

# WORLD'S FAIR: INTERNATIONAL SCOPE

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

**T**HE World's Fair is moving into high gear and the sound of recorded music, the smell of cooking oils and the spray of fountains fill the spring air. Interiors have bloomed miraculously in empty structures since opening day, so that it is now possible to visit those buildings that make a World's Fair a World's Fair—the international pavilions.

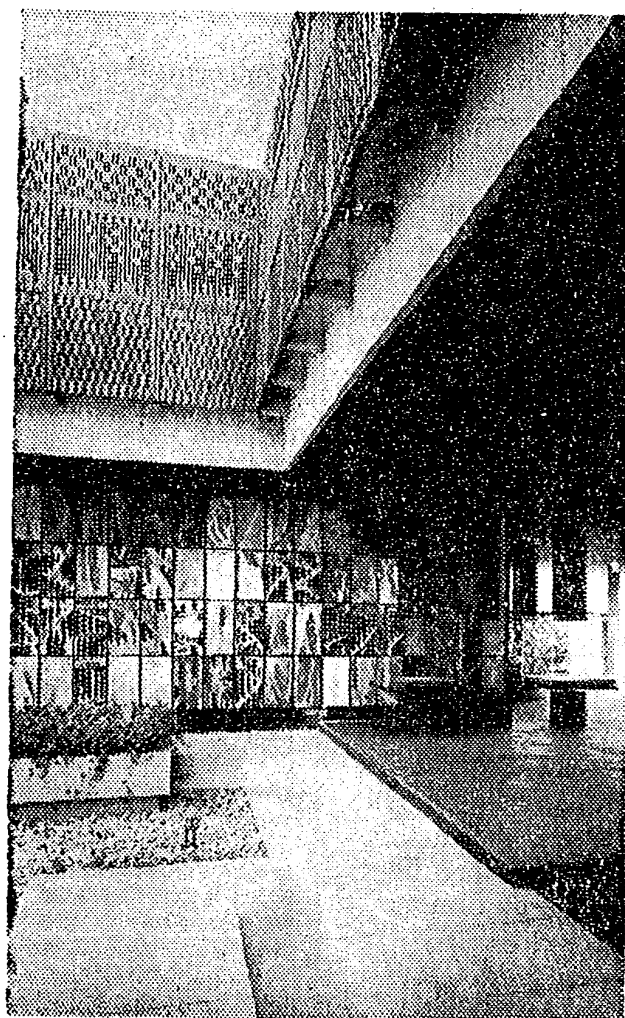
It is a well-known fact that the New York Fair failed in its bid for official accreditation as a world exposition and therefore signed up commercial and industrial groups where it was not possible to get direct government participation. The result is a mix of official and private sponsorship and an even greater mix in terms of architecture and design.

Traditionally, the role of the national pavilion at a World's Fair is to present a national image—a highly selective display of culture, products and attractions, the job of presentation usually done by leading national talents. It's a best-foot-forward kind of operation and it is sad to report that most of the "nations," ranging from G for government to P for private and including a hybrid marked PGS (private, with government sanction), are tripping all over themselves.

## Dangerous Diversions

Since it has been noted here and elsewhere that this is the Fair of the Big Sell, it is not surprising that there is heavy emphasis on food and shops, with snacks and souvenirs to be eaten and bought at one's own peril, to the thump of Congo drums, the wail of Arabian bagpipes and the beat of Calypso rhythms—all live and in competition with the airborne recordings. It's heaven or hell, depending on the state of your stomach and your feet and the standards of dignity and design that you expect from the nations of the world.

It is not unreasonable to expect high standards, because every country has artists and architects of ability who are quite capable of doing the job well. Occasionally, they have. Austria (PGS), Denmark (PGS), Sweden (P) and Japan (G and P) are among those countries that have made a concerted effort to present their arts and industries with distinction and style, although in some cases the public-private approach has produced an un-



**SPANISH STAR**—In Spain's pavilion, somber dignity, elegant design, and sophisticated collaborative arts.

easy design blend in which the official portion peters out rapidly into trade show clichés.

Against this consistent second-rateness, the Spanish exhibition (G) stands out like a lonely star. Behind a slightly oppressive, not overly distinguished facade, which is intended to be a blank, unrevealing wall deliberately concealing the delights inside, Spain has put together a superbly integrated, beautifully selected, absolutely top-notch show.

The pavilion, its furnishings and installations were all designed by the Madrid architect Javier Carvajal, who won the commission in a national competition. The difficult dovetailing of Spanish and American components was worked out with the consulting New York architects, Kelly and Gruzen. (Construction of the \$7 million building is permanent, like most of the "temporary" structures that will be torn down at the end of the Fair.)

There is a weighty elegance in all of the handsomely coordinated modern details from showcases and lighting that are integral with ceiling and floor to the slightly heavy con-

porary furniture. This Spanish characteristic—as opposed to Scandinavian lightness, for example—is deliberately and skillfully invoked.

The building employs a sombre palette of muted earth colors in tile floors and walnut ceilings and in painted, ceramic and collage murals and metal and wood sculpture of gates and jalousies produced by a remarkably successful collaboration of Spanish artists—Cumulla, Farreras, Gabino, de Labra, Molezun, Sanchez and Turcios.

From the breathtaking Goyas and Velasquez installed by the Prado in the small, choice museum to the Balenciaga uniforms of the hostesses, Spain has sent her best. And she has displayed it with sophisticated grace. It is a rebuke to the surrounding mediocrity as sharp as her flamenco dancers' heels.

It might be better to stop right there, because everything else suffers by comparison with Spain's stylish sweep and size. The crowds in Denmark's small building overwhelm and defeat the delicate, handsome display, a well disposed forest of modular metal supports and glass cases by Erik Moller, the pavilion's designer.

In Japan's three structures, east and west meet with a jangling crash. The superb, stone-walled government pavilion by the architect Kunio Mackawa and the sculptor Nagare offers intriguing contrasts; it is feudal outside and industrial inside, with a factory-severe presentation of Japan's impressive technical products, installed by the architect.

This restrained directness degenerates into a salesman's sample room in the second government building, of glass and steel, where the architect's control of interiors stopped, and the manufacturers set up their own displays. The third pavilion, privately constructed in tea-room-modern, houses restaurants, tourist souvenirs and "beautiful kimono-clad young waitresses from Japan."

As a kind of cultural garnish there are generous examples of Ikebana, the art of flower arranging, or flower torturing, scattered among the watches and lacquer ware, composed of such unblinkingly garish vulgarities as plastic orchids and ostrich plumes.

The Republic of China is represented by a building of polychrome banality and a display like an elaborately bad Oriental furniture store. Korea has sent routine export ware. Greece is better not mentioned at all.

## Dreary Designs

The ambitious Indian pavilion is a curious mixture of beautiful objects and bad installations that looks as if it had changed elephants several times in midstream. A bit of traditional marble balustrading is combined with glass-walled modernity and crassly commercial display-house dissertations on the national economy. The incomparable Indian fabrics, crafts and colors are a silent reproach to the building's gross materials and finishes.

If there is a common characteristic of most of the foreign pavilions, it is a flashy dreariness and a too-heavy reliance on commercial samples. Salesmanship may make the world go round, but it doesn't make World's Fairs. They are shaped and remembered by concepts above the trade show level, realized through the arts of architecture and design.

But where there's a Fair, there's hope, and we'll be there again on the next fine, flag-fluttering day. You'll find us at the Spanish pavilion. Olé!