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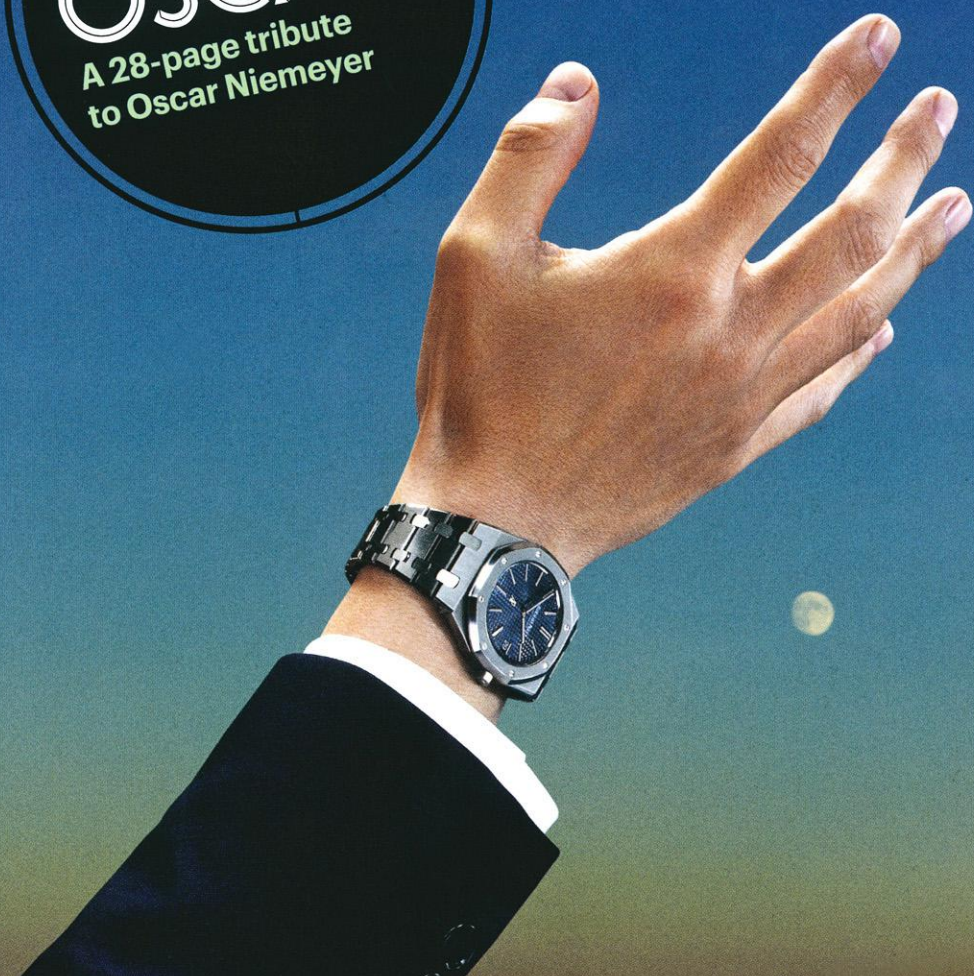
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Trophy designed by Nendo

SQUARE DEAL

This picture, the new faculty has been designed as a kind of cubist tree, with jutting cubes creating perfect office spaces

Below, angled surfaces in mirrored panels, stone, concrete and wood create a dynamic ground-floor lobby and exhibition space

Best lab

Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences, University of British Columbia, by Saucier + Perrotte Architects and Hughes Condon Marler Architects



The University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver has stood, architecturally at least, in the shadows of the city's other leading academic institution, the Simon Fraser University – a perfectly pitched, classically-executed ode to academia designed by the late, great Arthur Erickson.

A hodgepodge of styles ranging from faux Tudor to 1980s corporate, the UBC campus' architecture has often seemed like an afterthought. While buildings such as Richard Henriquez's War Memorial Gym, Erickson's Museum of Anthropology and Peter Cardew's Belkin Gallery shine, there is little sense of cohesion. Additionally, most buildings are inward-looking, lacking engagement with the street and the public.

Enter the striking new Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences building



designed by Montreal's Saucier + Perrotte Architects and Vancouver's Hughes Condon Marler Architects and the university now has a crowd-pleasing piece of controlled drama.

Marking the new gateway to the rapidly developing southeastern edge of the campus, this building is instantly engaging. The entrance features an open plaza that slopes down from an adjacent knoll, literally drawing one inside. Passers-by not rushing inside to class might be forgiven for lingering on one of the concrete benches outside and gazing up at the dramatic west-facing façade.

Designed as a kind of cubist tree, the façade reveals the building's intent: to transform organic form into Cartesian geometry and to pay homage to the debt science owes to nature. The façade's variegated glass boxes – an alternating >>



NEW PERSPECTIVE
One of the buildings' two atriums. It features a subdued palette of red cedar cladding, white walls and black steel, and Saucier's signature stairwells, which seem set at arbitrary angles

pattern of smoked, enamelled and clear glazing – jut out in different widths and depths, reflecting nearby foliage. They are the ‘branches’ to the ‘trunk’ of concrete at the building’s base, imprinted with the groove of local bark. Lead architect Gilles Saucier’s inspiration was ‘the idea of two trees and their foliage intertwining’, with the ‘trunks’ forming the building’s structural basis and the ‘roots’ emerging from the ground plane to house the two main auditoriums.

Fittingly for a university campus carved out of forest, the tree inspiration continues throughout the building. As you enter the lobby, taking in a permanent exhibition that skilfully fetishises pharmacy (with just a hint of Damien Hirst) and opens up to ground-level glass windows, there is a sense of

being at the base of a tree trunk. An elegantly angled cedar ceiling and a seamless fusion of materials – it’s hard to tell where the concrete ends and the wood begins – create a dynamic sense of movement and texture and a sometimes dizzying three-dimensionality.

Two atrium light wells open up the building to the sky, creating a sense of forest canopy as you ascend the six floors filled with labs and classrooms. Black steel-clad stairwells at seemingly arbitrary angles (one of Saucier’s signature elements) bridge the different levels and then disappear into the atrium. Alternating smoked and clear glazing breaks up long corridors and filters patterned, leaf-like light into the interior.

Articulated spaces – such as a mezzanine lounge brightened by

fluorescent pharmaceutical diagrams – offer a place for students to interact and exchange ideas, while classrooms vary in depth and height to allow for more intimate or group spaces. A subdued palette of red cedar, glass, black steel cladding and clinical white is punctuated by bright oranges and yellows, referencing again the connection between nature and science.

Intriguingly, Saucier studied botany before becoming an architect, and his sunken south-facing garden links the structure directly to the earth. ‘It’s not just about a new building,’ says Saucier of his tree-as-abstract, rigorously designed architectural offering. ‘It’s about bringing new life to the campus.’ ✱
www.saucierperrotte.com, hcma.ca,
www.pharmacy.ubc.ca