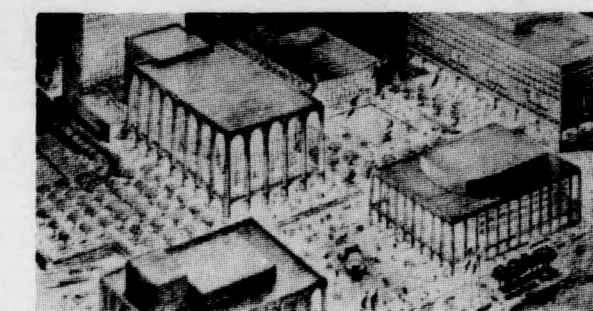


PHOTOS BY GARY BLAKELEY



Given that the dominant architectural tendency of the early 1960s was neoclassicism, we ought to be thankful, at least, that no groovy, curvilinear pseudotemples were erected along Keele Street.



L. Centre, New York, 1961-63.



The stairway acoustics are excellent; however, in respect to the building's current usage, this is no celebratory feature.



The variety of materials and textures is a pleasant relief from the omnipresent York brick and concrete.



The third-floor student lounge, adjoined on the right by the assembly hall, should be a model for future semi-public spaces at York. It is well illuminated by natural light and accommodates flexible seating arrangements.

# Slick new Lumbers Building transcends tired old Master Plan

By R.D. MACPHERSON

The physical structure of York University's Keele Campus has certainly been much maligned over the years. It has come under additional scrutiny during York's 25th anniversary, as the York community re-evaluates its institution with an assiduousness one would expect to attend such a milestone. The arrival of the Leonard Lumbers Building and the nascent implementation of the Lapp Report have further aroused an interest in the past, present and future development of the campus.

The opening of the Lumbers building represents a critical point in York's physical development, which is both an extremely positive marker for the campus' future, and surprisingly, is largely consistent with the aims of York's original Master Plan.

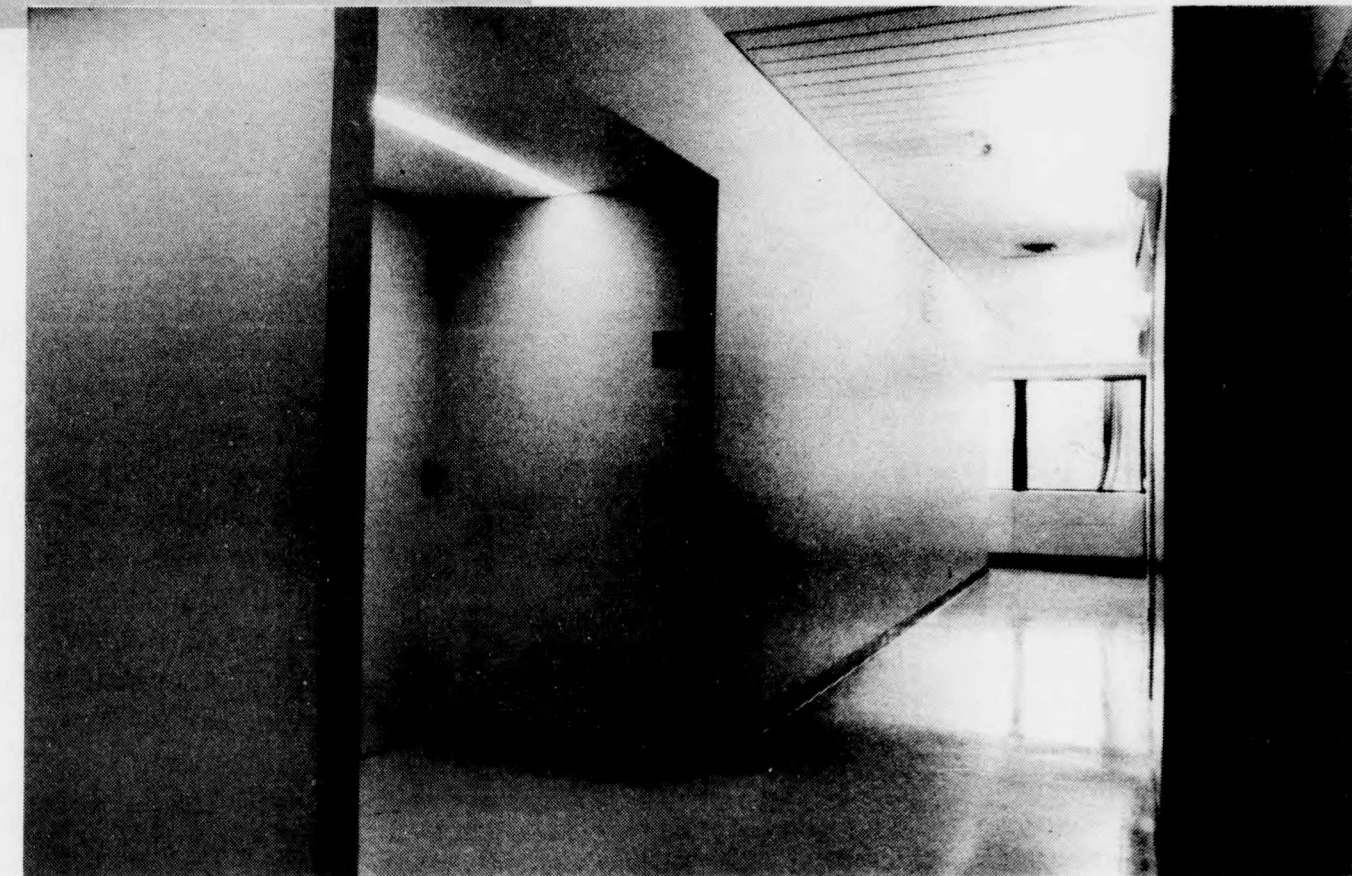
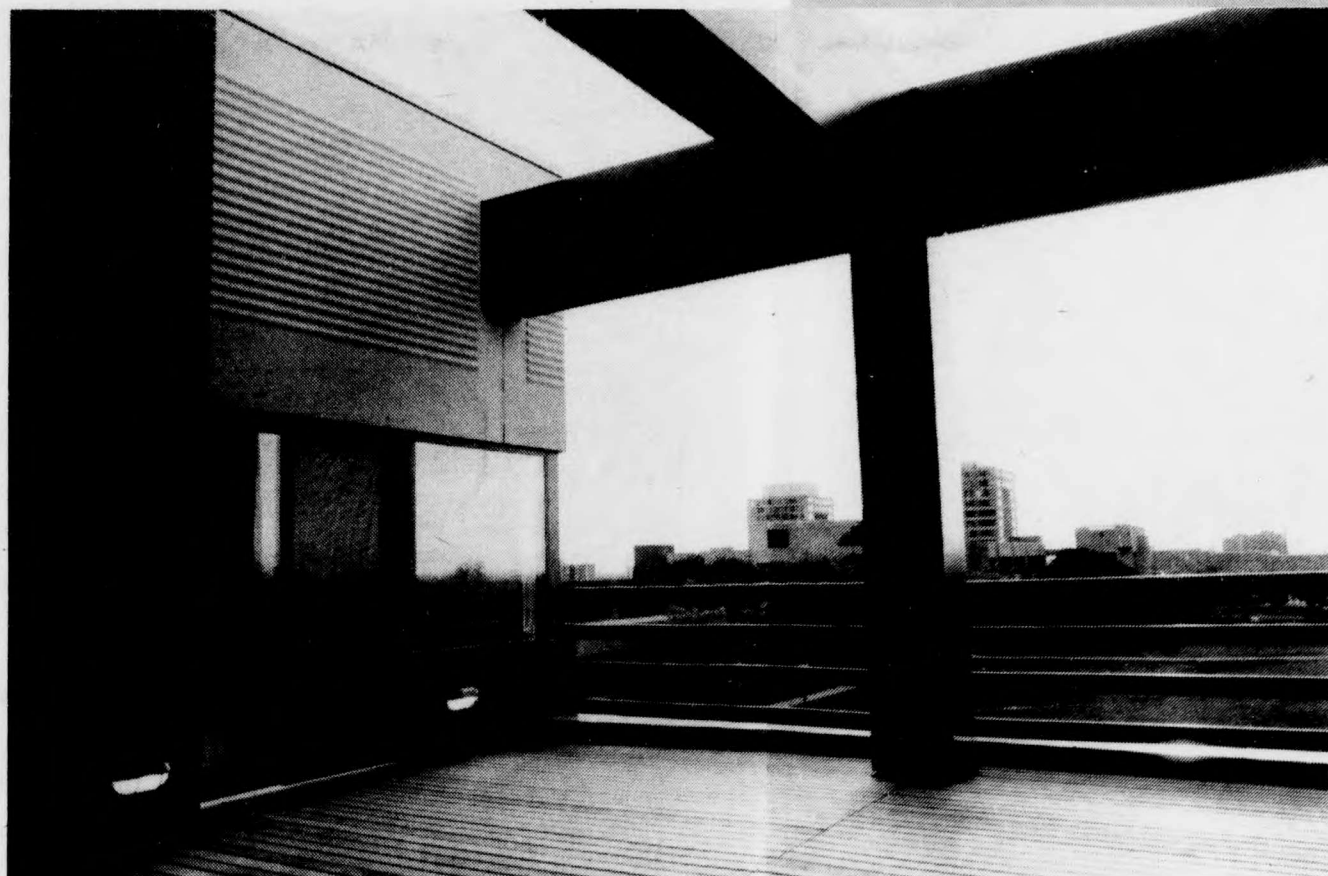
The creation of a university in an empty field presented great freedom and possibilities to the politicians, planners and architects involved. York is, presently, one half of their collective vision, which foresaw fully integrated complexes of buildings, connected to, or adjacent to other complexes, spanning the campus. Most of our present environmental problems, such as our inhospitable vacant expanses and chasms are no fault of the Master Plan, which sought to create an interconnected and sheltered environment. Where the plan erred was not in its overall conception, but in its random execution, which has left the campus with its peripheral structures lacking central focus. If the structures had been built in sequence, emanating from the core—the Ross aggregate—outwards, then the 1972 building moratorium would not have left us with the sequestered, exposed and potentially dangerous inter-complex spaces. The fundamental failure is, therefore, external to the Plan. (The issue of aesthetic "failure" should some day be addressed properly and thoroughly, as the existing architecture is as often criticized as the environmental plan is. Given, however, that the dominant architectural tendency of the early 1960s was neoclassical, we ought to be thankful at least that no groovy, curvilinear pseudo-temples were erected along Keele Street. See the Lincoln Center photograph for a study in contrasts.)

Any sound analysis of York's campus should recognize that its shortcomings were caused largely by events which occurred outside of the responsibility of the Plan's authors. Yet such explanations do not redress the current disequilibrium.

Our newest structure enters this framework of ambivalence in part as affirmation, and in part refutation of the Master Plan. The Lumbers building is the first real building to be added to York's inventory, exclusively for academic purposes, since the moratorium. The Track and Field Centre, the Tennis Centre and the transcendental portables that York calls office buildings are post-moratorium, yet do not rectify our space problems sub-

Right: 3rd floor balcony looking west. The pastoral scenery will likely be short-lived, as a mall for Lumbers is already being planned.

Far right: The intelligent deflected lighting system more than offsets the seemingly inescapable institutional ambience one finds wherever academic pursuits occur.



stantially; nor have these projects infilled the inter-complex wastelands. That the Lumbers building fulfills solely an academic function represents in itself an unexpected turn of events.

Initially, the capital funding for the project was to have been generated within the University; under this programme, one floor of three would have been rented to a relevant scientific/research concern, from the field of private enterprise. A somewhat unexpected capital grant from the Ontario government rendered this inclusion unnecessary; furthermore, it facilitated the creation of a new home for the Faculty of Environmental Studies (FES), who were occupying the top floor of the Scott Library. Two ensuing positive consequences attended this movement. Firstly, an additional and much needed floor was added/returned to the library at no expense. Secondly, the FES became involved within the planning process of the Lumbers Building. It was a fortuitous collaboration for York.

An ad hoc committee of FES faculty were given just four months to generate their proposals for the project; these

were internal environmental plans (the external form was already decided) which had substantial effect on the design. The project architect, Macy Duboi, worked well in dialogue with the FES committee. The Master Plan was somewhat more difficult to work with: for instance, a little-known Plan stipulation that there be no opening windows on campus was still in effect. The FES group challenged this ruling and won their case. This openness on behalf of the Administration bodes well for the future, and the precedent will hopefully result in the implementation of opening windows in all applicable future buildings. These windows necessitated a reevaluation of the existing heating/cooling system. A new system was designed with individually adjustable room thermostats: a happy by-product, facilitating environmental autonomy for room users, and more importantly, healthier working conditions. For those not privileged with a third floor outer office (the only ones with opening windows) an active fresh air circulation system more than compensates by allowing programmable air changing based on a selected percentage between 0 to 100% per hour. Mean-

while, the remainder of the campus smothers in an endlessly circulated closed air system, punctuated by the opening of those unavoidable cavities (doors). One might assume that the architects of the Master Plan anticipated some mechanistic utopian future, where cures for an environmental inadequacies would be available over-the-counter. They certainly erred gravely in the aspect of air quality. On the third floor of the Lumbers Building, a ban on public-space smoking, combined with the above mentioned features, results in an air quality which is best described as being alien to the campus.

The factor of high air quality might be termed an insidious aspect of the design: it positively affects us physiologically, without our awareness of it. Similarly, the deflected, full-spectrum warm white fluorescent lighting throughout the building is less stressful on the eyes. But we do not always interact passively in the architectural environment. We enter a building intentionally, whether we work there or are seeking something there. This obvious fact is frequently overlooked in the process of designing buildings. The internal structural organization

(a passive guidance system) and its signage (an active system) can at best lead us effortlessly to our destination; at worst, it can frustrate and complicate our quest. As the Ross Building is to the latter, the Lumbers Building is to the former. In the Lumbers Building, a two colour signage system is utilized: red for science, blue for Environmental Studies—it is very simple and very effective.

In what would appear, when contrasted with other York structures, to be a great leap of imagination, someone thought to include Braille signage on the Lumbers' elevator control boards. It is odd that in a university that tries to be accessible to the handicapped, that no one has thought of this before. But then, the Lumbers Building is more thoughtfully designed than most campus buildings.

The Lumbers Building has underscored our principle internal-environment deficiencies. As York begins its second growth phase, we would do well to synthesize these findings into the old Master Plan. And insofar as much of the success of the new building can be directly attributed to its own FES, York would be well advised to continue to look internally for solutions.

In this feature Excalibur's outspoken yet too-often suppressed Art Director is finally given his big chance to express himself in prose. Macpherson's style is bold and strident, and we can sense his pure joy as he explores new, wonderful conglomerations of words, and the exciting world of syntax. Just as exciting for Rob was his recent visit to York's new and fancy Leonard Lumbers Building.