

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE AND PLANNING  
77 Massachusetts Avenue  
Cambridge 39, Massachusetts

OFFICE OF THE DEAN

June 6, 1961

Mr. W. B. Harrell  
Chairman, UCAR Planning Committee  
Vice President for Business Affairs  
University of Chicago  
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Mr. Harrell:

The Advisory Committee of Deans--composed of Arthur P. Herrman, University of Washington; Theo R. Holleman, A and M College of Texas; Burnham Kelly, Cornell University; Sidney W. Little, University of Arizona; Milton S. Osborne, Pennsylvania State University; Philip N. Youtz, University of Michigan; and Pietro Belluschi, Massachusetts Institute of Technology--met at Boulder, Colorado, on May 21, 1961, to discuss and advise on selection of an architect for a proposed new building for the National Center for Atmospheric Research.

The question of holding a competition was analyzed first. The gist of our conclusions on this point may be summarized as follows:

Generally speaking and from an idealistic point of view, competition is a satisfactory method of selection. It demands the formulation of a clear-cut program, it searches fairly for the best solution, it gives a chance to young talent to come forth, it brings fame and good will to the client, and it creates general public interest in architecture as a civic art. From an ethical point of view, a properly conducted competition justly rewards the most capable architect, rather than the man with social or political connections. A nation wishing to create a monumental project embodying the aspirations and ideals of its

people can do no better than to hold a nationwide and well-rewarded competition.

Competition is not widely used because it is an expensive method--to the owner, because he must pay for the services of a highly competent professional adviser and provide enough substantial prizes to engage the interest of the best in the profession; to the profession, because the hours an entrant must devote to the task of thinking and of preparing sketches, multiplied by the number of entrants, account for a very great waste of energies.

Another and perhaps more compelling reason why competition is not more widely used is that the client must abdicate his power to select. Few clients are willing to do this; yet it is an established requirements of the American Institute of Architects that entrants be judged by a competent professional jury.

A third reason against competition is that a winning design may be produced by a brilliant mind, even a genius, yet possessing only scant knowledge of the practical and organizational demands necessary to carry a task to completion; worse yet, he may be completely uncooperative and difficult to handle. This situation of course is usually remedied by requesting that the winner associate himself with a more experienced firm. This system is fraught with legal dangers, yet the discovery of a worthwhile idea may justify taking a chance. More dangerous from a legal point of view is the temptation on the part of the client to use original ideas of other non-winning entrants. A provision for

monetary compensation may be written into the competition's rules, but this is obviously a difficult task at best and leads to more complications than it avoids.

In spite of the above objections, competition is at times a desirable method of selection--mostly when prestige, wealth of means, and search of enduring symbols make its virtues apparent.

Some members have expressed the opinion that in your case a closed competition among six selected architects may be desirable. This kind of method in a way seems to negate the principal virtue of competition, which is the finding of new talent. If it is to be restricted to architects already known for their works, it is not difficult to establish their suitability for the project by a closer examination of what they have done and how satisfied their clients have been; selection can be made on a balance of virtues, merits, and personalities. Above all, the client by this method would lose at least in the formative stages the opportunity to establish a continuing sympathetic relationship, a fruitful exchange of ideas, and feelings which always emerge between a talented, sensitive, and sympathetic architect and an enlightened client. However, should you find it difficult to decide between the architects, whose names are listed below, you may wish to resort to a closed competition among them, on the chance that in this manner better ideas may be born.

In examining the special nature of your problem, having read all pertinent material (particularly the excellent statement of purpose.

written by Dr. Roberts), and having visited the site, we have formulated certain criteria which served us in making a list of suitable candidates. The first requirement naturally is that the architect be gifted, but even more, that he be willing and capable of understanding and sharing with your Committee the excitement of this unusual challenge. He must be able to shed fashionable architectural doctrines and see with a fresh eye and with sympathy the human, the practical, and the esthetic aspects of your problem.

The six names on the list were selected with the above in mind. It would be well to remember that such requirements are not absolute and should be kept flexible in their application. Most of the architects and their works are known to some but not to all members of our Committee. It would be impossible to equate their worth on any definite scale. Also their works and their personalities were evaluated from past achievements under conditions which may no longer exist. Some of them may have become too busy; others may be organized in such a way that will not permit undertaking large, out-of-town commissions. We strongly recommend that you investigate further each architect on our list and find out:

- a) Whether he wants the commission.
- b) How much time he is willing to give personally.
- c) The composition of his staff and who will be in charge of preparing the various documents.
- d) The names of the engineering firms which will work with him on structure and services.

- e) Proof of his experience in projects of similar type.
- f) A list of projects completed, say, in the last ten years, with emphasis on the last five years, and with some photographic material to illustrate what they consider their best examples.
- g) A list of clients to whom you may write for reference.

We urge you to interview each candidate personally to get the "feeling" of how much "heart" he has. Often a happy rapport between architect and client makes an enormous difference in the final results. One may even say that no truly satisfying work was ever done where friction between them existed.

It is also well for you to bear in mind that the fact that architects, even the best ones, are only human, far from perfect, and with the usual balance of faults and virtues. Do not expect perfection in every part. Some of the great architects have had trouble with leaky roofs. The most creative ones may need watching to see that they take an interest in the more mundane problems, such as laboratory equipment and its proper plumbing.

Here then is the list, in no particular order of preference; brief comments will serve to introduce each architect to you:

Paul Hayden Kirk. A gifted and sensitive man who came to prominence as a designer of homes and has received innumerable awards for them. In the last few years he has done some excellent clinics, for which again he has received awards. His most recent job is the

University of Washington Faculty Club, which has great merit. His address is 615 Lakeview Blvd., Seattle 2, Washington.

Ieoh Ming Pei. A sophisticated, sure-handed designer with much experience in large projects. He has an excellent and well-knit staff. His present reputation reflects, in part, his involvement with large, promotional projects where the economics of business have forced him into rigid architectural patterns; but his skill is broad and subtle and not yet exploited in the more humane projects. His designs for the University of Tapei with its lovely Chapel and the East-West Center at the University of Hawaii give a hint of what he can do. His only drawback may be the large number of his present commitments; but if he becomes interested in your project, he may welcome a personal involvement. His address is 385 Madison Ave., New York 17, New York.

Harry Weese. One of the most talented and versatile young men in the profession, he has done outstanding work, some of it for colleges and universities. He would take a personal interest and do an outstanding job within the limitations you may choose to impose upon him. He is young, but he has a good and experienced organization. His address is 140 East Ontario Street, Chicago 11, Illinois.

Anshen and Allen. Mr. Anshen has done excellent work. His chapel on the red hills of Arizona, as well as some of his housing developments in California, show a creative mind and a special feeling for the opportunities and limitations of the site. His address is 461 Bush Street, San Francisco 8, California--Robert Anshen and William S. Allen.

Edward L. Barnes. A most likeable and sensitive architect. His work, which is always simple and logical, shines with a convincing glow. He is now serving as consultant for Pan American Airways. His address is 23 East 67th Street, New York 21, New York.

Caudill, Rowlett and Scott. This firm has established a wide reputation for creative thinking in the design of schools. They will bring a fresh point of view to the solution of your practical problems. Their address is 3636 Richmond Avenue, Houston 27, Texas.

This list has been kept purposely brief. Obviously it should not be considered definitive. If later on other names appear to be suitable for this project, they should be given due consideration.

The Advisory Committee of Deans has enjoyed the opportunity of being of service and wishes to thank everyone for the courtesies extended to them during their visit to Boulder. Its members have unanimously agreed that impartial professional advice given on a continuing basis in the future may serve the interests of the N.C.A.R. They stand ready to be again at your call if needed.

Sincerely yours,

Arthur P. Herrman  
Theo R. Holleman  
Burnham Kelly  
Sidney W. Little  
Milton S. Osborne  
Philip N. Youtz  
Pietro Belluschi, Chairman

cc: Dr. Walter Orr Roberts, Director  
National Center for Atmospheric Research  
Boulder, Colorado