

# BAXTER HALL— A LABORATORY FOR THE HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

“We visualize the humanities building as a setting for courses focusing on the enormously complex problems of being a man—a creature who feels and dreams, loves and hates, hopes and despairs. Life is not confined to equations and laboratory experiments.”

Hallett Smith, chairman of the division of humanities, was writing to Arnold Beckman, president of Caltech’s board of trustees, in 1966, to describe the kind of home his faculty wanted for the humanities and social sciences.

The letter continued: “A building which houses these activities should symbolize the spirit in which they are pursued. It should not be stark or austere. It should have dignity and beauty. It should be spacious enough to encourage thought and contemplation. Let nobody ask of it what a passing tourist once asked about another Caltech building: ‘What do they make here?’ In the ideal humanities building, people make thoughts and insights and value judgments. The building should give that impression, even to a tourist.”

The years between that letter and its culmination in the dedication of the Donald E. Baxter, M.D., Hall of the Humanities and Social Sciences on May 10, 1971, were a time of much thought and planning, hard work, and generosity. And they saw the continuation and enlargement of an idea with a 50-year-long tradition in Caltech’s history: the idea that the humanities must be an integral part of the education of every Caltech undergraduate.

The first home for the division of humanities was provided by Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Dabney in 1928. At that time, tuition at Caltech was \$250 a year, the graduating class numbered 69, and there were 10 men on the humanities faculty. For them, Dabney Hall must have been spacious, but as the number of humanities courses and faculty grew, the building seemed to shrink. Finally, in 1962, the campus building committee allocated space to replace Dabney with a larger building on the north side of San Pasqual Street.

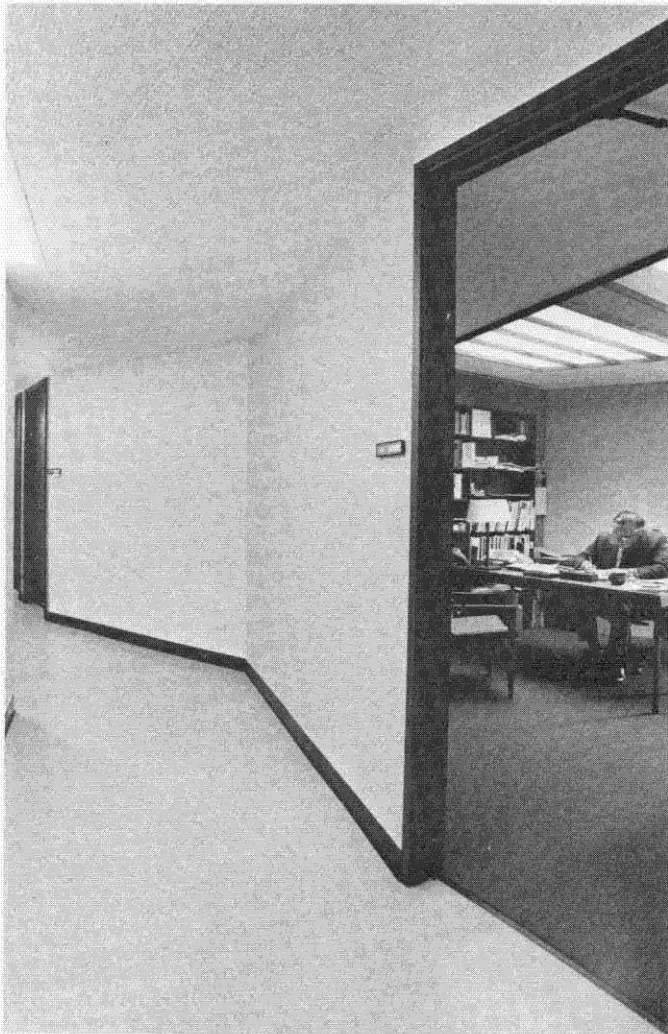
Robert Alexander, a Los Angeles architect and a fellow of the American Institute of Architects, was chosen to create the building described in Hallett Smith’s letter—possibly because he saw it as every bit as much a laboratory for the humanities and social sciences people as a physics or chemistry laboratory is to *its* occupants.

Although Alexander signed the contract to start the building plans in 1966, its reality was not assured until November of the following year when Mrs. Delia B. Baxter of Atherton, California, made the largest single gift ever presented to Caltech—\$2.8 million—with the suggestion that it be used “to build, equip, and maintain” a humanities and social sciences building. It was to be named in honor of her late husband, Donald E. Baxter, M.D., who pioneered in the development and production of solutions and associated medical equipment for intravenous therapy, and who founded the American Hospital Supply Corporation.

The Baxter family had a longtime interest in Caltech, going back to before Dr. Baxter’s death in 1931 at the age of 53. The Baxters at one time lived on California Boulevard two blocks east of Caltech, and their children viewed the campus as the place with the biggest yard in the neighborhood.

The formal announcement of the Baxter gift was made by Governor Ronald Reagan at a November 8, 1967, dinner heralding the start of Caltech’s \$85 million development campaign. By the time of the groundbreaking ceremonies in May 1969, Simon Ramo, a Caltech alumnus and trustee, and his wife, Virginia, had given

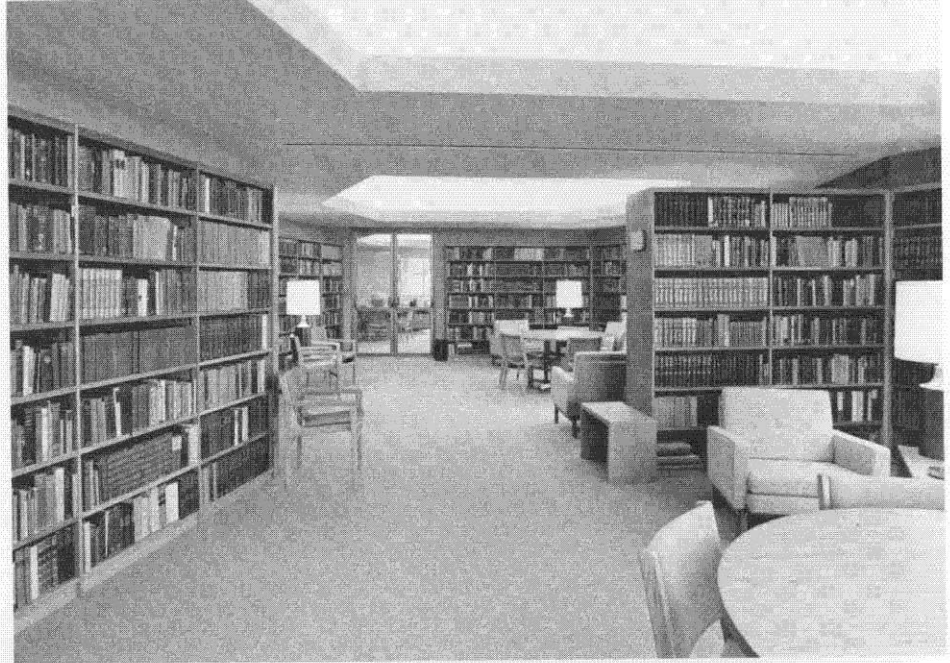
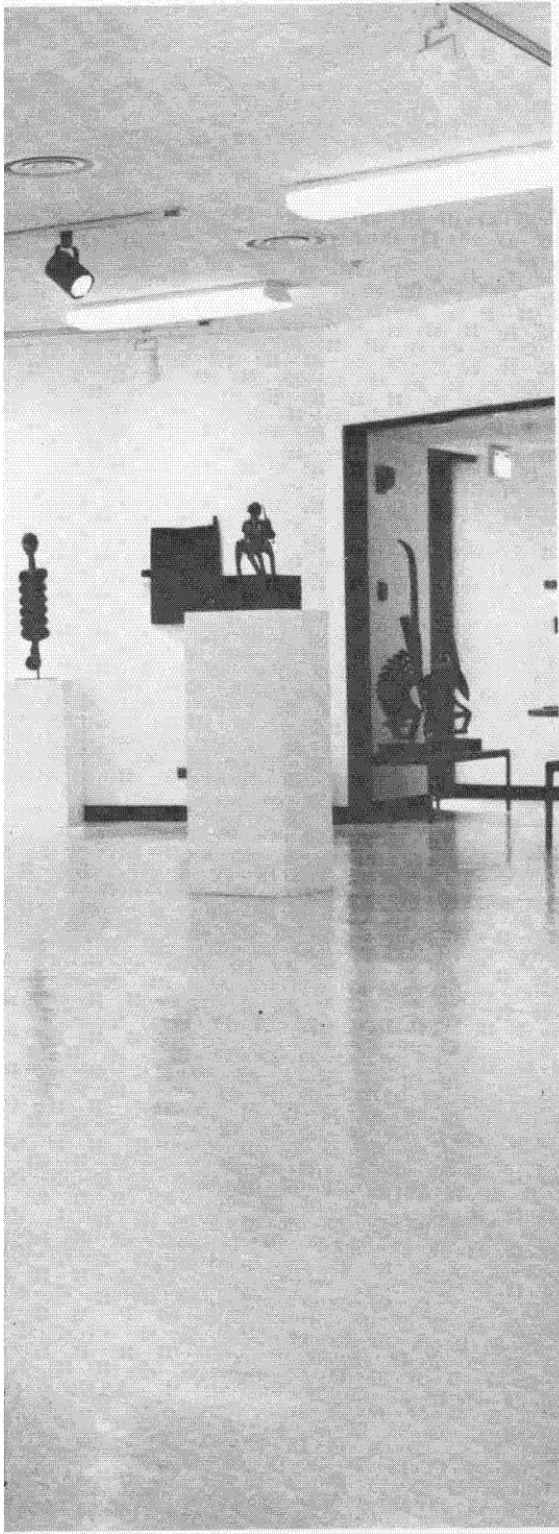




*Angled corridors and hexagonal offices are a Baxter trademark. They are designed to counteract the monotony and formality of long straight lines and cubicle rooms.*



*The new Baxter Art Gallery opened with a show devoted to the Victor DuBois Collection of West African Art. From 100 to 300 people visited it every day for five weeks.*



*Spacious and inviting for browsers or serious readers, the Clinton K. Judy Memorial Library is housed in Baxter Hall.*

money for an auditorium inside the Baxter building—Ramo Auditorium. The U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare gave funds for additional facilities.

Caltech's new humanities and social sciences "laboratory" expresses an entirely different concept from that of any other building on campus. In 1962 the specifications suggested 36,000 square feet, but the actual structure has 62,513, designed on the principle of the hexagon—three hexagons across, and with interacting subdivisions of hexagons. Even the foyer floor tiles are hexagonal, and the wall lighting fixtures also carry out that shape. The study-offices are long hexagons, and the smaller offices are half that. Hexagon-shaped rooms and double-sized offices had been tried out in the old library section of Dabney Hall, following the removal of the humanities library to Millikan. The consensus was that they helped communicate a warm and informal quality hard to come by in the conventional square.

Baxter's hallways are angled, which banishes the sterile aspect of long, straight corridors. They also incorporate conversation areas with groupings of furniture that encourage casual meetings among faculty and students.

Among the other features of Baxter Hall are a large art gallery and an expanded Public Affairs Room. Two special book collections are also housed in Baxter. One is a browsing library of English and French literature with its concurrent history. These books are from the library of Clinton Judy, chairman of the humanities division from 1923 to 1949. The other special library is the Africana collection belonging to Edwin S. Munger, professor of geography.



Almost 9,000 people visited the art gallery's first exhibit, which opened on April 6. On display were African artifacts, collected over a 12-year period of travel and study by Victor DuBois, a member of the American Universities Field Staff.

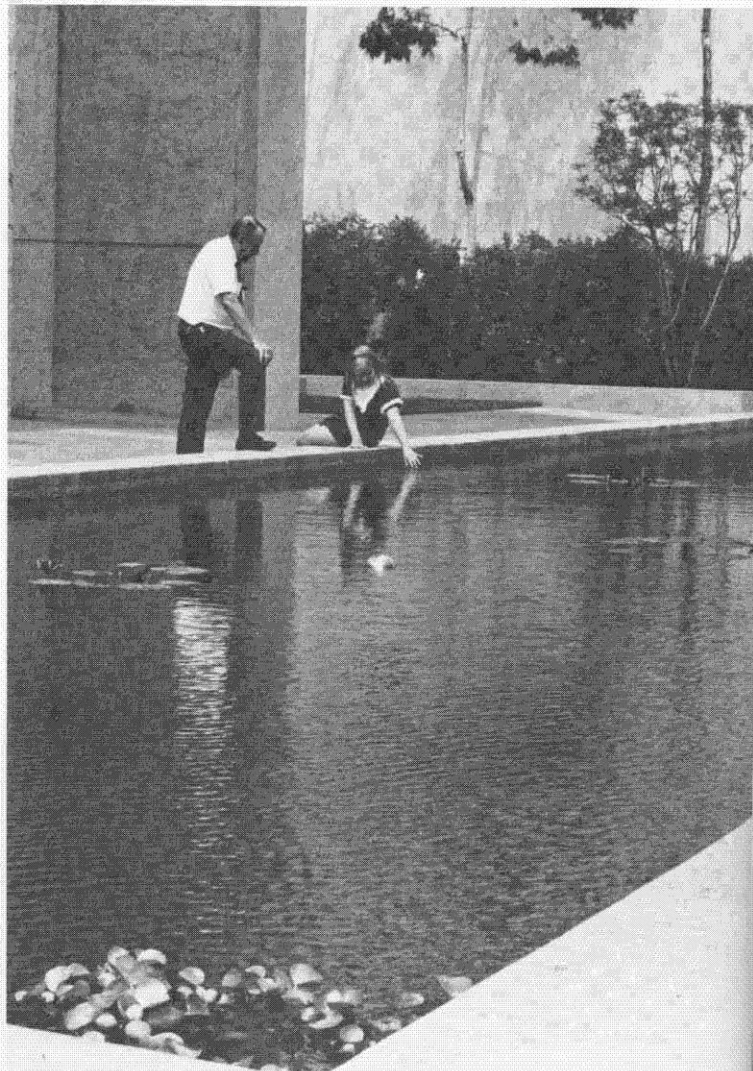
Ramo Auditorium is a sorely needed middle ground between the larger, more formal, Beckman Auditorium and the shabby discomforts of Culbertson Hall. The handsome 435-seat theater-like auditorium is already booked far ahead for lectures, intimate musical and theatrical presentations, and film showings. Baxter also has a 297-seat lecture hall.

Since the 54 members of the faculty and staff moved into Baxter at the end of March, they have found the building itself a good teacher. Architect Alexander, who says it is the best building he has ever done, is pleased when he hears a faculty member's report that students talk more in seminar classes in Baxter than they did in Dabney. Some of the faculty insist they can get far more done in their new offices than they could across the street—an idea confirmed by one of the secretaries who said: "I go home exhausted every day. Moving into this building has acted like pep pills on everybody!"

Not quite everybody all of the time, of course. Symbolizing fulfillment of some of Hallett Smith's original thoughts about the function of a humanities building is the pool along the south side of Baxter. Often a quiet few people are there—leaning over the edge to watch the carp gliding in and out among the water lilies and demonstrating that "life is not confined to equations and laboratory experiments."



*Ramo Hall on the first floor of Baxter is a 435-seat auditorium—the gift of Caltech trustee and alumnus Simon Ramo and his wife.*



*Pools are places for reflections—of buildings and trees and thoughtful people. The Baxter pool includes water lilies and golden carp.*

