



Globe staff photo/Barry Chin

And the 'winners' are . . .

Pru Awards recognize the low points of what went up in '87

ARCHITECTURE | ROBERT CAMPBELL

It's the season for the Pru Awards, those uncoated prizes given out annually by this column to the worst architecture of the year in Boston.

The Pru is named, of course, in honor of the Prudential Center. The original Pru is still the all-time Boston champion of bad design. Though many talents have certainly tried, no one has yet surpassed the grim horror of its placeless plazas and featureless towers.

Picking worthy winners of the Pru Award gets harder each year. Boston's architecture with all its faults is far better than it was even five years ago. Part of the reason is the city's aggressive, demanding review of the designs of new buildings. Architects and developers complain that the review process is arrogant, whimsical, confusing, secretive and slow, to pick some of the gentler adjectives. And often they're right; the rules should be clearer and the process should be more open, more predictable. But the buildings do keep getting better.

The two Pru winners for 1987 both managed to slither into existence without benefit of design review — one because it is in Cambridge, the other because the client, to its shame, is the federal government. To wit:

The Federal Office Building: This distressing jagged pink fortress next to Boston Garden is the perfect symbol, as one reader wrote, for an uncaring, distant and self-protective government. This is

a building that offers neither welcome nor trust to the streets of the city around it. Withdrawn into itself behind berms and terraces and blank walls, it seems to be expecting a state of siege.

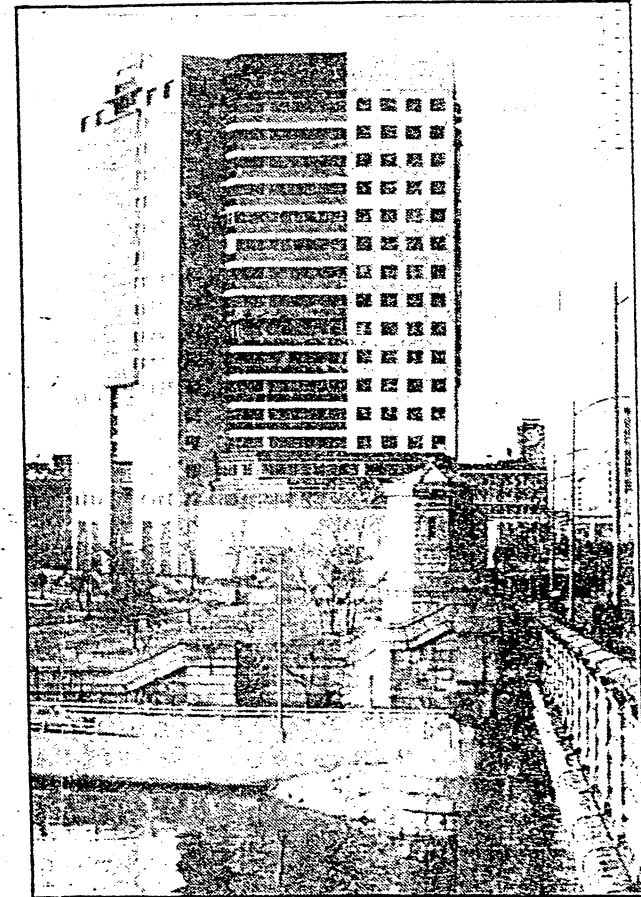
Little about the Federal Building suggests that human habitation is among its uses, unless it be that the slit windows suggest the presence of machine-gunners. The main entrance, easily defended in case of an uprising, is a dark chasm viewed across an empty no-man's land of paving.

It's amusing that this dreadful building has, as yet, no name. Can it be that no one wishes to be associated with it? Many people call it the Tip O'Neill Building, because the former Speaker helped get it sited in Boston, but it remains officially a nameless orphan, the pink Baby Doe of architecture.

Our own government has been, on the average, the worst office-building developer in Boston — much worse than any private developer. State government gave us the McCormack and Saltonstall Buildings; federal government gave us the JFK Building and now this nameless disaster. Four worse Boston buildings would be hard to name.

Forgotten are the idealistic days, only a decade ago, when the feds were promising (under the Public Building Co-operative Use Act) to integrate new buildings into the city with retail frontage. The state did so with fair success in the State Transportation Building on Stuart Street, but when the feds got their chance here they never really tried.

represent an uncaring, distant government? One Memorial Drive, below, is right at home in a neighborhood in chaos.



Globe staff photo/Tom Landers

The architect is Stubbins Associates of Cambridge.

One Memorial Drive: This Pru isn't so much for the building itself, although the building certainly deserves it, as it is for the complete chaos of the neighborhood of which it is part. Kendall Square in Cambridge has become the ugliest collection of mismatched buildings this side of downtown Tucson.

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The Pru Awards are announced

■ PRU AWARDS

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No building here seems to have been designed with the slightest regard for anything around it. Each building is an arrogant solipsist. From the ungainly Draper Laboratory all the way to the river, Kendall Square is a mess.

The addresses of Kendall Square's buildings are a tipoff to the self-involved arrogance of its developers - One Memorial Drive, One Kendall Square, Cambridge Center, One Broadway. Everyone here wants to be Number One or the Center. Nobody wants to be a team player. The architecture is the perfect expression of that arrogance. (Don't look for One Kendall Square in Kendall Square, by the way; it's blocks off, apparently seeking the prestige of the Kendall name at the expense of merely confusing its users.)

One Memorial Drive is the newest Kendall Square turkey and can serve to represent them all. Developed by Congress Group and designed by Huygens & DiMella of Boston, it stands on a magnificent site overlooking the Charles River at Broadway and Memorial Drive.

One Memorial is an incomprehensible mishmash of green glass and pink granite that lacks any discernible shape or style. Its frontage along Broadway - the gateway to Cambridge - alternates blank walls with truck loading platforms. The front along Memorial Drive is little better, consisting of the dreariest kind of pseudo-terrace, the kind that's never used because the real entrance to the building is by auto-

mobile into its ground-floor garage.

One Memorial should have been a superb building because its site is superb. It and the Saddlebrook Building across Broadway could have been a pair of pylons making a great gateway between Boston and Cambridge. But neither building has been designed with sensitivity for its key place in the urban scene.

Kendall Square is a great opportunity that now has been lost. Its riverfront site, served by a Red Line station and adjacent to MIT, surely deserved a higher destiny. Some of its buildings are better than others - architect Moshe Safdie's emerging Cambridge Center complex, let's say, is a lot better than One Memorial Drive or One Broadway - but good individual buildings count for little in the overall chaos.

Cambridge has a permissive city council majority and it performs relatively little design review. And it has many, many acres of overzoned, vacant developable land. If the city doesn't take care it will turn into a nightmare of which Kendall Square will be only the beginning.

It's only fair to add that Huygens & DiMella, the designers of One Memorial Drive, are a good firm that normally functions at a much higher level than this.

The Federal Office Building and One Memorial Drive both prove the same point. The point is that today it takes three to tango in architecture: a good architect, a good client, and a good city approval process.

Robert Campbell is the Boston Globe's architecture critic.



City of Cambridge

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IN CITY COUNCIL

January 11, 1988

COUNCILLOR DUEHAY

- ORDERED:** That the City Council request the Planning Board to recommend a binding design review process for all new development to the City Council; and be it further
- ORDERED:** That this measure be submitted to the City Council within two months.

In City Council January 11, 1988.
Adopted by the affirmative vote of 9 members.
Attest:- Joseph E. Connarton, City Clerk.

A true copy;

ATTEST:-

Joseph E. Connarton
Joseph E. Connarton, City Clerk.

C. Duehay order re: that the City Council request the Planning Board to recommend a binding design review process for all new development; said measure to be submitted to the Council within 2 months.

In City Council,

January 11, 1988

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(copy of order sent to Len Barber,
Planning Board 1/13/88 mlh)