

# OCULUS

on current new york architecture

The New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects

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*The Parker Meridien Hotel on West 57th Street offers a Sansovina-revived bit of Venice by Tom Lee Ltd.*

*Photo, courtesy of Tom Lee Ltd.*

# OCULUS

## Chapter Reports

## The New Midtown Arcades

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### Oculus

Editor: C. Ray Smith  
 Managing Editor: Marian Page  
 Art Director: Abigail Sturges  
 Typesetting: Susan Schechter

The New York Chapter of  
 the American Institute of Architects  
 The Urban Center, 457 Madison Avenue,  
 New York, New York 10022  
 212-838-9670

George S. Lewis, *Executive Director*

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### Photo, this page, column 3:

*The Garnier-reduplicated lobby-passageway at the Helmsley-Palace Hotel, another confection by Sara Tomerlin Lee, additionally offers one of Manhattan's unique urban vistas—up the baroque stair to the gothic Lady Chapel of St. Patrick's Cathedral.*

by George Lewis

**South Street Seaport/"Telco" Building Across Front Street**, just to the west of the Schermerhorn Block, a large and bulky telephone building utilizing air rights from the South Street Historic District had been approved some years ago. Subsequently a new developer gained Planning Commission approval to proceed within the Telco envelope with a commercial building. In the process a low addition appeared on the north, Fulton Street side. The chapter's special committee, Michael Parley chairman, wrote the Landmarks Commission, expressing "dismay" at the bulk, questioning the CPC approval process of the transformation to commercial, and particularly objecting to the addition, or "bustle," which would cut off the view of Schermerhorn as one approached down Fulton. The Landmarks Commission on November 10 disapproved the "bustle" and the materials on the building proper.

### Proposed Tower, Upper East Side Historic District

In a controversial decision attracting wide attention, the Landmarks Commission has denied by 6-5 vote on November 10 a Certificate of Appropriateness for a slender, 245 foot tower close to the corner of 71st Street and Madison Avenue. The tower, designed by Diana Agrest and Mario Gandelsonas in association with Gruzen & Partners, was admired for the sensitivity of its design by supporters and opponents alike, but many of the latter objected because of its location in the low-rise Frick block. A special chapter committee, confirmed by the Executive Committee, voted to approve the design, pointing out that it would enrich the Historic District and be viewed as a Madison Avenue building, not an encroachment on the block. One now wonders how the Commission will deal with other applicants to come—how a felicitous evolution of the District will be guided.

### St. Bart's, Cont.

Alan Melting, chairman of the Chapter's special committee, testified at a Community Board 5 hearing  
*cont'd. p. 8, col. 3*



*With the cold weather upon us, the new through-block arcades in midtown Manhattan will be getting their true testing. Among them, Park Avenue Plaza at the Fisher Brothers building (behind the Racquet Club) has been recently completed, and Olympic Place at Olympic Tower has been redesigned.*

*At Park Avenue Plaza, the Natural Source restaurant may look like a private press party because of its too-sparkling white tablecloths, but it is now open to the public as a not-to-be-missed midtown eatery. The restaurant serves breakfast from 8 am, and lunch and snacks until 7 pm (sandwiches at around \$5.75, salads around \$6.50, and entrees from \$5.75 to \$10.50); dinner service and a wine license are expected shortly. At lunch, the fountain encloses the open space with sound, muffles conversation, and gives calm and intimacy to the luscious, greenhouse-like, seemingly sunny arcade. It is surely the best public amenity we have gotten so far from the through-block-arcade legislation.*

*Le Cafe Delices la Cote Basque at Olympic Place offers another midtown lunchspot. The atmosphere here is busy and bustling, with a splashing, bumptious waterfall and layer-on-layer of wire lattice. Breakfast is served from 8 until 11 am, lunch from 11 am until 3 pm (soups at \$3.75, salads from \$4.75 to \$7.25, entrees from \$5.25 to \$6.75), and dinner until 10:30 pm.*

*After all, these enclosed arcades may ultimately provide a balance, in our seasonal climate, to the previous generation's outdoor plazas. CRS/MP*

## On Olympic Place

by Jaquelin Robertson



Olympic Tower was, from the start, a marriage of convenience — albeit a forced one — coupling a clearly perceived public policy about luxury retailing with more experimental urban design ideas.

Simply put, the Fifth Avenue Special District was specifically created to stop a serious erosion of luxury retail space along New York's most prestigious shopping street. The new legislation sought to reverse this trend by: 1) mandating selected ground floor retail uses (i.e. no banks, airline offices, etc.); 2) eliminating setbacks in order to maintain a continuous shopping frontage; 3) placing office entrances *off* the avenue; 4) creating mid-block covered arcades as alternatives to open plazas (these to have smaller retail outlets, restaurants, newsstands, etc. as well as serve as entrance foyers for offices).

But the real hook lay in the incentives. In order to encourage development of *more* than the minimal mandated level of retail, a 20% bonus in floor space was offered; this to be occupied by luxury housing.

The resulting 52-story mixed-use Olympic Tower had an exquisite logic: while it resulted in a bigger building, its density at 21.6 FAR was *less* than a  
*cont'd. p. 7, col. 1*

Jaquelin Robertson of Eisenman-Robertson proposed and prepared the special Fifth Avenue Zoning District under which Olympic Tower was originally conceived and built, and was later involved with the interior design of Olympic Place as part of the development team.

## On Olympic Place and Park Avenue Plaza

by Jim Morgan

It may surprise admirers of the new arcade restaurants at Olympic Tower and Park Avenue Plaza — with their crisp napery, gleaming tablewear, flowers, and hovering waiters — to learn that they are totally illegal.

In both cases, when the proposed designs were presented to Manhattan Community Board 5, the food offered from the kiosks in the arcades was limited to counter service. All tables and chairs were to be “areas where the public can relax and not feel obligated to purchase food or other items.” I am quoting from the City Planning Commission's own legislative report for Park Avenue Plaza. In the case of Olympic Tower, when Jaque Robertson presented plans to the Community Board for redesign of the arcade a couple of years ago, he assured us that any restaurant-style dining would be on the level beneath the ground floor and that in the public arcade the kiosk would offer its expensive pastries and espresso only at the counter. Park Avenue Plaza also promised that its restaurant-style facilities would be elsewhere.

Thus the present arrangements, however gracious they may appear to the uninformed eye, clearly abrogate the terms of the incentive zoning agreements made with the City.  
*cont'd. p. 7, col. 2*

Jim Morgan, architect, is a tireless and insightful campaigner for urban amenities as a member of Manhattan's Community Board 5 and as an author. He teaches at Pratt.

## On Park Avenue Plaza

by Jonathan Morse



Oculus called the other day to ask for my views on the “Galleria” in the Fisher Brothers' building behind the Racquet & Tennis Club. Delighted to oblige, as I had been curious myself, I grabbed my faithful mentor and attorney, Alan J.B. Aronsohn, and off we went for what turned out to be a most pleasant lunch. The space itself is very SOM, but with a lavish supply of trees, water, light, and people. A gay, “Hello Mr. Morse,” rang out as I entered — not from a well-tipped maitre-d', but from Larry Fisher's grandson, who was sitting in the “cheap seats” with his construction crew. Since our counselor is hardly a “brown bag” type of person, we proceeded to the “white table cloth” section.

Lunch, provided by The Natural Source, a small but growing operation with three other restaurants in New York and Fire Island, was delightful. Our attorney had a pasta al pesto, and your correspondent had a Mediterranean seafood salad that was so superior to what is served next door that thoughts of resignation flitted briefly through his mind. Missing his prandial glass of white wine, he was assured that the wine license was on its way. Prudence dictated against sampling the desserts, but there was no reason to disbelieve our attractive and helpful waiter when he pointed out that they  
*cont'd. p. 7, col. 3*

Jonathan Morse, architect, is president of the development firm, The Cowperwood Interests. He led the Racquet Club's fight against the Fisher Brothers building by proposing the hotel over the Club.

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## CONTINUING EVENTS

Oculus welcomes information for the calendar pertaining to public events about architecture and the other design professions. It is due by the 7th of the month for the following month's issue. Because of the time lag between information received and printed, final details of events are likely to change. It is recommended, therefore, that events be checked with the institutions before attending.

Send Oculus Calendar information to: New York Chapter/AIA, 457 Madison Avenue, N.Y. 10022.

**P.B. WIGHT: ARCHITECT CONTRACTOR, CRITIC 1838-1925**  
National Academy of Design, 1083 Fifth Ave. at 89 St. Closes Dec. 6.

**THE WORK OF KARL SCHINKEL**  
Avery Hall, Columbia Campus. Information 280-3414. Opened Nov. 16; closes Dec. 15.

**ARCOSANTI**  
Video and slide presentation covering Paoli Soleri's town under construction in Arizona. Zona Gallery, 484 Broome St. Closes Dec. 31.

## TUESDAY 1

**FORUMS ON FORM**  
Lecture by Robert A.M. Stern on *Robert A.M. Stern 1965-1980: Towards a Modern Architecture after Modernism* (Rizzoli). Urban Center Books, 457 Madison Ave. 12:30-1:30 pm.

**REVIEW OF REVIEWS**  
Roundtable of journalists discusses reviews of Tom Wolfe's *From Bauhaus to Our House* moderated by Suzanne Stephens. 6:30. The Architectural League, 457 Madison Ave. 753-1722.

## TUESDAY 8

**FORUMS ON FORM**  
Lecture by Richard Haas on his book, *Richard Haas: An Architecture of Illusion* (Rizzoli). MAS secretary Gordon Hyatt will introduce. Urban Center Books, 457 Madison Ave. 12:30-1:30.

**RICHARD G. STEIN: FORTY YEARS OF ARCHITECTURAL WORK**  
Covers work from 1940 to current projects—1980. Closes Dec. 31. The Urban Center, 457 Madison Ave. 838-9670.

**THE BEST LAID PLANS . . . ALTERED NEW YORK BUILDINGS**  
Exhibition of blueprints, drawings, plans from 1866 to 1981, presented by the Municipal Archives, Surrogates Court House, 31 Chambers St. Opened Oct. 1; closes Dec. 31.

**WINDOW, ROOM, FURNITURE**  
Exhibition of responses to these elements by artists and architects. Houghton Gallery, Cooper Union, 3rd Ave. and 7 St. Opened Nov. 30; closes Dec. 31.

## WEDNESDAY 2

## WEDNESDAY 9

**THE MAKING OF AN ARCHITECT, 1881-1981**  
Centennial exhibition, Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture including: student work dating back to 1880s, a selection of the best architectural accomplishments of Columbia alumni, and a special display showing Columbia's influence on New York City's built environment. National Academy of Design, Fifth Ave. and 89 St. Closes Jan. 10.

**BEYOND TRADITION: 25th ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION**  
American Crafts Museum, 44 W. 53 St. Opened Oct. 3; closes Jan. 10.

**BERENICE ABBOTT: THE 20s AND 30s**  
Exhibition of prints by the photographer including her documentation of a changing New York—buildings, streets, shops, neighborhoods, waterfront—between 1929 and 1939. International Center of Photography, 1130 5th Ave. at 94 St. Opened Nov. 22; closes Jan. 10.

## THURSDAY 3

**MIDTOWN MANHATTAN: ZONING, PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT**  
First session of course with Richard Bernstein. Six Thursdays, 5:50-7:35. \$80. New School, 66 W. 12. 741-5690.

**THE MANHATTAN TRANSCRIPTS**  
Exhibition of theoretical drawings by Bernard Tschumi. Max Protetch, 37 W. 57 St. Closes Jan. 2.

**HARMONY IN HEALTH DESIGN**  
Lecture by Emily Malino on hospital interiors. NYC/AIA, 457 Madison Ave. 5 pm. 838-9670

## THURSDAY 10

**THREE PROJECTS: ONE FORM**  
Lecture by Steven Holl, Assistant Professor of Architecture, Columbia, and manager of "Pamphlet Architecture," in fall series. The Open Atelier of Design, 12 W. 29 St. 6 pm. \$11 with advanced reservation. 686-8698.

**THE REPLY TIME: KENNETH FRAMPTON**  
Discussion of his book, *Modern Architecture: A Critical History*, and reply to his critics. 6:30 pm. The Architectural League, 457 Madison Ave. 753-1722.

**MANHATTAN ADDITIONS: TWO APARTMENT BUILDINGS**  
Exhibition of drawings and models by Diana Agrest and Mario Gandelsonas. The Lobby, 369 Lexington Ave. at 41 St. Opened Oct. 27; closes Jan. 15.

**SUBURBS**  
Exhibition. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, 2 E. 91 St. Opened Nov. 10; closes Jan. 24.

## FRIDAY 4

**SOLAR CONCEPTS**  
On Saturday, December 5, William Chales, passive solar architect in the East Hampton area will discuss his design concepts at a meeting of the Long Island Solar Energy Association. Brookhaven National Laboratory, William Floyd Parkway (Exit 68 on L.I. Expressway). 12 noon.

## FRIDAY 11

## MONDAY 7

**LIGHTING WORLD INTERNATIONAL**  
First Advanced Illumination Exposition & Conference, Dec. 7-9. The Sheraton Centre, 7th Ave. & 52 St. Information: Robert A. Weissman, National Expositions Co. 391-9111.

**LOOKING AT OPEN SPACES**  
Final lecture by August Hecksher in series on *Cities*. Cooper-Hewitt, 2 E. 91 St., 6:15 pm. 860-6868.

**HEALING URBAN SCARS**  
Exhibition of Richard Haas's exterior wall paintings. The Municipal Art Society in the Urban Center, 457 Madison Ave. 935-3960. Closes Jan. 15.

**MONDAY 14**

**A SEMINAR ON THE WORK OF RICHARD G. STEIN**

A seminar in conjunction with the exhibition (see Dec. 8). NYC/AIA, 457 Madison Ave. 6 pm. 838-9670.

**THE MOVE TO IMPROVE:**

**THE BANANA KELLY'S PIONEERS**

Exhibition of urban revitalization in the South Bronx. The Municipal Art Society in the Urban Center, 457 Madison Ave. 935-3960. Closes Jan. 30.

**TUESDAY 15**

**THE MANHATTAN TRANSCRIPTS**

Bernard Tschumi's discussion of his work in connection with exhibition at Max Protetch gallery (see Dec. 3). 6:30 pm. The Architectural League, 457 Madison Ave. 753-1722.

**WEDNESDAY 16**

**THURSDAY 17**

**THREE PROJECTS: ONE FORM**

Lecture in fall series: Taft Architects of Houston, John J. Casbarian, Robert H. Timme, Danny Samuels, partners. The Open Atelier of Design, 12 W. 29 St. 6 pm. \$11 with advanced reservation. 686-8698.

**FRIDAY 18**

**MONDAY 21**

**COMPUTER AIDED CONSTRUCTION COST ESTIMATING**

2-day seminar/workshop on the latest methods and most comprehensive data base in the construction industry. Grand Hyatt Hotel, Park Ave. at Grand Central. Information: Pat Houghton, 490-3898.

**TUESDAY 22**

**WEDNESDAY 23**

**THURSDAY 24**

**FRIDAY 25**

*Merry Christmas  
to one  
and all!*

**MONDAY 28**

**TUESDAY 29**

**WEDNESDAY 30**

**THURSDAY 31**

*Happy  
New Year!*

1. At Park Avenue Plaza a skylighted waterfall (left of photo) and round food-serving kiosks at each end enclose the Natural Source restaurant.

2. Between the trees and kiosks at each end of the Fisher Brothers building arcade are groups of tables and chairs for public seating.

3. At Olympic Place a cafe upstairs and a glass-enclosed restaurant below look out onto a three-tiered waterfall and pool (to the left of camera).

4. Public seating at the south end of Olympic Place recalls a French park. The wire mesh furniture reiterates the overall lattice motif.

All photos, except as noted, Stan Ries.



1



3



2



4

## On Olympic Place

*cont'd. from p. 3*

permitted pure office tower at 18.0. Furthermore, this smaller population came and went at different times reducing peak congestion; costly city infrastructure was used more economically over a 24-hour, 7-day-a-week period.

Without doubt the Arlen/Onassis commitment turned the retail tide on Fifth Avenue and introduced a new sense of international presence. The building itself, while architecturally bland and revealing nothing of its complex inner life (physically just another featureless brown office box), became New York's most famous symbol of the influx of new foreign money.

Now attention focuses on Olympic Place — accompanied both by a loss of memory and a new and different set of priorities. Is the refurbished (or more accurately, "completed") arcade serving its intended purpose? Is it as good as an open plaza? Does it serve the public?

Yes. Precisely. Despite real physical constraints, the through-block space offers extensive public seating, restrooms, telephones; new retail frontages (a bookstall/newsstand, and florist); a sidewalk cafe and bar and a concourse level restaurant; weekly public concerts; new graphics, lighting, and landscaping; improved exterior identification . . . all as originally envisioned and as more recently directed by the City and approved by the Community Board.

In this sense, as a covered pedestrian space in the Fifth Avenue District, Olympic Place should be seen in a different light from other Midtown examples and judged against the intentions of the District. Only use-over-time will tell how well it performs as a *supporting component of its hi-rent area* — and whether or not we continue to think this sort of role important.

## On Olympic Place and Park Avenue Plaza

*cont'd. from p. 3*

Strangely enough, the only through-block arcade where space was specifically set aside for a cafe with waiter service is the Galleria on 57th Street. Yet the owners of that desolate place have never gotten around to offering the amenity — or any other for that matter. There is of course one arcade where public seating is clearly offered: Citicorp (ironic to me because it is the only one that real-estate dominated Community Board 5 did not negotiate).

What is left at the Olympic Tower and Park Avenue Plaza arcades are a few chairs on the fringes where the average citizen feels he or she is welcome to sit down and relax even though in fact *every* seat is theirs to use freely. Once informed that all seats are public, it takes a bold person indeed to go sit at one of the linen-covered tables just to rest his feet or read a newspaper.

The issue has a doubly-negative effect: When the developers brought their original schemes to the City, asking for floor-area bonuses (Olympic Tower got 44 percent more than the zoning resolution maximum), they agreed in return that the arcades would be completely public space, except perhaps for a small kiosk selling candy and soda. By this means was created a generation of daylight-obliterating monsters whose deadly effect, on Madison Avenue for instance, is just now beginning to be seen. Even the Mayor wants the developers (when it is much too late) to move along.

But that is why the usurping of promised public seating by potentially profit-making restaurants is such a bitter pill for those of us who have warned for half-a-dozen years of the deleterious effect of overbuilding in Midtown.

## On Park Avenue Plaza

*cont'd. from p. 3*

were the "specialite de la maison." The table settings of white napery, a single red rose, and glass china were very pleasant indeed.

It's obvious what Jim Morgan, ever the non-conformist, would find objectionable in such an elegant and pleasant setting, but rather than take issue with him, I'd prefer to thank him publicly for his efforts, which are so richly rewarded here. The public toilets he campaigned so long and bitterly for are here; clean, accessible, and a tribute to his unrelenting zeal. Of course, he objects to a private restaurant, and would prefer more free tables, but it is precisely the restaurant that animates the space, staffs it, cleans it, and makes the free tables so attractive.

No doubt Jim's "provo" mentality would delight in seeing a hundred bag ladies playing a Felliniesque drama in this coolly elegant space, but I, for one, would not. No, I'm very pleased to see that New York has at last a sophisticated, public/private place, similar to the successful ones that generations of artists, writers, and architects have admired in Europe; rarely, if ever, to find them at home.

So — thank you Larry, Murray, Arnold and Sandy, and all the other Fisher people; thank you Jim, Betty, Hal, and all the Community Board 5 people; thanks Raul, Mike, Paul, and the gang at SOM. New York has a successful "Galleria" and the Racquet Club finally has an elegant place to eat!

## Names and News

**Edward Larrabee Barnes Associates** has been commissioned to design a new mathematics and computer science building on the Amherst College campus . . . **Cavaglieri/Edelman** are co-architects with SITE Projects to convert the former Police Headquarters Beaux Arts building at 240 Centre Street into a 125-room Grand Hotel de Ville. The building's domed exterior will be returned to its appearance when Hopin & Koen designed it at the turn of the century. A new interior will include "an atrium rising 164 feet into the dome," 97,000 square feet of room accommodations, 14,000 square feet of retail space, 20,000 square feet for community use, and a theater at basement level . . .

**Michael Graves** has been commissioned by the Whitney Museum of American Art to design an extension of its Marcel Breuer-designed building on Madison Avenue at 75th Street to take up the rest of the Madison Avenue block-front . . . Three NY Chapter members received awards in the 1981 New York State Association of Architects/AIA design awards program to honor distinguished design in New York State: **Alfredo DeVido** for a townhouse in Brooklyn; **Ashok M. Bhavnani** for a Creative and Performing Arts Center at Wheatley Heights, New York; and **Paul Segal Associates** for an apartment in Manhattan . . . **Cooper-Hewitt Museum and Parsons School of Design** have announced the first comprehensive program in the U.S. leading to a master of arts degree in the history of the decorative arts to begin in September 1982. For further information: 741-8910 . . . **Perkins & Will of New York** are architects for a 180,000 square foot addition and 125,000 square feet of alterations for the New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center over East 70 Street . . . **Haines Lundberg Waehler and FEAL**, a major construction organization in Italy, have announced the formation of the Italian-based company, **Architectural Design Consultants International (ADCI)**, to offer complete design and building services . . . **Conklin & Rossant** have been named architects to restore the exterior and remodel the interior of the Brooklyn Borough Hall

## Career Day



Over 600 students attended "Career Day" at the High School of Art and Design in October for an all-day series of seminars on careers in architecture. Representatives from 22 schools of architecture were on hand to answer questions. The highly successful annual event is sponsored by the National Institute for Architectural Education and NYC/AIA.

Civic Center, which was built in the 1840s and is listed in the Federal Register of Historic Places . . . **Gruzen & Partners** are the architects for a 400-room hotel on the west side of Broadway between 51st and 52nd Streets; it will be built over an existing four-story building. The developer is Novotel, the Paris-based hotel chain . . . Deadline for mailing entries to the 1982 Illumination Engineering Society Lighting Design Awards is March 3, 1982: Illuminating Engineering Society, 345 E. 47 St., 644-7924 . . . The National Institute for Architectural Education has announced two 1982 fellowships: 1) The William Van Alen Architect Memorial Fellowship offering \$20,600 in prizes is open to students working toward a degree in architectural or engineering schools full or part time. 2) The 1982 Lloyd Warren Fellowship 69th Paris Prize offering \$2,600 in prizes. Participants must have or anticipate receiving a professional degree in architecture from a U.S. school of architecture between June 1979 and December 1982. Information and official registration forms for both fellowships: NIAE, 139 E. 52 St., New York 10022 . . .

## Joint Project with COPAR

by Charles C.B. Moore

In a joint project of the chapter and the New York Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records/COPAR a letter was addressed to Emeritus members of the chapter during the summer requesting data about the history of New York architects and firms in practice in the period 1900 to 1941.

Thirty-one answers have been received so far. The Committee welcomes comments on its questionnaire as to form or substance. Some important addressees have not yet responded; follow-up is in progress.

Information received is being correlated, and will extend the valuable early history of New York architects assembled in a booklet published in 1979 by Dennis Steadman Francis, *Architects in Practice, New York City, 1840 to 1900*. New data will be deposited for general reference at chapter headquarters and also with the National Catalog of American Architectural Records of the Library of Congress. It is hoped that other AIA chapters will make similar efforts to record history of their areas.

## Chapter Reports

*cont'd. from p. 2*

November 19 that "the proposal to redevelop any portion of the landmark church, community house, terrace or garden is totally inappropriate to their historic designation and to landmark law."

**Stein Exhibition at Urban Center**  
On Tuesday, December 8 an exhibition, "Richard G. Stein: Forty Years of Architectural Work" will open, to run through the month. Many people missed it when it was shown at Cooper Union last year, and we are presenting it again to honor the Chapter's 1981 recipient of the Medal of Honor. There will be a seminar on December 14, at 6:00 p.m. to discuss Mr. Stein's work in the light of current architectural debate.