

## WOONG WASHINGTON WITH A NEW CHANCERY

A colossal pink palazzo on Washington's Embassy Row is sure to attract plenty of attention when it opens in June—indeed, the new Italian chancery (embassy office) is already turning heads along Massachusetts Avenue.

### Italian identity

Having outgrown its existing facilities, the chancery needed to move. By purchasing a prominent site at the entrance to Rock Creek Park and selecting Roman architect Piero Sartogo, who believes that "architecture is a transmitter of images," the Italian Foreign Ministry decided to adopt a high-profile presence in Washington and make a strong statement of Italian identity.



Piero Sartogo Architeti, in association with Leo A Daly of Washington, D.C., designed the eye-catching homage to Italian classical architecture—seen through the lens of a futurist. With windows faceted at angles, steps that narrow as they recede, and a soaring roof that sits slightly askew atop the boxy four-story building, the chancery might have been painted by De Chirico, who delighted in

using perspective to heighten and manipulate perception. Even the box is not a box, but a square (171.5 feet on a side) bisected on the diagonal (like the original plan of Washington, the architect says) by a glass-topped atrium.

### A display of designs

The interior walls are yellow and violet, and a glass exterior wall frames a view of the wooded

park beyond. Italian art will be on display, as will classic contemporary Italian furniture selected by the architect and installed in the atrium and on glass bridges above it. And, of course, authenticity mandates marble—42,000 blocks of hand-cut stone, quarried near the Italian town of Asiago.

Construction started in 1996. When

complete, the structure will have a total usable area of 145,700 square feet. The consular section will have its own entrance, as will the ambassador. Visitors will pass through a security check and then enter directly into the atrium for meetings and public receptions. Smoking will be permitted throughout the building. After all, as they say, "That's (also) Italian!"  
*Jane C. Loeffler*

## LAWSUIT TROUBLES VANCOUVER SKYSCRAPER PROJECT

One Wall Center is creating one big controversy. The black glass residential tower, now emerging on Vancouver's skyline, may forever change the trust between architects and Vancouver's planning department, according to many involved in the project. The city has filed a lawsuit against architect Peter Busby and Calmont Investments, the company owned by flamboyant developer Peter Wall. The city is arguing that both the architect and developer have not complied with the conditions that were placed on the tower's design prior to approval: a transparent building that incorporates clear glass as a prominent design feature.

After public hearings and a study commissioned by the city, the 48-story hotel/condominium tower was approved, based largely on its elliptical, transparent features (RECORD, May 1999). However, Busby has claimed that after the rezoning was granted, Wall changed his mind and decided on a more "obscure" glass color. For his part, Wall has stated that his choice of glass was indeed the glass approved by the city, and he has always complied with the directions. The confusion surrounding the chosen glass led to the lawsuit.

Jim Hancock, a partner with local firm Hancock Bruckner Eng and Wright, sat on the urban design panel that approved Busby's design. Hancock notes that regardless of the outcome, the relationship between architects and the city will be altered. "The system will have to change, the amount of trust between architects and the city will be reduced, and there will be fewer verbal agreements," he says. "There will be more accounting and record keeping and this will cost everyone more time and money." *John Gracey*

## VINOLY GOES BACK TO NATURE WITH A DESIGN FOR COLUMBIA'S CLIMATE RESEARCH BUILDING

Columbia University has a distinctly urban image, but the school's new Monell Building, which opened in January, features an entirely different aesthetic. Designed by Rafael Viñoly Architects of New York City, the \$12 million, 27,000-square-foot structure, which will be a venue for international climate research, is perched along the cliffs 500 feet above the Hudson River in Palisades, N.Y., on Columbia's Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory campus.

Viñoly wanted the building to

mimic the contours of the cliffside, so he designed a sloping, 562-foot-long, one-story structure with airy, sunlight-filled classrooms, offices, laboratories, and conference space. The structure is divided into two wings, which meet at a central point to form a central lobby. To ensure ample daylight, the architects placed a clerestory window along the entire length of the building. The facade was made of cedar and stone to blend with the surroundings. *Soren Larson*





TOUGH.

{ *c e m e n t* }

COLOR: #17

AVONITE® *Innovations in solid surfacing.*

1-800-428-6648 / [www.avonite.com](http://www.avonite.com)

CIRCLE 18 ON INQUIRY CARD