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Some Notes on a School Place/Center [Two Place Tales]

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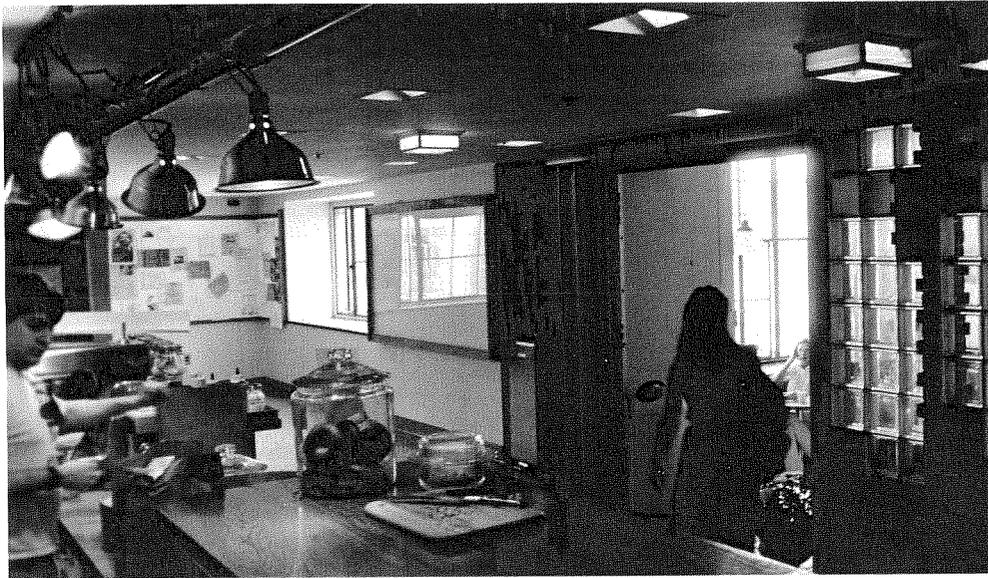
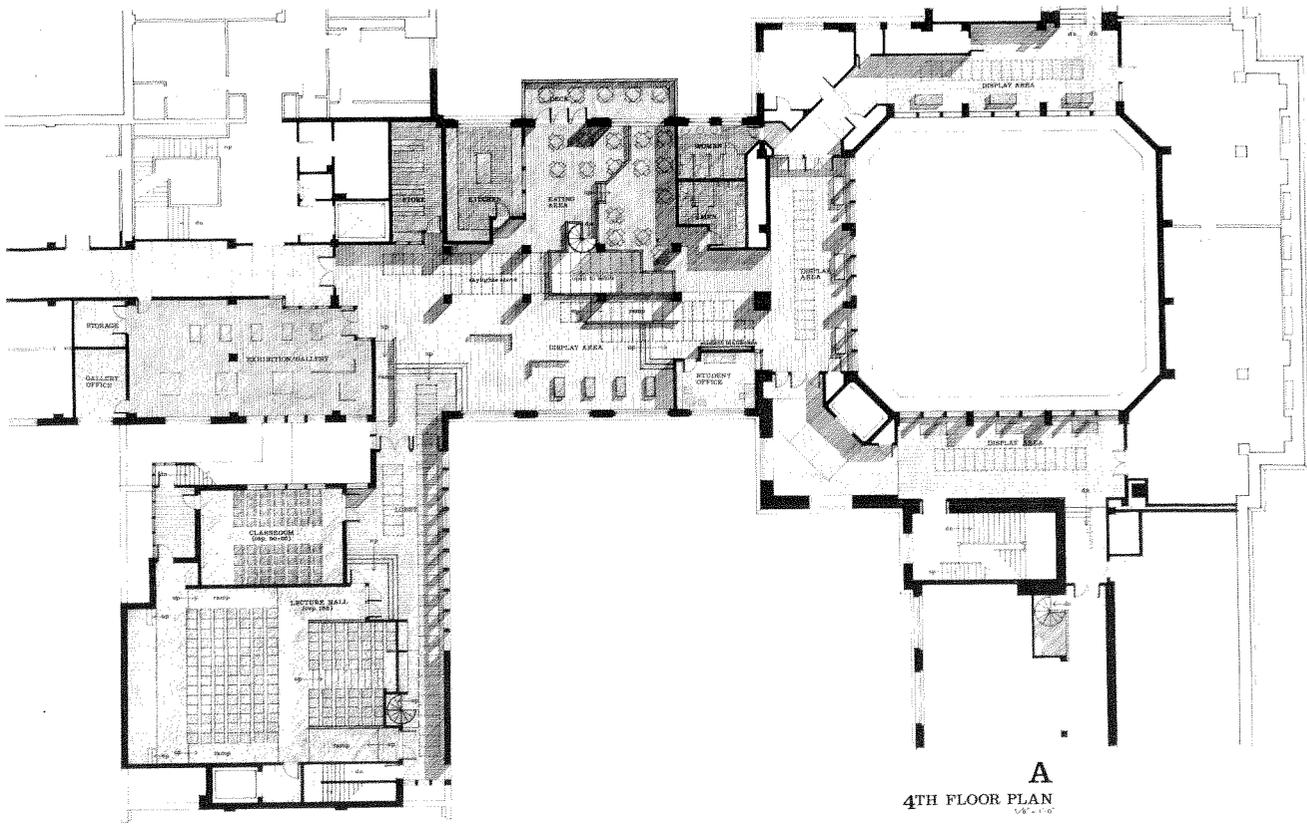
Jan Wampler

More peacefully than in the late 1960s—when heavy timbers were boldly thrust through the firewalls on the diagonal to challenge the authoritarian barrenness of the stripped MIT industrial building type and to create a new environment for learning—the café has made its place at the edges of the dome, where little was planned, less expected, and people were somehow forgotten. The café's language of form is plain and unmistakable.

The day of the café's opening was like no other. Conversations were animated, people talked who had not talked before, at least not that much. The school's Visiting Committee saw a social center for the architecture department. But the opening day was also the closing day; there was no money to operate the new café. Nevertheless, students continue to use it informally and it seems to have begun its own, fragile life.

William L. Porter

MIT's School of Architecture & Planning, which is buried within corridors of the larger structure of this Institution, has never had a sense of identity, place, or center. This design provides this place/center both by use and form. The program includes a new large lecture hall (160 seats), a small lecture hall (60 seats), an exhibition gallery, an open exhibition area, a café, a school store, student offices, and a lounge. To design a place/center the typical relationship at MIT—of a corridor in the center and rooms on the side—had to be changed. It is replaced with an area definition with movement across the space in a diagonal. At the same time vertical space connections are made with the Architecture & Planning headquarters on the third floor. The uses are clustered around this new place/center, which connects the rest of the School both horizontally and vertically. The dome, a symbol of MIT which is never seen from the inside, is used as a form reference for the School. Skylights in the roof make it visible both from the third floor and from parts of the fourth floor. Glazing around the dome makes the inside of the dome visible from the fourth floor. Corridors around the dome are used for exhibition display space, are associated with the adjacent area, and, yet, are just circulation space. The principle has been to replace the corridors with area definitions and to make a place/center.



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1 Sketch plan for New School Center
(Courtesy of Jan Wampler Architects)

2 MIT cafe
Photograph by Alka G. Badshah