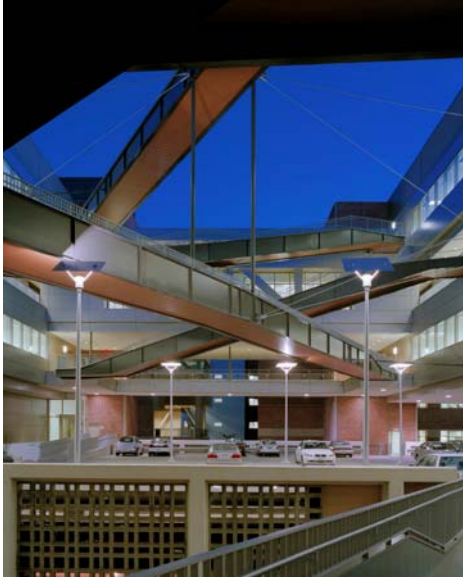


Westwood, Ho!

New buildings bring starchitects to UCLA



Suspended walkways at Viñoly's CNSI. BRAD FEINKNOFF

While the red brick Italian Romanesque core of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) is an ubiquitous presence on LA's western skyline, the school is not often on the lips of those discussing great contemporary Southern California architecture. That may be about to change, as Westwood has been altered by three new campus structures by architectural heavyweights Richard Meier, Rafael Viñoly, and I.M. Pei.

The new buildings—still intended, say campus officials, to blend with the school's overall aesthetic—include Meier's recently-completed Broad Art Center, Viñoly's just-finished California NanoSystems Institute (CNSI), and Pei and his son C.C.'s nearly-completed Ronald Reagan Medical Center. They are part of an ambitious expansion plan for the campus, which already has a population of nearly 40,000 and hundreds of acres of prime real estate.

"The existing style of the campus is extremely important in making any decisions regarding architecture," said campus architect Jeff Averill. "New buildings must have a contextual response to the campus. We have a framework, a palate of materials that we use. Of course, there are exceptions, and these three new buildings have more exceptions than other projects."

The south campus is receiving its share of construction as well. Located in what was once a cramped bit of space over an existing parking structure, the spectacular California NanoSystems Institute (CNSI), finished by Rafael Viñoly Architects in December, completes a group of contemporary-style science buildings known collectively as the Court of Sciences. Structures by Ralph Johnson and Cesar Pelli flank the CSNI and help to create a dense south campus network of buildings.

Set on a relatively small footprint, the CSNI is meant to bring together several scientific disciplines. The seven-story building, of which three floors were constructed over an existing parking structure, centers on fostering collaboration among scientific teams. "The design reflects how this work is performed: Large undetermined technical spaces with unexpected modes of circulation that encourage random activity," said Viñoly.

The exterior of the CSNI is deceptive; its clean brick and metal facade belies the hive-like interior courtyard. As if spun by an industrial arachnid, the chaotic web of pathways suspended above a portion of the parking structure connects various corners of the building. Though jarring at first, these suspended walkways are meant to illustrate the larger aim of this burgeoning technology. "It's all about creating connections across disciplines," said Averill. "The walkways and inner courtyard are indicative of that. The connections across this space are an expression of the idea of this building."

JAKE TOWNSEND