

# A JEWEL OF A MUSEUM: LUXURY

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

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WASHINGTON — the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, the Sheldon Gallery in Lincoln, Neb., Asia House in New York—and two to go—the addition to the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and one in Germany.

He is the perfect man for the job because a museum, ideally, is a total esthetic experience: a balance of art with architecture on the highest level of controlled, sensuous pleasure. Mr. Johnson's sense of beauty might be said to be on perfect pitch. There is restrained use of the richest and most luxurious materials for maximum impact without ostentation; form is an elegantly experimental game serving artful purposes

with extraordinary finesse; and above all, there is impeccable taste. He is at his best when the design is for a pleasure palace, unfettered by the grubby realities of life. The new museum is a kind of Petit Trianon manqué; an exquisite pavilion for royal esthetic games. And it gives pleasure in every sense; visually, tactily, spatially and as a setting for a collection of exceptional artifacts of notable beauty made all the more dramatic by their sophisticated surroundings. A little rich for some people's blood, perhaps, but this is not a simple age, in the arts or anything else.

The building consists of eight circular domed pavilions grouped in a square. In the center is a circle, with a fountain, open to the sky. In the cookie-cutter spaces between circles are plants in beds of black Japanese pebbles; outside are the famous Dumbarton Oaks gardens. Construction of reinforced concrete and steel is screened with richness. The round, marble-faced columns, some of them air ducts, support the domed roofs. Except for these, the walls are glass, and with the curtains drawn open, the vista is through and across the circular rooms and out again to the landscape for a bouquet of spatial and visual delights.

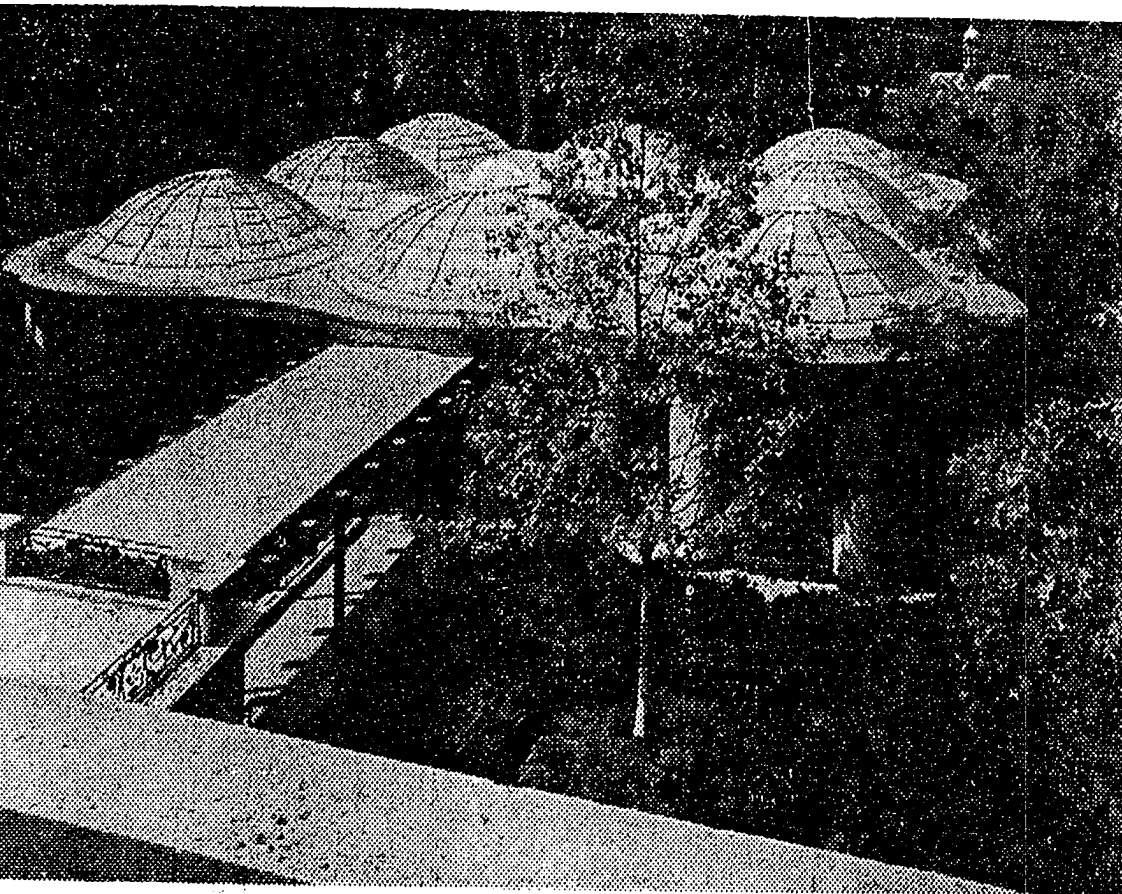
Mayo, is an installation that uses only plexiglass stands and vitrines, the closest approach to invisibility. Whether this is completely successful is questionable. It succeeds in putting the emphasis on the magnificent objects of stone, jade, pottery and gold on display, but it also has something of the air, with the round rooms and columns, of a Paris *style moderne parfumerie* of the nineteen-thirties, only the mirrors and the models in marabou are missing. The Bliss collection, which was at the National Gallery from 1947 to 1962, is now arranged in geographical and chronological sequence in seven of the eight rooms. Each example is of such quality and beauty that proceeding from room to room is like a dinner of course after course of caviar. The feast progresses from examples of Classic Teotihuacan, Olmec, Maya and Veracruz to Post Classic Mixteca-Puebla, Costa Rican, Panamanian and Colombian styles and the cultures of Peru.

The problem of relating the new wing to the old building, which is the famous seat of Byzantine studies of Harvard University, has been handled with singular skill. It is an object lesson in how not to compound the error of reproducing reproductions of 20th century versions of 18th century buildings, which become increasingly moribund as the process continues. The Georgian style house is joined suavely to the handsome, contemporary gallery, and the whole is more than the harmonious sum of its parts.

The materials and colors are muted. Fine-grained Illinois marble, soft, sheer window fabric of the same tone, bronze frames and trim, circular oiled teak floors of pie-shaped sections set in borders of dark green Vermont marble, are extravagantly luxurious. But the scale is delicate, even miniaturized; each pavilion room is only 25 feet in diameter. In spite of its subtlety, however, the architecture has a quiet insistence that has made installation almost as difficult as at the Guggenheim. There, it is a screaming fishwife fight between building and contents, with victory only to a determined director. Here it is a delicate duet in which the architecture, always as strong as the art, never retreats or submits. The art has had to be carefully accommodated to it.

### Luxury

The solution, devised by the director, Jack Thacher, his curator, Elizabeth Benson, and the designer of the cases, James



Ezra Stoller



ART TEMPLE: Exterior and interior views of Philip Johnson's addition to Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, D. C. It houses Pre-Columbian art.