

Arch 464
ECS
Spring 2012

Name _____

Quiz #2

"Do Water and Poetry Mix?"



For this problem you are the water use consultant for the Poetry Foundation and John Ronan Architects. The Foundation's Board is not satisfied with the water conservation strategies employed on the site. The completed building features an urban garden that does little to control stormwater, much less celebrate it. Your role is to suggest greener and more poetic alternatives for water use and treatment throughout the building and on the site.

Context. The site is in a dense mixed-use neighborhood on Chicago's near north side. Chicago has a temperate climate with about 40 inches of rain each year. The building is connected to city water supply and sewers.

Description. *Architectural Record* described the project in its November 2011 issue. The text of that description is on pages 2–3 of the quiz.

READ THE ENTIRE QUIZ BEFORE YOU BEGIN!

IN THE ROMANTIC version of the story, creative genius endures poverty in pursuit of a higher calling. Rodolfo and Mimi's story would not have been *La Bohème* without the famously shabby garret, from which Rodolfo's poetry flowed. But as Chicago's new center for the Poetry Foundation by John Ronan Architects shows, a windfall of cold cash certainly can help when trying to make concrete an architectural idea.

The building, which opened in June, has its origins in a classic rags-to-riches story. *Poetry* magazine, founded by Harriet Monroe and published continuously since 1912, lurched along on a shoestring budget for most of its history. The magazine's life was turned upside down in 2002 when Indianapolis pharmaceutical heiress Ruth Lilly bequeathed about \$200 million to the little publication. Soon after, the Poetry Foundation (which grew out of the Modern Poetry Association) was formed. One of its early decisions was to build a permanent home for

Poetry, which had long housed its collection of books, manuscripts, and recordings in the basement of Chicago's Newberry Library and hosted readings in borrowed spaces around the city. Predictable controversy erupted when some of the foundation's trustees opposed the decision, decrying the hubristic palace they believed would result.

John Ronan says he steered clear of the internal politics, keeping his sights on the task at hand. Initial visioning sessions revolved around the question "What is a building for poetry?" "There's no paradigm for this building," the architect points out. In any case, what he has created is not trophy architecture. In keeping with the art form it serves, the new Poetry Foundation is a respectful, restrained building that employs an economy of means and methods, just as a good poem employs an economy of language.

While giving physical presence to the foundation, the new 22,000-square-foot building also had to reflect its mission: to help poets pursue their art, and to raise poetry's profile and bring it to the public by making it visible and accessible. The choice of this urban site—a corner lot in Chicago's North River neighborhood surrounded by residential towers—and the decision to make transparency central to the building design address these desires. In addition to offices, the client requested a library to house its 30,000 noncirculating volumes, a dedicated space for readings, and a gallery for related exhibitions. One of the more unusual requirements was for a garden that could be used to host events. Exploring this

element drove the initial design investigation and resulted in a 4,000-square-foot courtyard carved out of the site's north side.

To define the site's boundary—without rendering the building opaque or fortresslike—Ronan wrapped the perimeter with a corrugated, oxidized zinc wall, which, around



You enter the building through the open NE corner, walk diagonally through the garden to the vestibule entry.

the garden, becomes perforated and veil-like, blurring the lines between inside and out.

As you pass through a narrow corridor formed by the metal screen and the glass front of the performance space, you reach the garden and, through double-height windows, see the library's colorful patchwork of book spines lining shelves on two levels. Baltic birch plywood embraces the interior by forming the shelves as well as paneling. The building is conceived as layers of materials—zinc, glass, and wood—that compress and then separate to create different spaces. "The idea is that this spatial narrative unfolds as visitors move through and between these layers," says Ronan. "We were trying to achieve a transcendent materiality where we take very humble materials and then ennoble them in some way—not unlike what a poet would do with words." For example, the team spent months developing the sandblasted concrete (for the ground-level floors that extend out into the garden), which incorporates white silica and cement and specks of slag, lending it a warmth and complexity.

Inside, public spaces occupy the ground floor while the offices upstairs are organized according to operations: administrative, magazine and website, and programs. The north, garden-facing glass, which jogs in and out, admits abundant, diffuse light, even on

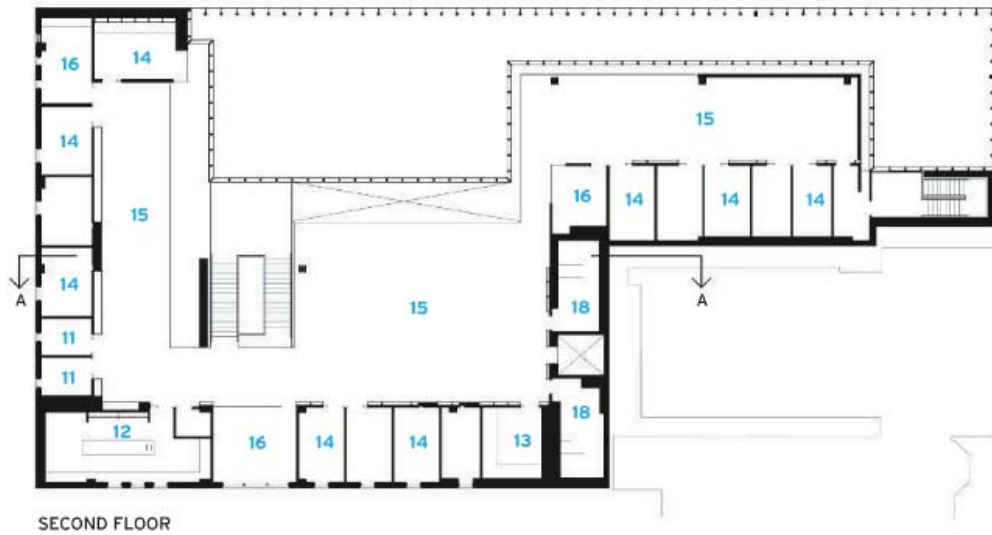
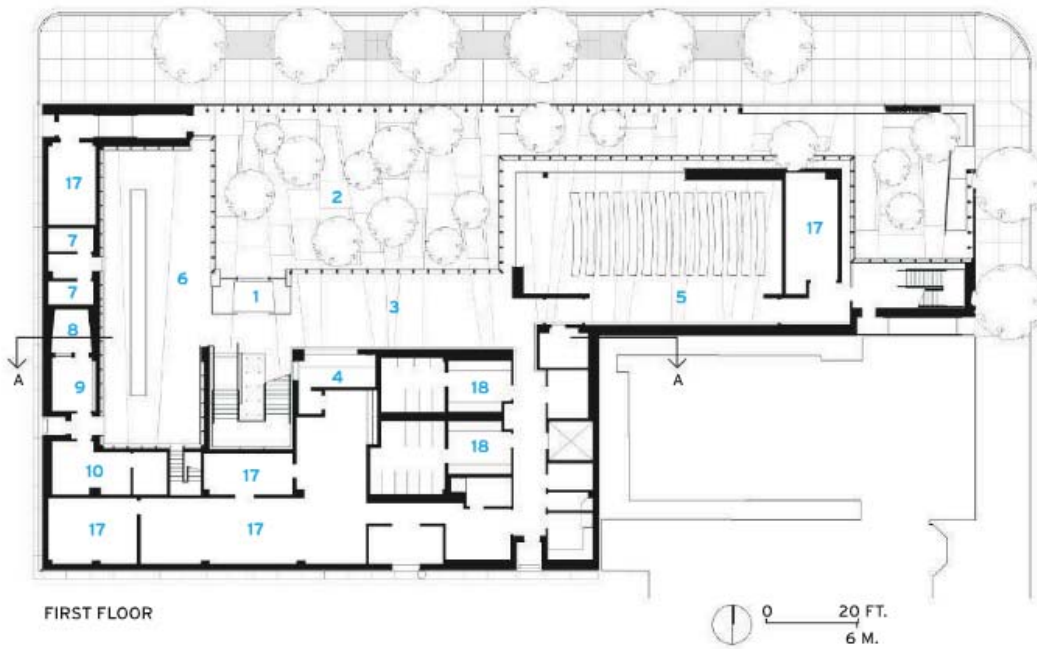


Photos on this page show the stark nature of the garden and the implied diagonal path through it.



an inclement day, and helps to visually connect the different spaces. To balance the conflicting demands of a building that celebrates its urban surroundings while functioning as a center of quiet work, the team employed a host of acoustic strategies, such as varied surface materials and an interior glass wall in the performance space, where poets read without amplification. During the day the foundation hums with the hushed business of the staff and visitors. At night, when it hosts readings, the building transforms into an elegant, diaphanous event space, as light and activity spill out into the garden and the street beyond.

Foundation president John Barr says that since the building's opening, use of the library and attendance at readings and functions have increased exponentially—and that, including its website, the foundation now reaches about 19 million people compared with just 10,000 Poetry subscribers previously. "A good poem has something indefinable, or magical, about it that keeps you coming back to experience it again," he says. "And our hope is that this building does that in architecture—it keeps people returning." ■

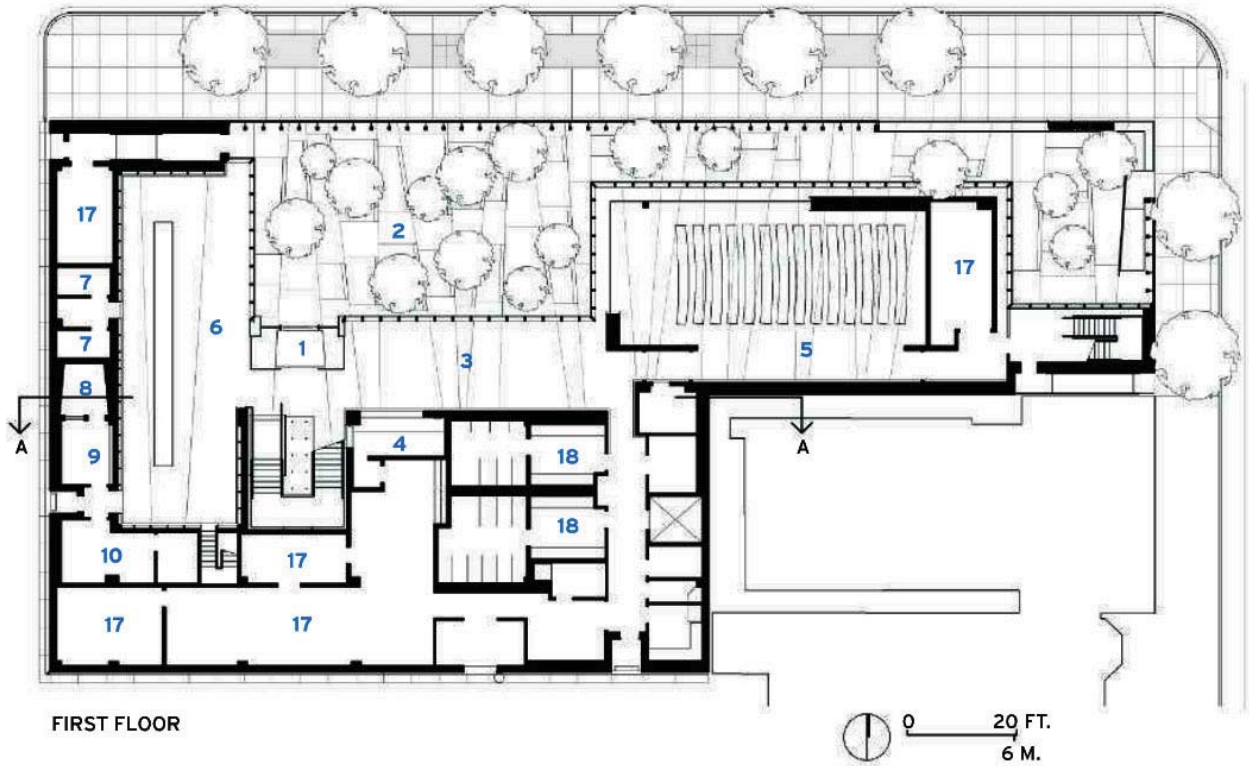


The stairway at the east end of the building provides roof and basement access.

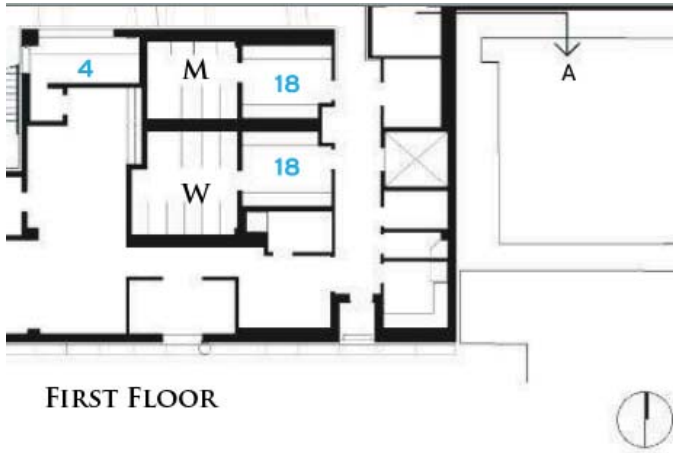
- 1 ENTRY VESTIBULE
- 2 GARDEN
- 3 GALLERY
- 4 RECEPTION
- 5 PERFORMANCE SPACE
- 6 LIBRARY
- 7 LISTENING ROOM
- 8 ISOLATION ROOM
- 9 CONTROL ROOM
- 10 WORKROOM
- 11 PROOFREADING
- 12 COPY ROOM
- 13 LAYOUT
- 14 OFFICE
- 15 OPEN OFFICE
- 16 CONFERENCE
- 17 MECHANICAL/ELECTRICAL/STORAGE
- 18 TOILET



- 3 pts. 1. Describe **three** strategies the architects could have planned to employ (but didn't) to manage stormwater. On the plan below **show** how each impacts the site plan. **Critique each** for its merits, aesthetics, and limitations on this site.



- 3 pts. 2. **Describe three** fixtures the architects could have planned to employ (but didn't) to demonstrate alternative means to deal with gray and black water. On the partial plans below show where each would be located in the building. **Critique each** for its merits, aesthetics, and limitations in this building.



4 pts. **3. Make two concept sketches that show how your suggestions in question 1 serve to improve both the stormwater management and usability of the garden. You may add other elements to your sketches. Call out and explain the improvements to the garden.**
