

unexpected non-urban quality, partly to its absence of monumentality. Our expectant eye was frustrated by what we saw: the expectation of monumentality that might have been apparent from obvious historical continuity was absent; so was a sense of innovation in view of the familiarity of the model. It may well be that a critic writing in fifty years' time will face neither of these difficulties since expectations will be different. We need to be aware that our recognition of what constitutes the initial problem is determined by the time in which we operate, as is our appreciation of the outcome.

The design and construction of the Getty Center in Los Angeles was fraught but, at fourteen years, not as protracted as that of the British Library. It had all the characteristics of a huge building project, both in terms of obstacles and achievements. The mere completion of a group of buildings costing close to a billion dollars is in itself a triumph for the client, the architects and engineers, and the contractors. Such a project is not an everyday occurrence. Fortunately it has been documented both in its early stages and after completion (Williams *et al.*, 1991 & 1997; Meier, 1997 and Brawne, 1998). There is thus evidence from the client, the architect and outsiders.

In 1983 the Getty Trust invited expressions of interest from thirty-three architects who had in their opinion produced distinguished work. The list contained a high proportion of stars in the architectural firmament and hardly any outside it. By November 1983 the list had been reduced to seven: Batey & Mack, Fumiluko Maki & Associates, Richard Meier & Partners, Mitchell Giurgola, I.M. Pei & Partners (Henry N. Cobb Jr), James Stirling, Michael Wilford & Associates and Venturi, Rauch & Scott Brown. Members of the selection committee travelled to see buildings by these architects.

Finally the committee submitted three names to the Trustees: Maki, Meier and Stirling. The sifting process continued and it was not until October 1984 that the final decision to appoint Richard Meier & Partners was announced.

This detailed and extended selection procedure makes it all the more surprising that at a certain stage the Trustees asked Meier to depart from his known and accepted vocabulary. They especially turned against white metal panels, a material which was most closely associated with Meier's architecture. Jim Stirling, on hearing that he had not got the Getty and that Meier had been chosen, reputedly remarked bitterly 'they'll get another washing machine' (Girouard, 1998, p.230). That they did not get a washing machine is due to a number of forces, each demanding innovation.

The site for the Getty is a wonderful hill-top overlooking the Los Angeles basin: the Pacific Ocean on one side, frequently snow-capped mountains on the other. A host of labels has been applied to the Getty: acropolis, hill village, campus, belvedere.

Below  
**Richard Meier &  
Partners**, The Getty  
Center, Los Angeles,  
California 1984-97

