

MIT List Center

I.M. Pei

This is the Wiesner Building from 1985, designed by architect I.M. Pei. By the early 1980s, Pei, an MIT alumnus, had already executed three nearby buildings on the MIT campus. At the time of this project, I.M. Pei's son, Sandi, had recently joined his father's firm, I.M. Pei & Partners. And this was one of his first projects.

The connection to MIT to my father made me initially quite excited to be involved in such an interesting project.

At the time, the area where this building now stands marked the eastern edge of the MIT campus.

We were asked to position this building as a gateway, as the first one would encounter on coming to this part of the MIT campus. And this is why the entrance to our building is really defined by this concrete portal, 40 feet high.

Pei and his team were charged with designing a building that would house nine different academic programs that had been up until that point scattered around the campus. They were all associated with emerging technologies.

We knew when we started this project that the programs were going to evolve. And consequently, we did not want to define the building architecturally in a very specific way. We arrived, inevitably, at a building that would be quite straightforward and simple. It became this white aluminum panel building, partly for economy reasons, but also because the building itself had to be, essentially, a very flexible building.

Inside, a soaring atrium opens up the space-- providing light, air, and places to congregate. The Wiesner Building was the first art and architecture collaboration commissioned through the MIT Percent-For-Art, a program of the List Visual Arts Center. Begun in 1968, the initiative allocates a portion of the cost of new building projects or major renovations to the commissioning or purchase of art for public space. In addition to Pei, MIT commissioned three artists-- Richard Fleischner, Scott Burton, and Kenneth Noland-- to take part in the building's design. Sandi Pei:

What truly interested me and drew me to this project, it was the opportunity for this collaboration.

Artist Kenneth Noland designed a colorful five-story mural. Scott Burton designed the settee, benches, and balustrade that wraps the first floor balcony and leads downstairs, as well as a granite bench in the atrium's lower level, and Richard Fleischner, the exterior courtyard. To hear more about these works of art, please look for the identifying signage.