

ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

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RECORD INTERIORS 2014

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SHERI SANZONE
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BASKET CASE A lattice screen (above) made from a wood-covered mixture of paper and resin wraps the street-facing elevations of the Aspen Art Museum. Shigeru Ban Architects chose its brown color to evoke the bricks found on nearby buildings in downtown Aspen. On the sidewalk in front of the building (opposite), in a parklike “commons” area, are two wavy wooden benches.

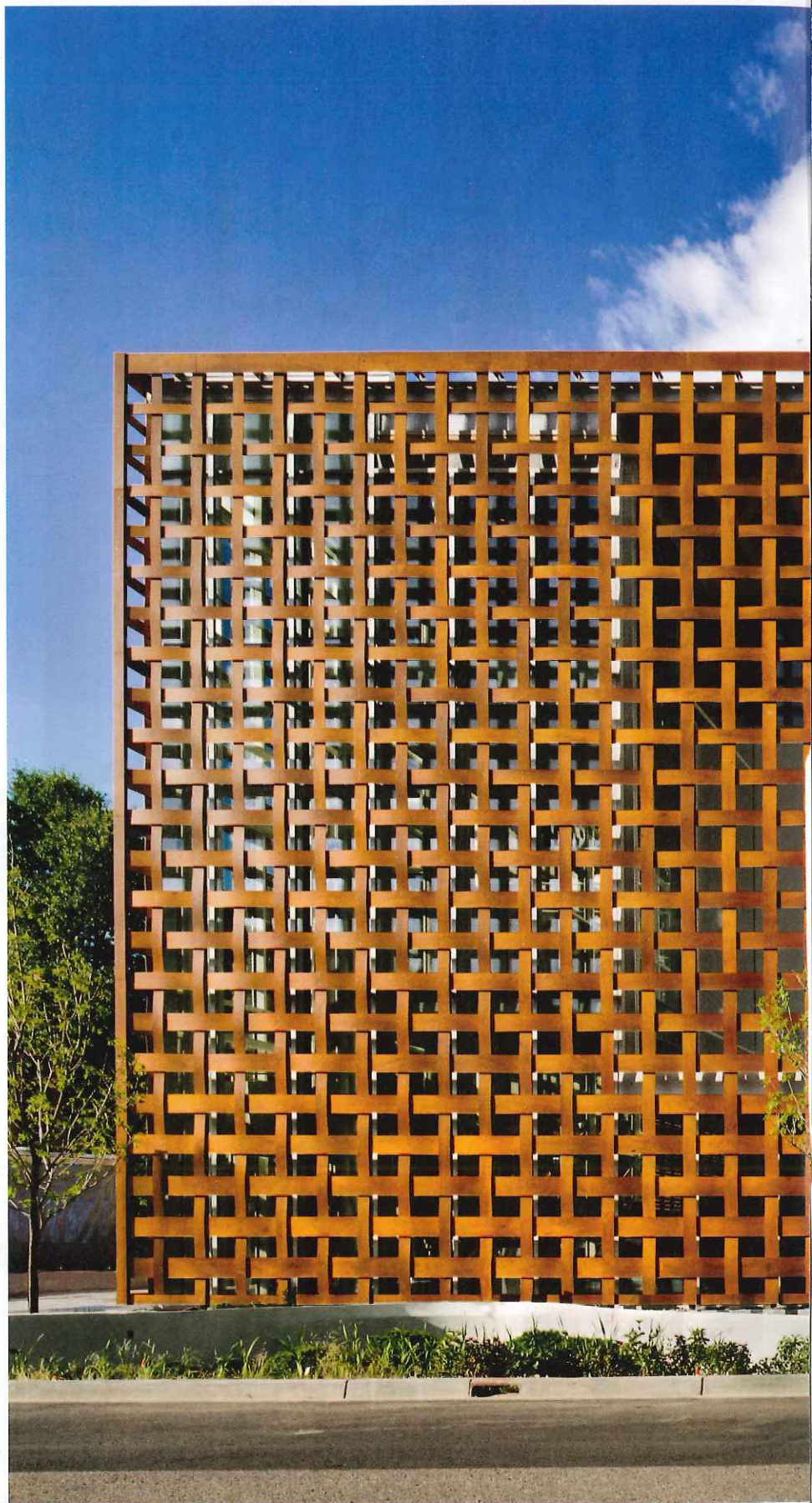
Stand on the corner of South Spring Street and East Hyman Avenue in downtown Aspen, Colorado, and you see two entrances to Shigeru Ban’s box-like Aspen Art Museum, his first completed project in the United States since winning the 2014 Pritzker Architecture Prize. To your right is the main entrance, a recessed section in the building’s striking woven-lattice exterior. To your left is a smaller cutout leading to a 10-foot-wide grand staircase, sandwiched between the woven screen and a glass curtain wall. Walk up the stairs, and you’ll find yourself in the rooftop sculpture garden, with its spectacular views of Aspen’s ski slopes and 12,095-foot-high Independence Pass.

If Ban had his way, this is how all visitors would enter the museum. “I wanted to make something very site-specific,” he says. “You go to the rooftop first, enjoy the beautiful view, then come down one floor at a time to see the art. It’s the same kind of experience as skiing. You take the ski lift up, enjoy the view, and then ski down the mountain.”

Museum director and chief curator Heidi Zuckerman Jacobson sees things differently. “When I take people through the museum,” she says, “I do the opposite, because I feel like it becomes increasingly spectacular as you go up. I like the big ‘mega moment’ at the end.”

No matter how the museum experience connects to its context, it’s fitting that Ban’s first American museum is located in Aspen, which has a rich history of forward-thinking architecture—even if several of its most significant works are now lost. Structures by Eero Saarinen, Herbert Bayer, Harry Weese, and Buckminster Fuller, to name a few, have come and gone. These days, the city is better known for its luxury vacation homes, and, if you know where to look, you can spot houses by John Lautner, Peter Gluck, and Antoine Predock, as well as one by Renzo Piano (RECORD, April 2014, page 104).

The 33,000-square-foot, \$45 million project adds to that architectural legacy, and replaces the Aspen Art Museum’s longtime home, a former power plant near the banks of the Roaring Fork River. Zuckerman Jacobson, who took the



Aspen Art Museum | Aspen, Colorado | Shigeru Ban Architects

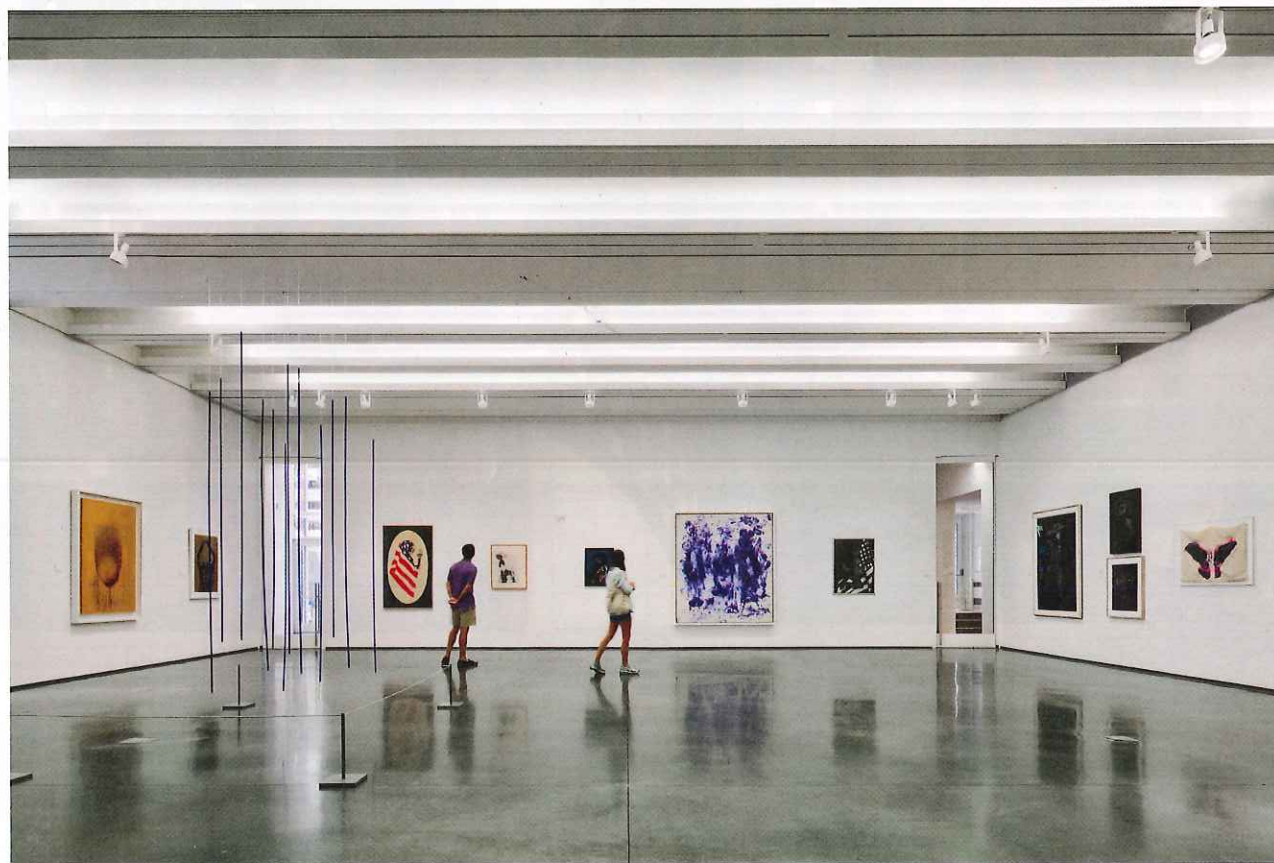
Woven into Place

Shigeru Ban's first U.S. building since winning the Pritzker adds a landmark to a city's downtown while looking out to its Rocky Mountain setting.

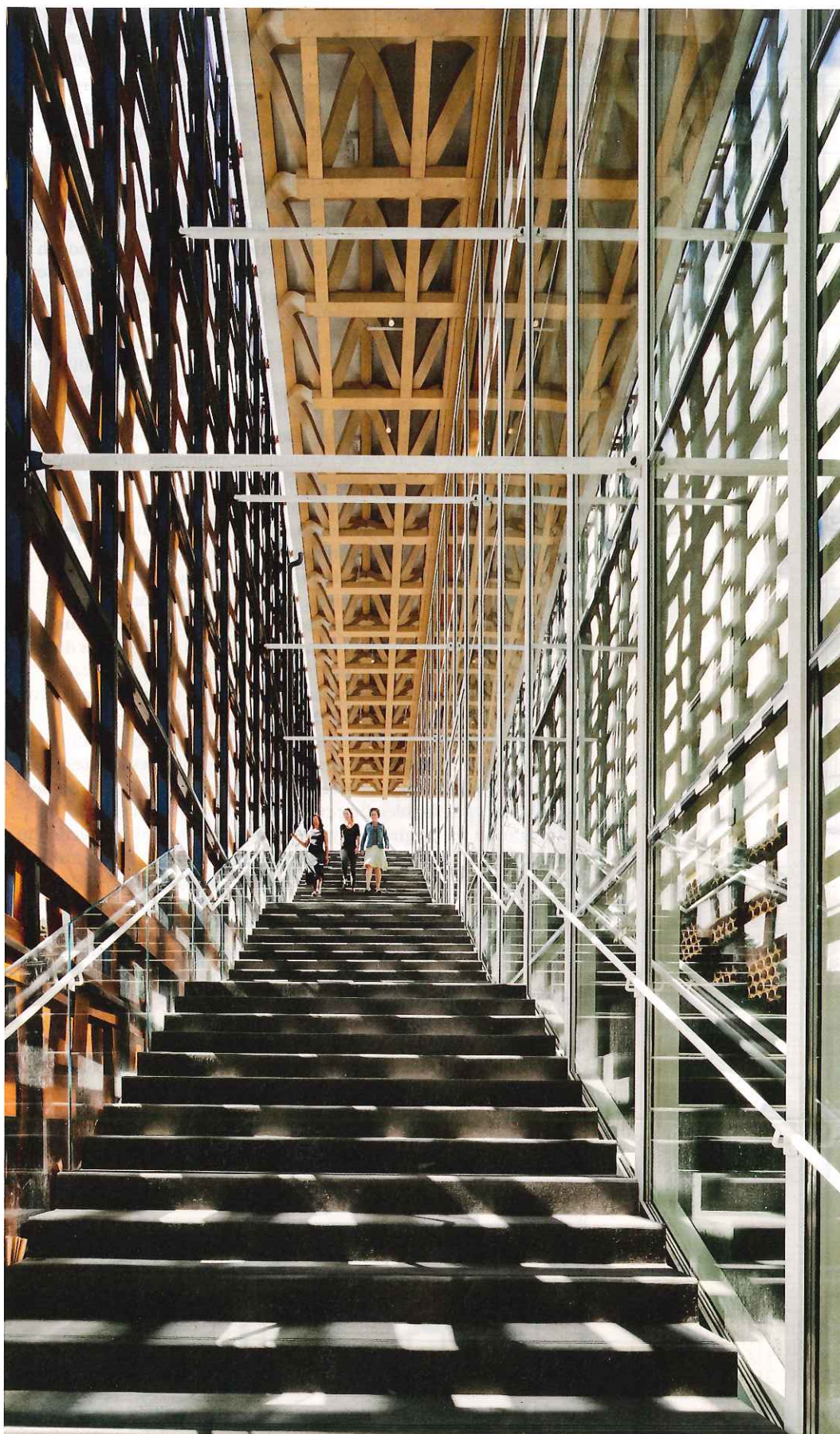
BY DAVID HILL

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL MORAN





ART AND CRAFT
 The architect used his signature paper tubes (above) in ground-floor walls, benches, and two ceilings. A grand stair (opposite) is split between the interior and the exterior of the building, running along both sides of a glass curtain wall. It climbs three stories from the sidewalk up to a roof terrace. The museum's six white-box galleries (one shown at left) not only lack columns, but light switches and sensors are all located in the ceilings and floors for uninterrupted art viewing.



museum's helm in 2005, led efforts to move to a larger facility, and in 2008, the museum announced the selection of Ban, from a list of 36 firms under consideration by the museum, to design a new building. His original scheme, for a sloping site in a five-acre swath of downtown—part of a multi-million-dollar redevelopment plan to create a new civic center—was scrapped in 2009 when voters rejected the sale of a former youth center that would have been razed to make room for the museum. After the vote, museum officials decided to look elsewhere.

For the new, far more constrained site, in the heart of downtown Aspen, Ban conceived a hybrid concrete-steel-and-wood structure enclosed on two sides by glass walls set behind the woven screen. The museum is a simple box inserted into the streetscape, but one that is open to its surroundings through a controlled series of sight lines. "I didn't just want to make a black-box building shielded from its context," Ban says.

From the exterior, the museum's main feature is the basket-weave cladding that covers its two street-facing

credits

ARCHITECT: Shigeru Ban Architects – Shigeru Ban, principal; Dean Maltz, partner; Nina Freedman, director of projects; Zachary Moreland, project architect

EXECUTIVE ARCHITECT: Cottle Carr Yaw Architects

ENGINEERS: KL&A, Création Holz – Hermann Blumer (structural); Beaudin Ganze Consulting Engineers (m/e/p, IT, AV); Sopris (civil)

CONSULTANTS: Front (building envelope); Gen3 (woven screen); Spearhead (specialty timber); L'Observatoire International (lighting)

GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Turner Construction

CLIENT: Aspen Art Museum

SIZE: 33,000 square feet

PROJECT COST: \$45 million

COMPLETION DATE: August 2014

SOURCES

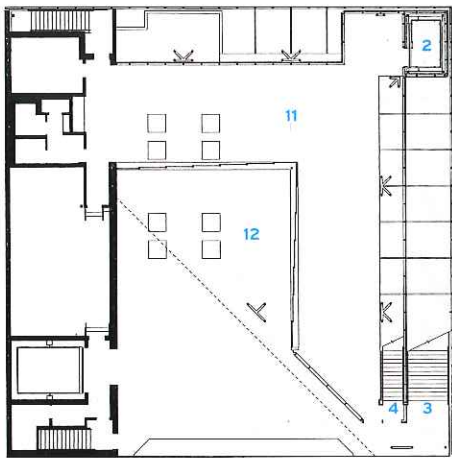
CURTAIN WALL: Harmon

GLASS: Safti First, EFCO (curtain wall); Agnora, Panda, Jockimo, Viracon (other glazing)

METAL PANELS: Elward

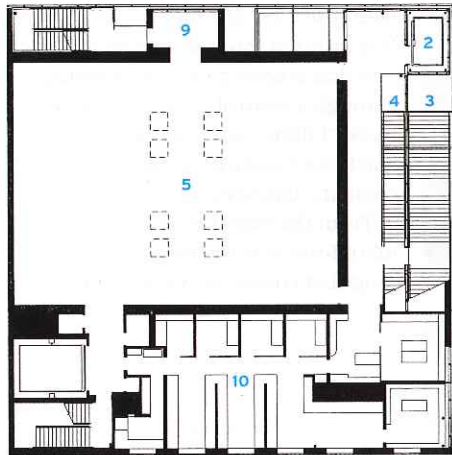
WOVEN SCREEN: Prodema

ROOF MEMBRANE: Firestone



THIRD FLOOR

- 1 ENTRY LOBBY
- 2 GLASS ELEVATOR
- 3 GRAND STAIR (OUTDOOR)
- 4 GRAND STAIR (INDOOR)
- 5 GALLERY
- 6 SHOP
- 7 EDUCATION WORKSHOP
- 8 LOADING
- 9 LOUNGE
- 10 OFFICES
- 11 CAFÉ
- 12 ROOF TERRACE



SECOND FLOOR



FIRST FLOOR

facades. The slats, “woven” together on-site, are made from a paper-and-resin composite sandwiched between two thin layers of brown okoume wood protected with a UV coating. The density of the weave changes from top to bottom and as it moves away from the corner of the building. Practically, the screen provides shade from the intense Colorado sunlight. Aesthetically, it helps give the museum a craftsmy, homemade quality, despite its bulky presence.

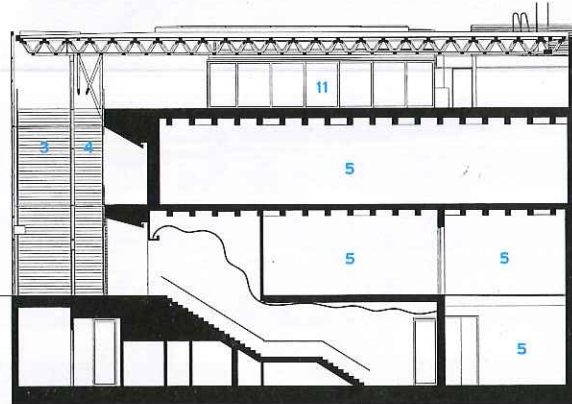
Because the museum has no permanent collection, the program called for open, flexible spaces that could accommodate a variety of contemporary artwork. All six galleries are column-free, with 14-foot-high ceilings. Ban calls them “very practical white boxes.” Although several galleries are partially illuminated by skylights, they are essentially blank slates. A show that pairs work by David Hammons and Yves Klein feels uncluttered, with paintings, drawings, and prints generously spaced on stark walls. The museum’s largest gallery, which occupies most of the second level, contains an exhibition of full-scale disaster-relief structures designed by Ban. It runs through October 5.

At almost every turn, visitors to the museum can look out to Aspen’s stunning mountain setting. A small lounge off the second-floor gallery, for example, has views through large openings in the lattice to nearby Red Mountain. The grand staircase actually has two parallel parts: that 10-foot-wide section between the glass skin and the exterior screen, and a 5-foot-wide section running inside the building, but either route offers glimpses of treetops and surrounding mountains. Even the large public elevator, in the building’s most prominent corner, has glass walls—Ban calls it a “moving glass room.”

The rooftop sculpture garden occupies roughly half of the museum’s third level, which also houses a small café behind sliding glass doors that open to create a spectacular indoor-outdoor space. A delicate triangular wood-truss roof, supported by discreet white steel columns, hovers over the café and part of the sculpture garden. The curvy trusses, stained with a light natural finish, were assembled without using any visible metal joints—only well-concealed screws. Like the exterior screen, the timber space frame—indeed, the entire museum—displays Ban’s gift for blending craftsmanship and architecture.

Going from the original hilly setting with an obvious connection to the topography to a tighter urban site could have led to an inward-looking building. But Ban is smart enough to know that Aspen is all about the out of doors. Here, even an art museum, with its climate-controlled galleries, needs to connect to nature. And that’s what the museum does, brilliantly. In Aspen, you can’t compete with the mountains. ■

Denver writer David Hill is a frequent RECORD contributor.



SECTION A - A

0 20 FT. 6 M.

