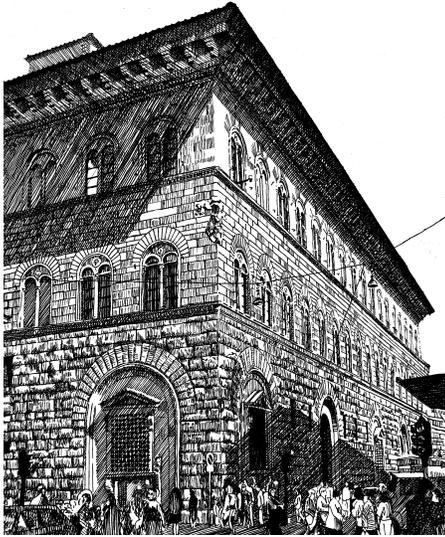


# ARCHITECTURE

EHLINGER & ASSOCIATES

THIRD QUARTER 1999



**PALAZZO MEDICI**  
Florence, Italy

The Palazzo Medici was one of the first Renaissance palaces in Florence to reflect the new style based upon classical forms and order. It was originally built for Cosimo dé Medici, the 'merchant prince' who dominated Florentine politics and economy for decades after returning with his family from a one year exile to Venice. The economy of Florence was so devastated by the flight of Medici capital and other merchant's capital that left with Cosimo and his family, that he was forgiven by the city and invited back.

When Cosimo returned in 1434, he was a wiser and more prudent man in his exercise of both political and economic power, preferring to bankrupt enemies with excessive taxation rather than physically abusing them or murdering them. He was a ruler in the background who kept the society on an even keel, always maintaining the peace so that prosperity abounded. His son and grandson who followed him (Lorenzo the Magnificent) continued his policies of peace and prosperity. Consequently there was a great flowering of the arts in Florence, particu-

larly in architecture because of plentiful financial resources available. Many palaces were built by the ruling merchant class. The Strozzi, the Rucellai, the Pitti, the Guadagni, the Quaritesi are just a few of these palaces. All of them were in the new Renaissance style.

One story of Cosimo is very instructive: he was a close personal friend of Brunelleschi, a famous architect at that time (who built the dome of San Spirito, the Florentine Cathedral), and he asked Brunelleschi to design him a palace. The design Brunelleschi produced was reputed to be magnificent as the architect had no other opportunity to design a palace and thus lavished his attention and skills on the project. When Cosimo first saw the elaborate model of the palace that Brunelleschi produced, he remarked that "envy is a plant one should never water". Brunelleschi was so enraged that he destroyed the model. Cosimo then employed Michelozzi as architect for his palace.

Michelozzi did not have the talent that Brunelleschi had, and in many instances copied Brunelleschi. However, on Cosimo's palace, he did design a magnificent structure, and appears to only have copied Brunelleschi's Foundling Hospital facade in the *Cortile* (courtyard) facade. The original palace was two thirds the size in plan of what you now see, having ten windows across the main facade from the street corner. It was enlarged when it was sold to the Riccardi family in 1659.

The organization of the building conformed to the new Renaissance theories of architecture. The ground floor was for family offices, shops, etc. -- functions having to do with the public. The main floor, the *piano nobile*, was on the second level. This was the living area for the family, while the third level was composed of private bedrooms and sitting areas. All were arranged around the central *Cortile* for light and air.

The facade expressed this organization by its horizontal emphasis at each floor level, and by the rustication of the stone on each level's walls. The roughest, most heavily rusticated wall surface is on the first level, the next level not quite so much, and the top level wall surface is quite smooth. The arches are somewhat crescent or horseshoe shaped where the circles that comprise the inner and outer boundaries are not concentric or parallel. This motif is peculiar to Florentine buildings and its origin is unknown. The entire structure is capped off with a large overhanging cornice, the size of which conformed to mathematical proportion theories at the time, which is intended to shade the walls and emphasize the play of light and shade.

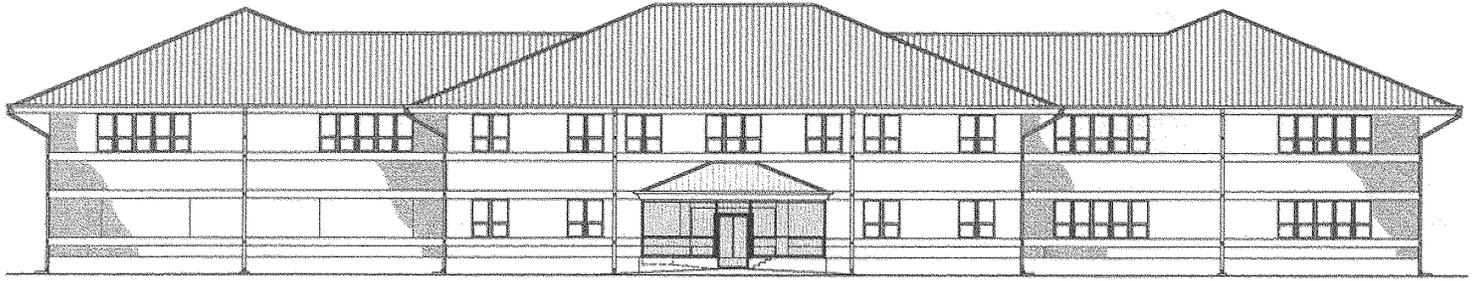
## Welcome Aboard!

Jordan Stewart joins E&A as an intern architect. After graduating in May from Tulane University with a BArch, a minor in Art History and nearly a minor in Visual Art, she worked as a model consultant. She also has strong computer skills in graphic and word-processing software. Newcomer to New Orleans from Birmingham, Jordan enjoys the festive spirit of the city.

## Edgar P. Harney Elementary School

"That looks like a horrible place for children to go to school", was my thought as I first saw Edgar P. Harney School in New Orleans in 1984. I had just moved into my home, which was close to the school. I remember a large white frame building, obviously worn out and dilapidated. Almost five hundred children attended school there, kindergarten to sixth grade.

Harney School was built in 1923 and originally named the Willow Street



**EAST ELEVATION**



School. It was renamed the John W. Hoffman School in 1927. Mr. Hoffman was the first principal of McDonogh School No. 35, and was responsible for instituting a rigorous college preparatory curriculum for African-American high school students.

Physical conditions at the school named in his honor didn't fare as well. In 1948, parents of two children attending Hoffman joined a suit against the Orleans Parish School Board, stating that the school board had "done nothing to provide a safe, well-lighted and comfortable building for the use of the Negro Children in this community."

In 1955, Hoffman School was renamed Edgar P. Harney School. Harney was a former vice-principal of the school in 1923, and moved on to become principal of other junior high schools. He improved the educational status of all the schools he administered, and was a charter member of several civil rights groups.

Still, conditions at the Harney School deteriorated. The general lack of regular maintenance and the damp climate of New Orleans joined to form an appalling cauldron. As late as 1984, the assistant superintendent of schools claimed that a new Harney school would be built, ready to open in 1987. The money would come from a half-cent sales tax passed by voters in 1980.

In May of 1985, a restless child hastened the end of the old Harney school. Left unattended in one of the old buildings of Harney, he poured duplicating fluid for a copying machine into an old gas space heater. Although the heater was off, the pilot light ignited, and the fire quickly spread.

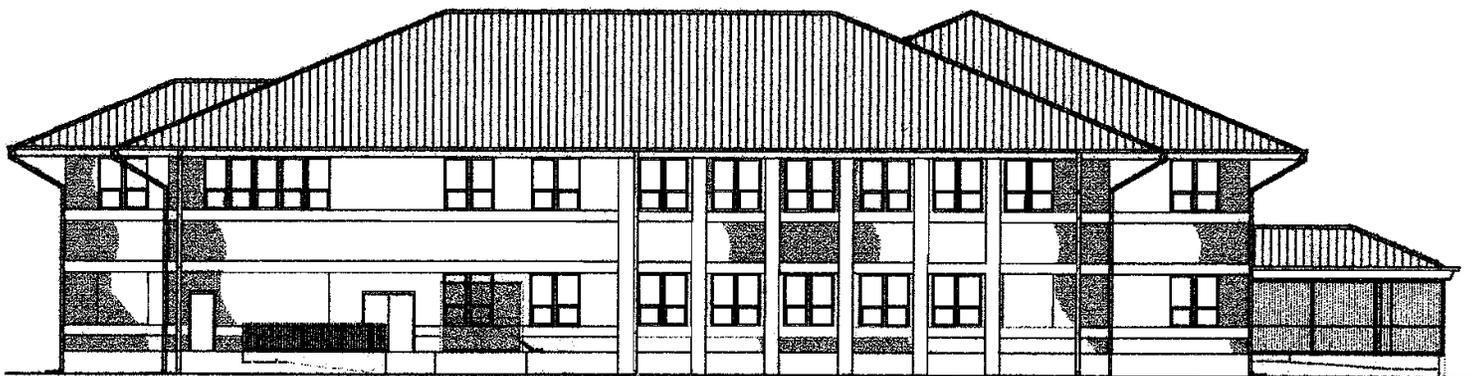
The building burned completely in less than 40 minutes, and the fire damaged several buildings next to the school. In what can only be termed a miracle, the children and staff of Harney evacuated in 90 seconds. Think of it-- almost 500 six to twelve year-old children evacuating in

90 seconds. That's less time than some coffee pots brewing coffee. That's less time than some red lights and less time than logging on the Internet.

E&A has been contracted with by the Orleans Parish School Board to perform architectural services for the new Harney School. The design work is now more than 50% complete on this \$6,000,000 budgeted school.

Future students will be able to attend a school with pride, a sense of well-being and safety. While now I see a large empty lot, decorated only by an old weather-worn sign, "Site of the New Edgar P. Harney School", one day I will see a new school in my neighborhood. As my co-worker Jordan said, "Building a school is a honor for an architect. To know that you're designing something that's for the civic good is exciting."

*Ray Rareshide*



**SOUTH ELEVATION**

