

reports

The new atrium at Salem's Peabody Essex Museum.

EAST IS EAST

FIRST LOOK The port town of Salem, Massachusetts, has always been associated with the spooky, the exotic, and the downright weird. Sea captains of the late 18th and early 19th centuries returned from Pacific voyages with private hoards of curiosities—shark-tooth war clubs, salmon-skin dresses—which formed the basis of the still-expanding collections of the Peabody Essex Museum, founded in 1799. This month the museum unveils a \$125 million expansion and redesign by Moshe Safdie, an Israeli-born architect known for his sensitivity to site and context. The atrium, with its broad central courtyard and series of interlocking brick-and-sandstone pavilions, evokes a New England common; a new glass-and-steel hall echoes the shape and scale of the museum's original Greek Revival entrance. The Salem collectors of the 1890's, who had a love affair with Asia (which they pictured as an aristocratic never-never land of exquisite taste), would be thrilled by the museum's latest acquisition: Yin Yu Tang, the house of a wealthy Chinese merchant, built during the late Ch'ing dynasty. **Peabody Essex Museum, East India Square, Salem; 978/745-9500; www.pem.org.**—CHRISTOPHER BENFEY