a tendency that 'a culture without roots builds them by evoking the past', reverting to the use of Classical motifs to bring dignity and trustworthiness to their (relatively) youthful organisations.

As such Piano's building, in plan at least, replicates that which existed before. In sections, however, the architects loosen up, permitting the spherical Planetarium Domes and the Rainforest Biosphere to breach and distort the strict horizontal demarcation established as sacrosanct in memory of the original 3-storey high buildings. With the two main volumes rising high, a wave of disturbance flows through the roof plane, sweeping down to its lowest point in Piano's stunning new plaza, with its welded steal and glass structure. Through this measured playfulness, Piano has added just enough theatricality and character to what is an extremely serious institution, avoiding vulgar visitor attraction gimmickry. While creating a building that both he and his nine-year-old son see more as a 'Funny gentle monster'.

Piano won the commission after 'showing around the Academy for a couple of days' (this time with his daughter) when invited by the client to pitch for the job. Unlike others who flew in with plans, sections, models and movies, Piano had no preconceptions. Instead he spent time in the Academy and gardens, where he observed the nature of the place and the nature of the client. After doing so, he rolled up his sleeves and produced the definitive sketch that posed the definitive question: 'Can

**Academy of Sciences, California, USA**

**ARCHITECT**

**RENZO PIANO BUILDING WORKSHOP**

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**Detailed section through Rainforest Biosphere**