

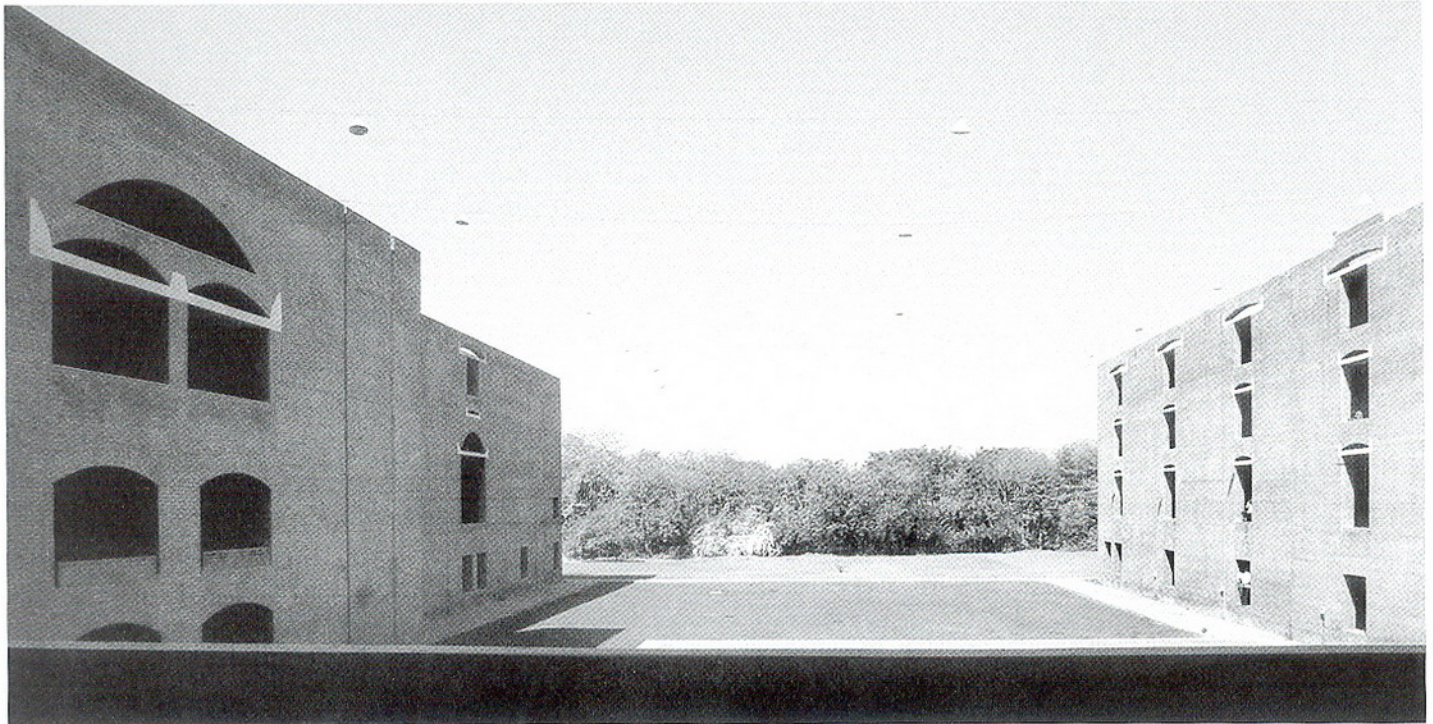
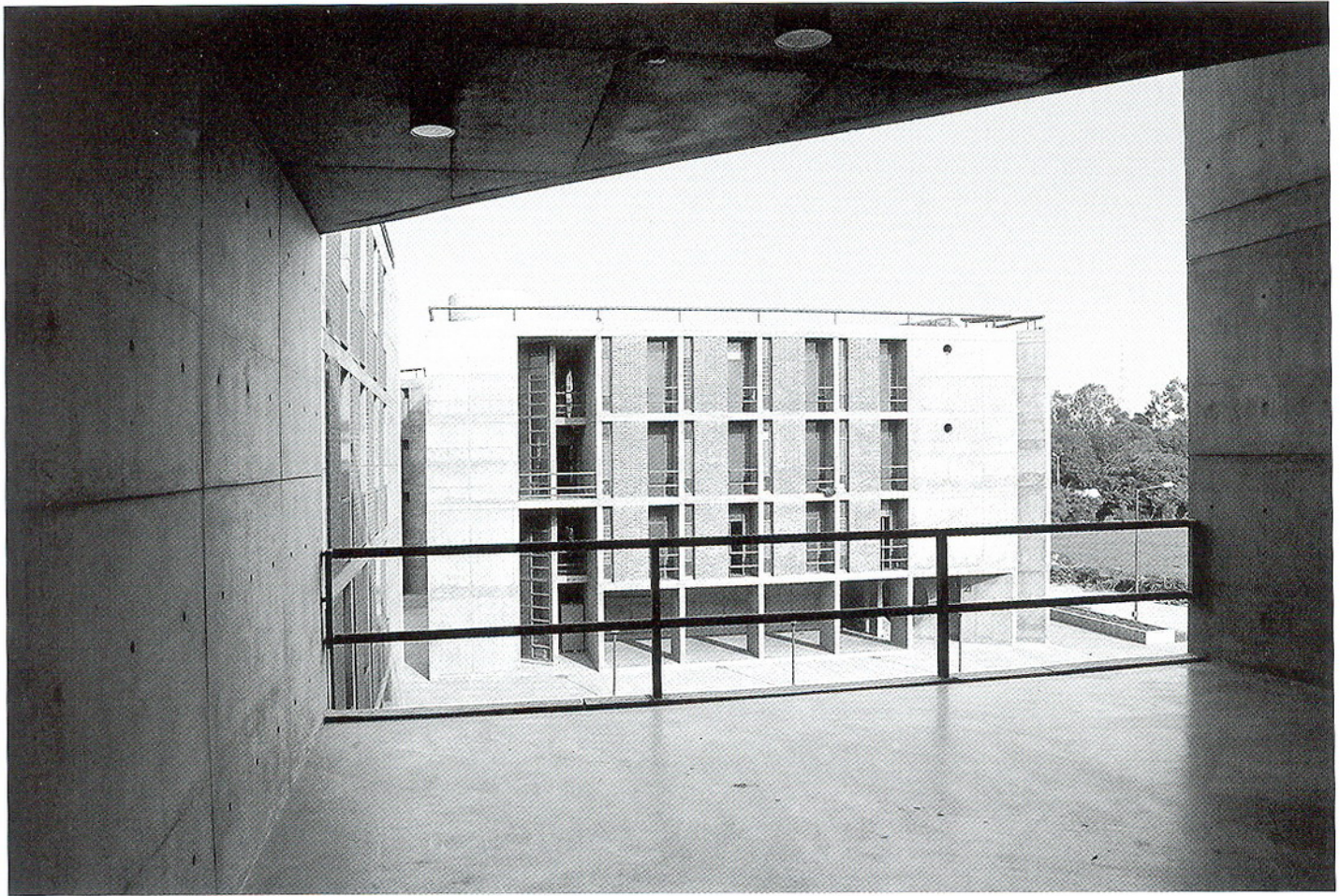
BIRKHAUSER

Klaus-Peter Gast

# Modern Traditions

Contemporary Architecture in India





On a dormitory gallery — The open courtyard in the Kahn building



A great weight of responsibility fell on the shoulders of Bimal Patel and his practice with its long abbreviation HCP-DPM, when they won the competition to extend the Indian Institute of Management (IIM) in Ahmedabad. Adding to one of the great monuments of late modern architecture with a world-wide reputation needed not just a precise analysis of the existing building, but also the greatest possible ability to empathise in terms of the dialogue between the two building complexes that was necessarily initiated. The IIM project was realised by Louis I. Kahn from 1962 to 1974 and continued after his death by Anant Raje. It was designed and built as an entity, as something complete in itself. It also included the Management Development Center (MDC) buildings, designed by Raje in Kahn's language and based on a concept of Kahn, and an auditorium with administration wing immediately adjacent to the Kahn buildings. 30 years ago there was no intention to extend the buildings on a large scale, so Kahn developed the plan of a hierarchically staggered ensemble of the entire site. The library dominated at the head of the school complex, then came the lecture theatres and the office wing, followed by the diagonal structure of the students' accommodation and finally the other residential buildings. Hence it was not possible to realise an extension on this original campus site, which was completely covered with a sophisticated residential building structure for employees as well as the school buildings and the student accommodation. So ultimately it was decided to use an adjacent plot, even though it was separated off by a busy road. Patel and his colleagues tried to forge a link: the site of the

new complex was to be directly accessible via an underpass. It is now possible to access the new campus quite safely from an existing path leading between the lecture theatres and dormitories and along the separate canteen building in the old complex. Thus the first hurdle in dealing with the existing building stock was overcome by this gesture of maintaining a respectful distance from the Kahn building, which is highly esteemed both for its world-famous architecture but also as an educational institution. The Kahn building remained untouched, yet the incompleteness of the original design, as shown in the opening courtyard, was taken as an invitation to realise the new complex so that it could address this opening. Thus the courtyard, the "Louis Kahn Plaza," at the end of which Kahn himself had intended to place the kitchen and canteen as a link between the wings, acquires a new level of meaning: the opening points towards the new buildings and suggests a connection.

The following functional areas were to be accommodated in the new building complex: teaching rooms for the Post-Graduate Programme (PGP) with five lecture theatres, seminar rooms and offices, then nine halls of residence for 340 students and 20 buildings for married students; then for the MDC four lecture halls, seminar rooms, a refectory and 160 apartments, and finally sports facilities and a water-tower. Kahn's successful idea of making learning and living into an entity was also pursued by Patel and his colleagues. Their difficult challenge was to develop an independent architecture that would still carry and interpret traces and structures from Kahn's building. In a kind of mirror image the dominant



The Kahn building before the extension

— HCP Design and Project Management Pvt. Ltd.  
**Indian Institute of Management New Campus (IIM)**  
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View of the dormitories from the lecture rooms

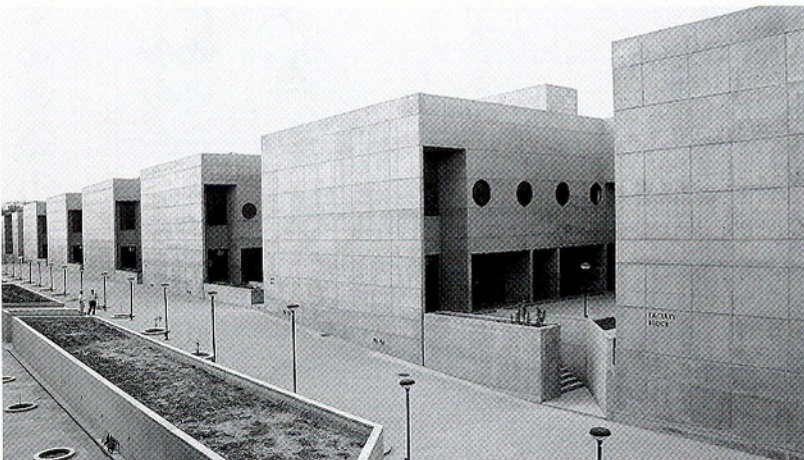


View of the lecture rooms from the garden courtyards — View of the lecture rooms from the dormitories



form of the dormitories from the old complex is taken up and used as a means of structuring the new functional areas. Lecture halls on the axis of the old classrooms are arranged as a “backbone” and guiding line, with the MDC and all the areas attached to it added at right angles on the north side. The student dormitories are arranged on a diagonal opposite the lecture hall axis, as individual halls of residence, similarly to the Kahn concept, but this time facing west. Residential units with detached houses for married students are placed on the west side of the plot, in a staggered structure. Kahn’s living and learning buildings are far more closely linked, they really do form a unit, not least because brick is universally employed as a completely homogenising material. This “all of a piece” approach was abandoned as well as the close linkage in terms of proximity. Patel’s buildings are more like an urban complex, some standing close together and some further apart, with city-style squares and a large axis ending in the water tower. The residential units are larger, contain more students, are further apart, certainly for reasons of economy as well. The intimate quality of Kahn’s architecture with its buildings snuggling close together, with shadier courtyards, sudden changes of level and little flights of steps and arcades, are abandoned in favour of a generous spacious quality on the same level. Even the common room inside the dormitories, seen as a particularly meaningful central area for student communication by Kahn, is shifted on to the periphery of the buildings. Perhaps present-day students’ need for more seclusion and concentration are the reasons for these changes. But the new dormitories are more comfortable, larger, and have lifts and individual bathrooms, an absolute luxury for occupants of the old complex. Prob-

ably the material chosen marks the greatest difference between the old and the new campus. Patel and his colleagues thoroughly discussed the question of whether they should continue to use Kahn’s material, whether the homogeneity of the whole, i.e. of both complexes, had to be a criterion. They came to the conclusion that the newness of the buildings should also be expressed in the materials, as the new campus was to embody a new age and the “modernisation of India as a whole” (Patel). This credo acquired symbolic material form in exposed concrete, smoothly shuttered and carefully worked, not the rough *béton brut* used by an architect like Le Corbusier in Chandigarh. But this material also refers subtly to the other master, as Kahn is considered to have invented concrete with a smooth surface, precisely pressed into steel shuttering. His 1959 Salk Institute in San Diego signposted this way of working with the material, and is still exemplary. It also acted as a stimulus for another master builder, Tadao Ando, who made it his trademark. Here the smooth concrete ties all the buildings together. It is combined with narrow brick panels for the dormitories and wears very well in contrast to the brick used for the Kahn buildings, which does not resist heat so well. Little details like walls placed diagonally, round apertures and semi-circular staircase towers are also reminiscent of the old buildings, without degenerating into kitsch. With the fundamental formal analogies of a rigid geometry, the simplicity and reticence of the architectural language, paired with the austerity of large, even walls, pays tribute to the master, but without copying him. Bimal Patel hopes to have done Kahn an honour in creating an architecture in his spirit where students are educated to think critically and attentively, just as Kahn once intended.

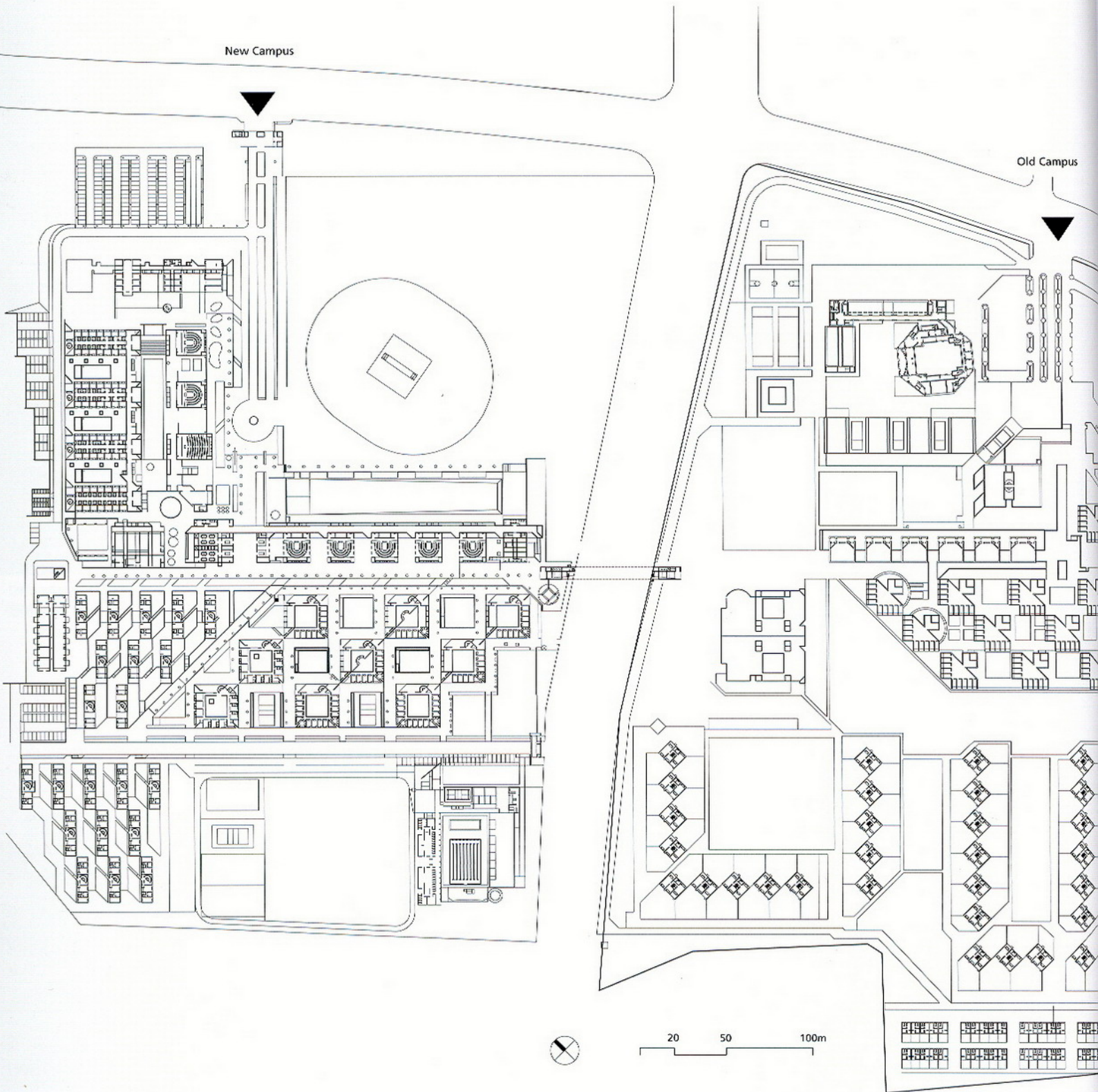


The lecture room line-up



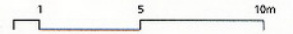
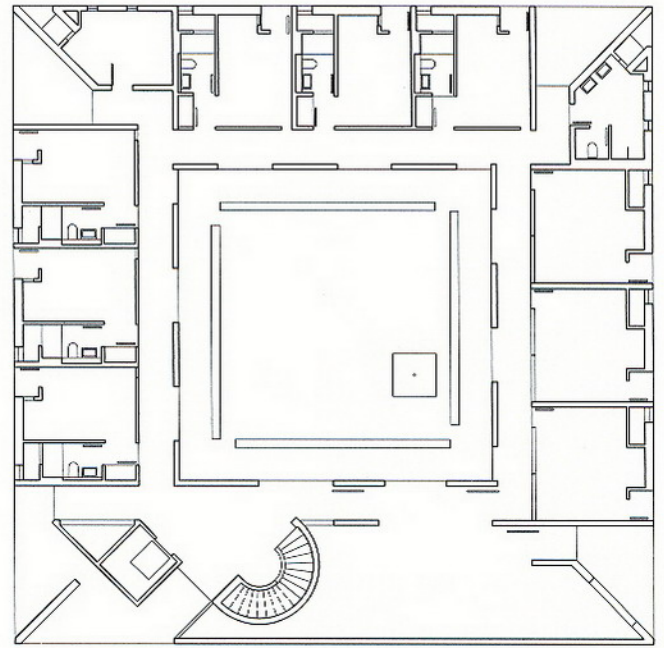
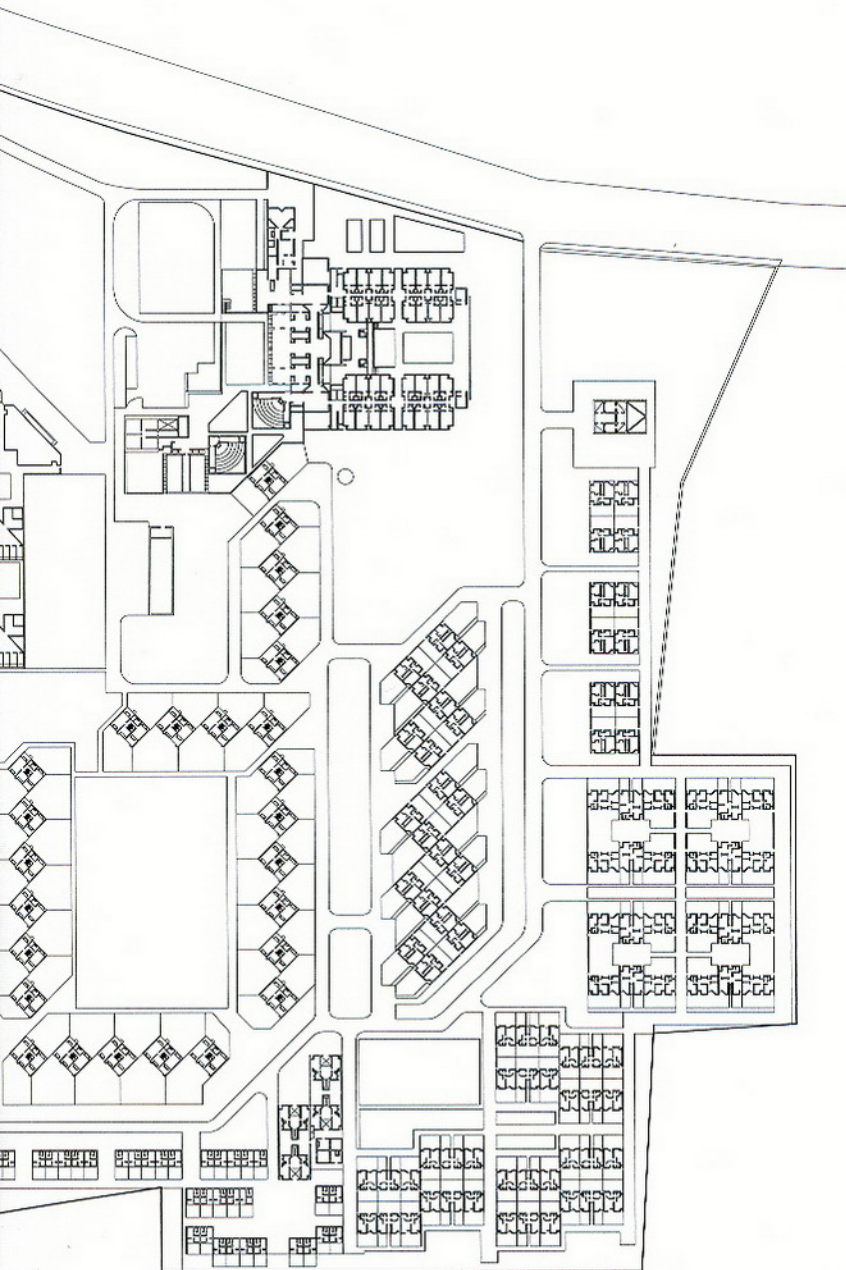
New Campus

Old Campus

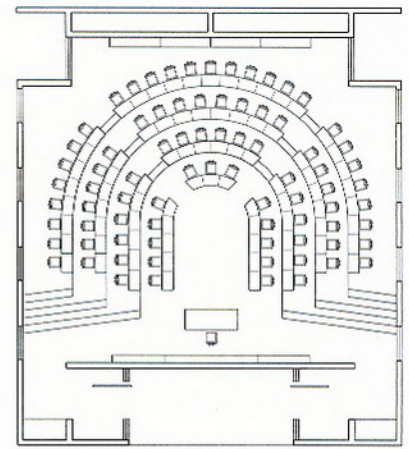


Site plan



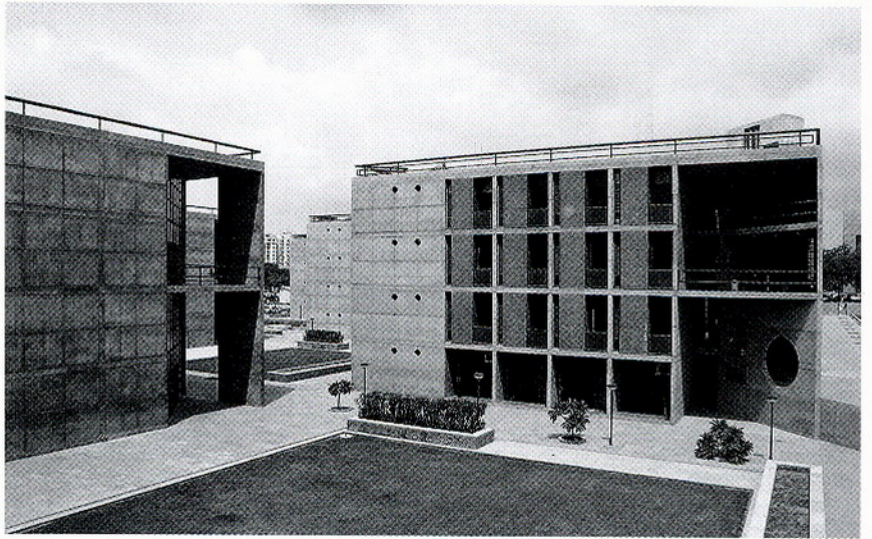


Dormitory, ground floor

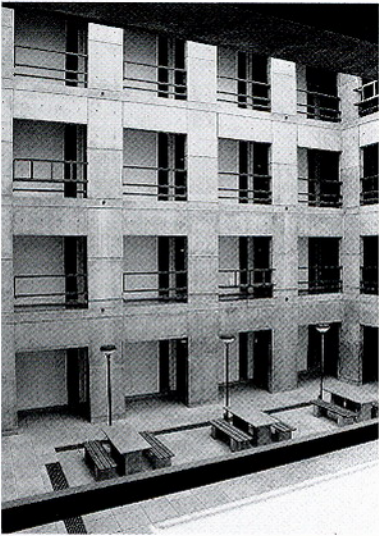


Lecture room



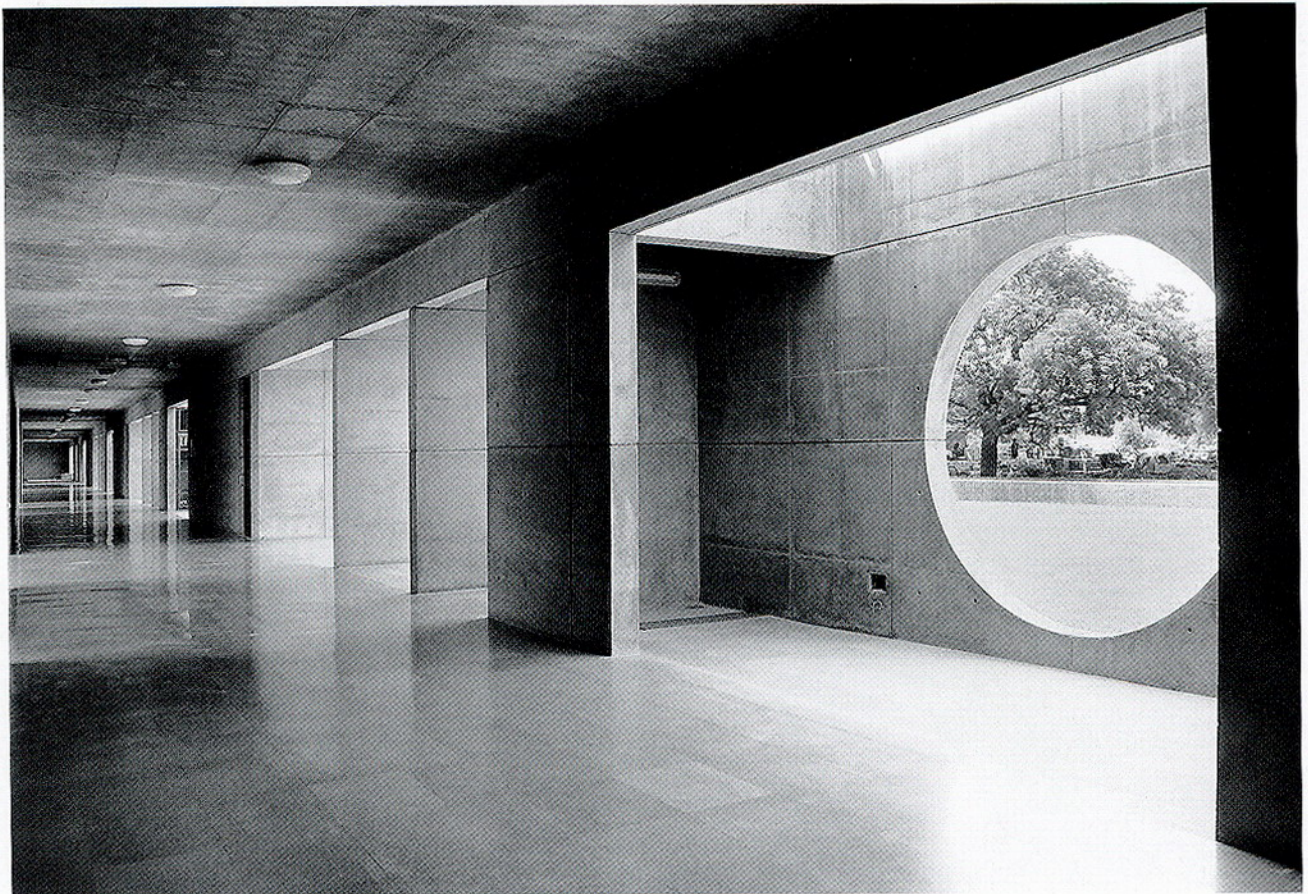
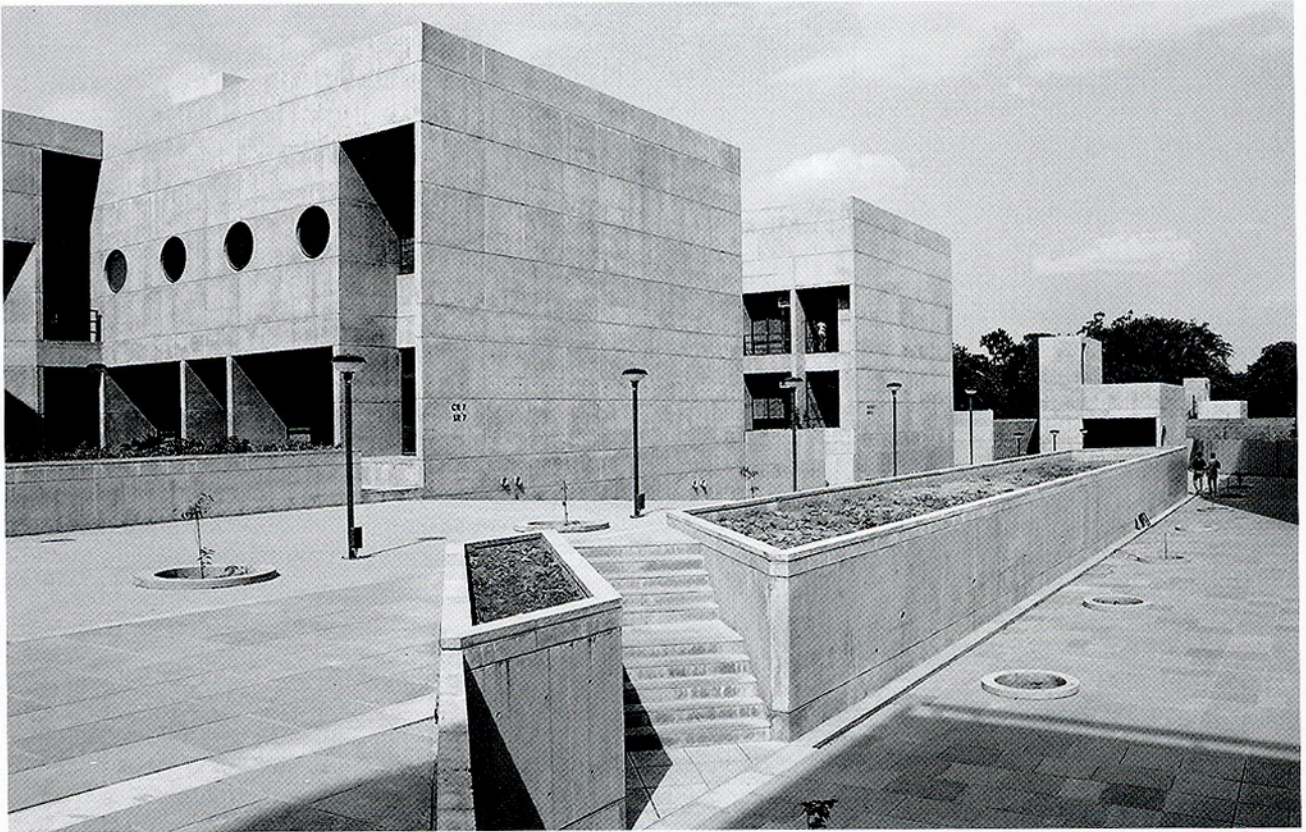


Dormitories and the area surrounding them — Garden courtyards between the dormitories



Inner courtyard of a dormitory — Lecture room





Dormitory with diagonal access — Corridor with light wells