



**Wells Fargo Center**

By Cesar Pelli

Interior Architecture

by STUDIOS

# Progressive Architecture



# Made in Minneapolis

**Norwest Center (now Wells Fargo Center) marks a turning point for its design architects Cesar Pelli & Associates.**



**Project:** Norwest Corporation & Norwest Bank Headquarters, Minneapolis.

**Interior Architects:** STUDIOS Architecture, San Francisco—Darryl T. Roberson, Martin Yardley, principals in charge; Thomas Yee, studio director; Kieran Boughan, Leif Glomset, JoAnne Powell, Mark Thompson, design team; in association with Shea Architects, Minneapolis—David Shea, principal; Steven Haasl, project manager; Sharon Gibbons, Russell Gilson, project team.

**Client:** Norwest Corporation, Norwest Properties, Inc. (Thomas J. Parish, president; Robert F. Seeger, vice president; Walfrid A. Johnson, construction manager; Marybeth Crandall, interiors).

**Consultants:** Michaud, Cooley, Erickson, mechanical/electrical; CBM Engineers, structural; S. Leonard Auerbach, lighting; Charles Salter Associates, acoustical; Jameison Associates, audio/visual; Canteen Company, food service.

**General Contractor:** M.A. Mortenson.

**Photos:** Christian Korab.

ALTHOUGH it must not have seemed so at the time, one of the luckiest opportunities to befall Cesar Pelli was the chance to start over on Norwest Center. “I doubt we could have designed a Minneapolis building under the first program,” says Pelli now. But, with the dissolution of the client partnership and the breakup of the site into two adjacent parcels, Pelli landed a program more in scale with its city. (It is a measure of Pelli’s skill with clients that he is the architect for both new sites, building not only Norwest Center, a project for developer Gerald D. Hines, but also a retail complex next door for Bell Canada Enterprises which opens this fall.) The bulky, square Scheme One that would have towered over the nearby IDS building gave way to a through-block slab that defers to that design by Johnson and Burgee and acknowledges its role as this city’s de facto symbol.

The most profound change in design, however, was not one of scale but of aesthetic. Although Norwest used Kasota stone, the local material that gives many Minneapolis buildings their famous golden hue, little else in the design tied it to the city. Its curtain wall had more in common with Pelli’s World Trade Center in New York than with such Minneapolis

landmarks as the Foshay or Dain Towers, and its pointed cap quoted a common Post-Modern cliché.

Scheme Two, however, is very much of its place, conforming with considerable grace to the character of Minneapolis architecture. Pressed to define the city’s style, Pelli cites a certain clarity and simplicity of form. “Minneapolis exudes a sense of quiet pride,” he says. “Its architecture is beautiful but not extravagant.” He speaks of the typically vertical organization of elevations, citing a 2’6” window module characteristic not only of older, pre-modern buildings but of modern ones built by local architects. He draws further distinctions between more recent buildings, contrasting the very mediocre Marriott Hotel tower with the IDS building, which, although a curtain-wall building like the Marriott, manages to achieve a vertical emphasis through its corner folds. Further study convinced Pelli and project architect Jon Pickard that Kasota stone alone was not the key to color in Minneapolis, but that it is the combination of that color with white that sparkles—a discovery that led directly to the use of white granite surrounds for windows in the base at Norwest and white granite accents where the tower meets the sky.









**The rotunda on South 6th Street is Norwest's grand public statement and the bank's principal entrance. This skylit Pantheon is organized around six chandeliers, 12 medallions, and railings (above right and facing page) salvaged from the 1930 Northwestern Bank Building, which stood on the site until a fire on Thanksgiving Day, 1982. Norwest's boardroom and the offices of the chairman look down into the space from the third and fourth floors. These are articulated on the street as projecting blocks to either side of the rotunda (above). Entering bank customers pass through the rotunda to elevators that serve only bank floors, or up the escalators to mezzanine offices. The mezzanine also connects to the city's extensive skyway system. Bank teller stations were designed by STUDIOS Architecture of San Francisco.**

At the same time, Norwest bears an undeniable resemblance to architecture of other times and places—most specifically Raymond Hood's RCA building at Rockefeller Center in New York. The 1930s feel of the new Norwest has particular resonance, given the history of the site. Pelli's tower replaced the much-loved Northwestern National Bank Building, which had served as Norwest's headquarters from its completion in 1930 until a tragic fire in 1982. Medallions, chandeliers, and railings saved from the old 16-story building, which in its heyday was the largest in downtown Minneapolis, were incorporated into Pelli's grand rotunda and through-block lobby.

These objects also became the core of a new corporate art collection amassed for Norwest over the last two years by curator David Ryan, who has chosen to concentrate on Modern decorative arts. His selections, which rival many museum offerings, will be dispersed throughout the public and office floors. A changing exhibition in specially designed vitrines in the lobby makes this collection accessible to the public. Norwest trustees will dine on Hoffmann furniture, while their employees work in the company of objets d'art by Olbrich, Wright, Mallet Stevens, and others.

There are, of course, significant differ-

ences between Norwest and RCA, which Pelli is quick to point out. RCA, he says, is an eroded slab, while Norwest is more the product of accretion than erosion, with "bustles" at either end. Norwest is, moreover, bilaterally symmetrical in both directions at the top, unlike the unidirectional RCA. Hood's building is mainly stone, Pelli's mainly glass. Indeed, from some angles and at night, the body of his building appears to be all glass. Dramatic night lighting of the top of the building, however, recalls 1930s architecture, and the "RCA effect" remains the building's most lasting image.

While acknowledging a debt to Hood, Pelli is more interested in the ways in which his building expresses itself as a product of the 1980s. Here he is supported by Lloyd Johnson, who as chairman of Norwest Corporation represents the building's prime tenant. The tower, says Johnson, had to provide a new symbol for Norwest. "This building kind of lets you know how you should behave," he explains, ascribing more power to architecture than the architect himself might claim. "It reflects the past but doesn't lie about the fact that it's new," he continues.

For Pelli, the latter description translates into a kind of architectural ethics, a moral





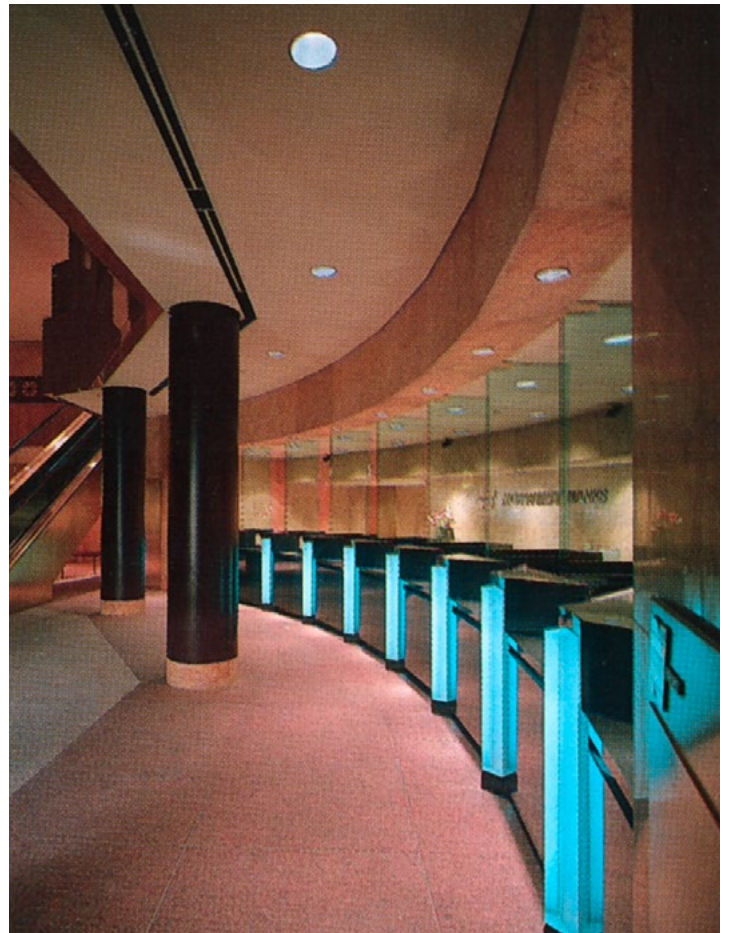
**Above: Pelli incorporated railings saved from the original building destroyed in the fire in his new building envelope. STUDIOS Architecture designed the classically modern bank teller stations, creating a distinct identity for Norwest Bank. The stations are formed of black granite and a white glass prism which is lighted from within. Below: Curving water wall of red sandstone.**











The problem for **STUDIOS Architecture of San Francisco** was establishing a distinct identity for the bank within the dramatic envelope designed by Cesar Pelli. Rather than compete with Pelli's rich palette, **STUDIOS** opted for simple, classically modern materials and forms. The teller stations, for example, are black and white, with the black granite wall broken by glass prisms lighted from within (above right). Railings from the original Northwestern Bank Building provide the principal decorative relief for bank offices on the mezzanine level (right). Norwest's main reception area is located on the third floor overlooking the rotunda (above). Here and throughout the executive offices, the use of maple and anigre, a light mahogany, together with ivory-colored linen, provides a subtle background for Norwest's developing collection of modern decorative arts. The staff cafeteria area, also located on the third floor, is distinguished by a curving water wall of red sandstone (previous page).



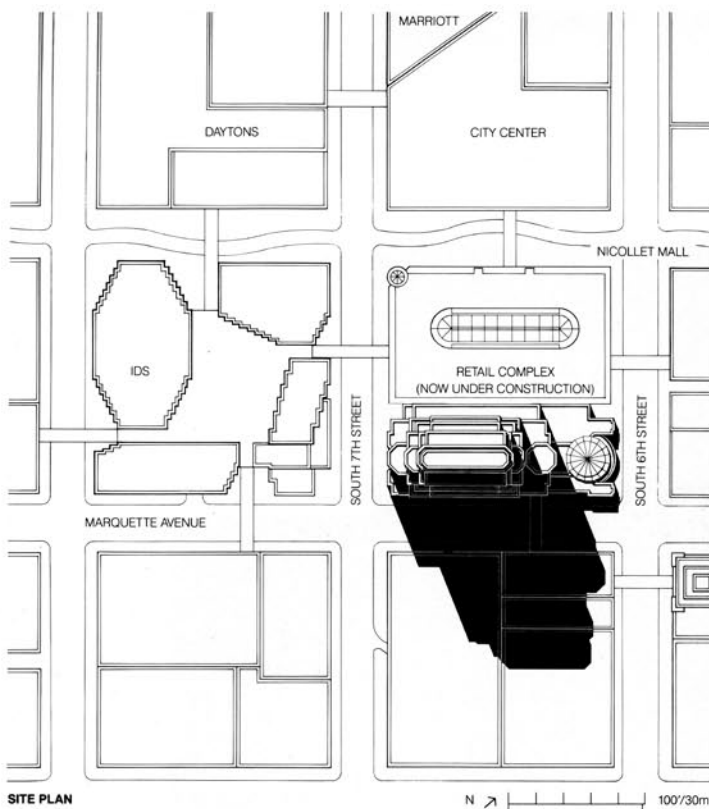
edict reflected in his motto that a building must not be merely good, but right. To that end, he says,

a design must be consistent with its technology. Thus Pelli criticizes contemporary architects who attempt to design towers in a Classical vein. (In this view, he echoes theorist Leon Krier who would limit Classical buildings to the five- or six-story maximum of masonry construction.) "The carved stone tradition has disappeared, but many architects can't cope with that so they keep the keystone

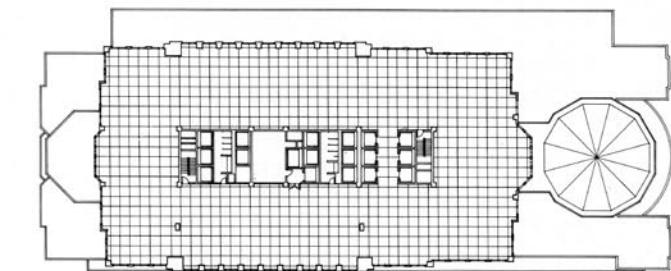
and the quoins," Pelli observes. Johnson/Burgee's AT&T building, for example, earns his criticism for columns that are designed to appear falsely structural.

What does it mean to make architectural expression consistent with technology in a building like Norwest, whose structure is based on a system of four supercolumns? Think of Mies, Pelli advises: "There is no need to express every beam." By the same token, the skin is not structural and should not be expressed as such. So Norwest is, in the end,

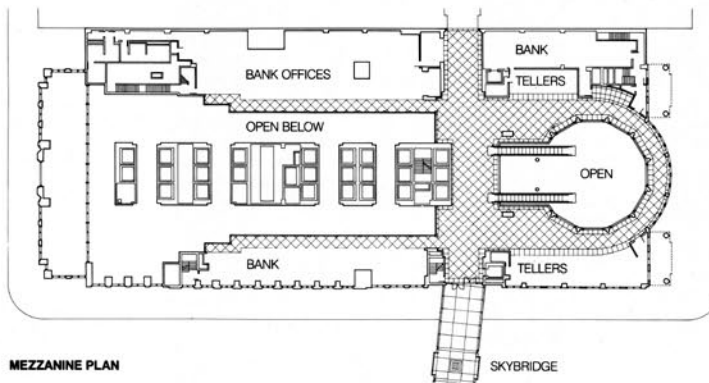




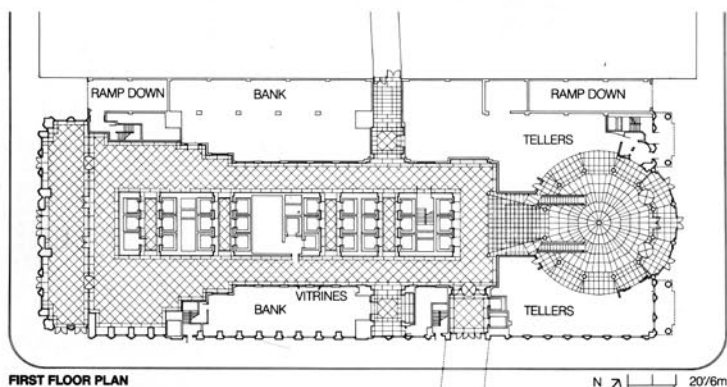
SITE PLAN



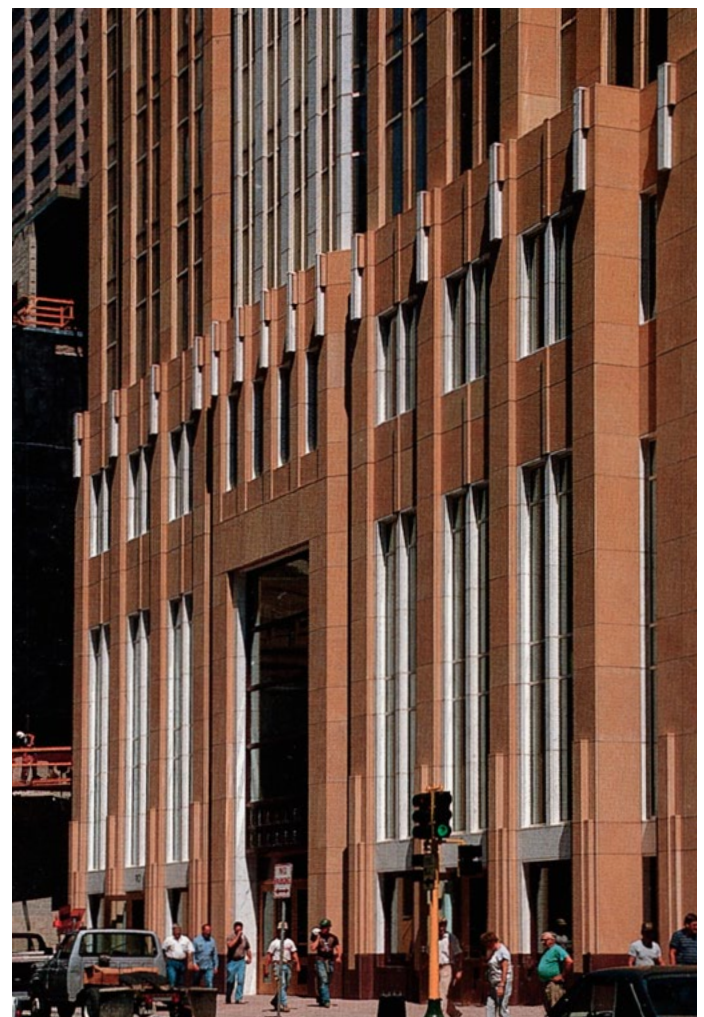
TYPICAL MIDRISE OFFICE FLOOR PLAN



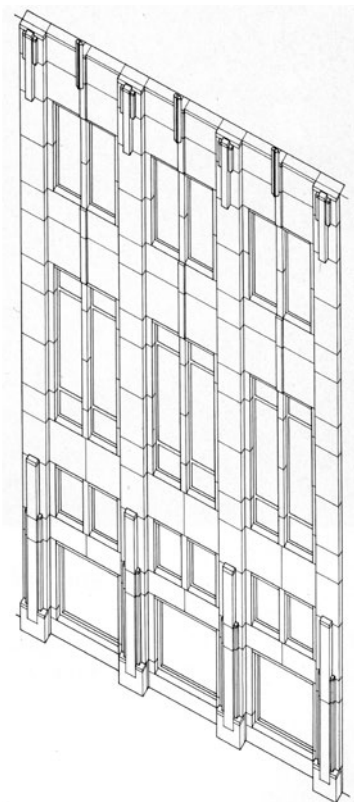
MEZZANINE PLAN



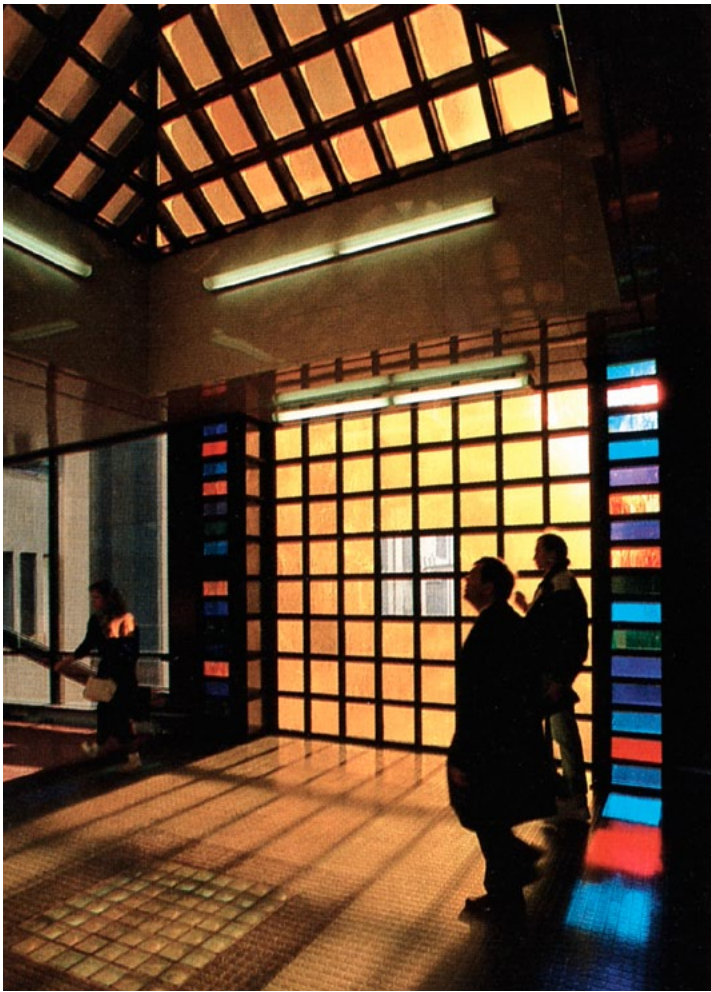
FIRST FLOOR PLAN



Norwest's façades adhere to many of the principles that Pelli considers to be keys to the character of Minneapolis architecture. Windows follow a 2'6" module, giving elevations a vertical emphasis. Use of Minnesota stone, captures the golden hue for which Minneapolis buildings are famous. This effect is heightened by the addition of white granite accents at the setbacks (above). Glazing is set back six inches from the face of the building within a white granite frame (axonometric, right). The site plan (top left) shows that the tower is symmetrical in two directions above the midrise, while floor plans (left) show the four supercolumns that handle wind load and permit column free office interiors.







**Viewed end on (next page), the slab becomes a true sky scraper. At its base, the tower is tied into the city's network by a new sky bridge (above right). The bridge is the work of Cesar Pelli in collaboration with Minneapolis artist and sculptor Siah Armajani. The two have collaborated before, and are continuing to do so, on projects ranging from the World Financial Center Plaza at Battery Park City in New York to the top of a skyscraper in San Francisco. Their design for the sky bridge departs from the vocabulary established in Norwest Center. At the same time, it goes beyond conventional sky bridges, which are treated more as building extrusions than bridges. The skylighted, stained glass pavilion at its center (above) is a kind of walk-through art work that marks the center of the span with a burst of color.**

a curtain-wall construction, and its architect has not moved as far from his forte as might at first appear. The facade is a veneer — not as thin, perhaps, as that of Herring Hall at Rice University (P/A, April 1985, pp. 86-97), nor as dedicated to pure pattern-making. But, as Pelli himself puts it, “The architect’s personality doesn’t disappear. I have certain preferences for color and massing, but those concerns don’t drive the project.” This, then, is the essence of the shift in Pelli’s direction: from an interest in skin for the sake of itself, to a composing of skin in the service of silhouette.

The attention paid to how the tower meets the sky also distinguishes Norwest from the proto typical highrise office building — be it Mies’ flattopped Seagram Building or Pelli’s own Tower at the Museum of Modern Art. Norwest is a skyscraper and as befits that tradition, it is at its most nostalgic at the top. (Gold finials at the setbacks and top, which were not in position when the building opened in January, are now going up.)

The base of the building, like its elevations, is equal parts Minneapolis and New York. The grand rotunda recalls Pelli’s own World Financial Center towers, and the airy public lobby is a lighter, brighter version of RCA. The skybridge, the first of two designed by Pelli in collaboration with Minneapolis artist Siah Armajani, departs altogether from the 1930s

feel of the building, anchoring Norwest in the modern skyway system for which Minneapolis is justly famous.

The shift in style from building to bridge — a move that will make it hard for anyone who doesn’t know better to recognize both as the work of one architect — is itself indicative of Pelli’s new contextualism. The building matches one Minneapolis — in keeping with the Dain Tower by Holabird & Root, a contemporary of the original Northwestern Bank building. The stripped down skybridge, on the other hand, eschews all historical reference to either buildings or bridges, matching this city’s skyways, most of which are frankly Modern structures.

So, by Pelli’s own criteria, is Norwest right for Minneapolis? In the words of one local resident, “When I first saw what they were proposing, I was disappointed that there wasn’t more flair to it. But then as it went up, it seemed to fit in, and I realized it didn’t need any gimmicks.” That sounds not only right, but good. *Daralice D. Boles*





**Project:** *Norwest Center*  
(now Wells Fargo Center), Minneapolis

**Architects:** *Cesar Pelli & Associates, New Haven, Conn. (Cesar Pelli, principal for design; Fred Clarke, principal in charge; Jon Pickard, senior associate; Gregg Jones, Malcolm Roberts, associates; Michael Duddy, Roberto Espejo, Greg Jacobson, Anthony Markese, designers) with Kendall/Heaton Associates, Houston (William Kendall, principal in charge; Larry Burns, project architect; Wayne Shull, project manager).*

**Client:** *Gerald D. Hines Interests*

**Site:** *Southeast half of city block bounded by 6th Street, Marquette Avenue, 7th Street, and Nicollet Mall.*

**Program:** *1.192 million-sq-ft., 57-story office tower with four levels of parking and a truck dock below grade.*

**Structural System:** *steel frame with concrete-filled metal deck floors and curtain walls. Four "supercolumns" handle wind loading.*

**Major Materials:** *Northern pink buff, Minnesota stone (equivalent to Kasota), white Carrara marble, New Imperial granite, reflective glass, aluminum for exterior wall; honed Crema Valencia marble, polished Rosa Verona marble, Stony Creek granite, bronze for lobby.*

**Consultants:** *CBM Engineers, structural; I.A. Naman & Associates, mechanical; Jules Fisher & Paul Marantz, architectural lighting design; Pentagram Design and Calori & Vanden-Eynden, graphics; Siah Armajani, sky bridge, designed in collaboration with Cesar Pelli; Schiff & Associates, security; Twin City Testing, geotechnical; BRW, civil engineering; Minnesota Valley Surveyors, land surveyors; Persohn/Hahn Associates, elevators; Richard A. Peterson & Associates, code; Peter M. Muller, curtain wall; Cerami & Associates, acoustical; Techcord Consulting Group, building controls.*

**General Contractor:** *Mortenson/ Schal*

**Costs:** *withheld*

**Photos:** *Balthazar and Christian Korab, except as noted*