Two-purpose tower

The new Time & Life Building weds a big communications plant to big rental office space, and both to the urbanity of Rockefeller Center.

Rockefeller Center built it, Time & Life gave it its name. The building's character reflects a joining of partners, a marriage of uses, a meld of design, and a union between New York's two generic office-building types.

Unlike the early postwar architectural pace-setters, such as the Seagram Building or Lever House, the Time & Life Building is not a posh institutional job with small floors, with architecture honed Seagram-sharp at fancy cost, and with or without extra space for rent to make ends meet. Nor is it a cheap, crowded rental building by an operative builder, dressed in the biggest tenant's name. In skyscraper society, the Time & Life Building is upper-middle-class.

This is Rockefeller Center's first joint venture with a former and future tenant, the Center taking a majority 55 per cent interest, and TIME INC. the remainder in a building corporation called Rock-Time, Inc. It came about like this. The Center needed to jump across Sixth Avenue to the west to offset the drift of mid-Manhattan away to the east. TIME INC., having settled upon the necessity of re-establishing its complex production operation in midtown Manhattan, wanted to go no higher than necessary above its 22-year-old bargain rental rate of $3.50 per square foot. But renting new air-conditioned space in the Center would have cost almost $7 per square foot. To give TIME INC. a way to recapture some of the difference in rental rates (and to keep the company in the Center) it was proposed in 1955 that TIME INC. and the Center share in the ownership of a new Center building.

The tower that came out of all this was designed by Architects Harrison & Abramovitz & Harris as a tall, big-boned flat slab, 47 stories high, 308 feet long, and 104½ feet wide, rising straight up, with a "wrap-around" eight-story annex to the north. The tower is set back on the lot, leaving a 70-foot-deep plaza on Sixth Avenue and a 30-foot-deep promenade along 50th Street. If surrender of one-fourth of the plot to trees and pavement, sculpture (forthcoming), pools, and fountains was a calculated gift to the city, it surely earned the citizens' affection. The building itself contains 1.9 million gross square feet and 1.5 million rental feet. The construction cost before tenant improvements was a little more than $50 million, about $27 per square foot.

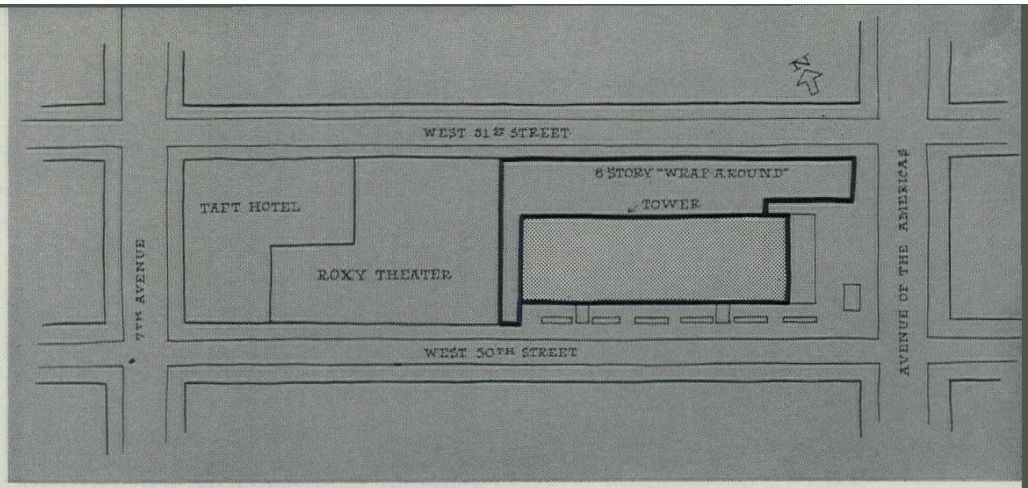
The architecture is conservative and in places wandering, but it is sturdy, and unquestionably the building is handsome. Originality was sacrificed to a more effective marriage with the Center, the city within a city. Purchase of the adjacent Roxy Theater's air rights allowed the tower to rise straight up as a large, simple slab, quickly identifiable with Rockefeller Center (see photos). And the combined effect of its big, projecting, limestone-faced columns and outside ducts, on glass walls trimmed with dark gray aluminum, is a surprising harmonization with the older buildings. For a report of the melding of uses, turn the page.

PHOTOS: ANDREAS FEININGER

. . . extending Rockefeller Center west and . . .

happily marrying old and new.

The new Time & Life Building, a handsome tower in civic space . . .



Block plan: purchase of the theater air rights permitted a tall tower of large and uniform floors.

Plazas and fountains

In the early thirties when Rockefeller Center was planned, New York had all but forgotten about plazas and fountains. The story is told that when Rockefeller Plaza's famous Prometheus Fountain was proposed, the sponsors were appalled that it would use 26,000 gallons of water daily. But when Architect Raymond Hood asked, simply, how much would that cost, the answer was something like $10 — and the fountain was built.

The four mushroom fountains with jets in the 30½ by 109½-foot reflecting pool at the TIME & LIFE plaza, plus the twin jets in the six smaller pools on the promenade along 50th Street, cost an average of $50 a day for water, pumping, maintenance, and underwater illumination. The architects deliberately designed all pools with wide edges, seat-high, and the crowds love it (see photos). The mushroom fountain shape, more massive than jet types currently fashionable, is less easily scattered by wind, less likely to wet crowds.

Trees along 50th Street, shrubs on Sixth Avenue above subway gratings, three flagpoles in front of the east entrance, a neat subway entrance which will be topped by sculpture — all these make the TIME & LIFE plaza a happy place. (One sad note: the undulating pattern of the terrazzo pavement of the plaza and the lobby—an idea which Harrison imported from the Copacabana in Rio de Janeiro — became a glaring distraction.)

Would the new plaza influence the city as a whole? Following Rockefeller Center's first superblock with open plazas, not another commercial plaza was built in New York until Lever House, even though a few speculative builders had in the meantime covered more ground, sidewalk to sidewalk, than the total area of the Center. They never became the urban princes that they might have been, had they learned to pool their land acquisitions.

"We are not Rockefellers," was their explanation.

Pool edges form comfortable seats; on windy days the taller fountain jets are turned off.

Front plaza between the pool and sidewalk is paved in a Copacabana pattern.

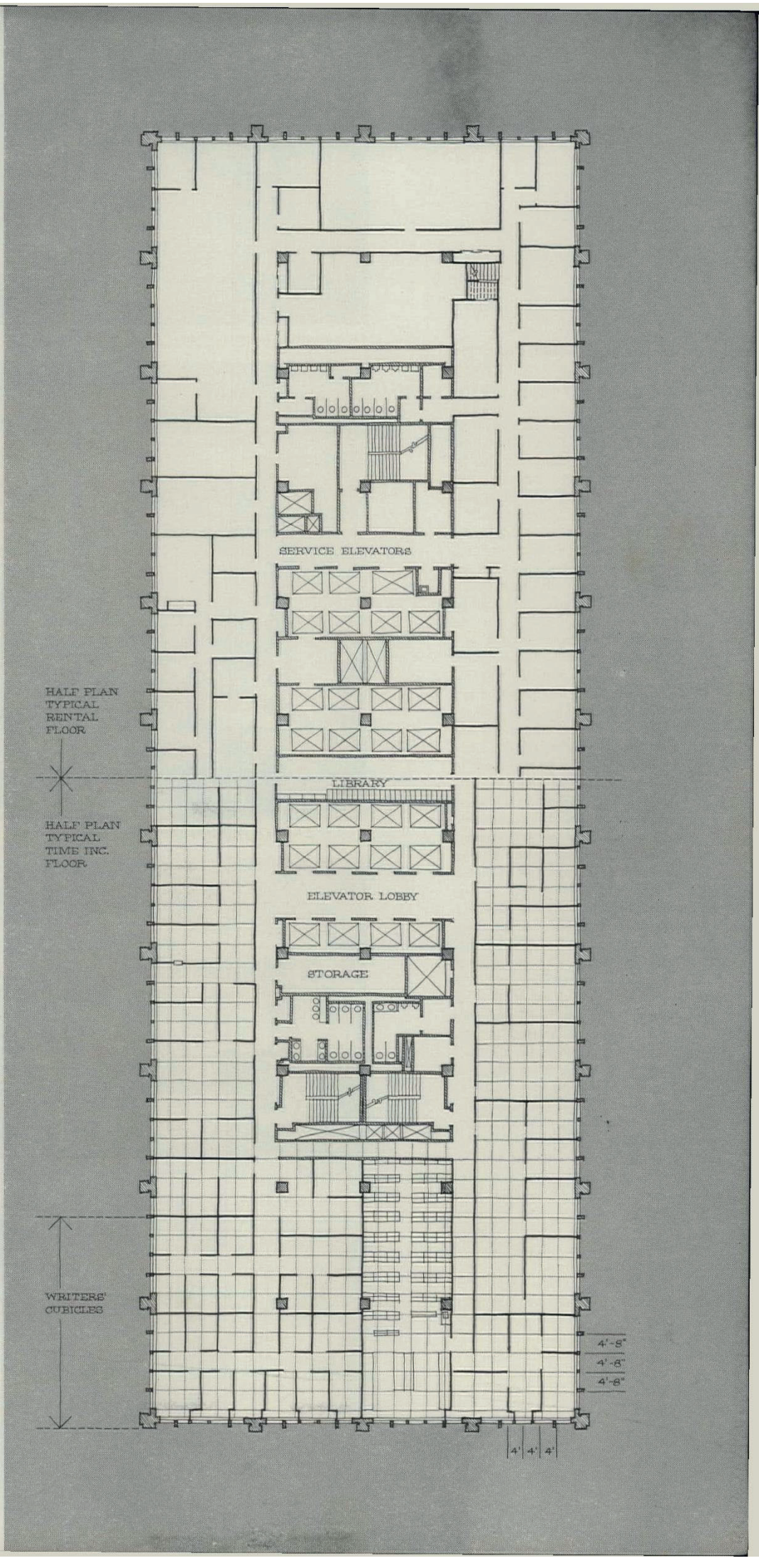
Big floors, little cubicles

The two half-plans at the right, one half showing space occupied by TIME INC. and the other typical office space occupied by another tenant, display the disparities that must often be met in "package" buildings serving a variety of users with different needs. TIME INC. is by far the biggest tenant; it rents 21 floors, six of which are being sublet pending future expansion.

The net 28,000-square-foot floors are really big (by comparison, the Socony Mobil Building's tower floors average only 16,000 square feet), and TIME INC.'s special problem was that it had to fit so many small rooms into these big floors. Other tenants left much of the big area open in "bull pens," as can be seen in the plan, and TIME INC. needed some of these, too. But TIME INC. also had to pack in large numbers of smaller-than-office-size writers' cubicles, measuring at a minimum only 75 square feet. An earlier issue (FORUM, Jan. '58) described the system worked out by Designs for Business, the interior planners of TIME INC.'s space. As the plan shows, the essential idea was to line up cubicles three deep in the 24-foot distance between the peripheral window wall and the main corridor surrounding the elevator core. Spur corridors, each serving six cubicles, end at light-giving windows (photos, bottom of next page).

All in all, it has worked well. Few of the highly articulate writers, struggling initially with the dangling extension cords required to bridge an occasional lighting or wiring eccentricity, entirely understood the problem. A tight system of exact little rooms, each needing everything—space, access, ventilation, light, wiring, and sound reduction—enormously complicates and runs up the cost of ducting, pipes, and conduits, above the ceiling, which in some parts of the building are as tightly packed as a submarine. Only in a few cubicles at the ends of the floors, where the modular spacing of the partitions could not quite match the nonmodular spacing of the mullions, did the system get really clumsy.

The structure was engineered by Edwards & Hjorth, built by George A. Fuller Co. and John Lowry, Inc.



Individualistic elevator lobbies: for SPORTS ILLUSTRATED *. . . and for* LIFE.

Variety, individuality

In the elevator lobbies, used as foyers, the different magazines sought to express themselves as individualities. But with a few exceptions (notably SPORTS ILLUSTRATED, by FORUM's Ray Komai, top left), the results were more flashy than expressive.

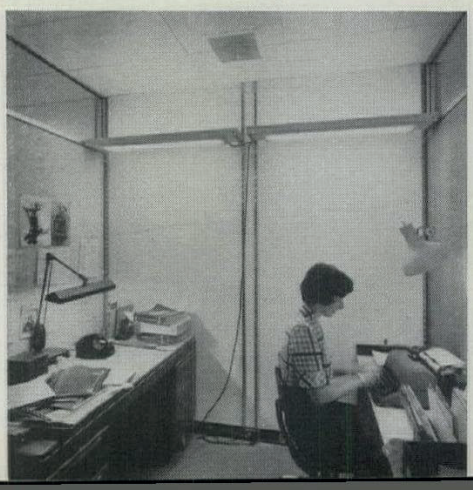
In the whole area of interiors and furnishings, TIME INC. has made no high-style effort but has contented itself with what Gerald Luss of Designs for Business could dream up, plus a few furnishings inevitably carried over from the old building. Luss's best stroke was probably his share in designing a new partition system which is integrated with the lighting, wiring, acoustical, and air-conditioning systems to make possible easy rearrangement of space without disturbing the floor and ceiling finishes. As the larger pictures on these two pages show, these partitions not only create a manageable sort of space across a wide diversity of uses and dimensions, but keep it looking airy and light-footed. The ingenious posts are square-section aluminum extrusions, with a channel on each face to receive neoprene gaskets, into which panels may be butted with no screwing except at crossbars. The panels, which are easily interchangeable even after the partitions are in place, are made up in an almost overgenerous variety with a wide series of alternate surfaces: oak, birch, walnut, or butternut plywood, thumbtack-able plastic, natural or painted burlap, milk safety glass, and unpolished plate glass, the latter two highly useful as a translucent facing for inside cubicles far from windows (bottom left). In some places, like the LIFE layout room (top, opposite), the posts are used as ingenious "space dividers," supporting nothing but shelves. A space-saving sliding door for offices was also developed as part of the partition package. The cost to TIME INC. for all its interior work was roughly $13 million.

Airy and flexible glass-topped partitions create pleasant interior offices.

Typical office for a FORTUNE *manager*

. . . and a conference room for LIFE.

An inside cubicle served by a spur corridor leading to a window.



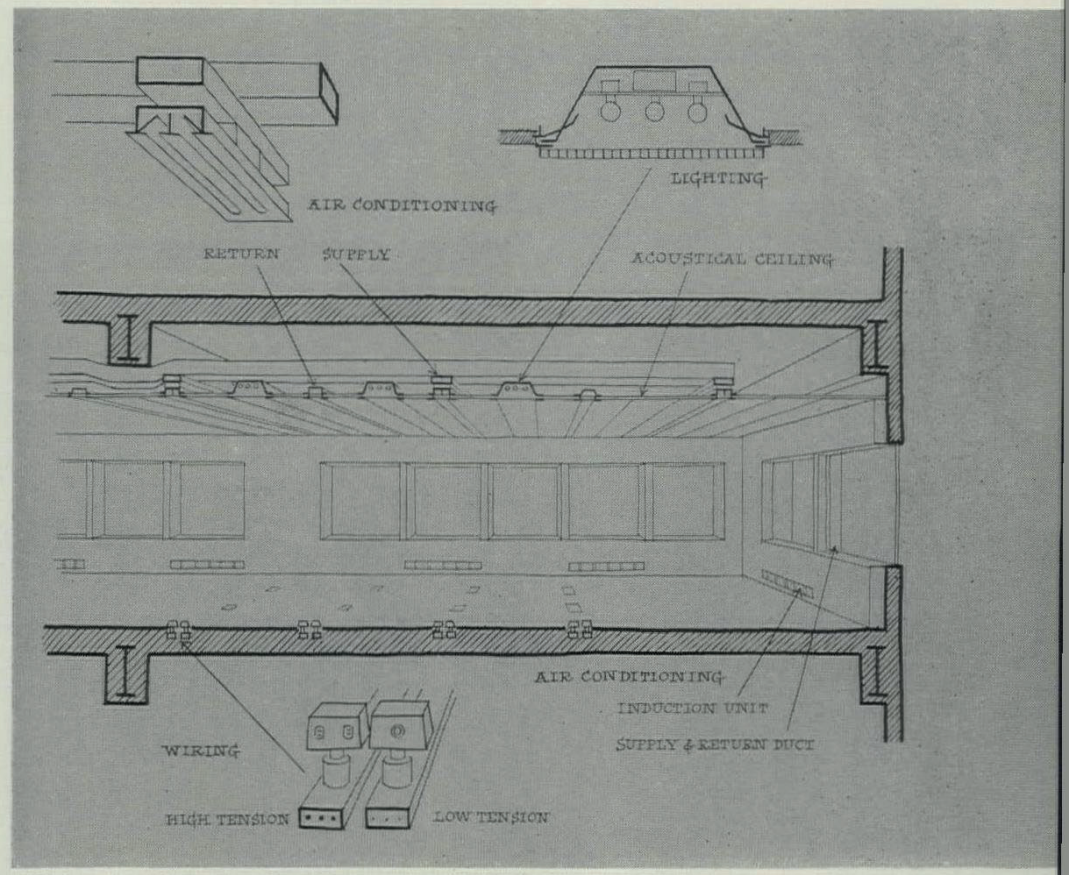
Light, air, sound

With very little to-do, Architects Harrison & Abramovitz & Harris have reversed the big-window trend set by Lever and Seagram, though they gave TIME & LIFE 369,000 square feet of glass-surfaced façades. The row-window openings are only 43 per cent of the wall. Astonishingly little, if anything, was lost thereby in interior pleasantness, while air-conditioning cost was cut a lot. The window glass is clear, not blue or green, mostly because of a demand by TIME INCers, many of whom work with color printing, for undistorted daylight.

The air conditioning by Engineers Syska & Hennessy (and Cosentini Associates for the TIME INC. space) has already been described (FORUM, Jan. '58): a central distribution system plus underwindow induction units individually controlled, with cooling air supply in risers on the outside face of the wall.

What has troubled TIME INCers most is the higher transmission of sound in a building with thin movable partitions instead of thick block walls. In field tests in a mockup of the building, Acoustical Experts Bolt Beranek & Newman had established that the new partition design stood about midway, acoustically, with others on the market. When, nevertheless, during the initial occupancy of the building even whispers could be heard from room to room in some places, attention was directed to that weak element in every building design —joints and openings, including ductways. During the building's shakedown period these acoustical problems are being solved by applying a mastic sealant to the joints between the factory-made partitions and the handmade walls and by adding denser neoprene gaskets to the offending joints in the partition system. The noise nuisance will be further tamed once the air-conditioning system is balanced and ready for the operation of that paradoxical expedient of acoustical engineers: noisemakers in the ducts to help blanket conversational tones.

In LIFE's *layout room partition posts on grid intersections support only space-dividing shelves.*

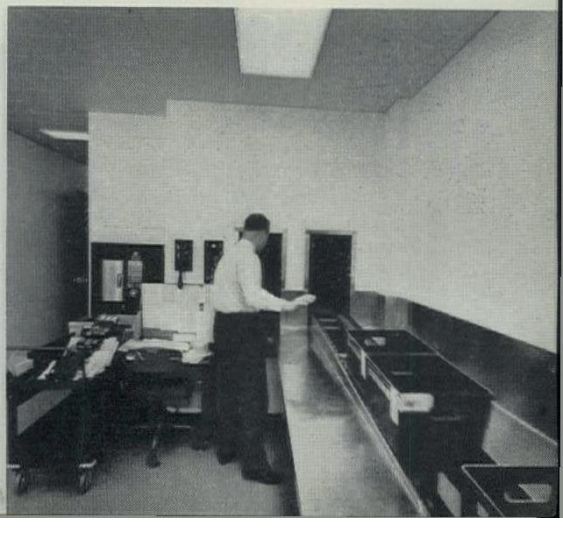


Lighting, air, and wiring are brought to every module on the floor.

Special rooms: the message-tube center

RICHARD H. ALTHOFF

. . . and a typical conveyor station.



Lobby floor and below

Against the current trend, the lobby is built high (16 feet), wide, and handsome. Its chief entrances are on the cross streets, not on the avenue front, so as to sidestep the nasty problem of entering a long structure end-on. TIME INC.'s own reception center, 32 feet high, behind its four huge windows facing the plaza's reflection pool, is unorthodox too: it can be entered only from the building lobby.

In that lobby, Architect Harrison was unusually free to do as he preferred. He buttoned up the elevator shafts in stainless steel (top view), brightened the entire ends of the elevator core with murals, and cooled the wall of the surrounding stores with white marble (center view). The eastern mural, by Fritz Glarner, is all primary red, yellow, blue, plus two grays and black and white, cheering but puzzling spectators as a sort of skew-gee Mondrian. At the other end there is coming an equally abstract Albers. The ceiling (middle view) is a pin-lighted sheet of maroon that few will guess is opaque glass.

Side-stepping the elevators, with their automatic controls, electronic timing, 1,200-foot-per-minute speed, and mechanical music (to enrage the more savage breast), the rubberneck can find fresh interest, going down by escalator to the concourse below. Fronted in part by high-class commercial space (bottom left), and connecting to the rest of the Center, past the subway, these bright, clean passages show how nice civic underground space can be.

Down underneath there are two basements more, which rubbernecks will never see. They contain all sorts of mechanical devices and storage, not the least interesting item being two full-sized trailer-truck elevators and a turntable (bottom right).

Elevator stacks in the lobby are buttoned in stainless steel.

Bright colors of Glarner mural at lobby entrance contrast with maroon glass ceiling, white marble walls.

Show windows in the basement concourse

. . . and the truck turntable in the subbasement.

The Ponti pavilion

Madison Avenue never had it so good. Atop the eighth-floor setback there was placed a set of rooms for meetings — many of them with advertisers. And here, although Italian Architect Gio Ponti never once reached for an obvious device of the Baroque, he hit it voluptuously aplenty.

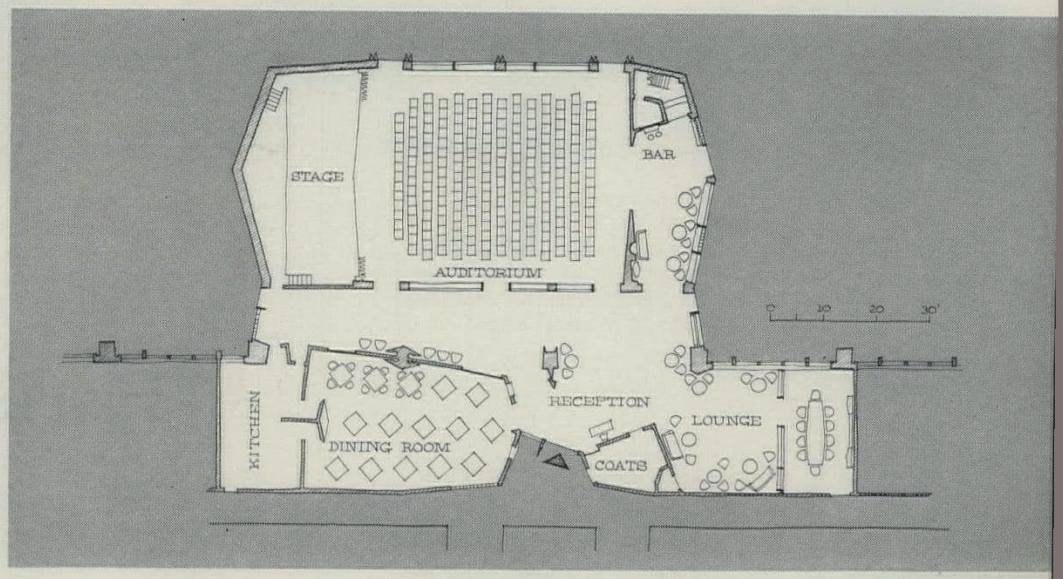
The roof-garden setting is not completed; but the interior is already busy. The auditorium and adjunct spaces (see plan) flow without a break between tower and pavilion; angular lines create irregular spaces nice and usable—rooms, foyers, nooks, bars (and a caterer's pantry)—all just right for informal conversations of all magnitudes.

The auditorium itself is audio-visually so equipped that probably nowhere else can the art of communication be made into so high-style a jamboree.

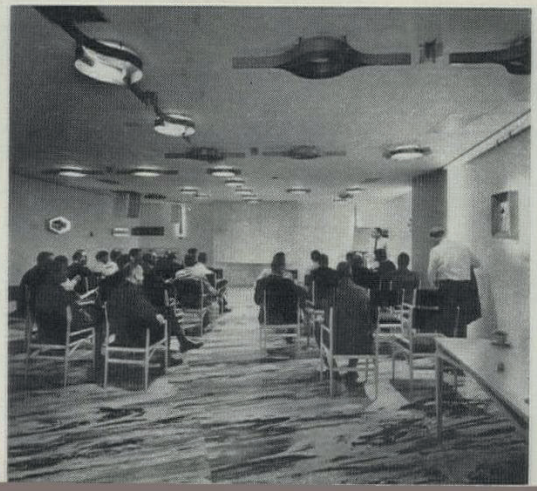
As for the atmosphere of the whole, even a Milanese colleague of the designer had to catch his breath, and could only gasp: "Well, that's Gio [pronounced Joe] Ponti." Ceilings when not all saucered as in the auditorium (top view) are a biz-baz of brass strapwork, embracing the lights in a variety of shapes which could suggest biological symbols nameable only in Latin (bottom views). Floors are a grand lava flow of marbleized sheet rubber in yellow with streaks of green, and dark blue—and on the bias. Walls are punched with panels of rich, luminous-colored glass block, and behung with rich Sicilian fantasy paintings — and daggers. Chairs, neo-*art-nouveau*, have as many joints as a praying mantis. The many-angled Italian cabinetwork, in blond wood, is beyond the capacity of American mechanical civilization.

Only the design-wily Italian Ponti could so dare the critics—but he knew his Madison Avenue audience.

Auditorium in Ponti's pavilion, used as dining space . . .



. . . the dining space used as a meeting room



. . . and the reception area, linking the two.