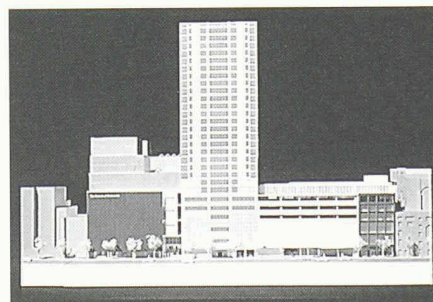
Aerial View from the North East of The Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Sculpture Garden. Architect Yoshio Taniguchi. Model 1997 (Photo: David Allison, MoMA)

stair will be a link to the architecture department and there will be a ground floor cafe and roof terrace. Terence Riley, Director of the Department of Architecture and Design, who advised on the architect selection, said that «Taniguchi was able to stitch together in a lovely clear form, all the disparate parts. He had the idealism to put it together, matched with a bold and daring series of gestures which appealed to the trustees.»

He is preserving and articulating each facade in a collage of existing and new buildings which are a background to the works of art. Unlike so many grand museum schemes which are in vogue these days, the Taniguchi project is subtle in its idea to present modern art in a modern architecture, the strength of the museum's past. The monochromatic materials are modest and harmonize with the landscape of the garden. His concept is one of the movement and circulation through luminous and open spaces for the public to serenely contemplate art. As a work in process, the plans will evolve over the next year and it is planned for completion in time for the Museum's 75th Anniversary in 2004.

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53rd Street Facade (above) and 54th Street facade (below). Architect Yoshio Taniguchi. Model 1997 (Photos: David Allison, MoMA)