



August 2014

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Brutal love.



Photo by Gwendolyn Horton

“A box is the easiest thing to build. This ain’t no box,” said [Paul Rudolph](#) in response to criticism of the Government Center he designed in the town of Goshen, New York. Completed in 1967, the Brutalist building is considered one of Rudolph’s greatest achievements. However, the structure landed on the [World Monuments Fund watch list](#) after poor maintenance led to deterioration and a series of damaging storms caused its closure in 2011. Preservationists want it saved, many in the Orange County legislature do not, and – in an interesting 11th-hour twist – architect Gene Kaufman [recently offered](#) to buy the building and transform it into art studios and exhibition spaces.



Photo by Gwendolyn Horton

Located an hour northwest of New York City, the building is worth going to see, as I did recently. At first, it felt smaller than it appears in photographs, but then it literally grew on me. I’ve always been a fan of Rudolph’s work, and this building does not disappoint. Standing at the end of an empty parking lot riddled with cracks and weeds, the now vacant building is surrounded by a freshly mowed lawn and neatly trimmed trees. The facade is a cluster of windowed boxes that appear to be lurching forward, as if they’re each trying to get a better look at you. The side of the building that faces Main Street is long and windowless. Having a sense of exaggerated



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perspective, the stretched and staggered boxes look as if they were frozen in mid stride, like a single frame of a stop-motion film.



Photo by Gwendolyn Horton

It's impossible to ignore the fact that the boxes look a bit like jail cells – albeit beautifully designed, sunlight-flooded jail cells – foreshadowing the future for those who appeared before judges inside. Many had their fate decided here, including three suspects in the 1981 **Brink's armored car robbery** that left two police officers and a security guard dead. While some had their last glimpse of freedom in Rudolph's building, others were treated to an extraordinary setting for paying taxes and doing other commonplace tasks.



Dibs on the corner office. Photo by Gwendolyn Horton

This is where people were convicted, acquitted, married, divorced, given the right to drive, awarded passports, questioned by probation officers and granted U.S. citizenship. These are powerful events that deserve a powerful building, which Rudolph delivered. With its differently shaped windowed rooms, it celebrates both individuals and community. The boxes huddle together as one but are separated by height, width and viewpoint – a lot like people who found their lives transformed in them.



A shaded quad between the government and courtroom wings. Photo by Gwendolyn Horton

There are several arguments to raze the building: It's not compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act; it fails to meet the current industry standard for percentage of useable space (it offers 65% as opposed to today's required 85%); all 127 single-pane windows need replacing; and it leaks. While these are all valid issues, "it would be surprising to hear such fiscal reasoning lead to the destruction of the county's 1887 county office building, which is still in use," writes Christopher Pryslopski in *The Hudson River Valley Review*.



The building's 87 roofs were designed with proper drainage, but poor maintenance caused them to deteriorate, and some of them – I've heard seven – leak. Photo by Gwendolyn Horton



Photo by Gwendolyn Horton



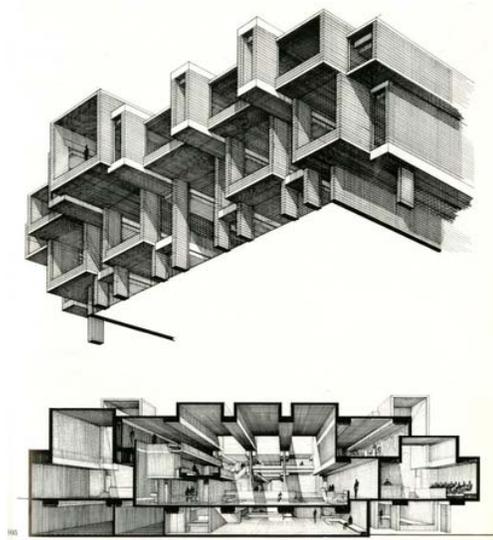
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Architect Salvatore Cuciti adds, "The fact is: many people can't appreciate modern architecture and so they rationalize about 'wasted space' when in fact they never mention such flaws in the high ceilings of neoclassical civic buildings. Is space wasted if it inspires people?"



The corduroy texture can also be found on Rudolph's 1963 A&A Building at Yale. (Yellow paint = somebody bumped their head here.) Photo by Gwendolyn Horton

"We've treated old buildings like we once treated plastic shopping bags," writes actress and preservationist Diane Keaton, "we haven't reused them, and when we've finished with them, we've tossed them out. This has to stop."



Drawings by Paul Rudolph

Personally, I find it amazing that the building plans were approved in the 1960s, and I believe that one of the most compelling reasons to save this building is that it's unlikely that anything like it will ever be built again. It is a special masterpiece to be treasured. Orange County government, I implore: Cherish it.

What do you think: Will we see another Rudolph building lost, or can this one be saved?