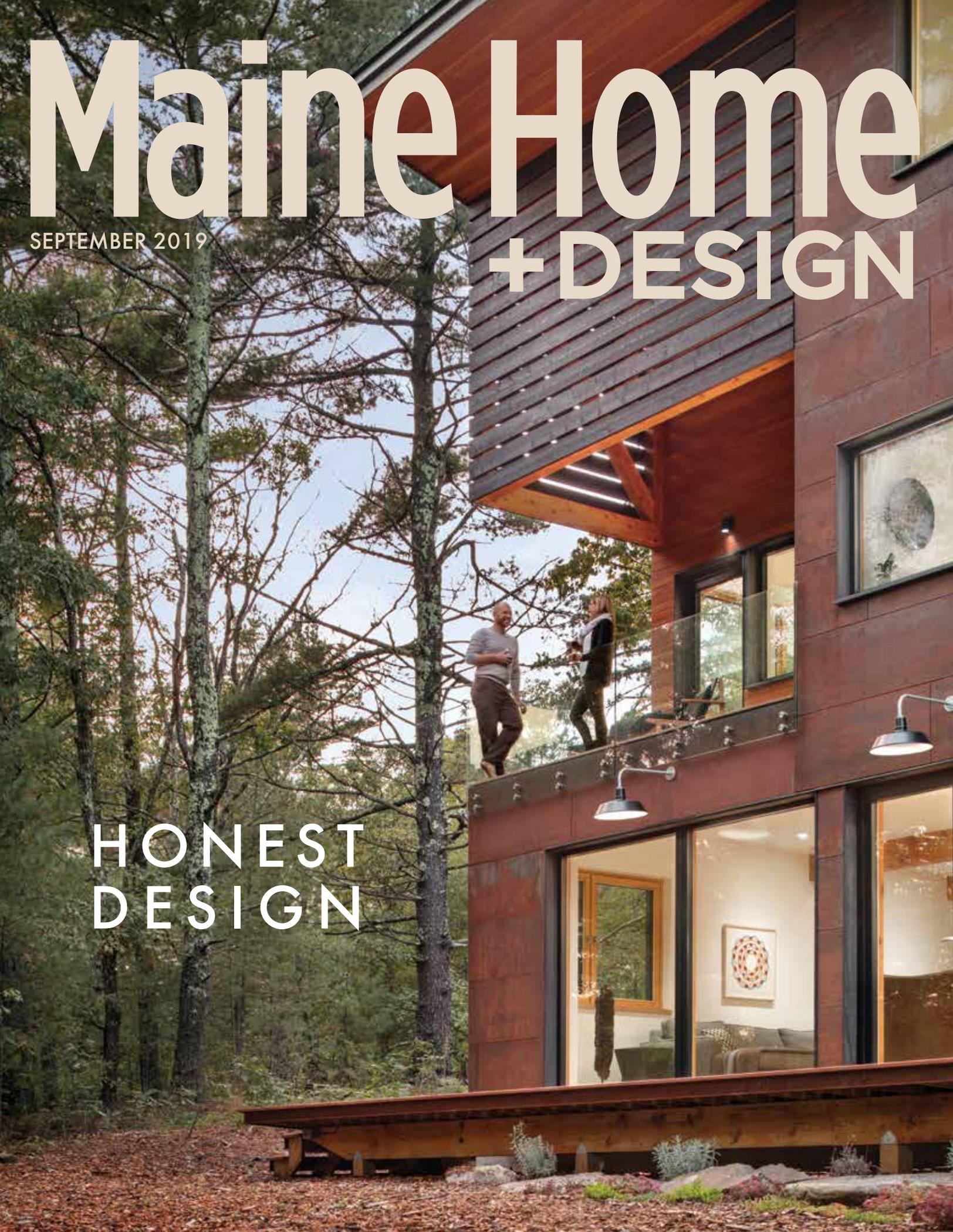


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DESIGN THEORY | KEVIN MOQUIN

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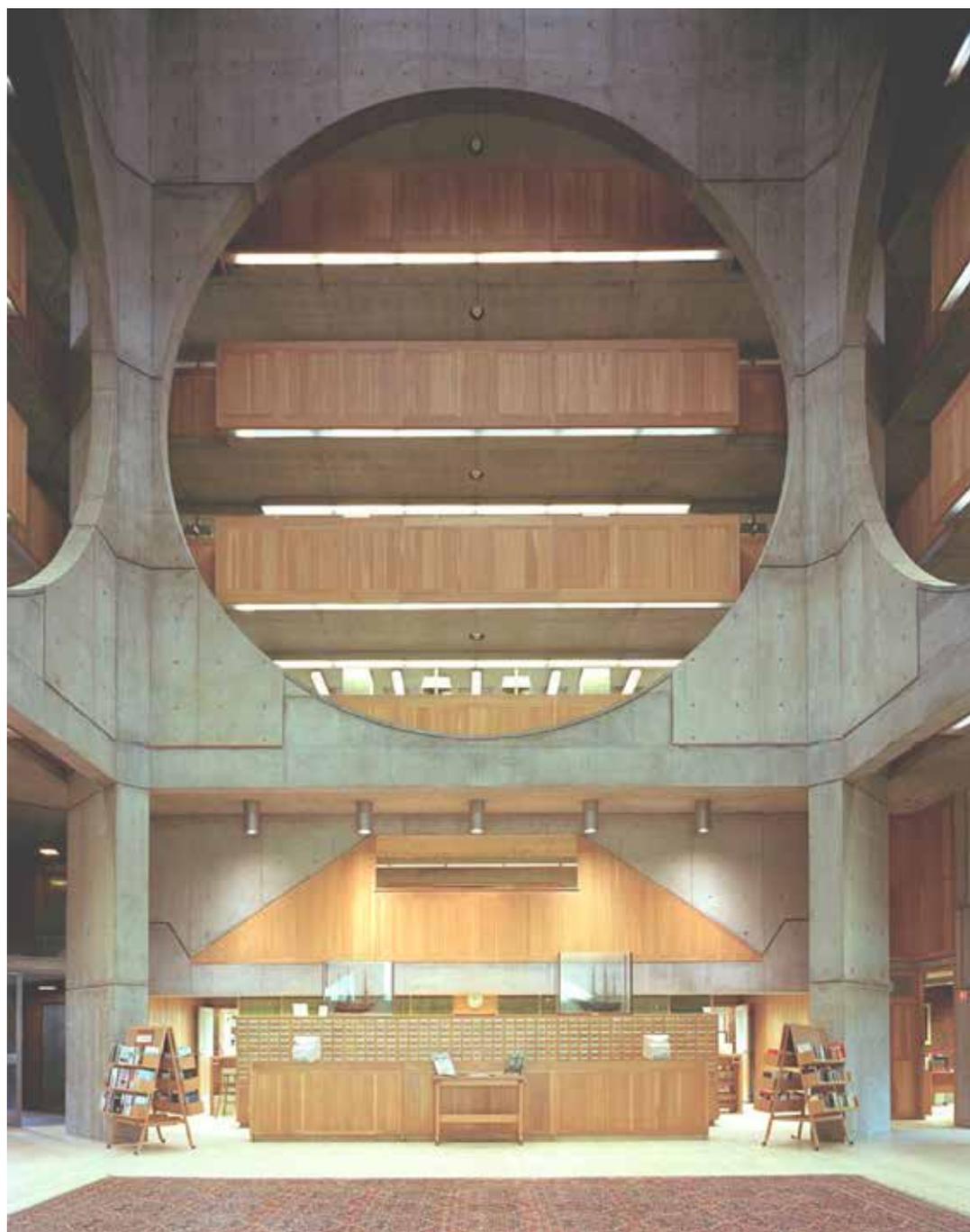
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IN *MH+D*'S CONTINUING COLLABORATION
WITH AIA MAINE, WE PRESENT TO YOU A DESIGN
CONCEPT FROM AN ARCHITECT'S POINT OF VIEW.

ARCHITECT KEVIN MOQUIN

ON THE INFLUENCE OF LOUIS KAHN'S LIBRARY

“The campus of Phillips Exeter Academy in Exeter, New Hampshire, is home to Georgian-style buildings like those found on many college and boarding school quadrangles. One building, however, has a home on the world stage of architecture.”





MH+D ASKS MOQUIN TO TELL US MORE.

Q. What did you find surprising or interesting when you first approached the library?

A. Approached from across the quad, the brick cube first appears abstract and scaleless. It looks to have more in common with a New England textile mill than a Georgian academic hall. That humble affect was intentional and the beginning of a layered impression of the Class of 1945 Library by architect Louis Kahn. The building is at once archaic and modern. It is timeless. This cube whose scale is unclear at first shares its articulation with visitors as they approach. Openings that are glazed or filled with teak panels begin to hint at the life within. The piers between the openings taper slightly as they rise. This visually portrays how the weight of the building is carried to the ground by the masonry. A recessed colonnade around the base gives rise to shadows, while corresponding openings capture sky at the top of the walls.

Q. What role did the material selection for the structure play?

A. Only by exploring the colonnade around the base of the building is the entrance discovered. The entry presents you with a curved marble stair—its curved path contrasts with the otherwise linear geometry of the space. Its marble contrasts with the concrete and brick. These contrasts celebrate the importance of the stairway's role in introducing you to the interior world of the library. When the visitor climbs to the top of the stairs, they arrive in the core of the library. Here again is another cube, but this time it is a void instead of a brick mass.

Q. Many architects are known for designing with symbolism in mind. Did Kahn give any nods to the function of this building with his design?



MH+D IS PROUD TO PARTNER WITH ACCLAIMED ARCHITECTURAL PHOTOGRAPHER TRENT BELL ON HIS ARCHITECTURE, DESIGN, AND PHOTOGRAPHY PODCAST. TO HEAR TRENT BELL'S CONVERSATION WITH KEVIN MOQUIN, PLEASE VISIT [TRENTBELL.COM/PODCAST](https://www.trentbell.com/podcast)

A. The open space suspended in the core of the library represents the potential for knowledge and growth offered by the building. Looking up into this cubic void, you peer through round openings into the book stacks. The void represents a potential, and it is actually surrounded by the tools for developing that potential. The curve of the opening is analogous to the curve of the stair, providing connections between worlds. One is physical access to the library and the other metaphorical access between potential (void) and the tools to develop that potential (books). When talking about the entry experience, Kahn said, "This is the place of the books. So you feel the building has the invitation of books."

Q. One of the most iconic elements of this building is the circular cutouts within the interior. Can you tell us a little about these cutouts?

A. Exploring the library, you discover that books reside in an inner ring, a "concrete doughnut" that surrounds the void on its four sides. The concrete here expresses the stout structure of the building. The core of structural support holds the intellectual core of the library: its collection. Around the "concrete doughnut" is a "brick doughnut" that is the interior expression of the brick cube the visitor first encounters from the exterior. The brick used here is clearly of human scale, the proper size to be placed by human hands. It is here that you find the places specifically designed for the students to occupy. The teak panels also first viewed from the exterior create an individual space for study with access to daylight. The grain of the wood defines a space of warmth for students and their books. Kahn referred to these as "discovered places in the folds of construction."

Q. Is there any guidance students of architecture can take from the design of Kahn's library?

A. Architecture can be more than a column supporting a beam or satisfying a requirement for a certain number of square feet. There are metaphoric and experiential ideas baked into buildings that enrich our experience of them. **MH+D**

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