

**UNITED STATES COURTHOUSE  
AND FEDERAL BUILDING**

Central Islip, New York



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**The Islip courthouse doesn't look like courthouses of the nineteenth century, and yet it retains a certain stateliness. The design of the building lets you know you are coming into a place of great significance, that you are entering a government building in which extremely important decisions are made.**

Richard Meier  
Architect, Richard Meier & Partners

## A CONTEMPORARY EXPRESSION OF CIVIC ARCHITECTURE

The United States Courthouse and Federal Building in Central Islip, Long Island, New York, is already a landmark. The elegant, 12-story white rectangle and rotunda dominate the skyline. But it is more than large. Its prominence and unique profile recall images of civic architecture from the past. The connection is intentional. Without mimicking history, this building is meant, in a landscape of small cities and towns, to impress and inspire those who see it. The building strikes a balance between expressing its stateliness with a certain formality and expressing an openness with a public plaza and interiors that welcome visitors and let them know that the justice system represented within is open and accessible to all.

Its stately quality is evident in the careful arrangement of public spaces. Creating a sense of place for the courthouse, two flights of stairs lead to a broad plaza. This paved, open area is more than 600 feet long and 150 wide. Within this space, low walls, stairs, ramps, and a grove of paper bark maple trees delineate subspaces, adding interest but not distracting from the impact and grandeur of the plaza.

A dramatic rotunda continues the entry sequence. It is a tall freestanding volume

that sits in front of the courthouse block. Conceptually, it is not unlike the towers that dignified public buildings in previous periods. Its design, however, is uncomplacably modern. Clad in white metal panels, it is an opaque cone that rises 190 feet, with walls that angle inward toward the top. A few carefully designed details enrich the pure simple form. On the exterior, a row of vertical fins crowns the flat roof, and a balcony-like element of intersecting planes emerges near the top of the cylinder. To the side, a canopy is cantilevered to reinforce the axis with the plaza stairs and celebrate the four-story portal cut into the rotunda wall. On the interior, the procession moves from a low, confined area to a stunning vista up the cone where a skylight directs the path of the moving sun across the rotunda walls.

Beyond the rotunda lies the atrium. It is airy and open, filled with natural light. Its edges are defined by windows, balconies, and bridges, elements repeated for nine floors to create a great rectangular hall. The atrium is an orientation space, a place where the building's organization—bankruptcy courts on one side, magistrate and district courts on the other side—is easily understood. It is a ceremonial space.

People can assemble on the ground floor and on an expansive second story balcony. It is also the public entrance to the second-floor Special Proceedings Courtroom. An open staircase leads to the large balcony that provides access to this court—a court used for ceremonies and special multi-defendant cases.

To signify the important events that take place in the Special Proceedings Courtroom, it—like the rotunda—is designed as a freestanding volume. In this case, it is a cube set behind, rather than in front of, the courthouse block. The interior is over 30 feet high and is paneled in richly grained beech wood. The well and judge's bench are illuminated with skylights, and the jury sits in a tall alcove that has a window to one side.

The corridors on each of the courtroom floors are also designed as public spaces. They are wide galleries that gradually narrow to reflect the gentle curve of the south facade. Their exterior walls are floor-to-ceiling glass offering expansive vistas to the Atlantic Ocean. Their interior walls are finished in light gray granite and are detailed with fins that mark courtroom vestibules. The vestibules are welcoming and comfortable spaces that provide quiet waiting areas.







**The building's nature is two-sided, a fact reflected in its formal organization. The courthouse has a public side facing the Atlantic Ocean, and a private side, which is the judges' side, facing Long Island Sound. The courts themselves are in between, part of both the public domain and the private domain.**

Richard Meier  
Architect, Richard Meier & Partners











## ORDER AND DESIGN

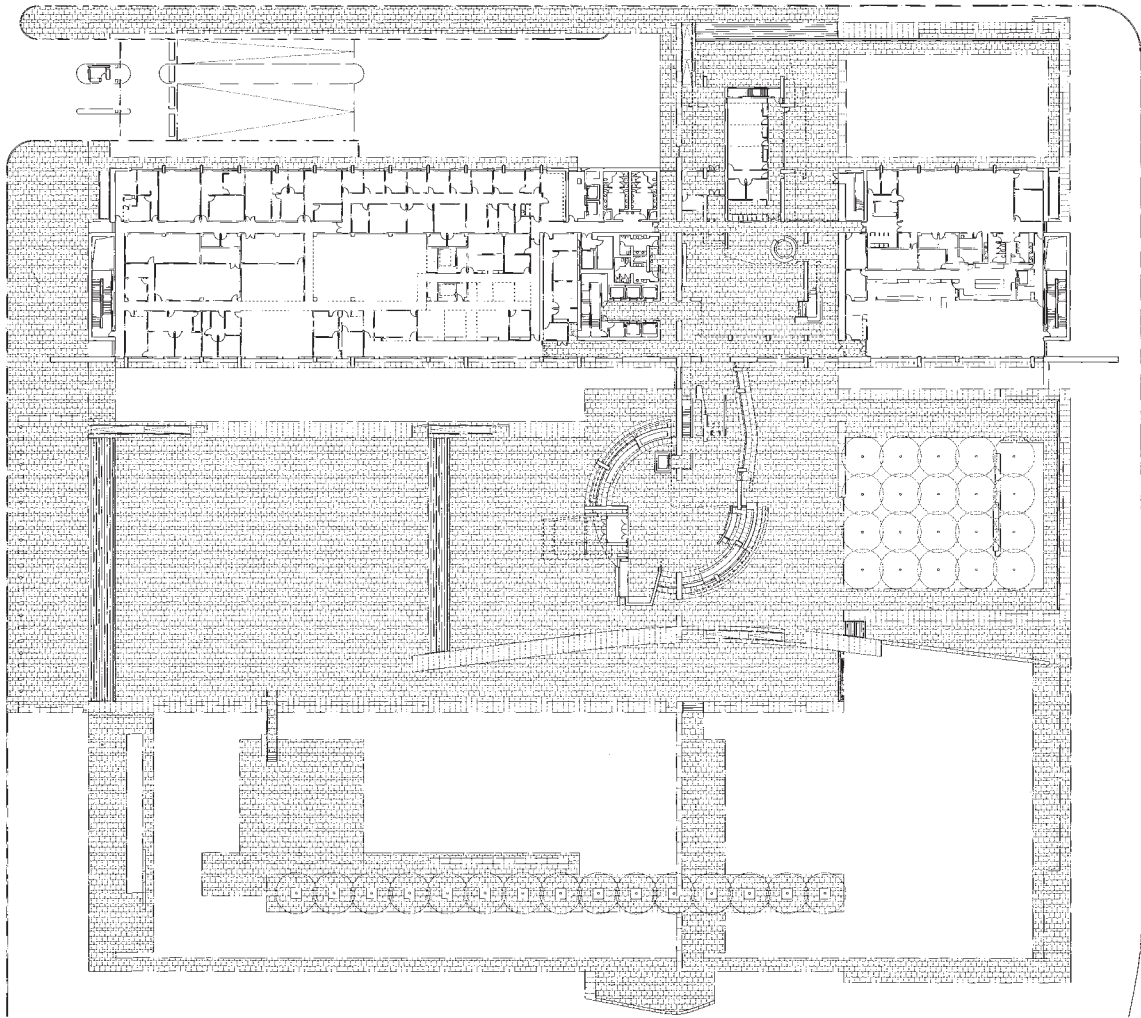
A hallmark of this United States Courthouse and Federal Building is its clear, elegant order. This is a significant design achievement. The building is home to a complex array of functions that, in addition to courtrooms and judges chambers, includes prisoner handling facilities, jury assembly rooms, a library, cafeteria, and several floors of office space. It is a large facility—735,000 square feet. There are 23 courtrooms and more than 2000 parking spaces. The building welcomes the public and stands as a symbol of the integrity and openness of the American judicial system. At the same time, it provides appropriate security for judges, staff, prisoners, users, and visitors.

The architect has addressed a litany of detailed requirements without losing sight of his concept for the design. Functions are layered in rows, an order evident in the building's linear form and symbolized by a granite wall that runs the entire length of the structure. The wall, a large plane that projects out, frames the building at each end and is visible through the front glass facade. Within the building, the wall is the threshold to the courtrooms, a boundary fabricated of a durable and distinguished material that emphasizes the building's solemn purpose.

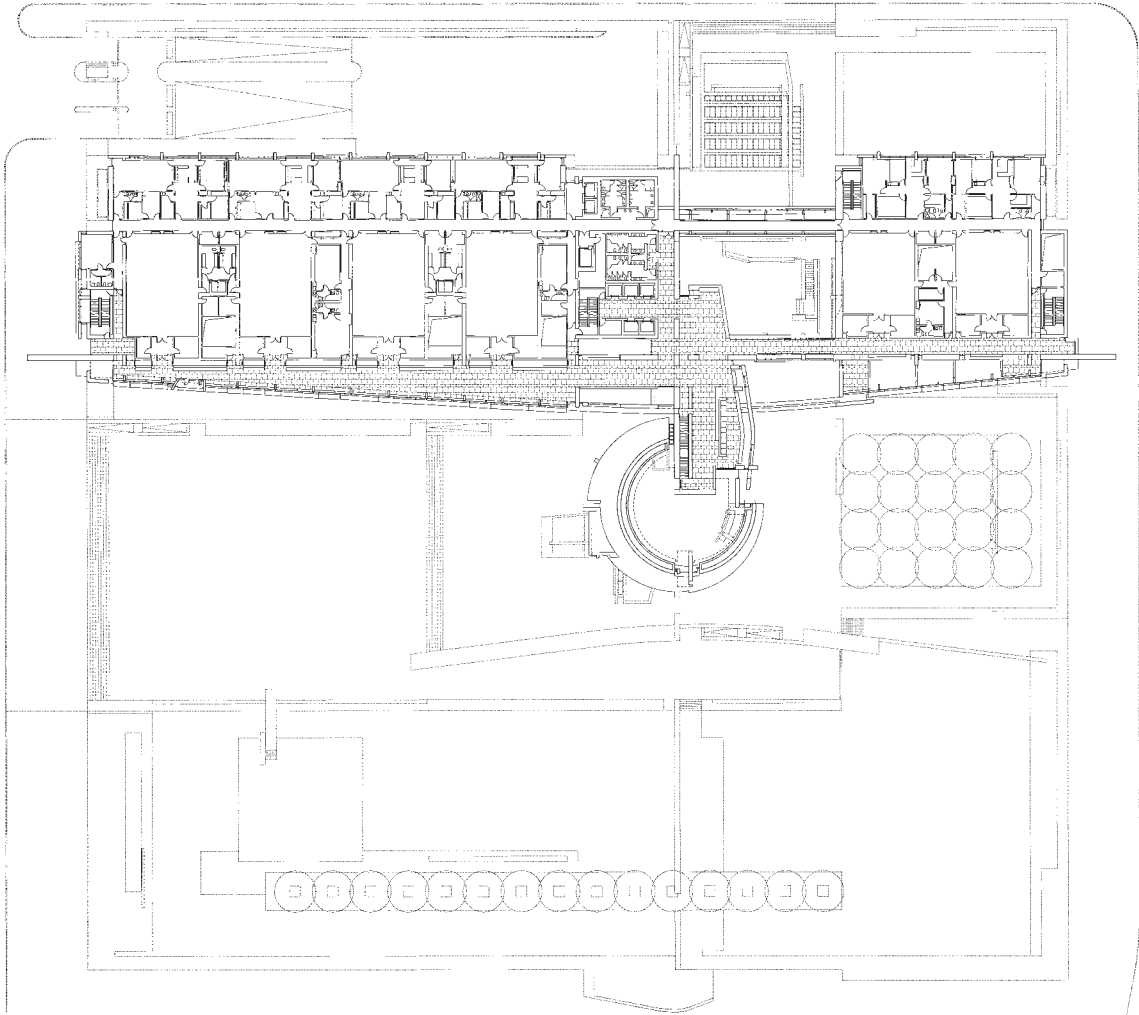
The two main facades reflect the dual nature of the design's order—the public and private sides of the building. The public, south-facing plaza wall is glass and offers panoramic views to the ocean. The north facade is a solid plane, the private edge of the courthouse highlighted with a rhythmic pattern of strip windows to articulate offices and judges' chambers.

Geometric systems and repeated patterns further order the design. In plan, the dimension and layout of spaces is refined as a composition of squares and proportional rectangles. On the south facade, floor levels are visible in the repetition of major horizontal beams, and court floors have projected sunscreens. On the north facade, judges' chambers have a tall grid of windows set over a line of smaller openings. Panels on the exterior of the building and Special Proceedings Courtroom are square, while panels on the exterior of the rotunda are vertical rectangles. Interior spaces and finish materials, including the division of windows, also juxtapose square and rectangular grids, a strategy that, throughout the building, generates a dynamic blend of consistency and richness.





**First Floor Plan**



**Eighth Floor Plan**







**The architectural principles explicit in the Islip courthouse—as in all of our work—are rooted in timeless classical design issues, such as a sense of order, the use of natural light, and the enrichment of immediate surroundings.**

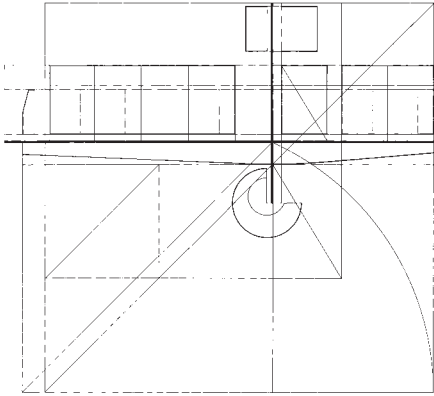
Richard Meier  
Architect, Richard Meier & Partners

## FORM AND LIGHT

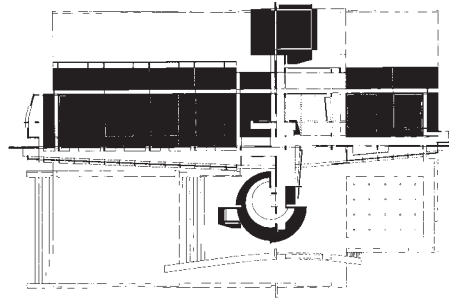
Compelling design is generally grounded in a strong philosophy. This is certainly true of Richard Meier's work whose theory of space is uniquely expressed in the handling of architectural volumes and light.

The striking juxtaposition of forms is one of the great strengths of this courthouse. On a large scale, there is the contrast between the long rectangular block and the rotunda, and on the opposite side of the building, the long rectangular block and the cube of the Special Proceedings Courtroom. A similarly exciting visual tension is found in the canopy and portal as they cut into the base of the rotunda and in the balcony as it emerges from the top of the rotunda. On the south facade, certain areas are enclosed in "frames" to break the rhythm of the horizontal sunscreens. In the atrium, bridges and balconies move into and across the space. More subtly, the glass wall facing the plaza is gently curved while the other walls of the courthouse block are rectilinear. These and other similar compositions create an architecture that is successful because it balances strong order with equally strong features.

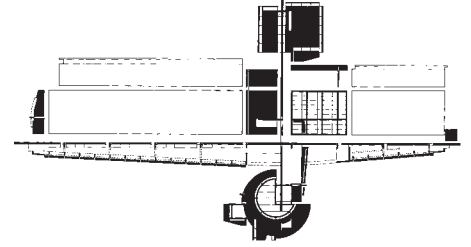
The modulation of light is another critical element in Meier's design philosophy. This appears in the interaction of sunlight with the building forms—in the overlapping volumes of the courthouse, in the shadows cast by sunscreens and window frames, and in the layering of facade materials. It is evident in the sequence of dark and light spaces on the interior—from the shadowy rotunda to the sun-filled atrium, and from the open galleries to the enclosed courtrooms. It is seen in the skylights and the slits in walls, openings that not only grab light and bring it into the building but that also yield surprising views of the sky and exterior spaces.



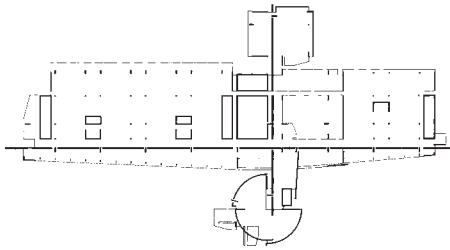
**Geometry**



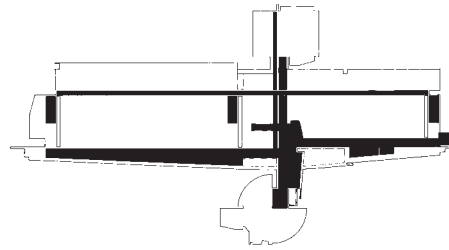
**Figure/Ground**



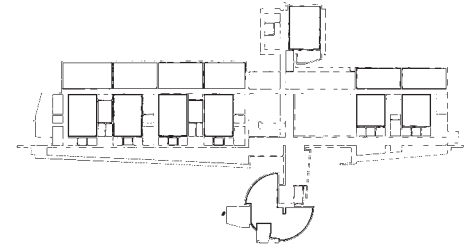
**Elements**



**Structure**



**Circulation**



**Program**



**Light shapes spaces, lends spirit, and marks the passage of time and the changing nature of the day.**

Richard Meier  
Architect, Richard Meier & Partners









## ART-IN-ARCHITECTURE

Art has always been an important feature of great architecture. For the United States Courthouse and Federal Building in Central Islip, New York, environmental sculptor Elyn Zimmerman has designed a landscape.

### **Untitled Sculpture/Landscape Project**

*Located on the South Side of the Building  
Beyond the Courthouse Plaza*

Elyn Zimmerman

This landscape project contains a fountain and watercourse. It is a linear environment that extends 260 feet parallel to, but just beyond, the wall of the entry terrace. Surrounded by trees, it is designed as a quiet gathering space, an inviting counterpoint to the monumental courthouse.

The circular fountain, ten and one half feet tall, is composed of three tiers of green-gray granite blocks. Water emerges from the center of a disc, flows through the spaces of the eight large blocks that surround it, and then between the spaces of the 12 blocks that make up the last and widest tier. The water is collected in a pool that surrounds the tiers and then flows into a 155-foot long watercourse located on one side of the fountain.

The granite-edged water channel varies in width from eight to 20 feet, changing and animating the rate and texture of the flowing water. A gravel walk with benches surrounds the fountain and watercourse.

The entire space is edged with deciduous shade trees. On the long sides, it is a sequence of single trees. At either end of the landscape, there is a grove of trees. A gravel pathway connects this environment to the plaza. To one side, large evergreen trees form a screen between the landscape and a service road, and beyond the long edge of this installation, evergreen shrubs establish a border that echoes the curve of the main courthouse facade.

**Art-in-Architecture Program**

GSA's Art-in-Architecture Program commissions artists, working in close consultation with project design teams, to create artwork that is appropriate to the diverse uses and architectural vocabularies of new Federal buildings. These permanent installations of contemporary art for the nation's civic buildings afford unique opportunities for exploring the integration of art and architecture, and facilitate a meaningful cultural dialogue between the American people and their government. A panel that includes the project architect, art professionals, the Federal client, and representatives of the community advises GSA in selecting the most suitable artist for each Art-in-Architecture commission.



## GENERAL FACTS ABOUT THE COURTHOUSE

The United States Courthouse and Federal Building in Central Islip, New York, is located on a 29-acre site at the intersection of Carleton Avenue and North Spur Drive. It is one of the tallest structures on Long Island rising 235 feet. The 12-story, 735,000 square foot facility includes 23 courtrooms: one Special Proceedings Courtroom, 13 District, four Magistrate, and five Bankruptcy courtrooms. There are also 25 judges' chambers, a law library, office space for several Federal agencies, and a cafeteria. Over the next 30 years, as the needs of the courts grow, spaces in the building can be converted to accommodate up to 39 courtrooms and 42 judges' chambers.

The building is organized linearly. Within the long rectangular main space, an atrium divides District and Magistrate Courts on the west from Bankruptcy Courts on the east. The three court types have been designed elegantly but simply. They are paneled with cherry wood and have ceilings more than 15 feet high. Their layout is traditional yet flexible with moveable witness boxes and attorneys' tables. The bench is elevated and on axis with the entrance. The jury box is

to the side opposite the witness box, and the spectator area is at the back. Perhaps the most modern element is the lighting, which is articulated with a large square or circular recess in the ceiling. The courtrooms integrate the latest audio-visual and digital technologies.

The exterior of the building is clad in white coated aluminum panels. In the interior, courtroom entrances are granite, and the same material is used for the floors of the public spaces.

There is extensive parking—1,251 spaces for users and visitors, 426 spaces for staff, and 366 secure spaces. The public and employees enter through two security checkpoints. Inside, there are three separate circulation systems: one for the public; one for judges and their staff; and one for prisoners.

**Location**

28.8 acres at the northeast corner of the intersection of Carleton Avenue and North Spur Drive (the north service road of the Southern State Parkway) in Central Islip, Long Island, New York. The site is 30 miles east of New York City, 3.5 miles north of the Great South Bay, and 11 miles south of Smithtown Harbor.

**Size**

735,000 Gross Square Feet  
235 Feet High  
11 Stories plus Basement

**Time Frame**

Design Awarded: January 1993  
Construction Starts: July 1996  
Occupancy: August 2000

**Major Building Components**

U.S. Courts	377,000 Square Feet
Tenant Office Space	68,000 Square Feet
GSA/Joint Use	20,000 Square Feet
Occupiable Area	465,000 Square Feet

**Parking**

Secure parking	366 Spaces
Staff Parking	426 Spaces
User/Visitor Parking	1,251 Spaces
Total	2,043 Spaces

**Structure**

Steel Frame Building  
Precast Concrete Garage

**Mechanical**

Central Air Handling Located in the Basement and in the Penthouse

**Exterior Wall**

Granite  
White Coated Aluminum Panels  
White Coated Window Mullions  
Clear Low-E Insulating Glass

**Interior Public Space Finishes**

Granite and Painted Wallboard

**Courtroom Levels**

**Corridors:** Granite Floors, Painted Wallboard and Granite Walls

**Courtrooms:** Wood Paneling

**Chambers:** Wood Paneling and Painted Wallboard





**BIOGRAPHIES:  
THE ARCHITECT AND THE ARTIST**

**Richard Meier** received his architectural training at Cornell University and established his own office in New York City in 1963. Since that time, his firm's practice has encompassed major civic commissions such as courthouses and city halls in the United States and Europe, museums, corporate headquarters, and housing and private residences. He has received the highest honors in the field including the Pritzker Prize for Architecture, the Gold Medals of the American Institute of Architects and the Royal Institute of British Architects as well as the Praemium Imperiale from the Japan Art Association. Among his most well-known projects are the acclaimed Getty Center in Los Angeles, the Church of the Year 2000 in Rome, the High Museum in Atlanta, the Barcelona Museum of Contemporary Art, the Frankfurt Museum for Decorative Arts, Canal+ Television Headquarters in Paris, and the City Hall and Central Library in The Hague. In addition to the United States Courthouse and Federal Building in Central Islip, Mr. Meier is also the architect of the Sandra Day O'Connor United States Courthouse in Phoenix, Arizona.

**Elyn Zimmerman's** sculpture ranges in scale from studio pieces to large scale, site-specific projects. She is best known for the use of stone, often in association with landscape elements and water features such as reflecting pools and fountains. In public projects, her primary interest is to create a sense of *place*. Some of her large-scale projects include: a fountain in New York City to memorialize the World Trade Center bombing; the design of the sculpture garden at the Birmingham Museum of Art in Alabama; the fountain and seating area for AT&T's headquarters in New Jersey; the plaza and pool at the National Geographic headquarters in Washington, DC; and a recently completed plaza project in Bridgeport, Connecticut, for a community college. She was born in Philadelphia, and earned both a Bachelor's and Master's in art at UCLA. She has lived in New York City and Columbia County, New York, since 1980. She exhibits with the Gagosian Gallery.



## THE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION TEAM

### **Owner**

U.S. General Services Administration  
Regional Office: New York, NY

### **Architects**

Richard Meier & Partners  
New York, NY

The Spector Group  
North Hills, NY

### **General Contractor**

Turner Construction  
New York, NY

### **Construction Quality Management**

Bovis Lend Lease  
New York, NY

### **Construction Quality Field Inspection**

Cole Consulting  
Elmsford, NY

### **Structural Engineers**

Ysrael A. Senuik, PC  
New York, NY

### **Mechanical, Electrical & Plumbing**

Syska & Hennessey  
New York, NY

### **Civil & Site Engineers**

Nelson & Pope  
Melville, NY

### **Curtain Wall Design Consultant**

R. A. Heintges  
New York, NY

### **Lighting Consultant**

Fisher Marantz Stone Partners  
New York, NY

### **Signage/Graphic**

Vignelli Associates  
New York, NY

### **Vertical Transportation**

Lerch Bates & Associates  
Littleton, CO

### **Fire & Life Safety**

Rolf Jensen & Associates, Inc  
New York, NY

### **Acoustical Engineer**

Shen Milson & Wilke  
New York, NY

### **Landscape Architects**

Michel & Associates  
Glen Cove, NY

### **Courts Programming Consultant**

Walter Sobel  
Chicago, IL

### **Courts Microprogramming, Furniture Acquisition & Move Management**

Ricci Associates  
New York, NY

### **Security Consultant**

Systech Group, Inc  
Reston, VA

### **Geotechnical Engineer**

Mueser Rutledge  
New York, NY

### **Cost Consultant**

Scharf-Godfrey Inc  
New York, NY

### **Value Engineering**

Project Management Services, Inc  
Rockville, MD

### **Concrete Consultant**

Reginald Hough  
New York, NY



**U.S. GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
AND THE DESIGN EXCELLENCE PROGRAM**

*Public buildings are part of a nation's legacy. They are symbolic of what Government is about, not just places where public business is conducted.*

The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) is responsible for providing work environments and all the products and services necessary to make these environments healthy and productive for Federal employees and cost-effective for the American taxpayers. As builder for the Federal civilian Government and steward of many of our nation's most valued architectural treasures that house Federal employees, GSA is committed to preserving and adding to America's architectural and artistic legacy.

GSA established the Design Excellence Program in 1994 to change the course of public architecture in the Federal Government. Under this program, administered by the Office of the Chief Architect, GSA has engaged many of the finest architects, designers, engineers, and artists working in America today to design the future landmarks of our nation. Through collaborative partnerships, GSA is implementing the goals of the 1962 Guiding

Principles for Federal Architecture: (1) producing facilities that reflect the dignity, enterprise, vigor, and stability of the Federal Government, emphasizing designs that embody the finest contemporary architectural thought; (2) avoiding an official style; and (3) incorporating the work of living artists in public buildings. In this effort, each building is to be both an individual expression of design excellence and part of a larger body of work representing the best that America's designers and artists can leave to later generations.

To find the best, most creative talent, the Design Excellence Program has simplified the way GSA selects architects and engineers for construction and major renovation projects and opened up opportunities for emerging talent, small, small disadvantaged, and women-owned businesses. The Program recognizes and celebrates the creativity and diversity of the American people.

The United States Courthouse and Federal Building in Central Islip, New York, was designed and constructed under the GSA Design Excellence Program.



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