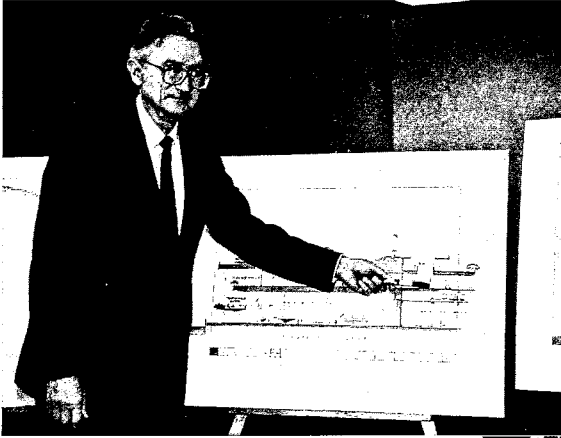
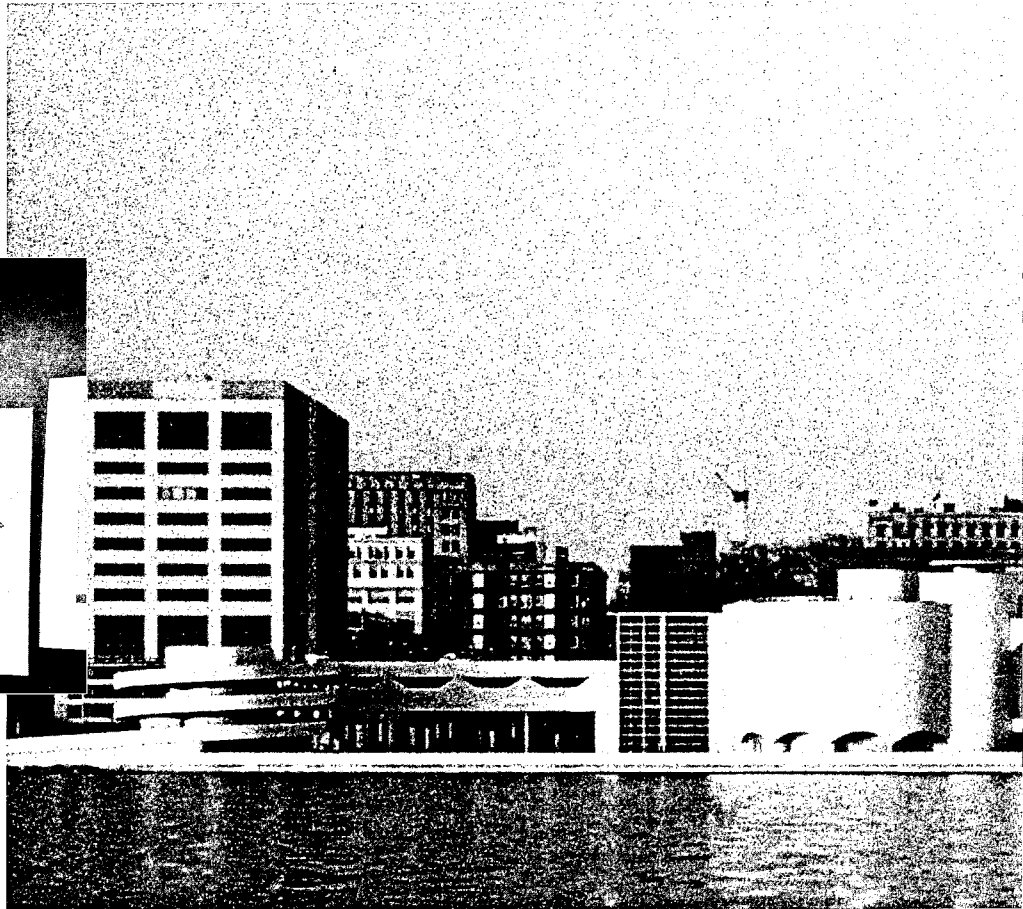


# MONONA TERRACE: C

A DISCUSSION WITH  
ANTHONY PUTTNAM  
OF TALIESIN  
ARCHITECTS



*As viewed from the lake, Monona Terrace complements Madison's skyline and the dramatic curves of the State Capitol building in the background. Above, Taliesin Architect Anthony Puttnam worked with Wright on Monona Terrace in the 1950s and is final design architect of the building today.*



**F**ifty-nine years after Frank Lloyd Wright first laid pencil to paper outlining his concept for a “dream civic center,” Monona Terrace has at last come to life. Occupying a 4.4 acre site at the edge of Lake Monona in downtown Madison, the five-level, 250,000-square-foot structure presents a stunning vision of towers, terraces and deep blue arches poised above the lakeshore.

Designed originally as a city/county building with jails and a courthouse, then a civic auditorium, and now a convention center, the building is a symphony of interlocking circular forms: Twin helix ramps flank the main structure—a grand semicircle of reinforced concrete with a sweeping three-story wall of glass. Two drum-like towers containing a lecture hall,

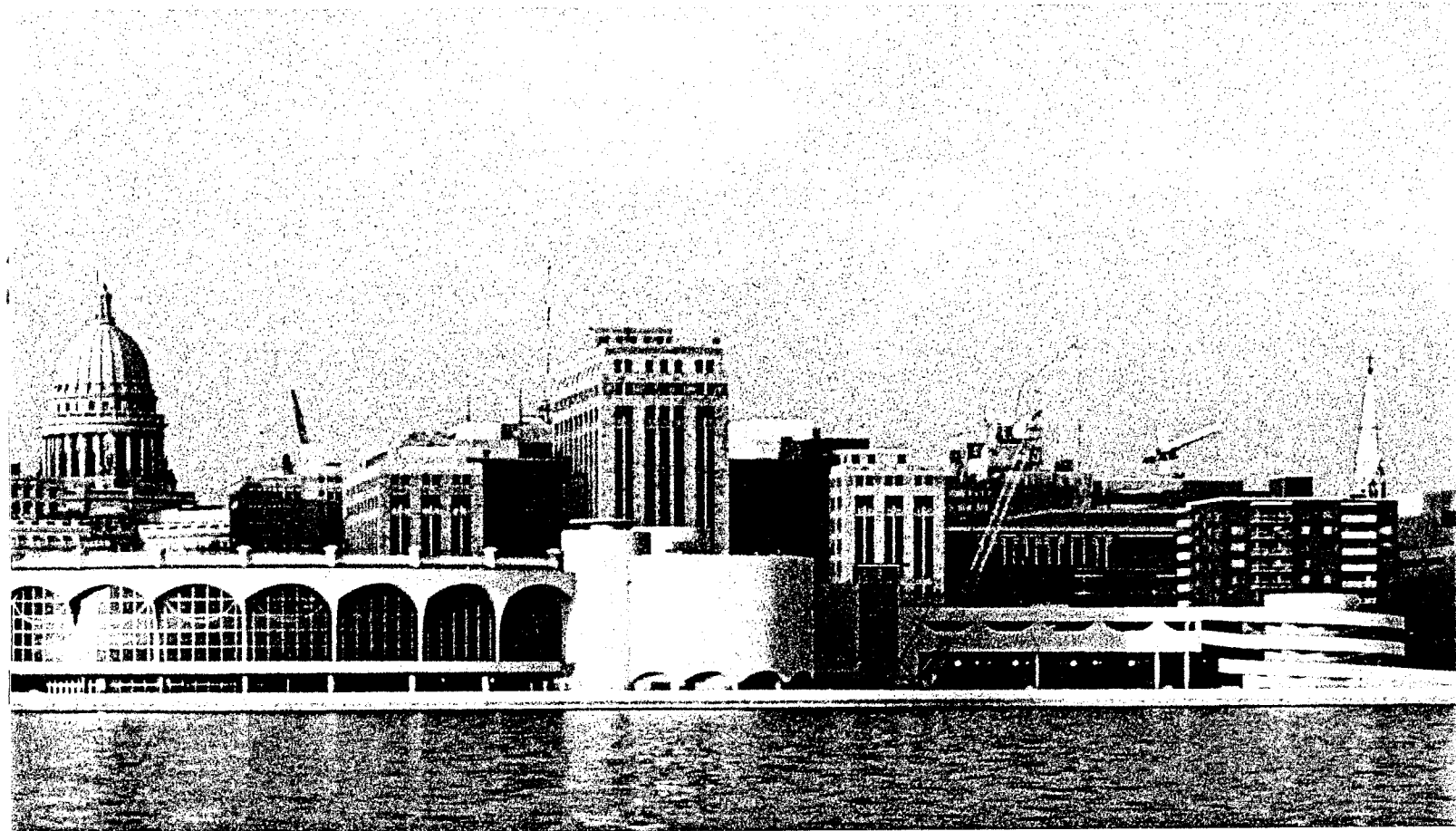
service areas, and mechanical systems, are set between the main building and the parking decks. A pair of taller cylinders holds the stairwells.

Commissioned from Wright in 1938, revised three times before his death in 1959, and three times by his successor firm, Taliesin Architects, (twice under the direction of William Wesley Peters), Monona Terrace is positioned on the same extraordinary site Wright planned for it 59 years ago. Situated just two blocks south of the State Capitol building, the structure is set flush to a steep, 60-foot bluff overlooking the lake, brilliantly linking the city's downtown with its lakefront.

Though Wright is the original architect, the final design architect is Anthony Puttnam of Taliesin Architects. He is also responsible for

# COMPLETING WRIGHT'S VISION

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the interior configuration. As an apprentice to Wright, Putnam spent time working on the 1950s version of the project. When the city of Madison first approached Taliesin Architects in 1989 to determine if Wright's design could be adapted for a convention center, Putnam headed the team that carried out the study. He has been working on the project as lead architect ever since. Here he answers a few questions for the *Frank Lloyd Wright Quarterly*:

*Q. Can you describe the physical surroundings and the special constraints that Wright and ultimately Taliesin Architects faced in building this structure?*

*A.* Downtown Madison and the State Capitol building are positioned at a high point on a narrow isthmus between two lakes. In 1910, city plan-

ner John Nolen identified the bluff leading down to Lake Monona as an important link between the city and the lake, and he envisioned a set of wide terraces that would lead down to the lakefront. In 1938, Mr. Wright advanced Nolen's idea by designing a building that extends the city out onto the lake. The challenge was to create a building that would begin at the high-point or bluff, extend over a ravine, which now contains a railroad corridor and highway, and then fan out over the lake. Because of its extension over the lake, the building required 1,700 pilings to support it. Since the lake bottom was not level, the pilings range in size between 40 and 125 feet long. They had to be driven into the lake bed off barges.

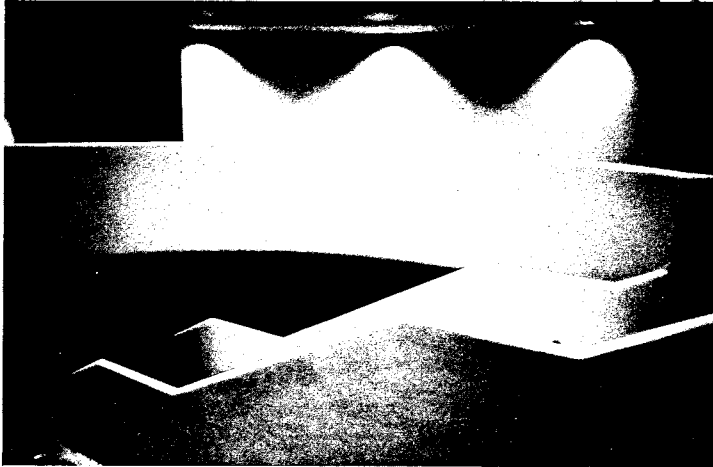
*Q. Since the building is now a convention center and not a civic center*

*as Wright last envisioned it, what has changed and what has not changed from Wright's design?*

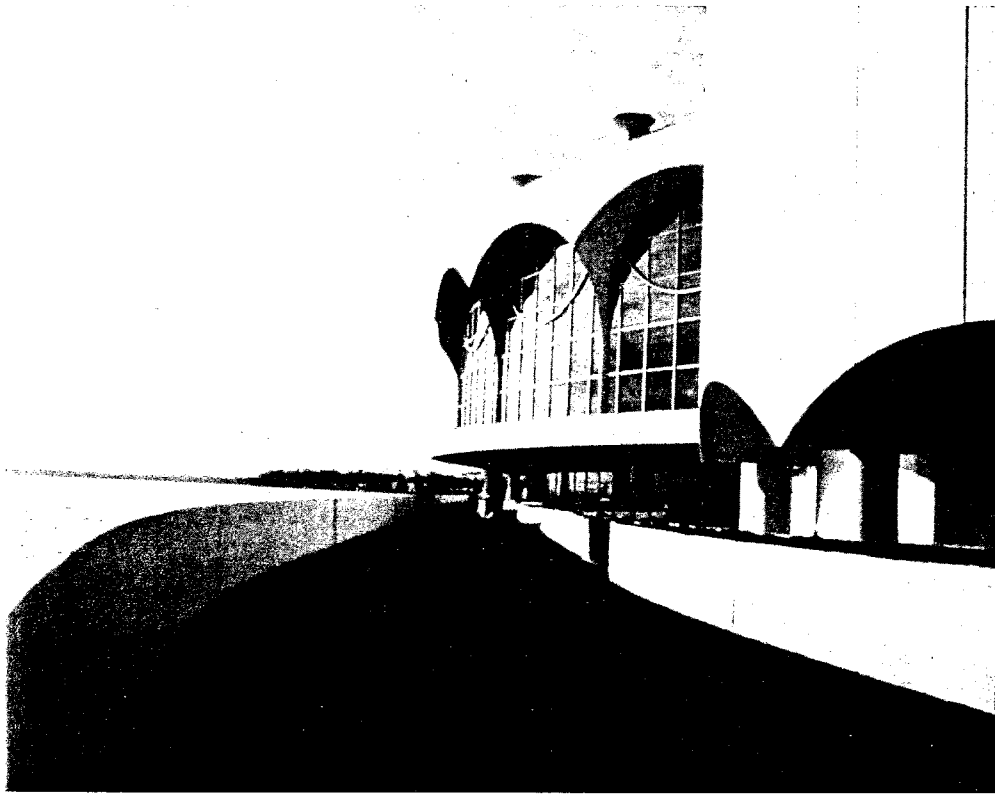
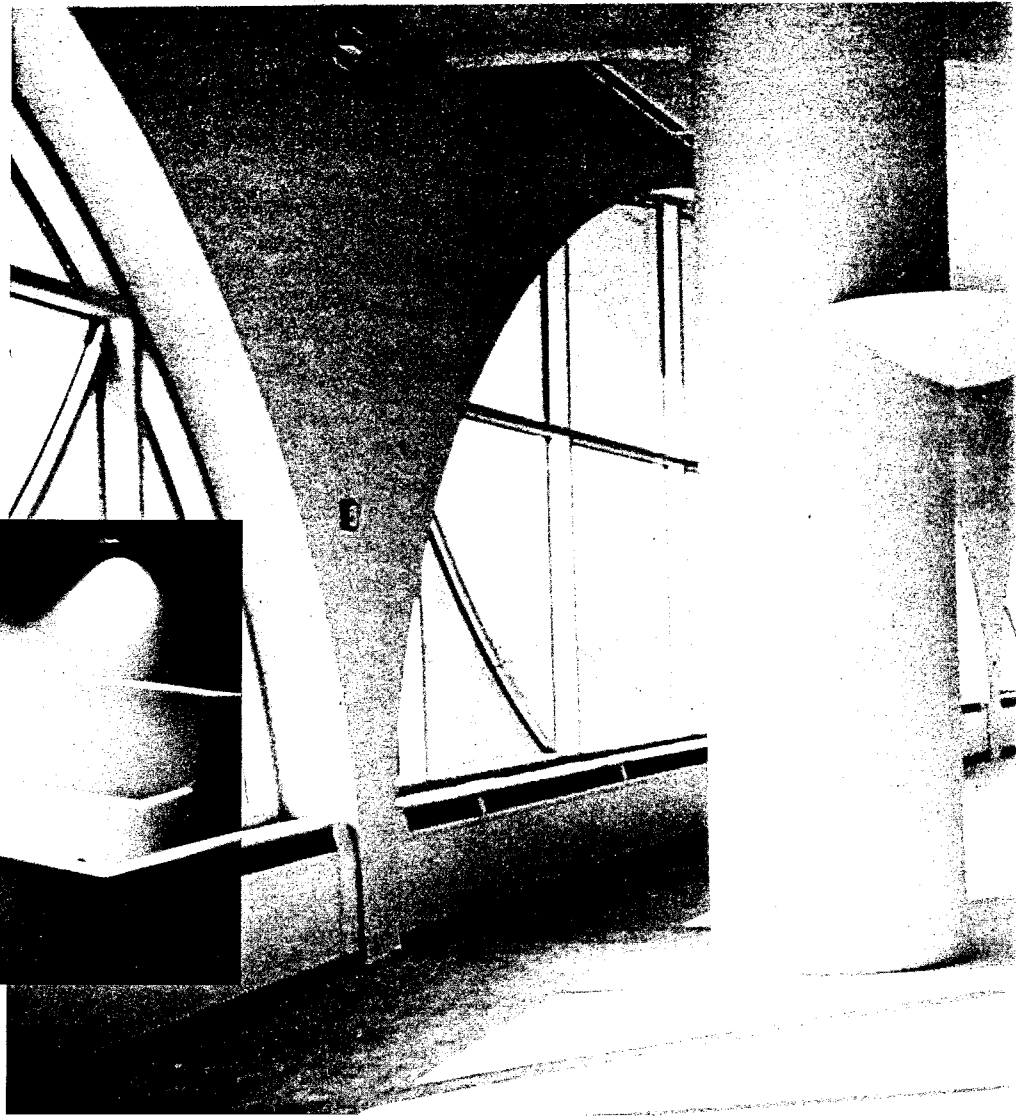
*A.* The footprint and exterior proportions are virtually identical to his last design. The rooftop garden is the same, the arches are the same, the towers, and the bowl-shaped fountain are the same, and, of course, there is still the view of the lake. Inside, many of the spaces serve similar functions as they did in Mr. Wright's day; the theater and exhibit hall are in the same place. But as a convention center, the interior functions are obviously different, and required a different configuration of space. We also had to accommodate the requirements of modern-day mechanical systems and environmental regulations as well as changes in technology, building codes and materials.

*Q. Frank Lloyd Wright may be*

Though the interiors were not yet complete when these photos were taken, it's clear that the theme of curves, circles and arches continues on the interior as seen in the lakefront mezzanine, right, and curved stairwell, below.



Thirty-four-foot-tall arched windows provide stunning views of Lake Monona.



*better known for his residential designs, especially those in pastoral, rural settings, than designs for the city. What does Monona Terrace have to say about Wright's concepts for urban designs?*

A. This is a building that allows us to see Frank Lloyd Wright in a way we almost never see him—reinforcing the fabric of the city. Here he is celebrating the circumstance of the city. Mr. Wright said the “city should be a festival of wit, a show of pomp and a celebration of circumstance.” You need only look at the rooftop garden at Monona Terrace to see the way this idea of celebration comes into play. It celebrates the look and relationship of the building to the lake, and of man to nature. It's not an architecture of empty show and the image of power, but rather a recognition of the human wish for



space, greenery and vista—of warmth, mystery, shelter, and ceremonial space.

Mr. Wright's design is a public place that adds to the conviviality and richness of the city. It's not the traditional 40-foot blank wall facing the street that most modern convention centers are. This is a welcoming building, with grand public spaces, generously scaled, to afford processional entries. The mezzanine overlooking the lake, for example, is the kind of space that heightens the drama of any type of activity that might take place there.

*Q. Why did Frank Lloyd Wright use the circle as the theme of this building?*

A. Monona Terrace is located on a direct access to the Wisconsin State Capitol building, a great domed, circular space. When Mr. Wright made his first sketch of Monona Terrace, he

drew a picture of the capitol and labeled it "dome" and then drew the building that would become Monona Terrace and wrote "dome" on that. Monona Terrace has all of the same architectural vocabulary of the capitol—arched and circular forms—but in a completely new and fresh manner. The two buildings were intended to resonate off each other.

Mr. Wright always took great pains to point out that connection, and it allows us to see him in a different relationship to tradition than we most often think of him. In his speeches and writings, he often seemed to reject forms of the past, but the truth is that he may have rejected the forms, but he did not reject the traditions or the ideas. In fact, years earlier, in 1893, I believe, he designed a boathouse for a site on this same lake, addressing the same issues in a

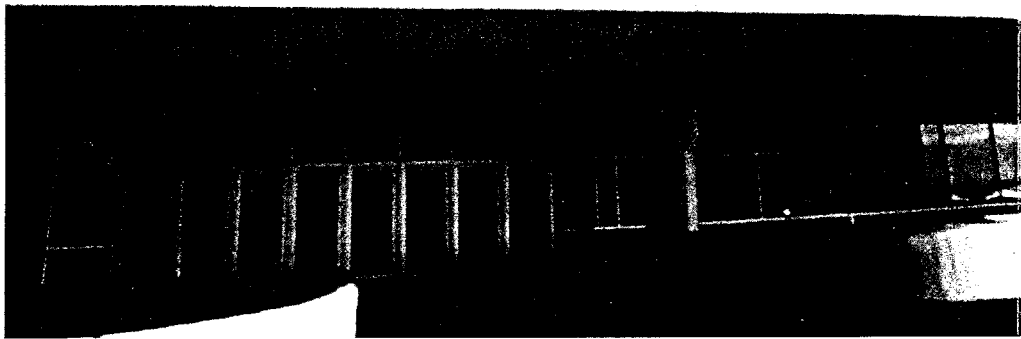
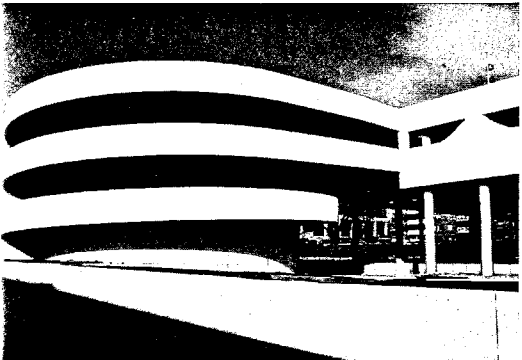
very similar fashion. Just like Monona Terrace, he keyed the boathouse to the capitol and carried it out in an equally ceremonial manner. It had arches, a dome, and four side pavilions just like the capitol. Unfortunately, it was never built, but the city is considering it.

It's amazing to me that at age 25 or so, when he designed the little, round boathouse, he had the same concerns and used the same basic architectural grammar that he did in 1938, forty-five years later. It would be wonderful to see the city build the boathouse. What a pair of bookends that would make on the lake—one of Mr. Wright's first public buildings, and his last, side by side. It's a wonderful story of Mr. Wright having the same thought and reaction to an architectural problem on the lakefront as a young man and later as a mature architect, and keying both to the tradition and forms of the capitol.

*Q. Frank Lloyd Wright tried valiantly to get this building constructed during his lifetime, but never succeeded. What's different now?*

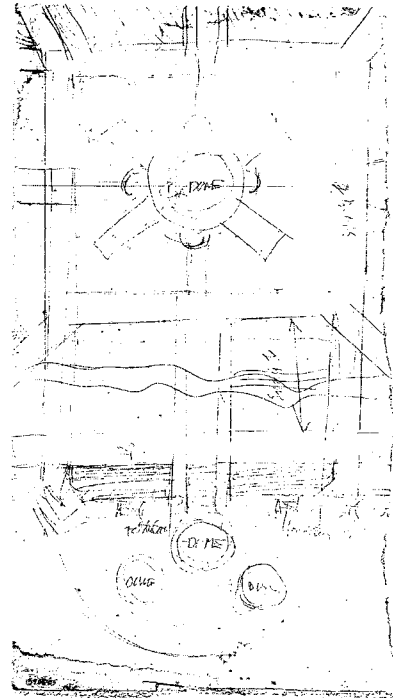
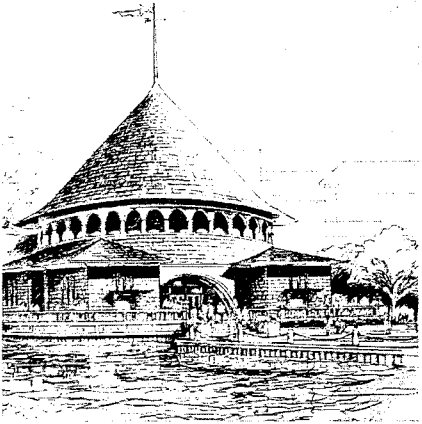
A. Certainly there was a lot of opposition to Mr. Wright's personal life, and many people fought hard to stop the building's construction. Some thought it was too expensive. Even today, there was opposition, primarily because of the lakefront site. But I think the test of time and the recognition of Mr. Wright's achievements have had a great deal to do with seeing this through now. This is also the first time that everybody came together—the city, the county, the state, the private sector and the community—to make it happen. It was a strong coalition—a Republican governor, a Democratic mayor, a business community and an enlightened public—that saw value in building this structure.

*Q. You worked on the project as an apprentice to Wright in the 1950s. How did that impact your work on the building now?*



Top left, the rooftop garden and promenade leads directly to the State Capitol building two blocks away. Above right, the deep arches over the windows on the lake facade form an effective sunshade. Above, circular ramps on the east and west provide parking for 560 cars.

As early as 1893, Wright was considering curves, arches and domes for a boat-house on Lake Monona, below, a structure the city of Madison may yet build.



Wright's 1938 drawing showing the State Capitol, labeled "dome" at the top, and his early concept for Monona Terrace, appearing as three "domes."

A. Like anyone from that era that worked on this with Mr. Wright, it gave us all a special commitment to see it through. It's enormously satisfying to see it go up after all these years. Looking at it, I can remember Mr. Wright's sense of fun, playfulness and excitement in designing it. He always had a great deal of faith in the building.

In Spring Green one day, after a meeting in the late 1950s to present the building, he said, "They're not going to build this building now. But someday they will."

**GRAND OPENING EVENTS**

Grand opening ceremonies for Monona Terrace take place July 18 through 20, and feature a ribbon cutting ceremony at 12:30 p.m. on July 18, as well as musical events, a light show, and a boat parade. Some programs require tickets. Participants needing overnight accommodations are cautioned to plan ahead

## TIMELINE: MONONA TERRACE

- 1910 Noted city planner and landscape architect John Nolen prepares Madison's first master plan, calling for a series of buildings connecting the Capitol building with Lake Monona and a lakeside park with a grand set of terraces stepping down to the lakeshore.
- 1938 Funded by a local businessman, Frank Lloyd Wright generates his first proposal for the "dream civic center" that would link the Capitol with Lake Monona; Madison loses federal funding when the county board rejects the proposed official design in favor of the Wright scheme. Wright's design fails to win sufficient public support and it sets in motion a half century of civic battles.
- 1941 Wright offers a revised plan as an alternative to a proposed municipal auditorium, but the bombing of Pearl Harbor causes Madison to shelve construction plans.
- 1948 The project is reintroduced as a civic and transportation center.
- 1953 The Wright proposal is rejected.
- 1954 Madison voters approve Wright's employment as the architect for a municipal auditorium and civic center, select the Monona Terrace site, and approve a \$4 million bond referendum.
- 1957 After attempts to stall the project, Wright is at last offered a contract for a scaled-back program on the same site. Wright's supporters and critics continue to battle. Passage of the Metzner bill, reducing the height of lakefront buildings to 20 feet, kills the scheme.
- 1959 Political and personal charges are leveled against Wright by those hoping to stop the project; nevertheless, the Metzner law is repealed in March. In April, Wright dies. Taliesin Architects, under William Wesley Peters, starts the contract documents for the project.
- 1961 Over budget, construction is postponed.
- 1962 Project is rejected in an April referendum.
- 1966 The City commissions Taliesin Architects to prepare an ambitious master plan, the "Monona Basin Project," for three miles of Lake Monona shoreline.
- 1968 The City commissions Taliesin Architects to design the first phase, a 2,500-seat performing arts center.
- 1969 Bids are \$250,000 over budget, a new mayor stops the project.
- 1980s The City looks into three schemes for a downtown convention center; all fail.
- 1989 At the request of Mayor Paul Soglin, Taliesin Architects analyzes the city's proposal for a convention center and determines that Wright's final 1959 design for Monona Terrace could be adapted.
- 1991 Taliesin Architects is commissioned to do schematic designs.
- 1992 Voters approve project in a November referendum.
- 1993 Funding is secured through a combination of City bed tax, bonds, support from the State and County, and \$9 million in private donations.
- 1994 Taliesin Architects, as part of the "Monona Terrace Design Venture," which includes Potter Lawson Architects and Arnold and O'Sheridan Engineers, start construction documents. Construction begins in December.
- 1997 In July, 59 years after the inception of the project, the Monona Terrace Community and Convention Center opens.

since space may be limited. For information call (608) 252-5670.

Other events planned in conjunction with the grand opening include a special exhibit featuring the work of Wright photographer Pedro E. Guerrero. Sponsored by the Wisconsin Academy of Sciences, Arts and Letters, the free exhibit features 62 large-scale photographs and will be on display at Monona Terrace through June 1998.

Also of note, the Frank Lloyd Wright® Heritage Tour Program is sponsoring a series of gala events at several privately owned Madison area residences designed by Wright and Louis Sullivan. The Bradley, Gilmore, Pew, and Jacobs II residences will be open for tours as well as cocktails, brunch, or dessert on July 19 and 20. For details check the calendar on page 35, or call (608) 221-4111.

