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Roofs that Wander, Lanterns that Levitate [Images that Motivate]

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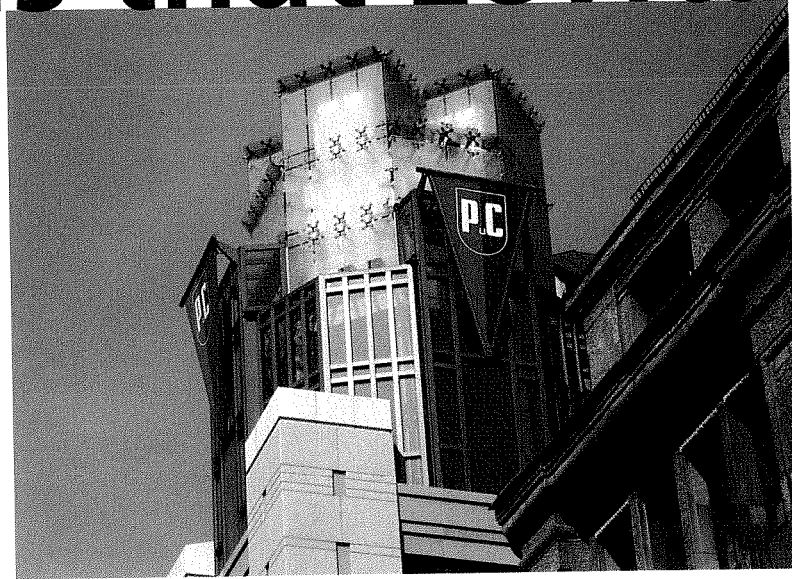
John Ruble

Roofs that Wander,



Potatiså kern housing, Malmö,
Sweden. (Moore Ruble Yudell)

Lanterns that Levitate

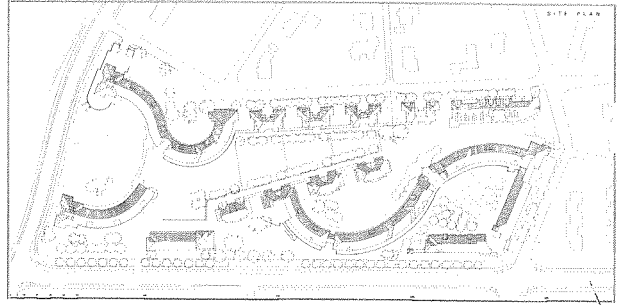


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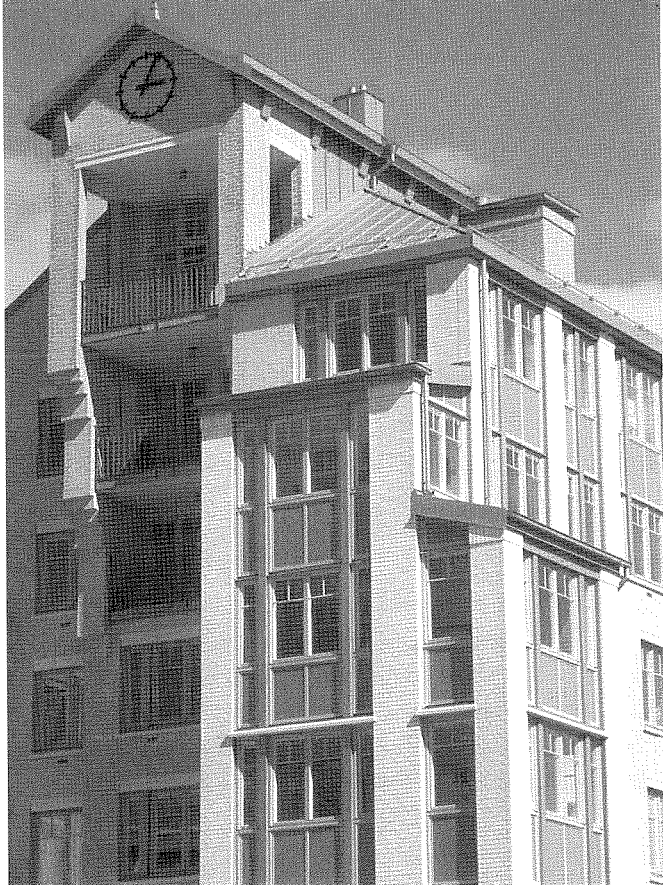
Peek & Cloppenberg store,
Leipzig, Germany.
(Moore Ruble Yudell)

Today we crossed the sound from Copenhagen to Malmö — Öresund, it is called, Golden Sound, a name that must have come from the color of its light and air on a summer day, just like this day. All the way I kept thinking about our last conversation, which had to do with memory palaces, and how their many chambers are held together in the mind. What kinds of images might inform the sequence, the connection?

As you said, the palace itself is the very form that gives the memory a framework, and it probably works because it is not very subtle. You start with an entry hall, then a grand stair to a gallery with niches and pictures, then on to more halls on either side — symmetry helps you remember, doubles your RAM, as it were — and finally onto the wings, adding as many rooms as you need. Palladio is the obvious answer, but could other forms apply?



Potatisåkern housing, Malmö, Sweden. (Moore Ruble Yudell)



When we arrived at Malmö harbor we were greeted by Bertil Öhrström, our Swedish colleague, who took us directly to Potatisåkern — The Potato Fields — to see our housing project, which is nearly complete. Walking through the site, it struck me that the whole design is about movement and connection between places, very much the issue we talked about, and I began to ask what it was that holds the whole collection of gardens and courts together. I have decided that the roofs are playing that role, as, it seems, they often do in our work. At Potatisåkern, the roofs seem to move around on the site so much that they remind me of Charles’s “Paths that Wander.”

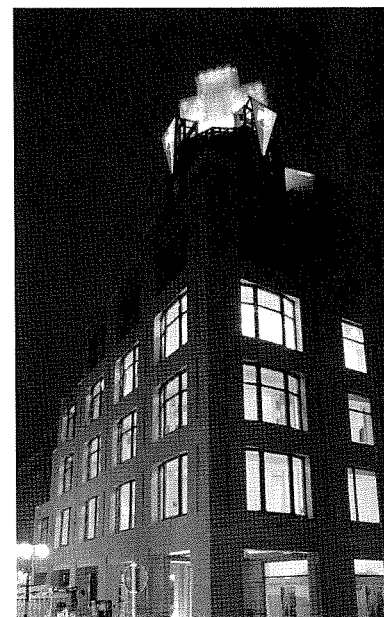
At Potatisåkern there is an interesting dynamic balance between places that have a certain shape and building forms that move around too much to be pinned down. The series of places, no one of which is quite complete, is such that each space leads on to the next one, always leaning over to the next space, eventually taking you out to the surrounding neighborhood. The buildings twist and bend, reach out to grab a corner, or march along in a series, giving shape to gardens and terraces. The roofs, as they’re wandering around on the buildings, really start to take on a life of their own: they don’t seem to know how to stay in their

place. As you can see, they start climbing down onto the sides of the building, as if yearning towards the ground. The weathered zinc connects to and extends the soft blue sky, and the light of Golden Sound is picked up by brick walls of a light ochre.

The rooftops meander around, climbing down the sides, reaching out and becoming houses in and of themselves, trying to form alliances with the yellow bricks coming from the ground up, sometimes getting carried away and making too many chimneys, and generally trying to upstage everything else that’s happening in the building. As they do this, they also lead the eye on a grand tour of the courts, gardens and sky.

Our Peek & Cloppenburg store in Leipzig has a roof-wall complex as well; we liked the copper roof so much that we decided more was better. Bay windows, with their folded copper spandrels and colonettes, drop down the facades to land on limestone walls and buttresses. It all builds up to a corner tower with a glass lantern on top. The nighttime picture shows the Peek & Cloppenburg lantern floating over the street like a still fountain of light.

Leipzig’s old commercial buildings have a spirited, almost civic-minded quality, which is helped by having lots of gold-leaf details. We hope the



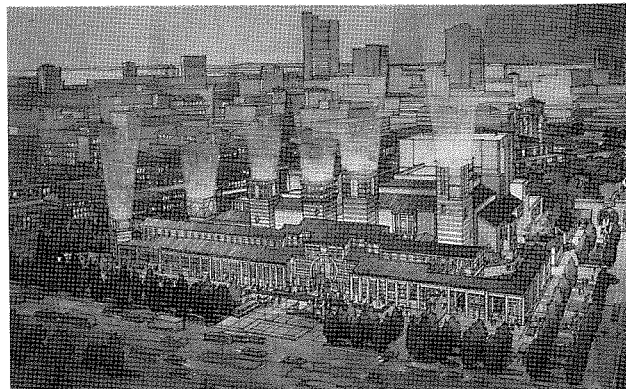
Above: Peek & Cloppenburg store, Leipzig, Germany. (Moore Ruble Yudell)
Above left: Potatisåkern housing, Malmö, Sweden. (Moore Ruble Yudell)

Shanghai Grand Theatre,
competition entry.
(Moore Ruble Yudell).

Peek & Cloppenburg lantern, with its amber-hued light, makes a modern contribution.

The image of the floating lantern reminds me of our competition design for the Shanghai Grand Theatre. The theatre was to be located in Shanghai's new Civic Center, on the site of the old race track. Substantial buildings remain from the pre-war years, when the racing grounds were Shanghai's major social center, but the track itself has been replaced by a park, and the whole area is dominated by the brooding hulk of the new City Hall.

Our proposal for the theater included a full opera house and three other performance halls, standing behind a long vaulted gallery. Here we thought of Chinese gardens, in which you move from one place to another through a moon gate, as if passing between different worlds. From the lobby gallery, theater-goers would cross a narrow garden

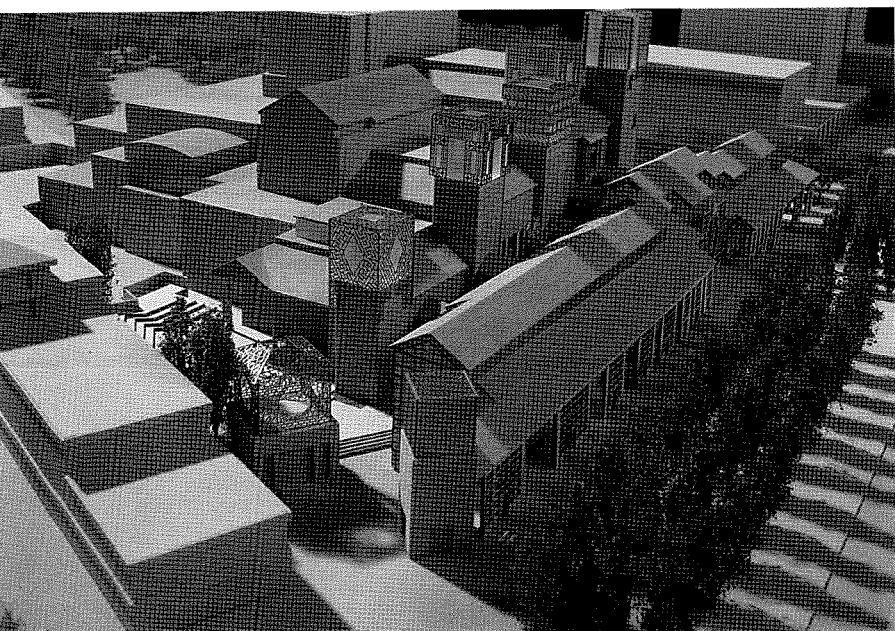


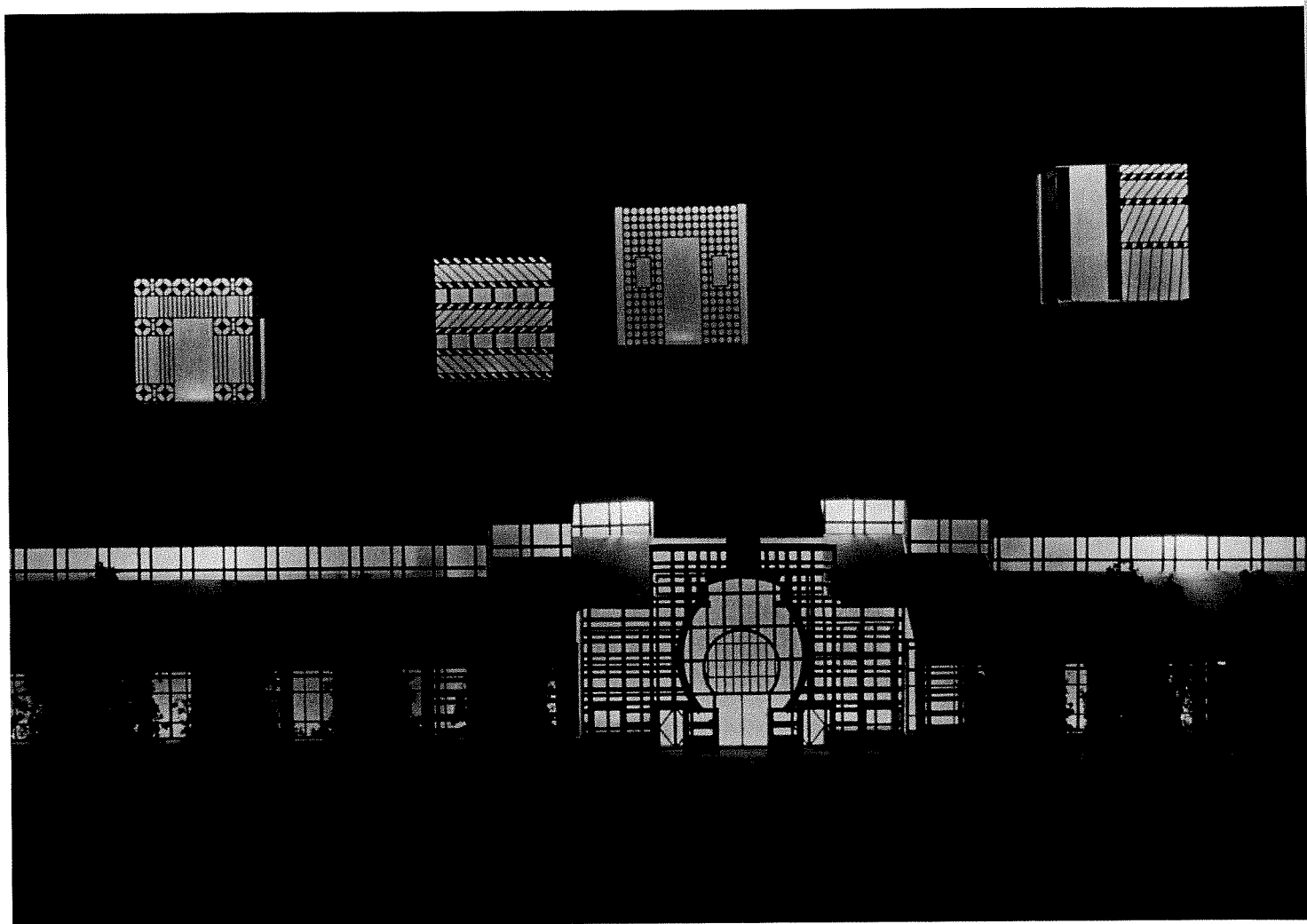
by bridges into each theater space, heightening the sense of leaving the ordinary world behind.

We thought lanterns would provide a sense of festival — an image we all remember from Chinatown — and we decided to make them really big. The glass and steel lanterns are each as big as a house. Mounted on towers at various heights, they seem to float over the gardens, thrusting their beacons up into Shanghai's dusty night sky to announce the theater's place in the city, which is fast becoming a wilderness of dreary new high-rise buildings.

While we didn't win the competition, the intrigues of our two trips to China were an unforgettable experience — enough at least for a teahouse-sized memory palace, or our next chat in the airport lounge.

— JOHN





Shanghai Grand Theatre, competi-
tion entry. (Moore Ruble Yudell).