

New York's Next Crystal Palace

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After ten years, two sites and two designs, New York City's latest proposed Convention Center seems, delightfully, to be the right building in the right place. The facility will outclass — there is no other word for it — and outdistance all its competitors.

The new Convention Center will be the largest of its kind in the country. Although bigness by itself is no virtue, it makes sense when one considers how much space large trade shows and expositions require: more every year. Yet the design, by I. M. Pei and Partners and Lewis, Turner Partnership, goes beyond the conventional, blockbuster warehouses that most cities have erected. As worked out by the Pei office, this immense structure will be worth looking at, walking around and spending time in. The design, in creative ways, blends special trade-show facilities with general functions like restaurants, shops, services and displays. The public activities would be located inside a

soaring area at the center, rivaling Paris's Grand Palais. With a sparkling glass skin wrapped around a lightweight frame, the building would be a new Crystal Palace, on the edge of the Hudson.

The designers have solved problems of cost, circulation and environmental impact, as well as the need for a vitalizing, rather than deadening, sort of construction. Their facility would provide a remarkable opportunity for an orderly upgrading of the West Side. This chance should not be lost to haphazard speculation and development. The city's planners would be wise to declare the area a Special Convention Center District.

Until now, the case for the Convention Center has rested on how much a generally suitable facility would contribute to the city's economy. That economic argument is now strengthened by imagining how much this world-class building will please the city's visitors — and how much pride it should give the city's own.

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