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CAMBRIDGE HISTORICAL COMMISSION

831 Massachusetts Avenue, 2nd Fl., Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139
Telephone: 617 349 4683 TTY: 617 349 6112
E-mail: histcomm@cambridgema.gov URL: www.cambridgema.gov/Historic

APPLICATION FOR CERTIFICATE

- 1. The undersigned hereby applies to the Cambridge Historical Commission for a Certificate of (check one box): [X] Appropriateness, [ ] Nonapplicability, or [ ] Hardship, in accordance with Chapter 40C of the Massachusetts General Laws and/or Chapter 2.78 of the Municipal Code.
2. Address of property: 271 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts
3. Describe the proposed alteration(s), construction or demolition in the space provided below: (An additional page can be attached, if necessary).

271 Cambridge Street - designed in parts by Koetter/Kim Architects in 1983 and again in 1989 - is the both the product of its immediate context and a unique architectural lineage.
The intent of our proposed renovation is to transition a structure designed in the 1980s for a single tenant (the Hastings-Tapley Insurance Company) to a multi-user building attractive to today's office users.
Our goals are to simultaneously bring more daylight into the building while remaining faithful to its intellectual pedigree. As such, we propose increasing glazed areas in the lobby and along the ground level, in the central panel on the 2nd floor, and along the 2nd level of the 1989 addition; each with a very careful eye toward's Koetter/Kim's original architectural intent.

I certify that the information contained herein is true and accurate to the best of my knowledge and belief. The undersigned also attests that he/she has read the statements printed on the reverse.

Name of Property Owner of Record: 271 CS Property LLC (Phil Smith = Manager)
Mailing Address: 271 Cambridge Street, Cambridge MA 02141
Telephone/Fax: 617-939-8252 E-mail: psmith@vccre.com
Signature of Property Owner of Record: [Handwritten Signature]
Name of proponent, if not record owner:
Mailing Address:
Telephone/Fax: E-mail:

(for office use only):
Date Application Received: 8/10/20 Case Number: 4323 Hearing Date: 9/10/2020
Type of Certificate Issued: Date Issued:

# **271 Cambridge Street**

**BUTZ + KLUG 2020.08.18**



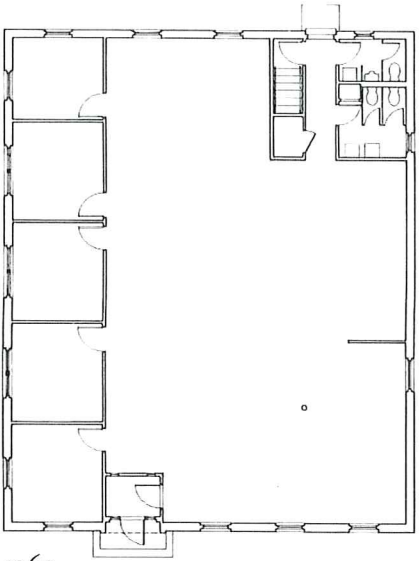
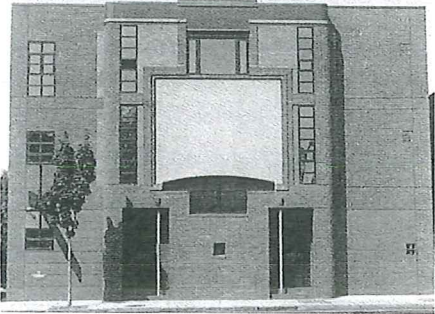
271 Cambridge Street  
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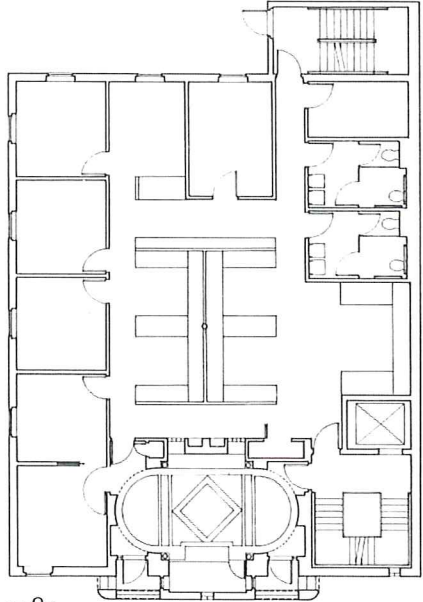
# Background

271 Cambridge Street began its modern history as a single-story building, itself built on the abandoned foundation of a nineteenth century church. It was tripartite in its organization reflecting the foundation of the church and the organization of many buildings of Cambridge Street.

The first phase of the present building at 271 Cambridge Street began in 1983. Although Fred Koetter and Suzie Kim had made several substantial proposals in the Boston area, they were theoretical in nature, and this project for the Hastings-Tapley Insurance Company's headquarters was the first substantial commission for their firm. The firm would go on to have an international reach both in the profession and in academia.



1969



1983

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## Intellectual Heritage

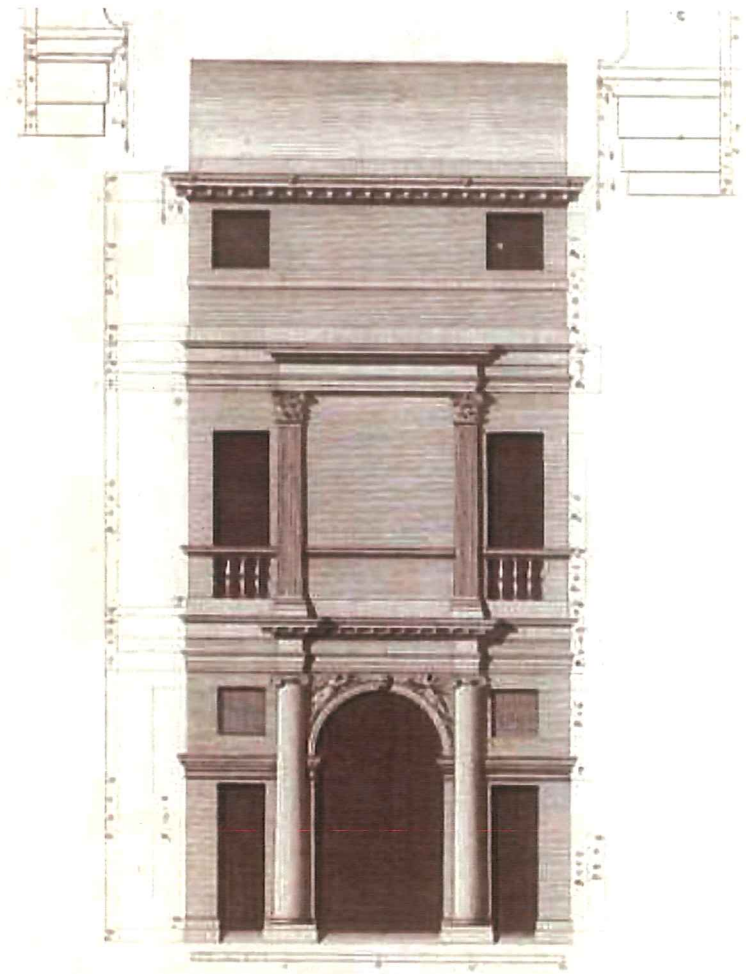
Although the format of the building is very much a product of its immediate and local context, it is equally derived of a lineage of unique, peculiar, and fascinating architectural thought. In an article entitled *Mannerism and Modernism* by Colin Rowe, a mentor of Fred Koetter and Suzie Kim and with whom Fred would go on to co-author the influential book *Collage City*, this intellectual legacy is described in great and compelling detail. Rowe identifies a genre of architecture that has persisted since at least the 16th Century, a genre that embraces that impulse to do the opposite of what may be intuitively obvious and create something provocative and compelling. There are dominant motifs in this genre - for example, its characteristic 'blank panel' - but what is more important is the investment of thought and careful detail required to make what otherwise would be at best an oddity, and at worst a mistake, into an engaging and significant piece of architecture. Two of the most relevant examples cited by Rowe are:

- Casa di Palladio (aka Casa Cogollo), Vicenza, Italy.
- Villa Schwob, La Chau-de-Fonds, Switzerland.

## Casa di Palladio, Vicenza, Italy

The facade of this palazzo by Andrea Palladio in 1559 was designed with the intent of elevating the civic status of its owner. The activity of the architecture is described by Colin Rowe:

*"[T]he breaking forward of the Ionic Entablature about the arch provides a direct vertical movement through the two orders, emphasizing their interdependence, so that the panel retains the focus developed by the arch below, but seems otherwise to read as an intrusion projected upwards into the 'Piano Nobile.' Its anomalous character is further increased by details which suggest a respect for the functions of the domestic façade; and thus such a feature as the balcony rail of the windows, which emerges from behind the pilasters to appear in the panel as a continuous string course, only serves to exaggerate [the Panel], as it was presumably intended."*



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## Casa di Palladio, Vicenza, Italy

Colin Rowe's description of the Casa Palladio illustrates the importance and care required in the detailing of a building that endeavors to undertake the task of inversion. Note the lack of ornament and detail around the square and rectangular openings that flank the central panel. This is an unusual level of simplicity and abstraction for a building that adheres to the Classical cannon. These openings stand in stark contrast to the careful and elaborate detail surrounding the Panel itself.



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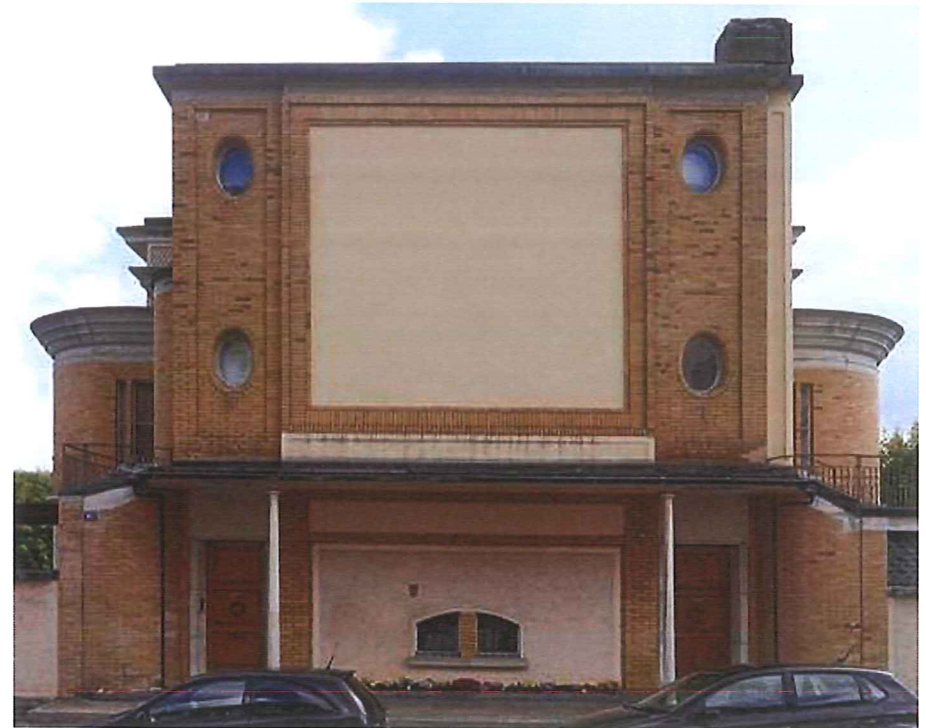
## Villa Schwob, La Chau-de-Fonds, Switzerland

The Villa was designed by Le Corbusier around 1918 and was one his first works of a significant scale. Again from Colin Rowe:

*“Contemplating this façade for any length of time, one is both ravished and immensely irritated. Its moldings are of extreme finesse, lucid and complex; the slightly curved window reveals are of considerable suavity; the contrast of wall above and below the canopy is permanently exciting; the sharp and dogmatic change of texture refreshes and soothes; but the blank surface is both a disturbance and a delight. The masses and the modeling impel the eye towards it, but it is the activity of emptiness, which the intellect is called upon to enjoy.”*

Further, notice the necessity of a cogent level of detail required to lead both the eye and the intellect to Rowe’s conclusion:

*“The masses and the modeling impel the eye towards it, but it is the activity of emptiness, which the intellect is called upon to enjoy.”*



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## Villa Schwob, La Chau-de-Fonds, Switzerland

Again observe the detailing. The Panel is given a careful level of relief; three frames of masonry of varying widths protrude from the facade. The supporting actors – the oval windows, equally carefully detailed in contrast – recede from the surface of the building. Also note the odd little arched window at the center between the two identical entry doors.



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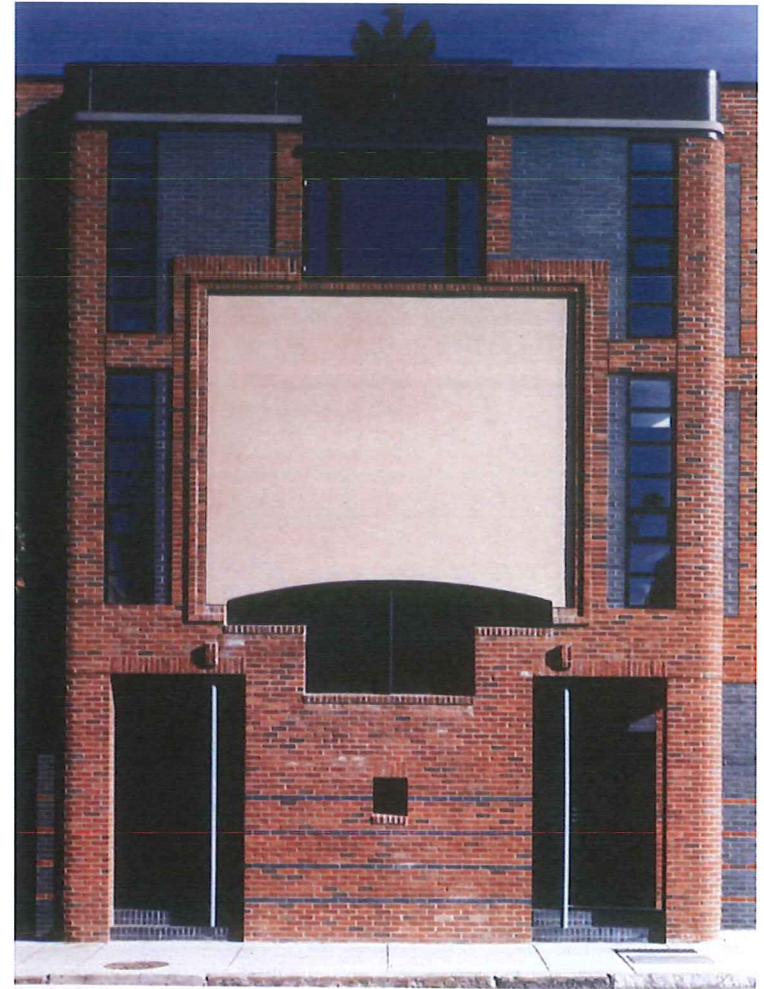
## 271 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA

271 Cambridge Street extends the legacy of these unique buildings. The impulse to deny what is expected and to create a compelling work by inverting, perplexing, and ultimately delighting is what motivates almost every detail. Its kinship to these two precedents is obvious in its overt use of similar motifs but more importantly in its intellectual motivations.

More latitude is taken with the autonomy of the blank Panel. Its frame, similar in construction to that of the panel at Villa Schwob, is allowed to meander and include the central window above while being abruptly interrupted by an overlapping arched window below. The result, a vertical axis relating five elements: the very small and deep square window at the ground level, the intruding arched window below, the tripartite window above, and the surmounting eagle all vie for attention as central figures, but ultimately succumb to the blankness of the central Panel where the eye must ultimately come to rest.

## 271 Cambridge Street

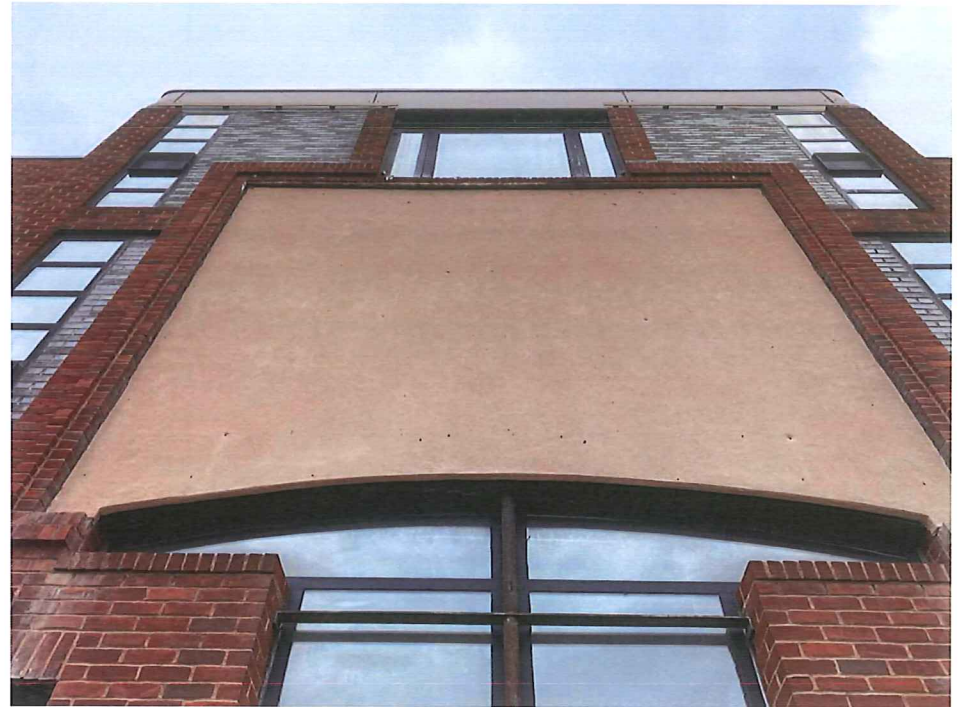
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## 271 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA

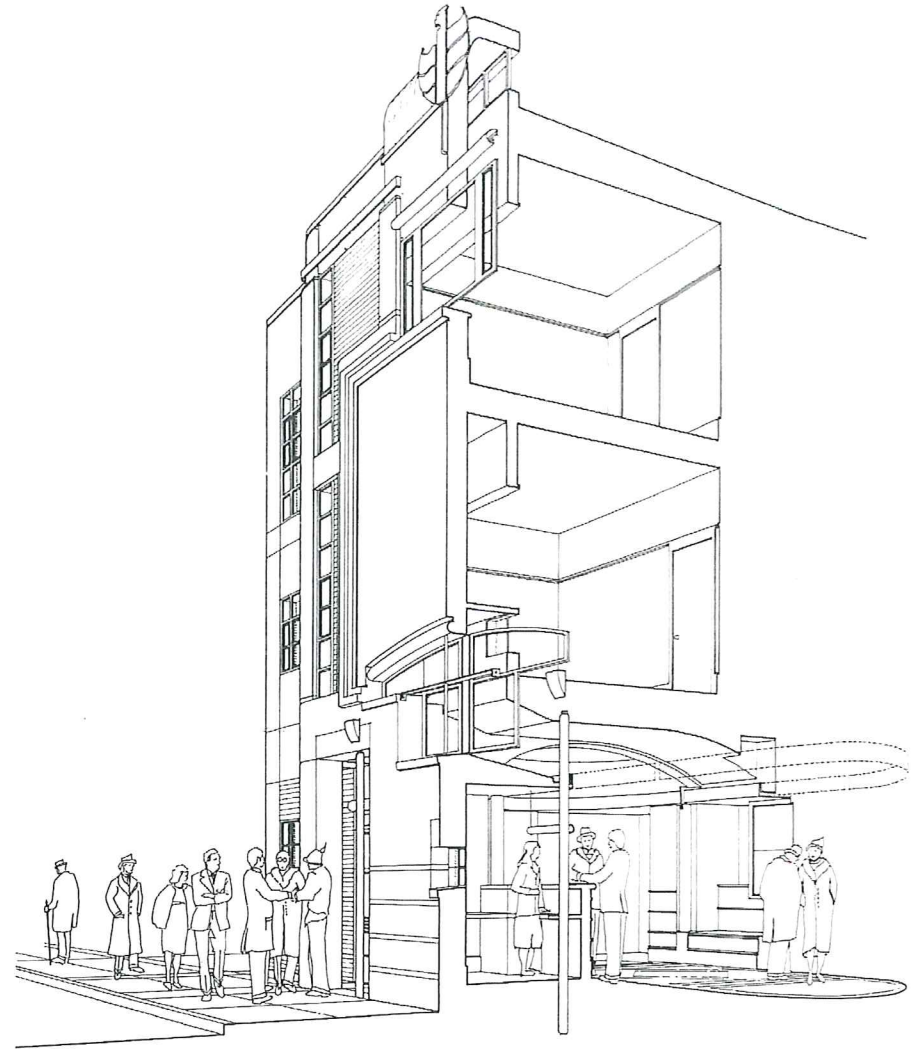
Like Villa Schwob, the level of texture around the Panel stands in contrast to the unusual 'flatness' of the adjacent windows. Only 1/4" separates the window frame and the face of the building, and only another 1/8" further separates that frame from the glass. This shallowness insures an emphasis on the emptiness of the building's central figure, the Panel.



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## 271 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, MA

This is a section perspective of the building produced by the Koetter/Kim in 1983. It describes the effort to bring natural light into the lobby despite security concerns. It also depicts the clever light monitor – ultimately value engineered out – on the third floor just behind the eagle. And if there is any doubt as to the influence of Le Corbusier, the central figure in the grouping of three individuals just outside the entrance is "Corb" himself with his characteristic round glasses.

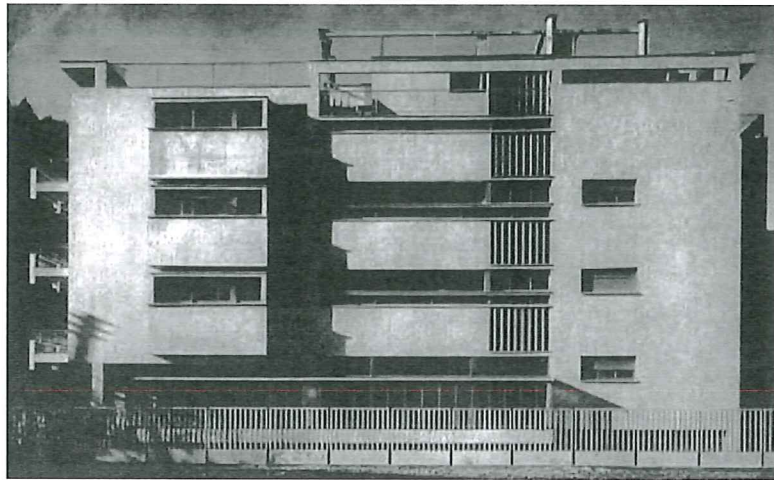


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## 271 Cambridge Street: The Addition

Around 1987 Koetter/Kim was again commissioned by the Hastings-Tapley Insurance Company to design an addition to 271 Cambridge Street. In an intraoffice competition, John Reed, a young architect then and now a Design Principal at Cannon Design in NYC, was the author of the most provocative proposal. Relying on the work of Giuseppe Terragni, a modernist Italian architect, John proposed 'stretching' the facade, making it more taught, as though the addition had been slid, out of the original building, like a series of drawers.



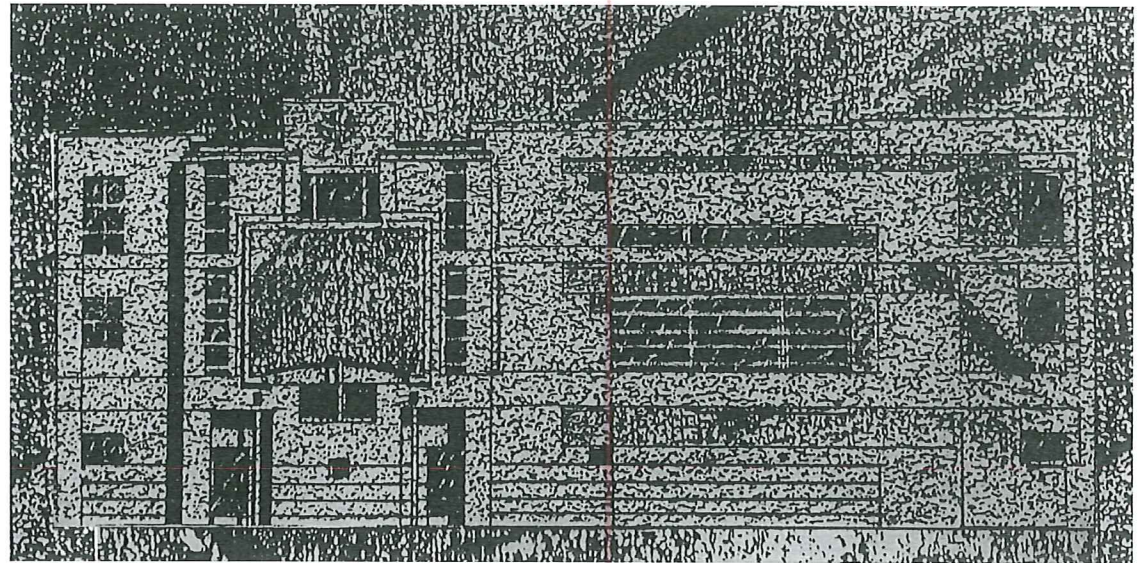
Gasa Giuliani Frigerio by Giuseppe Terragni (1939), Como, Italy.

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Original Building

Addition

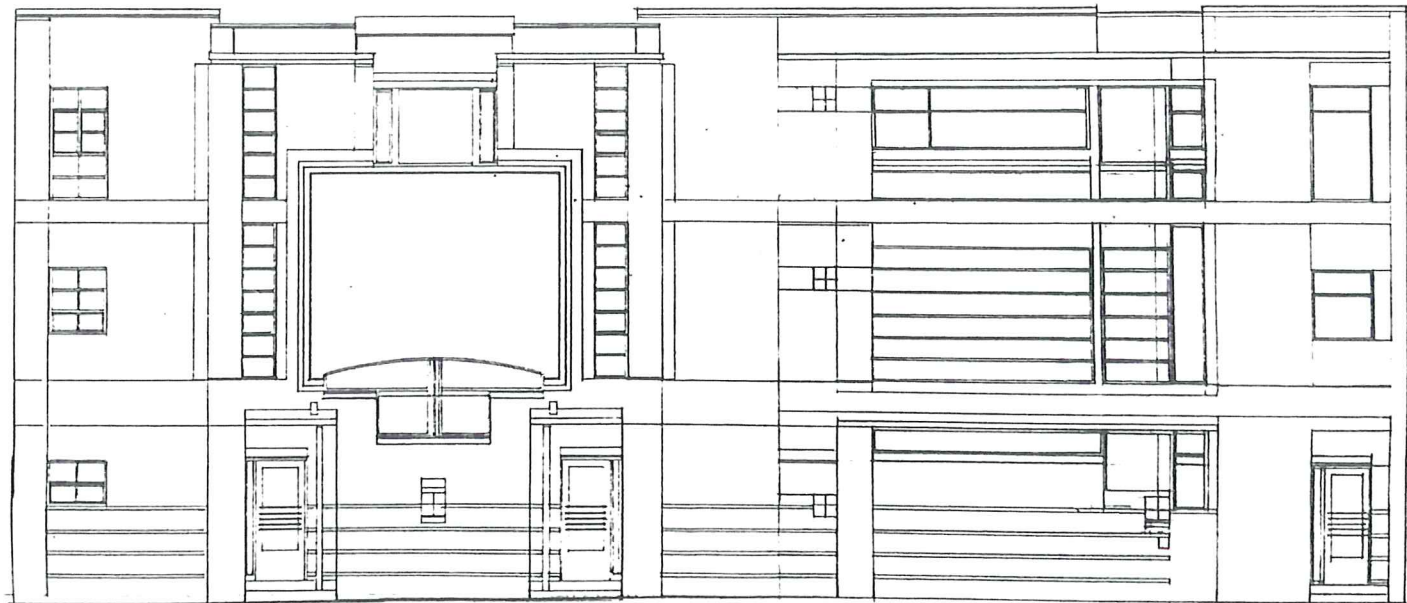


John Reed's original Sketch of Intraoffice competition winning sketch (1987).



## 271 Cambridge Street: The Addition

The further development of the proposal adhered to the concept of 'stretching' the original façade. Note the expanse of glass on the second level.



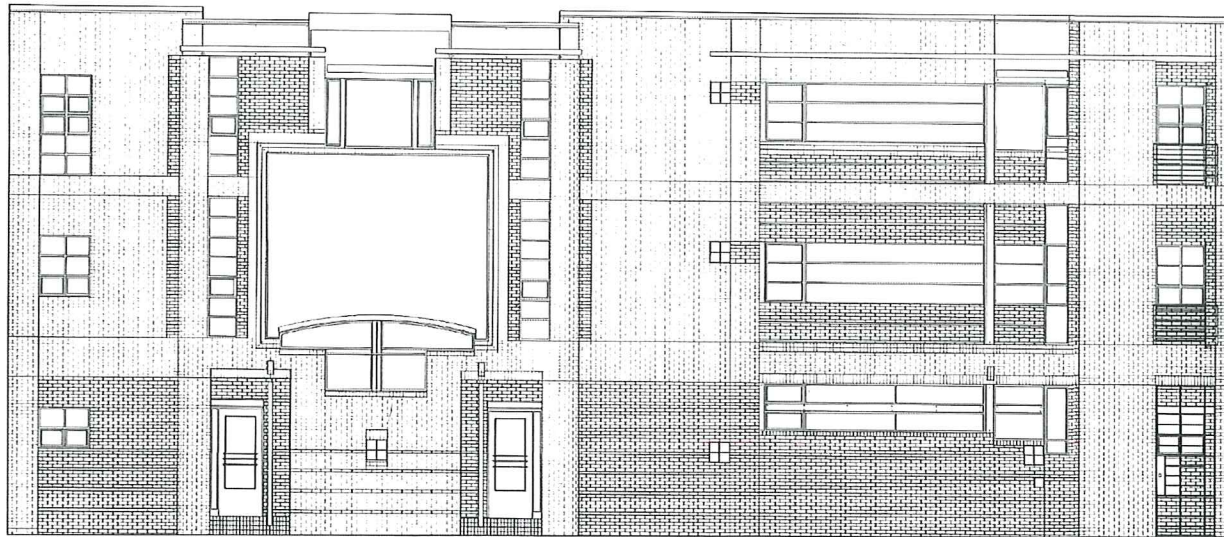
271 Cambridge Street addition as developed and proposed by Koetter/Kim.

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## 271 Cambridge Street: The Addition

The building as it is built today is the result of continued development; note for instance the railings on the right side of the building, an attempt to draw the eye to the far edge creating a companion to the three windows on the left side of the building.

This final design is also the result of economic realities; the expanse of glass on the second level was reduced to realize some cost savings.



271 Cambridge Street addition as constructed.

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## 271 Cambridge Street: Proposed Alterations

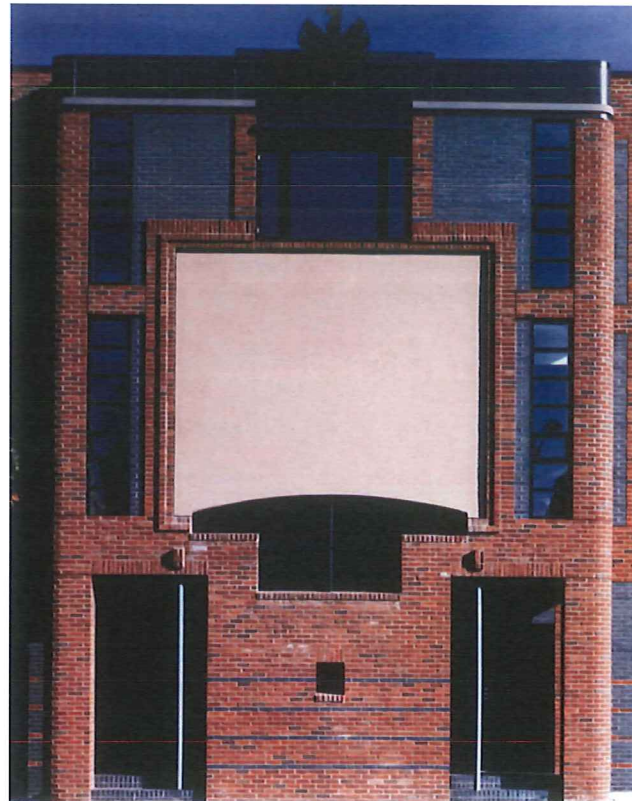
The motivations for the proposed alterations are as follows:

- The chief impetus is to allow more daylight into the building addressing the needs of modern tenants as well as contributing to the commercial life of Cambridge Street. The whole building has minimal fenestration, especially the original section, and at the time of construction in the 1980's the street level was developed with security in mind.
- Much like the addition of 1990, an accompanying goal is to preserve and enhance the intellectual investment and architectural ideas of this unique building.



## The Panel

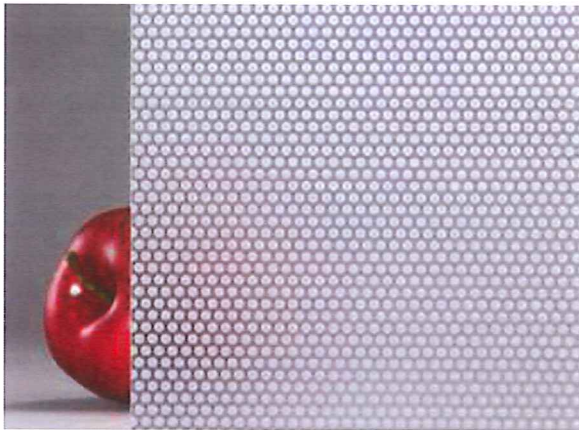
The current entirely opaque Panel presents a significant obstruction to daylight. Yet simply opening the area would subvert its aspirations. We propose replacing the majority of the surface with porcelain fritted glass with a significant degree of opacity. This would create an apparently solid surface during the day (enhanced when in direct sunlight; and mitigating heat gain on the interior). This expanse of fritted glass is framed on either side by thin vertical transparent glass to establish a contrasting surface. The arch below further creates a level of tension in the surface of the fritted panel; like a piece of fabric held at its corners and stretched taught.



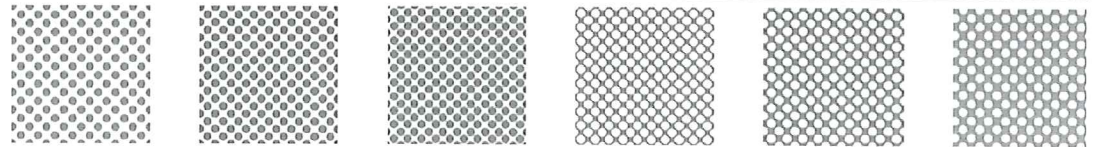
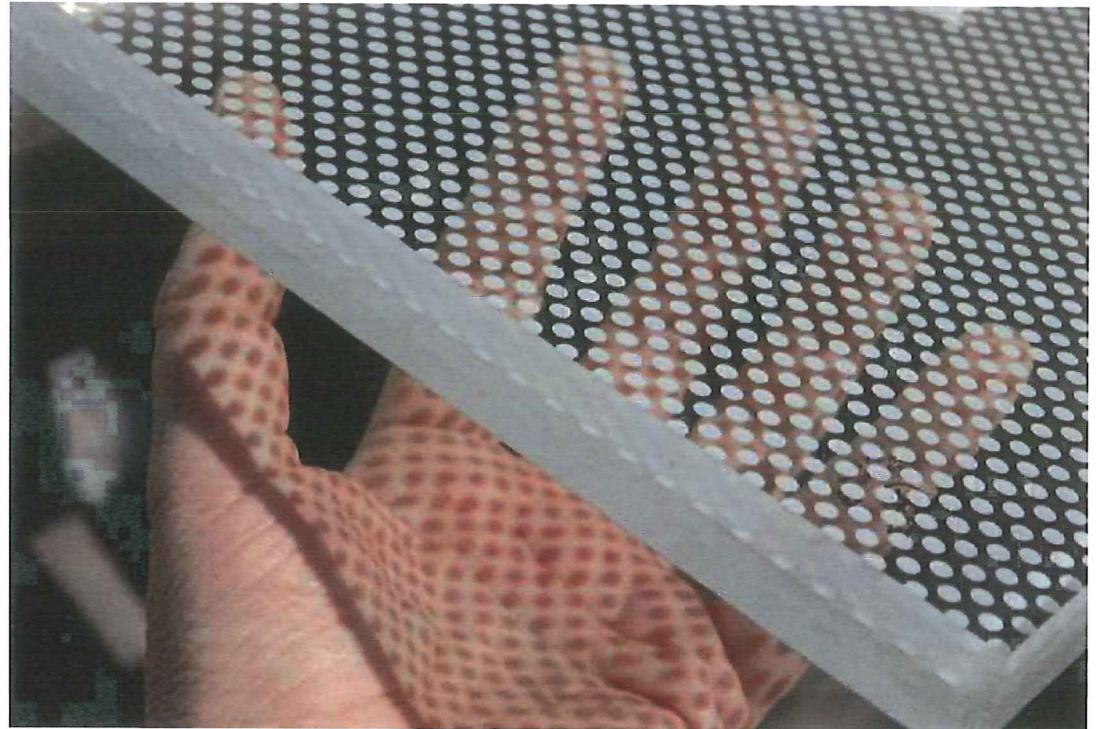
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## The Panel: Fritted Glass



Example of porcelain fritted glass.



Ceramic frit opacities.

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## 271 Cambridge Street: Proposed Alterations



271 Cambridge Street as built.

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## 271 Cambridge Street: Proposed Alterations



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## 271 Cambridge Street: Proposed Alterations



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## 271 Cambridge Street: Proposed Alterations



271 Cambridge Street with modified Panel + enlarged area of glass at second and ground floors.

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## 271 Cambridge Street: Proposed Alterations

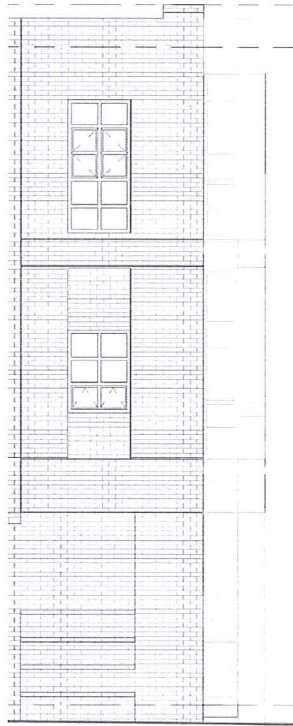


Existing lobby windows.

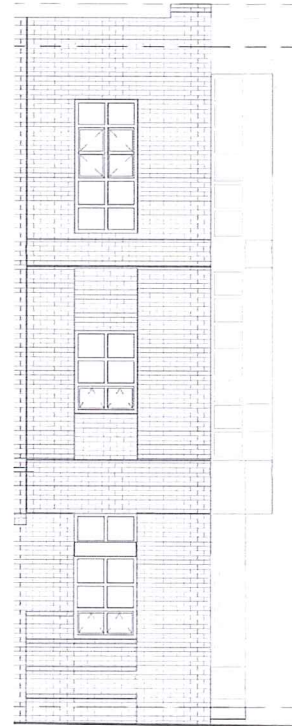


Proposed enlarged lobby windows.

## 271 Cambridge Street: Proposed Alterations



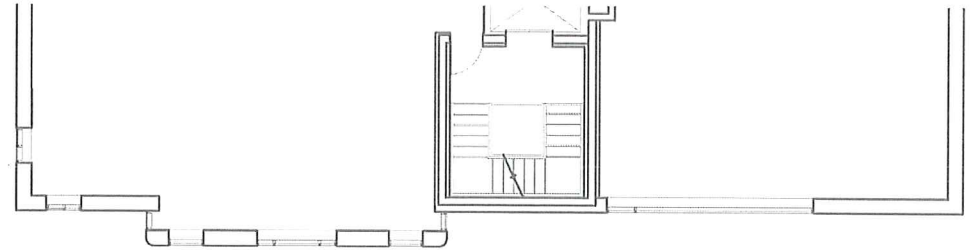
Existing west elevation.



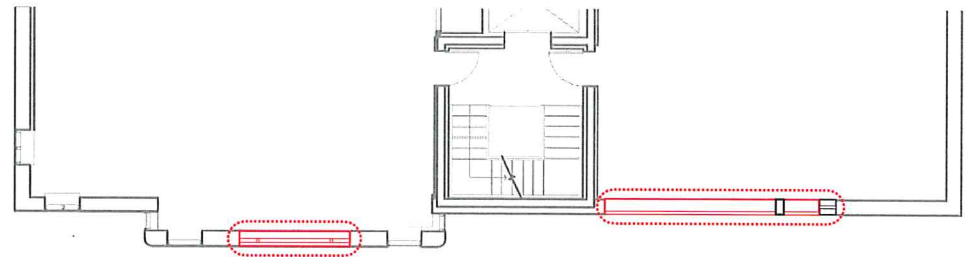
Proposed west elevation, with ground floor window addition.

# 271 Cambridge Street: Proposed Alterations

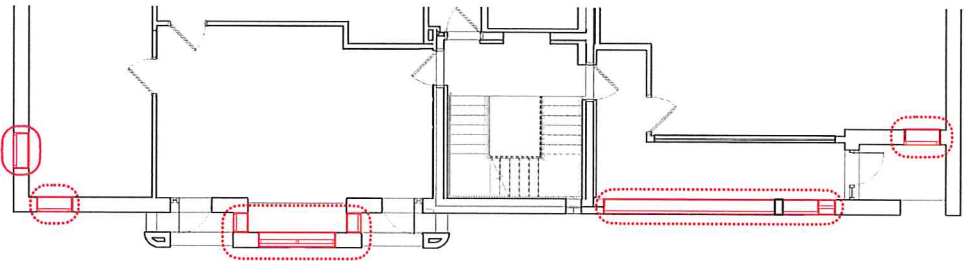
3rd floor.




2nd floor.



Ground floor.



 Proposed enlarged/new fenestration.



## 271 Cambridge Street: Proposed Alterations



271 Cambridge Street as proposed.

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## 271 Cambridge Street: Side-by-Side Comparison



271 Cambridge Street as built.



271 Cambridge Street as proposed.

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