THE MALL AT COLUMBIA, MARYLAND BY COPE, LINDER & WALMSLEY
BUILDING TYPES STUDY: SHOPPING MALLS IN SUBURBIA
DENVER ART MUSEUM BY JAMES SUDLER ASSOCIATES AND GIO PONTI
URBAN SPACES BY M. PAUL FRIEDBERG & ASSOCIATES
"WHY LONDON WORKS BETTER THAN NEW YORK" BY JONATHAN BARNETT
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SHOPPING MALLS IN SUBURBIA

The growing commitments to concentration and mixed activities in these malls are a strong sign that people do not want to abandon their urban life—even in the suburbs.

Suburbia is (supposedly) a powerful threat to existing cities; the people in suburbia don't (supposedly) like crowded cities—and the suburban road systems, two car garages, ranch style living and all the drive-in banks, movies and churches are (supposedly) the ultimate formal proof of that suburban rejection of the city and its concentration. Not only do suburbanites say they hate the city, but they prove their animosity in what they build (supposedly).

But suburban shopping malls are taking on all the best urban characteristics of central cities. These shopping malls are even achieving some of the idealized techniques of urban life that central cities have seldom achieved: separation of vehicular and pedestrian traffic; moving platforms, ramps and stairs for people-transportation; flowing water and trees integrated with heavy pedestrian use; multi-level arcaded spaces that are concentrated, urban and enclosed. Signs and advertising are reasonably controlled without limiting the individual freedom of expression necessary for small shops and, of course, for democratic life in general. Perhaps they show that it is time we recognize in suburbia the same human tendencies that have always led people to busy places: a need for social exchange in conversation, the presence of choices that make daily life interesting, the stimulation to our imagination that comes from watching crowds of different people on different errands, or the ability to go unnoticed for a
while—to not participate—which every small-town citizen knows exists only in crowds, in places like cities. The key is concentration—the close personal proximity of people and their activities—and that is at least part of the reason suburbia goes to shopping malls.

Suburban malls are still a little schizophrenic within their total boundaries. Automobiles—and of course malls cannot survive without them—seem to strangle the pedestrian part of malls in a no-man's land of parking lots and garages. But more and more the automobile and its parking lots are being given more design attention—as necessary evils, not "the main idea." Designers are trying to conceal them with berms, or screen them with trees, or stack them in little trays of garages to reduce the amount of space they require. The parking lot will never disappear; not until transportation problems are solved on a regional or even national basis, and maybe not even then if people insist on going anywhere, anytime—as they can now in an automobile.

The two major shopping malls in this study—The Mall at Columbia, Maryland, pages 113-121, and The Eastridge Regional Mall in San Jose, California, pages 124-128—have no offices or residential units above them, or in close conjunction down the street, but Columbia's new downtown will come very near to that kind of urbanity. Seen in the aerial photo on the following page, nearby garden apartments and townhouse developments put some residents of Columbia within walking distance of the mall. There is one office building completed now in the downtown center, and connected to the mall by a wide pedestrian bridge. A bank, the Rouse Company headquarters building, a hotel called the Columbia Inn, two movie houses and two more parking garages will be constructed soon. The true urban experience requires this full range of commercial, entertainment and housing activities in relatively close proximity.

But there is no question about the impulse to achieve this urbanity being alive in these suburban malls now; it is planned for, it will be achieved, and most importantly, the images and some of the content of urban life are there to feel and see today. The concentration and diversity of malls are drawing people to them, away from the older long-line shopping centers with parking in front, away from the small-village centers around which suburbia first grew. And in so doing they tell us that our large central cities cannot be abandoned, or more correctly, that they will never be abandoned. The human reasons for the existence of cities in the first place are still alive, and we have greater technical means at hand for building or re-building cities than ever before. What suburban residents flee from is bad air, bad schools, or dangerous streets; and these are not the direct result of concentrations of people, as suburbia is beginning to learn for itself. Shopping malls are a strong sign of our returning commitment to urbanity, using techniques that may one day revolutionize our cities, too.

—Robert Jensen

The property for Columbia, Maryland was purchased as pastureland in 1963, and construction of the first houses was begun some three years later. It is now an incorporated city, and along with Reston, Virginia, it has been described as the first modern new town in the United States. Today it has a population of 20,000 people within its city limits, with a projected population of 110,000 by 1980. Columbia, the new town, has been one of the major enterprises-for-profit of The Rouse Company, and its land values have risen dramat-
ically, along with its population. Long before Rouse was building new towns, however, the company was building profitable shopping centers. They started in the 1950's with the then-typical long-line centers facing the road, and today—including Columbia—have about 16 fully enclosed shopping malls completed around the country, with more in development. They are experienced experts in the organization of suburban shopping complexes, and the mall at Columbia—creating as it does the shopping and "downtown" focus for their own new town—can be seen as the showcase of the company; the focus for their best creative energies.

The mall shown here is the first phase of what will eventually become a 2,000,000 square foot enclosed shopping district, with five department stores. Today there are two department stores (Hochschild-Kohn and Woodward & Lathrop) at either end of a 720-foot-long enclosed mall, as shown in the site plan and aerial photograph below. When expansion takes place in the mall, it will grow toward the grove of trees behind it in the aerial photo, bringing it somewhat nearer the major portion of townhouses at Columbia.

The mall at Columbia is two levels and enclosed, with entrances directly into both levels. It is set into a hill, bringing the west side parking lot up to the level of the upper floor gallery; the south side parking garage, with a capacity for 300 cars, also allows entrance to the upper floor. As seen from the main route through Columbia's town center (photo below), the mall projects a surprisingly urban, city-of-the-future quality. The bridge spanning the highway leads to Columbia's office center and recreational lake, discussed in the introduction. (See page 113.)

The principal architectural feature of the mall is its space frame, used to roof all of the public thoroughfares. Gerald Cope, of Cope, Linder & Walmsley, architects for the mall, says he chose the space frame because of its powerful architectural order. It allows almost any number of extraneous forms to be added to it or set in front
of it, without losing its own consistency. The space frame has also been used as a kind of heraldic symbol of the Mall: It has been carried to the exterior facade at the main west side entrances (photo, next page) and the eight-foot-high band of clerestory light that the space frame admits in the daytime (or projects at night) has been carried around the whole perimeter of the mall concourse. The four pyramids over the public plazas within the mall can be seen at night from the major roads in the area.

The clerestory and pyramid structures are glazed with tinted sheet plastic and set in gasketed aluminum supports. This aluminum-glass-and-plastic feeling within the shopping mall is reinforced by the lacy, powerful ordering of the space frame system, and both the lightness and the order are carried out in a consistent visual pattern. The five-foot space frame modules carry into 3D-foot-square column bays, and the columns themselves run through to the ground floor in the gallery spaces. The metal handrail throughout the gallery echoes the ceiling, with light steel bars and circle cut-outs to lighten the railing member itself. The stairs at either end of the Mall are brightly painted, appear to be floating in their space, and continue the circle motif of the handrails (color photo, right). Everywhere direct sunlight sparkles in, creating strong shadow patterns on the walls and ground, as in any busy, concentrated outdoor place.

The typical mall section at Columbia is unusual: Instead of cantilevering two upper level walls over a wide ground floor, the designers have created a T-shaped section (see page 119). This has several advantages. Anyone walking along the upper aisles can easily see the signs for the stores at the ground, because they are no longer tucked underneath the opposite balcony. The section creates a narrow, often crowded and jostling urban sidewalk on the ground floor, and this is just what the designers wanted. The balconies above are carpeted and more serene, but at the ground, the paths seem to burst into the large plaza areas.

The architects have used the space frame with steel roof deck exposed for the ceiling.
and brick pavers for the ground floor, set in patterns that follow the line of stairs and fountains. The brick is a reminder of outside walks and old streets, lending warmth to the surprisingly inexpensive materials of most of the rest of the center. Exterior walls are a combination of textured and plain concrete block cast in a special soft brown color, and fascias are exposed painted steel.

Foliage, water, lighting and signs contribute most to the excitement and urban quality. In the Mall, greenery is everywhere, from small shrubbery to the large Ficus trees imported from Florida that line the gallery and the main Center Court as in the photos below. Each grouping of live foliage is set in its own sealed container and must be individually watered. This allows the floors to be hosed down and scrubbed with soap without fear that chemical-filled water might reach the root systems of the plants.

Fountains add to the sense of activity in the space. In the Center Court (opposite, lower left) two fountains alternately gush to 25 feet in the air then fall to nothing, with smaller bubble-fountains causing a smaller scale of activity in the same pool. These fountains are lighted and may alternate in color, but it is not just their visual quality that is important. The sounds of running water and splashing fountains fill the shopping center, and establish a warm, even restful background noise that helps obliterate harsher noises from other sources.

And, of course, the lighting of this center, particularly for evenings, was an important issue. The only exposed fixtures are the clear-glass globes placed two-per-column throughout the concourse. These establish a soft general light, and are an obvious and understandable light source for orientation. But unlike the Eastridge Shopping Mall shown on pages 121-128 of this study, the Columbia designers have chosen to have few visible fixtures. Instead, most of the light sources are concealed, and objects being lit are the only things drawn to the viewers' attention. In the photos below, cylindrical light fixtures may be seen within the webbing of the space frame mem-
bers, and these lights have been carefully placed to provide both accent and fill light. The viewer never notices them. But at night, as in the photo at right, their existence is acknowledged in the sparkle of the trees and walls.

One of the best parts of Columbia's Mall is its signs and graphics. Through long experience The Rouse Company has learned to control tenant signs for the benefit of the merchants as a whole, and to clearly set forth the limits of allowable signage. The basis at Columbia
for clear communication with the tenants was the Rouse-created Tenant Information Manual. It specifies and illustrates sign criteria that tenants must follow, and these are worth illustrating here. It requires that tenants submit all of their own preliminary drawings for signs to Rouse for approval, then sets out a clearly drawn series of basic sign types, to be followed in preparing drawings. The first thing the Manual establishes are the Basic Sign Types for Columbia.

**Type 1:** (illustration, below) describes dimensional wood or metal letters that may be applied to a bulkhead (14 inches maximum).

**Type 2:** describes wood or metal letters applied to a storefront. All dimensional letters must be at least one-inch-thick.

**Type 3:** metal letters back-lit (halo effect). Warm white light (3200°K-3500°K only) is permitted (no illustration).

**Type 4:** internally illuminated channel letters with opaque metal sides and plastic face. White plastic only is permitted for the faces (14 inches maximum).

**Type 5:** describes an internally illuminated sign box. The sign must employ graphics or color on all five exposed sides. The box may be plastic, painted with translucent colors or partially opaque. Or the box may be transparent plastic with exposed neon tubes forming design inside.

**Type 6:** externally illuminated sign box. Signbox may be painted wood with color, graphics appearing on all exposed sides, stained or natural wood, polished chrome, or brass, etc., with letters or design cut through faces, or with letters and design routed or carved into faces. Note: Imitation wood, wood grain laminated plastic, are prohibited.

**Type 7:** sign band 14 inches by length of store. Band to be painted wood or metal with letters cut through and back-lit. Lettering to be white. Panel may be sheet-plastic and comfortably, internally illuminated over its entire surface.

**Type 8:** exposed neon tubes forming letters and logo as approved by landlord.

**Type 9:** exposed incandescent bulbs forming letters as approved by landlord.

**Type 10:** sign, logo, decorative elements painted directly on bulkhead. Entire bulkhead covering full width of storefront must be painted.

**Type 11:** projecting signs. To give added excitement to the mall and added exposure to the tenant, project signs like the ones shown at right were encouraged. Signs were designed by landlord and furnished and installed by tenant at tenant's expense. Six basic types are illustrated here:

- **Type 8:**
  - Carved or routed wood
  - Transparent signs (partially or totally)

- **Type 11:**
  - Painted panels
  - Painted sign with decorative lights

- **Type 1:**
  - Three-dimensional signs
  - Three-dimensional signs

- **Type 6:**
  - Painted panels
  - Painted sign with decorative lights

- **Type 7:**
  - Carved or routed wood
  - Transparent signs (partially or totally)

- **Type 9:**
  - Carved or routed wood
  - Transparent signs (partially or totally)

- **Type 10:**
  - Carved or routed wood
  - Transparent signs (partially or totally)
The sizes of signs were specified throughout at Columbia Mall, and the Tenants Manual set forth the drawing above, saying along with the drawing: "projecting signs on lower level may be no larger than seven feet tall and four feet wide. Projecting signs on upper level may be as tall as ten feet if they are at least 40 per cent transparent."

On some of the sign drawings just illustrated, the reader will not notice the consistent facade background on which various allowable signs are drawn. This facade is also part of the specifications of the Manual, as drawn below.

Judging from the number of people who crowd into its spaces on the weekend, the mall at Columbia would appear to be a huge commercial success. Some of that success is certainly due to its location in a market area that encompasses over 430,000 people, but we can feel from these pictures what an exciting place it is for just strolling, and looking, and meeting your friends. The designed-in concentration and diversity of the mall is also part of the reason for its crowds, and whether it's suburbia or not, people will continue to be drawn to such urban environments.