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# Interiors



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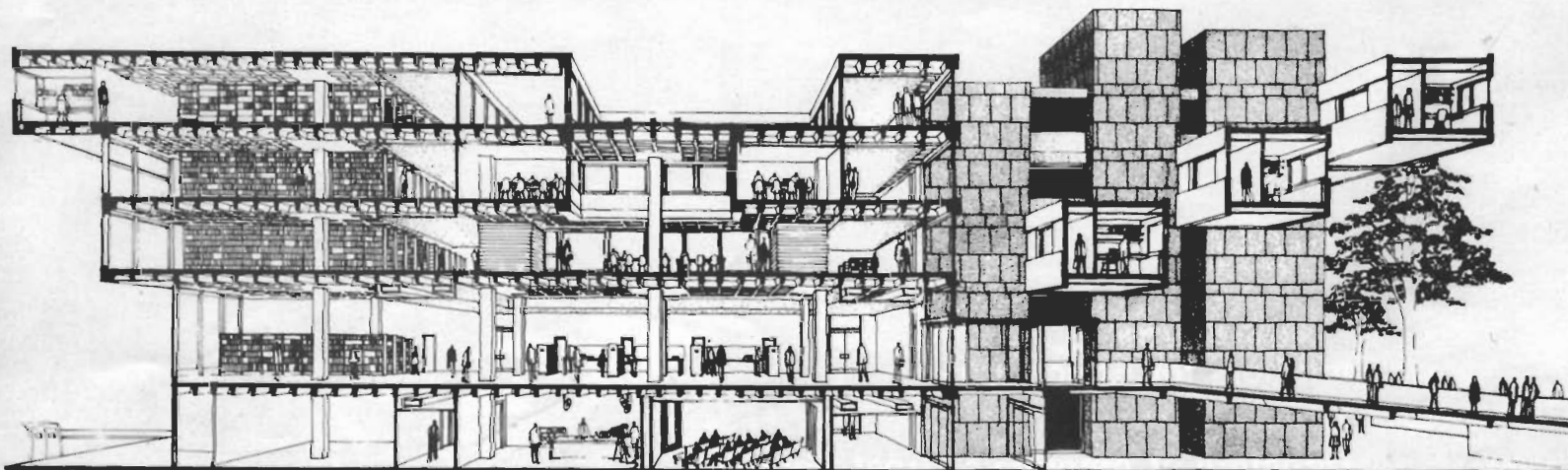
# A banner building

For the Seeley G. Mudd Learning Center at Oberlin College, architects Warner Burns Toan Lunde sustain a low-key ambiance



Listening Room (*top photo and facing page*) where ear phones and turntables are built into table tops. Some outlets connect with college's AV studio. Colorful Stendig cube with seats and backs are augmented with tables and higher units designed by WBTL to give the effect of a multi-level "mountain." Listening Room (*opposite*) is enlivened with banners (5 ft. 7 in. by 54 in.) designed by Gertrude Gray, with colors zig-zag sewn together. Natural light filters down from a clear glass skylight.

Main entrance facade (*left, middle*) has recessed Scholar Studies "bridges," entry ramp, and steps to lower level. Longitudinal section depicts entry, "bridges," and center portion of structure with open court on top, two-story Listening Room under skylight.



The Seeley G. Mudd Learning Center at Oberlin College in Oberlin, Ohio, which opened last September, is in the tradition of Warner Burns Toan Lunde—a highly humanistic building with interiors that sing with light. The use of a palette of bold colors serves for area identification as well as creating a variety of color moods. Basic colors throughout are red, green, and yellow. Wings of each stack floor are all one color—in different values—for the stacks, upholstery, carpet, and graphics.

An abundance of windows and skylights, plus a variety of artificial illumination, adds a lively cadence—as the colorful banners in the Listening Room lounge do (*cover and below*).

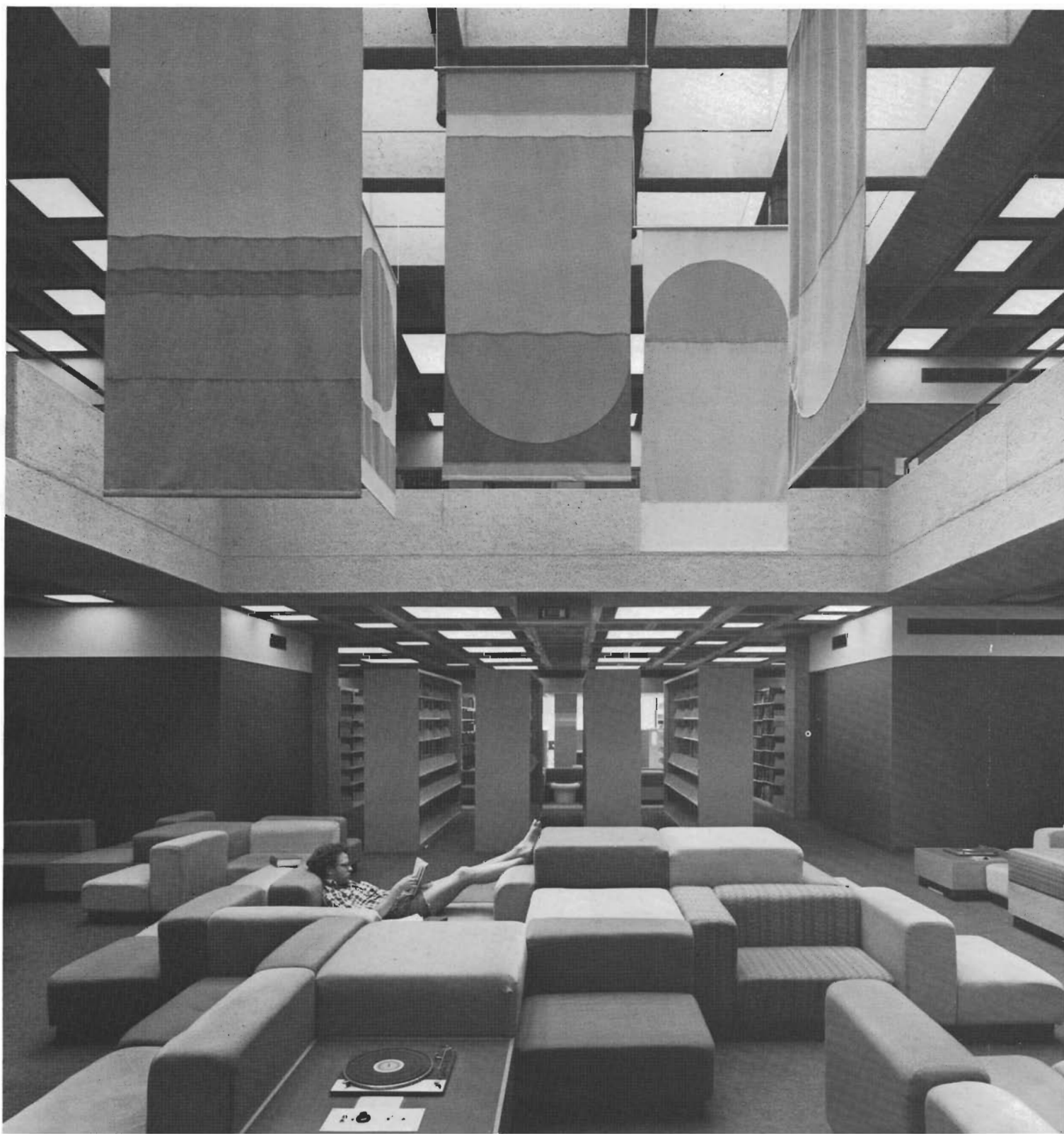
Despite the Center's heroic size and the need for uncluttered space to house Oberlin's large book collection, provisions have been

made for "organized nooks and crannies" offering all students different kinds of places to study—in groups, in hideaways, in lounges with formal seating, or on piles of pillows. Book stacks are interspersed with furniture groupings and study carrels so people can sit down nearby with their selected volumes.

Interior designer Gertrude Gray points to the use of a graphic carpet system that is now an on-going program for WBTL facilities, begun at Brown University and used in the Sarah Lawrence library (*see following pages*). Having found that large areas of solid carpet eventually end up, looking like patchwork quilts after replacement of worn areas, WBTL has developed a supergraphic carpet program with changing colors in stripes, circles, or directional patterns so that when heavy wear is

shown, replacement can be made while maintaining the overall design.

Integrating a new and large complex structure with existing campus buildings has been one of the major challenges for architects as new educational buildings are required. New York architects Warner Burns Toan Lunde have conquered the problem many times in the past. Brown University's science library, for example, was "designed to be a spatial pivot point and intellectual symbol for the university's science complex," (*INTERIORS*, December 1972). At Hofstra University, when new buildings were sprouting fast, the same architects as master planning consultants endeavored to integrate old and new by retaining the color and texture of limestone and old brick of the original campus buildings by ar-



PHOTOGRAPHY BY BALTHAZAR KORAB

## WBTL: Oberlin's Learning Center

chitect Aymar Embury, whose model was Jefferson's plan for the University of Virginia (INTERIORS, December 1968).

In envisioning the five-story Seeley G. Mudd Learning Center, with its almost 200,000 sq. ft. of floor area, Warner Burns Toan Lunde was actually aware of the need, both to integrate the new building with the existing environment of the older ones of smaller scale, and to continue the low-key feeling of the college, founded in 1833. The architects felt that the Learning Center should maintain the general height relationship of the surrounding buildings and not rise above the roof line of Wilder Hall, one of the early campus structures immediately adjacent to the Learning Center. The location of the Center forms a new quadrangle upon which Wilder Hall

faces, as well as two buildings by Cass Gilbert.

To solve the problem of size versus scale, the architects designed the facade of the Center in three parts—the two corners wrapped with solid walls of limestone which correspond in color and texture to the neighboring buildings, and a central portion in between glazed with Solarbronze glass.

The main floor is one half-level above grade, entered by a pedestrian ramp. Steps lead to the lower level. At the second, third, and fourth levels there are three enclosed "bridges" which contain Scholar Studies, spanning the entrance to the building. Each of these bridges is set further back in descending order of floor levels, to produce a recessed entrance facade which visually draws one into

the building. From the entrance ramp there are vistas into the upper levels of the building.

The computer service area, audiovisual department, a 24-hour study room, and the Scholar-Studies bridges are designed to be accessible from the entrance vestibules at main and lower levels when the library proper is closed.

The entire building is monumentally designed, yet throughout it maintains a free feeling to which students respond. Librarian Ted Johnson's vision for a library alive and inviting has been realized. It invokes trust and good treatment, and is not "policed" (staff works on the main floor for the most part). Returning from leave this fall, Mr. Johnson found the building had been heavily used, but with enjoyment and respect. B.R.

### Sources:

Custom furniture designs throughout by the architects, for carrels, cube seating, and tables, executed by KELLER MANUFACTURING. Lounge furniture: Plastic group, THONET; coffee tables, VECTA. Seat and back cubes and Ball chairs: STENDIG. Morrison-Hannah chairs and tables: KNOLL; cube tables, coffee tables: GLASSFORM. Periodicals Room: Custom design tables, reference desks, card catalog housing by WBTL, executed by KELLER MANUFACTURING. Readers' chairs: THONET. Card index drawers: JENS RISOM. Stacks: WILSON METAL PRODUCTS. Carpeting throughout: LEES, to WBTL design. Banners: fabricated by GENERAL DRAPERY.

WBTL project designer: ROSARIA PIOMELLI  
WBTL project architect: ALEC GIBSON  
WBTL interior designer: GERTRUDE GRAY  
Structural engineers: FISHER SADLER  
ASSOCIATES

Mechanical engineers:  
ZUMWALT & VINTHER, INC.

Acoustical consultant: RANGER FARRELL

Contractor: FREEMAN CONSTRUCTION  
COMPANY

East side of window wall on second floor (*below, left*) is furnished with Knoll's Morrison-Hannah chairs and tables and with Glassform cube tables. Quadrant color key here is green. Color, striped 5 ft. up in mid-wings of stacks for book identification, is repeated in upholstery, and in easily replaced carpet inserts of lounge groupings—a feature of WBTL's carpet graphics program. Heavy wear traffic in aisles is striped brown and white, with directional arrow in dark brown. All Lees' carpeting is glue-down installation. A double carrel fills out one end of a stack. Periodical reading room (*below*) glows with yellow upholstery, yellow metal shelving, and natural oak end panels of stacks. Chairs are Thonet's in natural oak.



Four Stendig "Ball" chairs (*below*), that provide the coziest of hideaways for readers, are placed at glass entrance walls (four to a floor) where they make a colorful splash of red, green, or yellow when seen from outside and from the bridges.

Pinwheel carrels (*right*) were designed by WBTL of multi-laminate plywood with playful cut-outs, that serve to alleviate a closeted feeling. Carrels measure 50 in. high by 3 ft. 6 in. square with built-in table top 2 ft. deep by 3 ft. 6 in. long. In this study area they are stained red outside (to match the Ball chairs), and natural wood finish inside.

Lounge (*bottom*) is furnished with Thonet's molded plastic seating and Vecta coffee tables. Color key here is yellow. All lighting is fluorescent. Fixtures in hung ceiling above stacks have acoustical Tectum between. Oak fascia panel is stained in the color of the quadrant. Other fixtures fit slab ceiling structure.

