

urban link (Awards, 2002). It is sad that nowadays the pressures on architects are such that simply designing with a sense of decorum, with respect for the nature of a street or precinct, brings an award.

The issue of how an individual building adds to or makes its context is a fundamental concern in urban design. Should a building meld in with those around it or stand out? Should it be a foreground or a background building? Almost all developers and their architects want their buildings to be foreground buildings and resent any guidelines or other design controls that they see as limiting their imaginative power. Interestingly, major architects seem to have less difficulty in designing background buildings than minor ones striving to make their mark.

CASE STUDY

Pioneer Place, Portland, Oregon, USA: building in context (1979–90)

Central Portland has a number of characteristics that make it unusual amongst American cities. The first difference is that its blocks are small (200 feet square; 61 metres square) and the streets are narrow (60 to 80 feet; 18 to 24 metres) thus providing a pedestrian friendly, easily walkable environment. Secondly, the downtown area has block-sized parks. (There is also a linear park along the western edge of the Willamette River). Thirdly, the city has many older buildings that give it both a sense of history and visual character. Fourthly, sunlight at street level is valued; Portland is cloudier than most North American cities! Fifthly, many of the streets have views to the surrounding hills. In sum, these variables make Portland, well, Portland. They form a well-loved city pattern.

A proposal by property developers Cadillac-Fairview designed by the Zimmer Gunsul Frasca Partnership in 1980 demonstrates the issues that arise in designing in cities when a building complex, architecturally interesting, but paying little respect to its context runs into political opposition. The proposal was for a multi-use

four-block scheme that combined four buildings (one on each block) into a single development (see Figure 6.2). The four buildings were to be linked with skybridges such as those in Minneapolis although Portland's climate is considerably less harsh than that of Minneapolis. Unlike the skybridges in Minneapolis that must have glass walls (see Figure 10.22), the ones in this proposed complex were lined with shops that made them wide and opaque. Their function was to make the buildings a unified cluster, an island, largely independent of its surroundings.

Portland is a city with a lively street-life, yet the proposal turned life inwards as if it was a suburban shopping centre. The size of the complex was well beyond that of Portland's block structure; the skybridges blocked the view of the hills and, it was feared, as in Minneapolis, that they would take people, particularly the middle-class, off the streets. The size of the complex would have also dwarfed the adjacent Pioneer Courthouse. The proposal, if built, would have changed its context in a way that was regarded as negative and would probably