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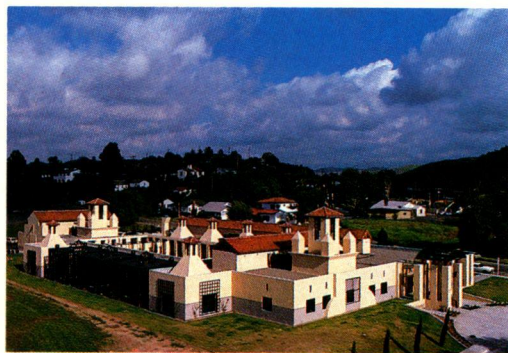
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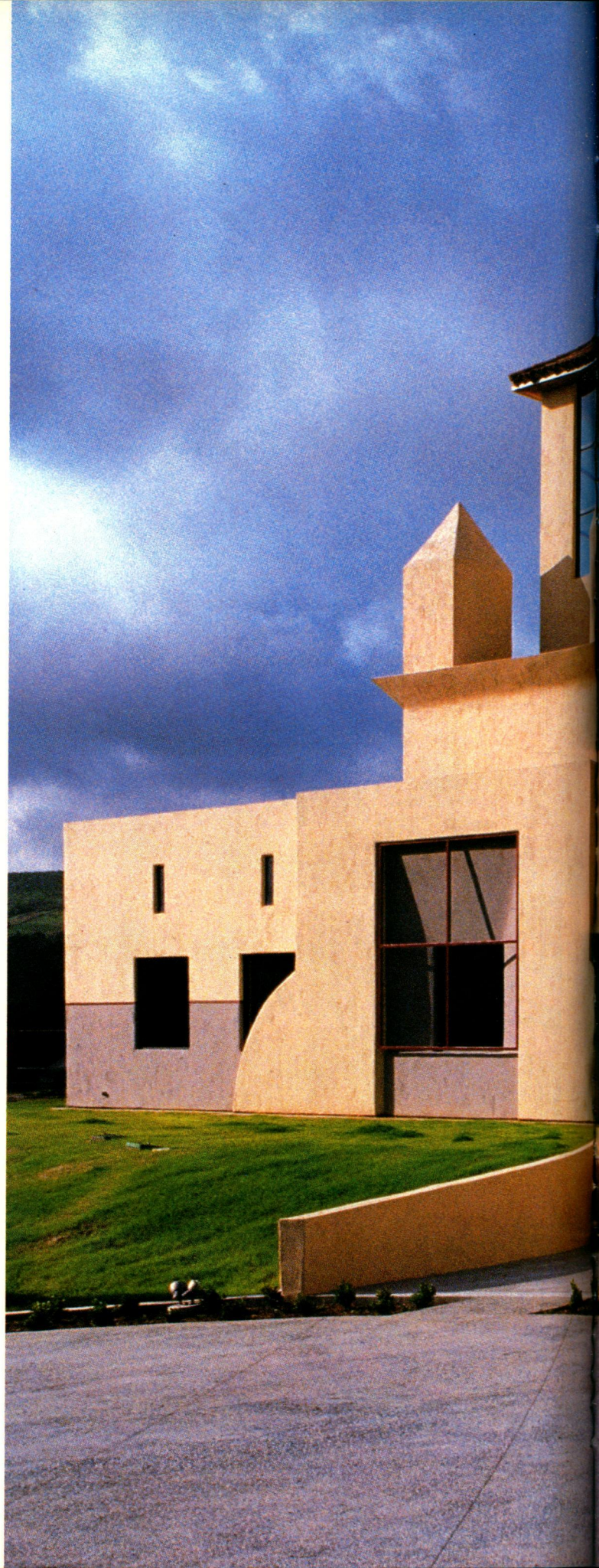


Michael Graves's new library in the California Mission tradition

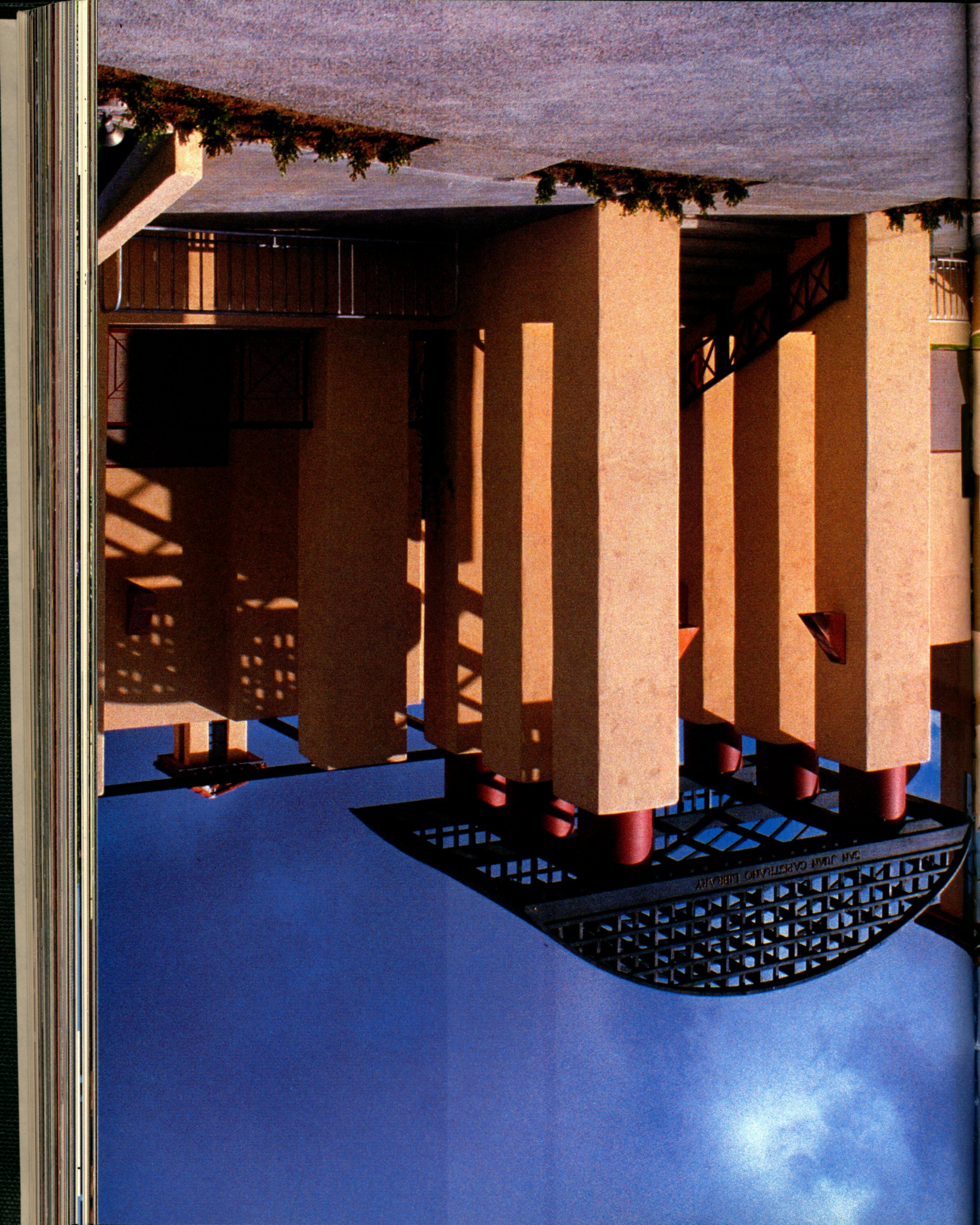
PHOTOGRAPHS BY HENRY BOWLES

In a few short years Michael Graves has had a profound effect on American architecture, though his Classically inspired, traditionally detailed, richly colored designs have provoked more controversy than their inherently sweet nature would lead one to expect. Several of Graves's ideas have already reached the mainstream of American architectural practice, and his influence has spread with a speed that is surely a record for a member of the avant-garde. His output, however, still lags behind his fame: his first major urban commission, the widely publicized Portland Building in Oregon, was dedi-

*Right:* The entrance to the San Juan Capistrano Regional Library is marked by a lattice-roofed pergola. *Above:* The stucco structure, arranged around a central courtyard, relates closely to the Spanish Colonial architecture of the town.







SAN JUAN CATHEDRAL LIBRARY





cated just a year and a half ago, and his next wave of smaller public projects is only now reaching completion.

Among them is a building that in time might be seen as an archetypal Graves work: his San Juan Capistrano Regional Library in the Southern California town best known for its historic eighteenth-century mission and, of course, the annual return of its legendary swallows every March 19. San Juan Capistrano is another of those Southern California communities (like Santa Barbara and Mission Viejo) that has enacted stringent architectural guidelines for new construction, in an attempt to create a more coherent civic identity than is the norm in the exurban chaos of that region. Although the town's choice of Michael Graves to design its new library might seem adventurous for such a small community, it was actually quite appropriate. His recent work had already moved very

*Right:* A striking file of pinnacled turrets brings to mind a childhood fantasy castle or the dream architecture of the Surrealists. Reading nooks are housed in the lower portions. A latticework pergola at the far right mimics the shape of the stucco towers. *Above:* The 75-foot-long gallery is the library's main circulation spine. The Classically inspired sconces repeat a favorite Graves design motif.



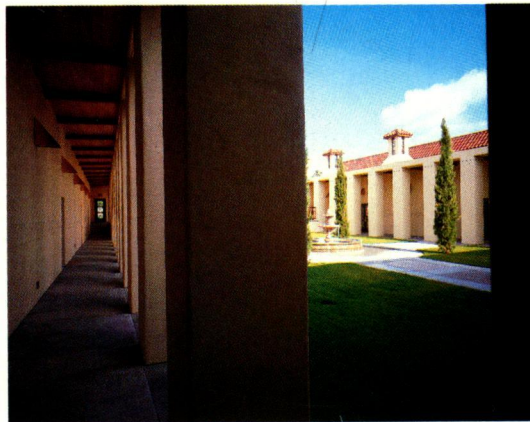












*Left:* On the west side of the library are three outdoor garden reading rooms, sheathed in deep blue-green lattice. Bougainvillea will eventually envelop the framework. Visible through the far doorway is the fountain at the center of the library's atrium. *Above:* The central courtyard was intended to evoke the monastic calm of the cloisters of the Mission San Juan Capistrano, directly adjacent to the library site.

close to what his client wanted: a small-scale, stucco, tile-roofed building that would fit in with the prevailing local style, Spanish Colonial, which ranges from the authenticity of the venerable mission itself to the kitschy adaptations of gas stations and Taco Bells.

Graves has succeeded here in employing his basic design repertoire—the boldly defined entryways, the Classical colonnades, the strongly processional sequence of spaces, the rhythmic repetition of elements—with such a keen eye to what was desired of him formally that one might well forget what specific functions this building was meant to fulfill. In truth, the San Juan Capistrano Regional Library bears a striking resemblance to another recently completed Graves work, his Environmental Education Center in Jersey City, New Jersey, a reminder that Graves is an artist involved above all in working out his own aesthetic concerns, an architect who more or less adapts use to his designs rather than vice versa.

As always, Graves has devised a memorable series of effects and has invested a visit to the library with a sense of occasion lacking in the vast majority of contemporary architecture. Though quite small, the Capistrano library aspires to a certain grandeur, and that alone is enough to qualify it among Graves's other noble experiments. But in the (Text continued on page 202)

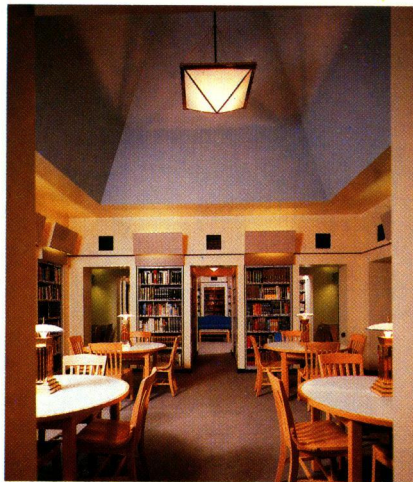


## CAPISTRANO

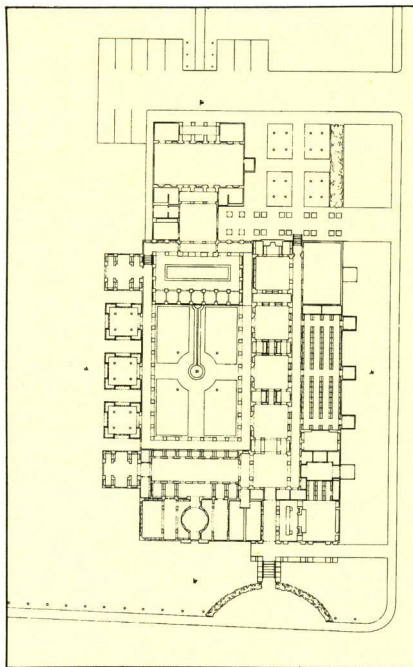
(Continued from page 153) end its minuscule scale gives it more the quaint and quirky quality of the architecture of Sir John Soane rather than the solidity and clarity of the work of Thomas Jefferson, to name but two inventive revivors of the Classical tradition.

The interiors of the Capistrano library were intended by their designer to be inviting and humane, and they do indeed succeed in creating an atmosphere of quiet, internal focus. But they also point up another of Graves's predominant tendencies: the emphasis of circulation routes at the expense of space. One is reminded of Mary Pickford's exasperated comment while working with the great film director Ernst Lubitsch, whose obsession with portals led her to exclaim, "Doors! He's a director of doors! Nothing interests him but doors!" To a certain extent Michael Graves isn't an architect of rooms, he's an architect of corridors. Often in a Graves interior, more than half the fun is getting there. Certainly, there are some very thoughtfully conceived spaces in the Capistrano library, such as the tiny reading nooks in the buttresslike towers on the east façade of the building; but while some people will find those hideaways intimate, others might consider them claustrophobic.

Graves has gone to great lengths to bring natural light into interiors where illumination obviously must play a crucial role, but overall the atmosphere is more absorptive than reflective of light, as might be expected from the architect's extensive use of his characteristically dusky mauves and muted blues.



Above: One of the reading rooms. Below: The ground plan allows for future expansion of the building to the north (top).



Fortunately, the library is not plunged in the crepuscular gloom of Graves's Sunar showroom in Los Angeles, but its interiors and its sense of connection with the outdoors—so typical of California architecture old and new—are engaged in a Mexican stand-off. On one hand, all the areas adjoining the central atrium open onto it, and there are three open garden reading rooms that face west, into the afternoon sun. On the other hand, most of the library's windows are unusually small, the ground plan (like those of the old missions) is inward-turning, and it is the massive walls, and not the openings in them, that provide the basic character of the place. But that, of course, is what the traditional architecture of the Mediterranean is all about, especially when it is used as a source of inspiration by an architect who has immersed himself in the true character of the original (as few developer-architects ever bother to do).

Thus Michael Graves continues on his determined way toward evolving what he hopes will be a more satisfying way of making buildings than has been the standard, in his opinion, since modern architecture took command some fifty years ago. He has not yet made his case completely or convincingly, but his intentions remain admirable. The San Juan Capistrano Regional Library is at the very least architecture that its community could grow quite fond of, and the place that it creates for itself in the lives and hearts of its users will be the surest indication of whether or not its mission is accomplished. □ By Martin Filler. Editor: Elizabeth Sverbeyeff Byron

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