

Breaking out of the existing box, new skylights, aglow at night, give the building a dynamic presence (top). Daly Genik "exploded" a stairway from the main volume (bottom).



Daly Genik turns an aircraft-testing wind tunnel into a dynamic structure, inaugurating ART CENTER COLLEGE OF DESIGN's new campus

By Joseph Giovannini

Marcel Duchamp famously put a signature on a urinal, transforming a found object into a work of art suitable for displaying. But at Art Center College of Design, in Pasadena, California, the objet trouvé for architects Daly Genik was a wind tunnel. For the first structure of the school's fledgling South Campus, the Santa Monica architects transformed a huge World War II-era artifact into a building suitable for making art.

Art Center, best known for producing the world's foremost car designers, has long occupied a building by Craig Ellwood: a svelte, Miesian, bridgelike structure that spans a gully in the Linda Vista hills above Pasadena. Embodying a pristine, idealized vision of architectural beauty, this essentially classical building in bucolic seclusion represents the Modernist version of the ivory tower.

Art Center's president, Richard Koshalek, a former director of the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art, has long embraced architecture's potential to define and shape institutions. From the outset of his term as president, five years ago, he launched a building program that would take the college off the hill and into the community, engaging a broader and more visible public forum—while pivoting the institution invitingly toward Cal Tech, its crosstown colleague.

The new South Campus was predicated on a curriculum primarily of night extension courses, with a graduate fine arts program and various forms of academic and community outreach. Here, the wind tunnel—originally constructed to test airplane aerodynamics—stood amid vacant industrial buildings in a once neglected area of the city. The 90,000-square-foot, \$18.8 million adaptive reuse project, as Daly Genik envisioned it, would shift Art Center's image from the polished, self-contained box on the hill toward the unfinished character of an exposed concrete armature, open to continual change and reinterpretation. In essence, the concept favored the raw over the cooked.

In its new public role, the building would need a strong street presence, requiring more than a passive cleanup of the self-contained and massive volume. Confronting the wind tunnel's enclosed form, Daly Genik proceeded by subtraction. After forensic structural analysis, the team cut windows and skylights into the thick concrete walls and roof, bringing light into classrooms and studios while breaking open the box to make the program visible and animate the street. In rendering the exte-

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As documented in this historic photograph, the turbine was removed from the wind-tunnel building for a rare cleaning.

rior more porous, the architects recast the building's nighttime profile. "We wanted a certain amount of light to escape as beacons," says Kevin Daly, AIA, "letting skylights and signage make the building glow."

With consultant Bruce Mau, a Canadian graphic designer, who often collaborates with architects, Daly Genik developed perforated-stainless-steel screens for signage, and designed the sculptural pneumatic skylights that zigzag across much of the roof. The skylights comprise twin layers of a Teflon-coated polymer imprinted with sun-protecting graphic patterns that shift in and out of register as temperature sensors expand and deflate the space in between the polymer membranes. The resulting effect ranges in its opacity or transparency, as the facing sheets of pattern modulate the influx of light. With its changing levels of luminosity made graphic, this once monofunctional and nearly monolithic building becomes legible as a public structure.

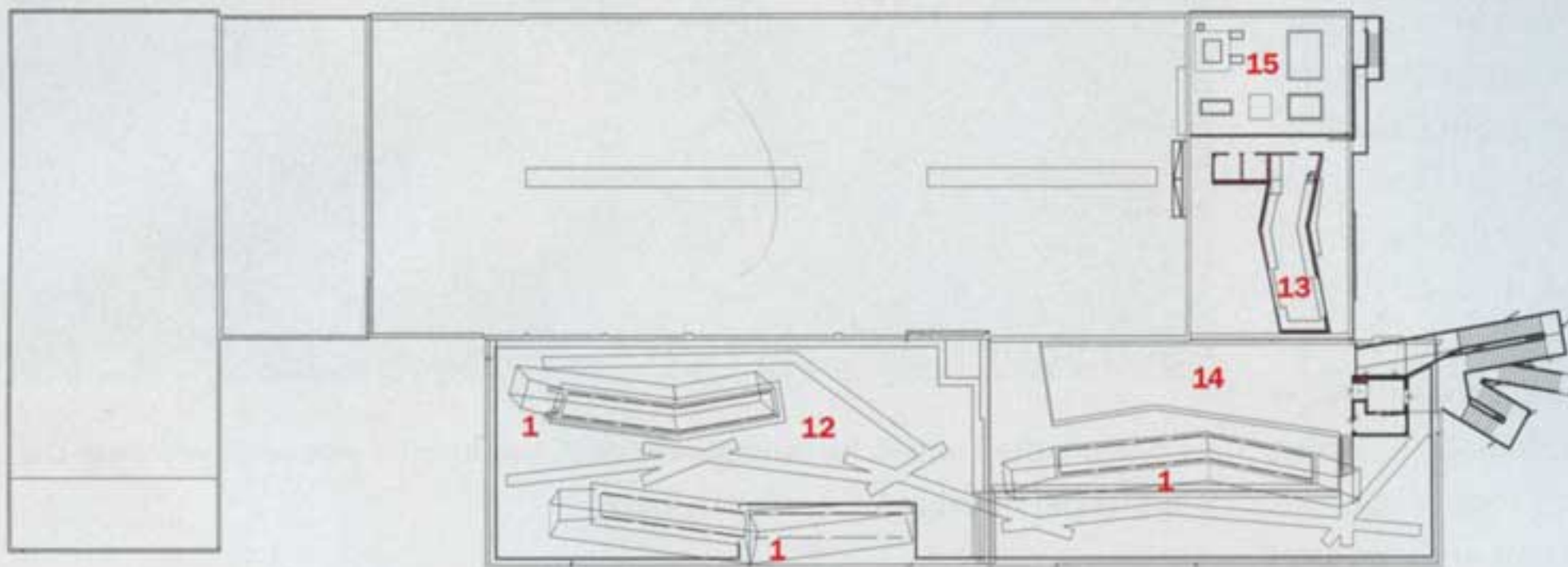
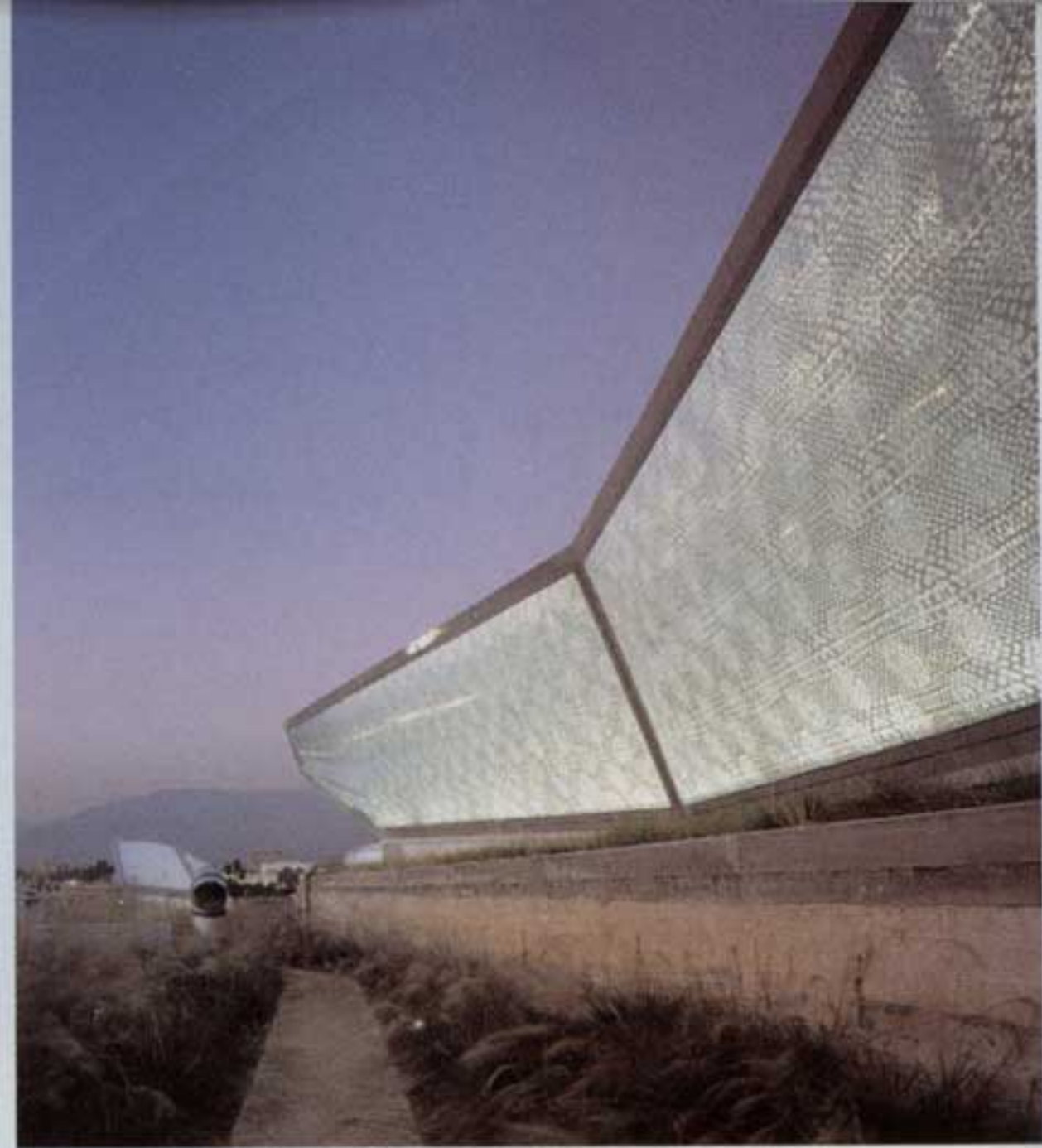
In approaching the existing building, "Richard [Koshalek] sought out opportunities beyond rote program," Daly recalls. "He was fascinated by hidden possibilities: The rooftop, for example, could serve as a quadrangle—with a restaurant or café—becoming a quasi-public place."

Exploiting the overlap between the school as an educational institution and a public venue within Pasadena, the architects made the rooftop an imperative destination by "exploding" the stair from the facade

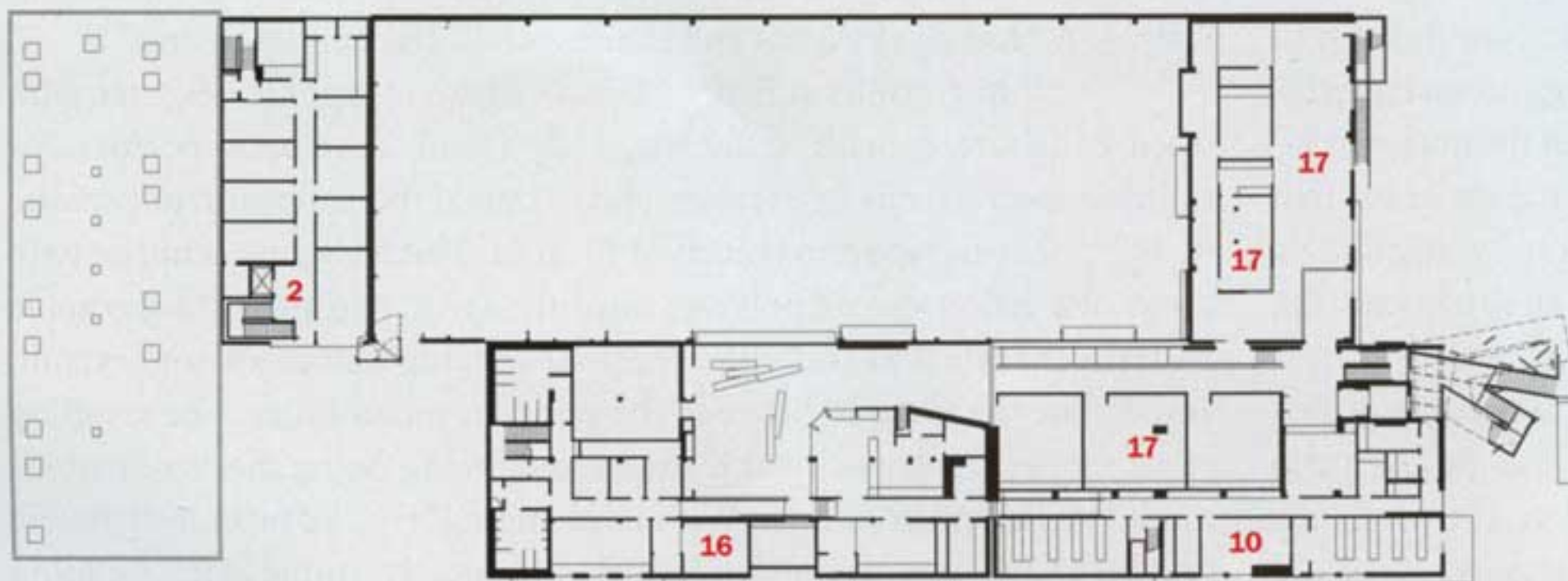
Project: Art Center College of Design South Campus, Pasadena, Calif.

Architect: Daly Genik—Kevin Daly, AIA, principal in charge; Tomaso Bradshaw, project manager; Victor Agran, Susan Benningfield, Krystal

Chang, Jerome Christensen, Ian Ferguson, Christopher Genik, Adela Ho, Josh Kenin, Mi Sum Lim, Brian Rieff, Thomas Robinson, Chia-Hung Wang, Jared Ward, Aaron Welton, Brian Wickersham, project team



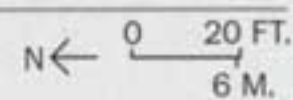
ROOF



SECOND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR



Pneumatic skylights (above right)—zigzagging across the accessible, planted roof—comprise twin layers of a Teflon-coated polymer imprinted with sun-protecting graphic patterns. These patterns shift in and out of

register as temperature sensors expand and deflate the space in between the polymer sheets. The building's interior, free of rigid programming, accepts flux and invites departmental change (above left).

- 1. Skylight
- 2. M.F.A. studios
- 3. Public events space
- 4. Fine arts courtyard
- 5. Video gallery
- 6. Video editing
- 7. Gallery
- 8. Printmaking lab
- 9. Archetype press
- 10. Computer lab
- 11. Design lab
- 12. Roof garden
- 13. Future café
- 14. Plaza
- 15. Mechanical
- 16. Conference
- 17. Administration



While the sculptural forms of the skylights retain a strong presence by day (left), the building transforms itself from its nighttime appearance. Inside, soaring ceiling heights and an abundance of sunlight (below), much of it entering from above, create luminous spaces suitable for art studios.

(much as Frank Gehry, for whom Daly once worked, had done at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles two decades earlier). The steps weave through a huge, now unused elevator shaft originally scaled for airplane parts, and rise to a terrace landscaped by Nancy Goslee Powers, a Santa Monica-based landscape architect, who frequently works on institutional projects. Here, the angular skylights riff through native grasses. The staircase's support columns, reminiscent of chopsticks tossed at random angles, are the only rhetorical excesses in a building otherwise sumptuous in its austerity.

The wind tunnel, a unique found object, gave the architects a powerful starting point. They maintained a respectfully light touch, as they brought out, with sandblasting, the original raw materiality and strong volumes. Daly Genik did not merely clean up the existing structure, politely erasing traces of the firm's hand, but instead added to the building visibly and strategically, charging it with an energy that establishes the new campus as an urban presence. By night, the building glows, and by day, the prominent new angular geometries of the skylights and exterior stairs animate the strong, silent shapes of the older structure.

Ellwood's Art Center campus—despite its universal, Mies-inspired space—remained locked in its rigid classical perfection and impeccable detailing. By contrast, Daly Genik has opened a concrete monolith to create an indeterminate shell. Using the original building as a loose matrix, the architects nested easily changeable and adaptable programs, keeping free space ambiguous and flexible, poised for reinterpretation by successive users. Rather than being read as complete, the interior accepts flux and invites departmental change. Building and program enjoy a loose fit. The collaboration between architect, engineer, graphic artist, and landscape architects did not result in overdesign.

In its unpretentious and frank informality, the scheme provides students with an armature for their own creativity. Removed from the parent structure, which held Art Center captive to its calculated beauty, Daly Genik have established a strong, post-classical paradigm. ■

Sources

Skylight: Foiltec; Super Sky Products

Elevator: Kone

Windows: Miller Metal Specialties;
C.R. Lawrence

Shading: MechoShade

Roofing: Sarnafil, Gaco-Western

(composite green roof system)

Lighting: Prudential Lighting;
B-K Lighting

For more information on this project,
go to Projects at

www.architecturalrecord.com.

