

UNITED STATES COURTHOUSE

Montgomery, Alabama



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The plan of the courthouse is a great arc. Functionally, this configuration allows both courtrooms and judges' chambers to have natural light. But perhaps more significantly, as an architectural strategy, this showcases, rather than upstages, the existing Beaux Arts courthouse. And from an urban design perspective, it defines the plaza — a distinctive civic space that marks an historic intersection in the city's layout.

Lee Sims, Architect
Barganier Davis Sims Architects Associated





CREATING A PLACE IN AN HISTORIC URBAN FABRIC

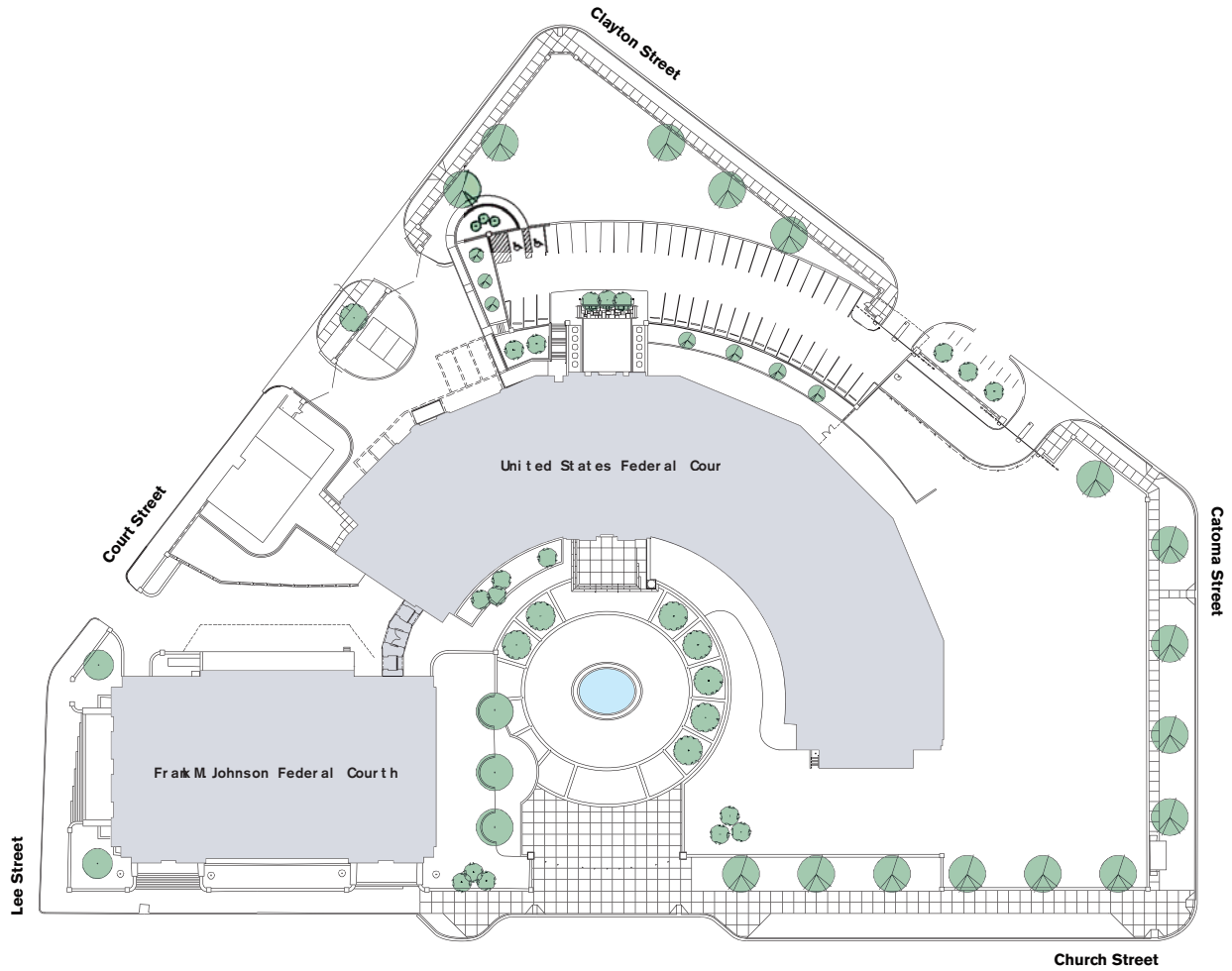
The United States Courthouse in Montgomery, Alabama, is a public edifice that explores the nexus between long-respected traditions in architecture and art and contemporary design. The building sits on a triangular site at the intersection of two grids that are major features of the city's urban history. "East Alabama" was laid out very practically in 1819 with streets parallel and perpendicular to the Alabama River. About the same time, another community—"New Philadelphia"—was developed further inland with a grid oriented to the cardinal points of the compass. The two systems meet at a 45-degree angle, and the new courthouse is a monumental civic building at the apex of this convergence.

The plan of the courthouse is a broad arc embracing a paved elliptical plaza over 200 feet in diameter. A granite pool—graced with a stainless steel sculpted head of Themis, the ancient Greek goddess of Justice—marks the center of the space and entry axis. The eastern side of the plaza is defined by the Frank M. Johnson, Jr., Federal Building and United States Courthouse, a Beaux Arts building constructed in 1932. A row of maple trees and band of

grass soften the edges of the open space and the surrounding architecture.

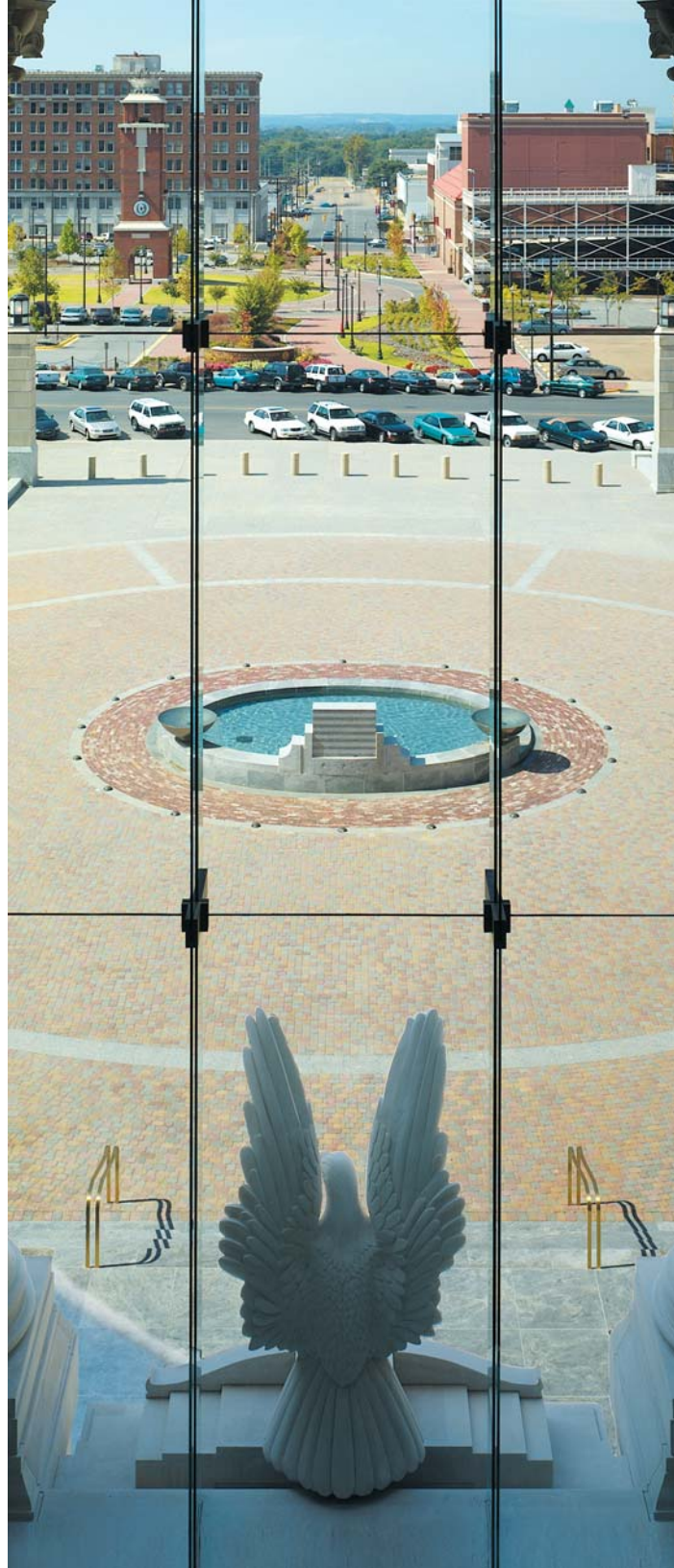
From the lobby and public corridors on the upper floors of the new courthouse, visitors have a view north over the pool, past two great piers that denote the plaza entrance, and down Molton Street (part of which was closed to create a site large enough for the courthouse). The culmination of this five-block vista is Montgomery's Civic Center, an historic railway station, and the Alabama River. In many ways, this new courthouse establishes the focus missing in the old urban plans, a place that, as the decades pass, aspires to become both a magnet and a model of future civic development.

In blending times past with the present and times to come, the site is also important in the story of the battle to end segregation in the United States. One of the significant events in the history of civil rights took place at the Greyhound bus terminal located behind the Johnson courthouse. In 1961, a group of African-American and white demonstrators, calling themselves the Freedom Riders, left Washington, DC, in



Site Plan





buses headed for New Orleans in a journey through the South in support of integration. When the buses crossed the Alabama line seventeen days into the trip, they were stopped by angry mobs. Eventually, with a police escort, they continued to Montgomery. Two blocks before they arrived at the bus station, however, the police disappeared, and 200 whites—wielding baseball bats, bottles, and lead pipes—attacked the buses. A riot broke out and 21 people were injured in what became a violent, highly publicized end to the Freedom Riders' journey.

Today, a portion of the Greyhound bus terminal is being restored to memorialize the event and honor the courage of the Freedom Riders. It is also noteworthy that Frank M. Johnson, Jr., the namesake of the older courthouse and a District judge appointed by President Eisenhower in 1955, ordered the desegregation of Montgomery's buses, public libraries, museum, and parks. The area around the Greyhound building is being landscaped, and the entire site, including the open space, the original courthouse, the new courthouse, and the bus terminal, stands

as a reminder of key moments in history and a tribute to the bravery and sacrifice sometimes required to make justice a reality.







In the hearts and minds of the judges in Montgomery, Alabama, the Frank M. Johnson, Jr., Federal Building and United States Courthouse is a special place architecturally. Understanding those sentiments and knowing this building would be on the same site, we sought to embody that same richness and style in the new courthouse, not with trite post-modern allusions but with a genuine respect for the materiality and design strategies of the past.

Lee Sims, Architect
Barganier Davis Sims Architects Associated





WE, THE PEOPLE OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, IN ORDER TO FORM A MORE
PERFECT UNION, ESTABLISH JUSTICE, INSURE DOMESTIC TRANQUILITY, PROVIDE
FOR THE COMMON DEFENSE, PROMOTE THE GENERAL WELFARE, AND SECURE THE
BLESSINGS OF LIBERTY TO OURSELVES AND OUR POSTERITY, DO ORDAIN AND
ESTABLISH THIS CONSTITUTION FOR THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.

CLASSICAL TRADITIONS — CONTEMPORARY SPACE

Balance is the architectural theme of the Montgomery courthouse. Echoing the imagery and dignity of Federal buildings as they have appeared so often since the founding of the nation, the façade of this structure has a Classical profile. The walls are clad in limestone. Pilasters frame the carefully proportioned window bays. Columns and a subtle three-dimensional layering of planes announce the entrance. A cornice marks the building's main volume. At the same time, the curved plan, the chaste detailing, and the expansive, three-story tall atrium window looking over the plaza are strikingly modern.

The entry sequence is characterized by similar juxtapositions. The first impressions are solemn and monumental. People move across the plaza toward large bronze and glass doors. These are framed in stone and crowned by an eagle with large wings poised to fly (a sculpture by artist William Galloway). Passing through this stately threshold, the 15-foot tall vestibule is quite intimate and includes an array of architectural ornament—elaborately stenciled beams (painted by the architect/artist David Keith Braly), pink sandstone piers,

an ochre-colored wall with a classically-lettered quote from the preamble of the Constitution, and a bronze grill that acts as a veil between the entrance and the procession to the main floor. Past security—which is discretely tucked to one side of the vestibule—visitors take a broad staircase to a landing with a view across the back of the site. Continuing, they move up to a grand, three-story atrium. Here, beneath a coffered ceiling painted with oversized renderings (also by Braly) of rosettes, magnolias, and a Japanese camellia (Alabama's state flower), patrons can survey Montgomery's skyline and walk to the courtrooms down light-filled galleries that overlook the plaza.

There is a clear hierarchy in the spatial organization of the building. The ground and basement levels are assigned to court-related offices. The second floor is, in a sense, a "piano nobile" dedicated to the six District courtrooms. The third so-called "collegial floor" is devoted to judges' chambers, while the fourth and fifth floors are home to the Magistrate and Bankruptcy courtrooms. All judges' chambers, the District courtrooms, and major public

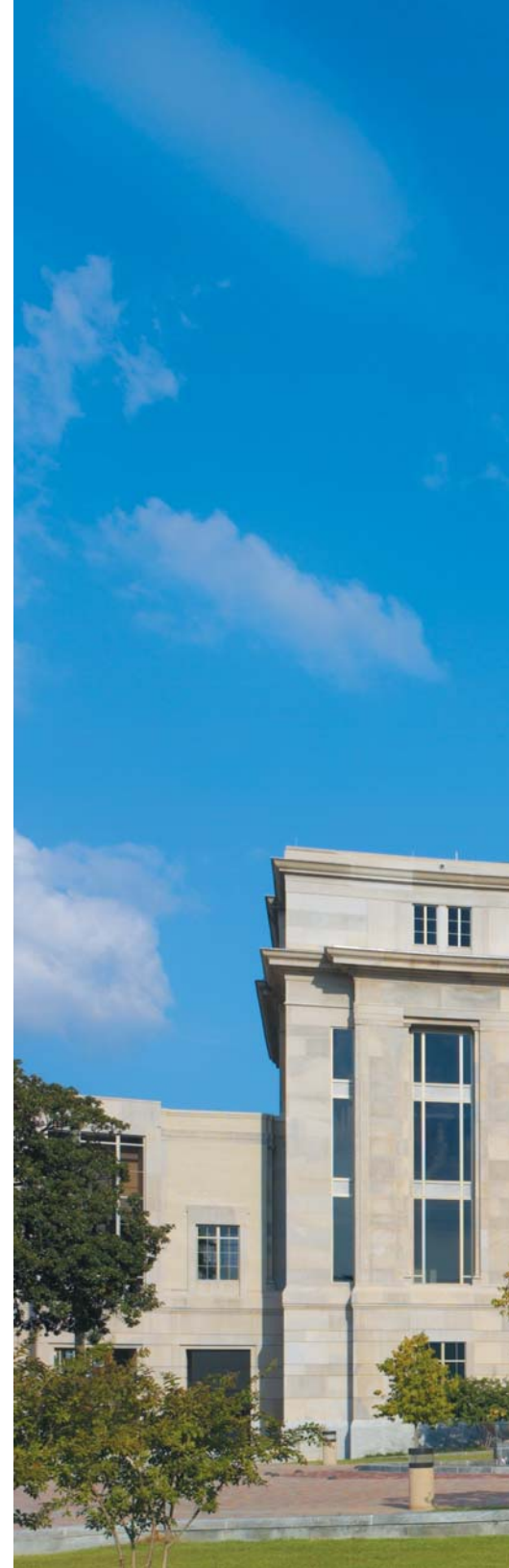
circulation enjoy natural light and an orientation either to the plaza on one side or to the landscaped hill on the opposite side of the building.

The courthouse uses many traditional building materials. Exterior walls are limestone. Floors in the public spaces are terrazzo, marble, and limestone. The courtrooms have cherry paneling and dark wood furniture. Functionally, however, the building is modern, efficient, and well organized. There are separate circulation systems for the public, prisoners, and judges, and the design incorporates up-to-date communications technologies and security features. In the final analysis, the United States Courthouse in Montgomery, Alabama, using a long-respected architectural vocabulary, is an enduring symbol of justice that, in its layout and infrastructure, fully responds to contemporary realities.



I see my work as forging a union between the rich detail, order, and proportions of Classicism and the clean lines and simplicity of Modernism. In this context, for Montgomery, my goal has been to design a courthouse that both thoughtfully and creatively moves tradition into the next century.

Lee Sims, Architect
Barganier Davis Sims Architects Associated







RESPECTING PRECEDENT

Just as precedent is essential to the practice of law, it is also evident in the design of this Federal courthouse. Many elements of the new building are modeled after the Johnson structure. They are both Classical with limestone walls and a common cornice line. The heights of columns and pilasters are the same, and the proportions of openings are similar. There are some differences. The Beaux Arts building is heavily rusticated with arched ground-level entrances; the new building is one story taller and more leanly detailed with a rectangular entrance. The one plan is orthogonal, while the other is curvilinear. Still, overall, the two buildings are remarkably alike in their style, scale, and sense of refinement.

Several smaller features reinforce the large-scale parallels. The bronze grill in the lobby of the new courthouse actually came from the former Post Office area of the Johnson courthouse. Stenciled beams in the older building's District courtroom inspired a similar treatment for the new lobby. Three-dimensional rosettes in the main halls of the older courthouse were the reference for the painted floral motifs in the coffers of the atrium, and the limestone eagles over

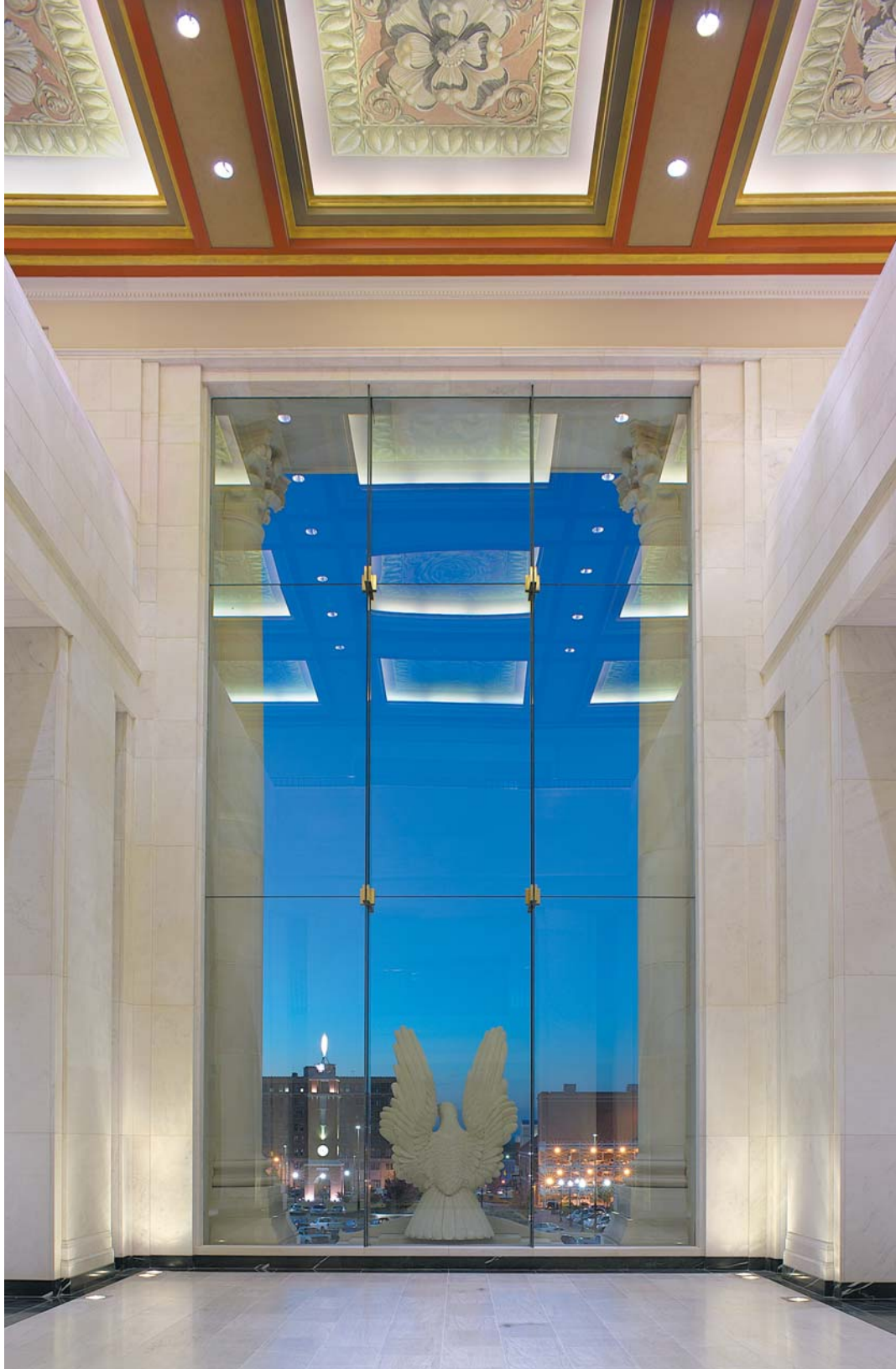
each of the Johnson building entrances reinforced the decision to place a dramatically sculpted eagle above the new courthouse entrance portal.

There are even stronger relationships between old and new in the designs for the courtrooms. In the Johnson building, the District judge's bench is elevated and sits in a niche with pilasters to the sides and an arched wall decorated with gold stars on a deep blue background. It is an arrangement much admired by current judges and one handsomely reinterpreted by architect/artist David Keith Braly in the new District courtrooms. Each has a shallow niche behind the bench. Replicating the older scheme, pilasters mark the sides of this space. Within the niche arch, the wall is detailed with 50 stars and 13 alternating dark and light stripes. Under the arch, there is a painted medallion surmounted by a "lamp of wisdom" and supported by a column capital. To the left there are olive branches—symbolizing peace and mercy—and to the right there is a fascis—the Roman symbol of authority. A Latin phrase is inscribed on the capital with each of the five District courtrooms having its own motto, words

taken from the five main entrances of the Johnson building: “Pro Bono Publico” (for the good of the people), “Regnant Populi” (the people shall rule), “Festina Lente” (make haste slowly), “Favete Linguis” (hold your tongue), and “Macte Virtute” (well done!). These beautifully crafted adornments give each courtroom a distinctive character, a quality missing in many other modern courthouses.

In the sixth District/Special Proceedings courtroom, the niche is faced with Tennessee Valley limestone, and instead of the arch and painted wall, the judicial seal is inscribed into the stone blocks. While not literally tied to a particular precedent, this detail typifies the thoughtful synthesis of the traditional and the contemporary.









ART IN ARCHITECTURE

Art has always been an important feature of great architecture. For the United States Courthouse in Montgomery, Alabama, artist Clyde Lynds has created a sculptural fountain as the urban focus of the entrance plaza.

Objective

Sculptural Fountain in the Center of the Entrance Plaza

Clyde Lynds

As the title suggests, the work visualizes a primary tenet of the American judicial system. The design embodies both traditional and contemporary qualities. The figural elements and forms allude to the Beaux Arts era, long-associated with courthouses in the United States, but the sculpture and simple lines of the composition are quite modern. A sculpted head of Themis, the ancient Greek goddess of Justice, is in the center of a low granite wall that rises along the side of an oval pool. Themis's face expresses confident equanimity and benevolent strength while her features are deliberately universalized, an allegorical representation of objectivity in the administration of the law. The face, approximately two feet high, is cast in

in the administration of the law. The face, approximately two feet high, is cast in relief from stainless steel. It emerges from a plane of thirteen stainless steel stripes that symbolize the American flag. Lynds distinguishes these alternating bands by using two different finishes, one matte and one highly polished. One of the bands extends over Themis's eyes to form a blindfold, the traditional expression of impartiality. By fusing Justice's blindfold with the flag, the implication is that our judicial system is closely allied with our national identity. Scales are another symbol of justice that is depicted unconventionally. The artist replaces the traditional suspended plates with two large, simple, stainless steel bowls, from which water cascades into the pool. As it was in ancient times, the fountain is a focal point in the urban landscape, a visual marker for the building, and a thoughtful comment on the activities that occur within.

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 in Montgomery, Alabama, is located on a 5.4-acre triangular site with the front of the building facing Church Street to the northwest and the back bounded by Court Street to the east and Clayton Street to the south. The two lower corners of the triangle are cut off by Lee Street (to the northeast) and Catoma Street (to the southwest). The triangular parcel was formed by closing Molton Street, which ran through the middle of the site. The structure's arc-shaped plan creates an urban plaza at a key location in Montgomery's historic downtown, and the courthouse's atrium and public galleries look across this public open space past Troy State University and the Civic Center to the Alabama River.

The building is 90 feet tall with 291,000 square feet of space. Beyond offices for various court-related functions, it accommodates 14 courtrooms: six District courtrooms (including the Special Proceedings courtroom), four Magistrate courtrooms, and four Bankruptcy courtrooms. There are chambers for 14 judges. Chambers for the District judges are located on an interstitial floor above the lobbies to the District courtrooms and are connected to those

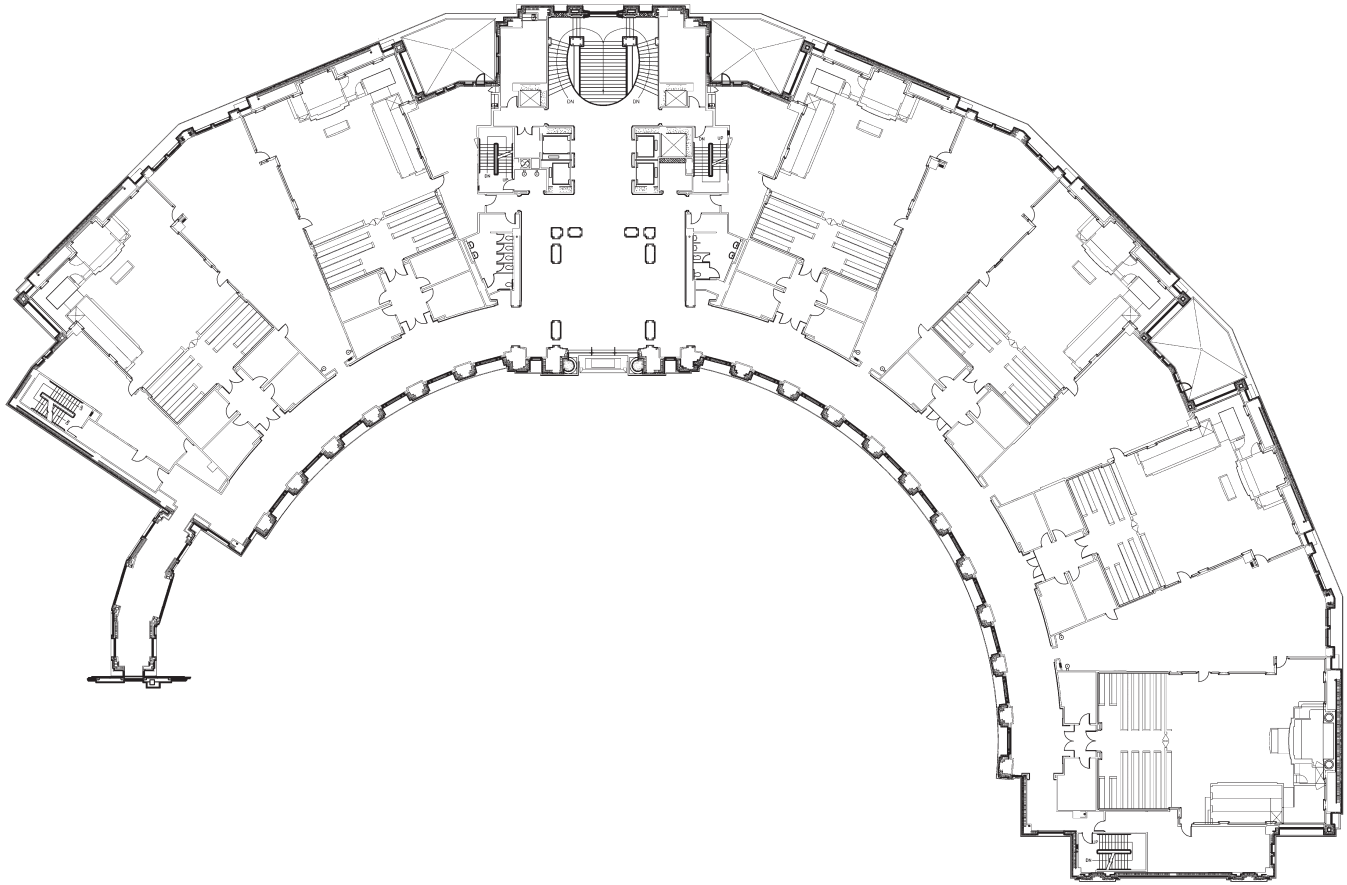
courtrooms via secured stairs and elevators. This interstitial floor also contains a handsome two-story, cherry-paneled judicial conference room. In the future, office spaces can be redesigned to accommodate four additional courtrooms and, if necessary, a bay can be added to the courthouse on the northwest.

Although equipped with the latest audio-visual and digital technologies, the configuration of courtrooms is traditional. The entry and public seating are opposite the judge's bench, and the jury box is to the side. Ceilings are coffered with spot lights to accent key areas and architectural details. The District courtrooms are graced with semi-circular, white glass pendant lamps. Doors, paneling, and furniture are cherry wood.

The entrance and atrium are highlighted with sunset blush sandstone, painted ceilings, and a restored bronze screen recovered from the Frank M. Johnson, Jr., Federal Building and United States Courthouse. Floors are Tennessee Valley limestone with verde marble baseboards. The building is clad in limestone with light bronze finish window frames. The plaza is paved with brick and granite trim.

The building has 97 secured parking spaces reserved exclusively for the use of tenants. Separate banks of elevators serve each of the courthouse's primary users—the public, judges, and prisoners. A bridge connects the new and old courthouses at the second and third levels.





Second Floor Plan





Building Section

Location

A 5.4-acre parcel of land located in Montgomery's historic downtown bounded by Court, Clayton, Catoma, Church, and Lee Streets.

Size

291,000 Gross Square Feet
90 Feet High
6 Floors plus Below-Grade Parking

Time Frame

Concept Design Initiated: May 1994
Construction Starts: June 1997
Occupancy: June 2002

Major Building Components

Total Rentable Space: 263,100 Square Feet
U.S. Courts: 223,700 Square Feet

Parking

Interior: 52 Spaces
Exterior: 45 Spaces
Service: 3 Loading Docks

Structure

Reinforced concrete frame

Mechanical

Variable air volume with central boiler and chiller plant supplying both buildings

Exterior Walls

Concrete masonry units with limestone veneer

Public Area Interior Finishes

Entrance: Indiana limestone, Alabama and verde marble floors; limestone and sandstone base; sandstone and painted veneer plaster walls; hand-stenciled and painted coffered ceiling. Indiana limestone and sandstone monumental staircase with custom bronze handrail.

Atrium: Indiana limestone and verde marble floors; painted veneer plaster walls with three-story structural glass wall; limestone and verde marble base; limestone-clad columns; ceiling with artist-painted murals in the coffer recesses.

Galleries: two-color terrazzo floors; limestone and verde marble base; limestone surrounds at courtroom entries; painted veneer plaster walls; painted veneer plaster ceilings with an articulated, cove-lighted oculus at each courtroom entry.

Courtrooms: custom carpet on raised flooring system; stained cherry-wood base, wainscoting, jury and spectator rails; fabric wrapped acoustical panels between painted veneer plaster pilasters with plaster mouldings; custom-designed cherry-wood judge's and clerk's benches with limestone and verde marble base; custom-designed and painted murals behind the judge's bench within a plaster moulding ringed recess—each mural specially designed for the sitting judge. Veneer plaster coffered ceiling with concealed-spine tile system.



BIOGRAPHIES:

THE ARCHITECT AND THE ARTIST

Lee Sims is the principal in charge of design and lead designer for governmental and institutional projects at Barganier Davis Sims in Montgomery, Alabama. His design philosophy embodies a marriage of Classicism and Modernism. In his own words: "Architectural design, especially civic design, must convey a sense of purpose and dignity at the same time that it celebrates technological achievement in terms of function, structure, and use of materials. This balance is achieved by emphasizing the overall ordering of design elements while responding to the constraints of a project's site, program, and budget." Sims' commissions include the new Supreme Court/Judicial Building for the State of Alabama in Montgomery, a fine and performing arts center for the University of Alabama in Tuscaloosa, the historic rehabilitation of 2601 Parkway—a circa 1940 apartment building adjacent to the Philadelphia Arts Museum, the master planning and expansion of the University of Alabama Law Center originally designed by Edward Durell Stone in 1974, and a proposed mixed-use development along Montgomery's downtown riverfront. He is active in many professional and civic organizations. He has taught design at

Auburn University and his firm, Barganier Davis Sims, has been honored with numerous awards from the Alabama chapter of the American Institute of Architects (including its "25 Year" award) and the International Interior Design Association.

Clyde Lynds is best known for his distinctive artwork that uses optic fibers in cast stone to create sculptures with constantly changing light programs. He lives and works in New Jersey. Lynds has exhibited internationally in Japan, Europe, and North America, and his work is in the collections of many museums. His commissions include a plaza incorporating a large fountain and sculpture for the New Jersey State Capitol, as well as works for many universities and corporations. He has completed four other GSA installations: the Foley Square Federal Building in New York City; the IRS Computing Center in Kearneysville, West Virginia; the Nogales East Border Station in Arizona; and the Veterans Administration Building in Philadelphia. Each of these works incorporates optic fibers. The sculptures, which initially appear to be solid stone, present a constantly changing surface as the points of light create shifting patterns.

THE DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION TEAM

Owner

U.S. General Services Administration
Regional Office: Atlanta, GA

Design Architects

Barganier Davis Sims Architects Associated
Montgomery, AL

Associate Architect — Interiors and Security

Spillis, Candela & Partners
West Palm Beach, FL

Contractor

Clark Construction
Bethesda, MD

Construction Quality Management

Heery International
Atlanta, GA

Structural Engineer

Lane Bishop York Delahay
Birmingham, AL

Civil Engineer

Sherlock Smith & Adams
Montgomery, AL

Mechanical Engineer

Edmonds CHN/Engineering
Birmingham, AL

Electrical and Plumbing Engineer

Henson Engineering
Birmingham, AL

Court Consultant

Space Management Consultants
Beverly Hills, CA

Fire Protection/Life Safety

Rolf Jensen & Associates
Houston, TX

Vertical Transportation

Braun Elevator Consultants
Winter Park, FL

Lighting

Colorlume
Chapel Hill, NC

Acoustics

Joiner Associates
Arlington, TX

Geo-Technical

Christian Testing Laboratories
Montgomery, AL



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 American 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 in Montgomery, Alabama, was designed and constructed during the initial development of the GSA Design Excellence Program.

