



This project, the product of a commission for the renovation of the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, was executed between 1988 and 1990 by the partnership of Albert Pope and William Sherman, Architects. The first phase included the design of new facilities for the storage of the permanent collection and exhibition preparation areas. The second phase had a more public face, the design of new donor walls for the main lobby.

The spatial and tectonic language of Mies van der Rohe's additions to the museum challenge both traditional urban hierarchies and the nature of the institution itself, subordinating curatorial activities to the public exhibition space. The singularity of "universal space" approaches its limit as the excluded hierarchies within the institution demand more than mere accommodation. By extending qualities of the constructional vocabulary and scale of the Mies pavilion into the Art Storage and Preparation Areas, the curatorial activities would be recognized with a significant setting within the institution. The materials, spatial composition, lighting and detailing were all conceived to reinforce the associa-

tion between the new storage rooms and the existing galleries.

In the main lobby of the 1973 addition, the challenge was to design the setting for the names of major donors. By reconstituting the materials of Mies's work with a strategy reflecting its spatial structure, we attempted to develop a language appropriate to the architecture. Eight panels are suspended off the walls on wide-flange stainless steel beams. A system of steel connections allows the relocation of the blocks, providing flexibility with the appearance of permanence. A plane of sandblasted glass separates the stone and steel. A steel angle interlocks with the bottom stone to provide support in a manner to sustain the tension between weightlessness and structure. The grain of the stone, a pronounced pattern of muted grays, reveals its materiality in reinforcement of its architectural presence. With the transference of the inscription from the entablature of the original classical museum building to the new slabs, the heightened assertion of Mies's spatial and material vocabulary as an architectural language is made explicit.

