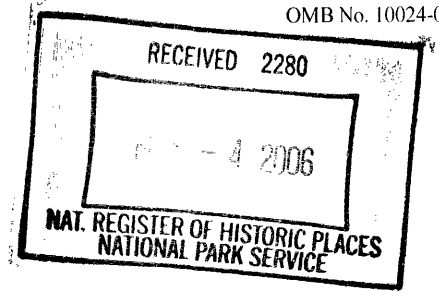


**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register Of Historic Places
Registration Form**



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Supreme Court Building

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number PO Box 9022392 not for publication

city or town San Juan vicinity

state Puerto Rico code PR county San Juan code 127 zip code 00902 - 2392

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally state-wide locally. See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Aida Bolon-Rivera-Ruiz

28 April 2006
Date

Signature of certifying official/Title

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

Supreme Court Building
San Juan, Puerto Rico

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
 - See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register
 - See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain): _____

[Signature]
Signature of the Keeper

Edson H. Beall *6-14-06*
Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing

1

0

0

0

1

Noncontributing

1 buildings

0 sites

0 structures

0 objects

2 Total

Name of related multiple property listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

Supreme Court Building
San Juan, Puerto Rico

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Government / Courthouse

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

Government / Courthouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

Modern Movement

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls concrete

roof concrete

other wood, marble

Narrative Description

X See continuation sheets.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Supreme Court Building
San Juan, Puerto Rico

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture _____
 Politics / Government _____

Period of Significance

1955 – 1956 _____

Significant Dates

1955 _____

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Oswaldo Toro / Miguel Ferrer _____

Narrative Statement of Significance

See continuation sheets.

Supreme Court Building
San Juan, Puerto Rico

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

See continuation sheets.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1	<u>19</u>	<u>807500</u>	<u>2044000</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2	_____	_____	_____
	Zone	Easting	Northing

3	_____	_____	_____
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4	_____	_____	_____
	Zone	Easting	Northing

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description

See continuation sheet.

Boundary Justification

See continuation sheet.

Supreme Court Building
San Juan, Puerto Rico

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Juan Llanes Santos/PRSHPO, Santiago Gala/PRSHPO, Karen González Jensen/Deputy SHPOorganization Puerto Rico State Historic Preservation Office date _____street & number PO Box 9066581 telephone (787) 721-3737city or town San Juan state PR zip code 00936 - 4267

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Gobierno de Puerto Ricostreet & number PO Box 9022392 telephone (787) 721-2900city or town San Juan state PR zip code 00902-2392

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register Of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 7 Page 1

*Supreme Court Building
San Juan, Puerto Rico*

Narrative Description

The Supreme Court of Puerto Rico is a three-story, reinforced concrete courthouse located in the easternmost point of the grounds of Luis Muñoz Rivera Park at Puerta de Tierra in San Juan. The building was designed in 1952 by local firm Toro-Ferrer, with the collaboration of Charles H. Warner, Jr. and Harold Eliot Leeds as design consultants. In order to integrate the building with its surrounding context, the designers projected a rectangular building over a perpendicular 50' x 300' reflecting pool that follows the park's formal axis (*Fig. 1*). The pool and the building intersect on the two most emblematic spaces of the courthouse –the main lobby on the main floor and the courtroom on the third-, which are also arranged and oriented within the park's historic alignment and crowned by a shallow dome. There is, however, a slight, off-centered displacement within the overall volume that generates an asymmetrical appreciation of the whole composition (*Fig. 2*).

The main access to the property is through a tree-covered road, which is an extension of the entrance to the park. The secluded location instantly generates a quiet atmosphere that surrounds the entire site. This “green” access to the court also anticipates the playful yet profound relation between indoor and outdoor environments that are consistent throughout the property.

Originally, the new facilities for the island's highest judicial authority must have accommodated seven associate justices with their staff, a library, a courtroom, plus archival and storage space for a total area of approximately 39,000 square feet. The structural, post-and-beam solution provided the building with a perception of lightness that is stressed by the use of louvered windows on the second level and wide, glass panes and wrought iron railings on the third. Reinforced concrete was finished with white cement plaster while some areas were lined with a white marble veneer and granite. The recessed and discreet location of storage, archival and mechanical space on the ground floor level –where floor-to-ceiling height is minimum and exterior walls were given a special dark finish- create the illusion of a floating, light building. With the exception of the main lobby, the library, and the courtroom, the rest of the space on both the second and third floors consists essentially of multiple office areas distributed along both east and west facades.

To enter the first floor, the visitor must pass through a flight of white marble steps that leads to a platform terrace or podium suspended above the reflecting pool, a transitional element between natural and man-made environments (*Fig. 3*). A second stair as wide as a typical bay precedes the entrance vestibule and main lobby, which are separated by an ornamental iron gate. The main lobby is an open-air space that runs through the whole width of the building that features a long reception counter of white marble finish and a mahogany faced wall as its backdrop. The four walls that flank both the entrance vestibule and the main stairs are faced with gray marble cladding while the floor is finished in terrazzo (*Fig. 4*). At the opposite end from the entrance, is the focal point of the whole space: a reinforced concrete, semi-circular stair that projects from the east façade and appears to be

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**National Register Of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

Section 7 Page 2

*Supreme Court Building
San Juan, Puerto Rico*

floating over the reflecting pool (*Fig. 5*). This is the main access to the second floor along the spatial sequence. Beyond the stairway, a glass railing and curtain wall protects the space from the outdoors (*Photo 3*).

The courtroom is located on the second floor as a freestanding object surrounded by two open galleries and its exterior wall is covered with mahogany strips (*Fig. 6*). Measuring forty-five feet in diameter, the courtroom is crowned by a two-inch thick, concrete-shell in the form of a shallow dome. A band of glass panes between the dome and the roof, allows an omni-directional diffusion of natural light throughout the space (*Figs. 7*). Its design layout accommodates all seven justices in an elevated, mahogany bench and equidistant from the appealing attorney, on the center of the space. At the opposite end, the audience seats behind a freestanding railing of similar scale and proportions as the bench, only this is lighter in design and craftsmanship. All interior details such as furnishings, flooring, and drapery are original specially the audience's chairs, which were designed by the architects themselves.

The design of the whole building is oriented towards open areas in harmony with the surrounding outdoors. From the open gallery and judge's offices in the third floor, the exuberant vegetation of the park becomes an integral feature of the building's design. The courtroom is the only space inside the building where the visitor experiences a sense of confinement. However, curved, movable partitions provide flexibility to the courtroom – whose area can be transformed depending on the required capacity and type of event.

The property is in good condition and alterations have been relatively minimal and reversible. The overall exterior appearance retains a significant level of integrity. Throughout the years the interior distribution in some office and service areas has been altered in order to accommodate new facilities and its personnel. On the first floor, the administrations of courts and library spaces have been subdivided with concrete block, gypsum board, wood and glass partitions and five private bathrooms were added. The original layout for specific spaces such as the office of the Administrator, the Property Clerk, the Secretary of the Court, the Registry of Wills, the library's reading room and bathrooms has been partially lost (*Fig. 8a*). On the other hand, the courtroom with its adjacent conference room and the seven offices for the associate justices, all located on the third floor, have been virtually preserved with all their finishes. Only the office areas for the Marshall, the Digester, the Translator, the Protocol Inspector and the attorney's waiting space have been consolidated to form the new Chief Justice's office (*Fig. 8b*). Service, archival and storage spaces that were reserved for the ground floor level reveal few significant interventions; only the administration of courts and general storages volume was expanded over gravel area adjacent to the reflecting pool (*Fig 8c*).

Ever since its construction and inauguration in 1955, the Supreme Court building has been considered a paradigm for architecture in Puerto Rico not only as the built symbol of political, social, cultural and economic achievements but also as an outstanding example of tropical modernism.

**United States Department of the Interior
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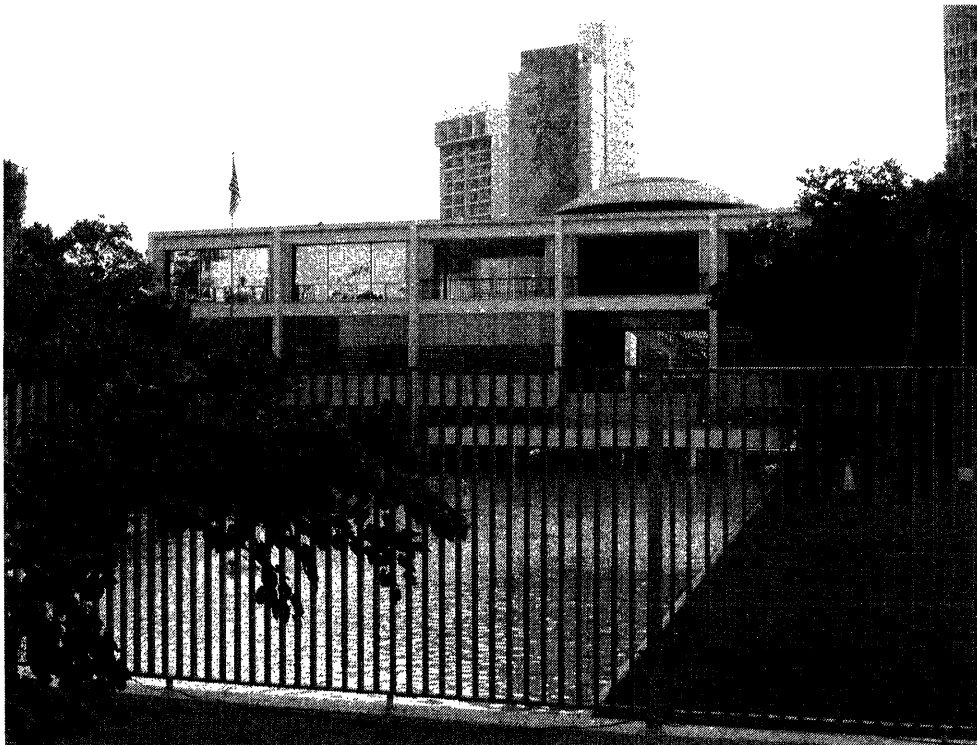
**National Register Of Historic Places
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*Supreme Court Building
San Juan, Puerto Rico*

List of Figures

Fig. 1. View of the Supreme Court Building.



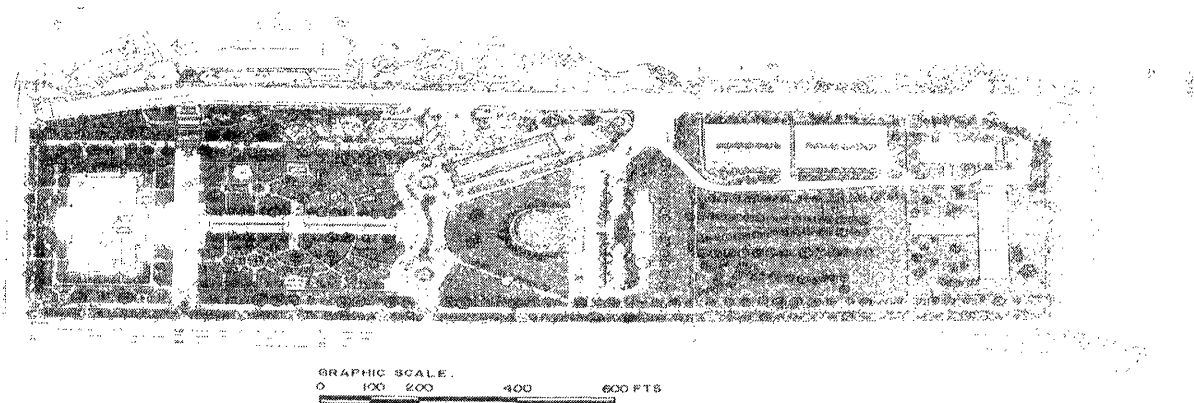
**United States Department of the Interior
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*Supreme Court Building
San Juan, Puerto Rico*

Figure 2. Lay-out of Muñoz Rivera Park with the Supreme Court Building.



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*Supreme Court Building
San Juan, Puerto Rico*

Figure 3. Platform terrace suspended over reflecting pool.



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Figure 4. Main lobby.



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Figure 5. The spiral stair.



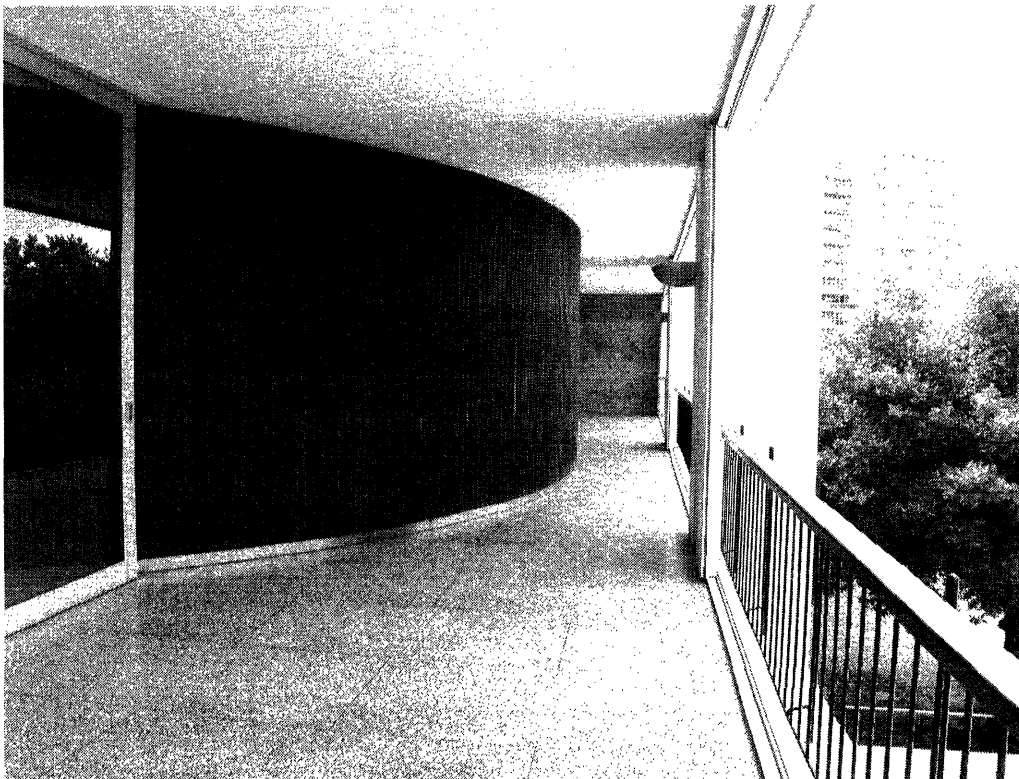
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**National Register Of Historic Places
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*Supreme Court Building
San Juan, Puerto Rico*

Figure 6. Open gallery with mahogany strips.



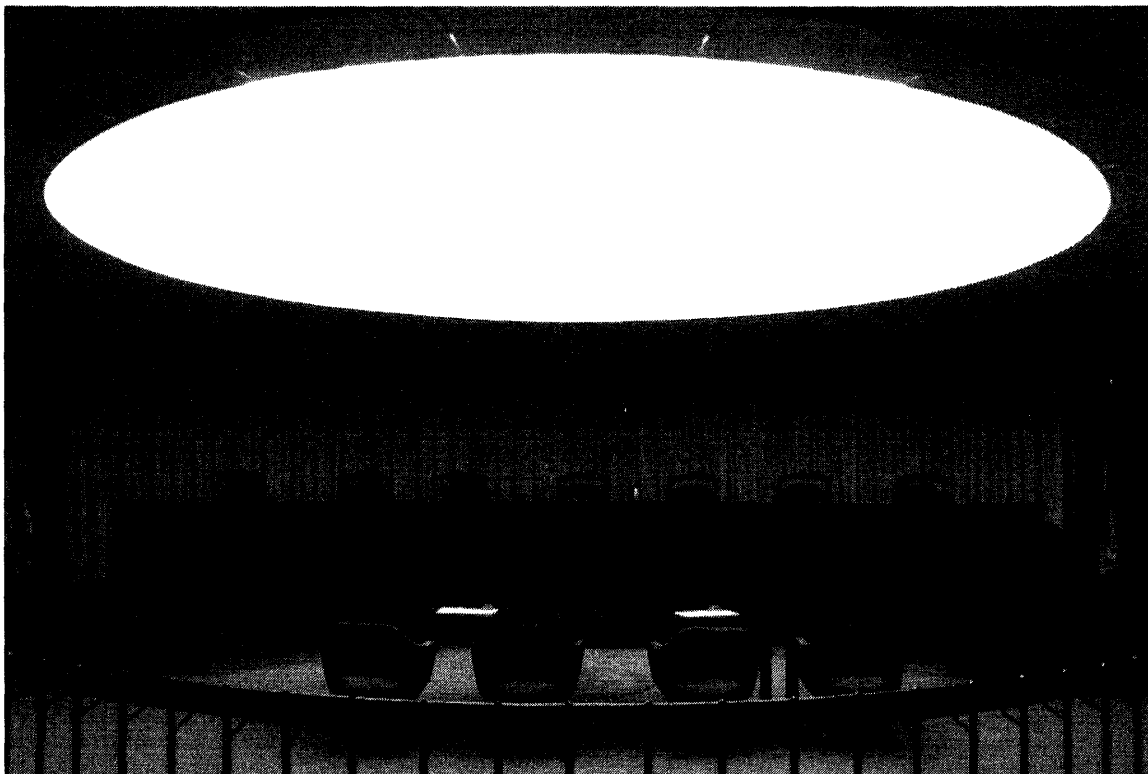
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*Supreme Court Building
San Juan, Puerto Rico*

Figure 7. The Courtroom.



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Building

*Supreme Court
San Juan, Puerto Rico*

Figures 8a, 8b and 8c.

Fig. 8a First Floor Plan

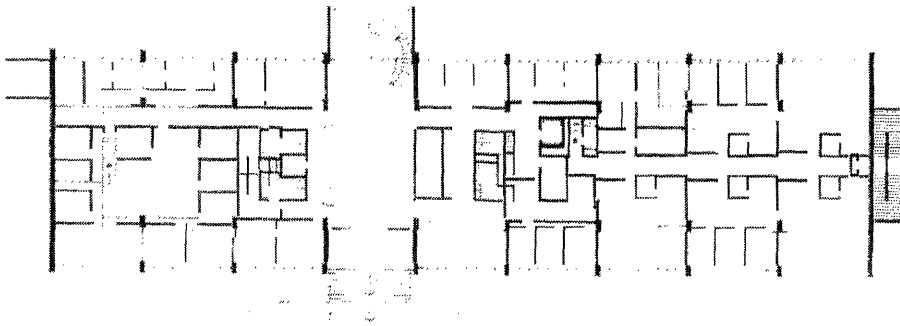


Fig. 8b. Second Floor Plan

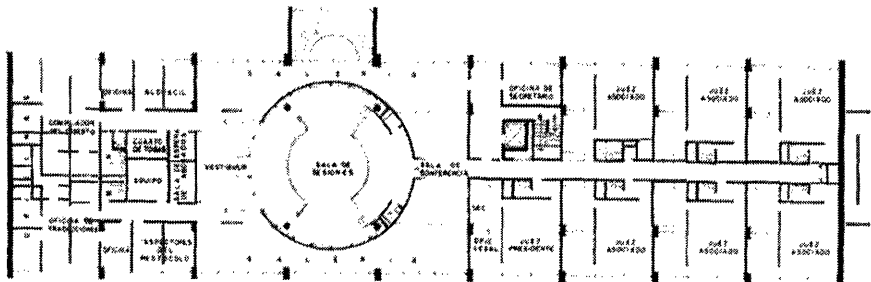
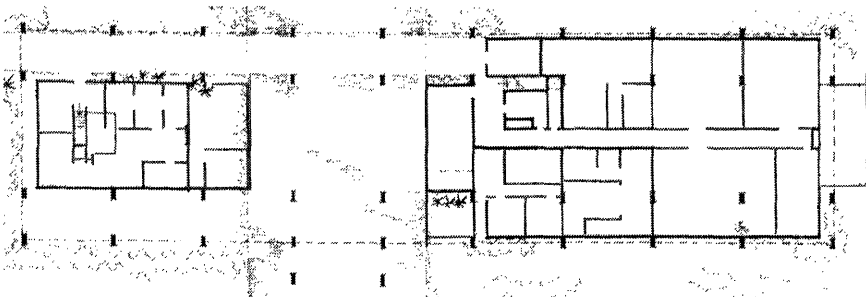


Fig. 8c. Ground Floor.



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*Supreme Court Building
San Juan, Puerto Rico*

Narrative Statement of Significance

The Supreme Court Building is significant state wide under Criterion C in the area of architecture as an outstanding example of the Modern Movement and its application within the local context. It's also significant under Criterion A as the building embodies the historical development of our highest court of law.

Historical Significance

The Supreme Court Building symbolizes the evolution of four hundred years of the complex judicial and political development of Puerto Rico. After three hundred years as an important part of the Spanish Empire in America, it was not until 1831, that the Spanish Crown established locally the first Court of Appeal with jurisdiction over the entire territory. Because of this, it was called the *Real Audiencia Territorial* (a Territorial Judicature). This court was officially established on July 23, 1832 and was located in a house in Fortaleza Street in Old San Juan. The original court was composed of six members, including the Captain General (Governor) of Puerto Rico. The Judicial and the Executive power were deeply entangled in the court. It was not until 1861, that the person serving as governor was excluded as a member of the court, theoretically creating a more defined separation between the Judicial and the Executive structures.¹ But this democratically separation of powers wouldn't take place until well advanced the twentieth century.

After the Spanish American War in 1898 and the transfer of Puerto Rico to the United States, a military government was established in the island. Among the changes done by the military was the creation of a new court that substituted the old "*Audiencia Territorial*". In August 7, 1899, the General Order 114 formed the new Supreme Court. The order became effective on September 10, 1899. That first Supreme Court was composed of one Chief Justice and four associated judges.² The military rule over the island lasted for two politically difficult years. By 1900, the Puerto Rican people happily received the inauguration of the civil government under the first Organic Law, the Foraker Act, approved by the United States Congress on April 12, 1900. The happiness rapidly disappeared when it was realized that all the local mayor political positions were going to be determined by the US Congress and the US president. Under this government of tutelage, the US Congress kept also the main political positions reserved to American politicians: the governor was an American until the 1940's; out of the eleven members of the governor's cabinet, six were Americans, which gave them the upper hand in all decisions. This

¹ Carmen Ramos de Santiago. *El desarrollo constitucional de Puerto Rico*. Editorial Universitaria, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1979. pp. 410.

² Roberto H. Todd, Jr. "La Corte Suprema y sus Presidentes". *El Mundo*, 20 de septiembre de 1952, p. 20.

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*Supreme Court Building
San Juan, Puerto Rico*

Cabinet served also, until 1917, as the Upper Chamber of the Legislature, creating a rupture within the American political tradition of the separation of Powers.

However, within the judicial structure of the new Supreme Court, the US government opted to maintain a majority of Puerto Ricans. In the 1900 original Supreme Court, out of five judges, three were locals (including the Chief Justice, José Severo Quiñónez), although, all the judges were designated by the United States president. Two continentals were designated to be part of this court by President William McKinley. The Puerto Ricans lawyers remained a majority within the Supreme Court through both Organic Laws: Foraker Act (1900 – 1917) and Jones Act (1917 – 1952). A native lawyer was always also designated as Chief Justice through this entire period.

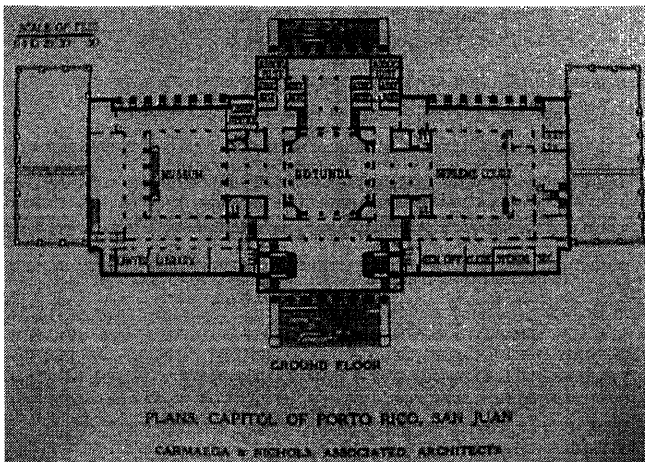


Fig. 9 State Capitol, first floor layout.³

For the first three decades of the Twentieth Century, the seat of the Supreme Court was located in the historic building of the old Convent of the Dominics in Old San Juan. In 1931, the court was transferred to the recently built State Capitol, inaugurated in 1929. The Capitol became the seat for members of the Senate, the House of Representatives, the Supreme Court and their respective staff. The Supreme Court occupied part of the east wing in the first floor (Fig. 9).

Although, the number of judges remained the same through the first five decades of the Twentieth Century (5 judges), the number of senators and representatives increased during that time. Under the Foraker Act, the Upper Chamber had eleven members; the Lower Chamber had thirty-five.

Through the Jones Act, the Senate was composed of eleven and the House of Representatives had thirty-nine members. All these government officials found the facilities and the space needed in the new Capitol building. But as the years went by, and as new government dependencies were created, the availability of working and storage space within the Capitol became highly reduced.

By the end of the 1940's dramatic changes altered the political structure in the island. In 1947 the Law of the Elected Governor was approved, allowing the Puerto Ricans, for the first time, to choose their governor in the 1948's election. In 1950, the United States Congress approved the Law 600, which permitted a local convocation for a Constitutional Convention. The Convention was convened in 1951, and by February 1952, the establishment

³ Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción de la Universidad de Puerto Rico (AACUPR). Caja: Capitolio de Puerto Rico.

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*Supreme Court Building
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of the *Estado Libre Asociado* (Commonwealth) and the new Constitution were ratified by a large majority of the local electorate. The new Constitution, effective on July 25, 1952, reorganized the structures of power once again. It created a twenty-seven members Senate and a House of Representatives of fifty-one individuals. The number of judges in the Supreme Court remained the same. But the 1952 constitution brought in a new arrangement: for the first time, all the judges were going to be nominated by the governor and ratified by the local Senate.

By this time it was evident, because of the increase of legislators and their staff, the necessity to enlarge or to identify new working spaces. To accommodate the augmentation in personnel, and to make the working conditions and use of space more reasonable, the idea of building facilities for the senators, representatives and judges, outside the Capitol, came out rapidly.

But, in the particular case of the Supreme Court, there was more than just the need of additional space. The 1952 Constitution represented a great achievement in the political evolution of Puerto Rico. After four hundred years of colonialism under Spain and fifty years of a similar arrangement under the United States, the *Estado Libre Asociado* created the image of a new political concept based on a freely and locally elected republican form of government, with a clear separation of Powers, distributed along the American Check & Balance concept. Out of this new political mentality, it was logical to derive the relevance to build a separate building for the Supreme Court. A new facility will remove the Court out of its "tenant status" in the Capitol (a building definitely associated with the Legislative Power) and create a new "space" that will embodied the political arrangement of the new Constitution. In that sense, it is extremely significant that the Supreme Court Building became the first major public building commissioned by the new Commonwealth government.

The plans for the construction of the building for the Supreme Court were on their way rapidly after the *Estado Libre Asociado* inauguration. By August, it was announced that the architectural firm Toro-Ferrer was the one selected to design the future site for the court. The location selected for the Court's building was a ten acres site located in the eastern portion of the 1929 Luis Muñoz Rivera Park in Puerta de Tierra (San Juan). The Puerto Rican Reconstruction Administration was using that area at the time. The land was going to be turnover to the government. Out of the ten acres, six were turned to the park's administration and the other four were reserved for the Supreme Court site. By April 1953, all contractual arrangements for the general contractor, electrical engineering, landscaping and acoustical engineering, were completed. By October 1953, the construction of the building was on its way.⁴

⁴ *El Mundo*. 6 de agosto de 1952, p. 20. / 8 de agosto de 1952, p. 14. / 27 de abril de 1953, p. 14. / 8 de octubre de 1953, p. 12.

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At ten o'clock in the morning on February 4, 1956, the new Supreme Court Building was officially inaugurated. A distinguish crowd of jurists from United States, Latin America and Europe were present at the site to listen to Judge Earl Warren, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court and main speaker on the historical occasion. The building of our highest court came to life (*Fig. 10*).

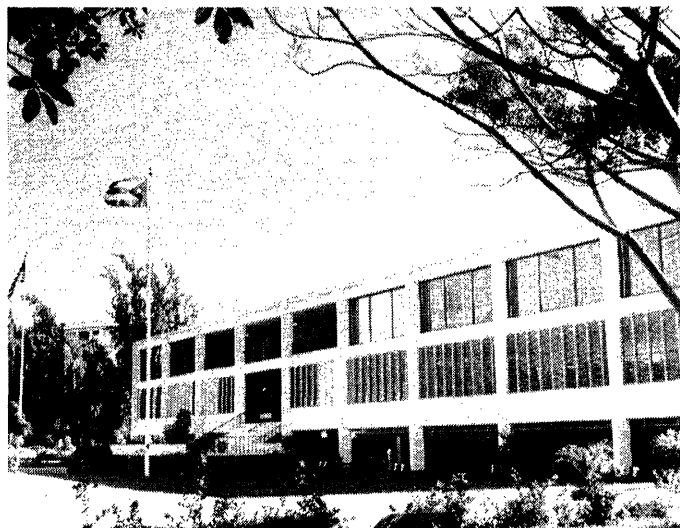


Fig. 10 Supreme Court Building, 1957.⁵

Architectural Significance

The Puerto Rico Supreme Court building is a significant property under Criterion C because it is a unique example of an International Style courthouse (highest appeal level) specifically interpreted, both in terms of iconography and architectural style, as a visual manifestation of the political situation of a Caribbean island transforming itself into a modern nation. It is considered one of the most distinguished works of the internationally recognized Puerto Rican architectural firm Toro-Ferrer. Because of its relevance as a legal and social symbol, it possesses the highest level of integrity.

By means of its architecture, the building is iconic of the spirit that marked the new political standing Puerto Rico had recently acquired: the Estado Libre Asociado (Commonwealth of Puerto Rico). The signing of a Constitution not only established the new political relationship between the island and the United States of

⁵ Archivo General de Puerto Rico. Unidad Fotográfica. Fondo: Instrucción Pública. Foto Tribunal Superior, 1957.

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*Supreme Court Building
San Juan, Puerto Rico*

America. Puerto Rico had its first supreme court in 1899 and this was the first building specifically designed and constructed to house the local final appeal's tribunal.

The only related typological precedents in the island the architects Osvaldo Toro and Miguel Ferrer had was the *Real Audiencia Territorial* building and the Dominics Convent, both in Old San Juan and the Capitol of Puerto Rico. The *Real Audiencia Territorial* and the Dominics Convent were located within the densely organized urban core and were masked by a so-called Colonial façade. Since the buildings housed several other functions, no particular stylistic personality associated it to its legal use. At the time of the commission, the Supreme Court temporarily occupied the western section of the Capitol of Puerto Rico –a Greek revival building. It is possible the architects decided to re-interpret the traditional Classical elements present in the Capitol Building. In any case the use of a dome, the horizontality of the rectangular main body, the podium-like base, and the elegant flight of stairs marking the entrance demonstrate the influence of Classical language with its profound symbolic connotations. What makes the design such a unique and relevant one is how these traditional elements have been reinterpreted to intersect the philosophical demands of the International Style.

The site chosen for the project is pregnant with symbolism and provided a most important philosophical context for the design, particularly at an urban scale. The location of the Supreme Court Building on the eastern extreme of the Luis Muñoz Rivera Park -an urban park designed -in 1924- by the Chicago firm Bennet, Parsons & Frost which marks the boundary between the islet of San Juan and the main island of Puerto Rico- became an opportunity to explore a new kind of courthouse: one that explored an intimate contact with nature. The design tandem generated a totally new and modern concept: modern tropical architecture that symbolically and morphologically makes reference to the past. The architects had the sensibility to respect the existing park's atmosphere and followed the proposed park's landscape design –specifically the main axis that organized the site. This grand axis pierces the court building transforming itself into a reflecting pool, which crosses the building, ending at semi-circular stairway and dome, anchoring the main lobby.

Unlike the Capitol of Puerto Rico, the Supreme Court building is an extroverted building, light and airy. The design exploits the visual effects that contribute to this perception: the grandiose reflecting pool that flows from the park, under the main entrance and through the building; the sculptural quality of all its stairways (the main one and the semi-circular at the lobby), both of which are suspended over water in a fascinating structural feat that allows these elements to be perceived as if floating; the soft curve of the shallow dome and its separation from the building's roof -eliminating the traditional ponderous perception of domes; the skeletal quality of its structural system –which rhythmically modulates façades and the first floor level that serves as a podium that elevates the body of the building. Since this part was conceived to be painted in a dark color, it camouflages itself and virtually disappears, making the building look as if it is floating over the greenery, which surrounds it.

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*Supreme Court Building
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Also significant in this perception of openness and lightness is the exposure of the cylindrical volume that defines the main session court. Toro-Ferrer took this perception to the extreme when they eliminated any element that would separate the exterior from the plastic expression of the cylindrical volume, literally opening the building to expose its most significant and sensible space –instead of protecting and covering it, as would had been common in other buildings with similar uses. The use of vertical wood planks to finish the exterior of the cylinder adds to this sensation. Such is the level of openness of the building that just until recent years nothing would mark or limit the perimeter or impede the pedestrian’s access to the building, neither from the park nor from the avenue that runs closely parallel to its east facade (and serves as the main entrance to the islet of San Juan). For security reasons, at the end of the 90’s a simple, transparent, iron fence was installed around the site. Contrary to other monumental buildings close by (the State Capitol, the National Archives Building), the Supreme Court Building do not impose its presence to the immediate surrounding, instead, it complements and flows with it, without losing its nobility and what it symbolizes: our highest Court of Law.

According to a statement of architect Osvaldo Toro, the circular shape of the courtroom made it one of the first of its kind in the world, at its time. The use of the circle as the shape of the courtroom, in addition to making a volumetrically statement when paired with the dome, establishes a very strong symbolic expression. By geometry, circular space lack a fixed axis or axes –contrary to the other basic forms, such as the oval, the triangle, the square or the rectangle. The use of a circle permitted the designers to distribute the same hierarchical position to all: the Supreme Court judges and the public, symbolizing that all men are equal. Above, the dome, as is traditional, represents God –the only one who is above the law. At the same time, the use of a circular plan directs the attention of the space to its only fixed position: its center, where the appealing attorney would expose its case. The semi-circular podium elevates the height of the judges in comparison to the rest of the people, thus putting them in a symbolic position between God and men. The separation between the dome and the roof level allows the entrance of natural light that results in an optical effect that gives the impression that dome is floating –providing a very mystic and solemn sense to the space.

The Supreme Court Building has kept, for the last fifty years, an impressive physical integrity. Only minor adjustments have been done to the building itself. However, the enormous amount of documents, reports and administrative paper work produced during the first twenty-five years demanded an extension to the Court Library. The original design firm, Toro-Ferrer, conducted a study to analyze the problem in 1979. Instead of making changes to the actual building that could affect negatively its integrity, the architects suggested the construction of an annex to be used as the new library and depository of documents.⁶ A three level building was designed and eventually built on the north side of the site. The Library connects to the Court’s building through

⁶ Informe de ampliación y modificación del Tribunal Supremo de Puerto Rico. Preparado para la Oficina de la Administración de los Tribunales. Preparado por Toro Ferrer y Asociados, Arquitectos. 15 de noviembre de 1979.

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an overhead bridge highly concealed by the surrounding trees. The first level of the Library is underground, so the structure does not compete in height with the Court (*Fig. 11*).

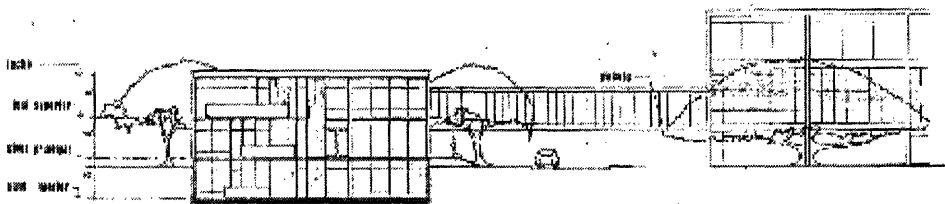


Fig. 11 Section through Library at left and Court building at right of the drawing.

The Architects

In December of 1945, just as World War Two came to an end, Osvaldo Toro, Miguel Ferrer and Luis Torregrosa founded the architectural and engineering firm *Toro Ferrer and Torregrosa* (*Fig. 12*).⁷ During the early 1950's, the firm became just *Toro-Ferrer, Architects* and from the moment of their foundation, the firm took the principles of the Modern Movement and adapted them to the tropical conditions of the island.



Fig. 12 Torregrosa, Toro, Hilton and Ferrer.

They developed a solid reputation when they were awarded the first place in a competition, sponsored by the government, to design a new hotel in San Juan. The hotel was part of Operation Bootstrap -a strong campaign to promote the quick industrialization of Puerto Rico. Even though tourism already was an important source of income for the state, the post-war policies propelled by Operation Bootstrap made necessary the revision of the existing facilities and the modernization of the tourist industry in order to fulfill its new role. The firm Toro-Ferrer was an integral part of the new tourism industry as designers of some of the most celebrated hotels in the island during the 40's, 50's and 60's (*Figs. 13-15*). They became the representatives and creators of the new architectural image promoted by the State.

⁷ Luis Torregrosa Casellas graduated from Cornell as a Civil Engineer in 1938. Toro and Ferrer were both architects. Miguel Ferrer graduated from Cornell in 1938 and Osvaldo Toro from Columbia University in 1937. During the early 1950's, the firm became just *Toro - Ferrer, Architects*.

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A new image that was not only limited to the tourism industry, but was also used in state buildings to represent the new political standing of the island and to promote the modernization of government's facilities.

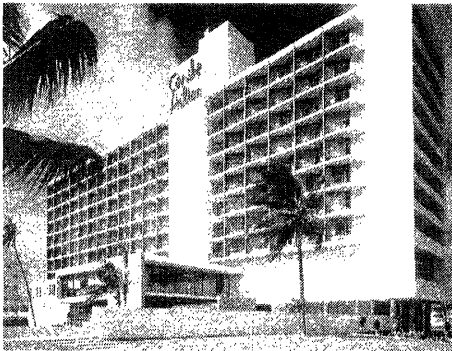


Fig. 13 Caribe Hilton Hotel, 1949.

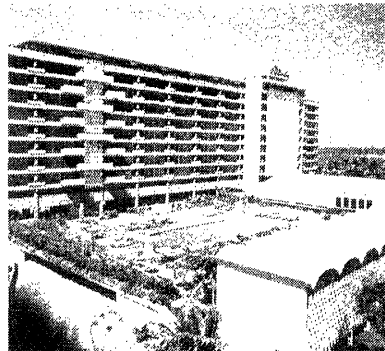


Fig. 14 La Concha Hotel, 1958.

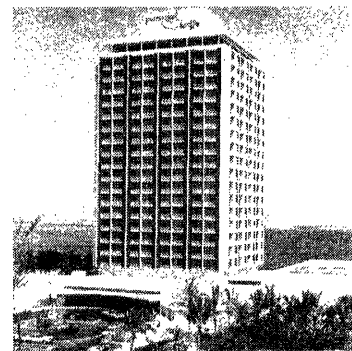


Fig. 15 Sheraton Hotel, 1963.

Under this circumstances, Toro-Ferrer not only were commissioned the Supreme Court Building but were also in charge of the State Capitol annexes.

The design of the Supreme Court Building brought high recognition to the firm. It was recognized as one of the best ten buildings in Puerto Rico by the New York League of Architects in 1960 and was awarded an honorific mention in an international competition sponsored by the same organization. The Supreme Court Building's design came in Eighteen Place out of two hundred and forty designs submitted.⁸

Most definitely, the architectural firm Toro-Ferrer is one of the most significant contributors to our recent past architecture.

⁸ El Mundo. 20 de mayo de 1960, p. 6.

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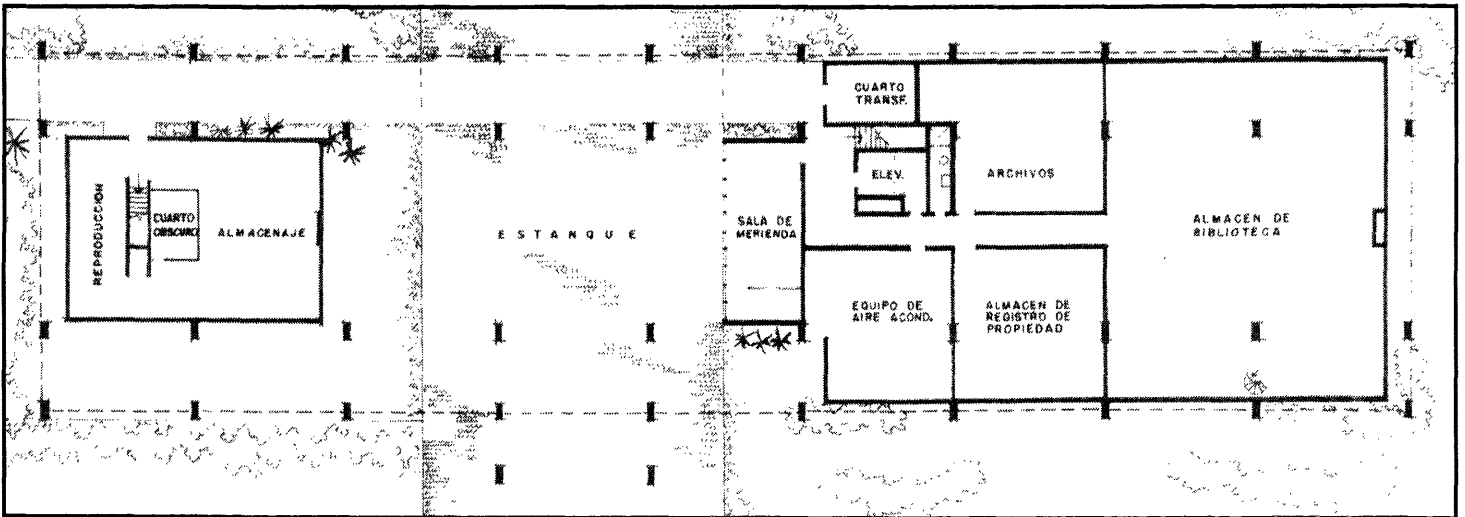
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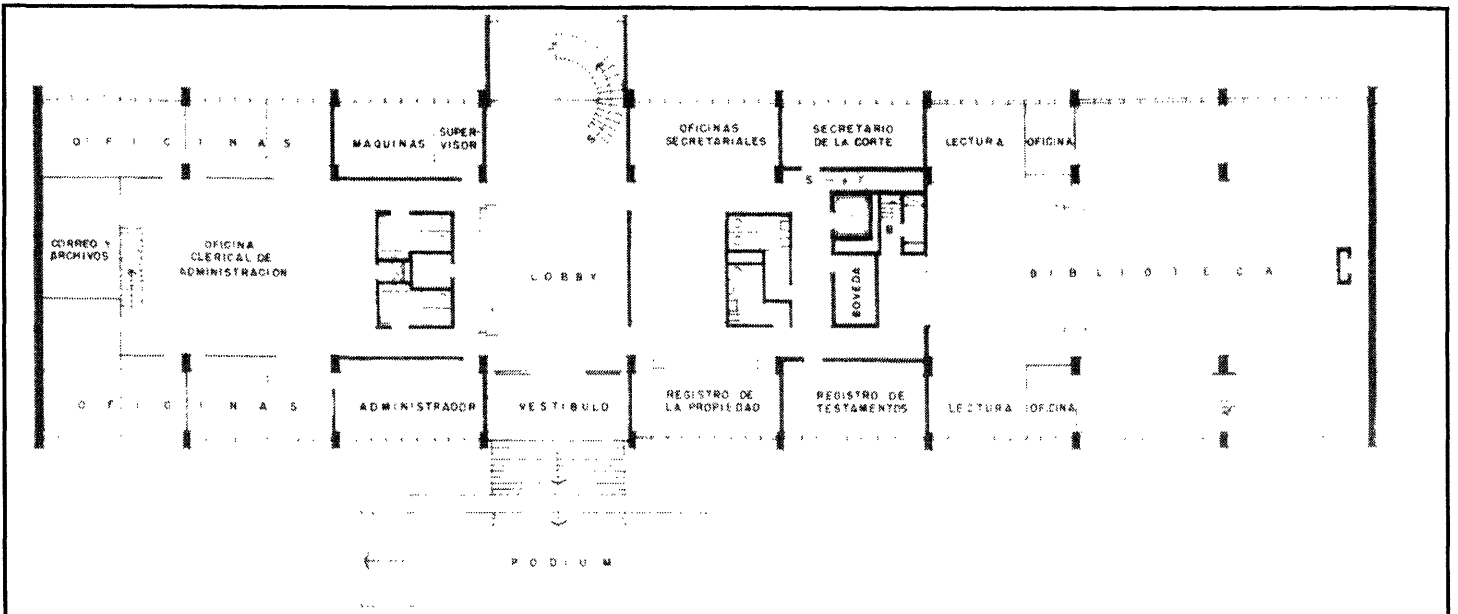
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Original Floor Plans

Ground Floor



First Floor



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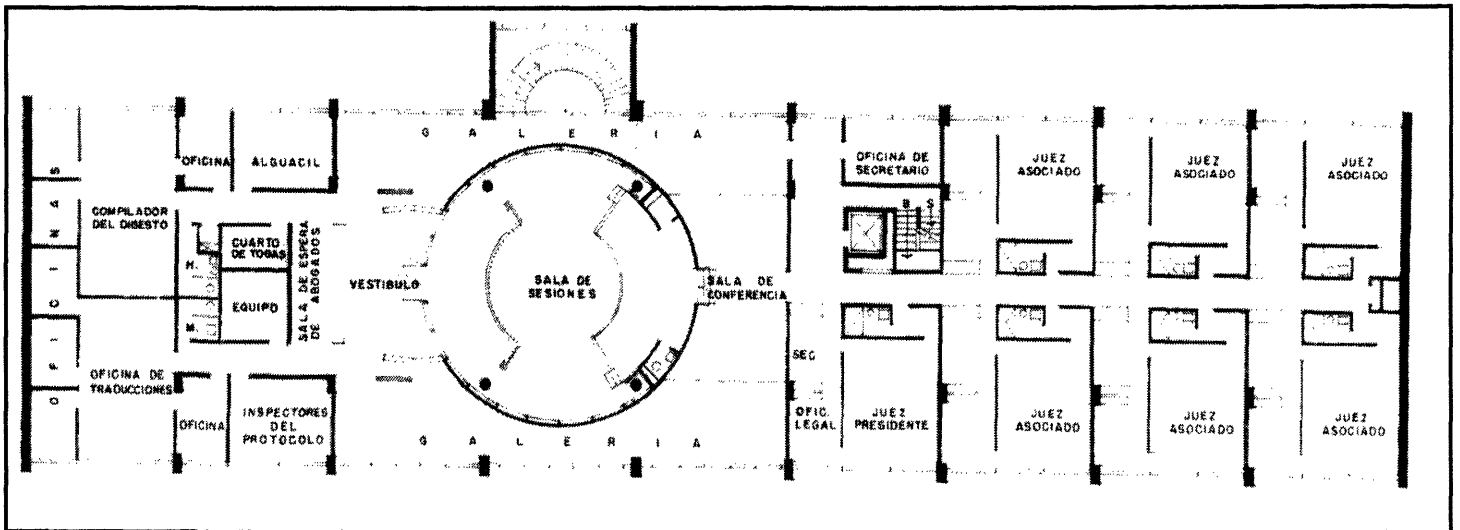
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Original Floor Plans (continuation)

Second Floor



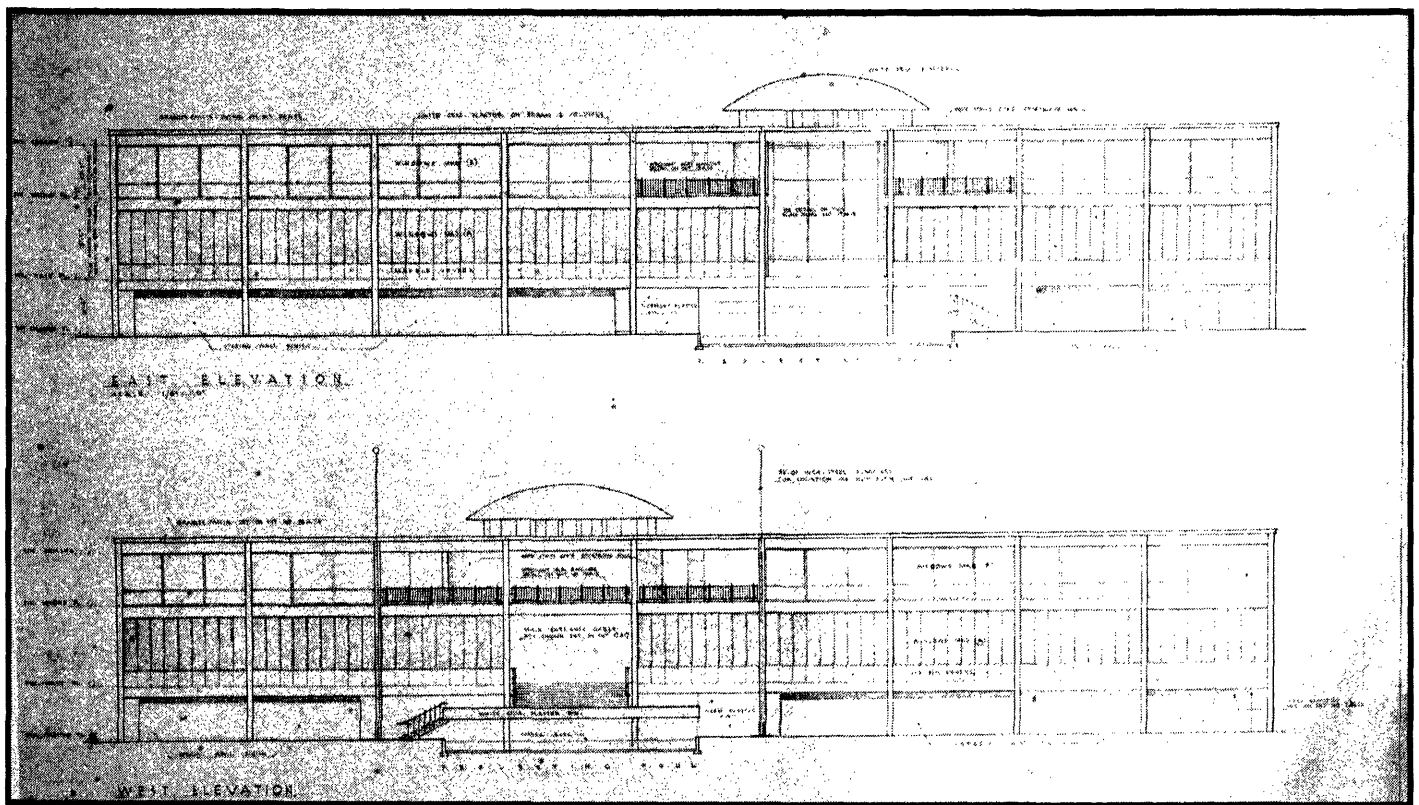
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East and West elevations



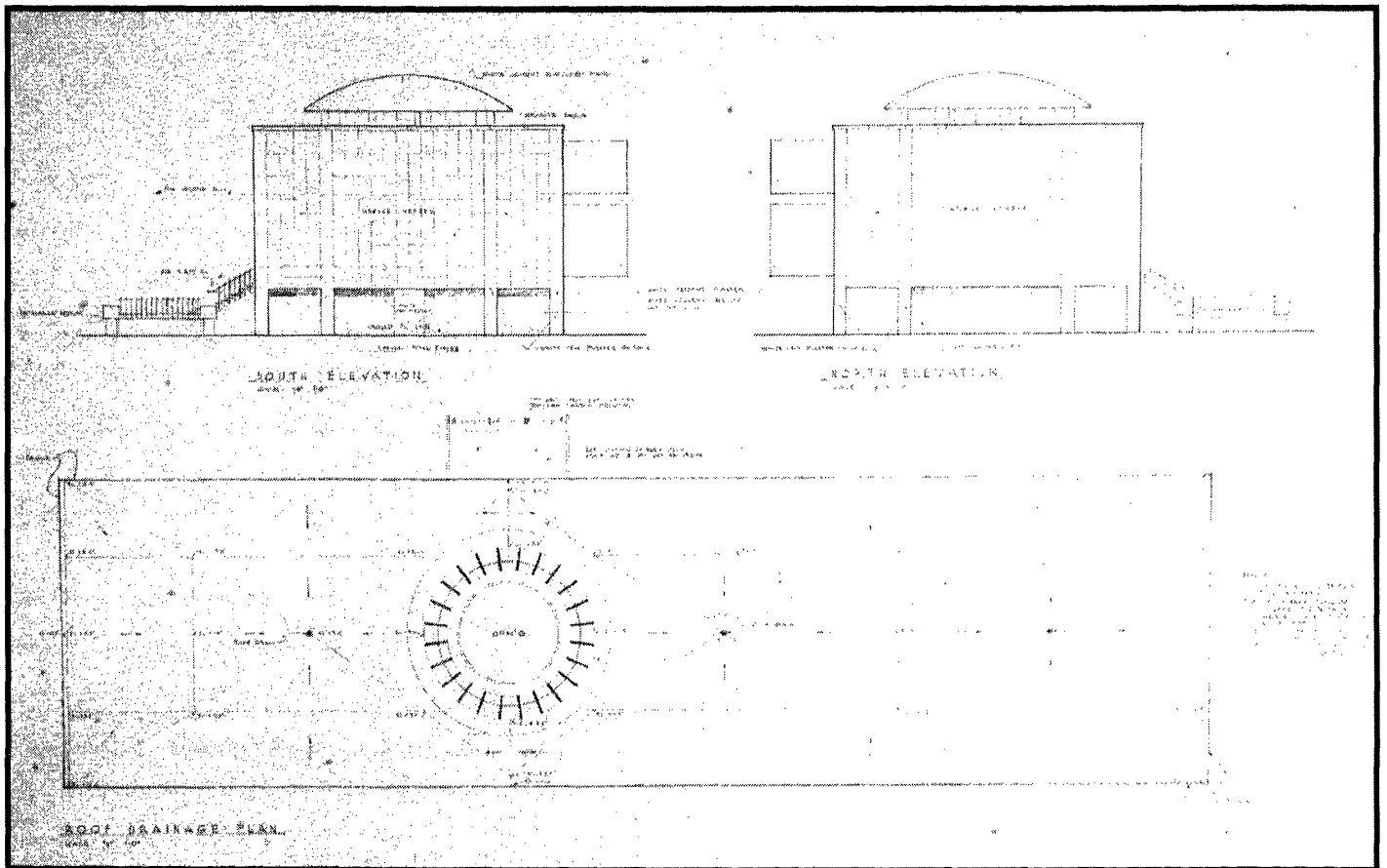
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North and South elevation / Roof Plan



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Site Map



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