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## MAKING DATA CENTERS COMPUTE

Forget redundant M/E/P—habitability is what elevates the common data center.

by C.C. Sullivan

Asked to prioritize, the typical data-center owner will list the top needs for her precious facilities: 1) powerful chillers for the hardware; 2) backup electrical equipment; and 3) state-of-the-art fire protection under the raised floors. Attention invariably focuses on cables and servers, not the human beings who enter data and safeguard the mother lode on a daily basis. Data centers are a relatively new typology and, like early factories, they are monuments to technology—but often retrograde workplaces.

Architects must push to humanize the program, as Columbia, South Carolina's Watson Tate Savory recently found. Taking lessons from the "industrially inspired buildings of early 'Heroic' modernism," the firm encouraged the state Budget and Control Board to make their new computer center in Columbia a great place to work. "We acted on our strong ethical desire to bring light and quality of environment into the project," explains principal Thomas M. Savory. Their design incorporates quality-of-life features "you can get for free."

Based on occupant response, the firm's work has boosted morale and productivity, while adding only nominally to the budget. The straightforward amenities remind us that while today's industrial buildings are often palaces of light, most data centers are still stuck in the dark ages. ■

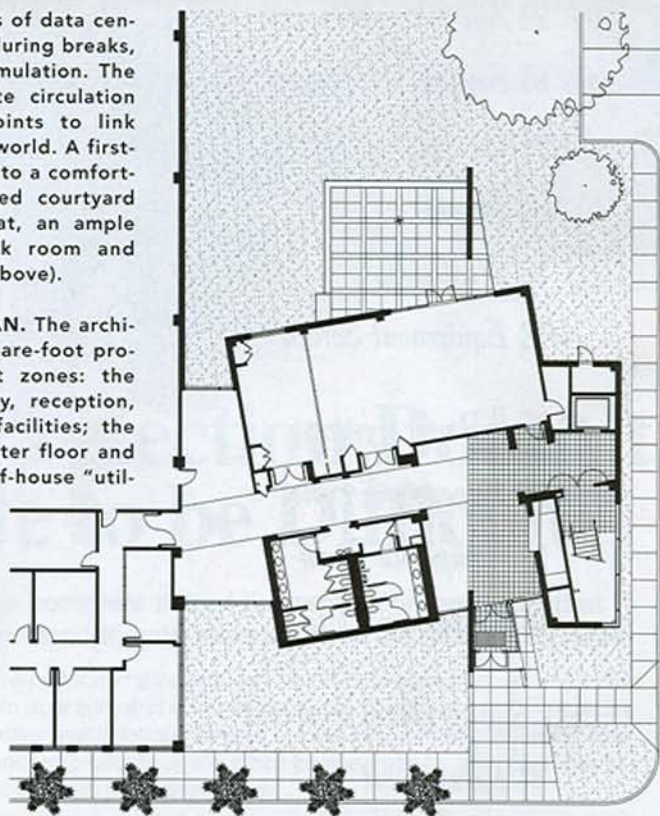
**LIGHT, VIEWS, AND MATERIALS.** Along key sightlines, the architects maximized framed views and allowed controlled daylight to enter, "for awareness of the outdoors and as much openness as possible," says principal Michael Watson. The idea extended to the prominent head-house stair (right), with its large curtain wall and a floor of black Mexican beach stones. The steel-framed structure is clad in white precast concrete, with ornamental joints, cast-iron scuppers, and aluminum downspouts. Slate slabs and wood-veneer panels framed in painted steel enliven the two-story reception volume (far right).



**OUTDOOR ACCESS.** Users of data centers tend to decompress during breaks, seeking light, air, and stimulation. The design includes deliberate circulation elements and access points to link workers with the outside world. A first-floor training room opens to a comfortable patio and landscaped courtyard with furniture; above that, an ample balcony extends a break room and accommodates smokers (above).

**SEGREGATED FLOOR PLAN.** The architects split the 77,000-square-foot program into three distinct zones: the "head house," with entry, reception, and training and break facilities; the "box" of the main computer floor and staff offices; and a back-of-house "utility building," mainly for electrical equipment. The plan increases window area and break areas and also improves adjacencies. "Part of the challenge was combining functions without creating a rabbit warren," says Savory.

For project specs, visit [www.architecturemag.com](http://www.architecturemag.com)



partial first-floor plan 15'

