

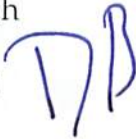
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO  
THE LAW SCHOOL

MEMORANDUM

December 17, 1996

To: Kim Rorschach

From: Douglas Baird



Re: Attached

I enclose the piece from the *Saturday Review* on our Pevsner.

encl.

## Fresh Breezes in the Windy City

Katharine Kuh\*

This spring Chicago hit the jackpot twice with impressive impact. First came the announcement that the Newberry Library had purchased Louis Silver's peerless collection of rare books, a formidable group designed to augment and reinforce the already distinguished holdings of that institution. Mr. Silver, a dynamic personality, served on the board of the library until his recent death. To visit the collection at his suburban home was an electrifying experience, made more so by the presence of several fine Rembrandt drawings and by Mr. Silver's own contagious ebullience. If my blood pressure sometimes shot up during these encounters, so always did my spirits. Mr. Silver's name is remembered, too, at the University of Chicago, from whose Law School he graduated. These, in the recently completed Law Library, a room dedicated to the Louis Silver Special Book Collection features rare legal volumes, some dating from as early as the fifteenth century.

And it was in front of the handsome new law buildings designed by the late Eero Saarinen that Chicago hit the jackpot a second time this season. On June 10, what may well prove to be the city's most important modern outdoor sculpture was dedicated. Conceived by Antoine Pevsner, noted Russian constructivist artist who lived in Paris from 1923 until his death in 1962, the soaring bronze abstraction is named *Construction in Space in the Third and Fourth Dimension*, a title which on first acquaintance may seem unduly pretentious but which after adequate study becomes entirely valid. For what happens here is peculiarly related to the dimensions of space and time. The sculpture, specifically planned to be seen from all sides, changes as the observer varies his position, an act requiring deliberation. To view it from a window in the Law Library is a radically different experience from approaching it at street level. Rarely has a sculpture been more fully oriented to the multilateral possibilities of its structure. It seems to unfold, to move not only in space but in time with an almost hypnotic rhythm, and yet this bronze is static, securely fastened to a magnificent granite base (also designed by Pevsner). Convoluted free places are so interpenetrated with linear ribs as to suggest the process of evolving growth.

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\*Reprinted from the July 25, 1964 issue of the *Saturday Review*, with the kind permission of the *Review* and of the author.

Pevsner and his equally renowned younger brother, Gabo, have proved that a sculpture can be mobile without being a mobile. Never literal, never realistic, Pevsner abstracted from both nature and contemporary life, his proliferating forms reminiscent of immaculate industrial machinery no less than intricate plant life.

In discussing the construction he gave to the University, New Yorker Alex Hillman, a graduate of Chicago forty years ago, has described it as "the conquest of a poetic vision." Pevsner, he says, "liberated us from mass. His sculpture affirms the architecture of Saarinen." And, indeed, from the start Eero Saarinen, advocated a work by Pevsner for the 90-by-120-foot, reflecting pool in the Law School's central court, a refreshing decision these days when public sculpture in America focuses almost obsessively on the massive figures of Henry Moore. This is not to deplore such abundance, but constant repetition can make even inspired work seem perfunctory. "Eero felt that Pevsner belong to our time," and the architect's widow, Arline Saarinen, at the dedication.

Saarinen's four buildings comprising the Law School complex are joined by organic passageways that lead without interruption from library to classrooms, from offices to auditorium. Here an authentic environment has been created, meaningful, useful, and vigorous. As Saarinen himself said, "The buildings were designed to function for the University of Chicago Law School and not for anything else. The over-all concept seeks to reflect the importance to the legal profession of both the written and the spoken word." Hence the pivotal position and dominating design of the library; hence the emphasis on free meeting areas for open discussion.

Finished in 1960, the new law group adapts itself but does not succumb to neighboring dormitories, which, alas, are all too typical examples of banal collegiate Gothic. The most dramatic single unit in the Saarinen compound in the six-story glass-walled library and office building, from whose multiple windows Pevsner's sculpture appears to consummate advantage.

The University is fortunate in having two faculty members who are once authorities in their own field and informed enthusiasts where art and architecture are concerned. The moving spirit behind the new buildings is Edward Levi, now provost of the University but until recently dean of the Law School. It was he who backed the entire project, assisted by his colleague, Walter Blum, professor of law and a tax specialist. It is both rare and reassuring to find legal scholars dedicated to such high quality in the arts.

Near Saarinen's Law School, Edward Durrell Stone has erected a Conference Center for Continuing Education, a somewhat overlegant building that seems curiously at odds with Chicago's exuberant vitality. Several blocks west, a pure skeleton of steel heralds a disciplined structure by Mies van Der Rohe soon to accommodate the Social Service Administration School. This good news and long overdue, for Chicago's greatest architect should certainly not be overlooked by Chicago's greatest educational institution. There is also talk that a Fermi Memorial may be designed by Nervi, an appropriate choice since both men represent the pinnacle of Italian invention during our century.

That the campus could become overdiversified is a danger not to be dismissed, for too many unrelated designers, no matter how able, can produce virtual anarchy. Yet given a master plan and ample space, along with the dedicated involvement of discerning faculty representation, the University of Chicago may in time physically parallel the brilliance of its academic achievements.