

Michael Graves
And The
Walt Disney Company

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Michael Graves And The Walt Disney Company
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INTRODUCTION

This thesis will examine the recent architecture by Michael Graves for the Walt Disney Company, in relation to its effect on postmodernism and its position within the postmodernist context. This architecture includes the Disney headquarters building in California, and the Dolphin and Swan hotels in Walt Disney World, Florida.

Under the chairmanship of Michael Eisner, Disney has changed from a cartoon and film making company, to a multinational theme park operator, publisher and merchandiser. The film making side of Disney is now dwarfed by the company's trade in selling good times, to millions of unhappy Americans in these theme parks

(1991 revenues at Disney were \$6,182,000,000.)(Disney, 1991,1),
(fig. 1).

Disney, among its activities, operates ten hotels, numerous television and radio stations, and theme parks in Tokyo, Europe and the United States. For these theme parks Disney has embarked on a massive development and expansion plan, selecting some of the worlds most highly regarded architects to complete a variety of projects.

Michael Graves is one of these architects, having completed a number of projects for Disney, most notably, the Dolphin and Swan hotels in Florida (fig. 2), and the Disney headquarters building in Burbank California. (fig. 3)

Postmodernism is a movement without definition or direction. It is a reactionary movement, running away from modernism, without thought to what it is running towards. It is however, beginning to be recognised and exploited by the corporate world, in this case Disney. This thesis will examine why a very serious, very financially orientated company like Disney wants to invest heavily in the postmodernist style. Where specifically do the advantages lie for Disney? Is it just part of the Disney image or does this style have a greater relevance?

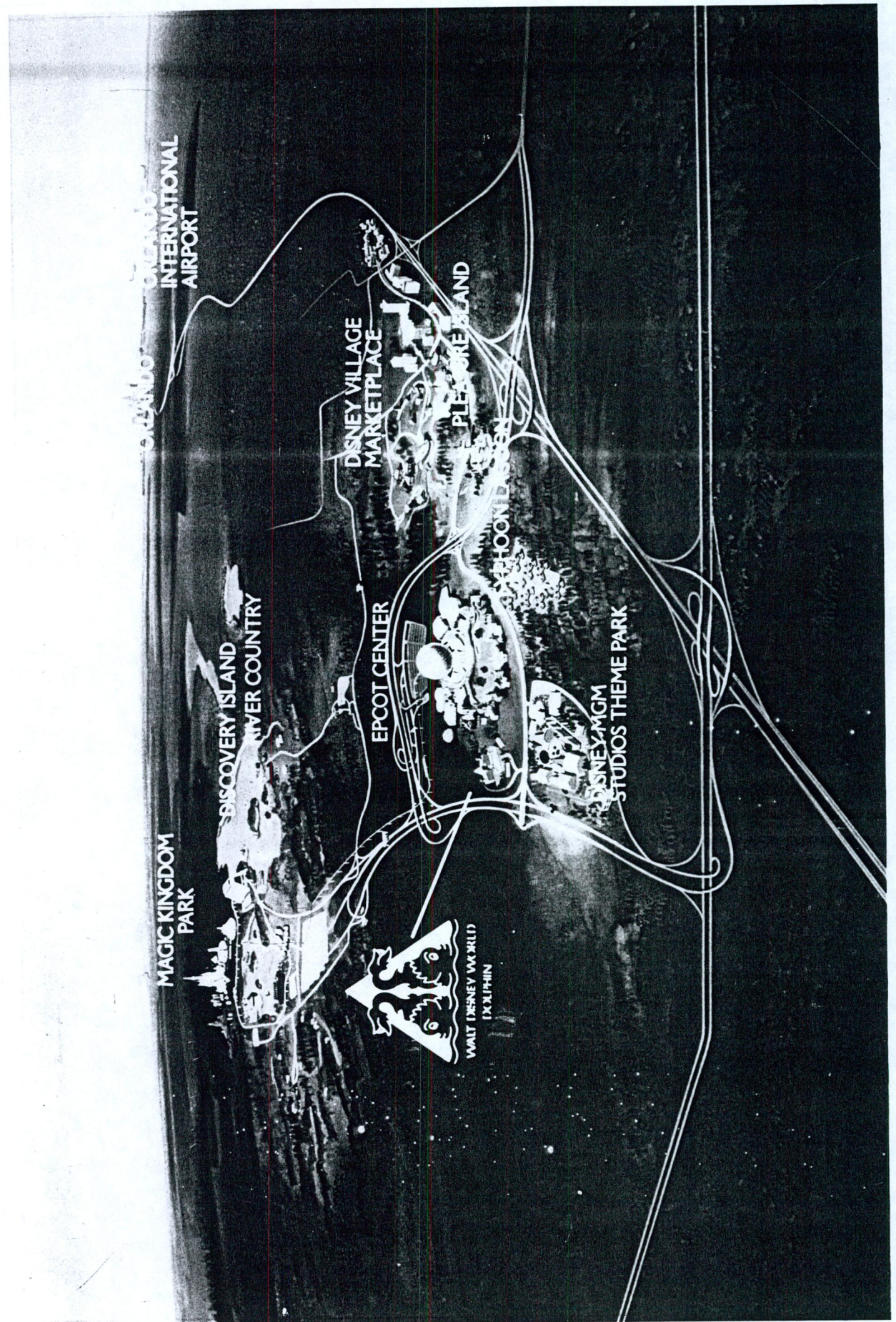


Fig. 1 The Dolphin and Swan hotels shown among the theme parks of Florida.

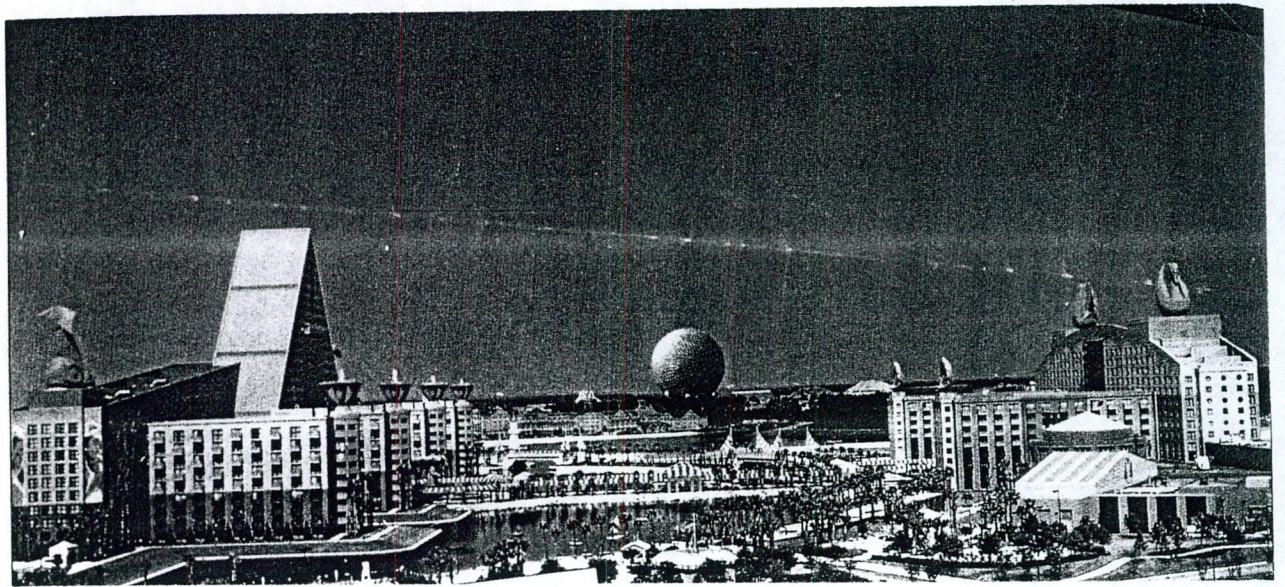


Fig. 2 The Dolphin and Swan hotels, Florida, with the EPCOT centre in the background.

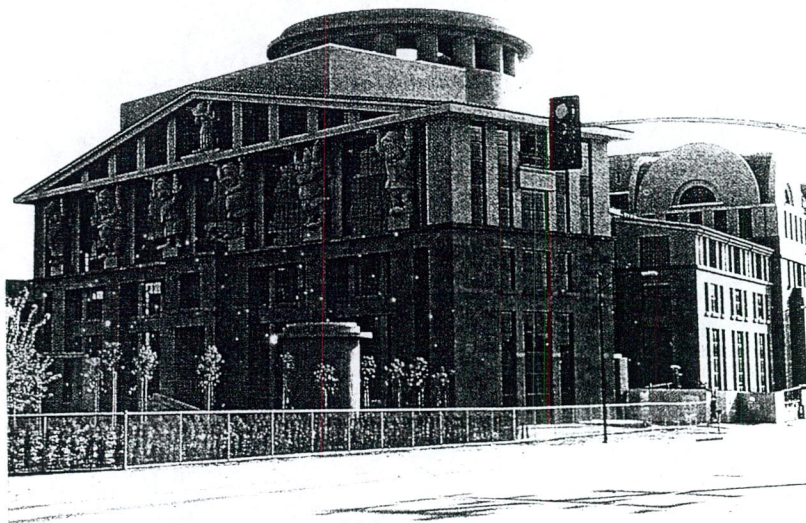


Fig. 3 The Disney headquarters building, Burbank, California.

CHAPTER 1

The Postmodern in Disney.

Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her sister on the riverbank and of having nothing to do; once or twice she had peeped in to the book her sister was reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it, "and what is the use of a book" thought Alice, "without pictures or conversations?"

So she was considering in her own mind, whether the pleasure of making a daisy chain would be worth the trouble of getting up and picking the daisies, when suddenly a white rabbit with pink eyes ran close by her. (Carroll, 1982, 17)

Disney and Michael Graves may at first glance seem to be leading two very different lives, if we look closer though we begin to see many similarities. These similarities bear a relevance to us all uncovering a relationship that goes past mere buildings. It bears a relevance to architecture and postmodernism in general, based deeply in figurative architecture and the fantasies of Disney.

This relevance begins, strangely with Alice in Wonderland.

Alice sitting quietly on the riverbank that afternoon, shared her world with Miles Van der Rohe and Frank Lloyd Wright.

Everything was real, each having its place and its own order. Things that looked well in this world, did so because they were made well and served their functions. Things got their beauty from the way they were used and touched, and when they aged, they aged elegantly.

To Alice, however, all this was just a little bit boring. "What is the use of a book ,....., without pictures or conversations?" she asked (Carroll, 1982, 17).

The world around her just wasn't quite the whole picture.

And so, Alice travelled, that afternoon into a wonderland free of realities confinements. It was a world where anything she could imagine, could happen. It was her imagination at work in a world without boundaries or restriction.

It wasn't some kind of utopia for Alice , it was just a dream, just Alice exploring the things she could dream up and imagine.

This dreaming, this little bit of fantasy is essential to all of us. It is the subconscious part of our minds, that only we control. This part of us is the place where the subtleties of reality become unmasked tangibility's. It can't exist without reality and in practice, reality can't really exist without it either.

This concept of the subconscious working in tandem with reality holds true for many other things, not least of which is architecture.

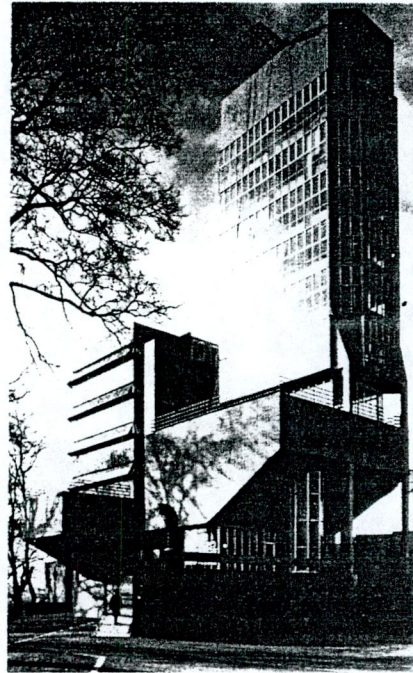
For any building to stay up it must first be firmly in touch with reality. It must have bricks and concrete, walls and a roof. It must have basic construction ,nowadays, that was probably drawn from modernism. (fig. 4) This basic construction is what the ideals of, what we now call postmodernism, rests on.

From the modernist viewpoint, construction is all you need. It is from purity of construction that form is drawn, and attention to basic construction gives you this. This honesty to materials and construction is probably why modernism, in its theoretical sense, will always be superior to postmodernism.

Unfortunately for modernism the "wonderland" quality was missing. It fulfilled the requirements of form to the specifications of the conscious, rational mind only. Missing was the subconscious, dreamlike quality that makes us human. The part of us, that we always look to in a building or an object. It is the part of us that makes us feel sad when a building is torn down, the part that simply makes us like a building. With the realisation of the importance of this human side, postmodernist architecture, in its various guises was born. Architects, including Michael Graves came to see the importance of anthropometry, metaphor and populism. The human side made a comeback.

Fig. 4 Stirling and Gowan, Engineering building, Leister university.

This building demonstrates how form may be drawn from function, in this case a lecture theatre and offices.



Michael Graves, with his allegiance to this style of architecture attempts, in his work to give poetic form to the prosaic words of modernism. (Graves, 1982, 11). Graves is addressing the side of us that sees the ceiling as the sky and the floor as the ground. The side of us that sees windows as eyes and doors as mouths. By addressing this he acknowledges the power of the mind in architecture, and he acknowledges the importance of fantasy. This is Michael Graves' figurative architecture.

This concept of the modern and the postmodern applies easily to architecture, for it was this that it was created. For a moment though, let us attempt to apply it to the Walt Disney company.

Walt Disney is not an ordinary company. It does not manufacture or market a product. Instead it is a company that exists to address the aspirations of the masses. Disney creates fantasies and dreams for millions of people world-wide. Unlike Companies such as IBM, Disney exists because of something abstract; dreams.(figs 5,6) IBM instead exists because of sound technical and business principals, it is a company with a firm grip on the balance sheet and a firm grip on reality.

It is no coincidence that IBM was a chief supporter of modernism. IBM suited modernism; the basic beliefs in manufacture and purity of form existed for both. IBM existed in a time when not only products but society was modernist ; and to properly address this modernist society IBM needed to be modernist too. It needed to be a company that was clean reliable and functional, it gave people what they wanted, to make their lives easier, not to ease their minds.

Disney on the other hand, although it is a multi billion dollar multinational, although being a company that is based in reality, it exists in a dream. Disney serves a population that demands entertainment and happiness. This population expects to be made laugh or cry with the flick of a remote control. It expects to be thrilled by, death defying theme park rides ,whenever it likes.



Fig. 5 Tokyo disneyland welcomes its 100,000,000th visitor.



Fig. 6 Disneys' production of Alice in Wonderland, for production by its television stations in the U.S.

This population is not the utilitarian, almost austere, one that IBM had to deal with. It is a population based on service industries, like the service Disney provides, not the manufacturing industries of the fifties and sixties. Disney is different, Disney is postmodern. This is what makes Disney relevant, it is a company providing a postmodern service to a postmodern population.

When we look at the work of Michael Graves, a postmodernist, we see houses, offices and factories; all modernist. We do not see the complete fulfilment of Graves' ideas. The belief in the power of the mind in architecture.

This is where his work for Disney becomes relevant. For the first time Graves has the opportunity to embody what he already believes in. He is a postmodern architect working for a postmodern client.

This chapter has shown that both Disney and Graves admit the existence and relevance of Alice's wonderland. They both strive to embody the same cultures and dreams in their work. The only question remaining is why ?

CHAPTER 2

MONEY AND postmodernism ; THE ARCHITECTURE OF DISNEY AND GRAVES.

FORM AND ORNAMENT

"Collar that Dormouse!" the Queen shrieked out.
"Behead that Dormouse! Turn that Dormouse out of court!
Suppress him! Off with his whiskers!"
(Carroll, 1982, 105).

Michael Eisner, the chairman of Disney, is a business man. He is someone who has spent his career worrying about balance sheets and profit margins. He is quite good at it too, under his chairmanship, revenues at Disney have increased by about 300 % to over six billion in 1991 (Disney, 1991,1).

He could be described as the 'wonderland queen' of entertainment, ruling the third most profitable multinational in the world, with an iron fist (Disney, 1991, 1).

He is a man with no conscience about cutting corners to cut costs, or even a little bit of superficiality. In an interview with metropolitan home in America he has openly admitted to "using real materials, like wood" in Disney constructions "where people can see them, and cheaper imitations where they can't".
(Abrams, 1991, 41). (fig, 7)

Eisner is obviously someone concerned with cost and function and not style and aesthetics, so why then has he embarked on a policy of hiring people like Arata Isozaki, Robert Venturi and Michael Graves. There must therefore be sound financial reasoning somewhere behind this architectural strategy, or else it simply wouldn't be happening. For a man with a psychology that allows him to see nothing wrong with superficiality an interest in something that, up to now, has been closer to being an art form than architecture, is strange.

The most obvious reasoning behind this strategy is of course, simple advertising, it is the whole style and mood of the theme parks. To attract customers Disney must first have attractive parks. Its a simple case of attracting the right customers with the right image. This is true, but it is only the surface of the financial reasoning behind postmodernist architecture.

If we look at Graves' Dolphin and Swan Hotels, firstly we see the tangible, or to use Graves' words "prosaic" form of the buildings. (Graves, 1982, 11). We see well constructed functional buildings that ,with the addition of a few pieces of fibreglass, just happen to look a little strange.

This prosaic form is the underlying reasoning behind all architecture, and it is the basic foundation holding everything up. If this prosaic form is the bottom line, architecturally, then it seems to follow that it is also the bottom line financially. To invest money in a building we must first be sure that it will stay up. We then, with that done, look for aesthetics. It is simply our nature to always look for, not necessarily financial gain, but for financial logic in all our dealings.

If we take this viewpoint with Graves' buildings we begin to see his strong points more clearly. They are essentially very functional buildings to live and work in. Graves has said that the bottom line with these hotels was always "the problem of devising the shortest route from check-in to bedroom; for, as Graves explains, had the hotel been laid out in a conventional manner, it would have covered the area of a small town" (McGuire, 1990, 56). His primary concern is to satisfy the prosaic needs of the client.

Graves displays an underlying concern for good quality architecture not fanciful styling. This is perhaps why Graves is one of the most successful architects in the world today. In 1985 he had approximately \$25 billion of work in progress at the same time. (Jencks, 1990, 26). Graves is someone who, first and foremost, delivers to the client good buildings.

From the evidence of Graves' 'prosaic' work he is without a doubt a very good architect.

If we look closer yet again, this time at the prosaic form of the Swan hotel and imagine it for a moment, without its colourful paint-work and its towering swans. What are we left with? All that remains is a flat concrete wall punched with windows. All we see is thirteen stories up and thirty two windows across (fig. 8).

What we don't see is form. There is no underlying form that says anything either superficially or subconsciously. It is essentially a very simple very boxy building. It is one large block with two smaller blocks protruding from it. Graves with his guise of postmodernism stripped cannot fall back on his prosaic roots, he does not have the foundation of modernism in his architecture. This building seems to exist as an exercise in concrete pouring showing no evidence of innovation or exploration of styles or forms. With the underlying form of this building Graves has clearly intended not to advance our understanding of architectural form in any way.

Even the plan that this building is based on appears to be taken from the 19th century Ecole des Beaux Arts (Jencks, 1990, 25). (fig. 9). He has taken a proven formal layout and used it for his own needs. This plan is what has solved the problem, of the distance from check in to bedroom, not Graves himself. It allows the easy flow of large numbers of people, and a tight layout.

The sweeping curve of the roof-line of this building, perhaps one of its most attractive features, does not translate into sloped ceilings inside; they are stepped. (fig. 10) Any stylistic elements to this building are applied, no element of the form of this building contributes to its style.

Graves has created a very cheap building to a very high standard. He appears, in doing this, to have allowed function to overwhelm the form. His brand of functionalism is not in any way akin to modernism it is instead a bastardisation of the ideals set out by people like Frank Lloyd Wright and Walter Gropius. He is exploiting the constructional advances made by people like this for his and Disneys gain.

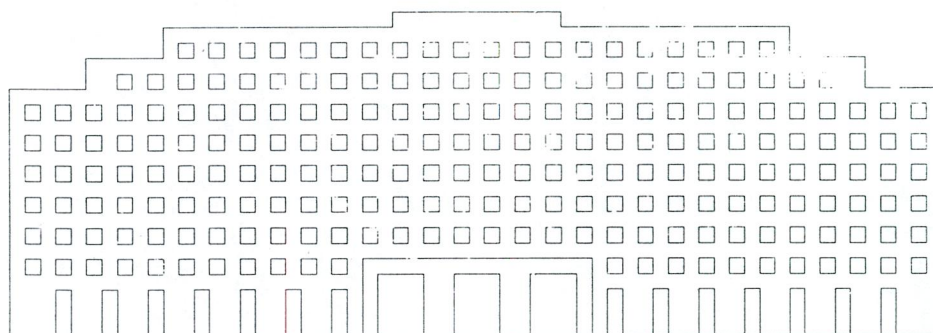
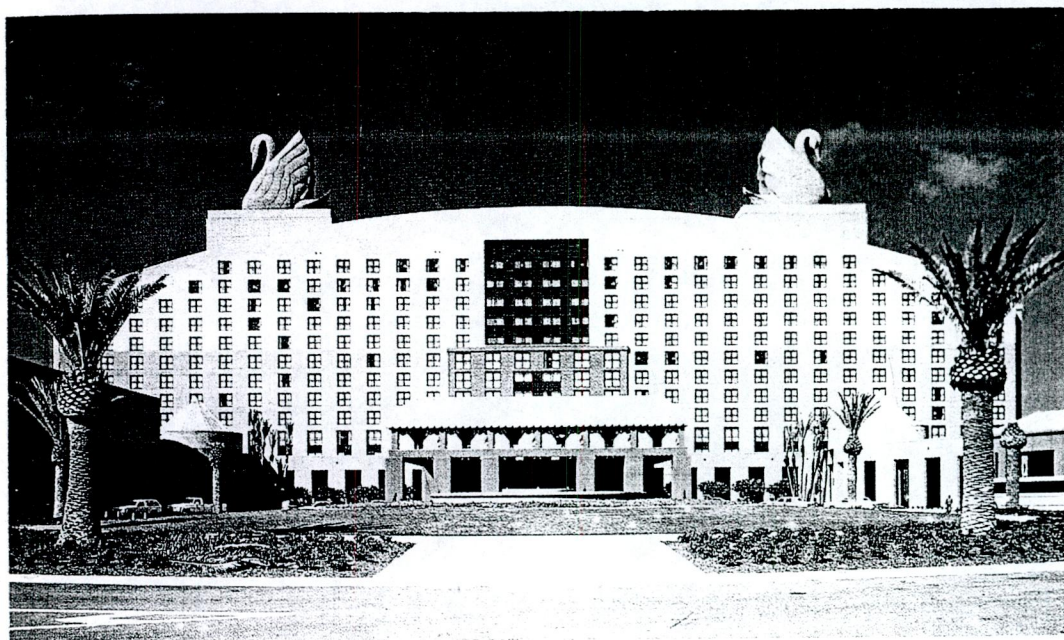


Fig. 8 The Swan hotel first with its ornamentation and then with it removed.

To carry the building that little bit further, to make it a fitting part of the Disney empire, he has left to applied ornament. Form to Graves is there for function and not for the form itself. Financial constraints must not dominate to the extent that form has been wiped out.

Of the ornament itself, it does stand on its own as a valid means of expression, but in a context such as this, one cannot help but notice how it has been used to add interesting features where there are no interesting features and break up flat undetailed spaces. (fig. 11)

Ornament is used in these hotels as a device. Its primary function is not aesthetics, but to disguise bad architecture. That is, the ability, or lack of ability, to do something innovative and interesting under economic constraints. This is where Graves has failed, he has accepted that this building must be constructed cheaply, and he has proceeded accordingly and he has covered up his inability to do anything innovative with ornament.

Graves not only has similar attitudes as Disney with regard to 'postmodernism' but also with form. They both see form as a function, to be used as a tool towards an end. The end in this case being architecture that sells.



Fig. 11 Ornamentation on the roof and front of the Swan hotel, viewed by night.

STYLE.

This ornamentation is not only there for functional reasons. We also see a style. A style that also works to considerable advantage in the clients favour.

In the case of Michael Graves, the advantages must obviously start with distinctiveness and simple shock value. Graves' very definite style attracts attention simply because of it's slightly flamboyant and colourful nature. Mere attention, however, is not enough. Exactly, to what, and how, this attention is given bears the relevance to Disney.

This type of attention, or type of opinion, that Disney is attracting, with its new architecture, has, from the beginning, been carefully chosen. Eisner has always referred to it as 'entertainment architecture' (Jencks, 1990, 25). It is an extension of their corporate image to him, it is architecture as an image.(fig. 12)

Unlike previously used examples of corporate design, such as the London Underground, where the aim was to bring together a fragmented company, under one image, the Disney aim is to create an almost believable fantasy for every part of their company.

Understandably it is important for a multi billion dollar company like Disney to display a coherent image (Disney is the 64th largest diversified services company in the world according to fortune magazine 1991.)(Disney, 1991, 5) But for Disney this coherent image seems to try very hard to disguise their corporate side.

From their headquarters building on Dopey Drive, Burbank, California, the Disney bosses rule over an entertainment empire, bigger than any other, and postmodernism has been chosen as the tool to keep this empire together into the next century.

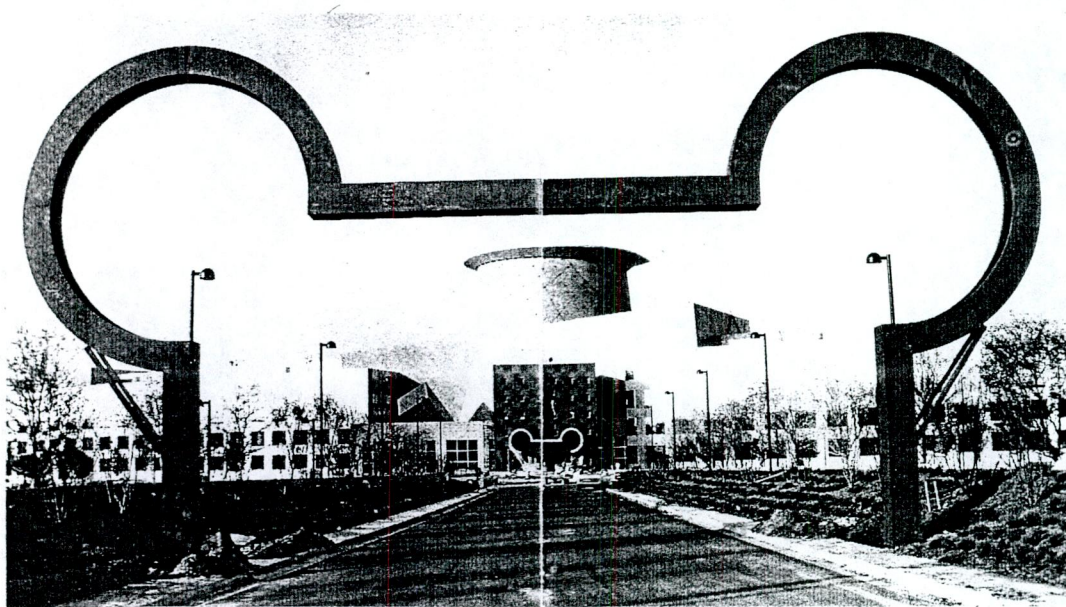


Fig. 12

Arata Isozaki, Team Disney building, Florida, 1990
The main facade from the entrance gate (under construction). This is an administrative building, but still part of the theme park image.

There is no recognisable split in Disney between the controlling business side and the entertaining, jokey side. They both blur into one leviathan.

This is best demonstrated by Graves' Disney headquarters building in Burbank, fronted by seven dwarf cataryids. The roof at the side refers to mickey mouse ears. (fig. 13)

The building does not reflect its function; it is not businesslike and formal and it does not reflect the spirit of the company. Instead the headquarters building is a reflection of a Disney theme park; a function of the company. It does not exist on its own, it exists as part of the complete package. Disney is a successful company because it carries its theme parks over into its corporate side. It is impossible to take this company seriously, we perceive Disney as a family business creating happy times. Disney is perceived, because of its corporate design, as a 'friendly' company, and consequently the fantasy is made that little bit more believable, and profits go up.

Because people like Graves, with their various styles, of figurative architecture have the ability to convey not only images but emotions (in this case friendliness) and make people at ease. Disney are using this ability of postmodern architecture to further this image, and thereby make more money.

Graves' style because of its figurative nature, enables him to use metaphor and anthropometry, gives him an ability to appeal to people on a subconscious level, from a level more powerful than modernism ever was.

Instead of placing you in a room (as modernism did), it can place you in the womb, in open countryside, or lying on a beach, as in the Swan hotels' pre-function corridor, with its pale blue ceiling and walls, divided at eye level from sky to sea, and at waist height from sea to sand. (fig. 14)

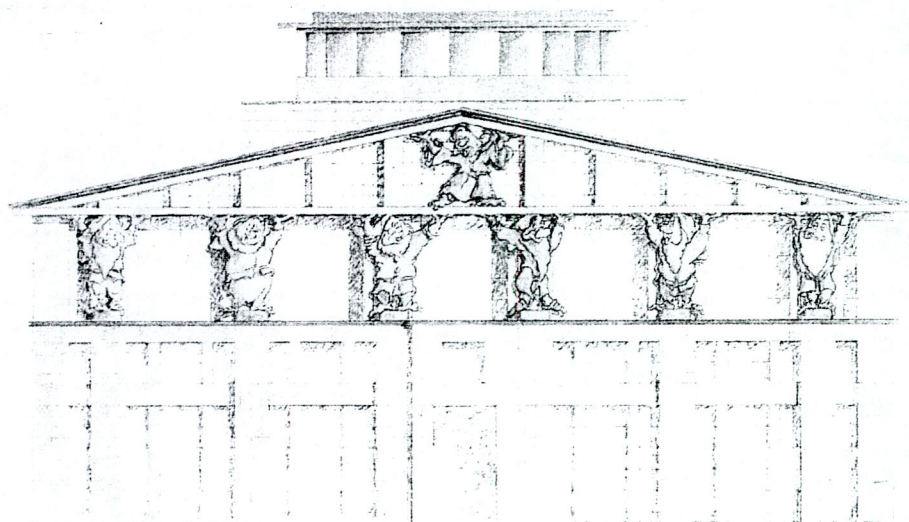


Fig. 13 Michael Graves, Disney headquarters building,
Burbank, California, 1986. The head office of Disney,
but once again more at home in a theme park.
(elevation rendering)

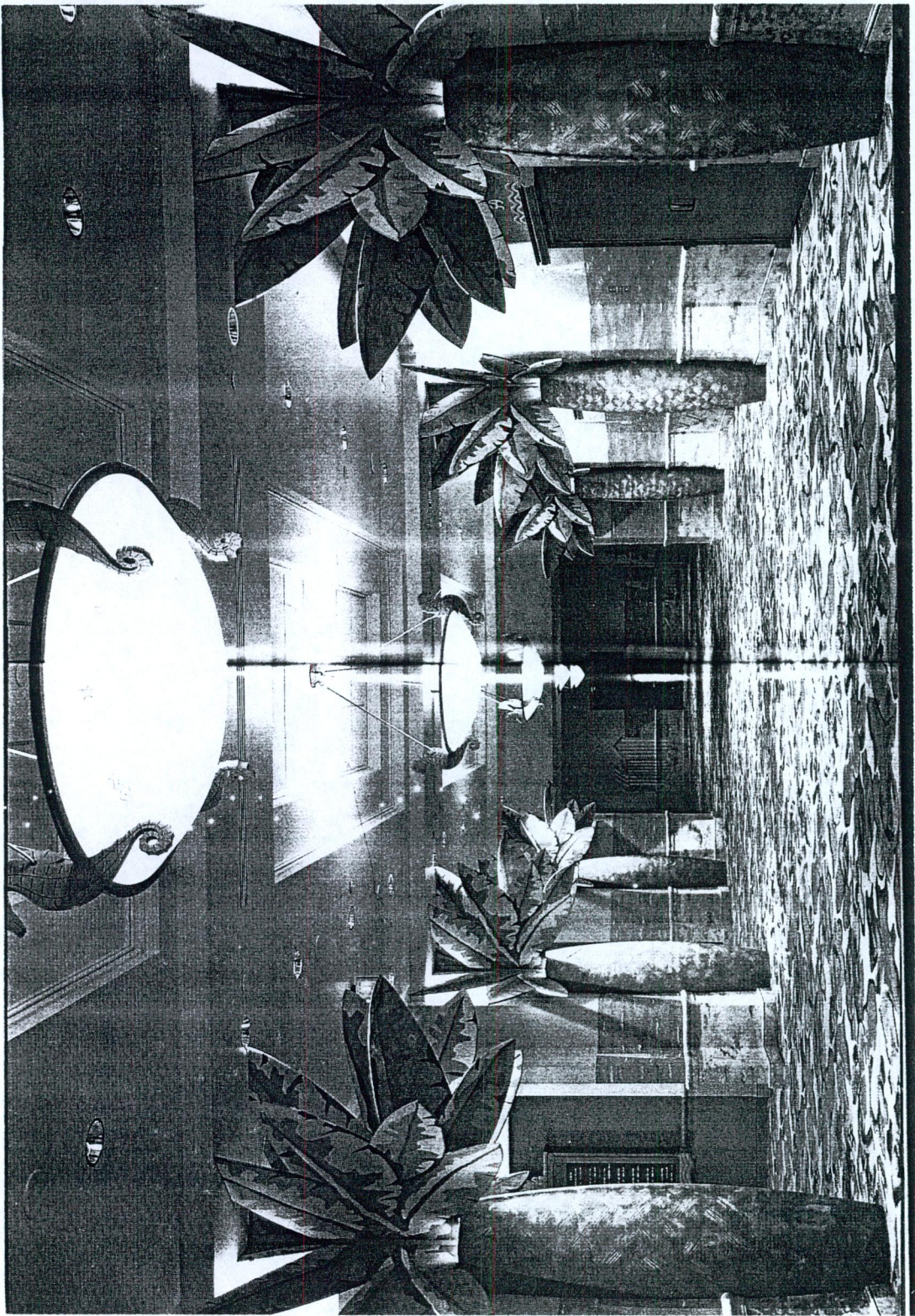


Fig. 14 The Swan Hotel prefunction corridor.
The murals of this corridor divide the walls at
head height from sky to sea, and at waist height
from sea to sand. This is one of Graves' most used
anthropomorphic devices.

Figurative architecture is about evoking emotions, it is what it exists to do. A building that was previously an office block, such as the headquarters building, can now be an expression of friendliness, and get away with it. This is its power over any architecture movement that has gone before it.

This ability of postmodernism, is a trait which business has not been slow to discover. This trait also is apparent in current marketing theory. It is simply that :

Buyers purchase services, education, healthcare etc. on the basis of promises of satisfaction. Promises, with the images and appearances of symbols, help consumers make judgements about tangible and intangible products. (Pride, 1989,225).

Just as the Esso tiger helps us to decide how powerful Esso petrol is against its rivals; the seven dwarfs on the Disney headquarters building, helps us to see Disney not as a leviathan but as a small family company.

It is this ability of postmodernism to evoke feelings and images that makes its "post" modernist title fitting. It is also the reason why postmodernism has withstood all of the pronouncements of its death over the past ten years. As a style it is compatible with modern lifestyles. It reflects the nature of the way we live today. Just as we expect advertising and product design (semantics) to function with symbols and metaphor, we also expect it of architecture. Postmodernism is not a frivolous art form. In both function and aesthetics it is financially sound.

In Michael Graves' case, he is delivering Disney not just a stylish building, he is delivering them the basis for a marketing plan. He is delivering a corporate image that appeals to the public. This we are sure of because the style that the corporate image is based on has been specifically designed to appeal to the public. It is subconscious architecture.

This semantic style is not coincidentally appealing to modern business. Clients hire architects that meet the specific needs of their company, and when the needs change, the architects (styles) change.

With rapid industrialisation and mechanisation in the nineteen fifties and sixties, modernism grew, not from a need for a fresh style, but from rapidly expanding populations, post war cost savings, and technological advancement.

Postmodernism is not a reaction to this functional aesthetic it is a progression from it following corporate trends. When the power of the mind was recognised, manufacturers quickly fine tuned techniques to make products and services appeal to the masses, architecture was carried with this; not to give a more human side to it, or to make it friendlier or more comfortable; but to give an economic side to aesthetics, to make money by making things friendly and more comfortable.

Postmodernism survives and keeps on surviving because with this human side recognised; it is good for business.

CHAPTER 3

THE DISNEY ETHIC IN ARCHITECTURE.

SCALE.

There were doors all round the hall, but they were all locked; and when Alice had been all the way down one side and up the other trying every door, she walked sadly down the middle, wondering how she was ever to get out again. (Carroll, 1982, 20).

The 758 rooms of the Swan hotel and the 1,510 of the Dolphin make them true giants among other hotels. Had Alice found herself there she would have had even more trouble getting out (fig. 15).

These hotels although they are so large have still been given the Disney treatment. They have been given the once over by the happy, friendly, 'personal' touch that Disney tries so hard to give everything. The friendly pastel colours, the murals, and the ever present swans and dolphins, are all there for 'Disneyfication'. That quality that must be present for things to be truly Disney. There is something of a contrived lack of seriousness present here. Fish hanging from the ceilings, bananas on the walls, are all there for the jokey, happy, Disney look (fig. 16).

Logically Disney have decided, that to make these hotels part of the image, they must go through this process; however, to stand back and compare 28 stories of concrete with blue dolphins and clamshells a certain inconsistency emerges. To try and make a building this big (Dolphin Hotel), look jokey and happy, just doesn't work.

It is easier to picture a building such as this among the ziggurats of Hugh Ferriss, than among the fantasies of Disneyworld (fig. 17). The scale of this building does not suit its function or its styling.



Fig. 15 The Dolphin hotel as viewed from the Swan. Note the size of the people in the foreground.

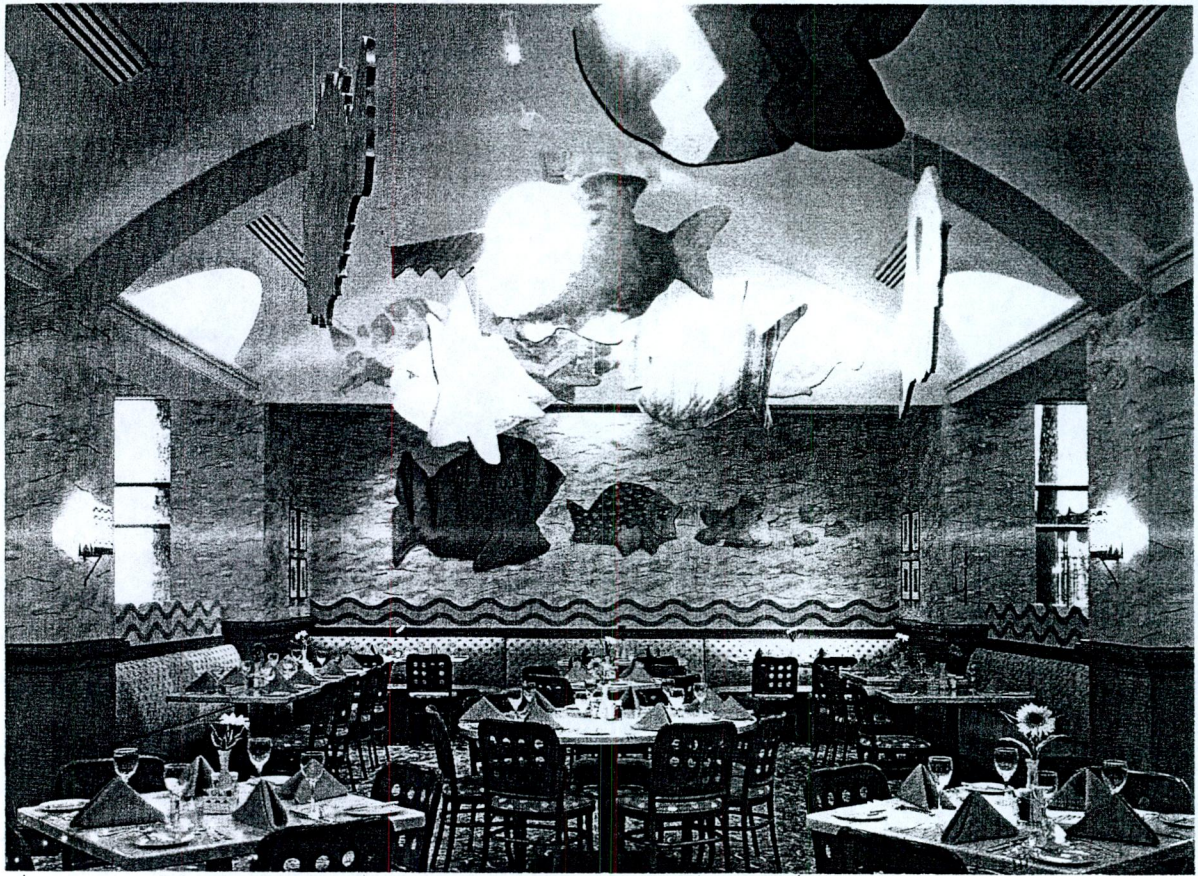
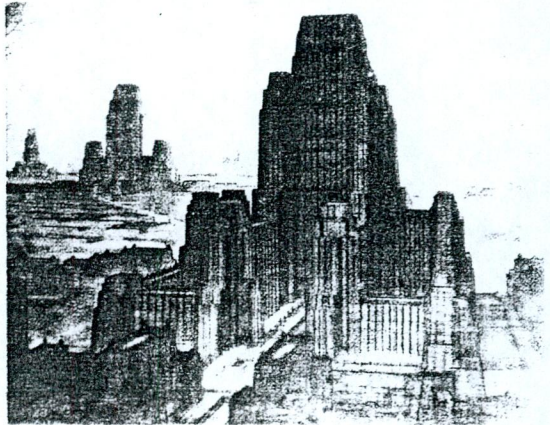


Fig. 16 The 'coral cafe', Dolphin Hotel.

Fig. 17 One of Hugh Ferriss' ziggurats from his Metropolis of tomorrow.



The problems of scale in this building go a little deeper yet again, because, Disney by failing to allow this building to be seen for what it is, have given it a lack of identity. Graves by not giving the building identifiable elements has allowed it to slip to a point where its character is blurred. This building does not know whether it is an office block, or a hotel, or a theme park, caused by the need to balance the convention centre part of the hotel with the residential side and all in a theme park context.

Just as in Alice in Wonderland, in the Dolphin Hotel, when the conventions of scale and proportion are lost, something else creeps in. In Disney's case, somewhere in these buildings lies the consciousness of a multinational company. Disney is present in this building, not in a theme park sense but in a corporate sense.

Deep in this building "there is the consciousness of a corporate megalomania, that mixes unhappily with whimsy". (McGuire, 1990, 57).

The central pyramid although taken from Ledoux (Jencks, 1991, 25), unknowingly conjures up images of power. The jagged part at the top and the embracing arms to either side, create an uneasy mood. They are in no way calming or entertaining. They are merely a bad attempt at kitsch. (fig. 18). Graves has attempted to create a loud happy image but instead has created a dominating 'big brother' image.

Disney in the past has held that big is beautiful. Huge theme parks and larger than life characters, all were glorified in the cause of entertainment; and correctly so. The public demands scale from Disney, scary theme park rides and awe inspiring parades with oversized cartoon characters. It is something Disney has become comfortable with.



Fig. 18

The central pyramid of the Dolphin hotel, viewed by night.

They have apparently applied this same logic to the Dolphin and Swan hotels. However, in the case of these hotels, the function of the buildings is different. They are not theme park attractions they are places to live. People seek habitable space in these buildings, not entertainment.

To inflate size in this manner and then to flaunt it is wrong. A building as arrogant in scale as these has more in common with Charles Jencks' beloved Pruitt-Igoe housing scheme. Those tower blocks which, upon their eventual demolition, Jencks continually uses to mark the day modernism died. (Jencks, 1984., 9).

Jencks forgets that housing schemes such as those were not examples of modernism but examples of how the ideals of a movement can get warped by misguided thinking and finance. How the purity of the original thought can be changed to suit individual needs. In this case how Graves' interpretation of postmodernism has become a profit making machine, devoid of any depth or form.

Graves' hotels pay only lip service to postmodernism. Instead of catering to the needs of people Graves has instead decided to cut corners and only cater to the superficial subconscious, the part of us that thinks pink is 'nice' and that kitsch is good.

It is possible for a building to display the eccentricities of Disney or the wishes of a population without it being almost half the height of London's Canary Wharf. Graves has perhaps invented a new architectural language; a language for the third reich of the 1990's. This architecture is a symbol of the corporate exploitation of architecture to further its own aims, and it is not afraid of telling us.

THE FIGURATIVE STYLE.

The essential compatibility between Graves and Disney lies in Graves' style of figurative architecture. His ability to express the fantasy side of a company like Disney in a tangible way. Just as Disney plays to the public subconscious with its theme parks, so does Graves with his figurative architecture. However, even though a certain comparison exists, Graves is still left to interpret Disney in many ways.

Are the Dolphin and Swan hotels expressions of all that is fun, are they entertainment as Michael Eisner is so keen to point out; or are they an expression of all that is wrong with Disney, superficial and utopian?

Charles Jencks argues that the 47 feet high swans of the Swan hotel should be exposed. They are constructed of fibreglass on a steel frame, and Jencks asks why this framework can not be exposed, or even a habitable room made of the whole thing. To make them both 'literal Swans and beautiful diagrams which show their internal workings'. (Jencks, 1990, 26).(fig. 19)

This is a valid argument for any postmodernist to make, it is an opportunity to go that little bit further to make it meaningful. (Or give it some of Jencks' double coding). However to expose the inner frame of these swans would be akin to a kind of machine aesthetic, too visually complex for a context like Disneyworld.

Graves has shown good judgement in not submitting to arguments such as these. Disney has been built on simple poster sized images such as these swans. He has made a clear effort to create something, that fits with Disney; simple, colourful and big.

His failure here is not his treatment of the swans but the nature of the swans themselves.

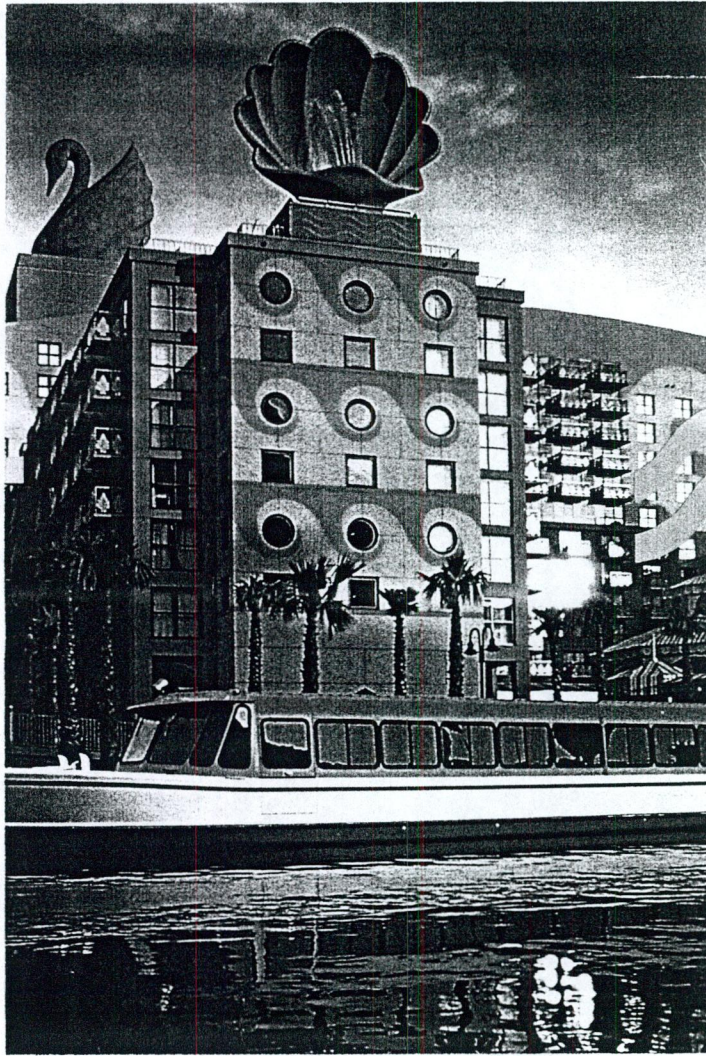


Fig. 19

The rooftop Swans and clamshells of the Swan hotel.

To begin with they are not recognisably Disney. They bear no reference to the company's activities. Where are the fairy castle images as in Robert Venturis casting centre, (fig. 20), or the Mickey Mouse imagery of Isozakis Team Disney building (fig. 21). These hotels could be almost anywhere. There is no reference made to Disney theme parks, characters, cartoons or films. Instead Graves appears to be creating his own Disney language, his own cartoon characters to carry the show. These characters which include, fish, monkeys, parrots and various murals are how Graves has chosen to embody Disney.

Of the swans, although Graves is not in agreement with Jencks over exposing the frame, he may still be using Jencks' double coding; perhaps inadvertently, but in a more subtle way. These swans are the essence of superficiality. They are a skin on a frame a perfect symbol for Disney. These swans are figurative not in a superficial way but instead with a sense of parody in true postmodern tradition. (Though perhaps not intended .)

Also these swans are inflated nine times their original sizes from their homes at the Palazzo Barberini in Italy, to their perches above the Florida swamps (Jencks, 1990, 25). Inflated size, eclecticism and a desire for culture are all traits of Disney. They steal symbols of culture, inflate them and paint them. This is Disney who's symbol is a cinderella's castle, exaggerated from a real life Bavarian pastiche.(fig. 22)

Graves' architecture by its very nature is figurative, in other words, he tries to look a little deeper into problems and give things extra meaning with maybe symbols or metaphor. If Graves sets out to embody something figuratively he must consequently seek to embody the symbols and images behind it, rather than the thing itself.

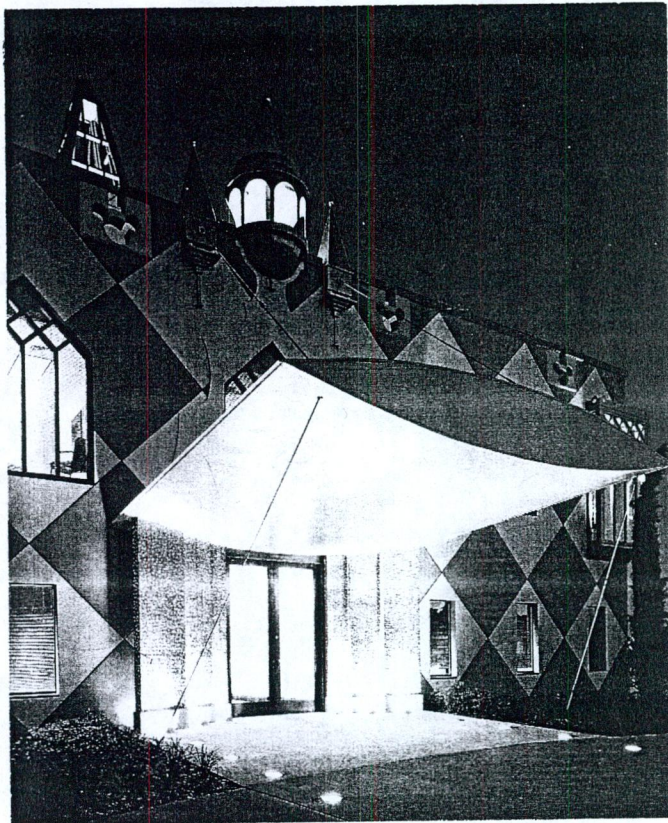


Fig. 20 The entrance to Robert Venturi's Disney casting centre.

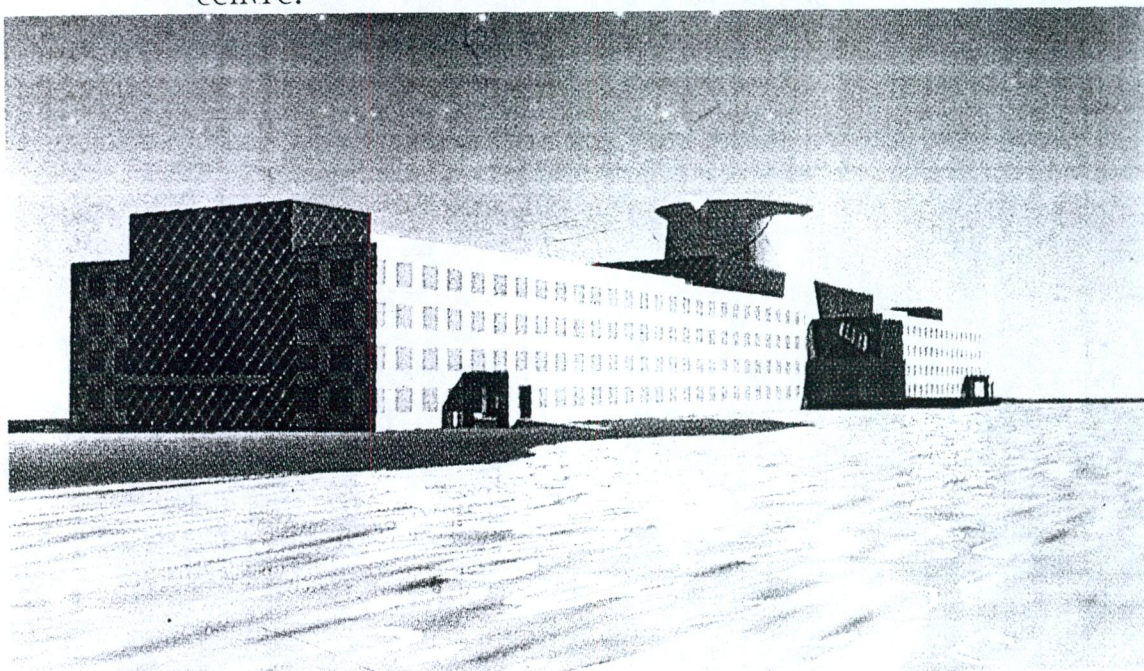


Fig. 21 Arata Isozaki's Team Disney building.



Fig. 22

The Eurodisney castle.

If Graves is embodying Disney then he must be embodying the figurative side. Unfortunately, the figurative side of Disney is not depth, fun or entertainment, it is superficiality and low culture.

Graves' architecture has come back on itself to parody postmodernism, by doing exactly the opposite of what he intended. Graves is embodying all that is wrong with Disney, instead of all that is fun.

Graves has created a very easy architecture. He has created a style that allows him to cut corners and save money, in the cause of aesthetics.

When we examine the plans of, for example, the Swan Hotel we see a very regular grid like formal pattern.(fig. 23) We see a classical symmetrical layout. What we don't see is a carefully crafted plan with a layout incorporating the lobby, the ballroom, and the cafe's. These rooms have not been made as part of the hotel instead Graves has consigned to them the status of 'outhouses'. He has distributed all of the irregular shaped rooms in this hotel, to various points around it, forming something of the tented village. The roofs of these he has painted with stripes to enhance this image.(fig. 24) These roofs refer to some kind of medieval carnival that is obviously somewhere in Graves mind. One expects to see knights jousting on the promenade, not holidaymakers. He has started with a problem of functions and given it a solution of postmodernism.

The roofs are painted to give the effect of a tented village to hide the unsightly spectacle of their concrete construction to guests, high above, in their rooms. Graves has addressed this problem inconsistently. A problem of function must be given a solution of function. It must not be given a postmodern solution. The function here being construction and form, the need to have certain larger irregular rooms, and also the need for a good layout. The postmodern solution to this has been to create an image and make it all fit, The carnival image is there because of a shortfall in design not because of a particular wish for that particular image.

Graves consistently displays a lack of understanding of what constitutes 'postmodernness'. He believes it is ornament, it is reference to the past, Europe, eclecticism, colour, metaphor, and pastiche. For him it is a series of devices to be applied to modernist values. Postmodernism in truth is deeper than that.

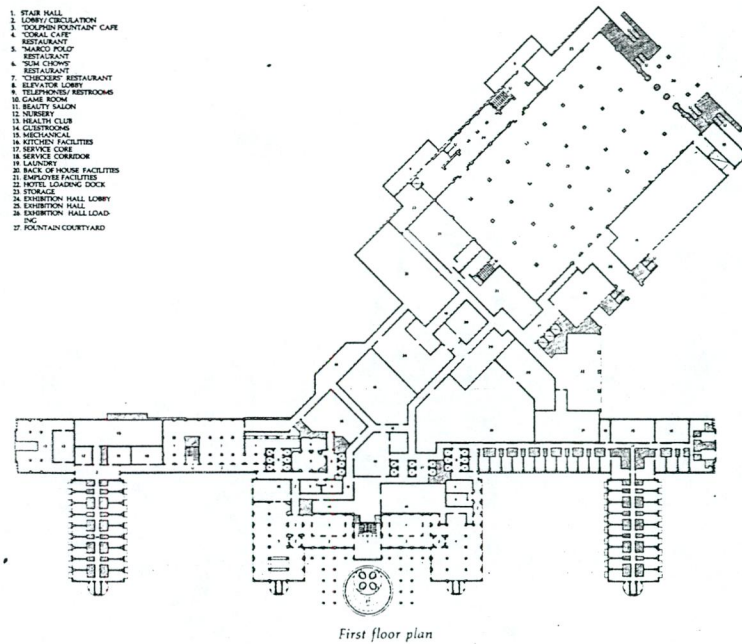


Fig. 23 First floor plan of the Dolphin hotel.

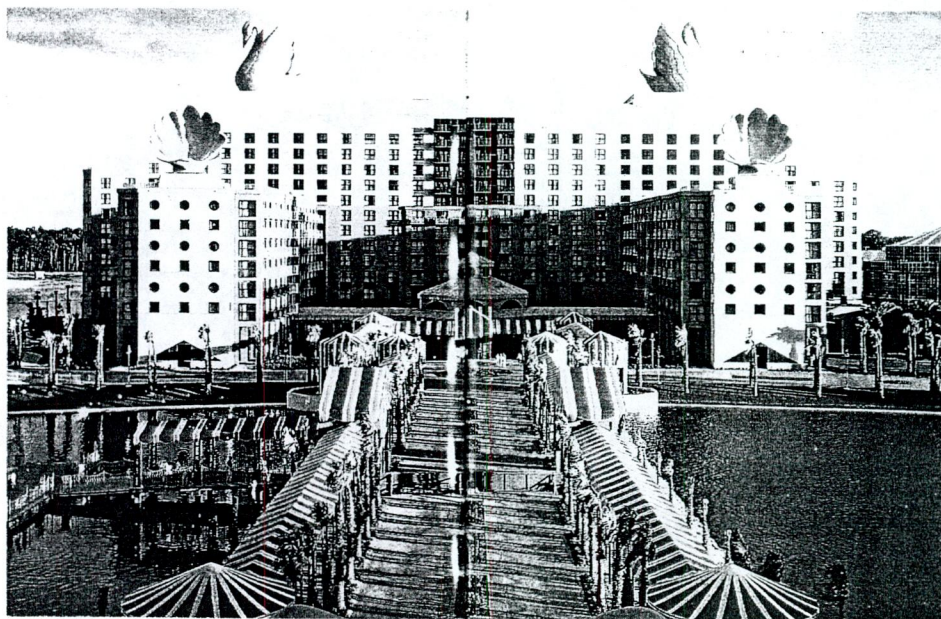


Fig. 24 The Swan hotel with its tented village surrounding.

For something to be postmodern it must not just have a postmodern shell on a modernist form. The postmodern qualities must run deeper.

Unfortunately however no postmodern form exists. We do not have anything to base postmodern architecture on. Modernism was not allowed to develop to the point where it became postmodernism. Instead postmodernism was born from a reaction to the bastardisations of modernism in the late 60's.

Graves by not fully understanding the movement is doing to postmodernism what was done to modernism. Graves has not understood function and how it relates to form, instead Graves relates finance to form. This treatment will only bring architecture into a deeper state of freefall.

Decoration in this case the applied paint-work of a tented village is a tool to Michael Graves, to again make something of nothing. Where another architect would be criticised for this solution Graves receives praise for his fairyland imagery. Is this bad architecture, is Graves covering up for his mistakes and his inabilities with ornament, or does it mean he is a very good architect? After all he has saved Disney money at the same time as creating a very stylish work which fits well with the Disney image. Everybody is happy Graves gets a good, well admired building and Disney gets a cheap one.

Some may call this the ideal solution in architecture cheap but good. Unfortunately however, the nature of the 'good' is fundamentally wrong.

Graves, instead of doing something creative with his imagination, has done something creative with his inabilities. We may call this good architecture only in a purely superficial sense. There is no depth to Graves' creativity. He seems always to be disguising the shortfalls with creativity rather than addressing the shortfalls with creativity.

He has however, by opting for this style of plan, released his interiors from the constraints of having other rooms surround them. His 'golden grove' cafe with its high ceiling and creative use of light, was made possible by this choice of plan. And on a superficial level it does work, and it is good architecture in this sense, but it is not good architecture in the context of other architects. Graves does not work perhaps to his full potential here. He is taking the easy options, and yes it does work, but it does not advance his architecture or the postmodern style in any way.

CHAPTER 4

MICHAEL GRAVES AND MODERNISM

"Oh, I've had such a curious dream !" said Alice. And she told her sister as well as she could remember them, all these strange adventures of hers that you have just been reading about; and, when she had finished, her sister kissed her, and said " it was a curious dream dear certainly; but now run into your tea; its getting late." So Alice got up and ran off thinking while she ran, as well she might, what a wonderful dream it had been. (Carroll,1982,112)

The ornamentation of this building may be criticised for being superficial, and correctly so. It shows, on Michael Graves' part, a lack of understanding of the nature of postmodernism. To Graves postmodernism is a set of tools to be used in conjunction with the lessons of form learned from the modernist movement. These are the tools of parody, eclecticism, metaphor and humanscale. Graves competently uses these tools to produce some extremely good buildings. Such as his Portland building, with its historical and metaphorical references.

However Graves only makes use of these skills in terms of modernism. The underlying form of his work is derived from the skills laid out by the modernists. We only have to look at the flat exterior of the Swan hotel to prove this. It is without form and detail, or anything to distinguish it from an office block.

The ornamentation is superficial, but it would be incorrect to blame Michael Graves for this. Instead we must look to the new brutalists of the 50's in England and America. These architects took the purist ideals of the modern movement and created a language of their own. This language was the language of the high rise tower block and the utilitarian office block. This language became confused with that of streets in the sky and accommodation for the masses. Because of this modernism became synonymous with cold cheap architecture. The backlash from this led to the 'warmer', postmodernism.

Postmodernism is without a language of its own, because its reactionary nature caused it to reject any that had existed before.(that of modernism). This has led to a situation where the movement is in freefall and without a clearly defined direction, or for that matter any direction at all. It simultaneously rejects the functional modernism and embraces the stylistic devices of antiquity. It does not embrace anything completely.

This freefall has left people like Michael Graves without an architectural language to base their architecture on. All Graves has is his ornamentation.

If we look at American culture we see a similar situation existing.(though on a bigger scale). America has no history of its own before the 1700's. This also caused America to be in a state of freefall, and consequently it came to rely on all it could come up with itself. What it invented was its own language of culture. Not its own culture itself. This is what we now snobbishly refer to as American superficiality.

This superficiality, or lack of depth in thought, is what American consumerism of the 60's was based on. This consumerism led to an explosion of colour and 'superficiality', embodied in everything from hot dog stands to coca-cola. Even in America this over 'superficialisation' has brought about a situation where today Americans seek the more human side of life. This is expressed in the 'Green' movement, and in postmodernism.

Michael Graves' work for Disney is the most complete embodiment of this American culture we have today. It is fully postmodern in style yet American in depth. It is the Coca-Cola bottle of the 1990's.

Unfortunately, from a European perspective, this embodiment is without depth, the depth that modernism could have given. American culture and architecture lacks the depth of form, and the understanding of function that modernism had. American architecture needs a return to basic principals to bring back this depth. And these basic principals may only be had from modernism.

Graves has allowed himself to become a brutalist of the 1990s. He is treating the modern movement with contempt, just as those architects of the sixties. This can only contribute to the current state of disarray in architecture today, and may even cause another backlash towards simplicity and austerity. Graves may inadvertently be cause this reaction and bring about the much needed return to modernist values.

Although the images of fifties modernism can never be regained, we may see a new form emerging with human depth along this with aesthetic depth. This may be the new step for the 'green' or organic movement.

CONCLUSION

Lastly she (Alices' sister) pictured to herself how this same little sister of hers would in the aftertime,....., gather about her other little children, and make *their* eyes bright and eager with many a strange tale, perhaps even with the dream of wonderland long ago.
(Carroll, 1982, 114)

Michael Graves and the Walt Disney company have formed the quintessential postmodernist alliance in the Dolphin and Swan hotels. A postmodern architect is probably for the first time working for a postmodern client. This alliance tells us a lot about the nature of architecture today. It is an example of the ideal situation showing us how finance works for both architect and client and how styling works for architect and client.

The Dolphin and Swan hotels are symbols of our times. They show us that beneath even the most avant garde constructions lie financial reasoning. Unfortunately they also show us that flamboyant architecture is not necessarily good architecture. These buildings, stripped of their ornament are inconsequential mounds of concrete that should be forgotten to history. Their foundations are firmly based in commerce. Disney controls these buildings it is not the work of Graves it is the work of Disney.

The styling that does manage to emerge from these buildings is in itself flawed. Where are the postmodern ideals of populism? They seem to no longer exist. Instead is a display of superficiality and disguise. The art of disguising unattractive features with murals and applied ornament. The underlying ideals of modernism have been lost, yet they are still being relied on. There is no loyalty to form. No effort to give depth and purity to the simple forms. Instead styling and ornament cover up bad workmanship and architecture.

Postmodernism is here being used as a tool to further the career of an aesthetically undistinguished architect. In the end commerce rules the day, and there is no room for originality or innovation. Postmodernism is not a reaction to the austerity of modernism it is a progression.

Postmodernist traits have permeated all aspects of our society, from architecture to music. This is because postmodernism is fundamental to the human mind, and is in all of us. It is the "Alice" factor in all our thinking.

Postmodernism is merely the next progression in an architecture becoming more and more sophisticated turning itself to the human condition. Unfortunately though it has lost touch with the reality of form. It has been corrupted by finance and a misguided hatred of all things modernist.

The work of Michael Graves is a symbol of this corruption, thankfully with the postmodernist pinnacle that is the Dolphin and Swan hotels, architecture may see the errors of its ways and make a return to simplicity and depth. A return to modernist values.

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WALT DISNEY WORLD DOLPHIN HOTEL

Location

Lake Buena Vista, Florida

Description

The Walt Disney World Dolphin Hotel is a 1.4 million square foot convention center with 1,510 rooms, a ballroom of 57,000 square feet, and an exhibit hall measuring 50,000 square feet, as well as meeting rooms, restaurants, shops, and recreational facilities. The Dolphin Hotel faces its companion building, the Walt Disney World Swan Hotel, across a large crescent-shaped lake. A landscaped pedestrian causeway traverses the lake connecting the two hotel lobbies and providing access to a tramway and transportation boats.

The Dolphin Hotel is organized to take advantage of the waterside views. Four nine-story wings containing guestrooms project into the lake, surrounding a restaurant court with a waterfall fountain supported by dolphin statues. On the opposite side of the building, visitors enter through the *porte cochere* and lobby linking the hotel with the convention facilities contained in the northwest wing of the building.

The color and decoration of the hotel and its surroundings suggest the character of Florida resorts and provide a thematic context consistent with Disney's program for "entertainment architecture." The lakeside facade of the Dolphin Hotel is decorated with murals depicting large banana leaves resting on a trellis. Wave patterns and dolphin murals adorn the long convention hall facade. Two gigantic dolphin statues mark both ends of the hotel roof, making the theme of the hotel visible from a distance. Roofs visible from guestrooms above are shaped and striped to appear like tents, reinforcing the hotel's festive resort themes.

In the hotel, the guestroom corridors are lined with thematic beach scenes. Doors are reminiscent of striped cabanas, and carpets depict boardwalks and beach towels scattered along a sandy shore. The restaurants are each given a thematic character consistent with the overall design. In the convention center, the structural columns in the large prefunction spaces are decorated to look like stylized palm trees. The ballroom walls are decorated with large-scale abstract floral patterns; the carpet contains a wave and starfish motif. These oversized elements attempt to give the ballroom and prefunction spaces a life and energy not typical of convention facilities.

Cost

\$220,000,000

Owner/Developer

A joint venture of Tishman Realty & Construction Co., Inc., Metropolitan Life Insurance Co., and Aoki Corp. The hotel is operated by The Sheraton Corporation.

Client

Michael Eisner, Chairman
Walt Disney Productions
500 South Buena Vista Street
Burbank, California 91521
818/560-1000

Services

Master planning. Architectural design. Interior design. Design of furniture, graphics, and artifacts.

Status

Completed July 1990.

