



Herewith three reports on the most luxurious skyscraper ever built. The first article (below) describes Seagram's architectural concept; the second (page 72), what makes the building work; and the third (page 76), why it may pay off.

Seagram's bronze tower

Across Park Avenue from McKim, Mead & White's Renaissance "Racquet Club," there now stands a stately tower of bronze, travertine, and tinted glass: the 38-story Seagram building, a skyscraper that has been hailed by its admirers as the most beautiful shaft ever to rise on the Manhattan sky line. It is, for sure, the most expensive office tower, per square foot, ever built in Manhattan or anywhere else (\$45). It is also fast becoming the most widely and heatedly discussed skyscraper ever built; for in its over-all concept, in its details, and in much of its equipment, Seagram challenges accepted skyscraper practice all the way down the line.

The new headquarters for Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, Inc. is primarily the work of Architects Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and his collaborator, Philip Johnson. In Mies's career, Seagram is something of a milestone: it is his first building in New York; it is the largest structure he has ever built anywhere; and it is, finally, the climax of Mies' 40-year search for a new kind of skyscraper—a slab that is, in effect, a sheer cliff of glass. The search began with a primitive but eloquent sketch, back in 1919; it is now concluded, and the evidence is a \$43 million monument that will be recorded as one of the great events in twentieth-century architecture.

The building will be remembered, in part, for what it is not. Most New Yorkers expected Seagram to be as shiny as a brass button when completed; instead, it has the warm solidity of an old penny—and will get more of that quality as it weathers. It is, in short, a building of enormous restraint. As British Architect Peter Smithson put it recently: "Everything else now looks like a jumped-up supermarket." There is restraint in the use of the site (50 per cent of which was sacrificed to make room for a serene plaza off Park Avenue); restraint in the use of color (none was applied) and light (no sources are visible); and restraint in every detail. In fact, the utter simplicity of every detail in the building belies the painstaking effort that went into the design down to the last doorknob and the last mail chute. Mies is famous for having said that "less is more"; when Architectural Critic Henry-Russell Hitchcock saw Seagram he commented that he had never seen more of less.

But Seagram will also be remembered for what it is: for its single-mindedness and strength, for its clarity and dignity. In the midst of Manhattan's turmoil and clutter, these qualities are rare and refreshing.



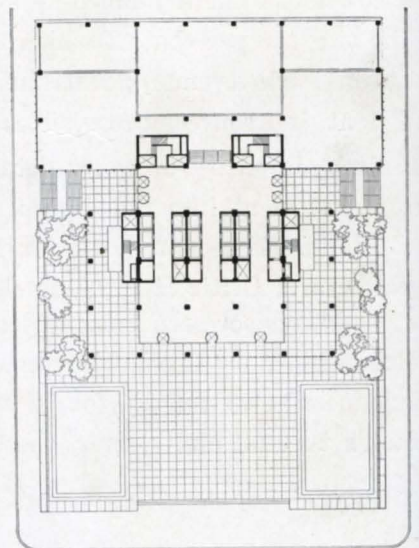
PHOTOS: (ABOVE) © EZRA STOLLER; (OPPOSITE) CSERNA

Green marble benches (opposite) form the edges of Seagram plaza. Weeping beech trees were planted to contrast with the rigid geometry of the plaza and building.

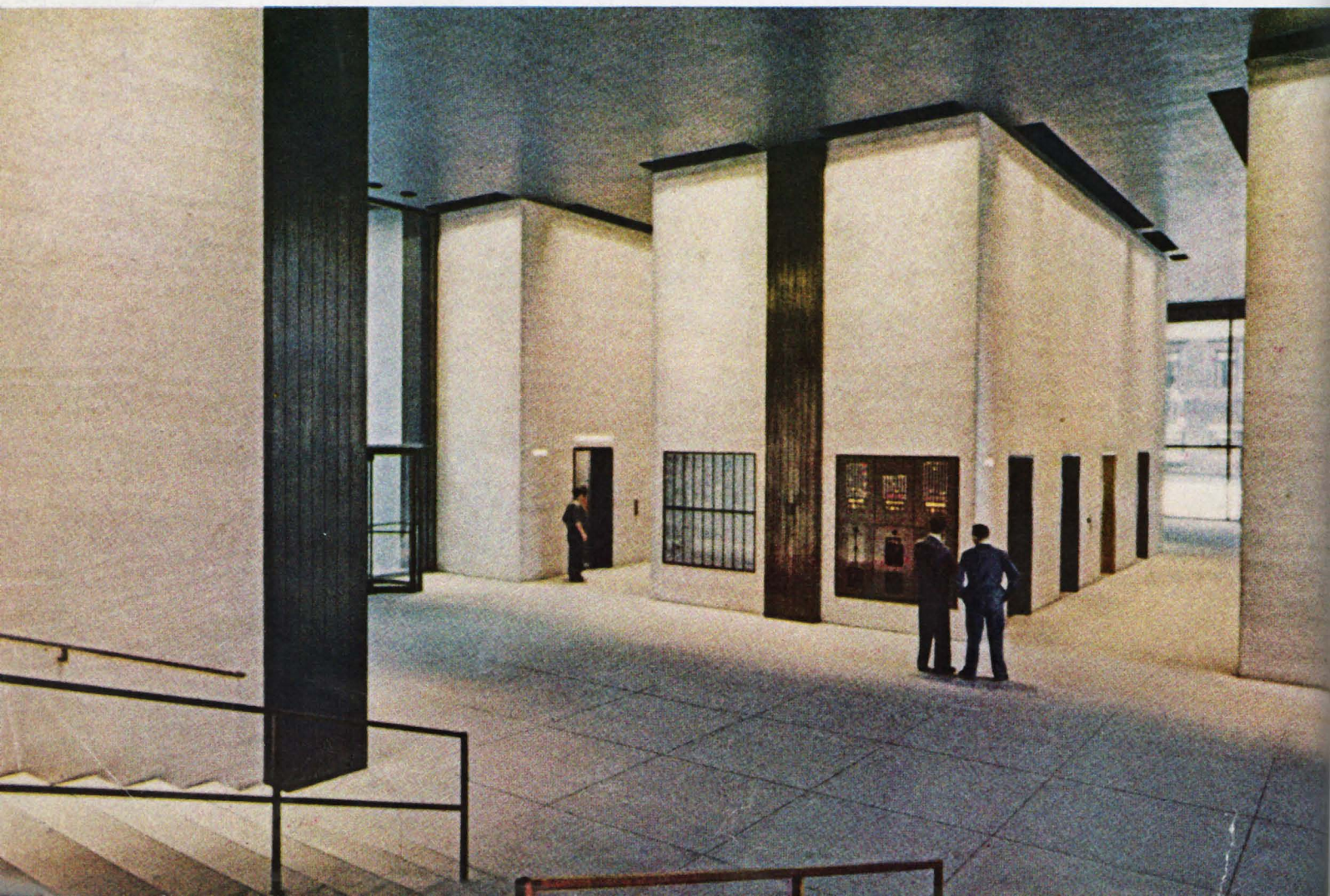


Granite-paved plaza and wide arcades recall the scale of Renaissance piazzas. The pavement is kept ice-free in the winter by radiant heating system, and pools will be overheated to generate steam for dramatic effect. Below: plan at level of plaza.

Seagram plaza. By knowing what to leave out, the architects of the Seagram building added a great deal to what they left in. For example, by setting the tower back a full 90 feet from Park Avenue, they achieved two results: first, they set a new and generous standard for open city space; and, second, they gave pedestrians and motorists something really stunning to gasp at—a sleek façade soaring straight up for 520 uninterrupted feet, and made to look even taller by virtue of its closely spaced, vertical ribs of bronze. The first result adds up to high prestige—and a fine public relations gesture; the second to high showmanship—and a fine institutional advertisement. Taken together, the results make for a dramatic building in a noble setting—a beautifully tooled prism of metal and glass, resting on a wide pedestal of pink granite inlaid with clear pools and beds of planting (opposite).









Seagram lobby. Because the 24-foot-high lobby is glass-walled, it “reads” as an integral part of the outside plaza and seems much more spacious than it really is. At night, this spaciousness is further accented by the wash of light (from recessed ceiling fixtures on dimmers) spilling over the travertine walls that enclose the elevator shafts. The ceiling is finished in gray glass mosaic, set in black cement. This beautiful surface mirrors the subtle coloring of travertine walls, floors, and bronze columns (photos opposite).

Seagram offices. The entire building was designed to provide executive suites for prestige-conscious tenants. Seagram’s own offices set a high standard which many tenants have followed. Above is a reception room sporting the bronze Seagram seal (redesigned by Herbert Matter) on a travertine wall, and lit from an invisible source in a recessed ceiling trough. Tapestries are by Miro and Stuart Davis. At right are a typical, oak-paneled conference room and an executive office with classic Mies-designed chairs and tables.

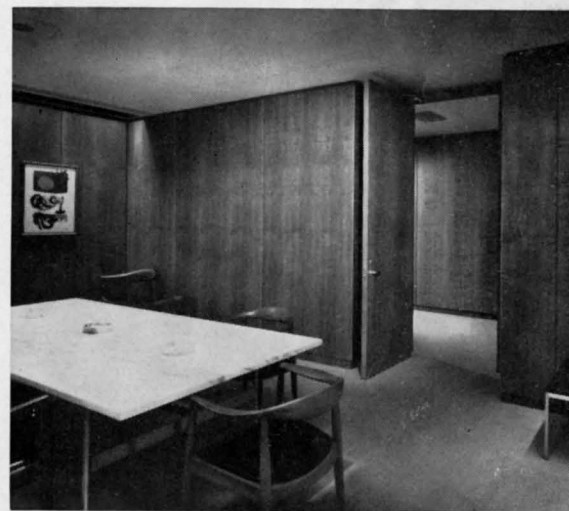


PHOTO: (ABOVE) © EZRA STOLLER; (OTHERS) CSERNA

ARCHITECTS: *Mies van der Rohe & Philip Johnson*; ASSOCIATE ARCHITECTS: *Kahn & Jacobs*; GENERAL CONTRACTOR: *George A. Fuller Co.*; MECHANICAL ENGINEERS: *Jaros, Baum & Bolles*; ELECTRICAL ENGINEER: *Clifton E. Smith*; STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS: *Severud-Elstad-Krueger*; LIGHTING CONSULTANT: *Richard Kelly*; OFFICE LAYOUT & FURNISHINGS: *Philip Johnson Associates, J. Gordon Carr and Knoll Associates*; LANDSCAPE CONSULTANTS: *Karl Linn & Charles Middleleer*; ACOUSTICAL CONSULTANTS: *Bolt, Beranek & Newman*; TYPOGRAPHICAL CONSULTANT: *Elaine Lustig*.

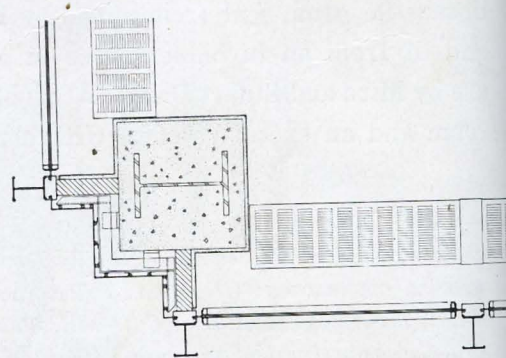


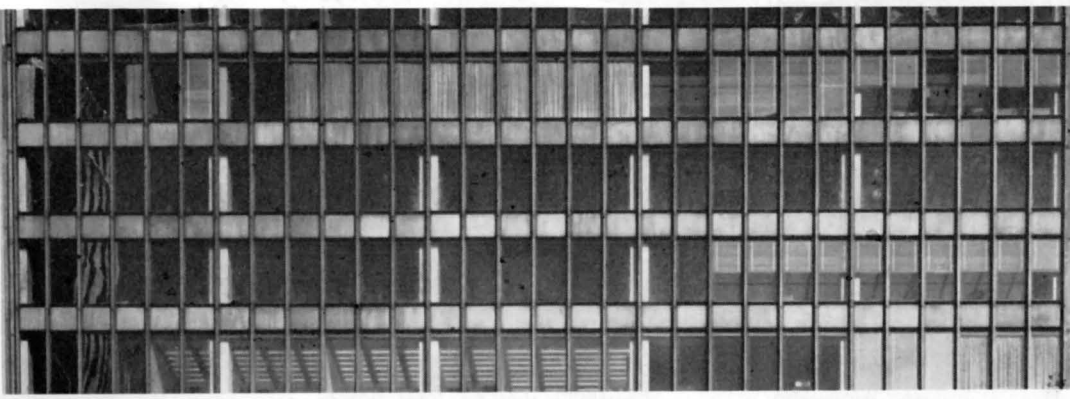
Seagram's custom look

13 new ideas for better skyscraper design

The Seagram building is, in effect, a half-million square foot laboratory in which new and special office designs are being tested in actual use. The building's architects refused to accept a standard material or standard method if they could see ways of improving it—and the result has been a whole catalogue of innovations that may soon affect office building design throughout the U.S. Some are merely redesigns of existing products to improve their appearance; others are more radical departures from present practice. All are part of the design vocabulary that makes this building speak with a clear, forceful voice.

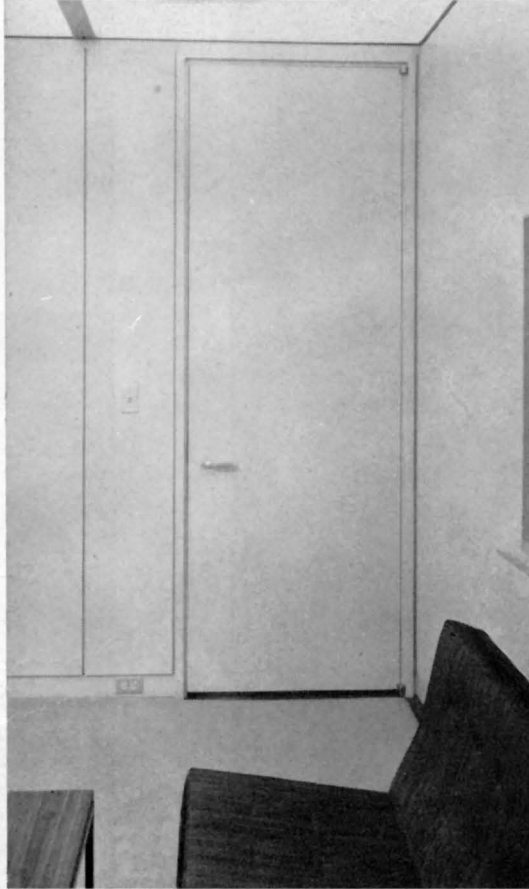
1. *Bronze and glass curtain wall consists of 4½ by 6 inch I-beam extrusions (largest sections ever extruded in bronze), spandrels of Muntz metal (an alloy which resembles mullions in color, but contains more copper), and pinkish-gray, heat- and glare-resistant glass in story-high bronze frames. I-beams were extruded 26 feet long. Complete cost of wall: \$18 per square foot. (Lever House, by comparison, would cost \$13 today.)*





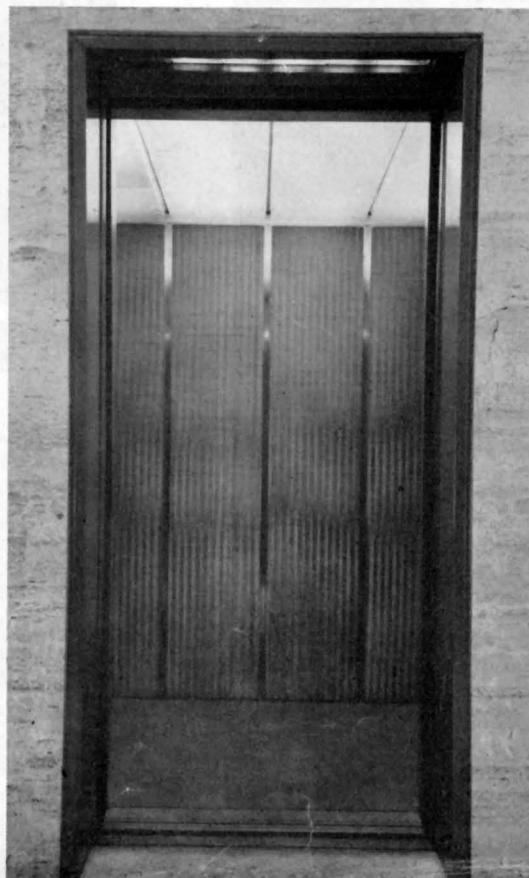
PHOTOS: (ABOVE) © EZRA STOLLER; (OTHERS) GEORGE CSERNA

2. *Controlled Venetian blinds* were specially designed to stop in only three positions: all the way up, all the way down, and at half mast. The angle of the slats is fixed at 45 degrees to let pedestrians get full impact of lit-up building at night. These controls produce façade patterns that always look neat.



3. *Floor-to-ceiling doors* (far left) added nothing to the cost of each opening, made doors look like integral part of paneling, hence gave interiors greater unity. This corridor is part of Seagram's executive suite.

4. *Floor-to-ceiling partitions* (near left) are stock units reworked for Seagram by the architects. Greatly simplified in detail, partitions have reveals at panel joints, recessed wiring chases behind baseboards, specially designed doorknobs and hinges, and continuous tubular rubber stops around door frames. Panels were finished with many different materials, all washable. The system is now standard with its manufacturer.



5. *Floor-to-ceiling travertine slabs* (far left) divide wash-room on Seagram's special executive floor. Orderly appearance was achieved in part by use of ceiling grid as module for partitions. All fixtures in all washrooms were specially designed, including pipe-connections at lavatories and toilets.

6. *Floor-to-ceiling elevator doors* reveal interior of cab lined with panels of stainless steel and bronze mesh designed for Seagram in a cartridge-belt pattern. These metal panels are removable, easily maintained (because they do not show scratches), reflect light from luminous ceiling above. Elevators are of the electronic brain type, which adjusts to changing loads at different times of day, eliminates need for elevator operators.

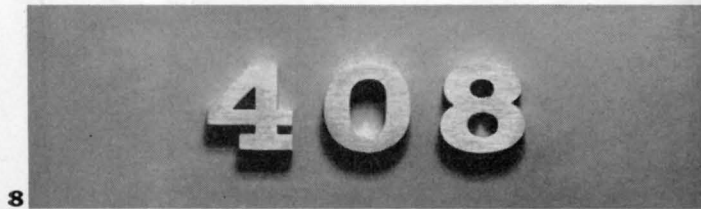


8. Special lettering (below) for use throughout building was designed by Elaine Lustig, is square serif.

9. Special faucets and other washroom fittings were designed by architects to harmonize with elegant detailing throughout the building.

10. Special hardware items

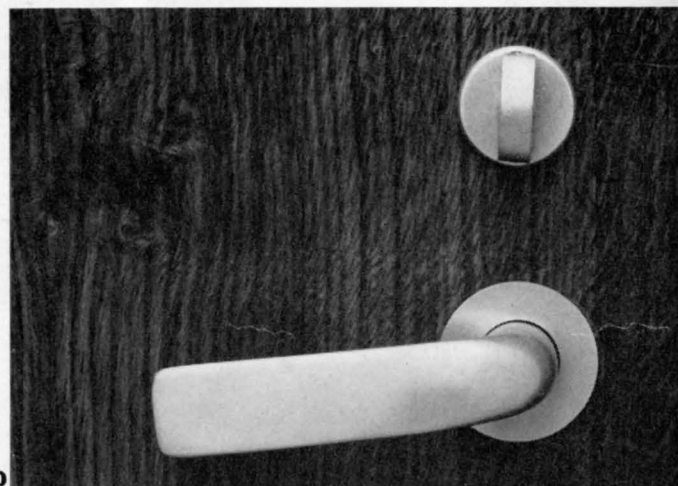
of brushed aluminum and stainless steel (see bottom photos) were custom-designed, and are now part of manufacturer's standard line. Original extra cost of these special items over top-quality hardware was "very, very minimal," according to manufacturer.



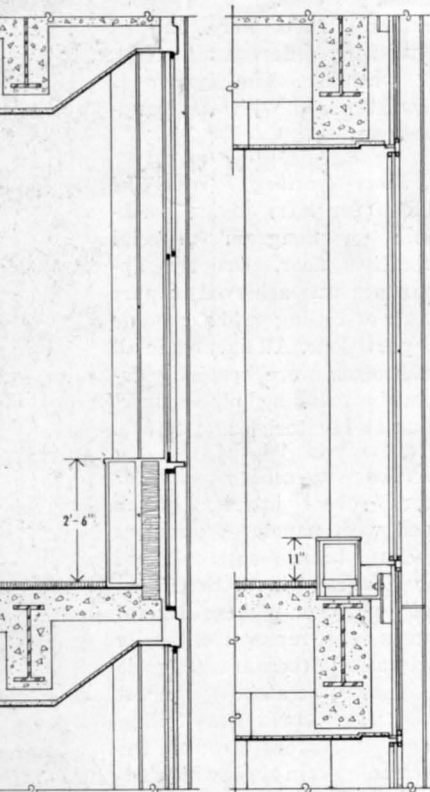
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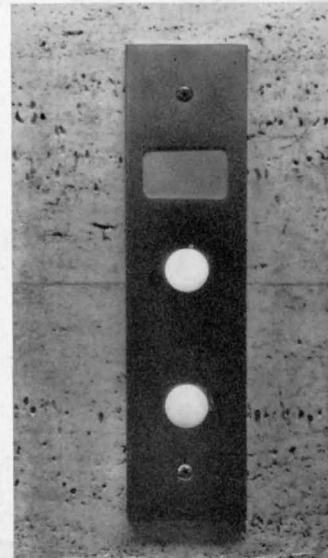
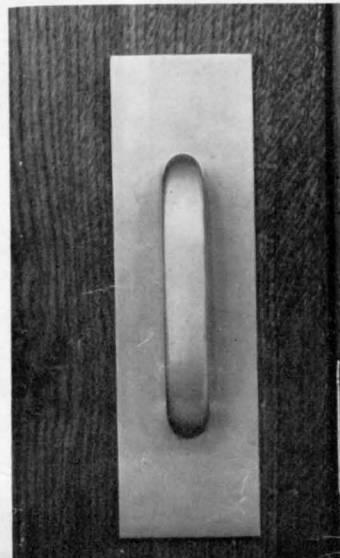


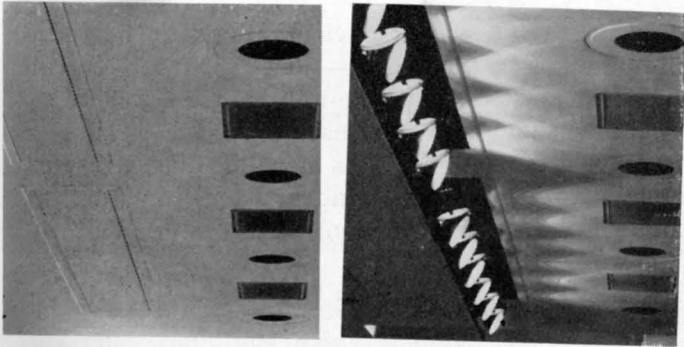
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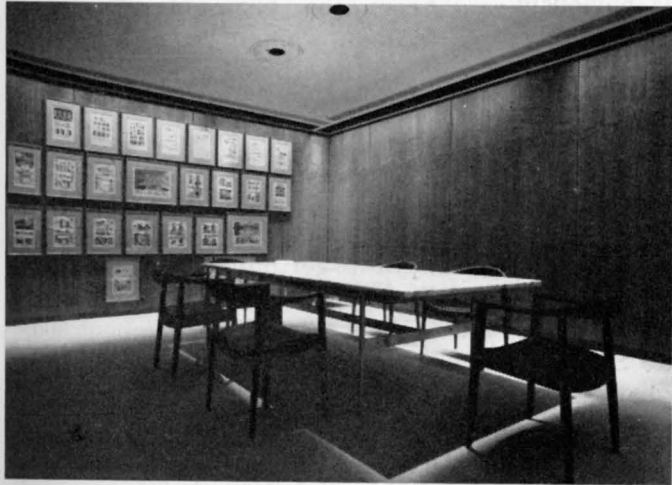
7. New air-conditioning system uses underwindow units that project only 11 inches above floor line (as opposed to 30 inches for similar units in UN tower—see comparative sections at left). These compact units make floor-to-ceiling glass walls practical for the first time. Seagram's system has unusually flexible temperature and humidity controls which can be adjusted to heat the lower portions of the south wall of the building (which may be shaded by adjacent buildings), while cooling the upper portions of the same wall (which may still be exposed to broiling sun). Office above, showing low underwindow unit, is part of Olivetti suite.

WALL SECTIONS
UN Secretariat Seagram





11



12



13

11. *Display lights* (top) were designed for executive meeting room, disappear into ceiling when not in use. They turn one end of meeting room into effective stage.

12. *Invisible light sources* (center row above) were used throughout building. Here they spill a wash of light over conference-room walls, and make a pool of light on conference table. Lighting Consultant Richard Kelly, in collaboration with Lighting Designer Edison Price, used concealed light sources to illuminate marble-faced elevator stack in lobby, and to light paintings and tapestries

in Seagram offices. Result: one of the best-illuminated buildings ever constructed.

13. *Luminous ceiling* forms a continuous 11½-foot-wide band around the perimeter of the building. Office (above) was designed by Ketchum & Sharp for O. E. McIntyre, Inc., shows modular ceiling grid in outside offices and corridor, plus a low-brightness system for interior office spaces. This system provides excellent light at desk surfaces. Each night, the luminous ceiling band is lit up on every floor, provides a dramatic spectacle on Manhattan's sky line (right).



© EZRA STOLLER

Seagram's bet on elegance

Most office towers today are built primarily for profit. This one was built primarily for prestige. Yet prestige may prove to have a considerable long-term cash value.

Can a custom-built, luxury skyscraper like the Seagram building—designed by a master architect and under a luxury budget—be made to pay its way in today's commercial real estate market? Samuel Bronfman, president of Distillers Corporation-Seagrams Limited, who has some \$43 million of his company's funds invested in an elegant new Park Avenue *palazzo*, is obviously keeping his fingers crossed. But the preliminary figures seem to indicate that the Seagram building, from 52nd to 53rd Streets, may not only pay its way, but also earn a modest profit for the company.

This is important, for if the Seagram building pays its way, every architect and builder in the U. S. will share in the profits. For they will, then, be able to cite Seagram to other clients who may be inspired to erect more structures of outstanding design by outstanding architects—if such ventures do not have to be recorded in red ink.

Seagram, to be sure, is a very special kind of real estate project: it was not built primarily as an investment intended to produce a fast money return; it was built to produce a long-term return in public good will, institutional advertising, and — only incidentally — in cash. This distinction is important. For if Seagram were judged as a fast-return real estate investment, it

would obviously have to be judged a failure—just as most postwar run-of-the-mill New York office zig-zaggers must be judged a failure as generators of public good will, institutional advertising, or for that matter, long-term cash value.

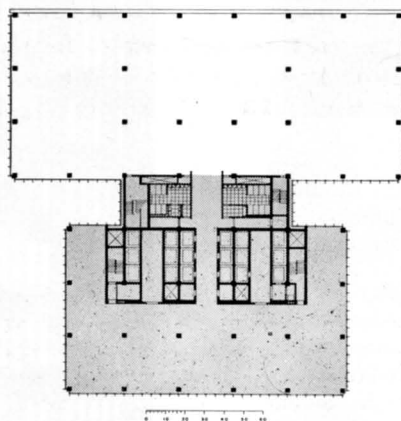
The public be pleased

From the beginning President Bronfman wanted "something special" in the way of a new corporate headquarters and he was willing to pay a premium to get it. So, although the 60,000 square foot Park Avenue site for which Seagram paid \$5 million would have accommodated a much larger building of perhaps 1 million square feet, Bronfman decided that a building of "about 500,000 square feet" of rentable floor area would probably be most suitable for the company's purposes.

As for quality, Bronfman made it clear to all hands that he wanted a structure that would offer prestige tenants space in a new, unsurpassed luxury building in units as small as 500 to 700 square feet if desired. (Most new commercial buildings in New York spurn small-space tenants in favor of full-floor or multifloor renters.) For these prestige accommodations, of course, Seagram would charge premium rents. The big question was whether the company would be able to get premium rents.

As it turns out, the building, which was officially opened at the end of May, is already 90 per cent rented, and the remaining 10 per cent is being rented with comparative ease—a tribute to the subtle, attractive elegance of the completed structure itself. Moreover, space is being rented at \$7 to \$8.30 per square foot in the 28 tower floors, as compared with the going rate of about \$5 to \$5.25 a foot for ordinary new buildings. By last month, the building had about 77 tenants, and was expected to be filled with a total of perhaps 100 tenants (averaging about 3,800 square feet of space each) by early fall. All tenants, happily, are on leases of at least ten years.

Here is how the economics of the Seagram building shape up. The final cost of the building will be in the neighborhood of \$43 million: \$38



Prestige tower floors (shaded area above) are relatively small; from the 11th to the 38th story each floor has about 12,000 square feet of rentable area as compared to the 28,300 square feet on the second to fourth floors, which include the block-wide wing at the rear of the tower (plan above). The intermediate fifth to tenth floors are reduced to 18,600 square feet each by a setback.

million for the structure (including all fees, tenant partitions, and finished interiors of Seagram floors) and \$5 million for the site. Thus the building alone, with 854,000 gross square feet of floor area, cost \$45 per square foot to build (about \$50 per foot including the land). By comparison the cost of ordinary New York office buildings today is only about \$25 to \$30 per square foot, including tenant partitions and alterations, but exclusive of land.

The company financed the construction of the building entirely on its own, and has no mortgage. It initially used working capital and, last April, marketed a \$40 million, 4¼ per cent issue of 25-year debenture bonds to replenish its working capital. It now appears that rents (Seagram charges itself \$6.36 per square foot for the 159,000 square feet it occupies on the eight lower floors) will more than pay for all the operating expenses, real estate taxes, and interest. In the first year these will total an estimated \$3,456,000 as against a rent roll of \$3,843,000.

Thus, in the simplest terms, the building may net about \$400,000 the first year, or 13 per cent on the company's initial \$3 million cash investment (the difference between the \$43 million cost of the building and the \$40 million borrowed), before federal taxes or amortization. This net would rise each year, as interest charges decline, to perhaps \$750,000 in the eighth year, for example. But depreciation completely

changes this simple picture. For tax-deductible depreciation that will be allowed can be applied against other company income for a tax saving of 52 per cent. Thus on a 50-year straight-line depreciation basis, the \$38 million building would preserve \$395,000 of corporate profit annually.

What price quality?

As against this far-from-gloomy prospect, what would have happened if Seagram had covered its entire plot with a more conventional and less expensive building of the maximum allowable floor area? Obviously, a larger, ordinary building would have shown a much greater net cash yield in its early years. But the premium building should command premium rents long after the bloom would have faded from an inferior building. Indeed, some real estate experts think Seagram's decision to build in moderation and good taste may prove to have been the most profitable business decision over the long pull.

If Seagram had wanted to exploit its site to the fullest it could probably have erected an ordinary office building with about 1 million square feet of rentable area for just about the same cost (i.e., \$38 million) as its luxury building, which is only about two-thirds that size. In that case, in contrast to the estimated 4.8 per cent return—before federal taxes or depreciation—that the company may earn on a “free-and-

clear” basis (the difference between total income and total operating expenses and real estate taxes) from the present Seagram building, the company might have achieved a speculative builder's yield of about 12 per cent to 20 per cent. But in that case it would have “earned” very little prestige or good will. Of course, even a 4.8 per cent free-and-clear return (the \$2,087,000 spread between income of \$3,843,000 and operating expenses and real estate taxes of \$1,756,000 expressed as a percentage of the \$43 million cost of the building) would make the project a poor conventional real estate “investment” at \$43 million. For, if that yield was capitalized at 7 per cent, a rate often used in valuing first-class office buildings in prime locations, the property might only command a price of about \$30 million if offered for sale to professional realty investors.

It could also be argued that the 27,000 square feet of plaza land cost Seagram an unnecessary \$2,250,000. But that would again ignore the intangible value this area adds to the entire project. It would also ignore the very tangible value derived from the space beneath the plaza which is used for a parking garage, storage area, and building maintenance shops.

But even if the Seagram building were not to “pay off” in dollar and cents at all, even if all the profit had to be taken in good will, even then Mr. Bronfman's investment would be a sound one. END

THE LADY AND THE ARCHITECTS



Johnson and Mies, Client Lambert

The Seagram building was the work of an unusual team headed by three people: Architects Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson, and 31-year old Phyllis Bronfman Lambert, daughter of Seagram President

Samuel Bronfman, and long a passionate *aficionada* of modern architecture. After seeing some preliminary, less-than-inspiring proposals for Seagram's new headquarters in 1954, Mrs. Lambert told her father that he was on the wrong track, that he ought to try to build the finest skyscraper that modern architecture could produce, and that she would help him do just that. There followed a two-and-one-half-month search for an architect. Mrs. Lambert got Philip Johnson, then director of architecture at New York's Museum of Modern Art, to draw up a list of the top dozen men in U.S. architecture, talked to them and saw their work. Mrs. Lambert's final choice: Chicago's Mies van

der Rohe, with Johnson (who had a New York office and was registered in the state) as Mies's associate. Seagram President Bronfman approved wholeheartedly, appointed his daughter director of planning to represent the clients in Mies's and Johnson's office. In her position as client, Mrs. Lambert took an active part in almost every major—and many minor—design decisions, helped select materials, equipment, furnishings and, most importantly, the paintings, sculpture, and tapestries that distinguish the interiors of the building. Her ultimate triumph will be the art commissioned for a luxurious ground-floor restaurant that will be opened to the public next year.