



DEDICATED AT FAIR: Throng in front of the Permanent Hall of Science at the World's Fair standing as the National Anthem was played during opening ceremony yesterday.

Romantic Science Hall

Harrison's Building at World's Fair Reminds One of 13th Century Cathedral

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

The extraordinary new building by Wallace Harrison that houses the Hall of Science at the World's Fair is an exotically handsome, highly romantic structure of great dramatic impact and considerable esthetic allure.

It is novel, in the tradition of architecture for a fair, but unlike most of the surrounding novelties, which are both specious and temporary, it is permanent. Which means that it must be judged in terms of the lasting value of its design, rather than for its architectural fireworks.

Its pyrotechnics, however, are notable. The honeycombed serpentine concrete walls with inset panels pierced by intense blue glass enclose an 80-foot high free-form space that would be a memorable interior for any purpose. The supporting structure of this huge hall, which in turn forms the exhibition area below, is a massive network of reticulated and faceted reinforced concrete columns and spans. This construction, made particularly heavy by marshy foundation conditions, has a somber, surrealist intricacy worthy of the cabinet of Dr. Caligari.

All Emotional Stops Out

This may be modern technology in the service of science, but it is a frankly visual and sensuous way of using it that pulls out all the emotional stops that architecture can command.

To anyone who expects a science museum to be didactic, orderly and dry, reflecting scientific methodology, this building will be unpalatable. (But so may the future exhibits, which promise to be highly popular, Disney-like animations. On the other hand, an architectural concept resting on the shaky symbolism of taut, sleek construction as an expression of precision technology would be just as romantic as this one.

Here one thinks immediately of the 13th century rather than the 20th; of Sainte-Chapelle; of the drama of soaring heights stained with colored light.

For this is a Cathedral of Science, rather than a Hall of Science, its luminous blue walls suggesting limitless extensions of space. At a time when science vies with religion in explaining the mysteries of the universe, this is an oddly significant architectural twist.

The building stems directly from an earlier exercise in the same vein by the same architect, Mr. Harrison's First Presbyterian Church in Stamford, Conn. Its even more direct source is

the equally romantic, neo-Gothic Federal Science Pavilion by Minoru Yamasaki at the Seattle Fair, an example that New York wished to emulate.

The question, of course, is whether this is a functional science museum or just a beautiful building or a functional anything. The answer is that the program was so wide open—only a large hall for films and a subsidiary exhibition area were called for, with later buildings to follow as part of a complete science complex—and the program was so flexible within those requirements that the architect had virtual carte blanche.

He chose a personal, creative solution. Expenses rose and schedules lagged because of the unconventional, hard-to-estimate construction. Cost accounting is more reliable with clichés. But in terms of design quality, the city has got its money's worth.

The obvious fact is that Mr. Harrison, like any architect worth his salt, wanted to build a beautiful building. He might not have designed this particular building if his assignment had been for, say, a pretzel factory, but it would surely have evolved in similar form for any amenable purpose that presented itself. It may be architectural heresy to say so, but if it works, it's all right.

'A New Wall' Sought

Mr. Harrison states simply that he was looking for a fresh approach to building a wall. Of such simple statements are architectural revolutions made. The fact that so many of today's architects are diligently searching for new ways to do something as basic as enclosing space against the elements is making architecture an extremely lively art and producing some highly provocative results.

As for the fair's legacy to the future in permanent buildings, it will consist of the Hall of Science, the Port Authority Heliport Building and, possibly, the New York State Pavilion. A more strangely assorted trio could not be found to show the world of the future what we admired in 1964.

The heliport is pure 1934 throwback "moderne." The New York State Pavilion is a superb, up-to-the-minute exercise in carnival-spirited, elegant fair design. The ultimate question is whether, together, they will look like something left over from the party—a kind of architectural morning after the night before—in a more sober Flushing Meadow park.