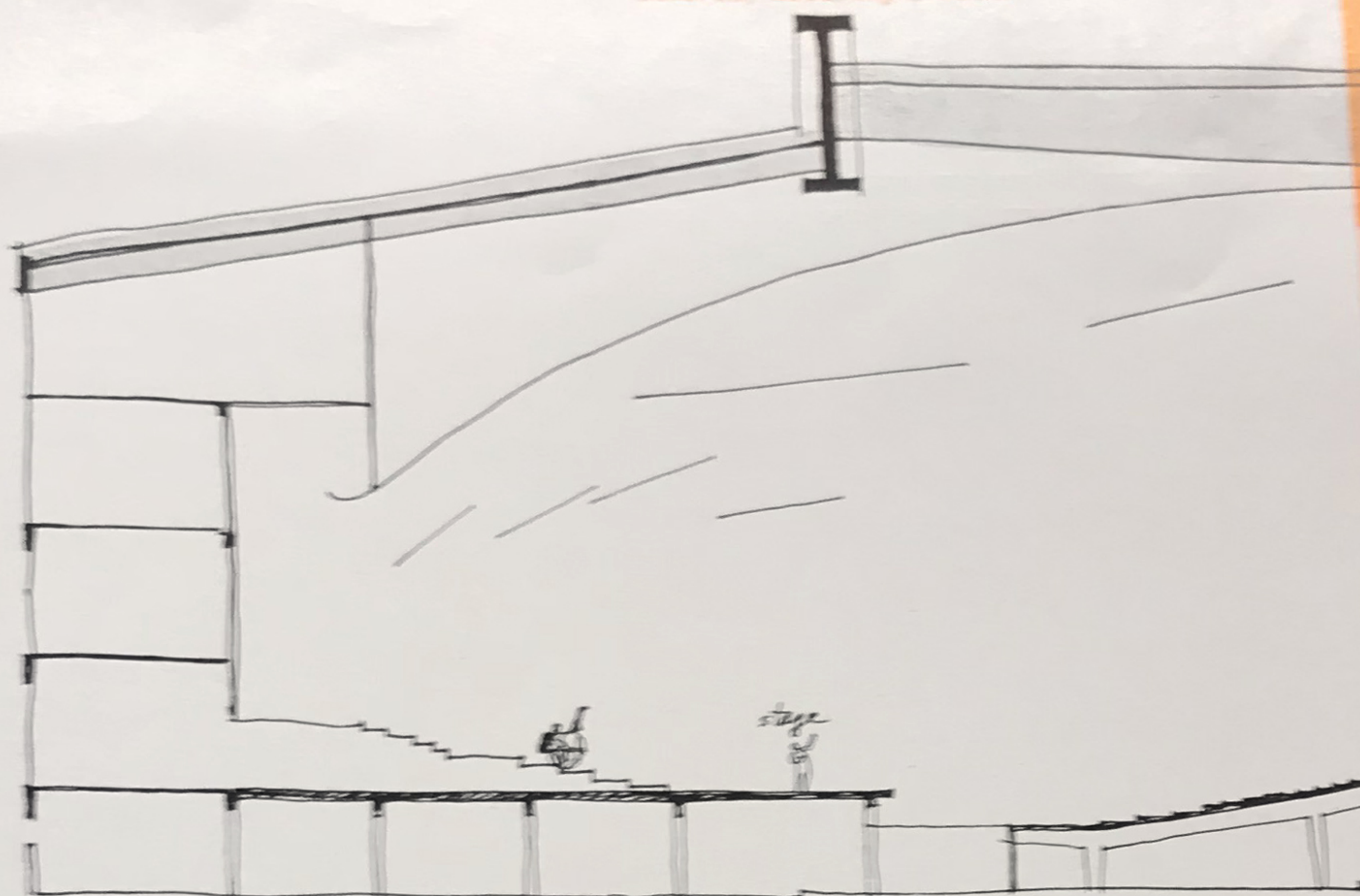


Across the top of these two pages: great auditorium of the Ciudad Universitaria of Caracas, by architect Carlos Villanueva. Concrete-ribbed, counterbalanced roof shell is furrowed inside, studded with round lights and rectangular vents behind huge multi-colored, hovering shields.



THE RACE TO DESIGN

theaters

Four places, four purposes, four extremely diverse results

A great deal has happened in theater design since *Interiors'* first survey of the field (March and April, 1945), but little of it has happened in New York, on account, the experts used to believe, of the provision in the New York City Administrative Building Code which required each theater to be housed in its own building. That provision was altered one year ago, but still no new New York theater has been built—blame it on high real estate values or video. But whatever the health of the drama may be in these environs, theaters are being

built, and strides in theater design are being made. Not all of them are in the same direction, however.

In the theater, structural advances and stylistic changes are secondary. The primary fact about theater design is how one conceives the functional problem.

Is your theater meant above all to provide perfect sight lines—like a circus? Or to carry the spoken word or music—like Shakespeare's Globe Theater or an opera house? Is the play to be seen in a framed, boxed, lighted world of its own by an audience disembodied in darkness?—



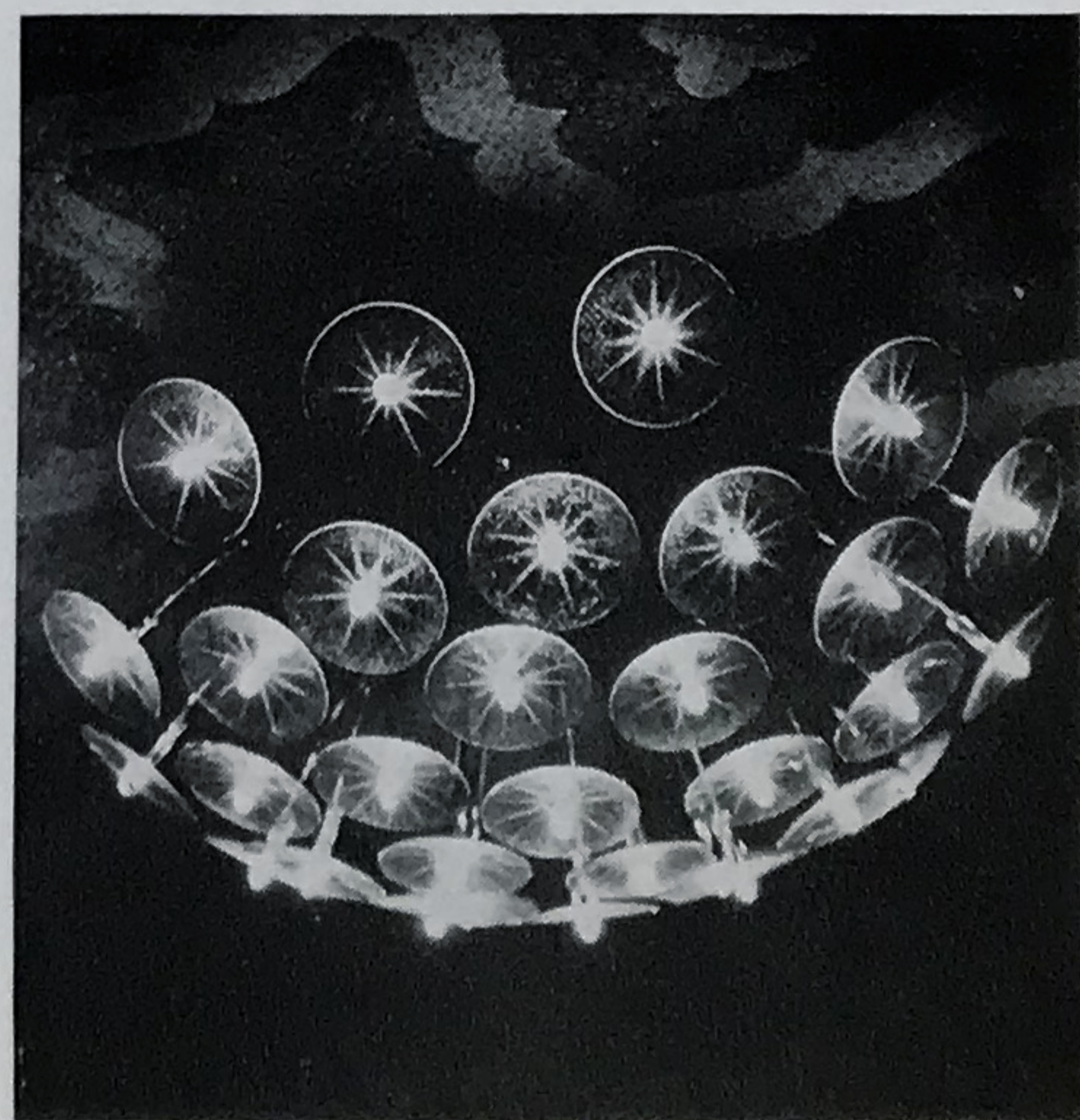


photographs courtesy of the ministry of education, venezuela

Left and right: The American Shakespeare Festival Theater on a 12-acre park overlooking the Housatonic River in Stratford, Connecticut. Outside, it is reminiscent of the Stratford Theatre in England, and Shakespeare's original Globe. Inside, it combines several ideas from several sources. Architect was Edwin L. Howard; landscape architect, Alice Orne Smith; designer of stage, Professor Edward Cole of Yale Drama School; interior fabrics and colors, Marie Nichols.



Stratford Theater is built of Angelique or French Guiana teak donated by French government. It is fire and weather resistant. Interior has octagonal auditorium, handsome modern lobby. Note Lightolier starfire fixtures against patterned acoustical tile ceiling.



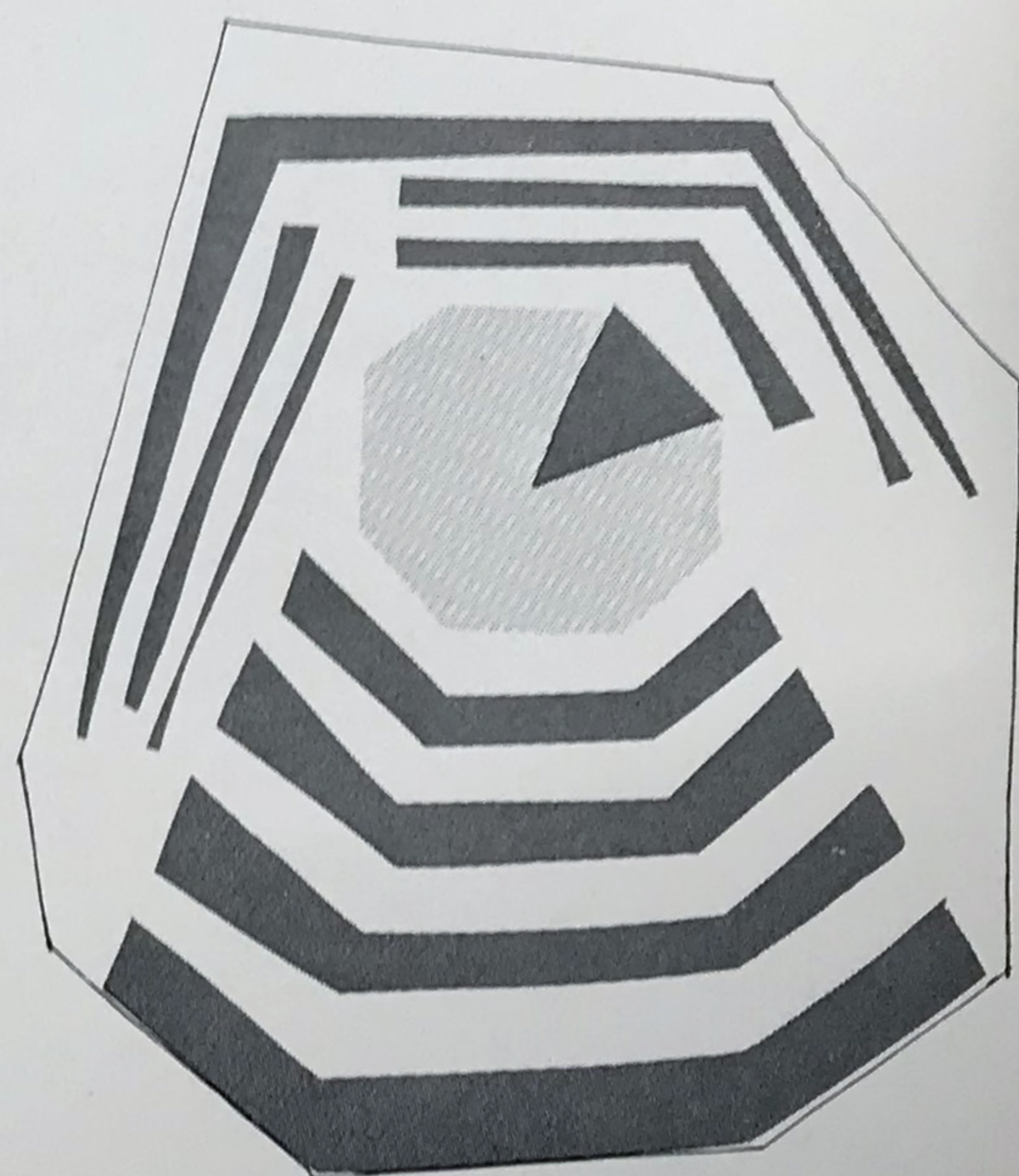
The Teatro Sant' Erasmo in Milan is not only delightful and dashing visually, but as successful a *théâtre intime* as one could wish for—thanks to excellent planning. It is designed for frankly experimental drama, concerts, and the like, for performances requiring a minimum of scenic equipment. It is, however, possible to place and change props on the irregular octagonal stage, since it lowers to the basement. This is not the sort of theater that draws a big audience—but then the theater is very tiny, and occupies first-

floor space in a large office building. Economy, however, is not the effect of the decor. Expanses of reddish mahogany paneling, blue and violet rubber tile flooring in the lobby and ticket areas (and it is merely and subtly marbled, not patterned), exquisite furniture upholstered in purple and maroon velvet, and very handsome lamps make a venture into this kind of drama a far cry from the step into bohemia that the same kind of attendance at one of the comparable Greenwich Village theaters involves in New

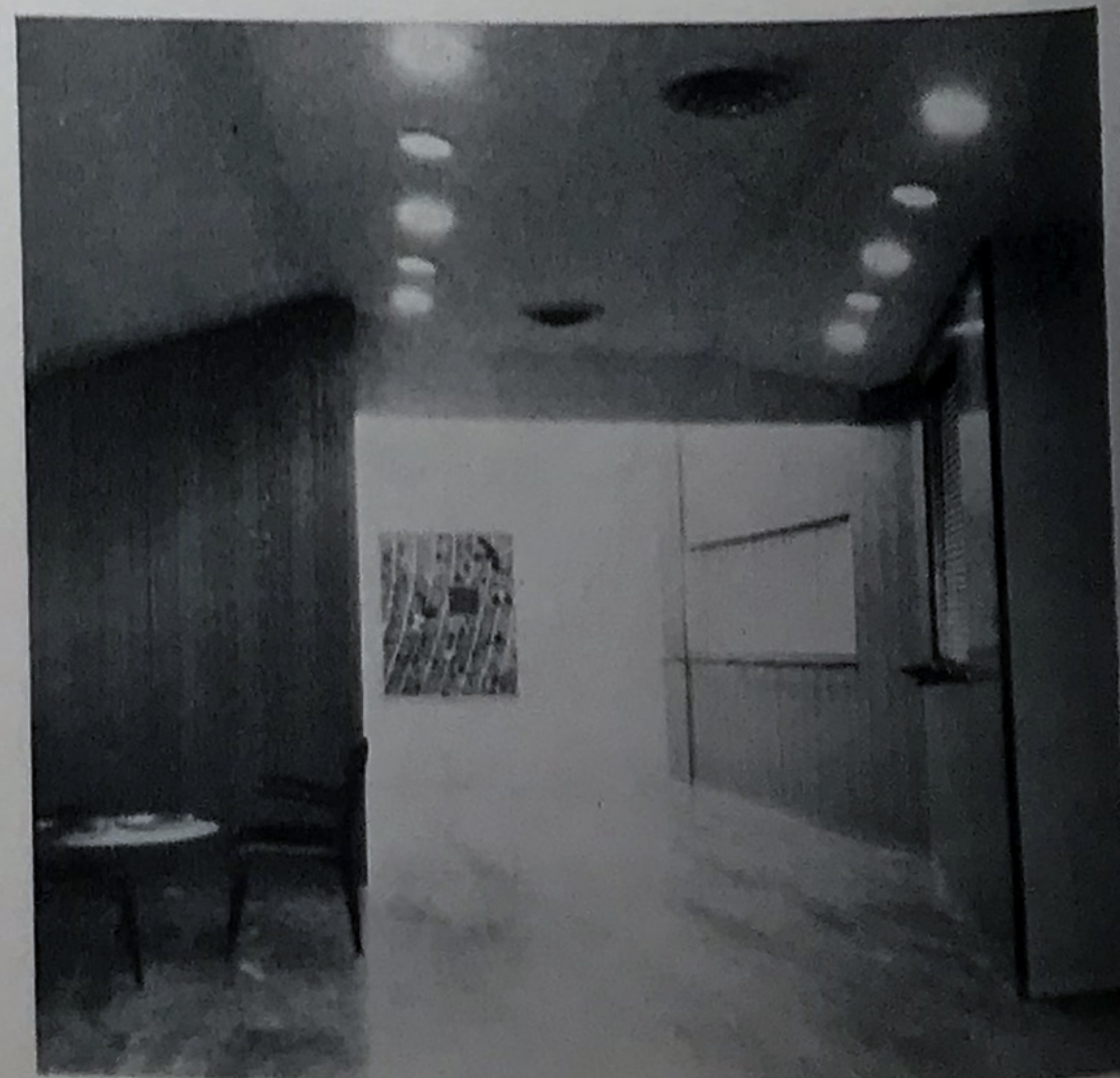
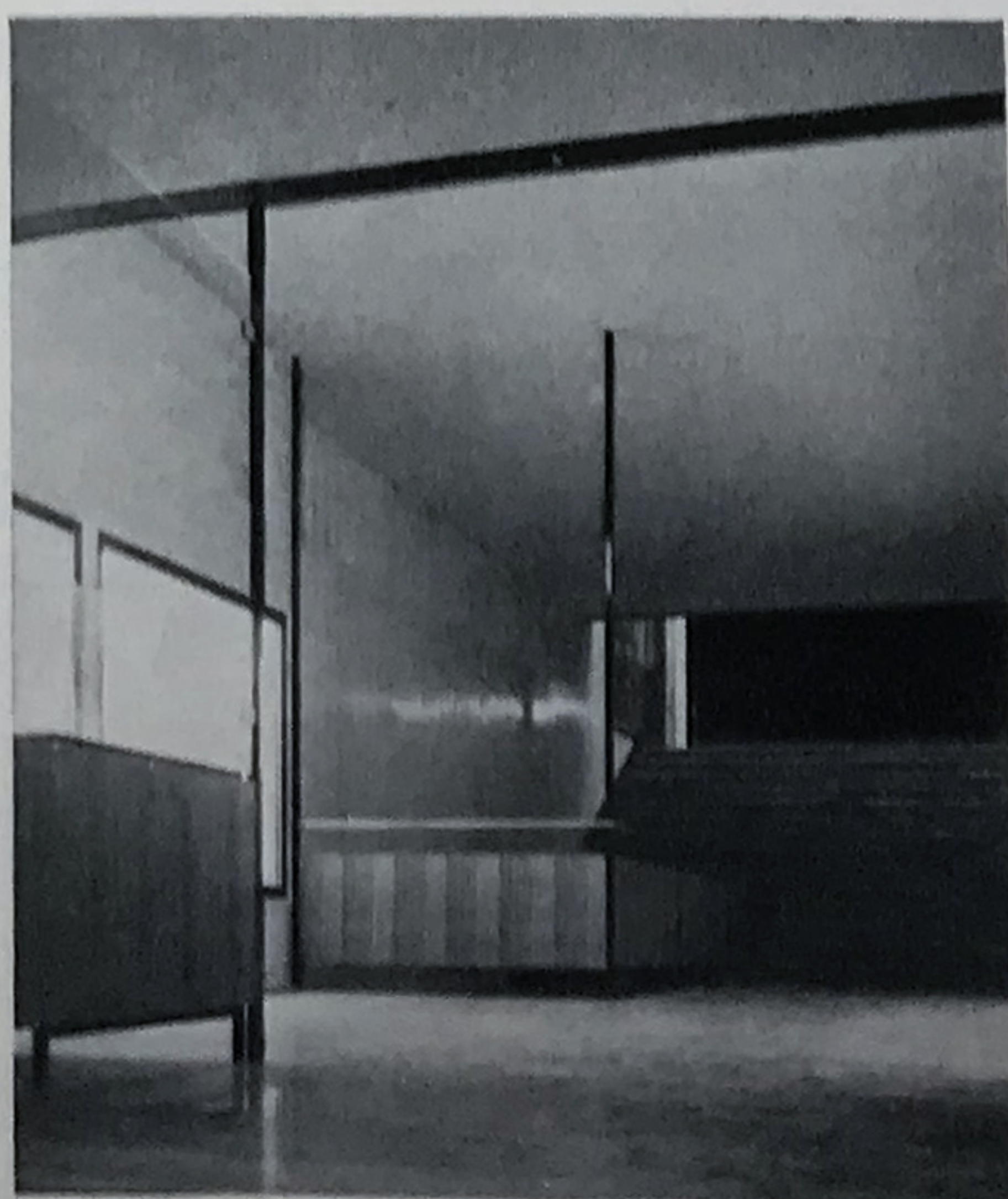
York. In itself, *this* is good theater. The excellence of workmanship and sumptuousness of materials in the auditorium, particularly, makes a dramatic contrast with the bare bones mechanization implied by the contours of walls and ceilings. This elegance of finish is not only a great drawing card for the theater itself—a place for the more intellectual *eleganti* to be seen—but good psychology for all participants—making it apparent that experimental drama can be valid and beautifully finished art.—O. G.

Teatro St. Erasmo, Milan

Carlo de Carli, architect



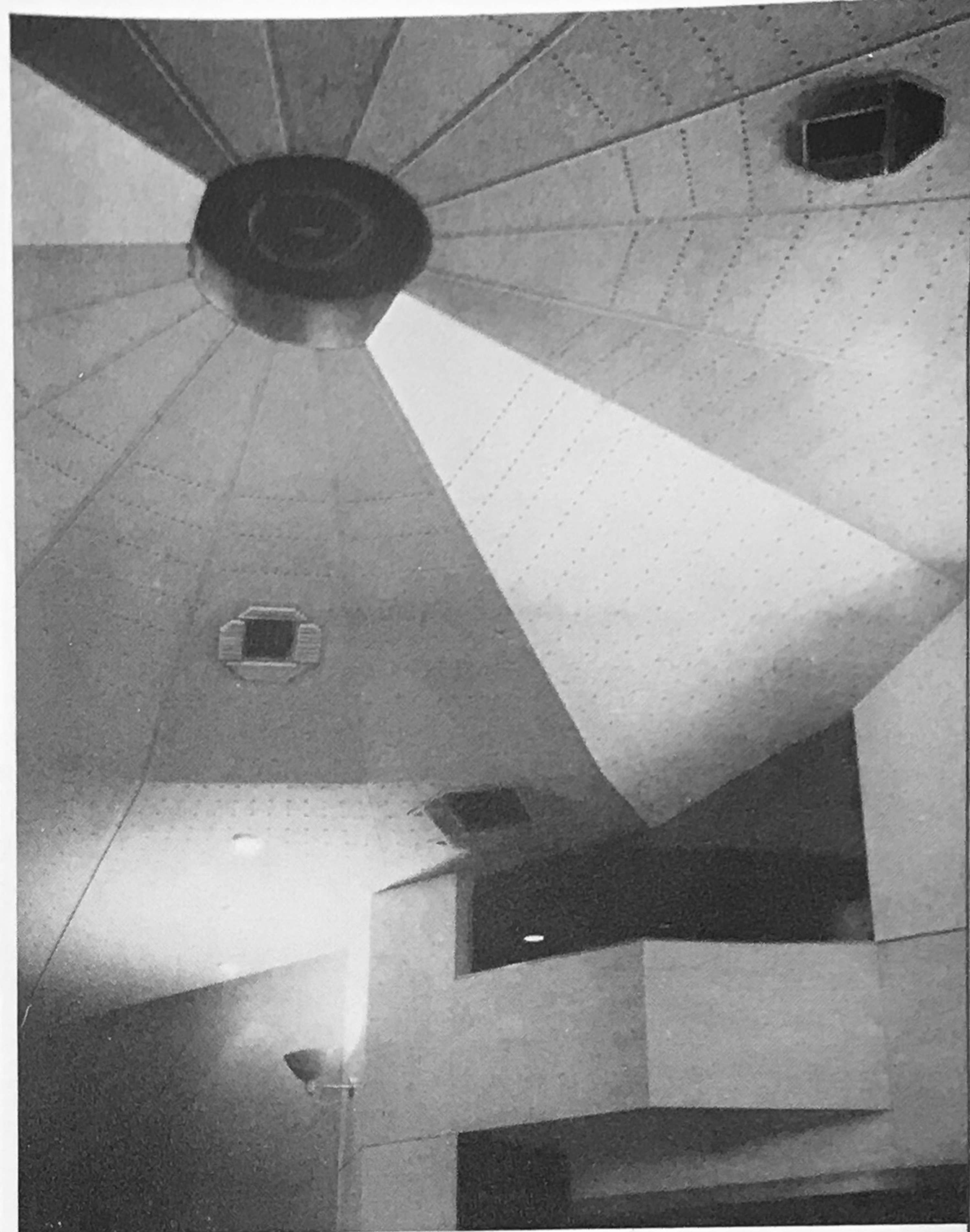
photographs by casali



The crisp, neat, extremely luxurious entrance, lobby, and ticket areas: Maroon velvet, reddish mahogany, blue rubber flooring.

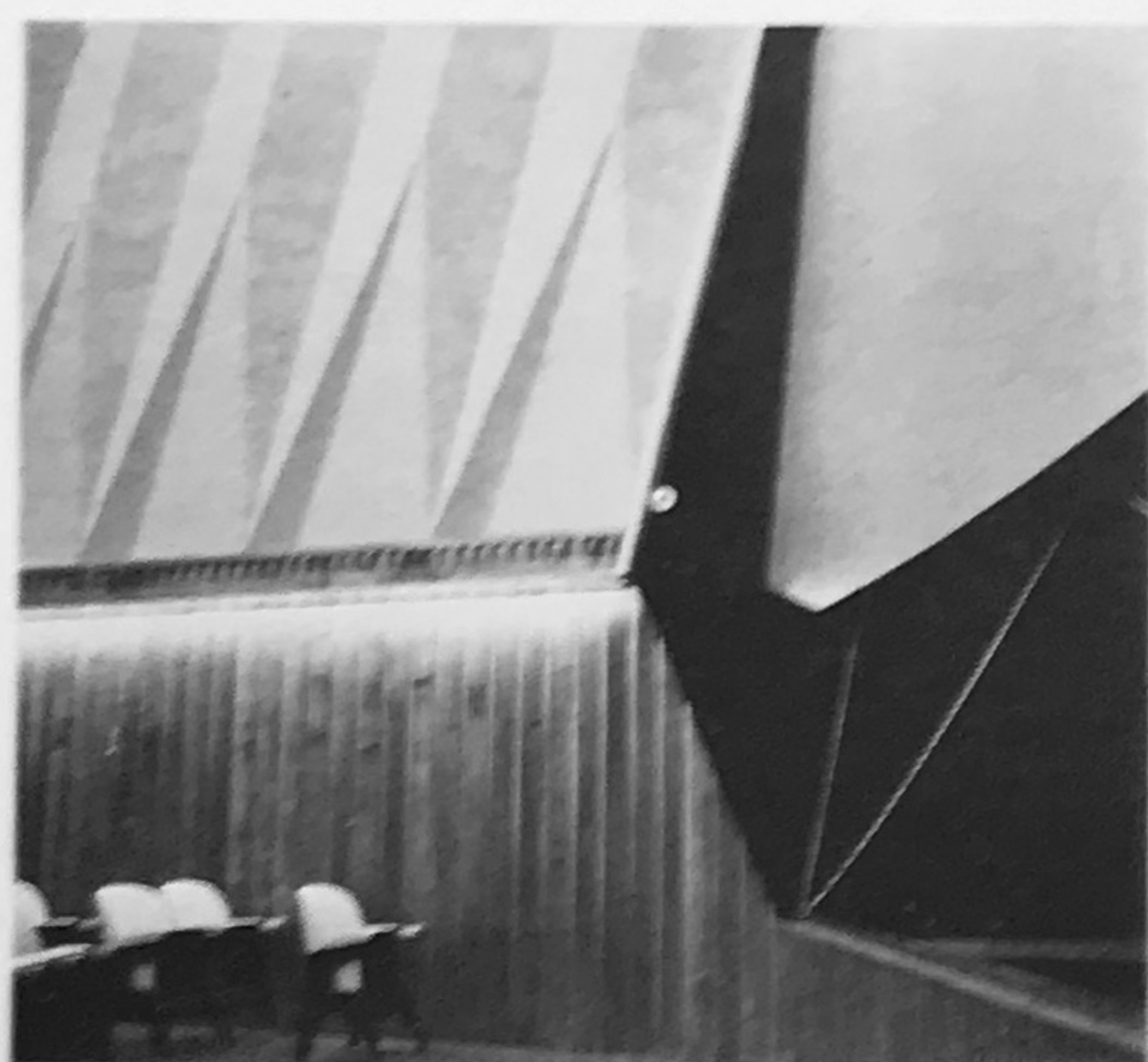


Interior of the auditorium is an irregular octagon banked by a main and a secondary seating area. Point of the triangle in plan indicates orientation of the actors for a performance in which only the main bank is used. When the entire seating area is filled, the actors face away from the blank area. Wooden flutes in upper walls and angular structure of the ceiling help maintain acoustical control.



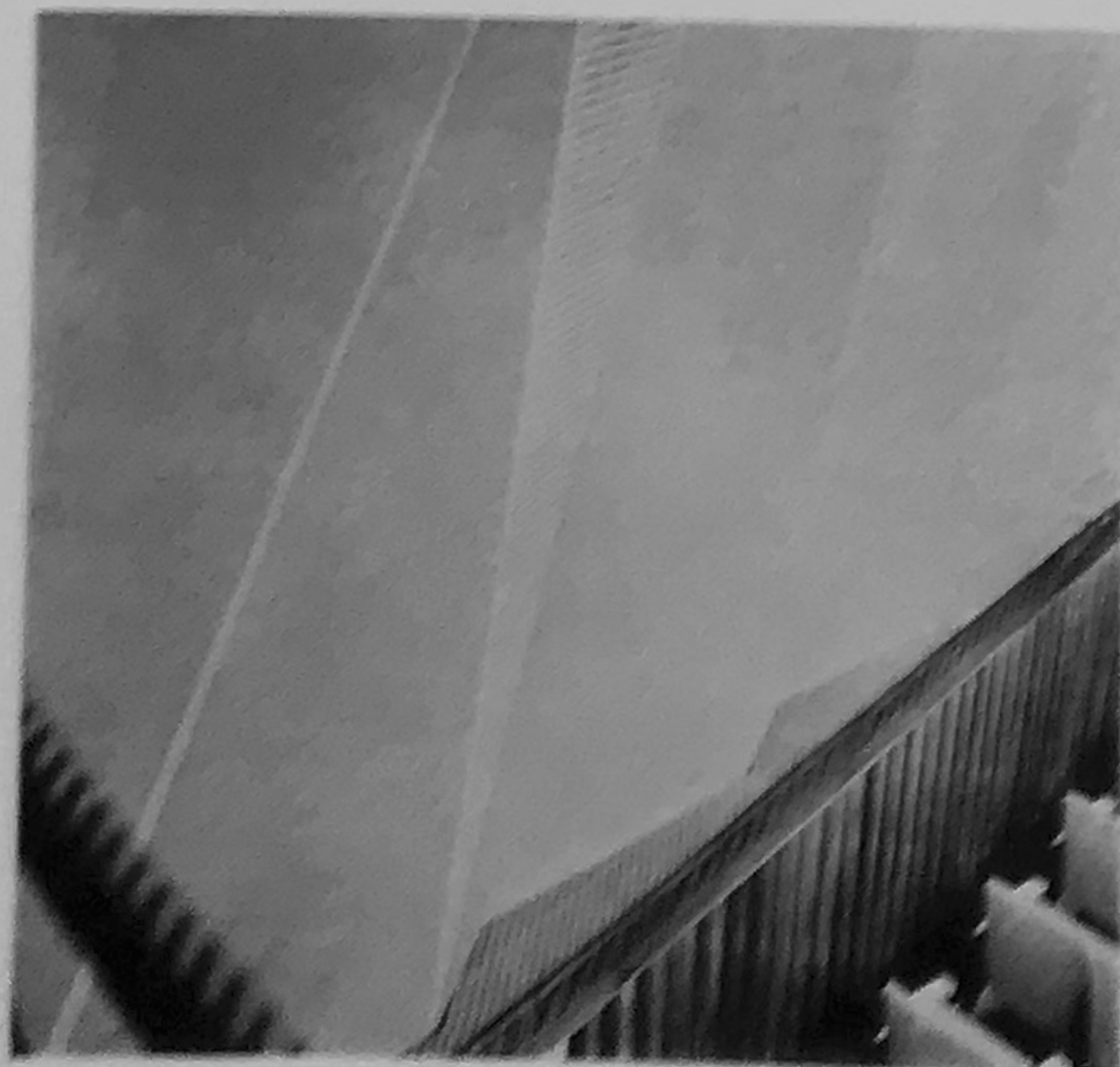
the stark Cinema Archimede in Parioli

Giulio Sterbini, architect

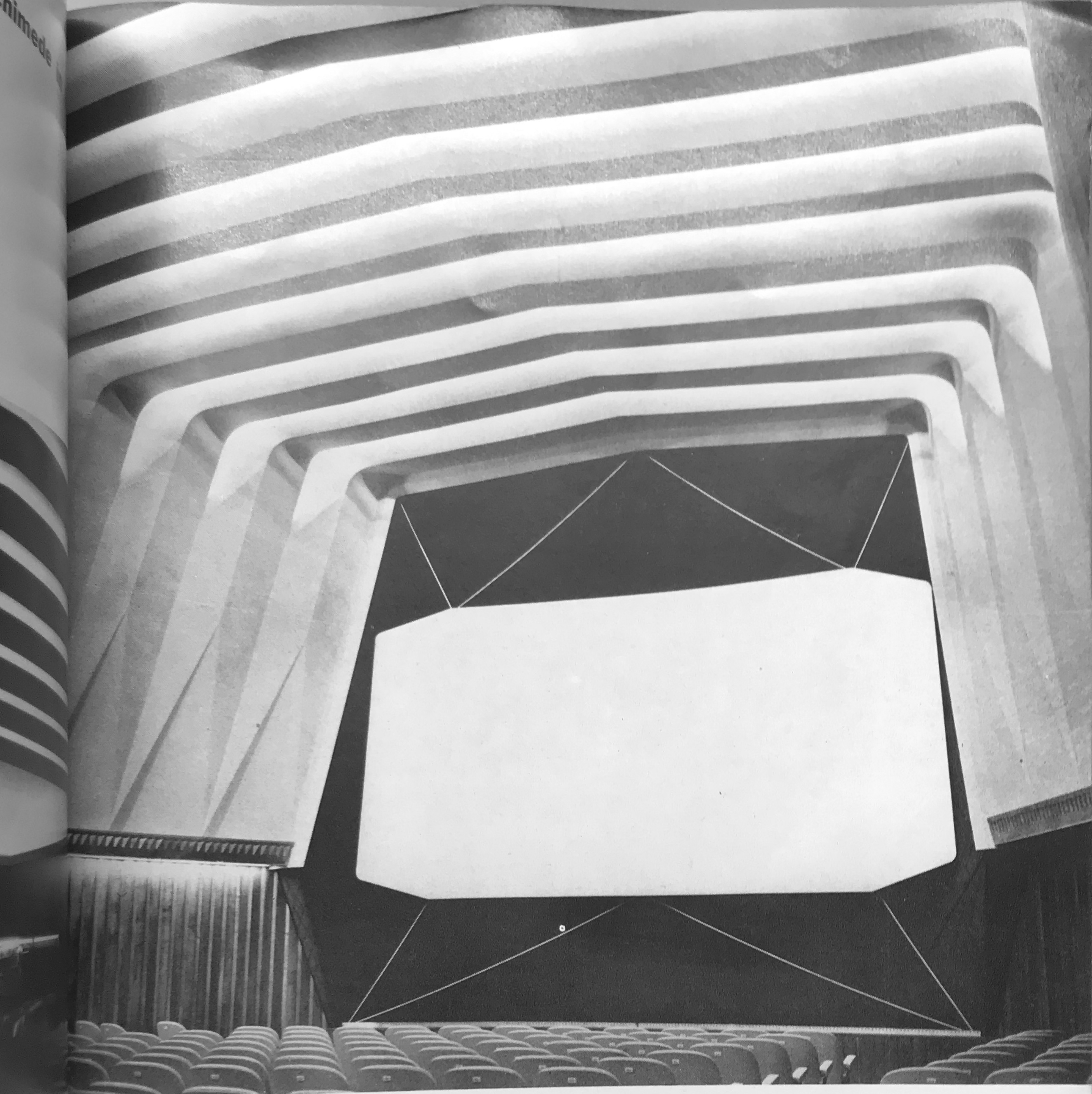


photographs by marilyn silverstone

The theater is on a difficult site on a queerly angled hill, downstairs in a plushy hotel — which may account for the odd plan, in which one enters on the balcony floor at an angle; this may also account for the fact that everything in the interior is angled — the screen, the contour of the orchestra (above) and the plan itself.



This small cinema is stark only in the sense that its interiors are free of applied decoration. Certainly there is nothing Spartan about the pale gray plastic over foam-rubber seats, the lightish wood paneling, the punched-out brass light cove, the dark blue velvet drapery, or the dark blue silk lining in the screen alcove, the balcony, the projection-booth alcove, and the display windows in the lobby. Parioli, the wildly, whitely-sprouting resi-



dential district north of the Villa Borghese in Rome, is the right setting for the almost stridently emphatic futuristic gesture that architect Sterbini has made here. Only it happens that the most spectacular feature is the most functional. The white ceiling — so light and bright that the interior of the theater seems daylit (house lights are on for longer periods in Italy's theaters than here, for social exchanges and lookings-over) — is an excellent lighting de-

vice, and also supplements the plastic and velvet materials around in their acoustical functions. It is concrete molded in a square pleating like so much paper. Lights in the hidden side of each deep recess bounce on the farthest, highest surface, making a row of perfectly luminous coves, and leaving the near surfaces dark.

The light, airy, geometrical character of the interior is emphasized by the treatment of the screen, which appears to be

strung on white nylon cords within its alcove of blue silk. Actually it is supported from behind. Its one serious fault is the cutting in of angles at the corners of the screen in order to make it conform to the prevailing geometry of the interior — which nicks into the image on the screen. Incidentally, as the reader can tell from the length of the screen — which curves — the Archimede is dedicated to that modern invention, 3D. — O. G.