FORUM

City's new architecture is 'business suits among fashion models'

HEN John Davenport and Theophi- Church at Chapel lus Eaton came to New Haven in 1638, and Olive streets they tried to establish a true theocracy, all take the natuand with it the utopian idea that the way a place ral focal points of is organized can reflect the spiritual intentions of a central grid of its inhabitants. Thus, the core of our town is nine streets and give superblocks of equal size, each the same size and

shape as the 16-acre Green that is set as the jewel in the crown of this uto- edges. pian community.

Truth be told, most New Haven the new buildresidents had no idea that their city had this overarching organizing center until the Ninth Square project happened in the early 1990s that took its name from the environment

city's layout. We all knew that in the center of icons? New Haven there was a Green and on it were three spiritual icons that

gave that space an even greater sense of gravitas. Beyond it are multiple points of attachment where the rest of the city's streets extend this nine square core that are points of opportunity for architectural expression.

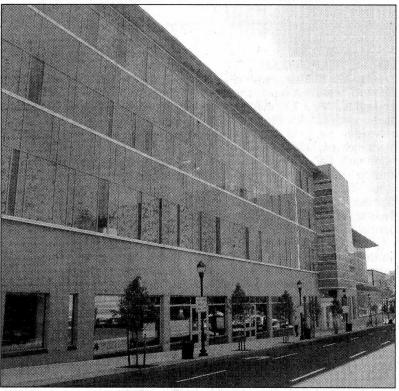
Just think of architect Paul Rudolph's Yale Art its predecessor. & Architecture building at the corner of Chapel the New Haven and York streets — now known as the Rudolph Coliseum, and Building — or Woosley Hall at College and Grove streets, or the Knights of Columbus building set in subservience where Church Street encounters Route 34.

Towers live up to the promise of our city's bold core: Sheffield-Sterling-Strathcona Hall at Prospect and Grove streets, the tower created by the Ninth Square project at Orange and Crown streets and the singular spire of Saint Paul and St. James

them architectural events at its

But, how do ings being built at the edges of this order compare to their rich of architectural

The final design of the new Long Wharf Theatre has yet to be seen, but it cannot have the outsized presence of will have to live to the Knights of Columbus tower.



Blake Brownstein/Special to the Register

Cooperative Arts and Humanities High School in downtown New Haven, designed by Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects, opened earlier this year.

Across from the K of C building, the new Gateway College building by Perkins + Will Architects is a long, boxed set, split by Crown Street, with a curved corner at North Frontage Road and Church the street-facing Roche's dominant tower.

The new Cooperative Arts and **Humanities High** School design Pelli Architects at George and College has cantilevered and at its entries. and brick, glass and metal cladven to make a clearly modern statement. These crafty manipulations break up a potentially blank

mass into a building that can be comfortable with the scale of the traditional buildings that share in Duo Dickinson, an architect, writes about architecture the streetscape.

In a similar style of enriched modernism, She-him at 94 Bradley Road, Madison 06443. E-mail: duo. pley Bulfinch Richardson & Abbott's design for dickinson@snet.net.

Street. This Yale-New Haven Hospital's new Smilow Cancer curved corner is Center turns vertical, but its shape is not in any dropped a story way a tower — it will have the sadly appropriate from the rest of inflated feel of a large institution.

The champion of new building bulk will be Beckfacade making er + Becker's 360 State Street, where a plinth that it a very passive follows the eave line of the existing Chapel Street counterpart to facades attempts to veil the 30-plus-story tower architect Kevin that sits amidships upon this horizontal base.

This new spate of building clearly lacks the heroism of the pre-World War II Yale University icons like Harkness Tower or Payne Whitney Gymnasium or the adventurous risk-taking of Eero Saarinen's Morse and Stiles colleges across Tower Parkway from the gym or Gordon Bunshaft's Beinecke by Pelli Clarke Library. They are, in short, accommodative and professional — sophisticated in their crisp detailing, but reticent in their shapes, in the spirit of Louis Kahn's twin art galleries on Chapel Street.

However, unlike Kahn's beauties, these new glazed elements buildings are very large masses for their contexts. attempting visual palatability by their material variety and manipulations of their bulk.

These are the business suits amid the fashion ding interwo- models that all crowd our Ninth Square dance floor. They are too big to be bland, but fairly deferential to all the amped up competitors that surround them — a little like a well-quaffed linebacker in a carefully tailored J. Press jacket. Large enough to be noticed, conventional enough to remain unthreatening.

and urban design for the Register. Readers may write