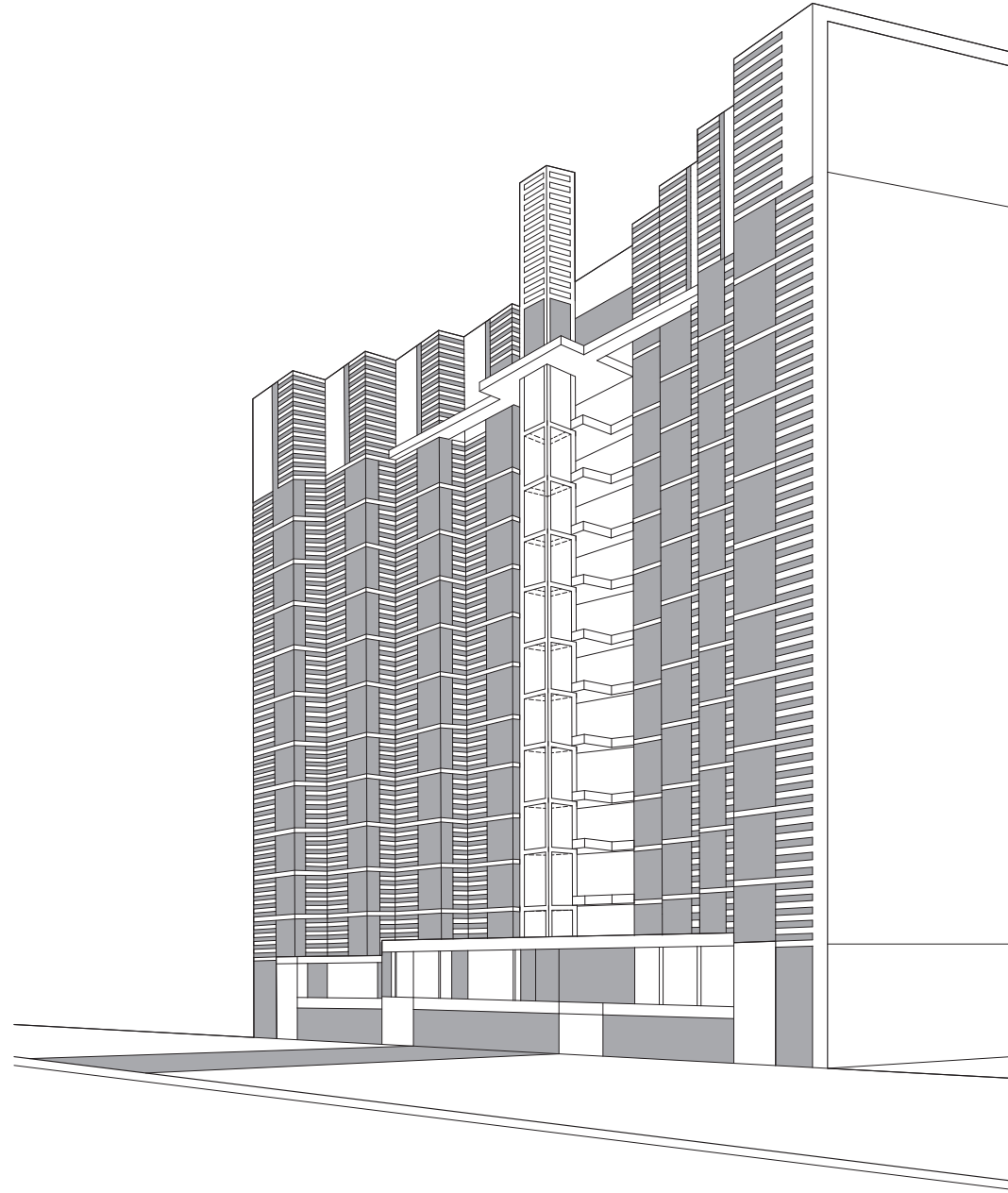


# MAK STAK

*by Urban Operations*



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The skyscraper drawings produced from subjects on Wilshire Boulevard also appear in the Wilshire Star Maps series which was produced by Urban Operations between 2011 and 2012.

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## Field Notes and Observations:

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## The Playmart: Forming Fiction

*Rudolph Schindler never built a skyscraper.*

*But he did design one.  
It was called the Playmart.*

The Playmart or Photoplay building was conceived between 1921 and 1922 for the Frank Meline Company in Los Angeles. A stepped vertical form, clad in smoked glass and aluminum, manifested itself as an urban playground complete with restaurants, business offices, a men's club, auditoria, and a rooftop gymnasium, pool, and a terraced sundeck for bronzed voyeurs to observe the action in the pool below. Despite his interest in aluminum and glass, Schindler did not propose another standardized monument of early 20th Century Modernism, but instead predicted the future: that Los Angeles, a city of apparently infinite horizontality, would eventually have to grow upward, and in doing so, might still be able to promote a cosmopolitan lifestyle that mixed all of the hedonistic intrigue of Southern California indoor-outdoor living with the pragmatic Real Estate ethics of New York and Chicago.

That the Playmart project never made it beyond the preliminary schematic phase is not surprising. In 1911 the Los Angeles City Council passed a zoning ordinance restricting tall buildings to the paltry height of 150'-0", resigning the metropolis to the architectural equivalent of erectile dysfunction, both physically and psychologically for almost half a century. While historical accounts differ as to whether this was due to earthquake regulations or political artifice seeking to maintain L.A. as a sprawling agricultural Eden<sup>1</sup>, when Schindler arrived in Los Angeles in the early 20's, the city had hardly developed a concentration of skyscrapers that would even remotely suggest the metropolitan congestion experienced on the East Coast or in Chicago. What it did provide however, was the seemingly infinite possibility of cultivating leasable square footage with the social proclivities of an artist class. Taking into account Schindler's posthumous local reputation as L.A. Modernism's "bad-boy," it is fair to say that the Playmart was his one-night stand with the city as a tourist.

What makes the Playmart Skyscraper so intriguing is that Schindler, who was repeatedly snubbed by Russell Hitchcock and Philip Johnson in their famous International Style exhibition at MoMA 10 years later, quickly seems to have evolved from this one experiment with the skyscraper typology toward his career interest of promoting the phenomenological properties of space and materiality on the intimate scale of the single-family home.<sup>2</sup>

While the Playmart never played out for him, Schindler's portfolio of drawings for the project demonstrates an adept reimagining of the skyscraper concept, one that, had it been built, would have certainly challenged the common notions of materiality, form, and programmatic aggregation that were promoted by his European counterparts across the Atlantic.

As a tourist coming to Los Angeles for the first time, Schindler wouldn't have experienced much in the way of skyscrapers in L.A. What examples did exist were hardly innovative due to both the prevalence of available land and the crippling restrictions of the zoning code. Instead Schindler re-imagined the very concept of the skyscraper itself. His vision brought the outside in, made space for the pedestrian in a city already consumed by the automobile, and presented itself less as an autonomous monument to the city skyline, than as a collector for cosmopolitan culture. Its unique presence in the city would've certainly garnered a mention in local visitor guides, perhaps even becoming a destination for the ubiquitous tour busses, which perpetually orbit between Hollywood and the Miracle Mile on Wilshire Boulevard.

There is no record of the Playmart's location. It remains a fiction within a city that has made the creation of fiction its guiding principle. When experiencing Los Angeles for the first time, as Schindler might have when he came to work for Frank Lloyd Wright in the early 1920's, one realizes that even though L.A.'s metropolitan fabric has filled in, the concept of site is still irrelevant where much of its commercial architecture is concerned. The skyscrapers that jumped beyond 150 feet after the code changed in 1957 (only a few years after Schindler died) are arguably as anonymous as the case studies that preceded them within the minds of both locals and tourists alike. Therefore, the Playmart represents L.A.'s unconsummated relationship with the skyscraper typology- its irrational form and porous programmatic composition ignore the superficial verticality of Hollywood and Sunset before taking a long, cool glance at the setting sun reflecting off the towers on Wilshire Boulevard which fail to visually complete the lazy stretch between Downtown and the beach.

The Playmart skyscraper was Schindler's vertical fiction for Los Angeles, one that lies unrealized in the city, even today. L.A. is filled with unremarkable skyscrapers, their material and formal composition a far cry from Schindler's visionary experiment. However, while towers grounded in the lexicon of International Modernism may have become the present reality, their extreme material and formal banality allows one to critically assess what might have been, had Schindler's client only funded his architect's touristic homage to a bohemian city still in the making.

## Bibliography

- 1) Paul Gleye, The Architecture of Los Angeles, (Knapp, Los Angeles, 1981).
- 2) Judith Sheine, R.M. Schindler, (New York, Phaidon, 2001).
- 3) August Sarnitz, R.M. Schindler: Architect 1887-1953, (New York, Rizzoli, 1988).

## Additional Resources

Kevin Roderick and J. Eric Lynxwiler, Wilshire Boulevard: Grand Concourse of Los Angeles, (Los Angeles, Angel City Press, 2005).

David Gebhard, Schindler, 3rd ed. (San Francisco, William Stout Publishers, 1997).

Richard Longstreth, City Center to Regional Mall” Architecture, the Automobile, and Retailing in Los Angeles, 1920-1950, (Cambridge, MIT Press, 1997).

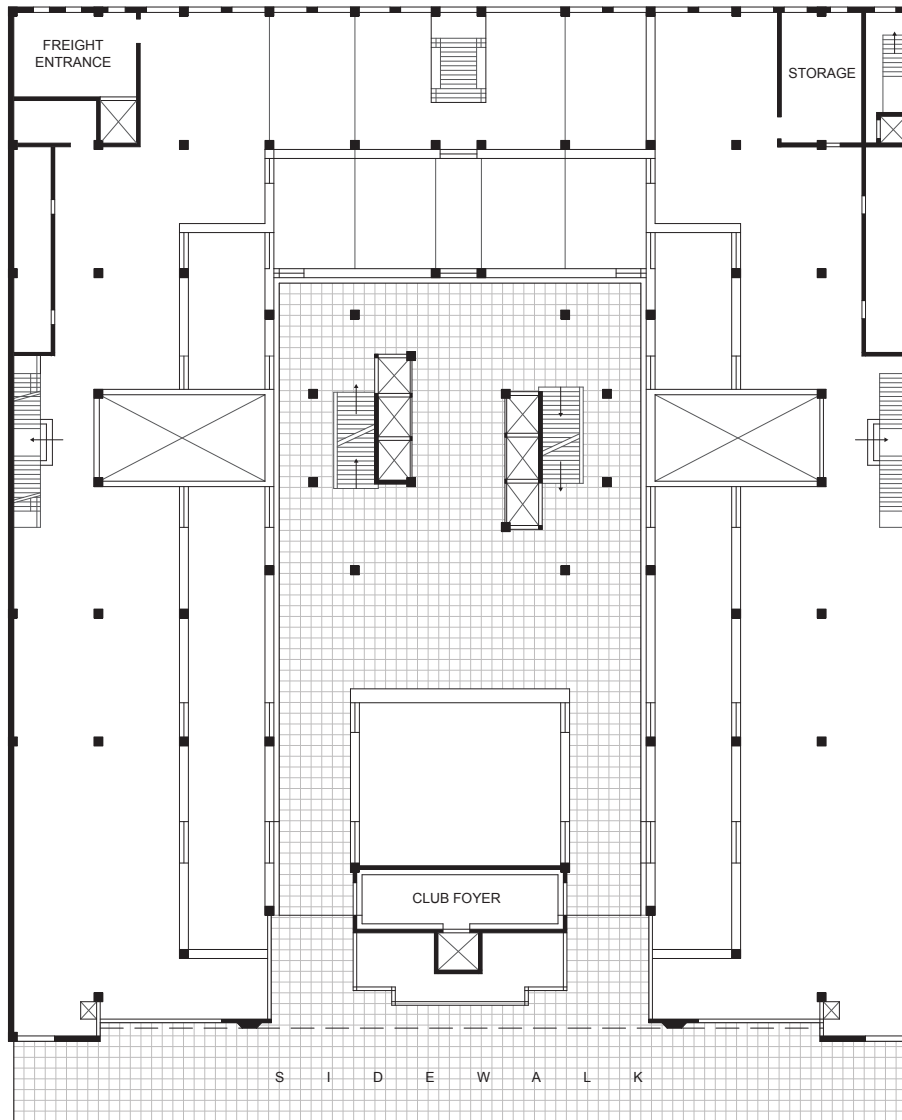
The Architectural Drawings of R.M. Schindler VOL.3, David Gebhard, ed. (New York, Garland Publishing Inc., 1993).

*Note: The scholarship on R.M. Schindler is extensive. Urban Operations has made every attempt to properly credit sources and authorship for the purposes of this project. We are indebted to August Sarnitz, whose book provided an extensive catalog of articles and personal notes produced by Schindler during his prolific career.*

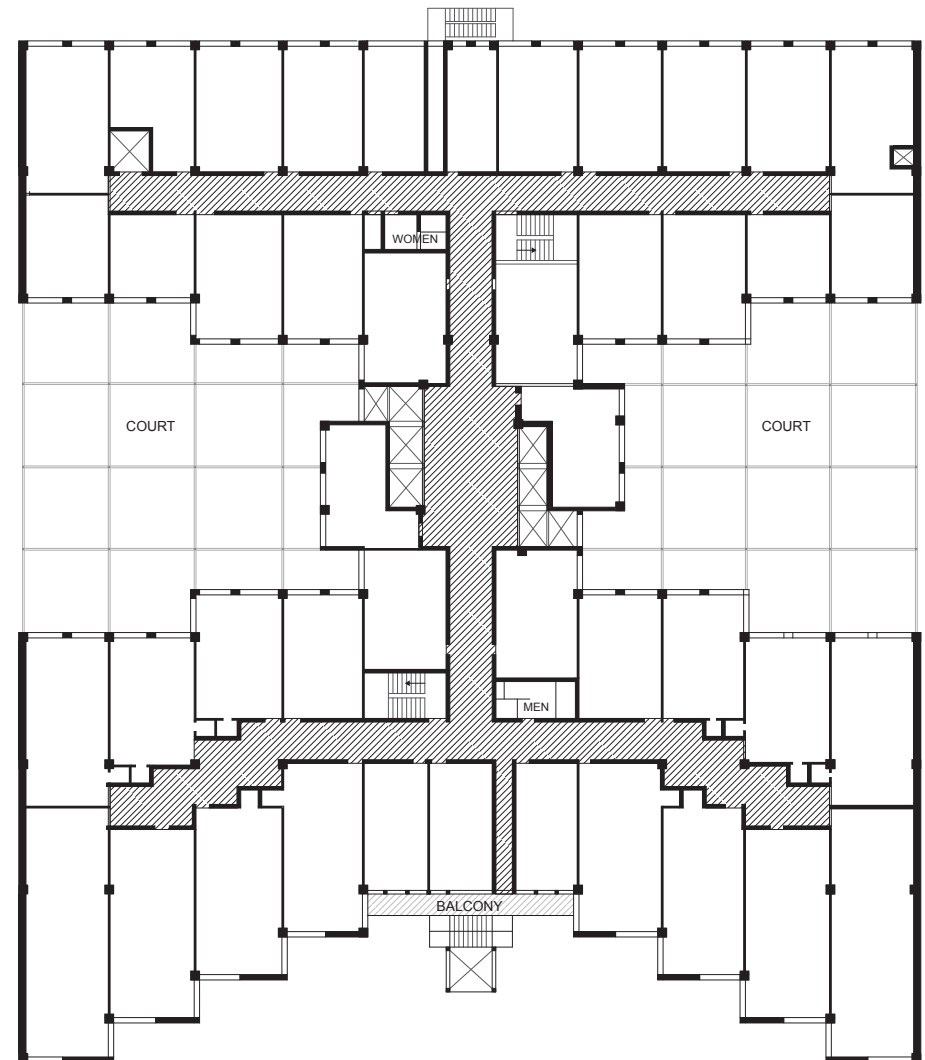
*The drawings of the Playmart that occur throughout the project were drafted from Schindler’s sketches and renderings, which are part of the Architecture and Design Collections Archive at the University of California, Santa Barbara.*

## Selected Plans

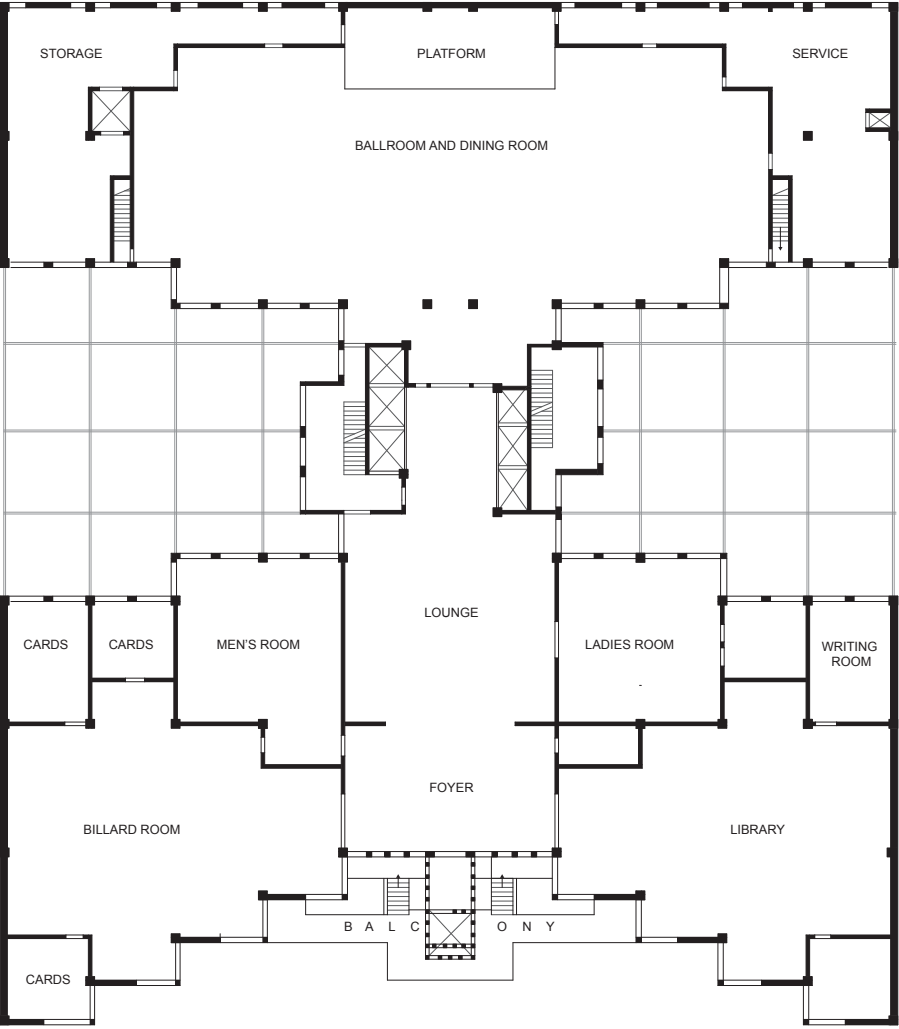
“If Mies’ sharp angular glass skyscraper of 1921-22 can be spoken of as Expressionist, then Schindler’s is super-Expressionist. Its street façade steps in on both sides, centering on an open glazed elevator tower, which stands separate within the building, connected to each floor by bridges. The neutral steel cage of the building is openly acknowledged, but the appliqué pattern of alternating black glass and aluminum bands visually establishes the horizontal as the dominant note.”  
-David Gebhard, *Schindler*.



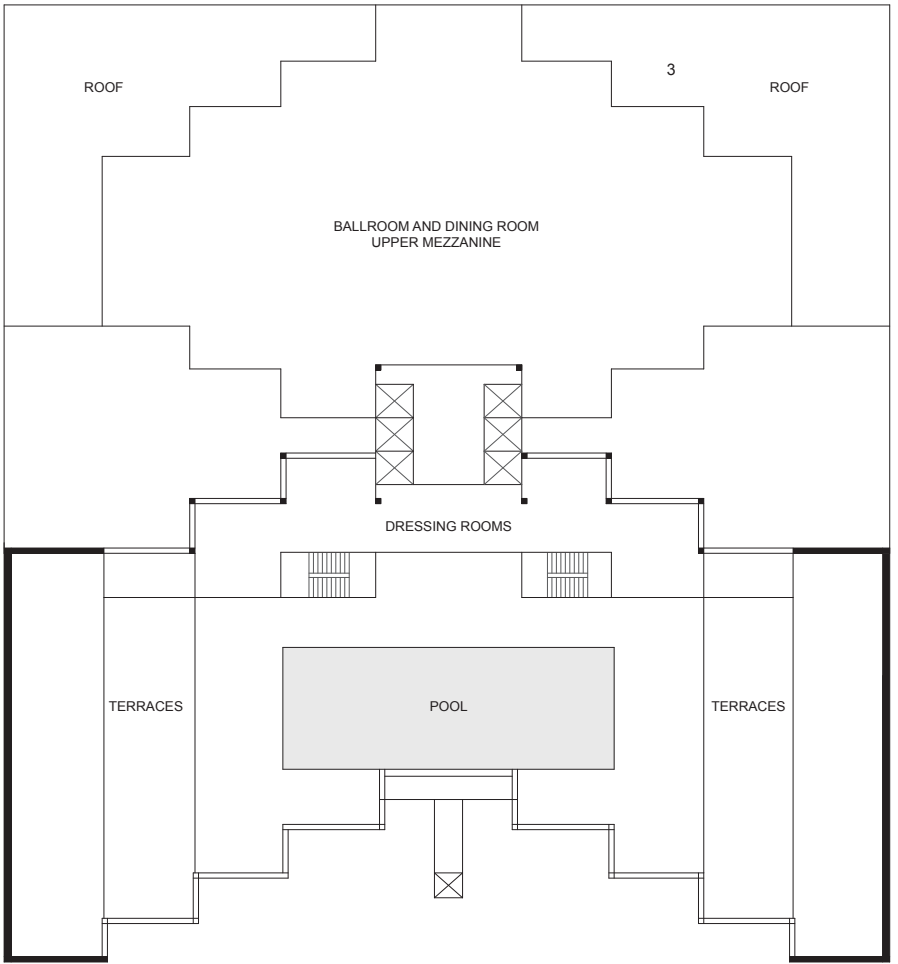
Ground Floor



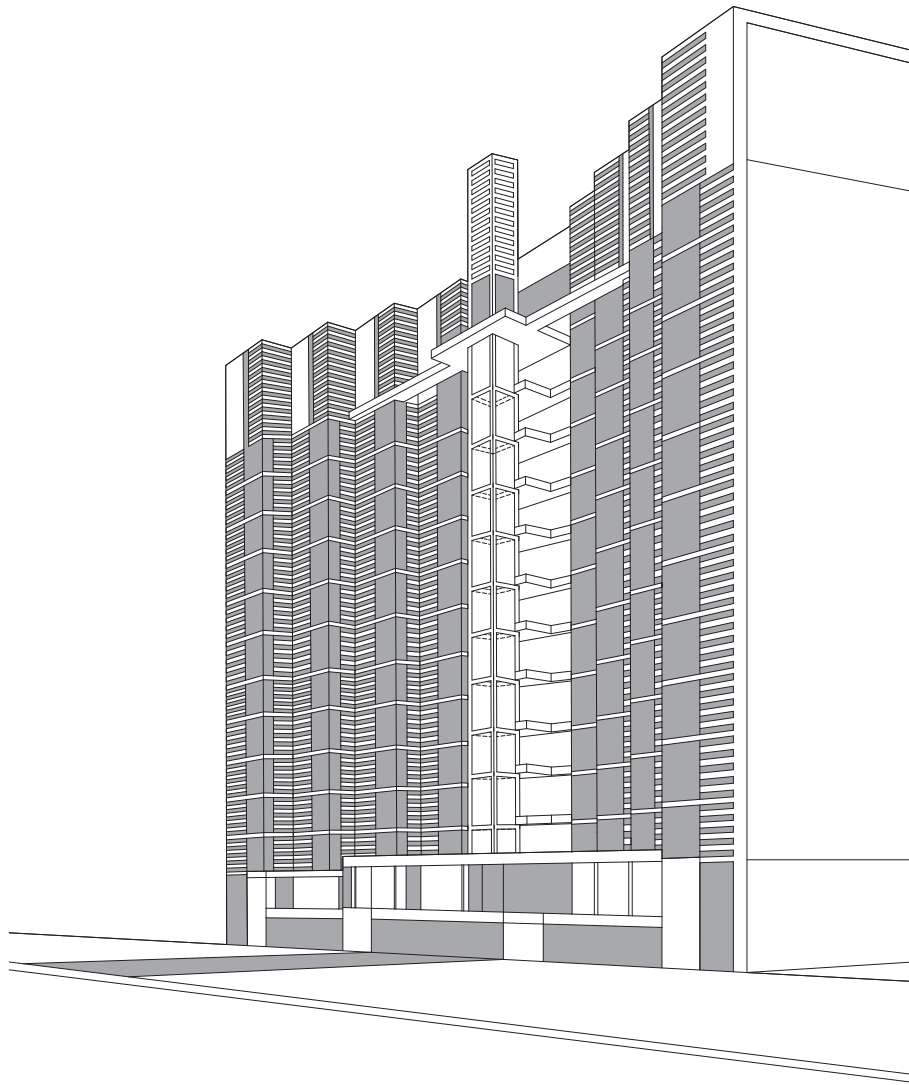
Typical Floor Plan



Top Floor



Roof Plan



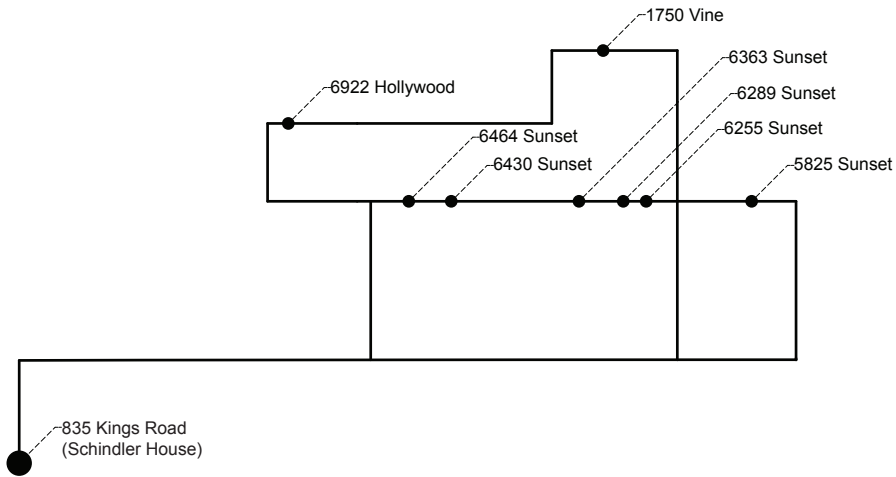
The following guide is an abbreviated tour of L.A.'s vertical fabric, in the two locales where we suspect the Playmart to have been built.

The first is Hollywood, which is within a short drive of his home and studio at 835 North Kings Road.

The second is on Wilshire Boulevard, located north of Schindler's Mackey Apartments at 1137 S Cochran Ave.

In order to make the journey through L.A.'s perpetually traffic-clogged streets more sufferable, a "Quoteable Schindler" has been included in order to make the journey between destinations go by, if not quickly, at least with some curious fodder for drive-time conversation.



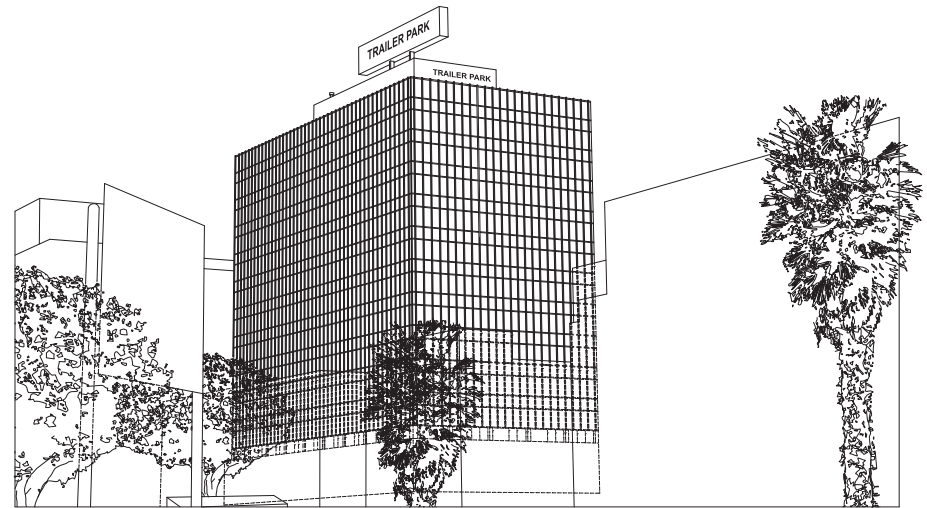


# Hollywood



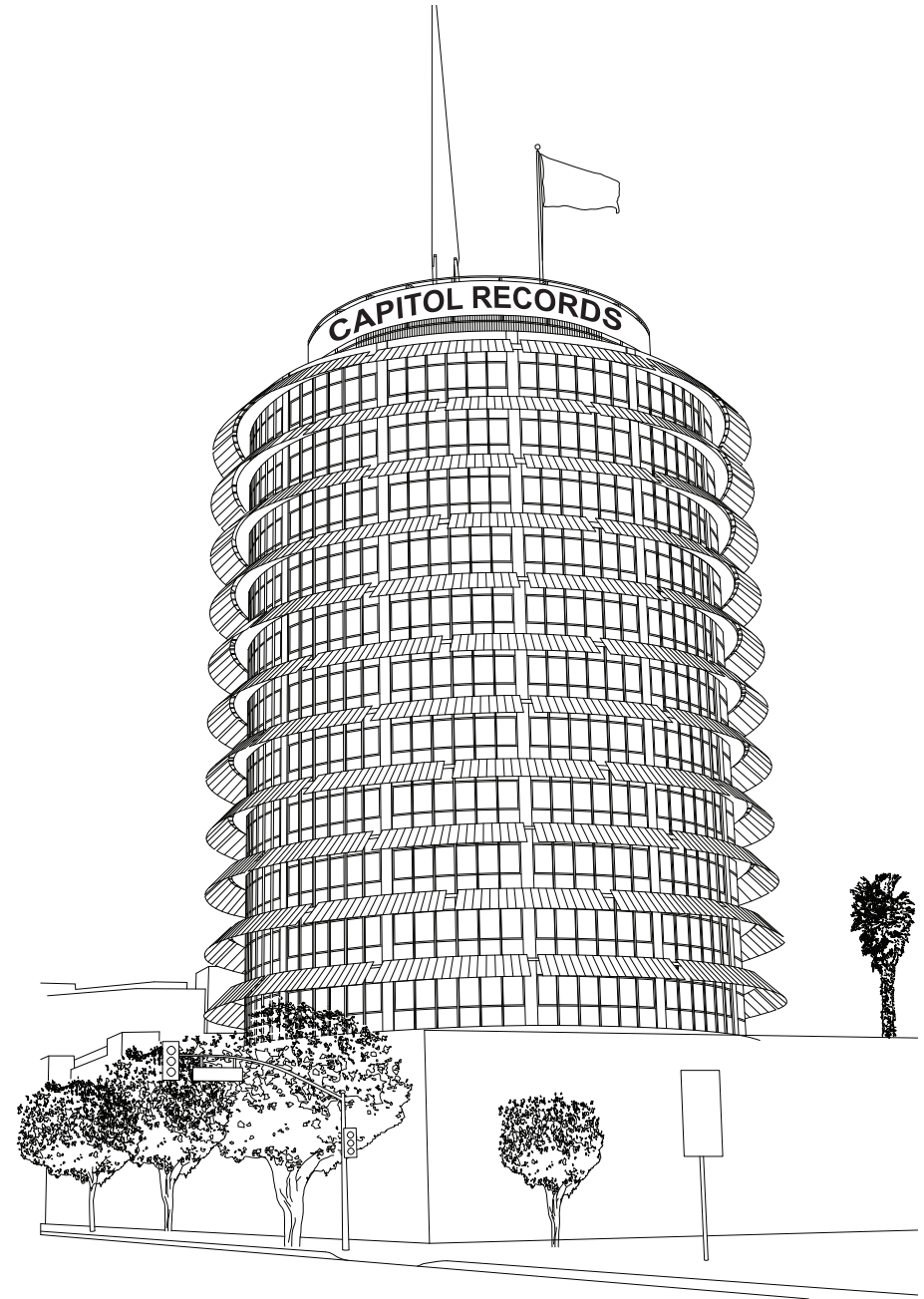
“Hollywood---a sound, a reminiscence, a legal term. And a settlement with the possibility of becoming a reality by taking form through the sweep of its hills. These might unite the most heterogeneous parts of a planless town into one,---into a harmonious civic composition.”

*Who Will Save Hollywood? A plea for the proper respect for an treatment of our wonderful endowment of nature. Holly Leaves (Hollywood) Nov. 3rd, 1922, p.36.*



"Standardization is only possible for products of our civilization...  
The richness of culture lies in the variations of its theme."

*Notes: Modern Architecture, Unpublished, 1944.*



1750 Vine Street

“Modern technique allows for the extensive use of polished surfaces. There is a complete negation of texture, and they produce a dematerialization of their form, which eliminates them as a factor in a space scheme using light-absorbing materials.”

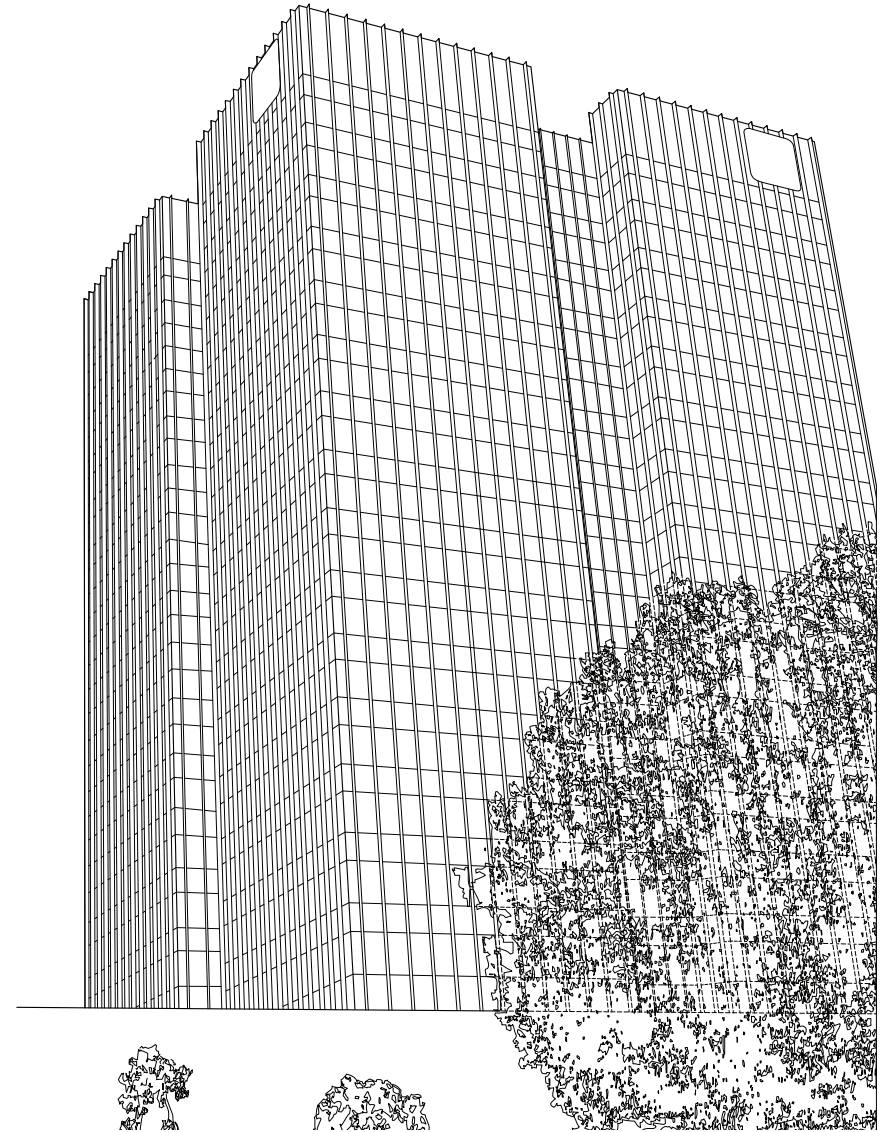
*Visual Technique, Unpublished, 1952.*



5825 Sunset Boulevard

"If I am to speak of "American Architecture" I must start by saying that no such thing yet exists. There are a few beginnings---but "architecture" and "America" have never really gone together, and the few skyscrapers that have been cast up by the immense vitality of the infinitely fruitful prairies have nothing human about them."

*Schindler to Neutra, Los Angeles, Dec. 1920.*



*6255 Sunset Boulevard*

“Modern architecture cannot be developed by changing slogans. It is not in the hands of the engineer, the efficiency expert, the machinist or the economist. It is developing in the minds of the artists who can grasp ‘space’ and ‘space forms’ as a new medium for human expression.”

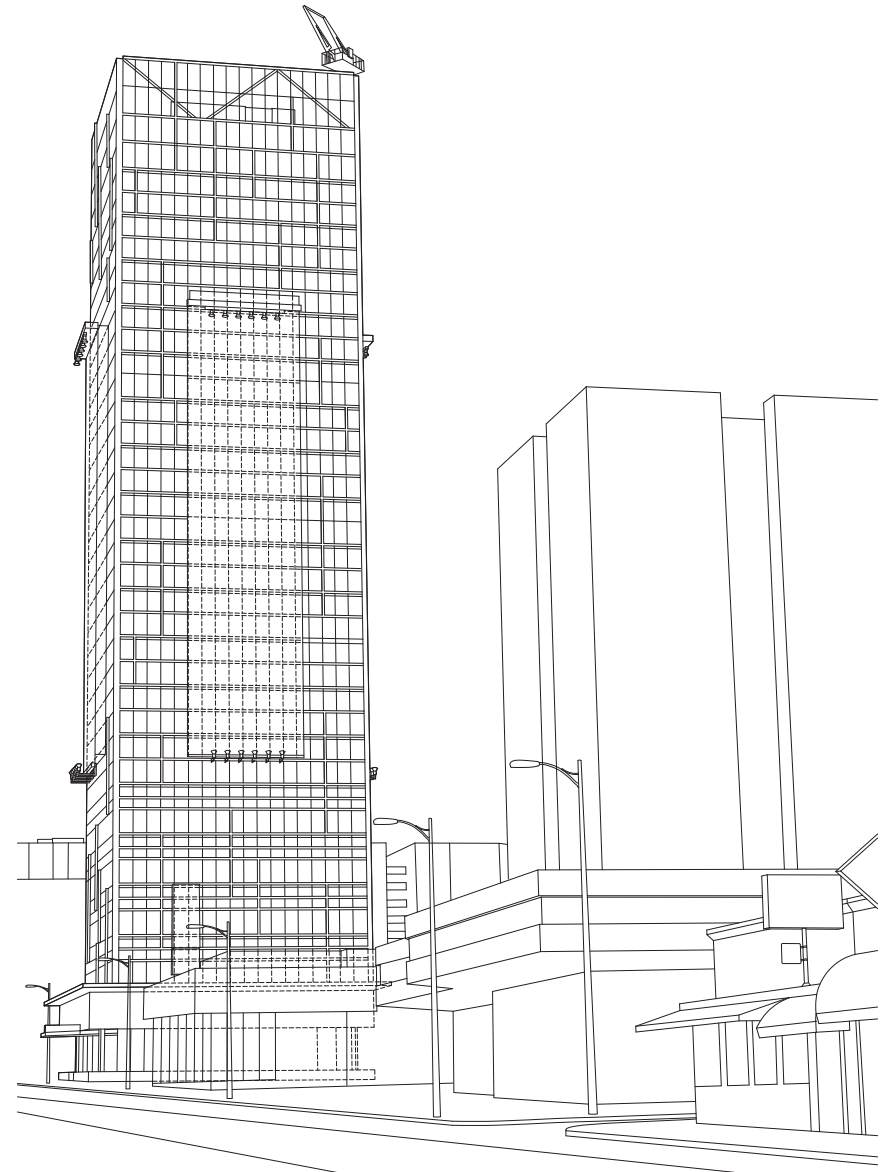
*Space Architecture, Los Angeles, 1934.*



6363 Sunset Boulevard

“Architecture’ is being born in our time. In all really modern buildings the attitude of the architect is fundamentally different from the one of the sculptor and the one of his brother, the conventional architect. He is not primarily concerned with the body of the structure and its sculptural possibilities. His one concern is the creation of space forms dealing with a new medium as rich and unlimited in possibilities of expression as any of the other media of art: color, sound, mass, etc...”

*Space Architecture, Los Angeles, 1934.*

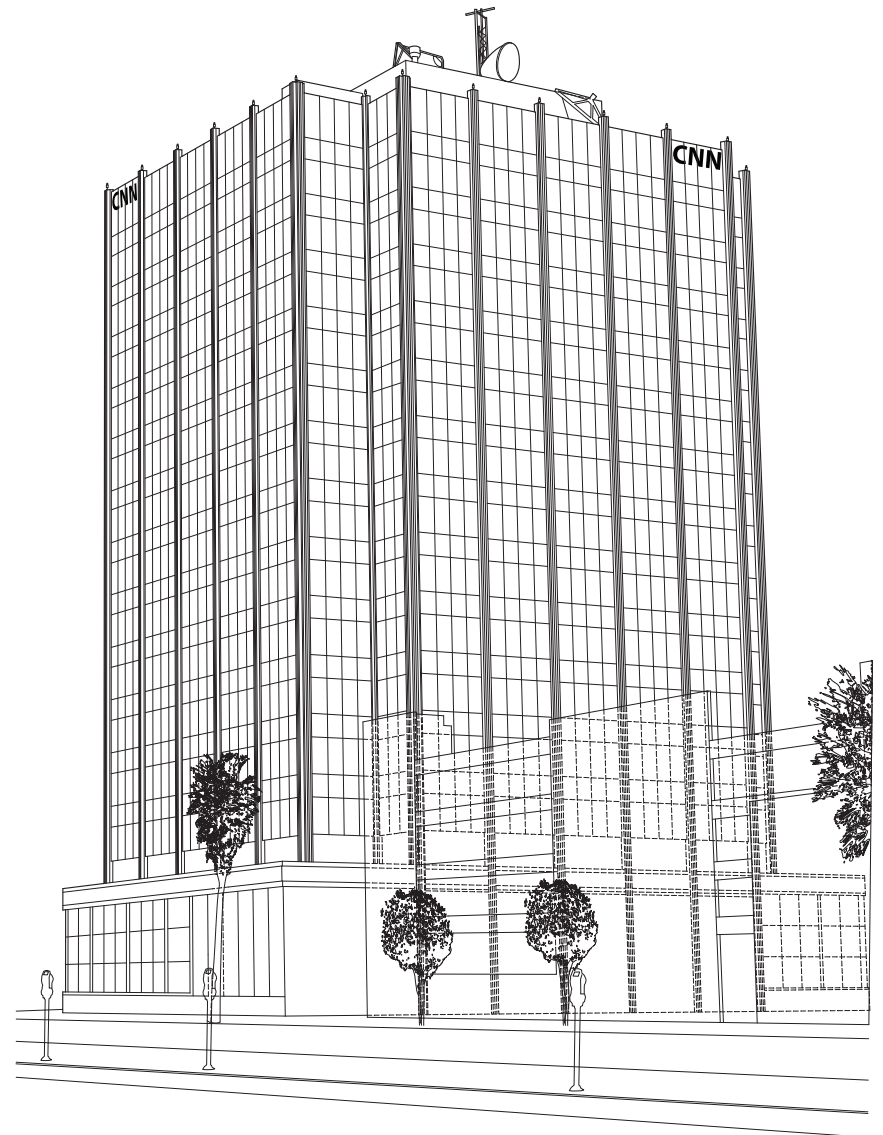


6289 Sunset Boulevard



"I am not a stylist, not a functionalist, nor any other sloganist. Each of my buildings deals with a different architectural problem, the existence of which has been entirely forgotten in this period of rational mechanization."

*Letter from Schindler to Philip Johnson, 9th of March, 1922.*

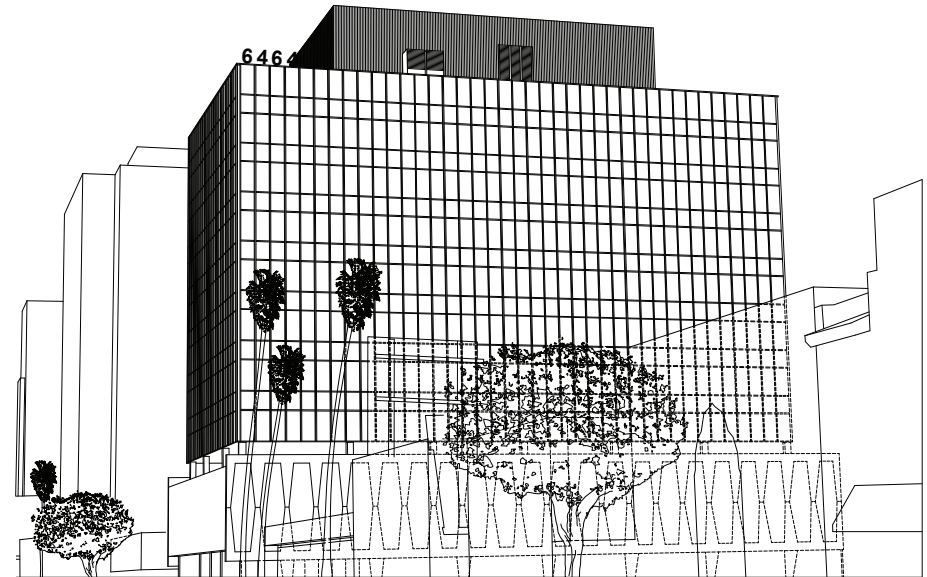


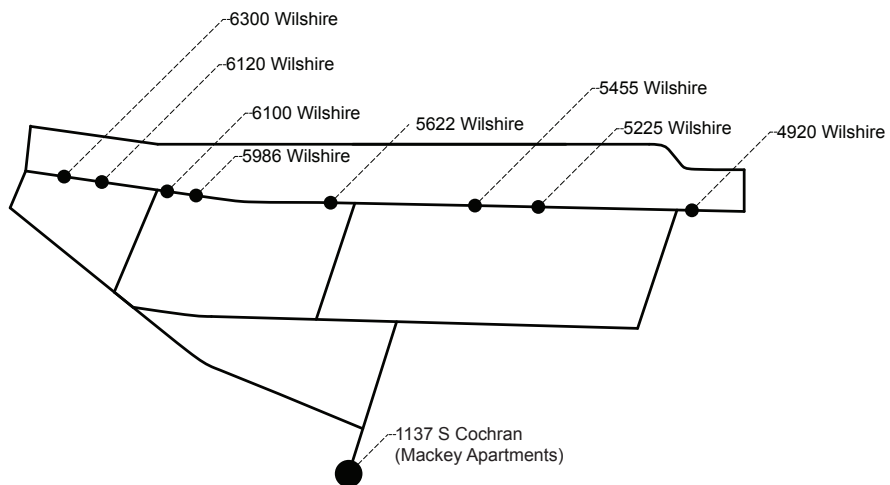
6430 Sunset Boulevard



"What we feel to be modern in American architecture is for the American architect the expression of those repulsive forces which he calls 'contractor and budget'."

*Schindler's personal notes, 1914.*





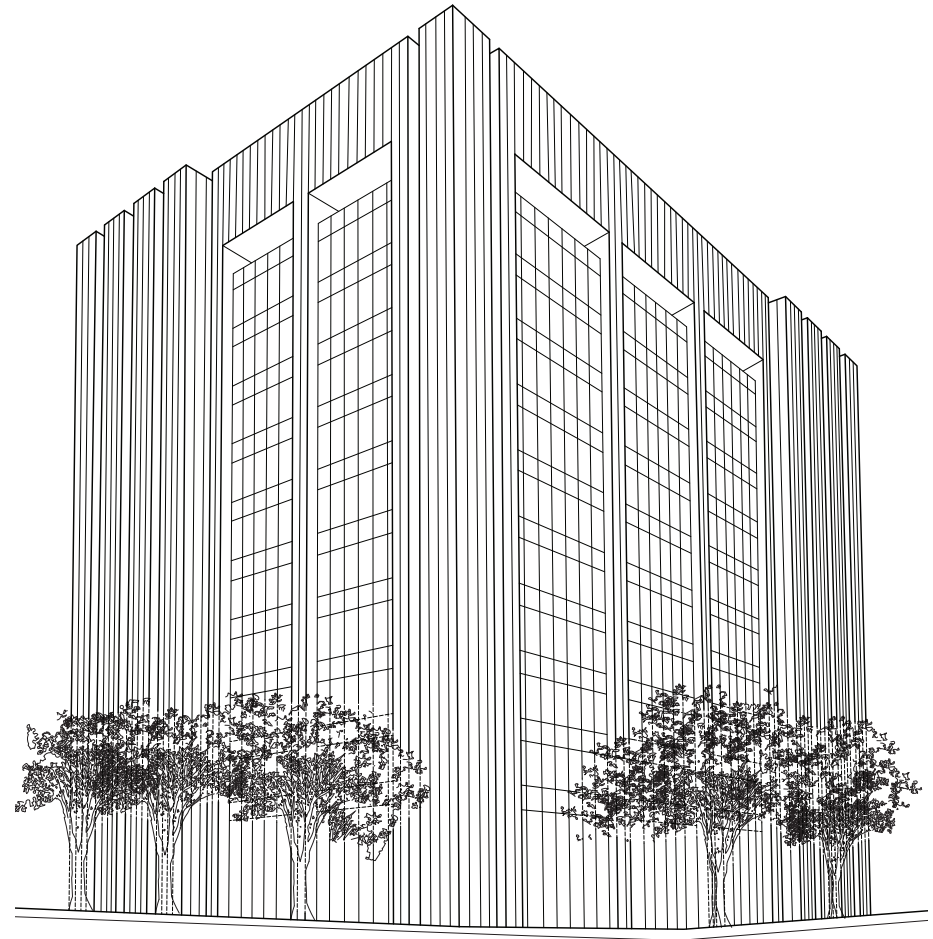
# Wilshire



“Dear Mr. Wilshire,

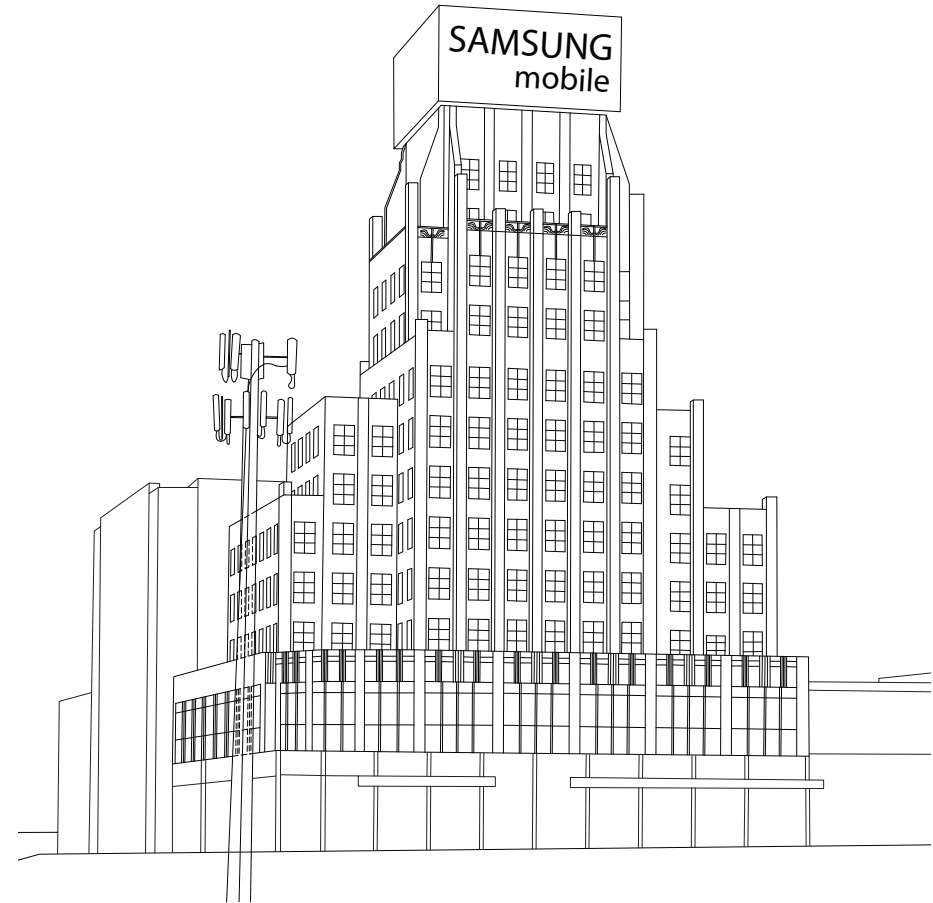
Will your vision be as keen architecturally as it was financially? I should like to plan your building—and give Los Angeles a glimpse into its architectural future.”

*R.M. Schindler’s correspondence to Gaylord Wilshire  
(Wilshire Boulevard: Grand Concourse of Los Angeles by Kevin Roderick & Eric Lynxwiler)*



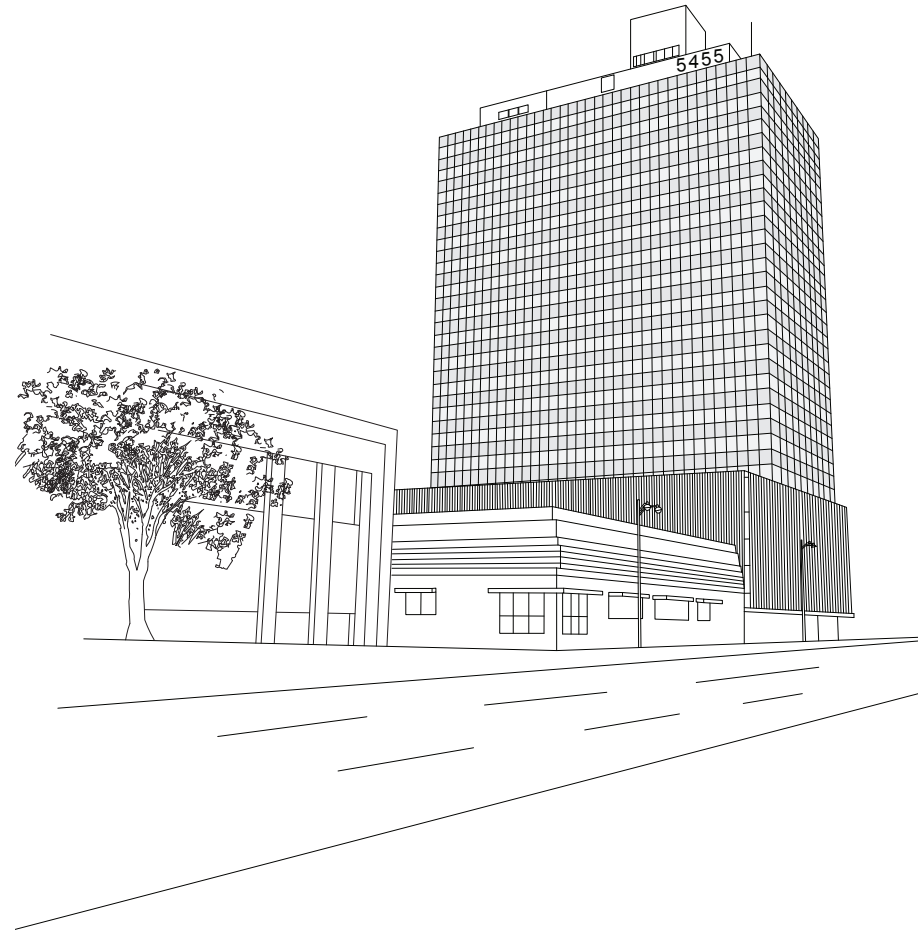
“The subconscious realization that architecture in its old sculptural form has died as an art, leads to an attitude characteristic of our age. Blind to the growth of a new art dealing with a new medium (space) in their midst, the “Functionalists” ask us to dismiss architecture as an art altogether. They want us to produce as the engineer does, producing “types” without other meaning but that to function.”

*Space Architecture, Los Angeles, 1934.*



“To make matters worse and public attention more concentrated, a group of functionalist have given their breed a name: International Style. Problems of form as such are completely dismissed. The manufacturer (influenced by considerations of available equipment, competition, labor, rules, profit, and personal inertia, etc...) is the god who furnishes ‘form’ ready-made.”

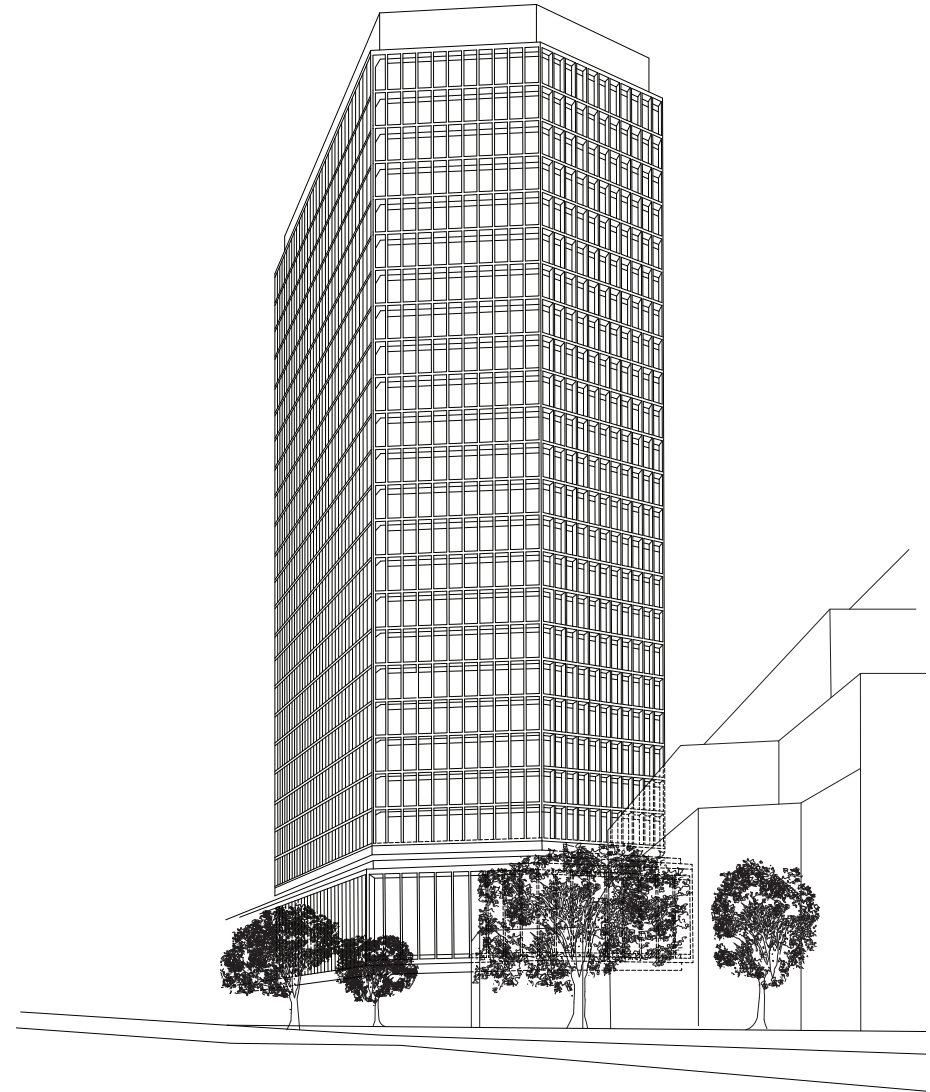
*Space Architecture, Los Angeles, 1934.*



*5455 Wilshire Boulevard*

"The Architectural design concerns itself with space and its raw material and the organized room as its product...New architectural problems have arisen, and their infancy is being safeguarded with a mask of practicability by the engineer."

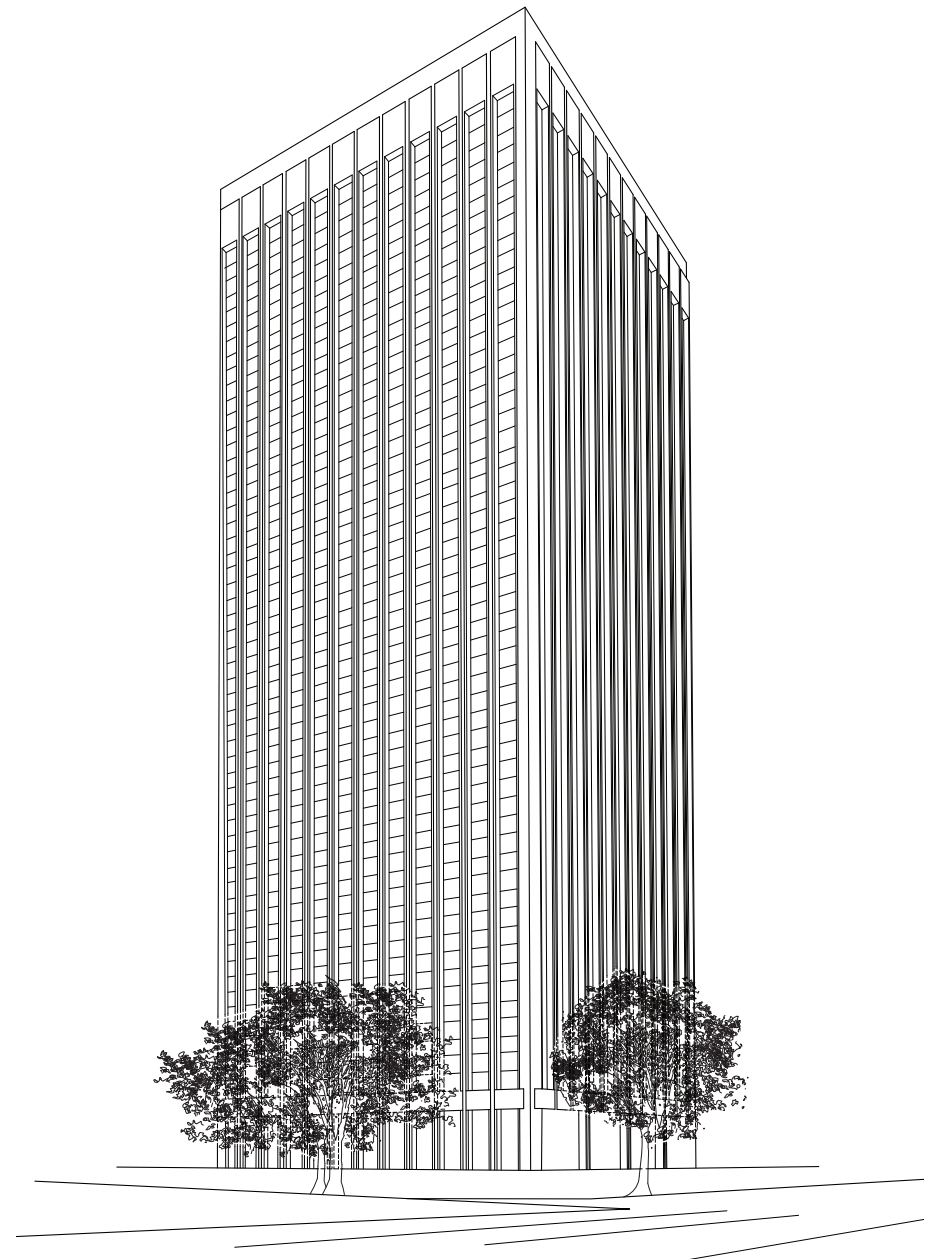
*Points of View—Contra, Southwest Review (Austin and Dallas),  
vol. 17, Spring 1932, pp.353-354.*



5622 Wilshire Boulevard

“Rhythm is a space relationship. It cannot be achieved by an arithmetical repetition of the same part but must be maintained by related spacings of parts, whether they are similar or not.”

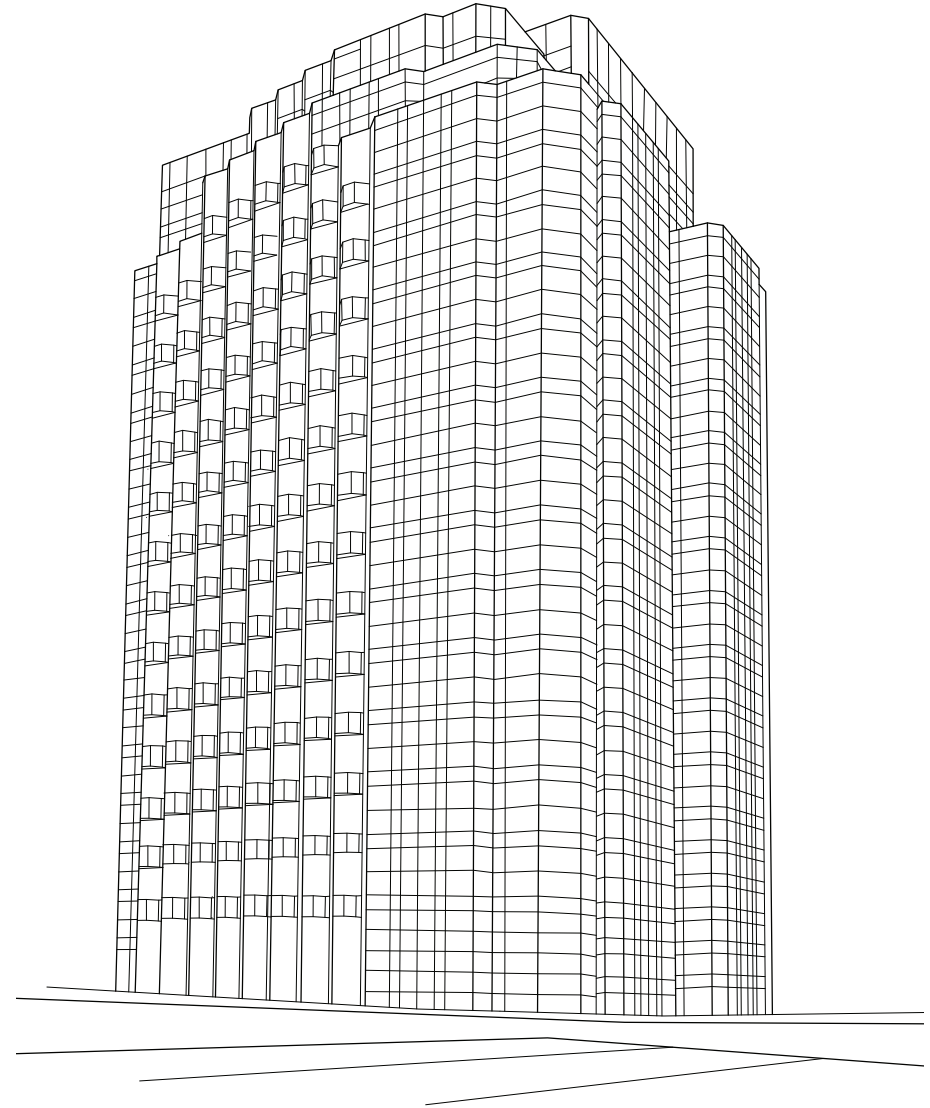
*Architect-Postwar-Post Everybody, in Pencil Points (New York), vol. 25, October 1944, pp.16-18, and November, pp 12-14.*



5986 Wilshire Boulevard

“Transparency, especially of textiles, was used for a long time subtly to divide adjoining space forms without separating them. The advent of translucent building materials, especially those with the ability to color light, presents a series of new problems for the architect. They enable him to transfuse the very space he is shaping with a color, forcing all objects in it to become active parts of palate, while reflecting individually the rays of his color medium.”

*Visual Technique, Unpublished. 1952.*

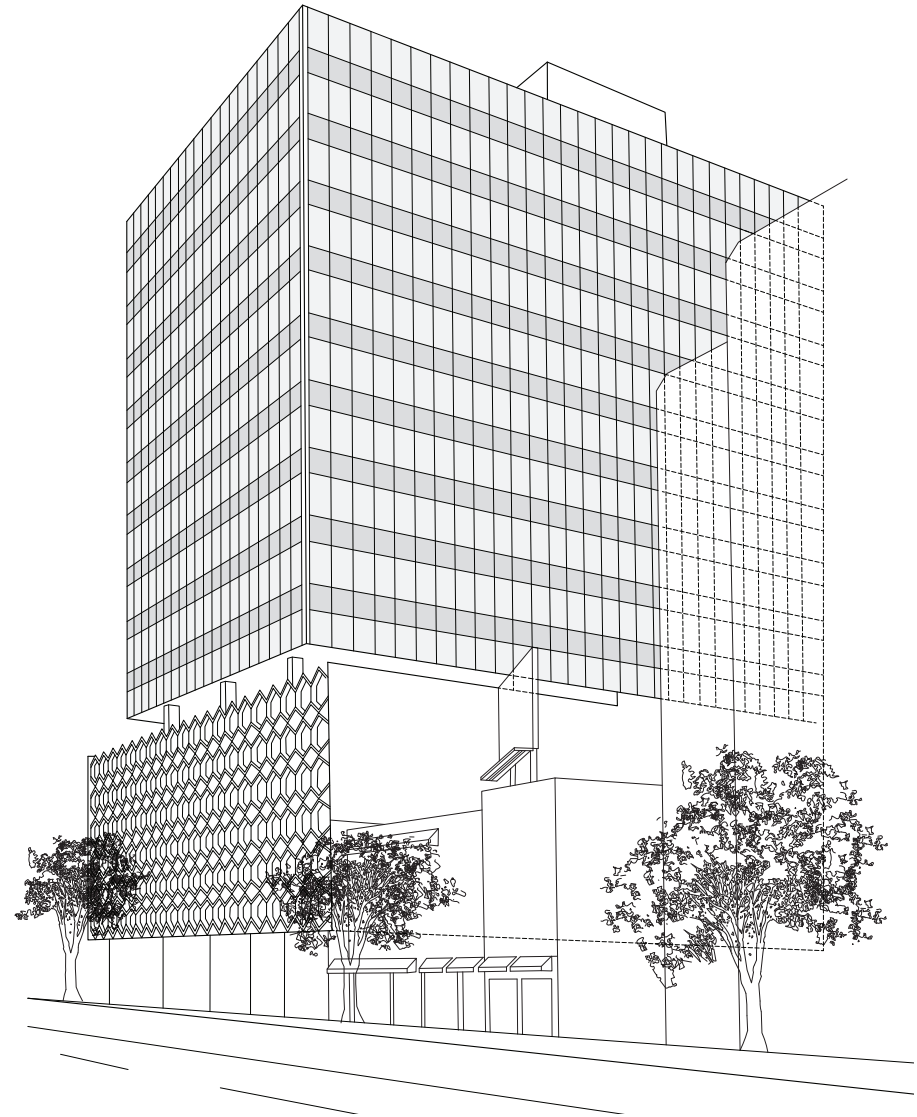


6100 Wilshire Boulevard



“Although the Crystal Palace in London and the Eiffel Tower in Paris are new forms of building due to the characteristics of the new materials (steel and glass) they are completely conventional in their attitude to architectural expression.”

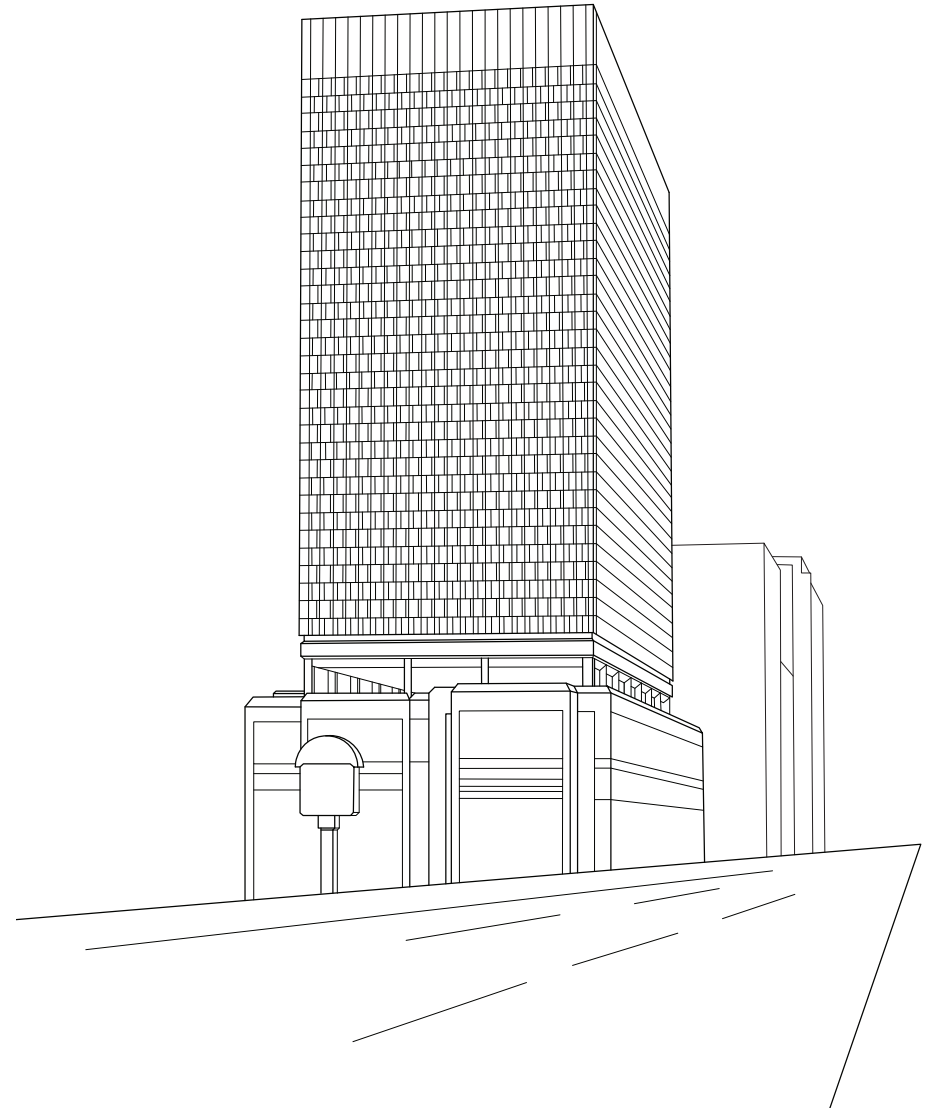
*Personal Notes: Modern Architecture, Unpublished. September, 1944.*



6120 Wilshire Boulevard

"There is little reward when placed in a position of being judged  
on the basis of the whims of a jury."

*R.M. Schindler in conversation with Julius Shulman  
(recollection by J.S. 02.15.86 and appearing in R.M. Schindler:  
Architect 1887-1953 by August Sarnitz)*



6300 Wilshire Boulevard