

## CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

# THE STUNNING NEW SACKLER MUSEUM

BY JOHN SEDGWICK

Just opened—a dramatic building with eye-popping art collections

The grand entrance to Harvard's new Arthur M. Sackler Museum augurs something far more dramatic than a mere art gallery—a Mycenaean fortress, perhaps, or the Temple of Doom. Although the Sackler is placed on the hallowed grounds of the university, beside the Neo-Georgian Fogg Art Museum and across from the Victorian Gothic Memorial Hall, it seems to have been created in the back lot at MGM. Few museums have such blazing theatricality about them. On either side of the grand entrance, there's a high cement column topped with a lime-green vent that is, presumably, ready to spew smoke if not fire. The doorway itself is shaped like a massive coffin, and it's framed by great cement blocks that might have been part of an Egyptian pyramid. Approaching it, you can almost hear the deep, throbbing organ music that moviegoers know portends an awesome event. It requires some of the daring of Indiana Jones to pull open the gallery door and enter.

The museum is built in an L shape; striking bands of orange and purplish-gray brick line the exterior side walls, one of which dramatically rounds a corner. The building has been called Post-Modernist. It has also been called trendy, garish and just plain ugly by Cambridge residents accustomed to the more soothing tones of the university's prevailing Georgian architecture. But no one label quite defines the Sackler. It was designed by the Scottish architect James Stirling, a winner of the prestigious Pritzker architecture



*The striking entrance to the Sackler Museum is hard to miss.*

award. Little known in the United States before his work on the Sackler, Stirling is the son of a marine engineer, which may account for the building's nearly nautical tightness and such affectations as port-hole windows and brass railings. His work combines high-tech Modernism and ornamentation from past styles with dabs from the distinctive Stirling palette of cartoon hues. Stirling is probably most famous for his triumphant Neustatzgalerie in Stuttgart and the expansion of the Tate Gallery in London; the Sackler is his first major American building.

Open since October, the Sackler marks the first addition to the university's public galleries since the Fogg was rebuilt in 1927. Its major benefactor, Dr. Arthur M. Sackler, is a medical publisher and researcher. Sackler contributed \$10.7 million for the design and construction costs of the building. The new museum was

intended to serve as an extension of the neighboring Fogg, with a connecting skyway across the street, but problems might develop in securing a zoning variance from the city, and the building might continue to stand alone. Besides providing a lecture hall and other academic facilities for the university's art department, the Sackler houses 14 public galleries exhibiting objects from the university's ancient, Oriental and Islamic art collections. Because of a long-standing shortage of gallery space, this is the first time many of these pieces have been displayed.

The timing couldn't be better, since Harvard is marking its 350th anniversary

this year, to be capped off with a four-day celebration in early September. Fifty thousand people are expected to hear speeches from President Reagan and the British royal family (who will bring greetings from John Harvard's alma mater, Cambridge University) and to attend various intellectual symposia, theatrical performances and special exhibits in all the university's art galleries, including the Sackler.

But the Sackler should draw visitors any time. Inside the grand entrance, there is a vast cool foyer. With its floors of slate, high walls of cement block and shadowy lighting that suggests torchlight, you feel as if you've entered the tomb of Ramses II. A long imperial staircase stretches upward from the foyer. Bands of purple and sand-colored stucco, studded with fragments of Roman sculpture, decorate the stairway walls.

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Sackler Museum *continued*

Unlike the standardized boxes of many modern galleries, each room of the Sackler is different in shape and size, and all are carefully tailored to the needs of the artwork. Each gallery has a floor of red oak; the doorways are framed by semicircular wooden columns that echo those flanking the grand entrance.

The first floor is given over to temporary exhibitions that last from six weeks to three months. Here in the large gallery, the Sackler has mounted a show entitled "Akbar's India: Art from the Mughal City of Victory," which will be displayed until March 16. A tribute to the 16th-century Indian ruler and arts patron Akbar the Great, the exhibition features Indian miniatures and carpets created during his reign. The smaller first-floor gallery is a showcase for "New Works," a series of exhibitions devoted to contemporary artists who create pieces especially for the space. Conceptual sculpture by Walter De Maria can be seen through March 16.

On the second floor you see changing exhibits of textiles from Harvard's collection of Islamic and Indian Art. Because of the materials' sensitivity to light, the pieces are displayed for only six

weeks at a time. Here there is a row of four galleries arranged in enfilade; from the first doorway you can see all the way through to the fourth gallery. From this vantage point, I gazed at a brilliant scarlet Ottoman pilgrim's banner, set behind a screen of pierced limestone from India at one end, to a sumptuous Japanese kimono from the Noh theater at the other. Craftily, Stirling narrowed the last doorway slightly to give the compact quarters an illusion of greater space. A skylight illuminates a Chinese rock garden of eerily eroded stone in a niche on one wall. From February 15 through March 30, the Indian room will display a broad sampling of John Kenneth Galbraith's collection of Indian miniatures acquired while he was the U.S. Ambassador to India in the early 1960s. In the adjoining Oriental rooms, you can expect to see a selection of Chinese scroll paintings, Japanese pottery, robes and screens, and other artwork from Harvard's permanent collection.

The top floor receives natural light through a system of skylights and baffles. In seven parallel galleries of permanent displays, there is a broad and impressive range of artifacts from Greece, Rome and

the Far East. From the staircase, you enter the ancient Greek gallery and sweep past rows of amphorae, an impressive marble stela and a beautiful Roman copy of a statue of the hero Meleager by Skopas. The small Near Eastern and Egyptian room on the far end is for ancient art. The highlight is a charming pair of bronze figurines depicting an Egyptian god and goddess with lion heads, who look like a duo of imperial house cats. A statue of the emperor Trajan dominates the ancient Roman room. At his feet is a collection of sculpted marble heads of various Roman emperors and heroes; those done closer to 275 A.D. are much more realistic representations.

In the Indian and Southeast Asian room beyond, stone statues of Buddha and various Hindu gods and goddesses predominate, all of them looking lithe and exotic after all the sturdy Romans. A group of eight particularly serene and enchanting painted marble Buddhist figures from China's sixth-century Northern Ch'i dynasty stands out in the Oriental galleries that follow. In the last room, you retreat further into the mists of the past to gaze upon ceremonial axe blades from China's third millennium B.C., some bronze cooking vessels, urns and chunky female nudes in jade from the Shang dynasty (1766-1122 B.C.), and a charming pitcher in the shape of a duck, with a rounded bill for a spout, from the Chou dynasty of the fifth to the third century B.C. From the top of that grand staircase, as you survey the vast reach of ancient civilization represented here, you feel you have reached a great height indeed.

The Arthur M. Sackler Museum is in Cambridge, at 485 Broadway, on the corner with Quincy Street. Like all of the Harvard museums, it is open 10 to 5 Monday-Saturday, 1\* to 5 on Sunday; admission is \$3, free on Saturday morning. Telephone 617-495-2387 for recorded information; 495-7768 for answers to questions.

## Other Changes in Cambridge

The Sackler is not the only dramatic addition to the Harvard University area. Adjoining Harvard Yard is Harvard Square, once a fairly casual place lined with bookstores, ice cream parlors and blue-jeans emporiums for the indigenous student population. Now it has been spruced up.

One of the biggest changes has occurred in the center of the square itself, which has been almost completely overhauled in the course of a seven-year, \$574-million project extending the subway line. As a result, the square has gained a snazzy

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**Sackler Museum** *continued*

new subway entrance. The original entrance, a charming little brick building with a copper roof, is a newsstand. The traffic has been rerouted to pass more smoothly through the square. Wide brick sidewalks now accommodate the heavy flow of pedestrians and are lined with old-fashioned street lamps. Trees, shrubs and grass have been planted to add a dash of green to all that red brick.

The best way to take all this in is on foot. The ambitious might sign up for a walking tour organized by Cambridge Discovery, which leaves from an unmistakable blue-and-lavender booth in the center of the square. The less ambitious can simply amble wherever their fancy takes them: into Harvard Yard, a blissfully quiet spot amid all the hubbub, with towering elms and red-brick Georgian buildings; along the Charles River to watch oarsmen cutting through the water in sleek shells; in and out of the area's 26 bookstores that welcome browsers, or to the other Harvard art museums, such as the Fogg and the Busch-Reisinger, or the Peabody Museum for archeology and ethnology.

In recent years, Harvard Square has grown like one of the spider plants fa-

vored by the student population, sending out offshoots, or mini-squares, such as Putnam Square just to the southeast or Porter Square to the northwest. But the most dazzling development is the addition of Charles Square, a complex built around a spacious, European-style piazza on Bennett Street, a short walk toward the river from the center of Harvard Square.

Anchoring the development is the 300-room **Charles Hotel**, the first true luxury hotel in the area. It makes an ideal base for museumgoers and strollers. Looking a bit like the famous Habitat from Expo '68, the Charles Hotel rises 10 stories and takes up half of Charles Square. In true Harvard Square style, the hotel is unpretentious but quite comfortable. Inside, natural elements of brick and wood repeat the square motif that gives the hotel its name. Paintings of Cambridge scenes and 19th-century American quilts adorn the walls. For entertainment, you can listen to jazz in the Regattabar on the third floor. The bedrooms are smaller than you'd expect, but they have attractive views of the courtyard or Harvard Square, with the Charles River in the distance. Double rooms cost \$125-\$205; special weekend

rates are available. For reservations or information, telephone 800-882-1818 or, in Massachusetts, 617-864-1200.

The hotel has two restaurants, both well worth trying. The Courtyard Café, as the name suggests, looks out at the courtyard and makes use of the space in warmer months. The tables are butcher block, the chairs bentwood; the atmosphere is airy and casual. As befits a café, it serves a light but appetizing menu of such dishes as capellini with smoked mussels, and smoked salmon on a croissant. A meal for two will cost about \$35.

For more elegant eating, head to Rarities, a glass-enclosed restaurant on the hotel's second floor. Among the entrees are tea-smoked duckling with shiitake mushrooms and plums, and lobster simmered in Gewürztraminer with baby leeks, Indonesian spices and spring peas. The pastries are particularly good. The wine list is extensive. Dinner for two, with wine, costs about \$120.

Two other restaurants in Harvard Square are worth a visit. One is **Upstairs at the Pudding**, on the top floor of the Hasty Pudding, a private club at Harvard known for its college theatricals. There, under the eaves, in a large open room with dark-green walls laden with posters announcing 19th-century Pudding productions, you dine in all the splendor that outsiders might mistakenly think is accorded regularly to Harvard undergraduates. The food is Northern Italian, with enough subtlety and surprise to satisfy the most discriminating taste. The veal scallopini with hazelnut-Marsala sauce, or the grilled sirloin with *porcini* and chanterelles? In the end it doesn't matter, because it is all terrific. The wine list is splendid, too. Dinner is prix-fixe, approximately \$35 depending on the entree, for three courses. The price for two, with wine, will be about \$90. Upstairs at the Pudding is at 10 Holyoke Street; telephone 864-1933 for reservations or information.

Finally, you might want to try the **Harvest Restaurant**, down Brattle Street at the other end of the square. It serves lunch and dinner in a setting that could be called casually sophisticated. The layout might have been designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, and Scandinavian-style wooden furniture surrounds a pleasant brick terrace. The eclectic menu has spicy Cajun overtones, but the results are uniformly delectable. The desserts are fabulous and the wine list is lengthy. Expect to pay about \$90 for two, with wine, for dinner; about \$45 for lunch. The Harvest is at 44 Brattle Street; telephone 492-1115 for reservations or more information. ■

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