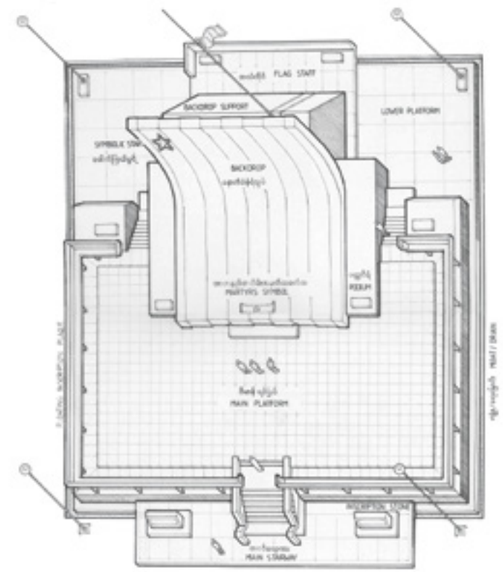
BOGYOKE AUNG SAN MAUSOLEUM

(MARTYRS' MAUSOLEUM)

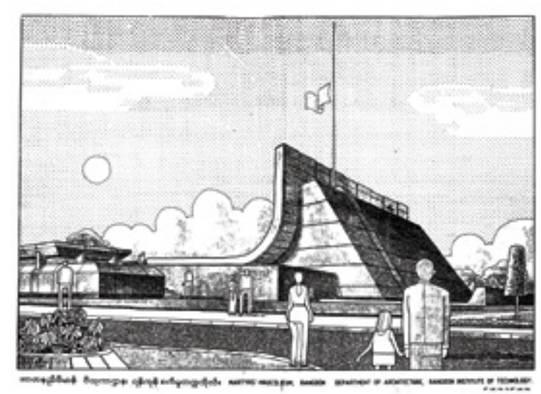
The Martyrs' Mausoleum in its present state with Shwedagon Pagoda in the background.

U Sun Oo and team, Rangoon Institute of Technology



Above
Floor plan, axonometric.

Below
Perspective drawing, back of the mausoleum.



Text: Moritz Henning with Brian Win Thant Win Shwin

On July 19, 1947, shortly after negotiations were held securing the independence of Burma, now Myanmar, Burmese nationalist leader and now national hero, Aung San,[01] along with seven other ministers, were assassinated during a cabinet meeting in Rangoon. To commemorate the victims, a small pavilion was erected at the foot of the famous Shwedagon Pagoda in the early 1960s, which was to be replaced by a new mausoleum in 1982. The competition was awarded to the design team at Rangoon Institute of Technology (RIT), led by the young architect U Sun Oo, who envisaged an open pavilion based on traditional building forms and constructed mainly of wood. However, the plans were not implemented in this form. In 1983, the old memorial was the site of a bomb attack on South Korean President Chun Doo-hwan, who was about to lay a wreath there during a state visit. While the president survived the assassination attempt perpetrated by North Korean agents, 21 people died and 47 were injured. U Sun Oo was asked to revise his design for the mausoleum to ensure more security in the event of another attack. This included changes such as the removal of the roof.

U Sun Oo soon submitted a new proposal, but that, too, had to be revised due to a personal intervention by the socialist President Ne Win, a general who came to power following a coup d'état in 1962. Some of the planned details were left out in the implementation of the design, which is why—as U Sun Oo later commented—the monument lacked the spirit it was intended to convey.[02] It was not until the monument's renovation in 2016 that some of the originally planned elements were added, such as the biographies of the martyrs and the symbolic star perforating the ramp. Under Ne Win, the monument was dedicated only to anonymous national martyrs, as the legacy of Aung San and the ministers were to be erased from the country's collective memory.

What remained of U Sun Oo's original plans was a modern, curved structure of reinforced concrete and brick, referencing the form and dimensions of Burma's traditional religious monuments. U Sun Oo's efforts to create an iconic, modern monument are recognizable, but were ultimately not fully realized due to the political circumstances. The Martyrs' Mausoleum is therefore a material reflection of the history of Myanmar's independence since colonial rule—infused with great pathos.

01 The Mausoleum was originally dedicated to Aung San, the father of Nobel laureate and later de facto head of government, Aung San Suu Kyi, who was arrested in February 2021 following a military coup.

02 Kyaw Phyo Tha, "Rangoon's Martyrs' Monument Revamped to Highlight Aung San," *The Irrawaddy,* July 12, 2016, accessed June 17, 2021, www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/rangoons-martyrs-monument-revamped-to-highlight-aung-san.html.