



Harvard Design School



## The Architecture of the Courthouse: a Franco-American Retrospective 1991-2006

Paris, March 26 and 27, 2009

Auditorium, Institut National d'Histoire d'Art (INHA)  
2, rue Vivienne 7502

Beginning in the early 1990's, the pressing need for a new generation of courthouses in both France and the United States prompted the creation of parallel ambitious building programs. The resulting new courthouses fulfilled a lack of space and functionality due to the age of existing facilities and increase in administrative services. They also embodied a new desire to establish a considered balance between openness, security, and dignity.

There is a long history of identifiable courthouse prototypes in France and in the United States. Since the 1930's however, the courthouse has increasingly become an anonymous administrative office building with little judicial identity. The challenge, revealed by these two programs committed to a search for architectural excellence and innovation, was to re-imagine the courthouse, respond to current needs and functionality, while recognizing the necessity in our democratic societies of creating a symbolic representation of justice.

- 1) In the US, the Design Excellence Program of the General Services Administration (GSA) planned the construction of 160 courthouses within 15 years.
- 2) In France, the Délégation Générale au Programme Pluriannuel d'équipement (DGPPE), the Multi-Year Judicial Facilities Program orchestrated the construction of approximately 20 courthouses within 15 years.

Now that a significant number of these courthouses have been completed, this conference, jointly organized by the University of Paris- 1 and the Harvard Graduate School of Design, intends to assess the two programs and put their contribution to the evolution of judicial architecture into perspective. Presentations will draw on resources from the judicial and legal communities, as well as historians of art and architects; they will consider the implications of design for the different judicial philosophies and legal systems. Some of the questions posed by the series of new courthouses, designed by distinguished architects in both countries, will be

1) how to conceive a fully functional courthouse which is neither an imitation of an historic model nor a bureaucratic office building, but a contemporary symbolic representation of justice,

2) how to achieve an ideal configuration for the courthouse in a specific, often highly constrained, site, and 3) how to reconcile the desire for openness and accessibility with the increasing need for security.

### Organization of the conference:

*Thursday, March 26*

- The current situation and the need for reflection on the efforts of the past 15 years
- The role and function of the justice systems in France and in the US; consequences for architectural design
- The historic evolution of courthouse architecture in France and in the US

*Friday, March 27*

- Presentation of each program by its principal actor: Ed Feiner and René Eladari
- Two case studies presented by judge and architect: Eugene (Oregon) and Grasse (Alpes- Maritimes)
- Critical reflection on the realized projects resulting from these two programs

### Objectives of the conference:

- To reflect on the nature of our two societies through the lens of recent judicial architecture
- To infuse scholarly work with the experience of professionals, and to give professionals historic perspective and intellectual distance
- To establish cross cultural dialogue between the realms of law, architecture, and scholarship

Each session will have presentations by French and American participants followed by reflection and commentary by a scholar familiar with both points of view. Simultaneous translation will be provided. There will be a small exhibition of projects, and on Saturday, March 28, participants will have the opportunity to visit the historic Paris courthouse and the new courthouse in nearby Pontoise.

The conference is open to the public.

For further information, contact conference organizers:

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