



Charles A. Dana Fine Arts Building

AGNES SCOTT COLLEGE ~~~ DECATUR, GEORGIA



Charles A. Dana Fine Arts Building

Dr. Dana's generosity helped give Agnes Scott a building which, in the architect's words, "is basically a cathedral to art."

This catalog is a facsimile of the publication for the opening of the Charles A. Dana Fine Arts Building. The text is largely unchanged, except for the omission of the biographical information about the building's donor, Charles A. Dana. The photographs by Joseph Molitor vary slightly from the original: they appear in color yet, in most cases, as slightly different frames in order to present the highest quality archival images. A digital copy of the original catalog is available on our project website, buildingondana.design.

The Building on Dana project, undertaken during the 2024-25 academic year, is a collaborative and interdisciplinary study of Edwards & Portman's Charles A. Dana Fine Arts Building (1965). We created this project to document its history and assess its current needs and new functions. Originally designed for art and speech & drama, it is now the hub of the Department of Creative Arts, launched in fall 2023, with concentrations in dance, digital media, music, theatre, and visual practices. As we have merged former departments into a new program, we are likewise planning a more inclusive and sustainable environment. We are looking backward and forward at once: bringing together archival materials and images, restoring furniture and recultivating gardens, and incorporating and proposing accessible and equitable design – past and future.

During fall 2024 the Dalton Gallery—the literal and metaphorical center through which students must pass to reach any classroom—was a workspace/design lab for two courses (Three-Dimensional Thinking and Topics in Visual Practices) developing the materials for *Building on Dana I Patterns in Space*. We have re-envisioned and re-opened the original reading room on the first floor (now the Dana Art Library & Reading Room), which dissolved into the gallery years ago. We are tidying and replanting the greenspaces, three courtyards and the "secret garden," as current students lovingly call it; we have removed invasive plants and are replacing them with native species to support pollinators and increase biodiversity. We are maintaining these areas without synthetic herbicides, as the third organic plot on campus. Making these changes to the interior and exterior spaces and, we hope, restoring the Ludwig Mies van der Rohe Barcelona chairs and Florence Knoll benches from 1965, will reinforce and expand the College's work toward greater sustainability and climate resiliency to which our Center for Sustainability and campus community have committed, in partnership with the City of Decatur.

Continuing the early claim, by the College, that Dana "symbolizes the relationship of the college to the larger contemporary world," we are not only organizing this public exhibition, built by our students, but we are also hosting workshops and conversations with local organizations, residents and members of professional conferences on art and architecture during this academic year, all participating in our pedagogy — and progress.¹ The Building on Dana project is gathering communities of students, faculty, staff, local alumnae, teachers, and neighbors as well as colleagues and contributors far beyond Decatur to share knowledge, skills, insights, and efforts to confront existential challenges through history, design, sustainability, accessibility, equity, and social justice. We will propose and adopt plans that are better for all of us and for our planet, recognizing the histories and developing new ways forward, more equitable, engaging, and inspiring inside and outside.

THANK YOU - Special thanks to the Forward Arts Foundation, Portman Archives, James T. and Ella Rather Kirk Fund, Beidler-Neiditz Fund, Jeanne Berry '55, Sarah Hamilton Leathers '53 and Leone Bowers Hamilton '26 Art Lecture Series Fund, Student Green Fee Fund and our Friends of Art for their support of the Building On Dana project.

¹ Narration by Karen Gearreald of a video of Agnes Scott College in the "General Electric College Bowl," aired on March 9, 1966 on NBC. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tClIvHgBTRU>



FORWARD ARTS FOUNDATION



THE ARCHITECT'S CONCEPT

TO PROVIDE a building of contemporary design to house the varied needs of the departments of art and of speech and drama at Agnes Scott and to have this contemporary building blend comfortably with its predominantly Gothic neighbors was the problem given us to solve in the Charles A. Dana Fine Arts Building. The functional requirements of the building called for painting, sculpture and ceramics studios, a small theater for the performing arts — primarily drama — and accompanying galleries, classrooms and offices. In addition, it was our conviction that since a fine arts building is dedicated by its very nature to the world of creativity, the teaching environment should provide an inspirational atmosphere for the students.

Our basic philosophy in design revolves around taking a set of conditions and evolving an individual solution that is true to those conditions in a natural and uninhibited way—taking the human being and his natural reaction to space and space psychology to create stimulating, exhilarating buildings, functioning through the use of modulated space. The Dana Building brings back into architecture the grand, luxurious use of space—in a legitimate way—born of the problem—not forced or superficial.

The Dana Building is a study in the relationship of space within space. The concrete folded plate roof over the studios evokes in a thoroughly modern manner the spirit of other gabled roofs on campus. The building is basically a cathedral to art, and the grand Gothic space, which is authentically buttressed, contains the floating platforms or studios with the gabled roof opened to the north for light. The platforms have further been perforated to reveal space flow and interrelated space relationships. The columns on the exterior are expressed to reveal the buttressing of the grand space. They are working as true buttresses.

The exterior courts have many varied uses: they provide work areas off the sculpture and ceramics studios on the lower level, space for sculpture displays and drama activities on the upper level, along with rest and relaxation areas.

To paraphrase Gertrude Stein, “a wall is a wall is a wall,” and the juxtaposition of the exterior screen wall of Dana with the glass and concrete wall inside the courtyard sets up the counterpoint which makes the building still a part of the campus and yet a distinct entity unto itself. The arched, corbeled, pierced brick wall relates in a contemporary manner to the style and texture of older buildings on the campus. Its laciness allows the visitor, as he approaches the building, gradually to become aware of the excitement that lies beyond.

Another distinctly new facility of the building is the theater which manages to combine many of the new ideas in theater design with a spirit and feeling of the Elizabethan theater. Designed to be used for new experimental techniques as well as conventional productions, the stage breaks into the seating area to provide a rare intimacy between audience and actors.

We believe the Charles A. Dana Building is a functional building adaptable to the change and growth that lie ahead. We are very pleased that the building has a quiet repose in its surroundings and solves the problem without compromising its own integrity. It has been evolved naturally from its conditions and speaks for itself.

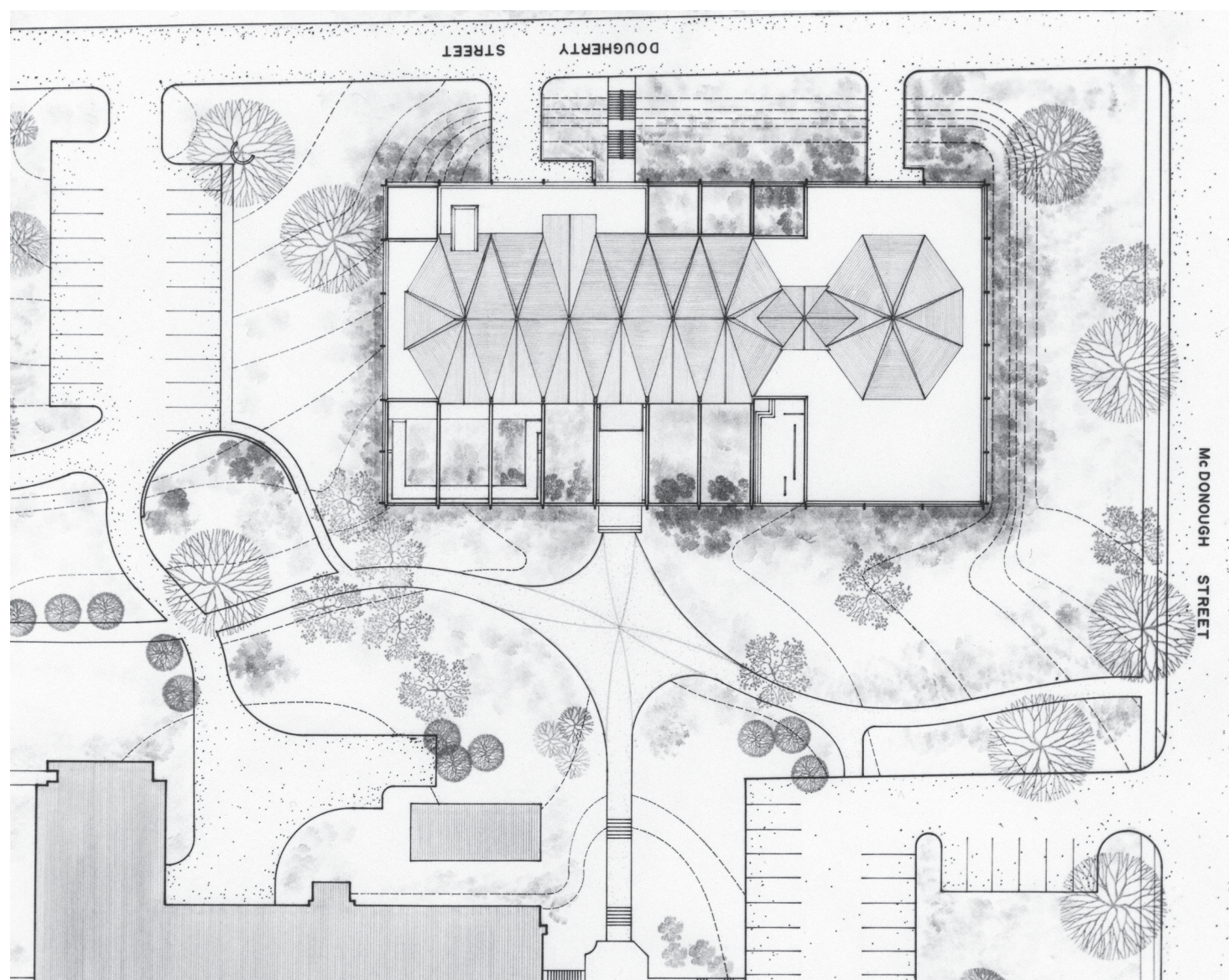
JOHN PORTMAN / EDWARDS & PORTMAN, A.I.A.



The building fronts a small quadrangle bounded on the left by Campbell Science Hall.



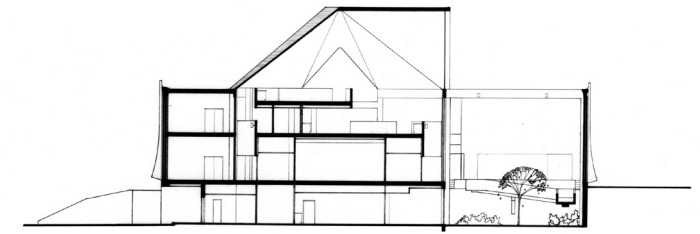
A rear view shows the great corbeled brick wall and exits leading to Dougherty Street.



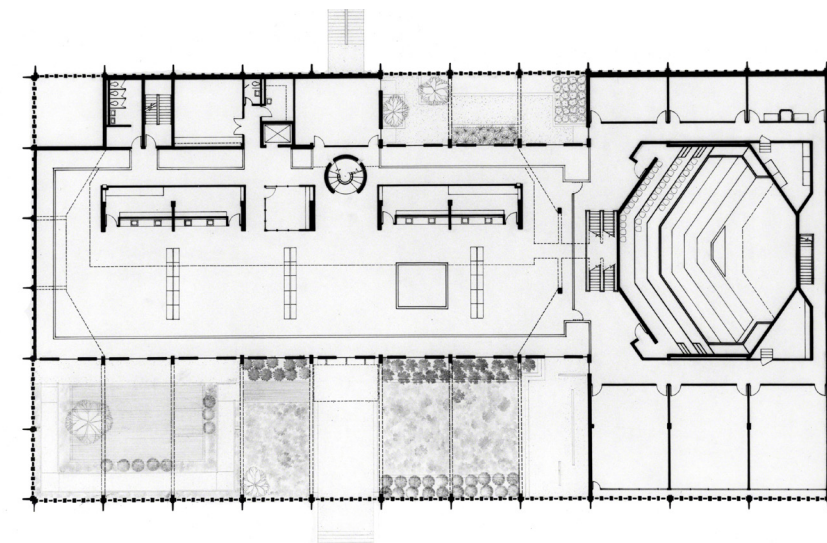
The architect's site plan and a front view (below) show the building's location.



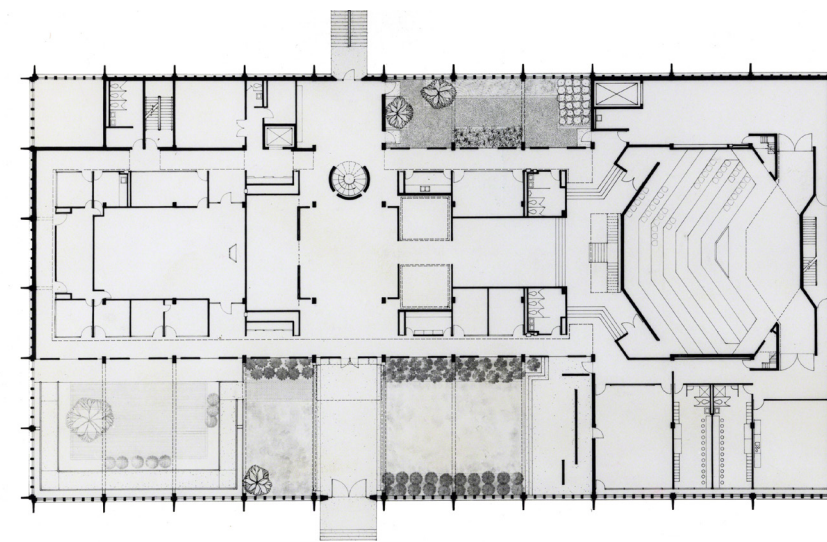
The architect says: "The Dana Building is a study in the relationship of space within space." This drawing shows the four levels with which he worked in the building and the use of the two-level court.



TRANSVERSE SECTION
0 10' 20'



Free-standing balconies compose the second and third floors adjacent to the theater area. Art studios, classrooms, conference rooms, a wardrobe room are some of the areas located on the second floor.



The teaching areas are separated, but the public areas in the building flow together, as this plan of the first floor demonstrates. Galleries, lounges, the theater entrance, faculty offices, exhibit spaces are on the first or main floor.

A cantilevered ramp leads from the ceramics area at ground level out to a sculpture court.



The entrance leads into a gallery lounge furnished with handsome Barcelona chairs. It opens on three sides to other galleries.

CREATIVE AND PERFORMING ARTS IN ACADEMIC COMMUNION



THE CHARLES A. DANA Fine Arts Building has been planned to house the teaching programs of the departments of art and of speech and drama as well as the public functions connected with these two departments. In the building the teaching activities of the two departments are separated, but the public areas flow together.

The main entrance to the building is through an arched gateway in the pierced brick wall into a large courtyard on two levels. The upper level will serve to exhibit sculpture and also as an outdoor theater. At its west end is a small open air stage, which may be lighted from the buttresses overhead. The lower court to the east is reached by a long ramp and provides a working area for students in sculpture and ceramics.

The front of the building proper consists of panels of glass and concrete set between the columns supporting the gabled roof. The entrance opens onto a long corri-

dor which is in turn open to the vaulted peaks of the gables.

Just beyond are the Dalton Galleries. In the center is a tastefully furnished gallery lounge defined at the far end by a circular staircase set in a pierced cylinder. To the east is a special exhibit gallery with handsome sliding gates which may be locked. To the west are two small square galleries, one open to the sky light, and a long main gallery, which leads to a striking red-carpeted open stairway and to the theater. To the south beyond the circular stairs is a smaller lounge and browsing area, with comfortable chairs and bookshelves, and there is a kitchenette nearby. Adjacent to the entry is the theater box office.

The theater itself is an intimate octagonal chamber seating 212 on the main floor and 100 in the balcony. The seats are a brilliant red in color and are arranged in continental style. The theater, designed by James Hull

From the lounge (above) one walks by the circular staircase into a smaller lounge and browsing area.

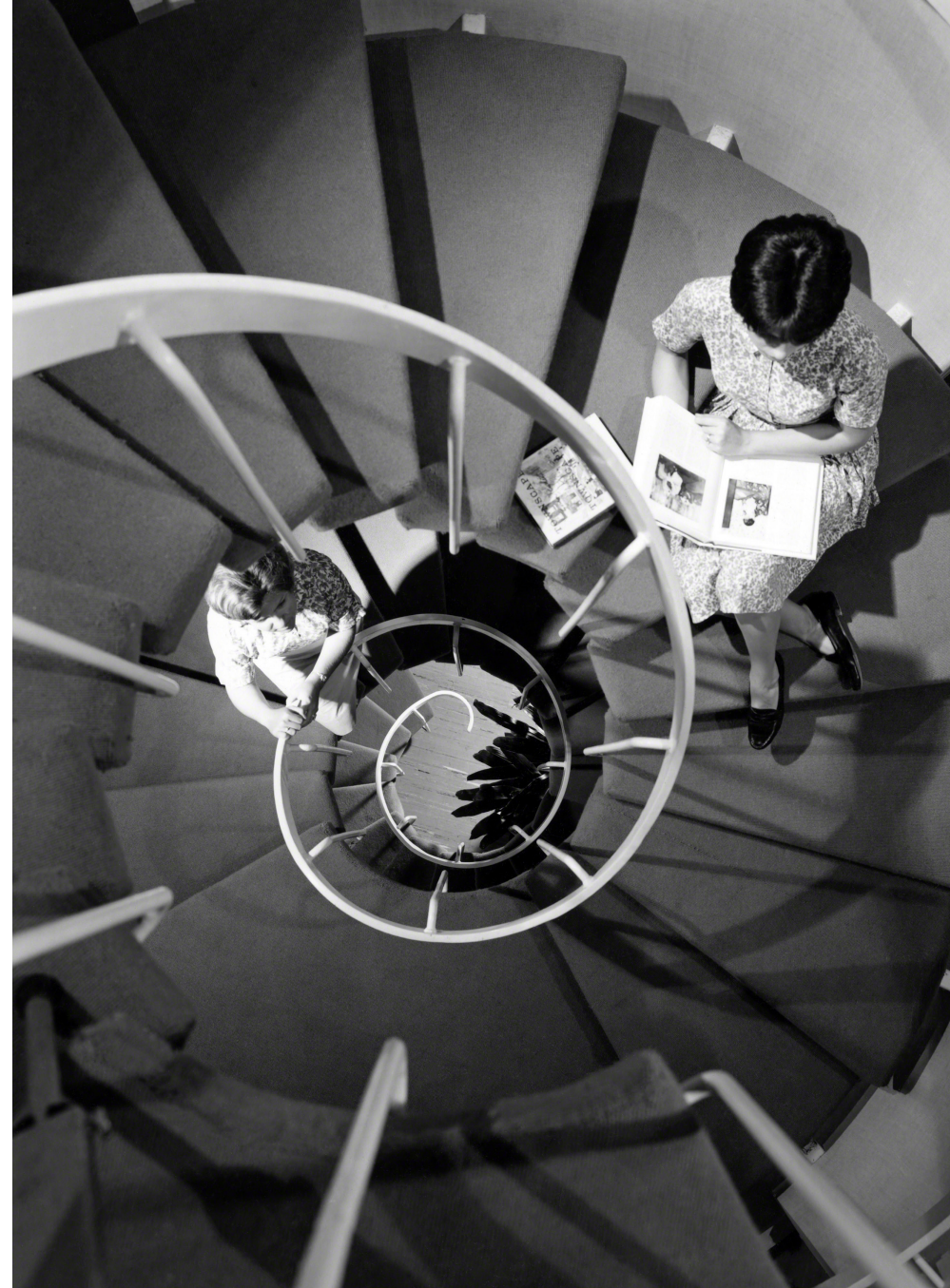


Gates open from one gallery to another.





A restful gallery is bounded by stairs leading to the theater. This gallery forms one of the major exhibit areas.



A splendid free-standing, circular staircase, carpeted in a brilliant red color, reaches from the first to the third floors.

An open stairway, running through three levels, leads off the main gallery to the theater area.



A ceramics exhibit area is on a first-floor hall.

Miller, features an open stage extending into the chamber and flanked by two-level towers. Lighting and sound equipment is modern and elaborate. It is controlled from a booth mounted high in the rear of the chamber over the balcony.

Just off stage on the south is a large, fully-equipped stagecraft workshop. Beneath it, served by an elevator, is a storage area for sets and properties. Adjacent to the theater on the north are two spacious dressing rooms and a clubroom for the Blackfriars drama group.

Offices for the department of speech and drama and one classroom are located on the first floor. On the

second floor flanking the theater are three more classrooms, two conference rooms, a wardrobe room, and costume storage rooms.

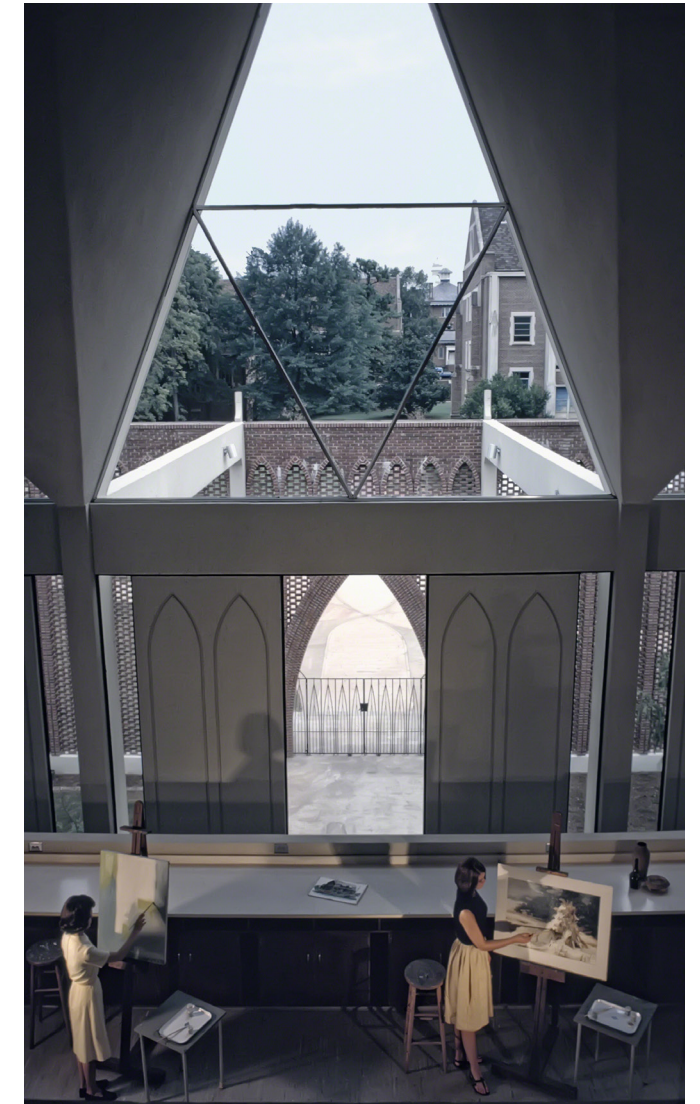
The east end of the main floor features an art history lecture room, seating 80 and equipped for remote control projection of slides and movies. Surrounding this are the slide room, a dark-room, a small seminar room, and offices for the department of art.

The studios for classes in design, drawing, and painting are located on the two free-standing balconies which are the second and third floors in the building. They are essentially uninterrupted spaces lit by natural



The open sweep of the two painting levels gives flexibility in arranging studio classes.

The relationship of three levels, an outer sculpture court, and the pierced brick wall makes a wholeness of design.



Windows in the gabled roof open to the north for the light so necessary to painters.



north light from the glass walls and gables. Using movable free-standing partitions, they are divided to form a separate working unit for each class. Sinks, counters, and cabinets for storing the materials for each student are provided. On the second-floor balcony and adjoining it, there are ample storage spaces and a seminar room equipped for projection of slides.

The east end of the ground floor of the building is designed for instruction in ceramics and sculpture. There are two L-shaped studios opening onto the lower courtyard. Between them is a small seminar room, and adjoining them are the mixing room, damp room, spray





Lighting from roof windows falls three levels into a gallery.

The open-stage theater, designed by James Hull Miller, combines contemporary ideas in theater design with a spirit and feeling of the Elizabethan theater.



room, and kiln room, as well as offices and storage spaces.

The colors in the building are neutral for the most part, but there are striking accents of red and blue in corridors. The furnishings are contemporary in offices, classrooms, and the public areas. The building is air conditioned throughout.

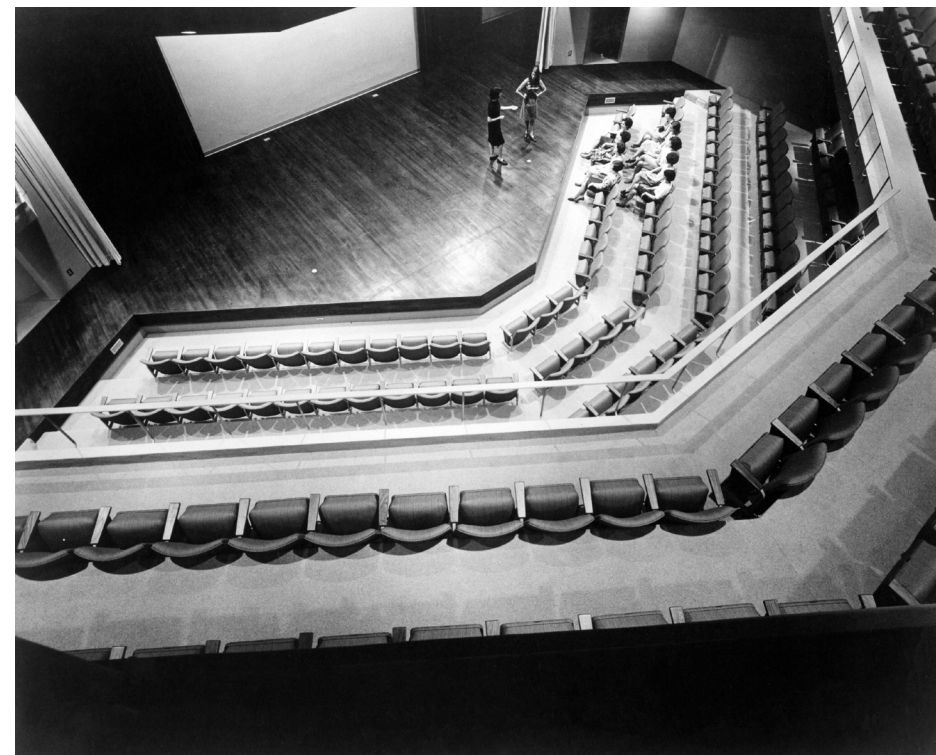
Architects for the building were Edwards and Portman of Atlanta. The builder was the J. A. Jones Construction Company. Landscaping was designed by Edward Daugherty.



This seminar room is typical of several in the building.



Each faculty member has an office similar to this one.



A control-panel bird's-eye view shows the open stage projecting into the audience area.



A sculpture court just inside the outer wall is beautifully landscaped.



The rear entrance repeats the architectural combination of Gothic and contemporary design.



AGNES
SCOTT
COLLEGE

DALTON
GALLERY