

# The Olympic Museum

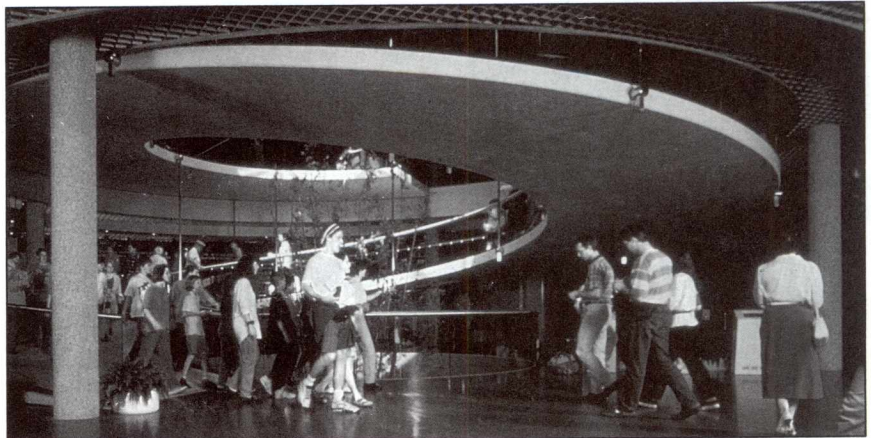
Alejandro Lazo \*

**T**he Olympic Museum, the world's largest center of written, graphic and visual information on the Olympic Games, was inaugurated in Lausanne, Switzerland, on June 23, 1993. Through exhibiting works of art, historical artifacts, documents, videos and all kinds of objects related to the Olympic Games from ancient Greece up to the present day, the museum seeks to analyze that combination of sport, art and culture which Baron Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Games, dubbed "Olympism."

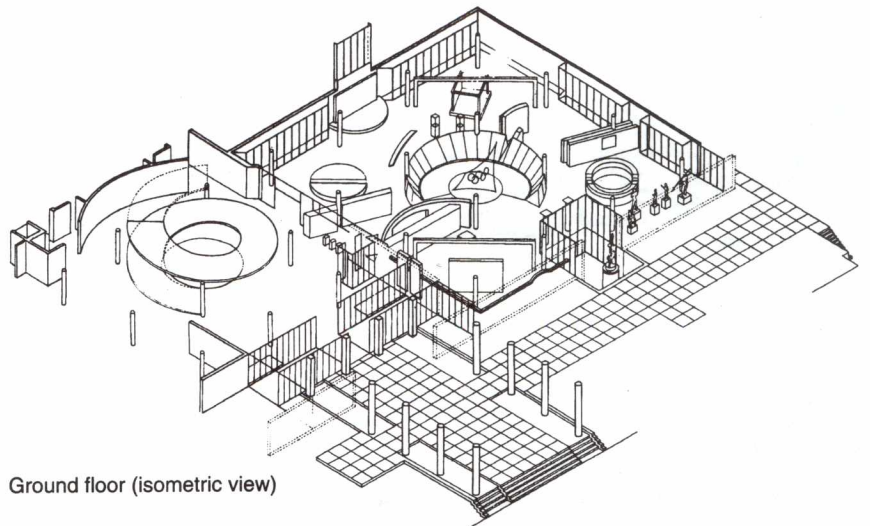
The museum is a new honor for Mexico and its architecture. It was created by architect Pedro Ramírez Vázquez, an exceptional Mexican who recently completed his fiftieth year in the profession, serving as an example of continual achievement for students and professionals in his field.

Ramírez Vázquez, a member of the International Olympic Committee (IOC), has defined the Olympic Museum as a center of information on the influence of the Olympic tradition on art, culture and world peace.

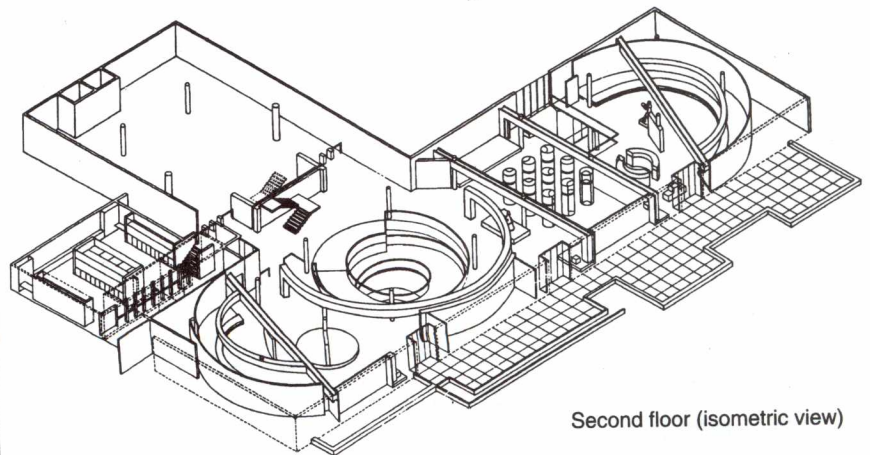
Regarding the nature of the museum, the architect says: "In 1915 Baron Pierre de Coubertin conceived the idea of a museum that would not only keep alive the tradition of the Olympic Games, which had recently been renewed, but also embody the ideals of the Olympic movement—the union of sport, art and culture, combined so as to produce the loftiest human achievements. Through the analysis of the Olympic Games from antiquity to the modern age, the museum will provide a complete overview of the history and evolution



*The museum is aimed primarily at children and young people.*

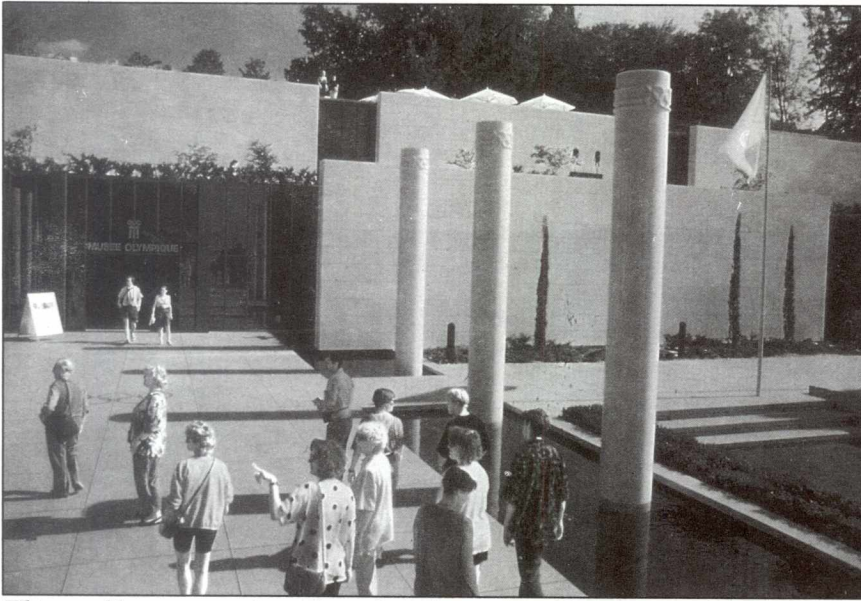


Ground floor (isometric view)

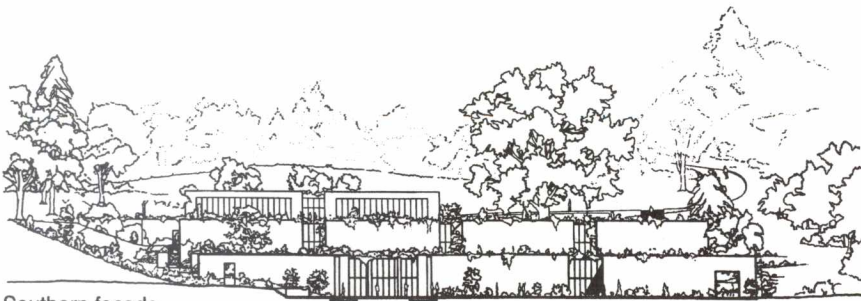


Second floor (isometric view)

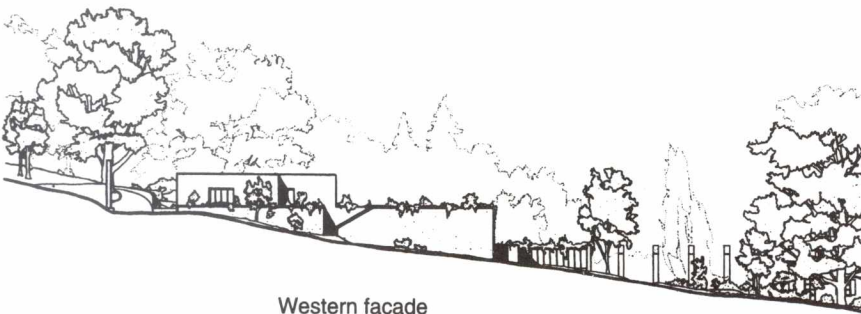
\* Industrial designer.



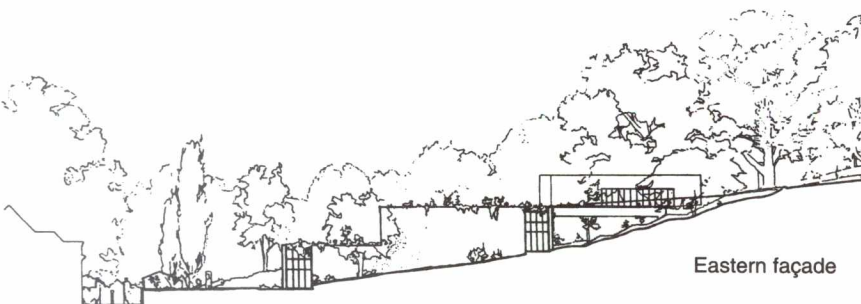
*White marble represents the purity and simplicity of the Olympic movement's ideals.*



Southern façade



Western façade



Eastern façade

of the games and will be a tribute to Coubertin, founder of the Olympic Movement.”

The museum is aimed fundamentally at children and young people, with the objective of creating harmony, understanding and mutual respect among them, using sports as a medium so that this seed may promote peace in the future. This message is transmitted through the architectural spaces and museum design, which function independently.

Interactive exhibits on the selection and training of competitors will represent an homage to the athletes who participate in the games, while other exhibits of a historical nature will outline the origins of the games, keeping alight the Greek tradition's flame. The museum's expositions, interactive videos and teaching resources will give visitors the opportunity to analyze the Olympic movement's role in modern society.

#### **The museum building**

This is not simply another museum with its traditional exhibition halls, but also a center for information and motivation on Olympic ideals. The white marble used in its construction represents the purity and simplicity of the Olympic movement's ideals, as well as recalling the origin of the Olympic Games, since it was donated by the Greek government. IOC president Juan Antonio Samaranch provided invaluable guidance and support for the conceptualization and realization of the museum project.

The design has nothing to do with additional decoration, but rather with a pre-existing visualization of the areas which were to be built and the way in which their contents would be housed. The spaces themselves create the atmosphere for the presentation of documents, objects, and the museum's exhaustive store of information. Thus the museum's interior is not conceived or constructed in an abstract

## Pedro Ramírez Vázquez

Over the fifty years of his professional life, he has designed buildings of all kinds as well as playing an outstanding role in many fields as organizer, builder, museum designer, public official, industrial and graphic designer, glazier, academic, promoter of a range of professions, advisor to Mexican and foreign businesses, etc.

Pedro Ramírez Vázquez's vast professional activity, as well as the high quality of his work, have won him international recognition and a place of honor in history and world art.

He was born in Mexico City on April 16, 1919 and educated at *UNAM*. In 1939 he was made a member of the University Council as representative of the students at the National School of Architecture, where he taught composition and urban planning. In 1952 he was part of the team that built the National School of Medicine at *UNAM*'s University City campus.

He served three consecutive terms (from 1953 to 1959) as president of the National Association of Architects and the Society of Mexican Architects. In 1956 he was awarded the Prize of Honor at the International Festival of Architecture and Monumental Art in Paris for the exhibition and book *4,000 años de arquitectura mexicana* (4,000 Years of Mexican Architecture).

In 1958 he was named general manager of the Federal School Construction Program. He created the prefabrication system used in the construction of 30,000 school buildings in Mexico and 17 countries of Latin America as well as the Philippines, India, Indonesia, Yugoslavia and Italy. As of 1990 this system had been used in the construction of more than two hundred thousand other buildings in Mexico.

In the sixties he planned and built the Mexico Pavilion at the Brussels Universal Exposition, winning Belgium's Gold Star Prize. He built the gallery of history in Mexico City's Chapultepec Park and the headquarters of the National Child Protection Institute in the southern part of the capital city.

He planned the design for the Mexico City Museum and in 1964 designed the Mexico Pavilion at the New York World Fair. That year he also inaugurated two extraordinary works, both located in Chapultepec Park: the National Museum of Anthropology and History and the Museum of Modern Art.

From 1965 to 1968 he designed the Secretariat of Foreign Relations building, the Japanese embassy and the Aztec Stadium, located in the capital, and Cuauhtémoc soccer stadium, in the city of Puebla. During that period he was named president of the Organizing Committee for the XIX Olympiad; under his direction several buildings were constructed in Mexico City for the games.

In the 70s he built the Mexico Pavilion at the World Exposition in Seattle, Washington; IMAN's Children's Hospital and Children's Home; and the "Tollocan Promenade" in Toluca (State of Mexico).

He was a founder and rector of the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, a unique and audacious departure in Mexico's higher education system. He served as an advisor in the design of the university while carrying out a range of other highly important works in Mexico City, such as the Basilica of Guadalupe and the Templo Mayor Museum.

Some of his most recent works are: the Tlalpan House of Culture; Puebla's Amparo Museum; the Chapel of Guadalupe in the Vatican; the Temple of Tocombo in Michoacán; the Library and Museum of the State of Mexico; the Mexico Pavilion at the World Fair in Seville; and the Museum of the Teotihuacan Pyramids.

way; it is directed towards future contents, towards those messages which will need to be communicated or transmitted—and it is also directed towards the services the museum seeks to provide to visitors.

The building is an example of the greatest respect for the environment and ecology—a characteristic of Swiss culture which should be emulated by us all. The architectural

design and construction were oriented to the preservation of existing green areas, and particularly to the conservation of the extraordinary oak tree which holds the statue of Pierre de Coubertin.

The water used in the air-conditioning system comes from the depths of a beautiful lake that faces the museum. The water is pumped from the lake and returned to it at a great

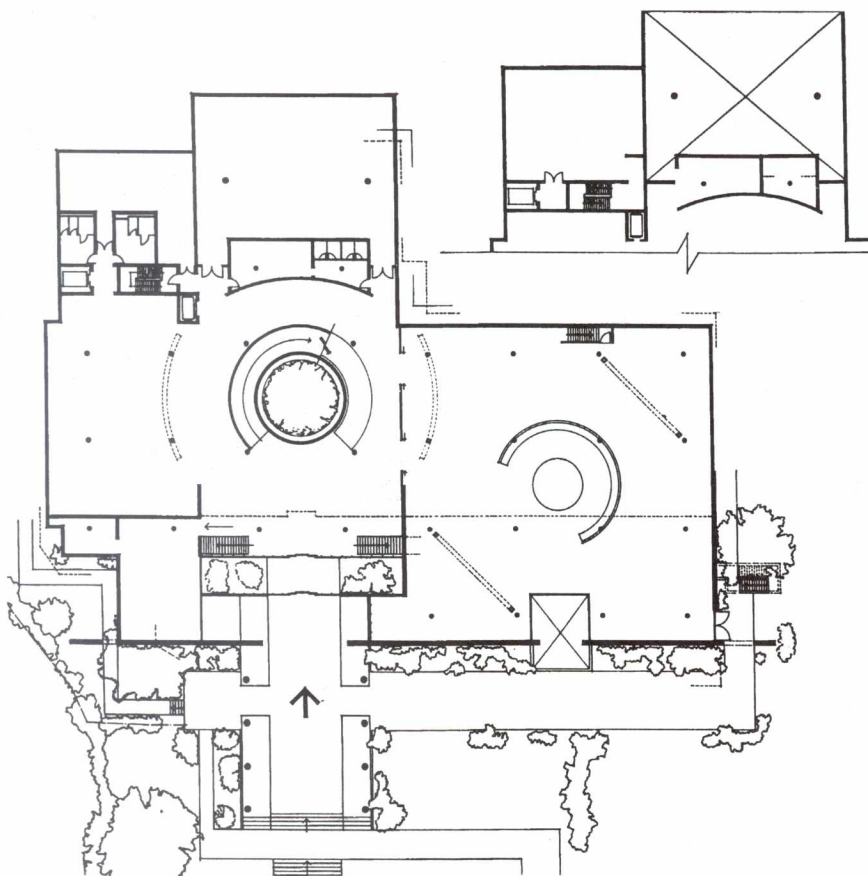
depth, in such a way as not to alter the normal characteristics of the lake.

### Facilities

The museum's facilities consist of two floors totalling more than 11,000 square feet of space for permanent and temporary exhibits. The permanent exhibits include: historical studies on the Olympic Games' origins in ancient Greece; dynamic and interactive



*The museum houses well-stocked archives of films and videos.*



Ground floor

presentations on various Olympic sports; exhibits tracing the games' influence on art, design and urban planning through the 20th century.

The collection of art work ranges from Greek and Etruscan pieces to paintings and sculptures by such artists as Auguste Rodin, Antoni Tàpies, Jean Tinguely and Robert Graham. The museum also has a very complete collection of Olympic coins and stamps, an archive of 200,000 photographs and a wide-ranging collection of other objects relating to the Olympics, back to the beginning of the games' modern epoch in 1896.

The museum includes a broad range of information services, libraries, well-stocked archives and videos. Exhibits make use of historical data on each period and events related to the Olympic Games, making extensive use of electronic methods in four languages. Thus, the museum is both educational and interactive, and the range of possibilities means each visit can be made into a unique and different experience.

The information systems allow visitors to consult facts related to the winter and summer games, up to the ones that have taken place most recently. This is, therefore, a one-of-a-kind museum, with a data bank which is updated every two years.

The museum will house the world's most complete archive of films and videos on Olympic themes, 7,000 hours of images in all. Equipped with the most advanced interactive audio-visual equipment, it will permit both casual visitors as well as researchers to trace the history of the games and the Olympic movement through time, and to have access to every kind of visual and written information. This modern technology, including high-resolution television, will also provide enormous capacities for communication through fiber optics and satellite transmission.

As a symbol of the Olympic Games, an eternal flame will burn near the entrance to the building 