

visit to Osborn was almost obligatory.

Dale Swearingen, the company's vice-president and its director of architecture, received us, in a resolutely unassuming reception area (a framed rendering of a ballpark hanging on one wall saved the space from complete self-effacement), and ushered us into a comfortable but hardly ornate office. We couldn't resist asking him if the plans for the Yankee Stadium job were still around somewhere.

"Right here," he said, and pulled open a long document drawer marked "Yankee Stadium: American League Baseball." There were five Yankee Stadium drawers, all told—drawers brimming with exquisite drawings of architectural details that were also indelibly familiar: the great twin eagle emblems that once graced the main stadium gate; the stadium's huge outer cathedral windows; the ubiquitous Art Deco copper frieze that encircled the old roof.

"Nearly every year since about 1910—at least, until recently—this firm has engaged in the design or redesign of one or two baseball stadiums, somewhere," Mr. Swearingen said. "Municipal Stadium and League Park, here in Cleveland—we designed them both. Fenway Park, in Boston—we redesigned that in 1934. Comiskey, in Chicago, and Sportsman's Park, in St. Louis—we expanded their capacities substantially in the twenties. Braves Field, in Boston; Briggs, now Tiger Stadium, in Detroit; old Griffith Stadium, in Washington; Milwaukee County Stadium—we designed them all."

How, we asked, had Osborn got into this business?

"Well, before Frank Osborn founded the company, in 1892, he was the chief designer of bridges for the King Bridge Company," Mr. Swearingen said. "At that time, he was working on structural experiments with steel and

concrete for all the new suspension bridges being built. Mr. Osborn pioneered the development of standards for strength with these materials, and stadium building became a natural extension and application of his work. You see, stadiums had not been much of an issue after Roman times. Not until the nineteenth century, when people were beginning to have more leisure time and sporting events were beginning to draw bigger crowds, did architects start to think about stadiums again. One of the first stadiums that we designed was the Polo Grounds, in New York City, in 1911. I'd love to show you those blueprints, but we can't seem to find them."

As we were paging through a sheaf of Fenway Park drawings, and pausing over a miraculous evocation of the legendary hand-operated left-field scoreboard, Mr. Swearingen said, "The last project that we worked on relating to baseball was the design of the light towers for Wrigley Field—yes, we put the lights up at Wrigley. But the last *new* baseball stadium that Osborn worked on from scratch was Three Rivers Stadium, in Pittsburgh, which opened back in 1970, and that was a joint venture with the Pirates' local architect and engineer." For a moment, he looked pained. Then he went on, "The stadium-building business today is very, very big business. You have a lot of people in cut-throat competition, and, frankly, we just got out. The heavy hitters in the ballpark game today are all masters at hyping the owners on domes and skyboxes and monumental scale. But we've always believed that the key to a good stadium is to get the most people as close as possible to the playing field. That's what Osborn did with all those old ballparks we built."

Mr. Swearingen grabbed a piece of scrap paper from a table and began to scratch diagrams on it with a pen. "The key, you see, is the cantilever—this upper deck—and the angle at which it hangs," he said. "In the old days, you used columns to move that upper tray of seats closer to the field at a minimal cost. Today, all these new outfits lay the foundation, if you will, of their pitch on what I call the fictitious Nirvana of columnless viewing. We'll build you a stadium without columns, they say. Well, without columns, you need a

cantilever, and the expense of that really intimate angle is too great. And so you get these huge stadiums where the upper decks are miles from the field, and the fans are so far away from the action that you need a huge television screen to keep them interested. Now, I know this is heretical, but we believe that there's way too much emphasis placed today on this column business. Don't the percentages dictate that, instead of building a stadium where every seat above ground level is too far away from the playing field, you build a stadium *with* columns and thereby bring tens of thousands of seats closer to the action, sacrificing maybe a couple of hundred obstructed seats on a handful of occasions each season, the few sellouts, when those ticket-holders will be absolutely trapped behind a pole? Doesn't that make some sense? Well, we think so here."

Mr. Swearingen began closing the drawers, and said, "Lately, there does seem to be a bit of renewed interest in the lessons that older parks teach us architecturally. Interest, I mean, beyond the buffs and preservationists. The plans that I've seen for a new ballpark in Baltimore look interesting. But we'll just have to see." He paused, then smiled, and asked, "So where are your seats for the Tigers?"



CLASSIC KOALA



DIET KOALA

Shanahan

Plans

SHORTLY before embarking on a week-long tour by rental car this summer of a few favorite Midwestern baseball landmarks—Cleveland Stadium, Detroit's Tiger Stadium, Milwaukee County Stadium, and Wrigley Field and Comiskey Park, those twin testaments to ballpark longevity in Chicago—we made a phone call to the Osborn Engineering Company, of Cleveland, and asked for an appointment. We'd been aware for years, in a trivia-question-and-answer sort of way, that the Bronx's own Yankee Stadium was designed by Osborn, and, in the spirit of our tour, we felt that a

