



Investigations through Space & Time

Eric Owen Moss talks about his practice and his method in conversation with IA&B as he insists on a rigorous pursuit to see a renewed, experimental and pragmatic spirit in architecture.

Photograph: Courtesy Piero Codato.

Eric Owen Moss practices architecture with his eponymously named LA-based 25-person firm founded in 1973. Throughout his career, Moss has worked to revitalize a once defunct industrial tract in Culver City, California. Eric Moss is one of the original radicals and treats architecture with an exemplary intensity in terms of research and practice. Eric Owen Moss Architects (EOMA) has designed and built many outstanding buildings that reflect a unique design vision specific to Eric Moss. The firm has designed and engineered some of the most awe-inspiring structures in contemporary world architecture.

IA&B: Can you tell us about your practice? What is the idea that drives Eric Owen Moss Architects?

EOM: I think my idea of architecture and my aspiration of architecture deviates from the system by resisting the system. Over a period of time, a lot of my colleagues and contemporaries face the question and wonder about what architecture should be in terms of form, shape, materials and the organisational obligation. What begins as an experimental language or an investigatory language or a language that expresses a kind of dissatisfaction with the way architecture is done becomes in fact another formula of practicing architecture.

IA&B: A lot of critics in US and Europe have termed and continue to term your architecture 'Radical'. Do you think of your work as radical?

EOM: Well the editor of Architectural Review once called me and asked me if I think anything of radical architecture left in the world. I think an urge to see something new or the urge to do something new has always been there. It is an old idea. I am one of the people who want to see architecture renewed and I think that makes me a radical. The reason why you or me wants to see this change in architectural thinking and doing is because somewhere we believe that architecture can be something other than what it is. The reason why we think so is because we are dissatisfied or disappointed and sometimes angry about what we see as architecture. For example look at Jantar Mantar in Jaipur. The person who thought of it and created it and had the intent and the drive to make it happen would definitely have been a radical. He had a very different way of looking at the world and the architecture of Jantar Mantar is its manifestation. I think for any radical architecture to develop, a fundamental dissatisfaction is generally the point of departure. Whenever you find a certain disappointment in the way things are, you find a radical impulse.

IA&B: Talking about media, your office works in multiple mediums; through traditional drawings and physical modelling to virtual, complex models and information systems. Do you follow a set process of work or each project is approached differently in terms of the tools and mediums of practicing architecture?

EOM: There are many sides to processing architecture. I am talking about the system of working. When you have a number of people working together in team, there has to be some kind of project sequence, method and chronology in terms of producing work and producing it in an efficient way. One of the paradoxes I face in this view is that I can think of projects that we designed in a sense to express resistance to rigid systems. When you start to draw these projects, to engineer them, you realise that when on one hand the project was designed to resist the rigidity of a system, the engineering of the same is increasingly rigorous. Thus while the 'image' of architecture is liberating at the core, the process of production, detailing and engineering is intensely systematic. So at times the need to express lack of control as an expression, forces you to control the process of production fastidiously.

IA&B: How important do you consider digital technology in your architecture? Do you see your practice being increasingly technology driven or software driven?

EOM: It is critical to define the word 'technology' in this question. I think that technology is a neutral idea. I think technology in terms of the capacity to understand is a very different issue from applied technology. Applied technology can have consequences. Things like the internet have

to be understood before applied. Technology does many things; lot of them great and a lot of them disastrous. I would say that what drives technology or what obligates technology – the 'tools' are very productive and unusual. What we can engineer, design and construct today is very different than what we could do a decade ago. Paradoxically, a decade ago, if you look at some buildings which are truly experimental, the point of departure was not technology. When we used to look for tools to break from a 'modernist' idiom and look for another language, we contributed in making of new tools. Our actions defined our tools and not the other way round. What interests me in technology is trying to find ways not by being subservient to the tools but by interpreting the tools and by developing and evolving ways to do things we want to do. I am interested in seeing it develop into tools that can help accomplish evolved intents and not confirming what everybody knows as the contribution of technology.

IA&B: If you were to choose a project or an architect who influences you in a very significant way, which project or architect would it be?

EOM: Years ago, when I was a student in Harvard, must be in 1972, Philip Johnson, who later came to be a friend and a colleague, gave a talk. He said that you guys know very little about the world of architecture. He said that you talk about the same projects and the same references all the time. He asked if anyone in that class knows about Fatehpur Sikri. A few years ago when I was travelling and I like to travel when I have nowhere to go; I went to Fatehpur Sikri, beyond the obvious places. It is a magnificent place with its scale and its materials and it had had a great impact. I think Mughal Architecture in terms of its impact and its influence has given me such remarkable experiences. These buildings, with not only their grandeur but their economical, social and political consequences intrigue me. The Jantar Mantar in Jaipur is another example of a building that moved me.

IA&B: Do you see your architecture as shocking?

EOM: I think if you are patient, then certain things that initially look difficult and complex and uncanny, eventually resolve into familiarity. I think if you take architecture piece by piece, you understand how and why it's done. I think initially that surprise quotient or factor is, in a way, important as eventually somebody will start seeing things differently. I think if you are open to possibilities and if you are willing to sit down and think for a minute, you will see that what we do is reasonable, practical and pragmatic. ■

To read more about Eric Owen Moss Architects and their work refer to the feature titled XXXXXXXX.



Samitaur Tower: View from the street – the acrylic skin of the structure permeates a human shadow from the viewing deck.

international

The Violence of Steel

Eric Owen Moss Architects design the Samitaur Tower at a strategic focus in the re-generating Culver City area of Los Angeles as a nodal entity that will distribute art and information through an architectural icon.

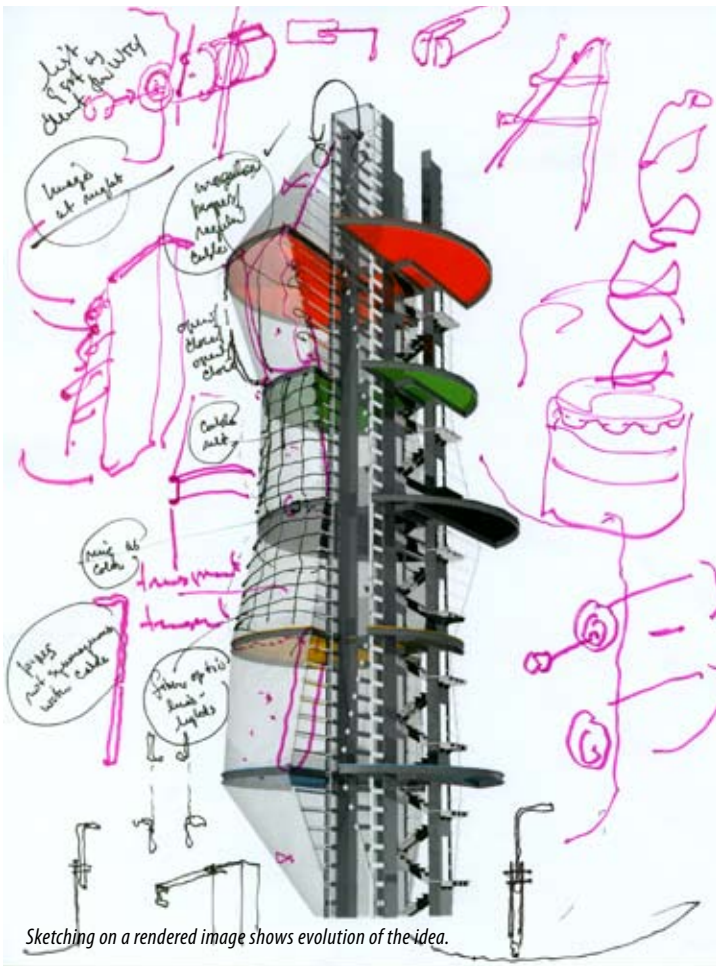
Text: Ruturaj Parikh

Photographs: ©Tom Bonner; Tom Bonner Photography

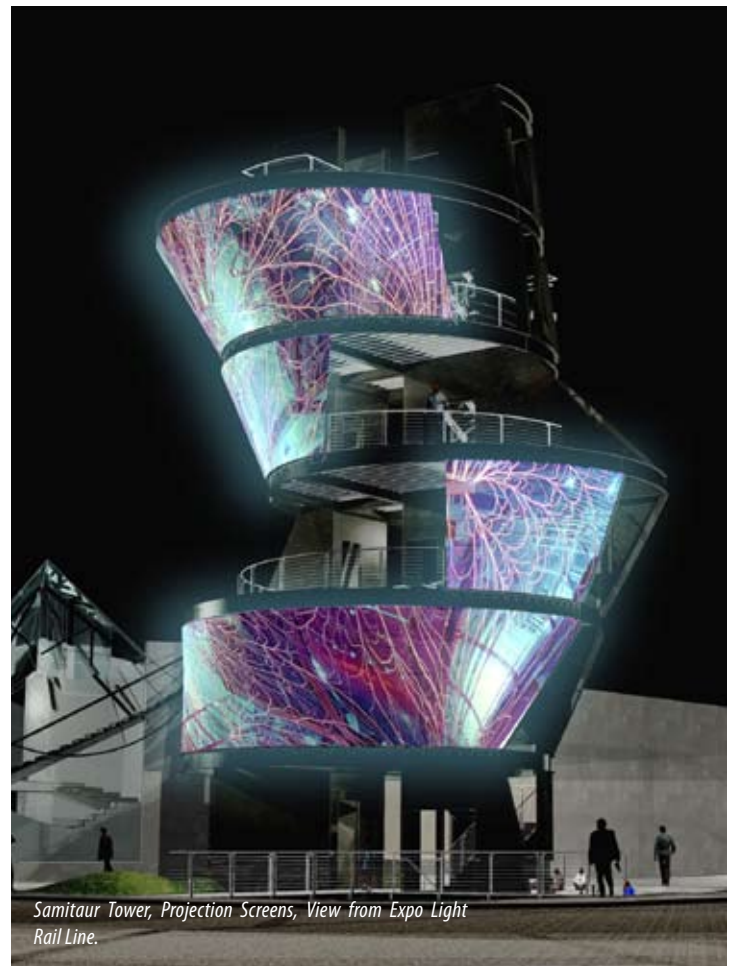
Images and information: ©Eric Owen Moss Architects

“Conceptually, the tower has both introverted and extroverted planning objectives. Internal to the burgeoning site area of new media companies, graphic designers, and general office tenants, the tower will symbolize the advent of this important new urban development, provide a changing art display for local viewing, and offer a variety of graphic content and data on its five screens concerning coming events and current achievements of the tenants who occupy that part of the city”.

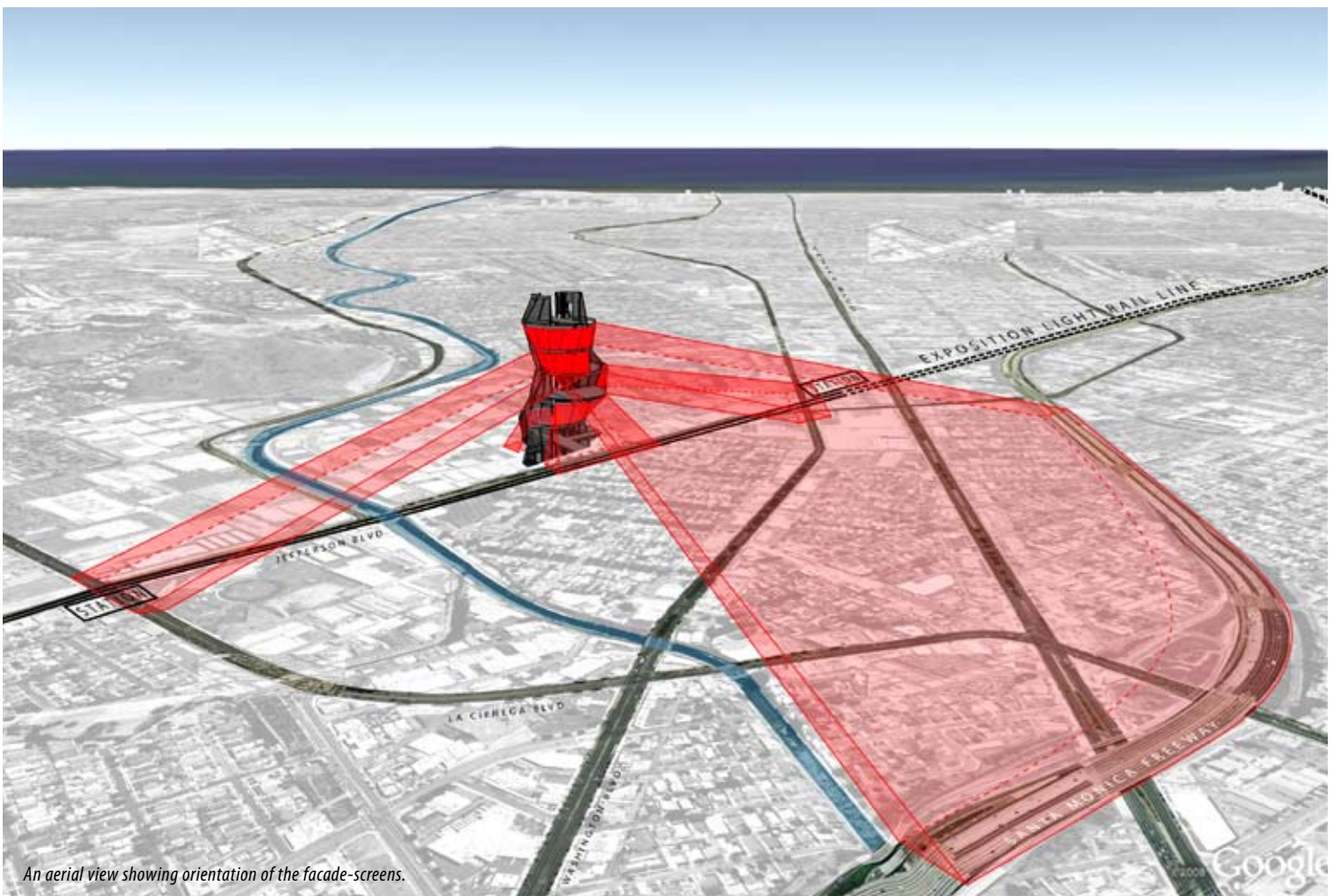
– Eric Owen Moss Architects.



Sketching on a rendered image shows evolution of the idea.



Samitaur Tower, Projection Screens, View from Expo Light Rail Line.

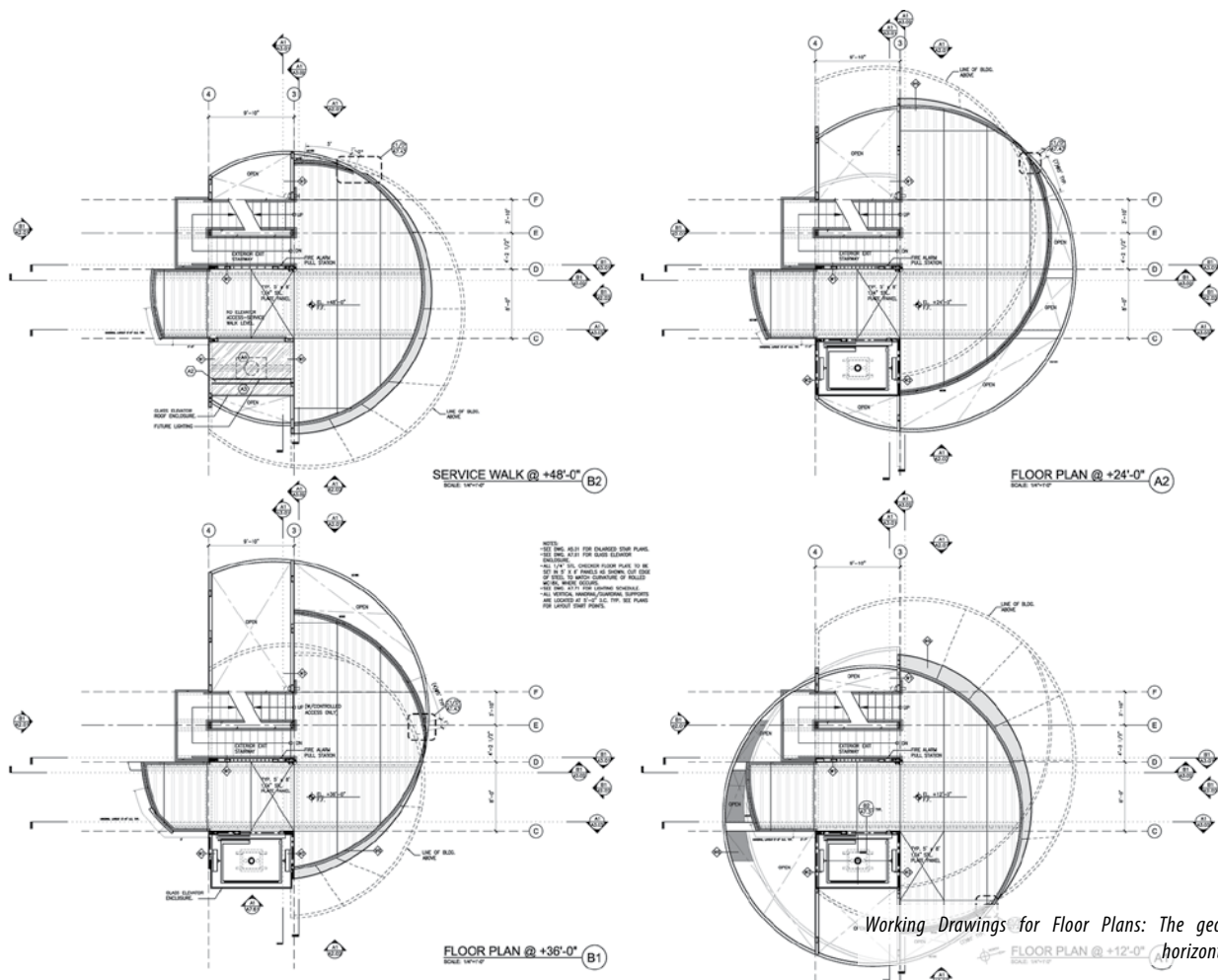
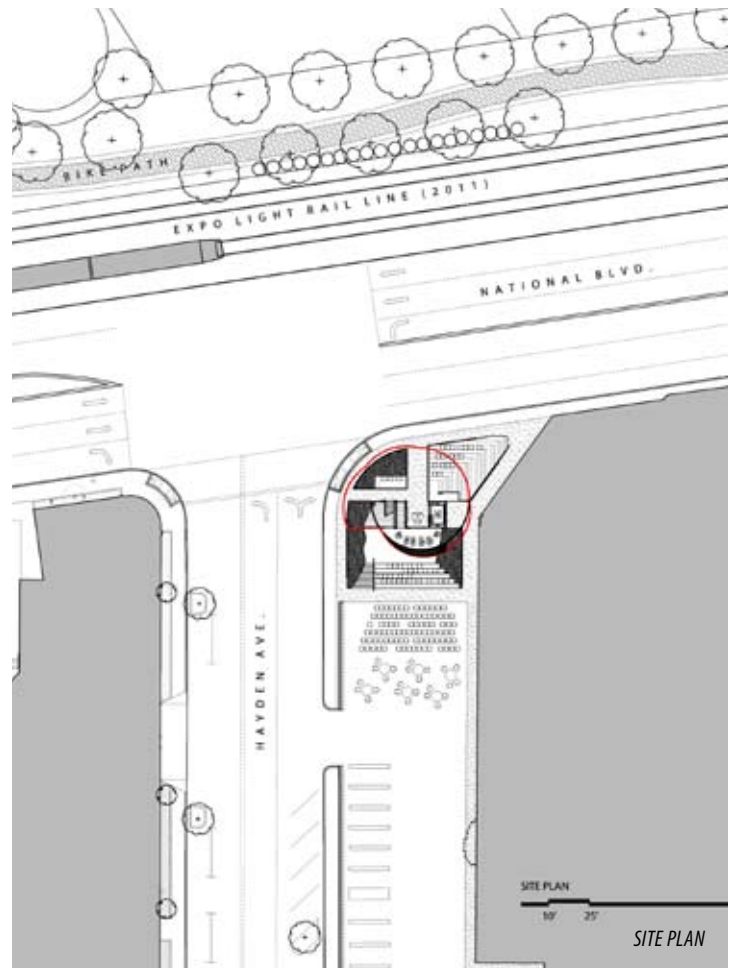


An aerial view showing orientation of the facade-screens.

The Uncanny of Incidence

Eric Owen Moss Architects since past two decades have critically read the landscape of the once-degenerating Culver City area of Los Angeles. Eric Owen Moss has designed and built some of the most remarkable architectural interventions in this area. With an idea of regenerating the life and fabric of Culver City, Eric Moss's work departs from a sense of 'dissatisfaction' and leads to architecture that rigorously stands out and against the hopelessly mundane interpretations of the modernist credo. The formal language is revoltingly radical against its backdrop and it takes time to assimilate and understand the purpose where realisation and reading comes after the initial shock of the apparent destruction of order.

The Samitaur Tower is an information tower built at an intersection that acts as a primary entry point to the redeveloped zone of the Culver City. Its steel and acrylic structure towers at 72 feet against the 56 feet height limit in the area. The structure locates an important three dimensional feature in the neighbouring areas-near and far. The apparent asymmetry of the steel frame with its acrylic envelope renders a certain un-stability to the built form. This precarious looking frame shocks by the nature of its geometry and tension of its un-easy lines. The multi-colour projection system on the acrylic skin adds to the visual dominance of the tower.



Working Drawings for Floor Plans: The geometry of horizontal planes.



The tower as it stands in Culver City: the five rings and the acrylic skin.



Rear view of the tower with the staircase slicing through its steel plane.

The five steel rings of the tower are about 30 feet in diameter and are staggered to establish appropriate viewing angles from focal points in proximity.

The Art of Architecture

The dynamic engineering effort in designing the structure creates architecture that seems violently effortless. Shattered notions of balance, symmetry and structural familiarity become generative of a rebellious architectural language. The live graphic walls of the structure are designed to inform mobile audiences. The external skin of the tower displays culturally significant content and local event information along with art and graphic presentations to viewers in cars and trains that frequent the node. With an estimated readership of 30,000 each day, an enormous daily audience will look and think about the architectural intent and information content that the tower intends to convey.

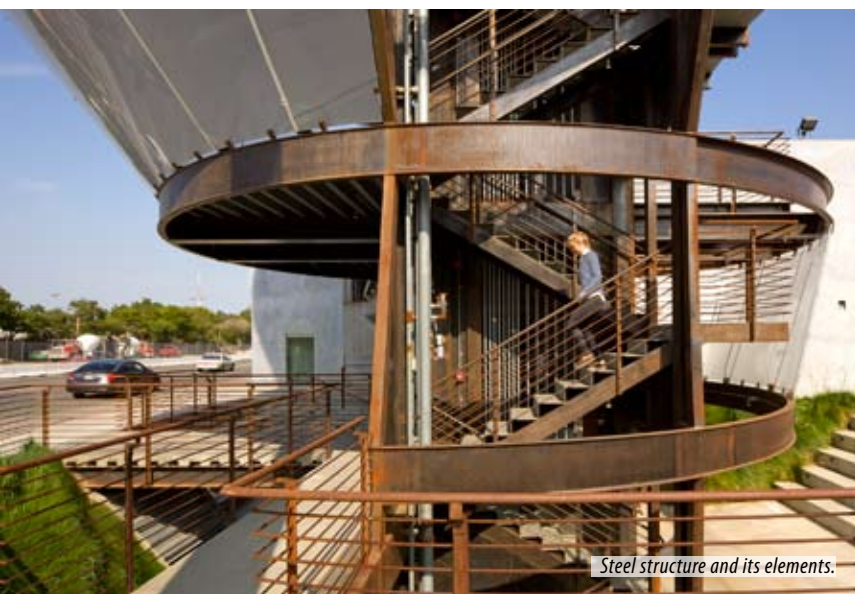
The five steel rings of the tower are about 30 feet in diameter and are staggered to establish appropriate viewing angles from focal points in



Looking up from behind: the steel skeleton with the stairwell, the rings and the vertical plane.



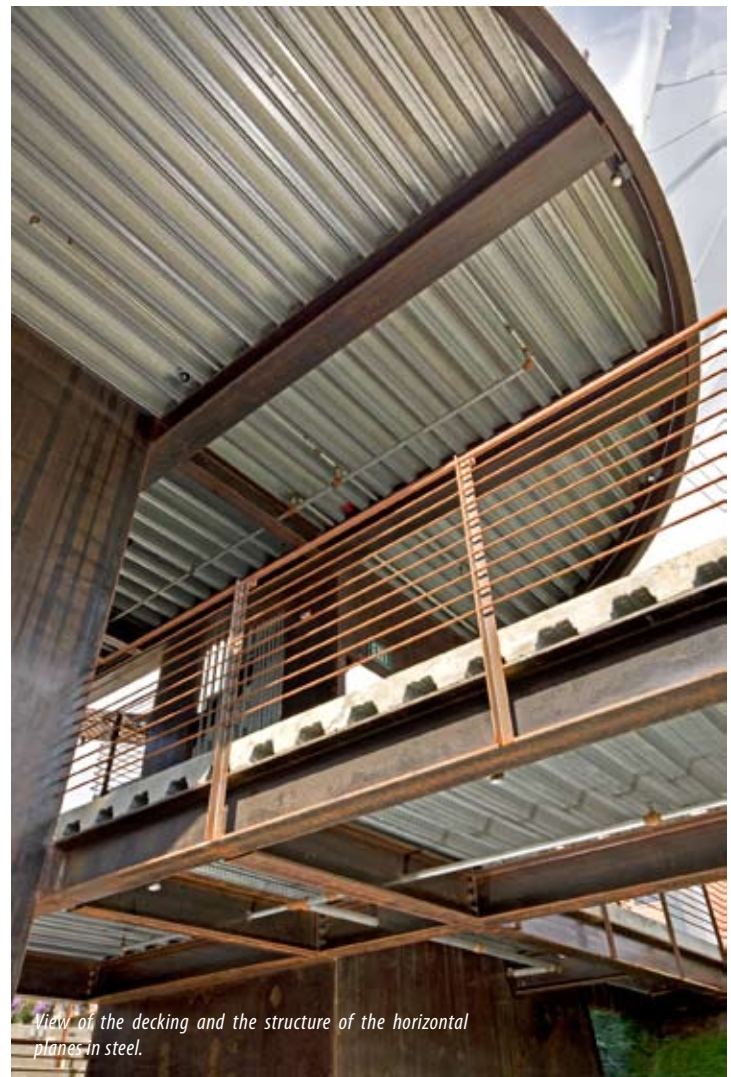
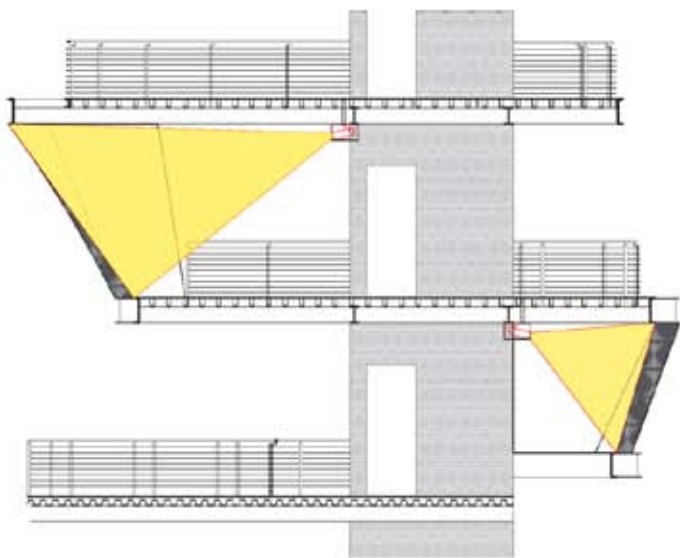
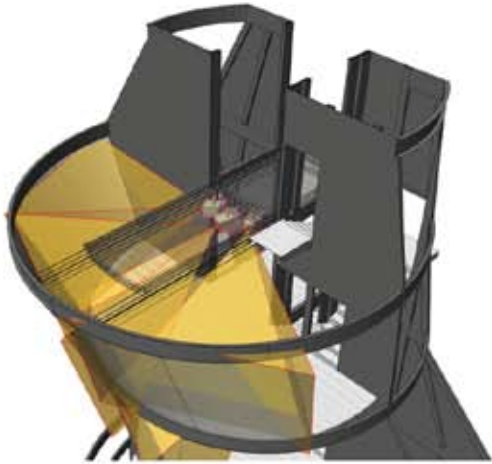
The central elevator shaft in glass.



Steel structure and its elements.

proximity. The screens can be seen from cars, streets, freeways, passengers at the train stops and pedestrians in the district as information is projected on the curved, conical screens of the structure. 10 projectors hung from the floors rear-project on the translucent acrylic screens. The steel decks of the tower enable viewers to look at the city. The screens are positioned for specific target audiences.

Samitaur Tower instinctively provokes a reaction owing to the intentional visual instability and the nature of the projection system. The fascination of the engineered form of its architecture augments the awe of the projected image. The throbbing facade and the fragmented geometry of the built form diminish the lines between the art that the tower intends to project and the art that the tower intends to represent. ■



Positioning and orientation study for the projector screens.

FACT FILE:

Project	:	Samitaur Tower
Location	:	Culver City, Los Angeles, USA
Owners	:	Frederick and Laurie Samitaur Smith
Architects	:	Eric Owen Moss Architects
Design team	:	Eric Owen Moss, Principal, Dolan Daggett, Project Architect, Pegah Sadr, Vanessa Jauregui, Eric McNevin, Amy Drezner
Structural Engineer	:	Arup - Los Angeles, Bruce Danziger

