THE SEGUE FROM CITY TO STAGE:
FACADES, MARQUEES, ENTRIES, LOBBIES
IN NEW YORK THEATER

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ABSTRACT

The Segue from City to Stage:

Facades, Marquees, Entries, Lobbies in New York Theater

by

Caroline Stacy Labiner

Submitted to the Department of Architecture on May 11, 1983
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This thesis studies the series of spaces that make up the
entrance to urban theaters. The relationships of these
parts to the street, each other, and the theater itself are
analyzed in particular. The intent is to develop a set of
design criteria dimensionally, materially, and spatially
that can be used to design these transitional spaces
successfully. A design of this set of lobby spaces for a
site in the New York Theater District, based on this
observation, research, and analysis, serves as a test of
their validity.
The work is based on the premise that careful design of these transitional spaces can improve the experience of the theater for the audience member, and the street experience of the passerby.

Fernando Domeyko,
Associate Professor of Architecture, Thesis Supervisor
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When one enters a theater one enters a separate, condensed world. The architecture within should be rich and evocative—to energize the audience and gear it up for a special experience. The
same should be true of the exterior of the building. It should be part of the approach to the stage by presenting a special facade to the street, and an effective entrance. The edge of the building should also give the passerby on the street a piece of the theatrical experience—if they have no intention of coming further into the building. The impetus for this strong feeling about lobbies, entrances, and facades comes from the "dead" lobbies of two modern theaters—the Uris (now the Gershwin) and the Minskoff. The unwelcoming plazas of modern theater clusters, such as Lincoln Center, also fail to provide hints and clues to the magic within. The audience would benefit from visually and sensuously anticipating the spectacle inside. Architecturally, one should design the passage from the reality of the street to its translation on the stage. John Cage said that theater exists when you put a frame around the public senses of hearing and seeing. That frame need not be abrupt. In fact, it would be better if it impinged noticeably on its outer edge—apparent to the passerby. The "segue" is the movement through the events and spaces that accomplish that transition.
Historically, the transition from street to stage occurred in the one direction from the place of spontaneous theater to the legitimate theater of the stage. The Greeks' transition was from their theater in the natural landscape to city architecture. The Middle Ages through the early Renaissance staged performances in churches, streets, or private courts. It was not until the theater moved indoors that the way of bringing one in from the real staging ground of the street to the illusionary realm of the theater became necessary. The invention of forms that mitigated both realms began to appear. In the Renaissance, little entry space was needed since the stage imitated the city street; only the scale was changed. As theater became more removed from the world just outside the door, and as we used it to extend our experiences beyond those of our immediate neighborhood, more attention to the transition

Section through the Paris opera, from a contemporary magazine illustration.
between was required. The lobby was needed to reflect and prepare for the unreal splendor of the stage.

The theatrical act is one of engagement. The performance begins with the advertisement and should continue past the time that the playbill is discarded the morning after a performance. The building should enhance this exchange between reality and commentary. The segue, from the city to stage, is accomplished by a sequence of spaces and events. The word "segue" implies a discrete bridge that moves us from one place, thought, or phrase to another—not the gentle melding of things implied by "transition." The elements which move us from the fantasy world to the urban world are the ones that give the street and Times Square their theatrical character.
The theater in New York moved gradually up Broadway from downtown to uptown as the rest of civilization slowly preceded it. Its current resting place is Times Square, but even here, certain smaller areas within the region are developing their own special character. The razing of several theaters last year and their reconstruction in the basements of new office buildings on the same sites will also change the relationship of the theater to the street and, by extension, the city. New zoning ordinances under consideration may also change their

A 1929 map of the Theatre District.
relationships to the neighborhood.

Moving from the general relationship of New York theaters to their regions and the street to the specifics of the entries of the Broadway theater is the focus. The siting and orientation of the houses in the times Square area is as important as their entries. I am interested in general typologies: where the theaters tend to occur--at corners, in clusters, on side streets or Avenues--and where different types of facades and entries occur.

I analyzed four theaters for specific dimensions and materials to use as guides in the development of design criteria for a successful lobby. The theaters I looked at were the Martin Beck, the Palace, the Booth, and the Shubert.

The Martin Beck is located slightly outside the Theater District, but represents a successful lobby that is gracious to the street without the help of adjacent lobbies or restaurants. The Booth lobby has an intimate setting. Both it and the Shubert lobby are off Shubert Alley and have the help of the Alley and other theater lobbies to enliven the street edge. The Palace has a very articulated and gracious series of entry spaces. The relationships and dimensions are used to set up specific design guidelines for designing the transitional spaces from the street to the house.

Research for the thesis has included primary documentation of the site, three case studies, as well as library research. The secondary sources will concentrate on theater history throughout the world and within New York. A brief study of theaters concentrated on urban
theaters, especially on the relationships of
lobby and street to the theater and theater
organization.

Come and meet those dancing feet,
On the Avenue I'm taking you to.
Forty-Second Street.
Hear the beat of dancing feet,
It's the song I love the melody of.
Forty-Second Street.

Little "nifties" from the Fifties, innocent and sweet,
Sexy ladies from the Eighties, who are indiscreet.
They're side by side,
They're glorified.
Where the underworld can meet the elite,
Naughty, bawdy, gawdy, sporty.
Forty-Second Street.*
When the Morosco, Bijou, and Helen Hayes Theatres were reduced to rubble in March 1982, people came out of the woodwork to guarantee that it would never happen to the remaining forty-four Broadway theaters. The prototypical theater in the district is valuable, but the coincidence of so many in such a small neighborhood makes them irreplaceable. The maximum 90-foot distance from the proscenium to the last row, the acoustics, and the wrap-around audience, which is so much a part of the production, can no longer be economically reproduced. It is important to examine them closely and, while not imitating an obsolete form, to preserve the pattern and rhythm of the
The core of the theater district contains sixteen theaters in six square blocks.
district. Land was available and inexpensive throughout the teens and twenties, and more than seventy theaters were built. More than forty remain. These theaters line the streets in the core of the district (between Broadway and Eighth Avenues on 44th, 45th, 46th, and 47th Streets). They form a tight enclave which has great importance to the city’s cultural and economic life. The density and value of land today make it unlikely that such a grouping of
theaters could ever reoccur. The district also includes the restaurants, bars, ticket brokers, costumers, wigmakers, cosmetic salesmen, agents, producers, dance studios and light manufacturers that support the theaters. It is that density of theatrical life that creates an excitement about going to Broadway theater. It is generated by the white lights and colors of the spectacular signs that adorn the tops and faces of the theaters. The marquees, posters,
photographs, blowups of rave-notices, the eagerness of the crowds, the taxis, the mounted policemen trying to keep it all moving, but, most of all, the abundance of it, one theater after another, produce the neighborhood's spice. People who come without tickets go to the "twofers" (half-priced tickets in Times Square at TKTS), to agents, to scalpers, or from one theater to another. Where theaters are within hotels or office buildings, they lose their
exterior character; all of this excitement dissipates. Rather than reinforce the pattern, they interrupt it. Theaters that are built over or included in other structures are in danger of having their character absorbed and overwhelmed by the superstructure above.

Vaudeville, drama, and musical theater are entertainment—gay, vibrant, bigger than life—and the architecture of the best theaters reflects these qualities in the design of their spaces and detailing of materials. There is anticipation and excitement as one moves toward and under the marquee, past the transparent doors, into the ticket lobby, past the ticket takers to inner lobbies, up curving stairways to mezzanines and balconies, and down again from the ramped aisles to seats. Occasionally
exterior motifs and forms are carried within the building to the lobbies and the house. There is a drama to the changing levels outside the auditorium, the enveloping side walls and ceilings that curve toward the stage, the lines of moldings, boxes, and richly carved proscenium arches. The interior decorations help focus attention on the stage opening, just as the
lobby and exterior ornament help orient the audience by emphasizing direction and form. It is this flamboyant decor that makes these houses part of the theatrical experience itself.
MODERN SOLUTIONS

The proscenium was developed as a masking device for the carefully painted stage pictures of the seventeenth century. Inigo Jones constructed elaborate proscenium arches for his masques. In 1777, Drury Lane had pilasters with a connecting arch over the stage opening, and by the end of the eighteenth century the proscenium was incorporated into the architecture of the theater. It is in this tradition that the Broadway houses were built to house popular melodramas and sentimental romances, with their large casts and large amounts of scenery, and later accommodated modern theater, which developed with the same forms housing it. These are theaters that also allow a great intimacy,
despite the separating form of the arch, by allowing fine visibility and acoustics, and close proximity to the actors. It is not surprising that all of the older theaters are proscenium houses and that they were so well proportioned and designed. They were built by individuals who worked in theater, knew how a theater should function, and understood the sense of conviviality and pleasure that one should experience even in the approach to the theater. Lobbies in the earliest New York theaters were more generous than in the surviving Broadway houses, but both generations reflected the builders' grasp of the ceremony and procession necessary. The men who commissioned and built them were actors, managers, and producers. Their names were legendary in the theater: David Belasco, Martin
Beck, Daniel Froehman, Vinton Freedley, Henry Miller, Sam Harris, Oscar Hammerstein I, and Irving Berlin. They collaborated closely with their architects, most of whom were specialists in theater design, and were proud to have their names on their own houses.

Several decades ago, in viewing of changing tastes in theater, the success of the downtown Circle-in-the-Square Theatre, and the proliferation of off-Broadway theaters, directors felt that arena, thrust, and open stages gave them more creative freedom. Several of the new or converted theaters have no flexible forms or prosceniums at all, and, certainly, directors and designers working in these theaters will demand more staging possibilities. The second, uptown, Circle-in-the-Square, is a theater in the round and makes the audience conscious of one another at the expense of the play. Fidgeting and yawning across the stage can destroy the illusion the
actors are creating. Separation between the actors and the audience seems to be undesirable more often than not. Similarly, their lobbies reflect a bias toward showing that the audience and actors are really the same and are in the play together. The gathering spaces are enormous but unfocused. The intention seems to have been to provide platforms to view other patrons. This distances the members of the audience from one another and isolates them. Conversely, older lobbies, in which the playgoers are crowded together, produce the feeling of a collective experience in viewing the theater, not a solitary one.

Brooks Atkinson, theater critic for thirty years, says in his book *Broadway* that the Uris (now the Gershwin) and the Minskoff are not theaters; rather, they are theater facilities.
They are houses, but not homes. Both theaters are located upstairs in immense office buildings. The physical accommodations, capacious auditoriums, deeply upholstered seats, ample legroom between rows, wide aisles, soft carpet, and even softer color schemes alienate the patron in the cheaper seats, deaden acoustics, and induce sleep more often than rapt attention. There is no graceful transition from the scale of the street to that of the lobby or from the lobby to the house. The theaters without well designed transitional spaces lack personality and do not engage the theater-goer in the theatrical experience. The patron is not a participant, but a visitor.

Lobby spaces in the Minskoff Theatre. Above, the escalators from the landing level to the mezzanine. Below, the landing level from the mezzanine.
Both the Minskoff and the Uris lobbies open off interior passageways and not off the street. The Uris's passage also serves the parking garage. Rather than providing an elegant porte-
cochere for cars, it makes the entrance seem as if it is inside a garage. At intermission, patrons spill out into this drive and not into the street. This robs them of the sidewalk as a collective lobby space, and of a special feeling of entry as they come into the theater.

The entrance to the Uris Theatre.
Although the Minskoff's entrance opens off a pedestrian passage, it too fails to provide any sense of passage from the street into the different world inside the theater. Back doors and blank walls line the inside of the alley, broken only by a small exhibition space hidden along the bleak stretch from 44th to 45th Streets. One is more worried about being mugged than exhilarated by splendor when entering the lobby. Finally, neither theater is legible from the street as a special or theatrical space. They are mysterious volumes that give nothing to the pedestrian and add nothing to the district.

Below, the Minskoff Building and its neighbor on 45th Street, the Booth. Right, the 45th Street entrance.
The Minskoff Theatre with its skyscraper above, and its new neighbor across 45th Street, the Portman House.
The individual theaters in Times Square produce a district not just because of their profusion but also because of similar patterns in dimension, orientation, surface decoration, and spatial sequence. The marquees and lights are flags visible from the Avenues (Broadway, Seventh, and Eighth) that signal these special, public places within the blocks. The patterns on the facades--overscaled in comparison to hotels and small office buildings that occupy most other sites--are more specific devices, expressing the scale of the volume inside, and often its orientation. The blank walls that contain the two new theaters in the district could as well contain telephone equipment.

The facades have all been handled differently, but they are all designed with an understanding of the interior on the exterior. They are giant billboards proclaiming the spectacle within. The signage that adorns them has usually been added much later and is clearly appended to the original designs, rather than integrated with them. The lights and advertisements are not read as part of the whole, which continues to have its original impact on the passerby.
Almost all the ornate original marquees have been replaced with modern, pared-down versions, but their impact as the first part of the building to engage the patron remains. The marquees are particularly important in a public area, even to the extent of involving the uninterested pedestrian in the event within.

The marquees are often lit underneath and on the sides, not only illuminating the title of the current play but also transforming the sidewalk into an extension of the theater's public space. There are specific parameters for the location and dimensions of marquees. They occur across the entire facade, just over the public area.
entrance, or cover both the stage and house doors. They usually project 12 feet, covering most of the sidewalk, and are between 10 and 15 feet high. In most cases they display the name of the theater and the show. In the case of the Shubert, home of the long-running Chorus Line, the marquee contains fragments of favorable reviews. The other standard
embellishments of the facade are publicity photographs of the cast or show, show posters for that play, and perhaps posters for other plays produced by the same people. These are usually in frames, which are integrated tightly into the facade at eye level. Atop most
theaters is an electric sign from which stars' names, in foot-high lights, shine up to Broadway.
The elevations and marquees set up horizontal bands that create a unifying effect down the length of the street. The first level occurs at waist height, for the pedestrian walking past, and extends up to about 10 feet. This band is aligned with the tops of the doorways to the street and defines the region in which posters and information about the play are displayed.
There is usually some embellishment of a personal scale on the wall in this region. Five feet above this is reserved for the marquees and arches that call out the public entrances. The wall treatment from the tops of the doorways to 30 or 40 feet is usually designed as a unit, defining the public volume within. The remaining 20 feet is often divided into two

The Plymouth and Golden Theatres.
parts: a band that delineates the end of the public zone, often houses offices, and is therefore fenestrated, and the band that contains the cornice. The top of the building occurs within the cone of vision (30 degrees vertically) of a pedestrian across the street. Thus the building volumes are perceptible for people on the street and can be appreciated as a

CORE STREETS
unit. The continuity of theater facade width and horizontal divisions creates a visible rhythm down the block. The buildings are within the sight and unconscious comprehension of the pedestrian. Their proximity in the core of the district creates a unique situation, with the repetitive patterns producing a special, public quality to the entire street. The decorated faces add both a human and theatrical scale. As a result, the street has become an integral part of theater-going, and theater an integral part of the city. Unlike Lincoln Center, which has a
special pedestrian preserve removed from the surrounding city, Broadway theaters co-exist with the burdens and joys of the street. They critically enhance the vitality of the neighborhood by imposing their character on the street.

The facade of Shubert Alley showing the distance from the street edge in which the 60-foot facade is visible.

The end of Shubert Alley with the height of perception across it indicated.
The founders of the city of New York, like many of the founders of this country, were puritans in outlook and practice. It was not until 1732 that the first theater appeared, despite the city's remarkable growth in the preceding century. A small troupe of traveling actors from London secured a large upstairs room in a building at Pearl Street and Maiden Lane near the tip of Manhattan and provided the first professional theater. The first building dedicated solely to plays, however, was the Nassau Street Theatre, which opened in 1750 with Richard III. The following years were filled with controversy and "theatricals," most of which were seen only by the men of the
community. Theater was seen as scandalous and was not sanctioned by the community. Other early theaters were Hallam's Nassau Street and several playhouses built by David Douglass. One of them, at the corner of Nassau and Chapel (now Beekman) Streets, cost $1,625 to construct and housed the first production of Hamlet in New York.

The leading theater of the eighteenth century was the Park, which opened in 1798 on Park Row with a full evening's entertainment: a curtain raiser, As You Like It, and a dramatic postlude. The Park also gave American audiences their first star, an actor named George Frederick Cooke. Cooke was buried in St. Paul Church in a grave that was thoughtfully kept up through the years by fellow actors Edmund Kean, Charles Kean, and E. A. Sothern, all of whom receive...
billing on his monument. In 1848, a file of playbills at the side of the Park Theatre stage fell against a gas jet, and in less than an hour the theater was reduced to ashes.

In the early nineteenth century, the Theater District was still far downtown. A pattern was developing: most of the theaters were located on streets adjacent to Broadway. This was not accidental, for Broadway was the only paved street in many of the districts it passed through. It was also the major thoroughfare connecting Wall Street, downtown, to Washington Heights, far uptown. During the season of 1822, yellow fever raged throughout the city, and the Park Theatre did not open as usual. Instead, its company performed at the New Olympic, whose location at Broadway and White Streets was considered almost out of town. Among other

New York Theaters from 1798 to 1850.
1. Park Theatre
2. Niblo's Garden
3. Olympic Theatre
4. Barnum's Museum
5. Vauxhall Theatre
famed theaters located in lower Manhattan in the early nineteenth century was Barnum's Museum. General Tom Thumb performed for the public there and, in the "moral lecture" room, performances were given of The Drunkard and Uncle Tom's Cabin. Another showplace associated with Barnum was Castle Gardens, which opened in 1845; it was here that Jenny Lind gave her first concert, with tickets going as high as $225 apiece.

As the nineteenth century progressed, the Theater District began its move uptown. In 1806, the Vauxhall opened opposite Cooper Institute Park. Among its original players was a Mr. Poe, father of Edgar Allan Poe. In 1825, the Lafayette opened north of Canal Street, and, in 1820, Niblo's Gardens opened on Broadway at Prince Street to become one of the city's outstanding theaters. Here, in 1844, New...
Yorkers saw the polka for the first time in a sketch called "Polkamania." Another historical first claimed by Niblo's in 1893 was the introduction of lady ushers. However, the claim was also made by the Third Avenue Theatre, whose patrons were guided to their seats by lady ushers in 1884.

By mid-century, the Theater District was centered on 14th Street. The Academy of Music, the Palace Garden, and Irving Hall (later the Irving Place Theater) were all on the street itself. Nearby at Broadway and 13th Street, stood Wallack's, for many years the most noted theater in America.

Wallack's was built in 1861 and later called by many names. It presented many of the top theatrical companies of the day, including Henry
Irving's troupe, starring Ellen Terry. The theater closed in 1901 to the strains of "Auld Lang Syne." Few people stayed in their seats to the end. One actor said, "The lemon's squeezed. Throw it away and there's an end to it."

As the 1860s drew to a close, it was evident that the Theater District was on the move again. The Fifth Avenue Opera House, Pike's (later the Grand) Opera House, and Augustin Daly's Theatre were all located in the 20s and 30s. It was at Daly's Theatre at 28th Street, west of Broadway, that Fanny Davenport played, as did Edwin Booth, John Drew, and Modjeska. The Pirates of Penzance was sung for the first time here on December 31, 1879. Accompanying this expansion of theater was an expansion of its audience. By
the middle of the century, the taint had disappeared from the theater, and all groups and classes enjoyed it. Niblo's Gardens was instrumental in implementing this change, by providing a pastoral setting for the theater with wholesome entertainment in the gardens.

The interior of Niblo's Theatre, left, and New York's theaters between 1850 and 1870, below.
themselves. Crowds listened to musicians while strolling in the Park before and after the play, and often at other times as well. At the same time, to satisfy a predominantly male audience, burlesque theaters were being established on the Bowery. A curious structure on Fourth Avenue between 26th and 27th Streets was originally built by the railroad company for the reception of milk trains and farmers' produce. Ultimately, it was leased to P. T. Barnum and opened as the original Madison Square Garden.

As the number and variety of theaters and other performances expanded, they followed the path of Broadway uptown. Again, there seemed little
preference for putting the theaters directly on Broadway, but rather on the side streets surrounding it. "The Great White Way" was so named because it was one of the few fully lighted streets in that century, and began to sport a variety of oversized, overlit advertisements. The Eagle, which became the Manhattan, was built in 1875 between 32nd and 33rd Streets.
33rd Streets at a cost of $175,000. Lester Wallack retired from his old theater at Broadway and 13th Street, followed the upward movement, and built a second Wallack's Theatre at Broadway and 30th Street in 1881, for $247,782. In 1893, the Empire opened at Broadway and 40th Street. It was praised as the most beautiful theater in New York until it was razed ten years ago. By the turn of the century, the heart of the Theater District was on 42nd Street. Over the next few decades, dozens of theaters were constructed near Broadway between 40th and 56th Streets.

The Theater District after 1900.
THE NATURE OF AN ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT

Welcoming in the New Year in Times Square is as genuine a tradition as this country possesses. Millions watch on television as thousands shiver in the intersection of Broadway and Seventh Avenue. Both the curious and the nostalgic mingle with Times Square regulars in this triangle of public space dedicated to celebrations of almost every kind.

Times Square features a twenty-five-cent peep show next door to a multi-million-dollar movie spectacular, and offers three-card monte in front of a legitimate theater. Up the street, under the blazing lights of an enormous
Fujichrome advertisement, the marquee of a seedy theater boasts of coming attractions. Amid the confusion of lights and noise, it is arguably a bastion of popular culture. Henri Matisse claimed that the Square would be one of the most beautiful places on earth--provided the viewer could not read.
It is undoubtedly one of the most famous squares/plazas/places in the world, yet for the citizens of New York it is a problem. A symbol of the city's vitality ("It stays open all night," Frank Sinatra croons in a television advertisement for the city as he leans against the statue of George M. Cohan at 46th Street and Broadway), it is also an emblem of its danger. More crime occurs in the block of 42nd between
Seventh and Eighth Avenues than in any block in New York. Prostitutes are so numerous and so pushy that barricades are raised to protect theatergoers from their advances. Every type of drug is proffered to the passerby, as well as every type of pornographic entertainment.
Nonetheless, many New Yorkers are tempted to let it be, but not because they enjoy it or because they see such decadence as a natural consequence in a Theater District (as Mary Henderson of the Museum of New York proclaims, "Ever since the Romans there has been an affinity between theater on one hand and sex and seedier aspects of life."). Should Times Square be "cleaned up," as has often been proposed, residents of New York fear the relocation of its riffraff to neighborhoods presently more desirable, such as their own. A known and generally contained evil which one can avoid on the subway or pass by in a taxi is better than one which appears in whatever aspect on one's own corner or just down the block.

In the 1980s this laissez-faire attitude has come under assault, not from the morally righteous, but other forces: the light infantry of the supporters of theater and the heavy artillery of real estate developers and the city's Urban Development Corporation. The two groups, often at odds, have joined in focusing attention on the area.
The proponents of legitimate theater became vocal when three major theaters—the Helen Hayes, the Bijou, and the Morosco—were torn down to make way for the Marriott Marquis Hotel. Amid its other attractions, Times Square was the scene of picket lines, dramatic readings, and nightly vigils manned by the likes of Jason Robards, Colleen Dewhurst, Ellen Burstyn, and other actors one can pay a small fortune to see on the stage. The theaters were lost, but an advisory group was established. It has debated proposals and offered guidelines for development of the area. Considerable discussion centers on the question of landmark status for theaters, seriously restricting what can be done to them. While some see it as the first step in
revivifying the area and establishing it as the center of theater in the United States, others, theater owners in particular, see it as an impossible constraint upon the property and its potential.

As this debate continues, the city and the state have joined forces in developing their own

The Portman Hotel, right, rising across 45th Street from Shubert Alley. Below, looking southward in Times Square.
proposals specifically for Times Square and the block of 42nd Street between Seventh and Eighth. In 1980 a set of design guidelines written by Cooper Eckstut intended to "preserve the unique qualities of the Times Square area" was commissioned. Though not legally binding, the guidelines were described as "not discretionary and proposals must conform to them to be considered." Thorough and detailed (recommendations are offered for stair treads in the subway stations), the guidelines' main thrust lay in "enhancing the sense of vitality at street level." Office towers were proposed, but their shafts were to be setback, reducing potential monolithic proportions to street scale and preserving the square openness to light and air. Hugh Hardy called the Square "an outdoor room in the city," and this is threatened by the
possible oversized development. The blaze of neon signs and images so essential to Times Square was not to be accommodated above the street facade, and the streetscape itself was to be a mix of colors, materials, and finishes with wide windows enabling passersby to look into shops and restaurants. The elemental quality of Times Square as a public place, a square catering to the scale of the pedestrian and to the image of show business, was to be maintained.

Or so it was hoped. But perhaps most anything might be hoped in the nether world of guidelines, even ones as specific as these. In December 1983, Park Tower Realty, the chosen developer, revealed the plan of architects Philip Johnson and John Burgee. It is a scheme
vast and sweeping in its deliverance of a corporate hegemony. In a fashion not untypical of Johnson, the most significant of the guidelines were ignored. To say that the office towers, located at the corners of 42nd and 43rd Streets, predominate, is to understate vastly. The four block-wide towers (fifty-six, forty-nine, thirty-seven, and twenty-nine stories respectively) are virtually identical chunks of polished granite. Their shafts are not set back, and their street facades are not the hoped-for assemblage of diverse elements but a five-story band of red granite, symmetrically articulated with ATT-like arches at their mid-points. The design's image has been compared by its developer, Gene Klein of Park Tower Realty, to Rockefeller Center. "What Rockefeller Center did for New York in the 1930s, this has the
potential for doing in the 1980s and '90s, you cannot build these buildings one at a time, because you cannot displace the garbage that way." But its detractors—among them, critic Robert Hughes—sum up it in terms once used for the Third Reich and Fascist architecture: "an
architecture of absolute regularity; a ponderous crushing symmetry against the plan of irregular units." The future of the Times Tower, now owned by T.S.N.Y. Realty, remains in doubt. Promised in Johnson's plan are the renovation of nine 42nd Street theaters, a new hotel and a merchandise mart on Eighth Avenue. As yet, these are but roughly depicted. The towers are the meat of the issue, and it is clear that they promise a radical alteration of what Times Square represents. The New York Times calls the panorama of bright lights, billboards, and buildings "of no particular architectural quality" and says that it will give way to the support structures of business and office life. Times Square as the symbol of show biz in its motley and often tawdry manifestations will be no longer.
In various ways the Johnson-Burgee scheme recalls the original development of the area once known as Great Kill into the Theater District of Times Square. The steady progress of corporate development into Midtown and along Broadway resembles the march of the theaters up Broadway from their original setting near the tip of Manhattan. Great Kill, a tiny hamlet by a creek, became in the nineteenth century the center of the carriage trade and borrowed the name of its London equivalent, Longacre. Its emergence as the Theater District began almost
from spite. The socially correct of late nineteenth-century New York all attended the opera and its festivities at the Academy of Music located on Union Square at 14th and Broadway. The less prominent, among them Vanderbilts, Rockefellers, and Morgans, were not allowed through the Academy's proud doors. In response, they built an opera house of their own at Broadway and 39th. Lavishly appointed, the first of its three tiers of boxes was known as the diamond horseshoe. It was not a financial success but did succeed in rising to the par of

Times Square, when it was Longacre Square, looking south.
the Academy. The two houses merged to form the Metropolitan Opera at the 39th Street location in 1883.

The corner of Thirty-Ninth Street and Broadway also accommodated the Casino Theater, less pretentious in its offerings than the Opera, but a favorite in the Gay Nineties. Prominent in the Casino's attractions were the Floradora Girls. Their charms are only to be imagined, but their success is legendary. Constantly escorted to the most popular restaurants and clubs of the day, each of the original Floradora sextet married a millionaire. Thus another Broadway axiom—that diamonds are indeed a girl's best friend—was born.
By the turn of the century the synonymity of Times Square and the Great White Way that was Broadway and the Theater District was established. In 1895, Oscar Hammerstein I opened the Olympia, which housed three theaters and a roof garden. Not unlike Philip Johnson's towers, this "grandest amusement temple in the world" was massive, occupying the entire block of Broadway between 44th and 45th Streets. The great white theater proved to be a great white elephant, but it was the "cornerstone of Times Square."

The Casino Theatre at 39th Street.
Hammerstein's financial losses on the Olympia did not prevent him or others from building more theaters in the area. In 1899 he opened the Victoria at 42nd Street and in 1900 the Republic, just behind it. The two were linked by the Paradise Roof Garden. These were joined on 42nd by the elegant and elaborate Hotel Knickerbocker, "the country club of 42nd Street," and home of the world's longest bar. David Belasco built his theater on 44th Street. The Astor, home of George M. Cohan, was on 45th. The new century also introduced the theatrical syndicate, organized by Charles Frohman, Abraham

Oscar Hammerstein I's Olympia Theatre complex.
Erlanger, and Marc Klaw. The group held a near-monopoly on the theater at the turn of the century; within five years they had built the Gaiety, the Lyceum, the Liberty, and the New Amsterdam.

In 1904, the New York Times moved into its new building, located in the triangle between Broadway and Seventh, north of 42nd Street. "The Times Towers loomed over the intersections..."
below," according to Jill Stone in her book on Times Square. There was but one Times Tower, however. Its presence gave the emerging district more than just a new name; it gave it focus. And the particular quality that is a newspaper gave it an institutional strength—one that depended upon public allegiance. It fit perfectly into the brimming street life of the new Theater District. In 1905, the ball dropped
along its flagpole for the first time, and the New Year's tradition began. In 1910, bulletins of the Jack Johnson fight were posted on a board outside a second-story window, and, in 1919, the electric sign, which for years flashed the headlines of the day, gave its first report: the scores of the World Series.

The character of the Theater District was established in this era. The Shubert and
Chanins picked up where the theatrical syndicate had left off, and over seventy theaters were built between 1900 and 1930. As the legitimate theater grew, on the side streets (with less fastidious amusements filling the theaters along Broadway), these lavish, elegant chunks of building altered the landscape remarkably. With them came the hotels, the fifteen-story Knickerbocker and the twenty-story Astor among them. Add to all of this the smaller interventions—restaurants, cabarets, dance halls—and the panorama, varied, special, and exciting, was complete.

The physical form of the district accurately reflected its life. The opera and serious

Times Square in 1911, looking south, and a brochure advertising the Chanin Theaters.
theater notwithstanding, it was the era of vaudeville. Burlesque and dance halls were the rage. The Marx Brothers, Al Jolson, W. C. Fields, Mae West, Lily Lillie Langtry, and Buster Keaton played to crowds which might, on another night, be practicing the Congo tango,
cakewalk, or turkey trot.

Prohibition dramatically altered life. The elegant celebration of cabaret society evident at Rectors or the Roman Gardens gave way to the closed doors of "dark, quiet side streets, where even the most innocent-appearing residences housed the delights of bootleg liquor and nightly excitement." The twenties roared, perhaps all the more so for being pent up.

A sketch of Lee Simonson's set design for the Damon Runyon musical Guys & Dolls, glamorizing the seedier side of Times Square life.
Making liquor illegal hardly made it unpopular. "Good time crime" soared. It ranged from the innocent drink at the corner speak, through gambling, numbers, vice, prostitution, and extortion to, in cases celebrated and uncelebrated, murder. Socialites and mobsters rubbed shoulders at the Silver Slipper and Ziegfried's Frolic. Characters as disparate as Beatrice Lillie and Lucky Luciano were essential parts of the New York nightlife.

The seamier side of all the celebrating became apparent. Times Square was not immune. The "Hotsy Totsy murders" were perhaps the most famous at the time. An argument in the Hotsy Totsy Club on Broadway (owned by "Legs" Diamond) culminated in the death of two men. Within days, all the witnesses to the crime were themselves murdered. The names and the crimes themselves were the stuff of legend--Gyp the Blood, Dago Frank, Lefty Louie--but the businesses they operated, like those lining 42nd Street these days, was not exactly the stuff of romance.

*Sardi's in the 1930s.*
The Depression added another chapter to the story of Times Square. Half of the legitimate theaters located on the streets off Broadway were dark in 1931. No one could afford to go to a show, not to mention produce one. Vaudeville, ailing since the teens, died its final death when the famous Palace Theater closed to be renovated as a movie house. Movies, theater's step-child, reigned along Broadway, and adopted its audiences.

Some critics date the decline of Times Square to the Great Depression, when the area began to direct its appeal to the average New Yorker, turning away from the exclusivity of the Rectors era and the nightclubs of the twenties.

Backstage at the Burlycue.
The Diamond Horseshoe reappeared, not at the opera but as a nightspot owned by Billy Rose. Burlesque as we know it, of the "scanty panties" and Sally Rand fan dance variety, was popular. Penny arcades and sideshow attractions one would expect in Coney Island began to appear.

If, in the eyes of some, Times Square was cheap, it was nonetheless popular. In the clubs and theaters the big bands played. Movies had their
premieres there. It was a kind of glittery amusement park of booths and stops, bright lights and signs that did tricks. A Maxwell House Coffee cup dripped, the Anheuser-Busch Eagle flapped its wings, the Camel cigarette gave off smoke, and "little Lulu hopped about an eight-story display pulling Kleenex from a box."

Famous, but characteristic, sailors eying women, and throngs celebrating Roosevelt's election were all magnetically attracted to Times Square.
During the war, the Stage Door Canteen opened on 44th Street, the USO was located on Broadway, and the Square was the site of rallies and bond drives. Times Square was well suited to provide relief for the average Joe, soldier, sailor, or working stiff, caught up in the effort to make the world safe from dictators. There was an egalitarianism about the era that found its most joyous celebration in the announcement of Japanese surrender. Two million crammed into
the blocks between 40th and 50th and celebrated the night away.

While that night is recalled with each New Year's celebration, the daily entertainment provided by the Square has taken a decidedly prurient turn. From the burlesque Gypsy Rose Lee described as "good clean fun," we now have "live sex acts" and "boys and girls together."

The Times Tower was sold to Allied Chemical and resheathed in bland 1960s modern white marble. The nightclubs fled, to be replaced by pinball arcades and drug pushers.

Times Square as the image of entertainment remains, but the party is a bit crude. It is hard to imagine an effort to clean it up that would not alter its presence dramatically. But the Johnson-Burgee scheme does not build upon
the tradition of street-scale activity, vitality, and exuberance that has so long characterized the various manifestations of Times Square. Although some critics recall the fanciful monumentality of the Astor Hotel or the original Times Tower in describing the new towers, they are so much more vast in their physicality as to deny any resemblance. Critics, such as the New York Times' Paul Goldberger, praise their presence in the skyline, but at ground level they would be like "glass towers sitting on stone bases and partly covered by stone walls." When one considers that the bases described are at least five stories high, the effect is complete. Amid such massive monuments to corporate life and real estate profits, the now puny Times Tower is obsolete.

An early proposal for a second renovation of the Times Tower, and Philip Johnson's plan to eliminate it.
What of Times Square? From where will the ball drop? Maybe it will become a video event. In a Square given over to computer stores and business lunches, if one out-of-place reveler gives his regards to Broadway some winter night, will it echo amid the cliffs of granite and glass with only a statue of George M. Cohan to answer? Can one imagine Times Square with no one there?
The width of most of the theaters is one hundred feet. Individual lots were twenty feet wide and five were the minimum for an average-sized theater. The Lunt-Fontanne and Imperial used extra lots for access and extra lobby space.
Because the tightness of the space within means that the buildings' uses come right to the street edge, in most instances these differing volumes and functions are expressed on the exterior. The theater at its simplest has three separate components: the stagehouse, the auditorium (or house), and the public or lobby spaces. Two of the three are often apparent in the facade, and legible in the scale and type of wall treatment on the street.

A plan and photograph of the Majestic showing how its interior is expressed externally.
The expressions of the auditorium are the most similar. Many are tripartite, often with arches emphasizing the house exits onto the street below them. Theaters of this type include the Ambassador, the Belasco, the Booth, and the Shubert. These all have facades which distinguish the auditorium from the rest of the theater, although these grand gestures sometimes
coincide with entrance to the lobby as well. Other over-scaled compositions are used to call out this special space--as seen in the ANTA (or Virginia) (which has large windows for the balcony's lobby), the Majestic (a collage of ornaments), and the Royale (five arches).
When the separate volumes are expressed, the stagehouse is usually covered with patterns, or with windows for the offices which often edge this volume. These treatments are apparent in the ANTA, Belasco, Booth, Shubert, Broadhurst, Majestic, Plymouth, and Royale. The lobbies may also be articulated, usually with a round corner, and the entire vertical edge is used.

The Plymouth and Broadhurst Theatres.
The Booth and Shubert are the best examples, but the Ambassador, Broadhurst, and Plymouth are similar. The Majestic has one of the most articulate facades. Its lobbies are expressed by a simple applied arch well above street level.

The Shubert and the Century (which was razed in the thirties).
The other way of handling the facade design is to disguise its specific functions and give it a uniform overscale pattern or composition. Most often a central surface is framed by entrances below, offices or cornice above, and more private zones on the sides. This is best shown on the Biltmore, Cort, Forty-Sixth Street,
Golden, Longacre, Lunt-Fontanne, Lyceum, Music Box, and St. James. These all present an oversized face to the street—an advertisement of the building inside, and a form recalling the proscenium within. Some have used pattern in the middle of the facade, as the Barrymore and old Helen Hayes. The Martin Beck has a unified front, with its special uses called out only in the functions behind the arcade, not in the overall organization.
Several of the facades are more than just skin deep. The Music Box, Brooks Atkinson, Forty-Sixth Street, Lyceum, Times Square, and Martin Beck Theatres have arches which occur at the property line, but do not coincide with closure. Behind them are outdoor balconies or fire escape stairs. The theaters do not sacrifice grandeur for the additions of public spaces on the public edge, but add some human scale within their facades.

The faces are billboards for the theaters behind them. Their overscale decorations represent the large volume within, yet they are designed to relate to the street and pedestrian as well.
The marquees and vertical signage are the first signals the passerby, whether on foot or in a car, sees. The actual words and decorations are only legible as far as a block away, but draw the pedestrian toward them. The theater

At left, the St. James Theatre, whose facade is its billboard, and the Palace, whose billboard is its facade.
marquees are very similar to one another and, while they are similar to other marquees in the neighborhood, have a few specific differences. The collection of the many marquees in this district is an expression of its public nature. They provide an enticing, public, transitional zone, as opposed to residential "stoops" that are an edge of privacy dividing the public from private. The theater marquees are broader than others belonging to movies or hotels, and sturdier, to support the great volume of information they support. The entrances to the legitimate theaters are broader than those of the movie theaters, and their marquees reflect his difference. The marquees are adorned not just with theater or show names, but with commentary and descriptions of the plays within. Almost all of the vertical signs display only
the names of the theaters. Atop many are lighted signs reiterating the names of the play and players. These are for Broadway and Avenue watchers, not side street pedestrians.
DOORWAYS AND BOX OFFICES

The public doors to most theaters open onto a shallow box office—usually ten to fifteen feet deep and fifteen to twenty feet wide. Three sets of glass doors under the marquee are common, although there is a wide amount of variation in this. The doors are almost always glass, making the box office a virtual extension of the street—the privacy of the theater.

The Plymouth entrance, and the Imperial's doorway.
Typical lobby, foyer, and box office dimensions, zones, and patterns.
usually occurring at the next set of doors. The decor and proportions of the box office most often have more in common with the lobby beyond than with the exterior, however.

In several theaters--the Biltmore, for example--the box office is the only public space between the street and house. Obviously, this provides less than adequate space to make the transition into the theater.

The plan of the Biltmore Theatre and the interior of the Shubert box office.
The box office and the interior lobby—and the street beyond—are overwhelmed by theater crowds and tuxedoed second-acters at intermission, before and after the show. It is a place to mingle, see and be seen, and is as important to theater as after-theater drinks.
LOBBIES

LOBBY ORGANIZATION AND DIMENSION,

CIRCULATION AND DIRECTION

When there are lobbies they are usually carried out of the space beneath the orchestra and below the upstairs mezzanine of the first balcony. Because most of the houses in the Theater District are oriented parallel to the street, the lobbies are entered on their short end, and circulation directly into the house is located on one long side. The circulation upstairs is either on the opposite long wall (as in the Majestic and Forty-Sixth) or opposite short side (as in the St. James and Martin Beck). These spaces are sometimes augmented by the smoking lounge, the enclosed ten-foot former fire alley.
The Majestic's plan and main lobby.

The Forty-Sixth Street's plan and lobby. The smoking lobby is beneath the stairs.
along the lobby. These are leftover spaces, but their subtle variety shows how rich their potentials are.

The lobbies are usually sixty feet long and twenty feet wide. The most familiar subdivision is into thirds: entrance from box office and to
The lobbies and foyers of the Majestic and St. James are typical in the Theater District. These two are opposite one another on 44th Street, and the street between them becomes the focus for the festivities and crowds within both buildings. Each zone away from the street is progressively more private, but each is apart of the total collective space.
house right, vertical circulation, and entrance to house left. The bar or refreshment stand occurs usually in one of the last two thirds. Three square bays support their structure and are emphasized by lighting. Columns and beams reinforce these tripartite divisions of function.

The Majestic's lobby, looking toward the outside lobby's doors.

The circulation from lobby to house varies from theater to theater. The stairs to the balcony occur either in the center of the lobby, or at its far end. In houses without lobbies, there are usually two sets of stairs in the back corners of the house. Direct circulation to the house most often occurs through a set of doors.

The Little Theatre (now the Helen Hayes) lobby, also looking toward box office doors at right. Street doors are at left.
on one broad side of the lobby. The other most common method is through two side-halls to each side of the house. The small scale of these halls, narrow and short, makes the entrance to the splendid house beyond more exciting than if it were entered from a simple set of lobby doors. The tunnels add an extra, effective step to the transitional sequence into the house.
The theaters in the district were built on the minimum sites necessary. Most are oriented parallel to the street, meaning the interior movement—from lobby down the aisles toward the stage—is in the same direction as movement along the sidewalk. Where the theater was small enough, the house orientation always shifts toward the perpendicular. This organization with the stage house furthest from the street was obviously the ideal orientation. It provides the perfect transition from the most public area through the semi-public spaces of
lobby and house to the most private area of the house—in a direct line. What it does not allow for, and what enriches the "compromise" designs of the perpendicular houses, is the direction change. The sideways orientation is very rare, even in urban situations, in the history of theaters. It can be internally disorienting, but when the sequence of interior spaces is externally legible this is not the case. This exposure of the usually hidden edges of stage door and stagehouse makes the building less mysterious and more integrated with the passing city life.
SPE\(\text{CIFIC SOLUTIONS}\)
THE MARTIN BECK THEATRE

AN EXTERIOR ARCADE

The Martin Beck was outside the central Theater District even when it was built. The theater is between Eighth and Ninth Avenues on 45th Street, and not far from the corner of Eighth Avenue. The building volume is invisible from the main streets of the district (between Broadway and Eighth Avenues), but the marquee and vertical sign project loudly into the street and signal the end of the long stretch of theaters. The materials of the Beck are unlike those of most of its sisters and are used to express its heavy, volumetric facade. The theater was designed by G. Albert Lansburgh, who designed many theaters for Martin Beck as part of the
Orpheum vaudeville circuit. Built toward the end of both men's careers in 1924, it was the only legitimate theater commissioned by Beck.

The theater facade is divided into eleven bays, with the entrances to both the theater house and stage distinguished by wider and taller arches. The arches that provide the horizontal definition extend past the first two floors, those of the large public spaces within. Above are three floors of offices and dressing rooms. Behind the arches is an exterior loggia, in which columns define the zones of special use in the facade eight feet behind. Stage door, loading dock, escape stairs, box office, fire doors, lobby, and fire alley are each distinguished within the bays. A double height limestone arcade stretches across the front and supports the brick wall above, which is pierced
with windows for the more private spaces of the building. The small windows in the upper stories create a loose symmetry. Enlargement of the second bay at each end articulates the public and stage entrances. It is a fine solution to the problem of composing a facade where the auditorium is parallel to the street and the public and private entrances are necessarily on the same face. The limestone and brick ornament which provide scale to the exterior are carried within the building. In the box office and outer lobby, the materials
are the same as those on the exterior. Within the inner foyer and mezzanine, the forms and dimensions are the same, but plaster replaces the stone, though details remain of the limestone.

The public space in the Martin Beck is generous. The lobby is unusually spacious and elegant,
consisting of a series of double vaulted and domed bays. The mezzanine looks out through three large arches onto the lobby and stair below. The bays reinforce the direction change into the auditorium itself by framing the doors to the house, each in its own bay. The architectural details and materials within the

The mezzanine and first-floor plan above and mezzanine from top of stairs at left.
house recall the exterior. Moorish details and stonework are once again prominent on the major columns that frame the proscenium and support the boxes and balcony frame the proscenium.

The most successful aspect of the facade design is the use of the arcade. It unifies the facade while still allowing the expression of the different uses necessary on the street side of a theater. The double height gives a sense of the volume within and distinguishes the building from its neighbors. The use of the stone implies a structure of greater than average size and significance. The arches tie it to the other theater facades of the district, where they are employed in profusion. The form is appropriate to them, amplifying their public nature. The public quality is best expressed in the Beck, where the arches actually allow entry.
They are not just surface detail but engage the public along the entire frontage. People pass from the street to a special place belonging distinctly to the theater just by passing within the shallow portico. Articulating the different zones perpendicular to the direction of the arcade effectively modulates its rather long run. Entering against the direction of this passage also strongly accomplishes the transition from street to interior.

Interior bay detail.
THE BOOTH AND THE SHUBERT THEATRES

AN ALLEY AS EXTERIOR COLLECTIVE LOBBY

The Booth and Shubert Theatres face onto 44th and 45th Streets respectively and share their rear walls. They also share Shubert Alley, which leads along the sides of the theaters to their entrances. The Alley is the vestige of the 10-foot alley required to be on either side of a theater by fire codes in the first quarter of this century. Shubert Alley was the only one to be used, however, and it still is, as the public access into its theaters. It was originally only 15 feet wide and virtually an extension of the sidewalk. The buildings were built by Herts and Tallant in 1912 and are matched in many details, although their size differs. Both have round corners to make the

Shubert Alley, from 44th to 45th Streets, in earlier times.
transition from the main street into the Alley, as is the case with the Broadhurst and Plymouth Theatres next door to the Booth and Shubert. In most other cases, the alleys have either been enclosed carelessly to make a "smoking lounge" or been eaten up by small dressing rooms, loading docks, or offices. Shubert Alley is the only example of this form which has been taken

The Shubert Theatre and Shubert Alley today from 44th Street.
advantage of and embellished. It deserves the special treatment; it is in a special place in the heart of the Theater District. It serves, almost, as a plaza at the entrance into the district from Times Square. Originally, a 20-story hotel stood across Schubert Alley from the theaters. Now, there is an 850-foot skyscraper,
atop a 60-foot pedestal, that houses the Minskoff Theatre. Directly across the Alley is a mid-price restaurant, which has neither a theatrical bent nor an engaging facade.

The Shubert has two perpendicular matching facades connected by a monumental wrap-around corner bay. Each facade features large stucco panels framed in bands of ornamental plaster.
(aggraffito) and terra cotta. Three double-height arched entrance bays are centered in the composition to announce the presence of the theater within. The orientation of the house is not, however, apparent from the facade. The exterior walls have no depth to them, and the decoration is just on the surface. It is not reflective of specific volumes within, but rather the general tenor of the buildings. The walls the theater presents to the street, with their over-scale divisions, signal the passerby that there is a special place within. The arches are a form used throughout the district to represent this large public space within. The walls the theater presents to the street, with their over-scale divisions, signal the passerby that there is a special place within. The arches, a form used throughout the district.
to represent this large interior space, make it public.

The Booth, similarly, is a well-composed example of the rounded-corner type with a composition matching the Shubert. There are two handsomely detailed facades connected by a monumental wrap-around corner bay leading to the ticket vestibule. Each facade has a large stucco panel framed in bands of terra cotta and ornamental plaster, now painted over. Three arched bays centered on the street side indicate the orientation of the house within and contain the exit doors at the back of the auditorium. The entrance is at the corner itself, with several doors in the Alley.

Both theaters have a problem with two public
fronts and solve the problem, only adequately, by associating the main entrance with the corner bays. In fact, entrance is from the Alley side, and the audience exits both onto the streets through the three bays there, and onto the Alley through the entrance doors and box office lobby. The Alley elevation has the problem of serving as an entrance near the streets and presenting the blank edge of the stage house in the middle. The facade's tripartite composition consists of the stagehouse anchored by this facade is tripartite, with the stagehouse anchored by the more decorated theaters on either end. Stage doors, an office entrance, and a small gift shop enliven the central part of this face. These are hardly significant enough to carry their important location at the center of the heart of the Theater District.
The facades of both theaters are shallow shells covering the volumes inside, and neither the materials nor forms from the exteriors are carried within the buildings. The Shubert is entered through a small vestibule-ticket lobby. One walks directly from this meager space into the side aisle of the house and from here to the back of the house, where the central aisles and stairs are located. The second balcony was originally reached by a separate entrance off
Shubert Alley. The Alley's use as access for the inexpensive seats, indicates the low value put on it. Moving this circulation inside makes the rear of the house even more confused and congested. The only lounge space is in the basement.

Although the facades of the two theaters are almost identical, their interiors are quite different. The Shubert is theatrically white,
gold, and red velvet; the Booth is dark wood and less Hollywood than London. The Booth has a more generous public lobby by far, due to the house's smaller size, but it bears little, if any, there is still little relationship to the materials and forms of the exterior. One enters the lobby, atypically, on its long side from the adjacent box office vestibule. The stairs to the balcony are on one of the short sides of the room, and the entrance to the orchestra promenade is on the long side opposite the entry. This is made possible by the unusual orientation of the side entrance of the Booth, perpendicular to 45th Street. Inside the

The Shubert ticket lobby.

The Booth ticket lobby.
downstairs and upstairs lobby spaces, the finish is plaster; inside the house it is dark stained wood. In both theaters there is little continuity from the street to stage, materially or dimensionally. This makes the passage into these theaters noticeably less successful than that of the Martin Beck Theatre.

Both theaters are very intimate, however, and allow the audience to be as close as possible to the stage. They are most successful as a unit that succeeds in unifying 44th and 45th Streets and Shubert Alley, through their cohesive facade designs.
A SYSTEM OF INTERIOR LOBBY SPACES

The Palace Theatre was built 1913 by Kirchoff and Rose as a vaudeville theater. It was built by Martin Beck, West Coast vaudeville magnate and founder of the Orpheum Circuit, as his first attempt to open a Broadway theater. His own legitimate theater, the Martin Beck, opened more than a decade later. As soon as the Palace was built, it became the most important showplace for vaudeville in the country, although Beck lost control of it almost immediately. It was unlike the rest of the theaters in the district, not so much in its capacity (Palace, 1686; Booth, 783; Shubert, 1483; Martin Beck, 1280; 46th Street, 1342; Imperial, 1452; Lunt-Fontanne, 1478; Majestic, 1629; St. James 1601;
Winter Garden, 1529), but in its use. Active during both day and night, it had two shows daily. It was the ambition of every variety artist to "play the Palace." The large numbers of people that the theater and lobby spaces needed to accommodate required larger and more articulated areas than legitimate houses, which opened only at 8:00 p.m. The sequence, however, was essentially the same. People came to see a live show and bought tickets in advance. The type of people were more like moviegoers, but their behavior and patterns had more in common with their play-going neighbors. It is currently a very successful legitimate house and has been operating as such for twenty years. The productions stayed there are most frequently
musicals, because of the theater's large size (making them more economically feasible) and fine acoustics. It has an over-decorated and festive interior. The Palace's exterior consists of a 12-story office building masked completely by a billboard announcing the current show. The question of continuity between interior and exterior is therefore moot.
The Palace is also interesting in that it is one of the only remaining legitimate theaters that enters on Broadway. (In 1957 several theaters moved their entrances to the side streets on which most of theaters were traditionally located, because of changes in tax laws.) The architectural signals given by the facade are minimal: the exterior signage and oversized,
movie-type marquee are the only signs of the special function within. Under the marquee is the vestibule with the box office. The doors to the street are, like many theaters, completely glass, making the first step into the building virtually an extension of the outdoors. In the Palace, this space is also the entrance to the offices above, which house the offices of the
owners, the Nederlanders. Beyond this flimsy vestibule is the most spacious lobby in the district. Normally, the control point, where the ticket taking occurs, is between the outdoor lobby and the foyer, or the house. Here, at the far end of the substantial foyer is a second set of doors, where the tickets are collected and patrons are directed to their seats. This third interior space is at a much more intimate scale than the second lobby, but is the circulation nexus of the building. The space is double-height, with a view of the stage through a set of glass doors, the stair to the balcony, and a balcony overlook from both the balcony promenade and the theater offices. There is a set of doors separating this pace from the house, but as the vestibule is more tied to the street than the building, so this space is more a part of

The main lobby, when it served as a ticket lobby during vaudeville days.
the house than the lobby. Also, the circulation is also lateral in this space: to the stairs, and sideways in the back of-house promenade to the aisles. This provides a natural pausing point to reorient, although the movement is not constricted or awkward. Similarly, the vestibule has a strong element of transverse motion.

Because the theater is on Times Square itself, the greater number of distancing steps is perhaps essential in making the separation from the reality of the city outside to the fantasy within. As with the Martin Beck, Booth, and Shubert Theatres, the accentuation of certain steps in the transitional sequence from city to stage enhances that passage. Short-cutting the number or quality diminishes the theatrical

The main and second lobbies.
experience within by lessening the importance of
the celebration of entry into the special world
of the stage. The entrance into the theater
must be treated with respect as befits the
entrance into a different world. This is
especially true on Broadway, where seeing a show
is a major event, a glamorous evening—even when
it is Strindberg.

The Palace sign amid
other spectacular 1930s
signs in Times Square.
DESIGN CRITERIA

THE SITE AND ANALYSIS OF EDGES

The site of the existing Minskoff Theater, bounded by Broadway and 44th and 45th Streets, is in the heart of the Theater District. Ten other theaters occupy the blocks between Broadway and Eighth Avenue, and the Minskoff building is the link connecting them to Times Square. Its neighbors along Broadway are the Times Building, a twenties skyscraper, whose loading docks it faces, and the Portman hotel, under construction. These three massive buildings in a row now form a wall on the Square, rather than gate to the core of the Theater District behind them. The western edge of Times Square is being consistently built up,
and, while this encloses the Square itself, it separates it from the theaters, which were so instrumental in shaping its character. Times Square has been the theatrical heart of New York, both literally and figuratively, for nearly a century. The celebrations that occur
THE PATH FROM CITY TO STAGE

Bus

Subway

Foot

Cab

Broadway

7th Avenue

8th Avenue

42nd Street

Times Square

44th

8th

10th

Street

Width, length, height, systems

Sidewalk

Width

Facade

- Height, pattern, materials, depth

Marquee

- Width, height, depth, frequency, form, illumination

Alleys

- Width, height

Box Office

- Materials, width, height, depth

Lobby

- Dimension, materials, access

House - circulation
there—at New Year’s, at war’s ends, to celebrate Lindberg’s flight—have as much, if not more, to do with the nature of the place as a focus for average nighttime whooping and festivities as with the New York Times’ light band of news. The connection between the Square and the theaters that developed it has been progressively lost with the construction of
The Astor Hotel, below left, and replaced by the Minskoff, insert at right.
TIMES SQUARE

WEST
historically less activity  
hotels, hi-rise, less permeable  
also, more speakeasies,  
rendezvous  
more night spunk

ENT
historically active  
small scale  
retail, commercial  
morn office, stable,  
daytime life

margin + signage (maximum 10 signs x/bldg signage)
dimension - average end-4th story, 20'x10'
        2 signs/ bldg (a 20' long)
        k9th sign

pathways - margins - 1/blk @ 20' long up
        20' open space (or glimpsed in) x 20' deep
        usually ridi under let
building of not only little or no theatrical function, but no theatrical character.

The Minskoff Theatre building is one of the greatest offenders in this respect. The celebration of entry that most of the theaters in this district exhibit is totally absent in the Minskoff. Zoning points distributed for adding this Theatre have allowed the construction of a building whose scale dwarfs its neighboring theaters. It is more than a little perverse to construct a theater to maintain the nature of the area on one hand, and on the other, constructing the theater volume itself in such a way as to deny its function. The edges of the theater volume are more out of scale with respect to existing theaters than is the skyscraper itself. Most critically, the theater entrance is so badly articulated the usual pleasure and anticipation of entering a theater is dissipated.

The main entrance of the theater is in the middle of a small passage from 44th to 45th Streets, which bisects the building. At each end the entrance to the passage is defined only
by a hole in the walls and signage. Opposite the 44th Street entrance is the back side of the New York Times' offices—a loading dock busy all day and night with large trucks transporting newsprint and newspapers. This activity alone makes this side of the Minskoff site the least acceptable for a major entrance. The building opposite on 45th Street will be the Portman Hotel, whose face will mirror that of the Minskoff. Opposite the entrance to the existing theater is the entrance of the Portman garage. The present face of the building on Broadway is commercial, repeating the pattern of the majority of Times Square frontage. It is clear that none of these faces provides an ideal place for a major theater entrance, but the current solution of burying the door within the building is a far inferior one to that of using a street edge.
The shared space of side wall and street acts as a collective lobby for all the theaters in a block and especially here, in the core, where the majority of buildings are theaters. The most important transition into the theaters in this district is from this shared space to their individual lobbies. This transition is obviated by the most disruptive element of the design of the Minskoff Theater its entrance. It is within an internal passage and ignores the possibility of using the building's fourth edge, an existing external alley, to accomplish the same end. Shubert Alley forms the back side of the site and already effectively functions as a pedestrian extension of the street within the block. The entrances for the Booth and Shubert Theaters are off this space, and its position as a connector between the two most densely populated theatrical streets makes it the heart
Shubert Alley looking at Portman Hotel below and Times Building at right.
of the district. Shubert Alley adds a special extra space in the traditional entry sequence for its theaters.

The potential of the Minskoff building was not fully realized when it was built, with its back turned to Shubert Alley. The building site is an important one and could have helped to establish not only a link between the Theater District and Times Square but also a focus to that district. Forty-fifth and 44th Streets are not central within the District but contain both the greatest density of, and most fully utilized, theaters. Shubert Alley is the front of two theaters and could have become more than a pass through the block if the other side had entrances as well, instead of just the side of a restaurant (as is currently the case).

My intention in choosing to work with this site was to investigate the possibility of using the designs of the other theaters in the district—their internal and external dimensions in plan, section and elevation, materials, and organization. By employing the selective repetition of these parts, I hoped to establish continuity between the old and the new. The site provides the possibility of a link between the ultra-public Square and the more selectively public streets. Most importantly, Shubert Alley, and its projected extension behind the Portman Hotel to 46th Street, allows the condition of a special place in the transition from city to the stage.

I assumed that the relationship of the building to the street, especially in its entrances and
edges, could be improved measurably by studying and using contextual clues. I assumed a similar program to the original—that is, a skyscraper with theatrical (public amenity) uses within. The size of the site, however, suggested that several theaters of varying dimensions or types might be possible. Adding several entrances along the street, or Shubert Alley, would enliven the edge and improve the 500-foot walk to the Alley from Times Square, and the beginning of the district.

One of my basic observations of theaters in the district was that lobby spaces tended to be meager. While this need not necessarily be the case, the by-product is that the street itself is enriched by assuming more than its fair share of activity. The lesson of the Minskoff and Uris Theaters is that an entrance that removes
the audience from the street edge breaks the sequence from Times Square into the theater, a sequence that reoccurs for the other theaters in the area. These two modern theaters are therefore disassociated from their context. I feel that to replicate and enhance that sequence in new theaters is essential.

The size of the site allowed for three theaters, a lobby for the offices above, and a retail edge along Broadway. Based on the surrounding theaters, I decided that the theaters should have capacities of fifteen hundred, one thousand, and eight hundred seats. As my primary concern is entrances and the street edge, I adopted traditional proscenium forms from the best of the examples I studied in New York. The smallest theater could accommodate a more experimental form. The addition of a less
traditional form within a complex of theaters is common within New York, as elsewhere. The Vivian Beaumont and the Circle-in-the-Square are two examples. My intention was less to create a self-sufficient group of theaters than to take advantage of the available space to enrich the edges of the site by populating it with as many theaters as possible.

A shared lobby between the three theaters was a possible solution to the design of the entries. I rejected it, because I felt it more important to reinforce the street and Alley as lobby than to internalize all the mulling and social interactions. Providing restaurants facing the street would also strengthen the street edge of the often dead side of a theater. Because the theaters and lobbies share the same building, a connection, between them is important to express

Sketch of possible Alley articulation using the different theater lobbies to shape the space.
their dimensional and locational similarities, but the lobbies need not, and should not, be coincident.

In redefining my initial studies of the site and program, I chose to establish the entries to the two major theaters on the side streets, but
within 25 feet of the entrance of the Alley. The third theater and a restaurant would enter off the Alley. In this way, and by using a shallow colonnade on the exterior of the building encompassing all of the entrances, including that to the offices above, I hoped to extend the influence of the semi-public nature of the Alley to the edges of the building adjacent to it. Creating an entrance zone that
was still visible and accessible from the street was important to retain a strong association between the interior and exterior public spaces.

The Alley itself needed to be more articulated than it is presently. The 45th Street side is more active and even now functions as the "entrance" to the Alley. When the Portman Hotel opens, there will be a connection through it continuing the pedestrian pathway to 46th Street. In designing the Alley I divided it into several elements, entry, path, secondary entrance, place, and active and inactive edges.

The dimensions I used for the entrance spaces—both internal and external—came from common dimensions I discovered by looking at theaters in this neighborhood. Some of these may have evolved not from design-based decisions about the quality of space, but rather from common
expedient solutions. Nevertheless, the commonality is itself important. The repetition of dimensions provides a rhythm and pattern to the street and entrances. However, it is important to distinguish these from the more thoughtfully replicated spaces. Lobbies (box offices) and foyers (interior lobbies) have almost constant dimensions throughout District theaters, yet these were more a product of the space available, given lot width and seating slope. I have used these in establishing basic forms, but have allowed variations, additions, and permutations to enhance them in ways not physically available in the older theaters. Density, up to allowable fire restrictions, enhances the collective theatrical experience. Part of the sequence one passes through into the theater is from a noisy, moving street into a 

Section sketch through small theater lobby on second floor and 1,500-person house.

Shubert Alley
noisy, static, and hot lobby.

The references I used directly were all from New York theaters. The Martin Beck, Booth, and Shubert were most important in establishing the exterior dimension; the Martin Beck, Little, Majestic, Forty-Sixth, St. James, and Palace Theatres in designing the interiors. The Public Theatre and Lincoln Center theaters were crucial for looking at the relationships of multiple theaters in a single building.
CONCLUSION

LEARNING FROM A SELECTED CONTEXT AND MAINTAINING PATTERN AND RHYTHM

The rhythm of the Theater District is greater than any of its parts. The lobbies add together to create a pattern of entry that unifies the street, while the similarity of internal movement lets the street serve a common function for each building. The total of these similar interactions between individual theater and the street, enhances the street's importance to them. The street becomes a collective external lobby for all the theaters. The other buildings in the neighborhood do not break these patterns, but, because of their generally related functions add variation to them. Movie theaters, hotels, and offices with agents and producers share the street. The neighborhood is an entertainer's district. The pornography that has infiltrated the neighborhood is disruptive because of its nature, not its architectural forms. The city cannot hold change back, but respecting but respecting the people a district as important and vital as this one is possible in respecting these changes. Adding tall buildings which kill scale of Times Square can replace the burlesque, but is no better in retaining the fine qualities of the area. The extraordinary development of the theaters in one short time has produced a special situation. The theaters, with their decorated facades,
glittering marquees and lights, and inviting lobbies, add to the streets and give them their special character. An understanding of these forms is crucial to appreciating the nature of the neighborhood. The careful design of these elements is crucial to an effective transition into the theaters themselves. More study into the use of material and small-scale dimensions would certainly make new designs in this neighborhood more effective. Designs which would preserve and enhance the quality of the Theater District while not allowing it to become just a theater piece in a sea of new structures built with new imperatives.
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