the Academy's former Beaux-Arts ensemble, through the creation of a
lightweight canopy of knowledge.

The new California Academy of Sciences replaces a curious precinct
of 12 buildings built between 1916 and 1979 that were damaged in
the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake. (The institution was victim of
the same fate as that experienced by the De Young Museum that sits
opposite, AR October 2003.) Compressed into a rectangular footprint
around an external plaza, the Academy's original buildings were
consistent in expression with the formal landscape in which they sat. In
replacing them Basile Herzog & de Meuron who did everything they
could to break the static symmetry of the old museum they replaced
with their elongated, twisted and dissected copper box. Piano showed
more respect for the conservative undercurrent that still exists in
many American institutions. This conservatism seems, he says, from

ACADEMY OF SCIENCES, CALIFORNIA, USA

ARCHITECT:
RENE PIANO BUILDING WORKSHOP

The building offers resources for
both light and shade.

The idea of a high-tech skin to
address nature's own needs,
where the cost of the skin
emulates the cost of the
solar panels that produce 1.64
per cent of the museum's
energy needs. The original
skylight was retained in this
version.

The nearly seamless
transition into a dense forest
with green support canopy

The roof of the Prado, where
Plant Demas' naturalism
seems almost too explicit.

And the Prado, where the
pervasive green benefits seem
to harmonize with layers of fully
light-controlled permeable green
matting, an light and sound.