



*Image Credit:*  
Brad Angelini

## ***Power Center for the Performing Arts***

121 FLETCHER STREET

**ARCHITECT:**

Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo, and  
Associates, 1965

## *Margaret Wong*

My standard approach to the Power Center for the Performing Arts: 1) arrive close to show time; 2) head directly to the auditorium; 3) depart straight away. The lobby's muted architectural flourishes don't deliver an enticing See-And-Be-Seen experience. When full of ticket-holders, the long and quite narrow space has all the ambience of a transit platform at rush hour.

What does give me strange joy is the stark contrast between the building's front and rear exteriors. Located beyond the zone of classical campus site planning, the Power Center is not a freestanding secular temple designed to command in-the-round admiration. A large adjacent parking lot renders the back-of-house east side highly visible. The windowless enclosure makes the neighboring Central Power Plant look positively ornamental. Even so, the fly space's tall raw concrete volume is unselfconsciously monumental, and the blunt compound massing is thoughtful. The theater's no-frills service face is almost elegant.

West side conditions are the complete inverse. Sited to preserve historic Felch Park, the Power Center's main facade sits a whopping 260 feet back from Fletcher Street. Behind full foliage, the building almost disappears from view. But the real architectural vanishing act is made possible by the lobby's signature mirrored glass envelope. A vast gridded looking glass by day, the Power Center's two-story, 250-foot-long front wall transmits a giant moving image of life in and around Felch Park. Transparent by night, the lobby's glazing gives the outside world an improvised show. The architecture actively plays with our perception of its presence. Important caveat: The design's compassion score will improve meaningfully when bird collision prevention material gets applied to all that glass.

Currently, there is exactly zero synergy between the Power Center and Felch Park. Mature trees notwithstanding, the park is simply an amenity-free cut-though connecting Central Campus to the Medical Campus and beyond. Substantial mowed lawn and a continuous wide barrier of wood chips along the building's entire main public face say "Keep Back (please)." This interface could be so much better.

There is untapped place-making potential in the west facade's architectural articulations. Standing proud of the roof's edge, six appealingly stout concrete columns sprout exposed steel beams that extend back to support a generous roof overhang. Clear glass infill set above the mirrored glazing completes the illusion of a floating roof. Two bumped-out cylindrical enclosures for the lobby main stairs send out playful distortions of the everyday world. The columns and bump-outs redefine the long west wall in terms of human-scale spaces. So, let folks come close and find shade and shelter under the overhang, lean against the columns, play with the reflections. Let this activity invigorate and populate Felch Park. Making the Power Center's main frontage a genuine place for people would be an excellent way to kick off the building's next half-century. ■

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