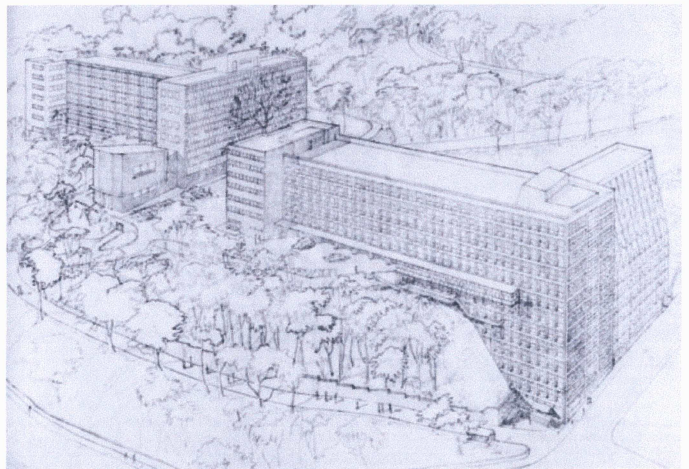


Professional Appraisals

Architecture of the West Wing Study – English

by Professor Vito Bertin, Gu Daqing and Woo Pui-leng



The architecture of the West Wing

These pages show 20 illustrations with comments and ten diagrams on the architectural value of the West Wing of the Central Government Offices of the Hong Kong SAR. They were prepared by Vito Bertin (retired), Gu Daqing and Woo Pui-leng of the School of Architecture of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, in support of the efforts by the Government Hill Concern Group to preserve this area of civic importance in its integrity.

Hong Kong, 04.05.2011



Central Government Offices

The Central Government Offices on Government Hill in Central consist of two buildings built in three phases: the 1954 East Wing, the 1956 Central Wing and the 1959 West Wing. They were designed by the Architectural Office of the Public Works Department.

Contradiction

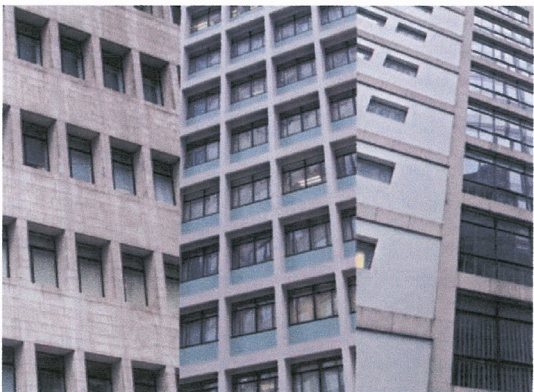
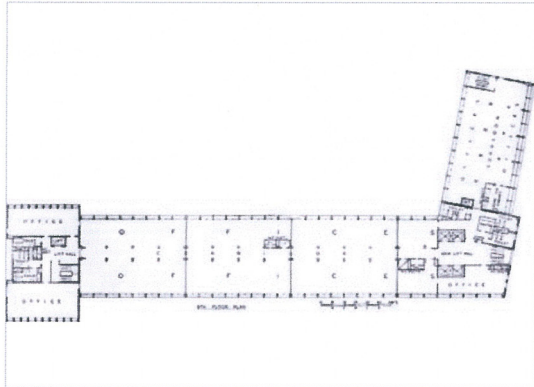
The appraisal report by Purcell Miller Tritton is well written and gives an extensive description of the site, the buildings and their context. Only in the conclusion in chapter 5, page 135 there seems to be a discrepancy between the acknowledgement of the architectural quality, the stated importance of the site and its surroundings and the recommendation, that the West Wing could be demolished. This recommendation does not follow from the so called headline issues. It might have been made based on considerations outside the report. The first point mentions: 'The buildings are of a high architectural quality ...'. The second point: '... West Wing is the least good piece ...'. This just looks like a ranking. Among three buildings of a high architectural quality, the West Wing ranks third. That still makes it a building of a high architectural quality. It is also interesting to note that the cover of the report shows a full page image of the West Wing.

Architectural quality

The following comments on the architecture of the West Wing complement the detailed description in the appraisal report. They are based on limited available material and only initial observations. For a real study, access to more material and the building itself would be necessary. The comments are grouped into several sections. The first four relate to site, structure, use and expression. The last two are used to further illustrate some of the points made.

Site

Although the three wings were built in phases, they were planned as a whole. Together with the Central Wing, the West Wing defines a space which is centred on and aligned with the axis of Government House. This space and the buildings insert protective layers between the commercial part of the city and Government House. The West Wing has a strong overall form which is differentiated into three parts which are further differentiated and react to the lateral conditions. This makes it possible to experience the building in different ways according to position and in relation to its surrounding. Of course, part of the surroundings have changed a lot since the West Wing was built. This lateral relationships are combined with vertical relationships, the way the building sits on the ground. This ground has steep slopes and big level differences to which the design reacts.



Space perception

We perceive itself invisible space indirectly through visible physical elements. Demolishing the West Wing would therefore not create more space. On the contrary, it would destroy a number of spaces on a range of scales to which the building now contributes. The atmosphere of the area would be weakened and the spatial experience impoverished.

Structure

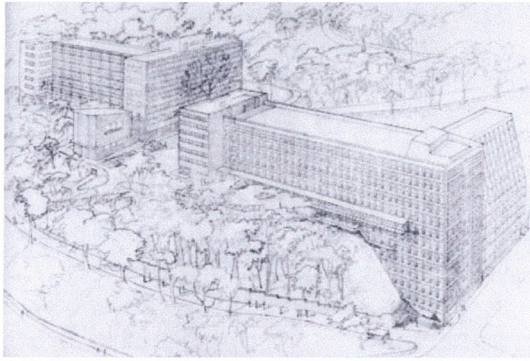
According to the plan of the 9th floor from the appraisal report, the structure of the West Wing consists of six sections separated by expansion joints and two types of structural systems. The vertical support in the standard middle sections is provided by two rows of square posts in the centre and narrower rectangular posts in double density along the periphery. The angled end section has a variation of this system. In the head section and in the corner section, there are load-bearing walls which provide lateral stability to the building. In the head section the peripheral posts are even denser spaced than in the middle sections. In the corner section the post and wall systems overlap. The load-bearing structure does much more than support the building. Internally, it organises and differentiates the floor plan and creates zones for use. For example, the central posts define a zone for the corridor and are shifted to one side to create two zones of different depths for offices. As part of the building envelope, it contributes to climate control, providing shading. Externally it is used for the differentiated articulation of the expression.

Use

With almost no information about the original programme for the West Wing, not much about this aspect can be said at the moment. But the 9th floor plan shows, that the plan is very flexible and can provide spaces of various properties and sizes for a range of future uses.

Expression

Additions to the West Wing and the painting of surfaces make it difficult to see the original expression. But the skill of making a composition which relates the whole to its parts over several levels is still impressively visible. The modesty of the building does not make its design trivial. The building expresses an attitude towards design which makes use of the site, of the programme and the means of construction to create a composition of mass and space. The interior organisation of the spaces, the materialisation through structure and enclosure, the exterior differentiation of the mass and the articulation of the relationship to the site are related. And the different aspects which a design has to consider and a building to provide support each other.



North-east elevation

This perspective view of the whole Government Office complex was published in the Hongkong & Far East builder on page 9, number 4, volume 12, 1956. It demonstrates that the complex of three buildings was designed as a whole. The three main parts of the West Wing are clearly recognisable. The north-east facing elevation of the middle part forms a big surface with the texture of the peripheral structure forming a deep layer of shading elements, windows, and infills. This surface transforms, without changing, from a horizontal plane on top of the hill to a vertical plane on street level.



Composition

The horizontality of the elevation is stopped by the head-volume with a different material and formal expression. The granite cladding is articulated in a way to give the expression of a massive block from which the windows are carved. At the top the surface is bounded by a strong horizontal band forming the roof parapet. The bottom ends with a horizontal surface forming an extension of the originally open space under the building. This slab ...



Transformation

... extends horizontally along the elevation, and later combines with a slab as an extension of the ground plane and transforms into a glazed volume, which contrasts with the grid of the elevation. The volume is a spatial extension of the canteen.

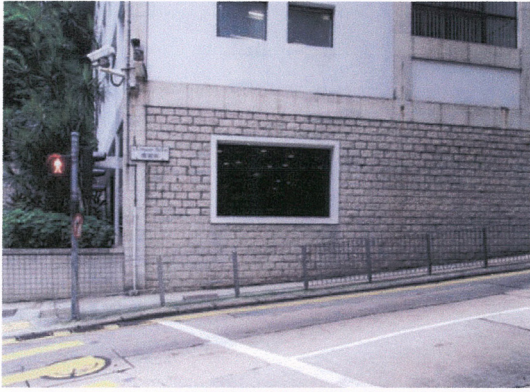


Entrance

At street level the finishes seem to have changed so that they are no more representing the original design. But it is still visible how the surface ends in a base, two fins are extended and emphasised, and form an entrance together with a cantilevering slab.

Base

On the north-west facing elevation, the original materialisation of the base with rough granite is still visible.



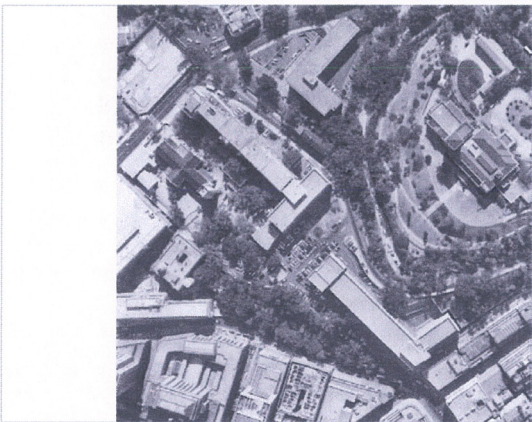
Contrasts

A frame of finer granite as cladding extends to the building's height and emphasises the horizontal part of the structure and the layering of the internal space, contrasting with the two adjoining elevations, and forming a lateral edge of the north-east elevation.



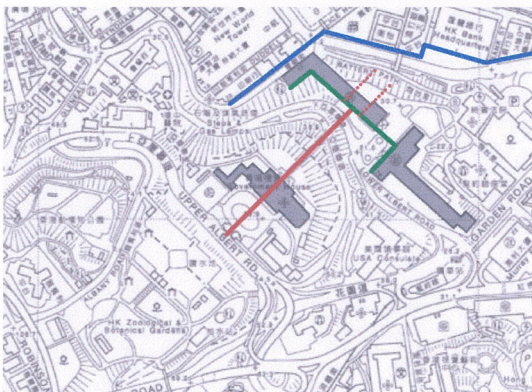
The centre of government

This aerial view from the appraisal report shows clearly the relationship between Government House, the Central Government Offices and the city beyond. The soft cover of the ground with grass and trees extends from the Zoological and Botanical Gardens to Government House and beyond the Government Offices.



Axis and layers

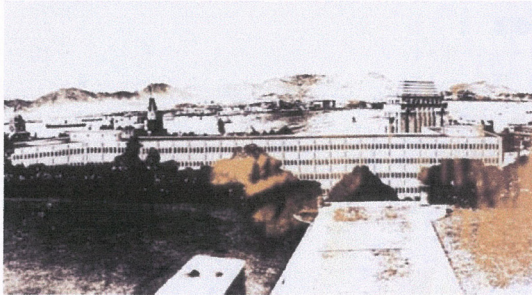
The map shows the axis of Government House, the line of the defined space and the edge of the commercial part of the city. Where the axis of Government House meets the West Wing, the ground floor was originally open. So the West Wing reacts to this axis by receiving it in a space and giving it a visual continuation on a different level.





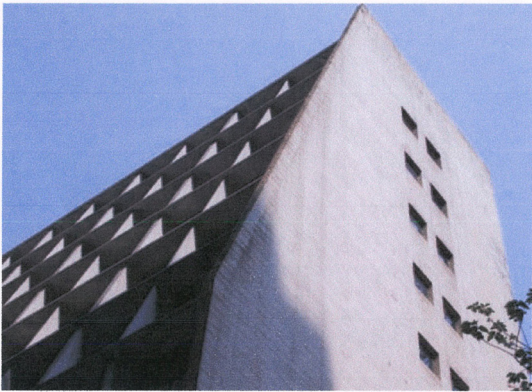
Extensive park

The contemporary satellite view shows that the planted areas around the Central Government Offices are still part of an important extensive park.



View axis and panorama

A photomontage in the report shows how at the time of the design, the view from Government House over the government buildings to the harbour and across to Kowloon was considered.



Conclusion

Looking at the building of the West Wing and its design reveals that this modest office building is carefully and skilfully designed. The design ideas are in the building and can be read from it. With the destruction of the building, another representative of a strong Hong Kong design tradition will be destroyed as well.



Wider issues

There are wider issues this specific case relates to. They are not discussed here, but have to be mentioned. One is the ability to appreciate architectural design and how this affects judgment of buildings, groups of buildings in the urban fabric and the landscape. The other is the current level of design know-how in relationship to design know-how accumulated over a timespan of not just decades but hundreds and even thousands of years. Recent revitalisation projects and demolitions in Hong Kong reveal that there are serious problems regarding the two issues: 1881 Heritage, Central Market, Hollywood Police Married Quarters, and also Central Star Ferry Pier, Queens Pier, Wan Chai Market.

Illustration sources

Photos and diagrams: Vito Bertin

Colour aerial view: Google maps

Floor-plan and perspective: Hong Kong & Far Eastern builder 4-12 1956

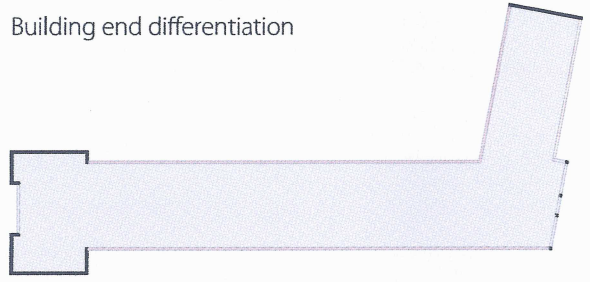
Gray aerial view, photomontage: Appraisal Report, Purcell Miller Tritton, AMO, 2009

Map: Government website

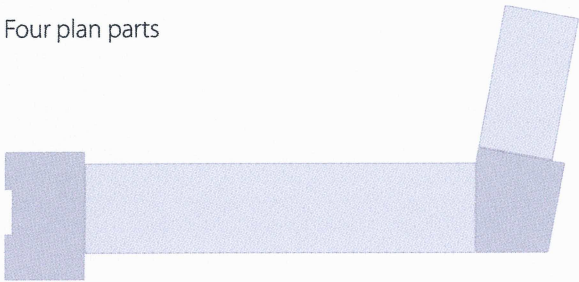
Six structural sections



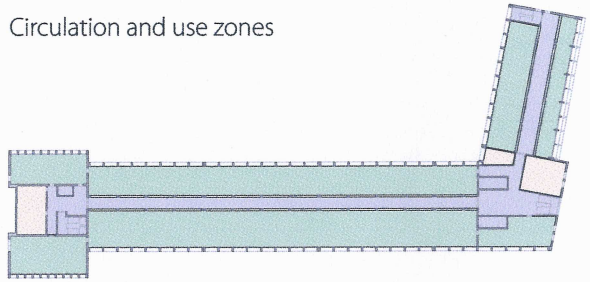
Building end differentiation



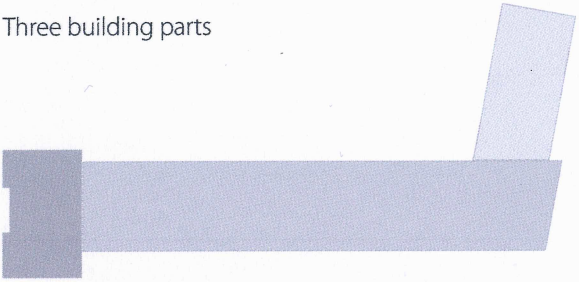
Four plan parts



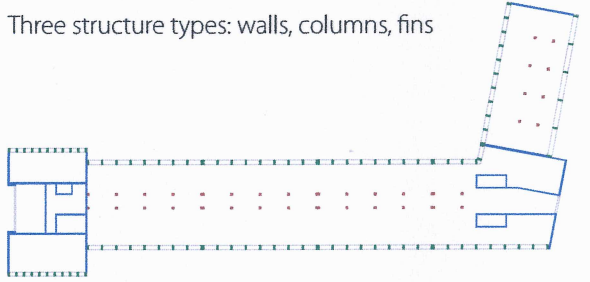
Circulation and use zones



Three building parts



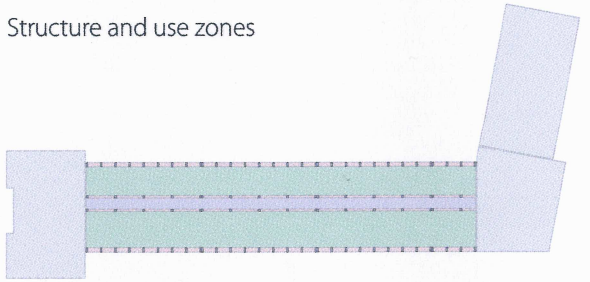
Three structure types: walls, columns, fins



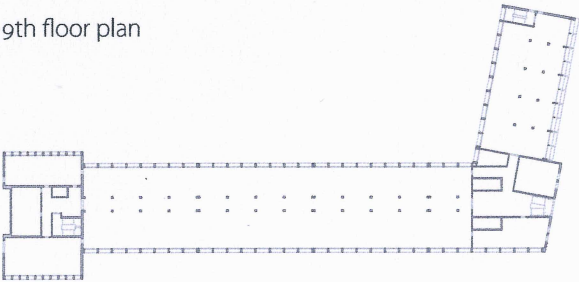
One mass outline



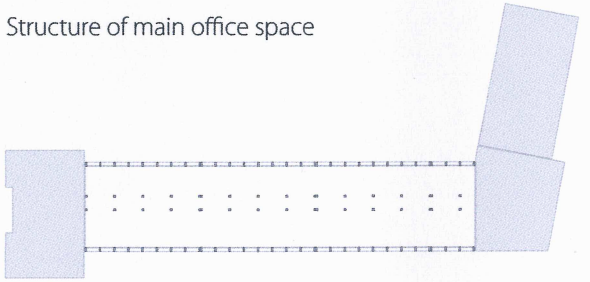
Structure and use zones



9th floor plan

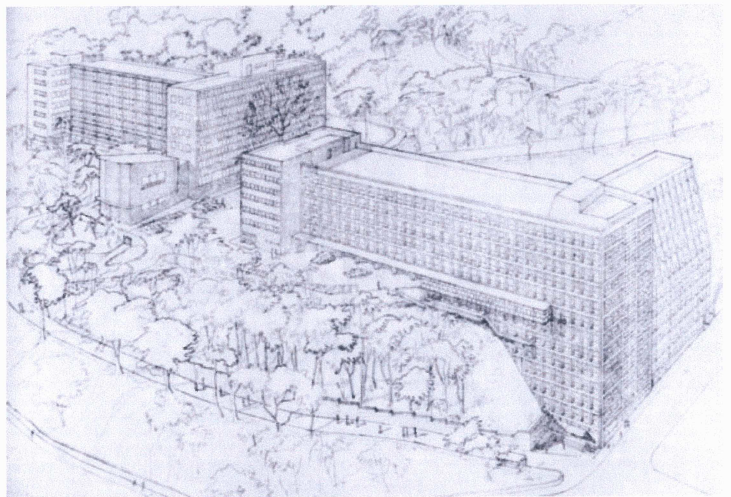


Structure of main office space



Architecture of the West Wing Study – Chinese

by Professor Vito Bertin, Gu Daqing and Woo Pui-leng



西座建筑

以下是關於香港特別行政區中區政府合署的20幅圖片和說明，以及10幅有關西座的建築價值的圖解。這些資料由香港中文大學建築學院的柏庭衛（已退休）、顧大慶和胡佩玲準備，以支持「政府山關注組」完整保留這個對市民來說有著重要價值的地段的訴求。

香港, 04.05.2011

政府合署

位於中環的政府合署由兩棟建築所組成，分三次建成，1954年的東座，1956年的中座，以及1959年的西座。這些建築由工務局的建築部門設計。



矛盾

Purcell Miller Tritton 事務所作了一份很好的評估報告，其中對於場地和建築都給予了詳盡的描述。唯獨在135頁第5章的結論中存在一個明顯的矛盾，一方面肯定了建築的設計品質和場地及其周邊環境的重要性，另一方面卻最終建議西座可以被拆除。這個建議沒有遵循其標題中的論點。它可能是基於報告之外的其他因素而提出的。報告先提到：「這些建築擁有很高的建築品質…」之後又說：「…西座是最差強人意的一部分…」我們可以認為這只是一個排名。在建築品質都很高的三個建築中，西座位列第三。但這仍無損於它是一棟高品質的建築。一個很有趣的發現就是評估報告的封面所用的是西座的照片。



建築品質

以下對於西座建築的討論補充了評估報告中詳細的描述。它基於有限的可利用資料而作，還只是最初始的觀察。對於一個真正的研究，需要更多的文獻資料以及對建築本身的深入觀察。這些評論被分成幾個部分。



基地

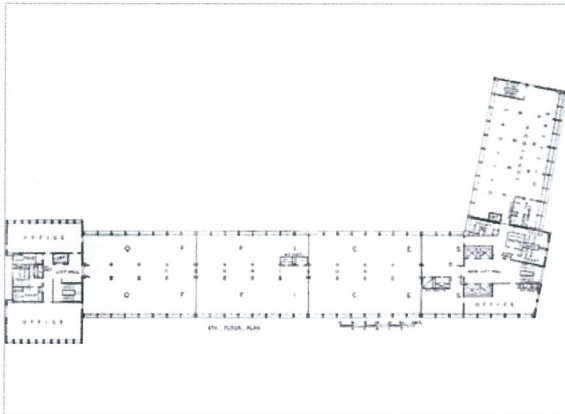
儘管三個部分是分階段建造的，它們卻是被整體規劃過的。西座與中座共同形成的空間以禮賓府為中心並位於其軸線上。這個空間和建築成為城市商業區和禮賓府之間的一個保護層。西座有一個強烈的外部形式，它包含三個不同的部分以進一步適應三種不同的橫向環境。這使得建築在不同的位置給人帶來不同的體驗，並與周邊環境取得不同的關係。當然，從建築建成至今，部分周邊環境已經發生了很大變化。這種橫向聯繫與豎向聯繫結合起來，建築便牢牢地立於這塊基地之上。這個設計回應了基地上陡峭的山坡和巨大的水平層差異。





空間知覺

我們是通過可見的物質要素才能感受到本身不可見的空間。從這個意義上來說，拆除西座建築未必就能增加更多的空間。相反，這反而會破壞現在由建築來限定的不同尺度的若干空間。整個區域的氛圍及空間經驗均將會減弱。



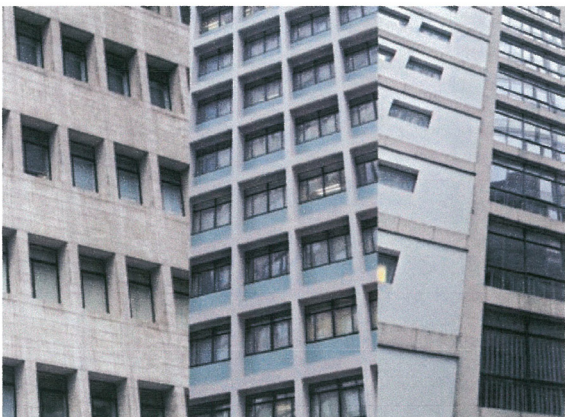
結構

從評估報告中提供的9層平面圖上看，西座建築的結構被伸縮縫和兩種類型的結構系統分成了六個部分。建築中間部分的豎向支撐是由位於中間的兩排方形柱子以及沿外圍佈置的密度加倍的略扁一些的矩形柱子共同提供。在轉角處和末端部分，這種結構系統發生了變化。在端頭和轉角處，由承重牆來抵抗建築的側向力。在端頭部分，外圍的柱子較中間部分密度增加。在轉角部分，柱子和承重牆則相互交疊。承重系統遠不只是支撐整座建築。在內部，它還組織和區分了樓層平面以形成不同的功能區。例如，位於中間的兩排柱子定義了一個走道空間，它偏向一側從而形成兩個不同進深的辦公區域。包裹建築的外部構件，它用於控制通風和遮陽。而在內部，它則是不同的私密程度的表達。



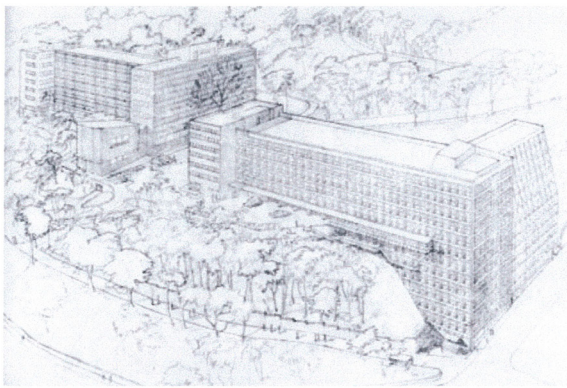
功能

由於幾乎沒有關於西座初始功能的任何訊息，現在這個方面已經沒有甚麼可說的。但是9層平面圖顯示出建築平面具有很大的靈活性，可以提供不同性質和尺度的空間以便將來之用。



外觀

西座的附加物以及表面的塗料使得瞭解它最初的外觀形象非常困難。但設計者將不同水平層上的不同部分組織成一個整體的技能仍給人留下深刻印象。建築謙遜的姿態並沒有使其設計湮沒。這個建築表達了一種設計態度：利用場地和功能以及通過結構系統來組織功能分區和空間。內部空間的組織，結構與維護的關係，不同區塊的外部表達以及對場地的不同的開放關係，這些都是相互關聯的。設計者需要考慮的和建築最終呈現出來的不同特徵都是互相支持的。



東北立面

這張政府辦公建築群的整體透視圖被刊印在 Hongkong & Far East builder 1956年12卷第4號刊第9頁上。它證明這三棟建築是被作為一個整體綜合設計的。西座建築的三個主要部分清晰可辨。外圍結構形成的遮陽，窗戶和間隙的明確肌理，共同構成了中間部分巨大的東北立面。這個表面沒有發生變化，便完成了從山頂的水平肌理到街道層的垂直肌理的轉化。



構圖

立面上的水平性被端頭體量的不同材質和形式特點終止了。花崗岩的飾面層使建築看上去像一個厚重的石塊，窗子像是被鑲刻在上面。立面在頂端止於一條強烈的水平邊條，形成屋頂護欄。立面在底部則被一條水平板終止，這就是最初建築底部架空的戶外空間的擴展。這個水平板...



轉換

...沿著立面的水平方向展開，與地面延伸的水平板結合，形成一個玻璃包裹的體量，與網格狀立面形成對比。該體量是餐廳空間的延續。

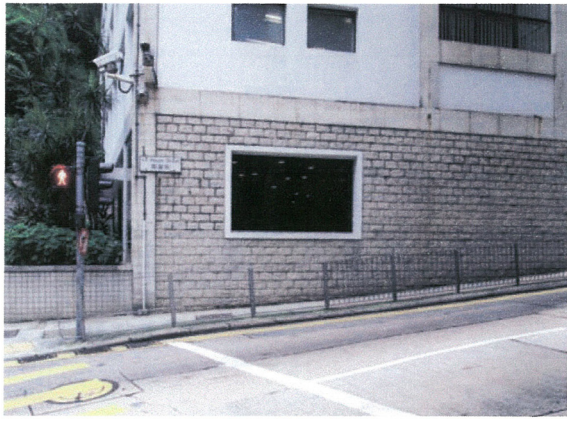


入口

在街道層上，表面處理好像有所改變以至於它們無法傳達最初的设计意圖。但立面到基座處如何終止仍然很清晰，兩條框邊延伸下來並被強化，與一片懸挑出來的水平板共同形成入口。

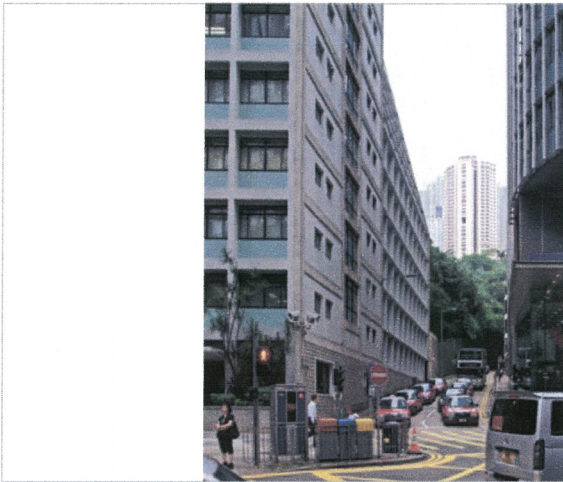
基座

建築的西南立面上，最初粗糙的花崗岩基座形式仍然清晰可見。



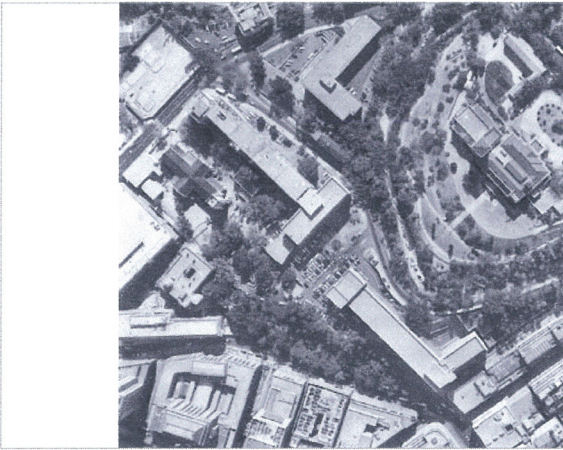
對比

精細花崗岩飾面形成的網格一直延伸至建築的最上端，強調了結構的水平部分和內部空間的分層，與相鄰的兩個立面形成對比，共同形成了東北立面的側邊界。



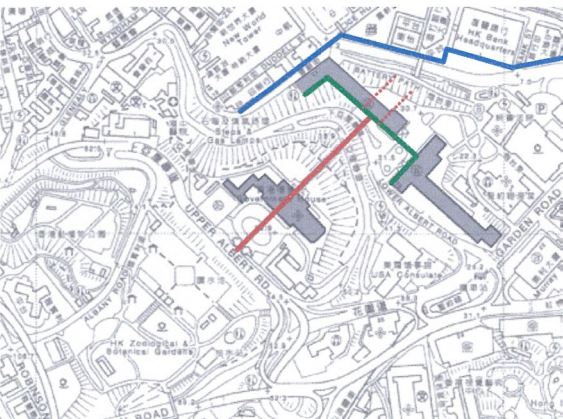
政府的中心

評估報告中的這張航空圖片清晰顯示了禮賓府、中區政府合署建築群和其後的城市之間的關係。草地和樹木形成的綠色植被從動植物公園延伸到禮賓府以及政府辦公建築群的後方。



軸線和層次

這張地圖顯示了禮賓府的軸線，以及建築形成的空間界限和城市商業區的邊界線。在禮賓府的軸線與西座建築交匯的地方，建築的地面層最初被架空了。也就是說，西座建築回應了這條軸線，把它延伸至空間中，並在另一個水平面上給予它一個視覺上的延續。



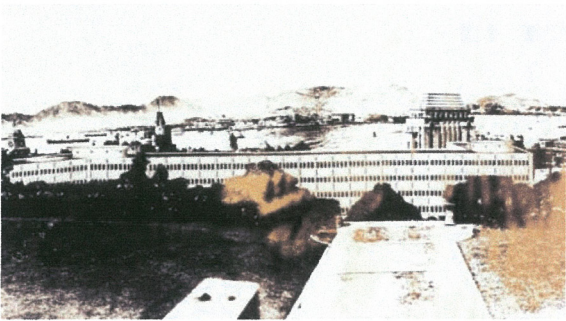
公園的擴延

現時的衛星圖片顯示了中區政府合署建築群周邊的植被仍然是公園擴延出來的一個重要部分。



景觀軸線和全景

評估報告中的一張拼貼照片顯示了當初設計時，設計者如何設定景觀從禮賓府往外延伸越過政府辦公建築群一直到達港口與九龍景觀交匯的。



結論

西座及其設計很好的展示了這個謙遜的建築物是如何被精心而嫺熟的設計出來的。這些設計想法存於建築之中並能被認識到。拆除了這棟建築，也就意味著又毀掉了一個香港優良設計傳統的典型案例。



延伸

這個特殊的案例引申出來與其有關的其他問題。它們在這裡沒有討論到，但卻不得被提及。一個問題就是建築設計價值的判斷水平以及這如何影響對城市建築和景觀中的建築物以及建築群的價值評定。另一個問題是，當前的設計技巧和水平應該繼承之前不只是幾十年而是數百年甚至上千年的設計技巧。香港最近的幾個保育更新和拆除項目暴露了在看待上面兩個事情上的嚴重問題：1881 Heritage、中環街市、荷李活道已婚警察宿舍，還有中環天星碼頭、皇后碼頭以及灣仔街市。



Illustration sources

Photos and diagrams: Vito Bertin

Colour aerial view: Google maps

Floor-plan and perspective: Hong Kong & Far Eastern builder 4-12 1956

Gray aerial view, photomontage: Appraisal Report, Purcell Miller Tritton, AMO, 2009

Map: Government website

六個結構分段



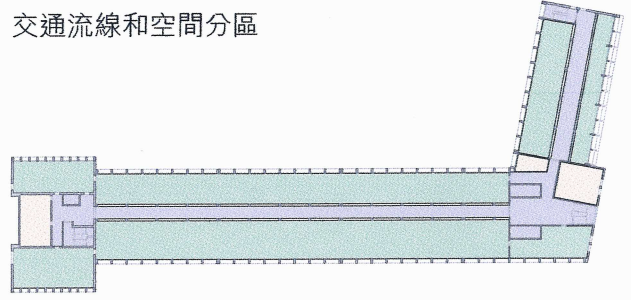
建築端部的區分



四個平面分區



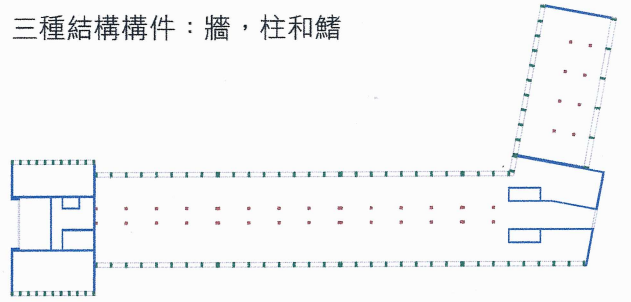
交通流線和空間分區



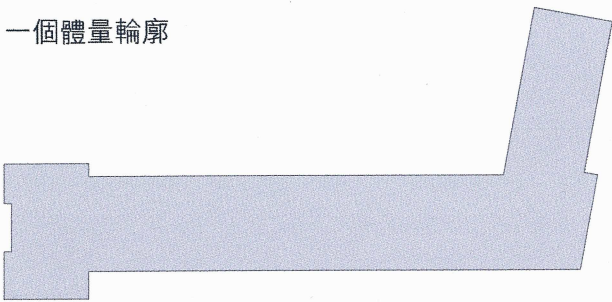
三個建築部份



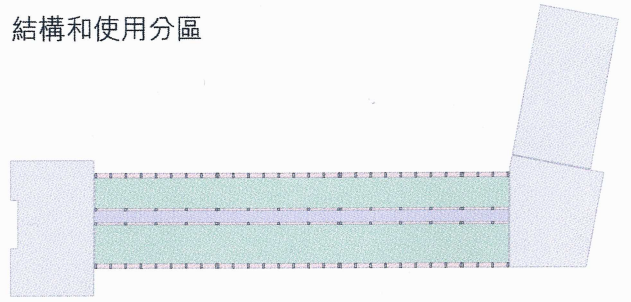
三種結構構件：牆，柱和鰭



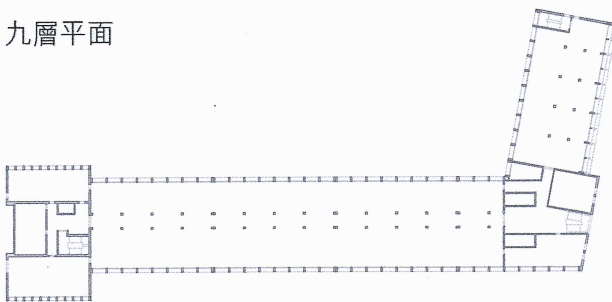
一個體量輪廓



結構和使用分區



九層平面



主要辦公空間的結構

