

A New City Is Emerging Downtown: A New City Is Emerging Downtown

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

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LOWER Manhattan, the southern tip of the island behind all the famous skyline views of those clustered Wall Street spires, is not so much in a state of renewal as in a state of explosion. The rising towers of the 110-story Trade Center will only be the top of the iceberg. What is going on from the Battery to Brooklyn Bridge is the remaking of a city, and the results are beginning to show.

Whole sections are already transformed. From Battery Park to Wall Street along the East River the changes are total. There is all new construction just south of Brooklyn Bridge. It usually takes bomb damage or bulldozer public renewal to produce clearance and rebuilding on a comparable scale. Except for Brooklyn Bridge South, this is almost all private construction. Including Battery Park City and the construction on East River landfill, there are about 50 million square feet of commercial and residential space to come.

An expatriate New Yorker with Lower Manhattan memories of small buildings redolent of coffee and spices and the graces of the Greek Revival would be lost. The handsome, five-story, red brick rows that survived the eighteen-thirties and forties virtually intact along the East River are almost all gone. So are slips and streets with historic names.

There are a few 19th-century survivals and landmarks—India House, Fraunces Tavern, Sweet's restaurant in the Fulton Street row slated for lonely preservation as the South Street Seaport. They are jostled by soaring glass, steel and aluminum on new superblocks.

What has been lost is New York's past, and that part of the story casts no glory on the city or its developers. It is full of sordid insensitivities. But what is being gained—much like the family of the bride that doesn't lose a daughter but gains a son—is a kind of planning and architectural quality all but unknown to 20th-century New York and unparalleled in other parts of the city.

Sometimes stumbling, sometimes

surefooted, Lower Manhattan is moving toward a standard of urban distinction that will make New York the world's prime stone and steel city by more than fortuitous accident. Downtown may not speak to uptown anymore. Major monuments by major architects will be here, with at least an occasional bow to the city's superior Lower Manhattan Plan. More than ever, it will be New York's solid banking and financial heart.

As builders seek sites and variances, they are faced, often for the first time, by negotiations with the city for plan-

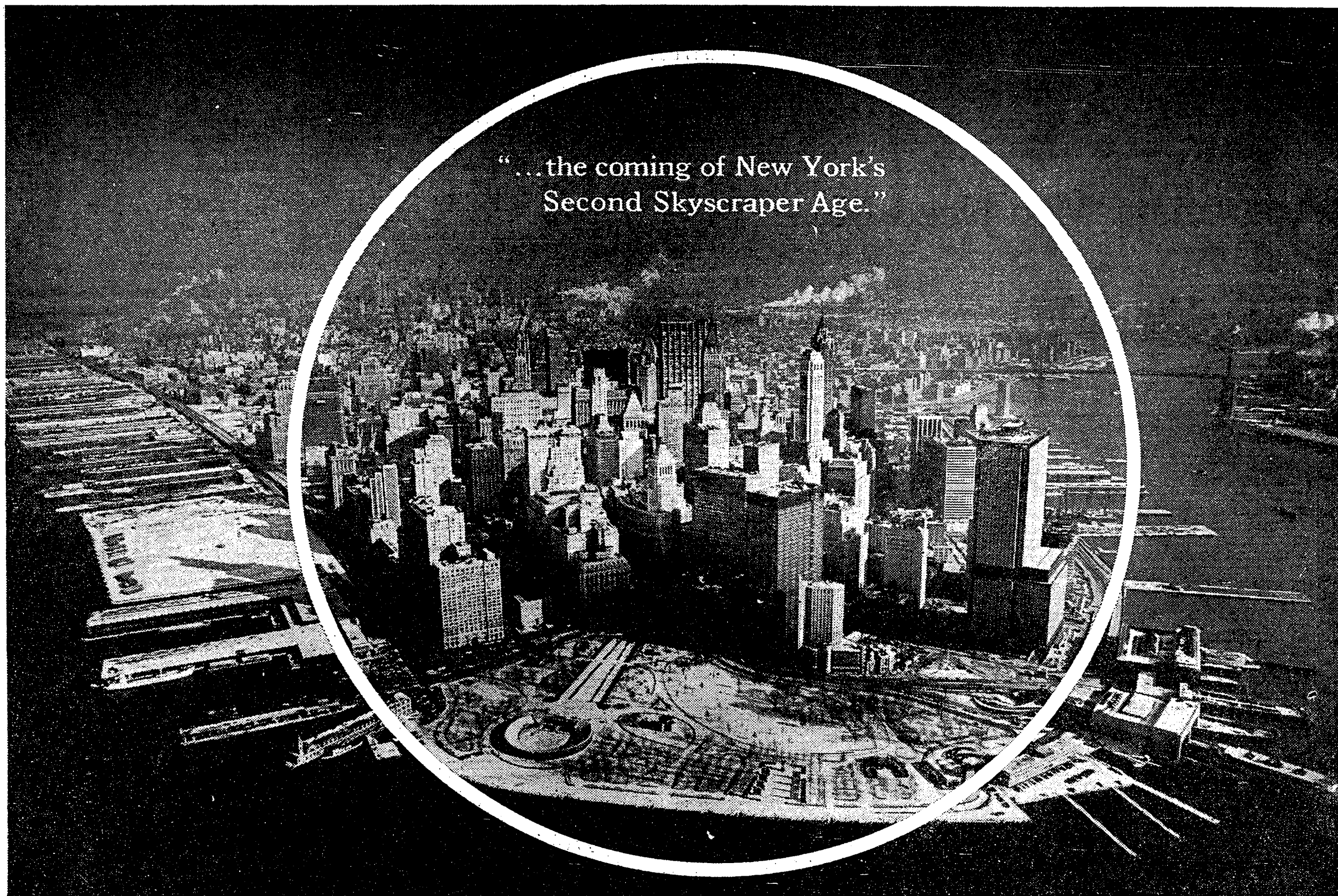
ning and architectural objectives. They call them "deals," and this is the best deal-watching in town. What shows already is a mixture of good and bad, and the best is yet to come. The best will be spectacular. We are witnessing the coming of New York's Second Skyscraper Age.

It will include Philip Johnson's 40-story 1.2-million-square-foot Lehman Brothers building at Williams and Broad Streets, Kevin Roche's Federal Reserve addition at Nassau Street and Maiden Lane, two structures by I. M. Pei, including a new U.S. Lines build-

ing on Broadway, the new U.S. Steel building at Broadway and Liberty Street by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, and the same firm's new Stock Exchange.

Of substantial impact but still undetermined character are the projected development of a 1.1-million-square-foot site assembled by Fisher Brothers just south of the World Trade Center between Washington and Greenwich Streets, and a structure of about 3 million square feet to be built by William Ronan and the

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The New York Times (by Neal Boenzi)

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Metropolitan Transportation Authority on the air rights over the Brooklyn-Battery Tunnel exit.

The renaissance of Lower Manhattan began with David Rockefeller's decision to build the Chase Manhattan headquarters downtown in the late nineteen-fifties. That tipped the scale toward keeping in the Wall Street area a financial community that had been on the verge of uptown flight. The 60-story structure at One Chase Manhattan Plaza, by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, started the spectacular renewal.

The East River transformation has

followed. The process began with the ruthless demolition of an extraordinary historic stand of Greek Revival structures that lined Water Street, only to widen it, about a decade ago. Buildings over a hundred years old are considered a liability by traffic engineers and the investment community.

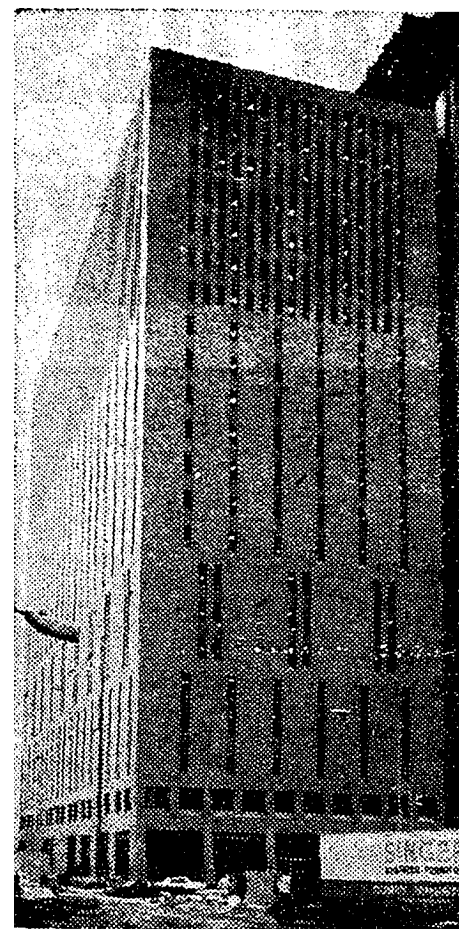
As city agencies slogged slowly toward urban renewal designation for the nearby area adjoining Battery Park on the East River, the real estate combination of Atlas-McGrath bought up most of it. This put the city in a non-negotiable position. On the Atlas-McGrath site, now called New York Plaza and innocent of urban planning, are three blockbusters, shouldering each other in blatant disharmony and deplorable massing at that focal and inescapable point where the island begins.

One is an above-average building. The 22-story structure by Carson, Lundin and Shaw for Manufacturers Hanover Trust displays some of the best brickwork in New York. Ironically, the brick was selected to go with a projected historic restoration that never materialized.

The bank building is overshadowed by two jazzy office superstructures put up by Atlas-McGrath. One of them is One New York Plaza, designed by the firm of the late William Lescaze. It is a 50-story, two-million-square-foot structure with a bustle, and Chase Manhattan occupies half of it. The building is popularly known as the waffle iron or barber shop building for its insistent pattern of prefabricated, shaped aluminum window framing that reminds some of stamped tin barber shop ceilings at a massively blown-up scale.

Two New York Plaza, designed by the architectural firm of Kahn and Jacobs, is a 40-story, one-million-square-foot building in construction now, half of it leased to Hayden Stone. It makes the flashy commercial formula of vertical aluminum strips inescapable by land or sea. Both are "drop dead" buildings in bulk and visual aspect.

Just north of New York Plaza there is a huge hole in the ground where a shabby and derelict Jeanette Park has



The New York Times (by Meyer Liebowitz)
Manufacturers Hanover Trust building on New York Plaza has brick facade.

disappeared. In its place there will be a larger public plaza, as part of a Uris Brothers development, an immense superblock to be called 55 Water Street.

Emery Roth and Sons are the architects for the 53-story, 3.2-million-square-foot structure — the largest commercial office building in the world. M. Paul Friedberg and Associates are the landscape architects for the plaza. Through voluntary collaboration between Uris and the city, both the building and the plaza conform to the objectives of the Lower Manhattan Plan.

The Roth firm has five more buildings in the immediate area. At 77 Water Street, 585,400 square feet are just being finished for William Kaufman; 10 Hanover Square will be 514,500 square feet for Helmsley Spear; 95 Wall Street is a completed building

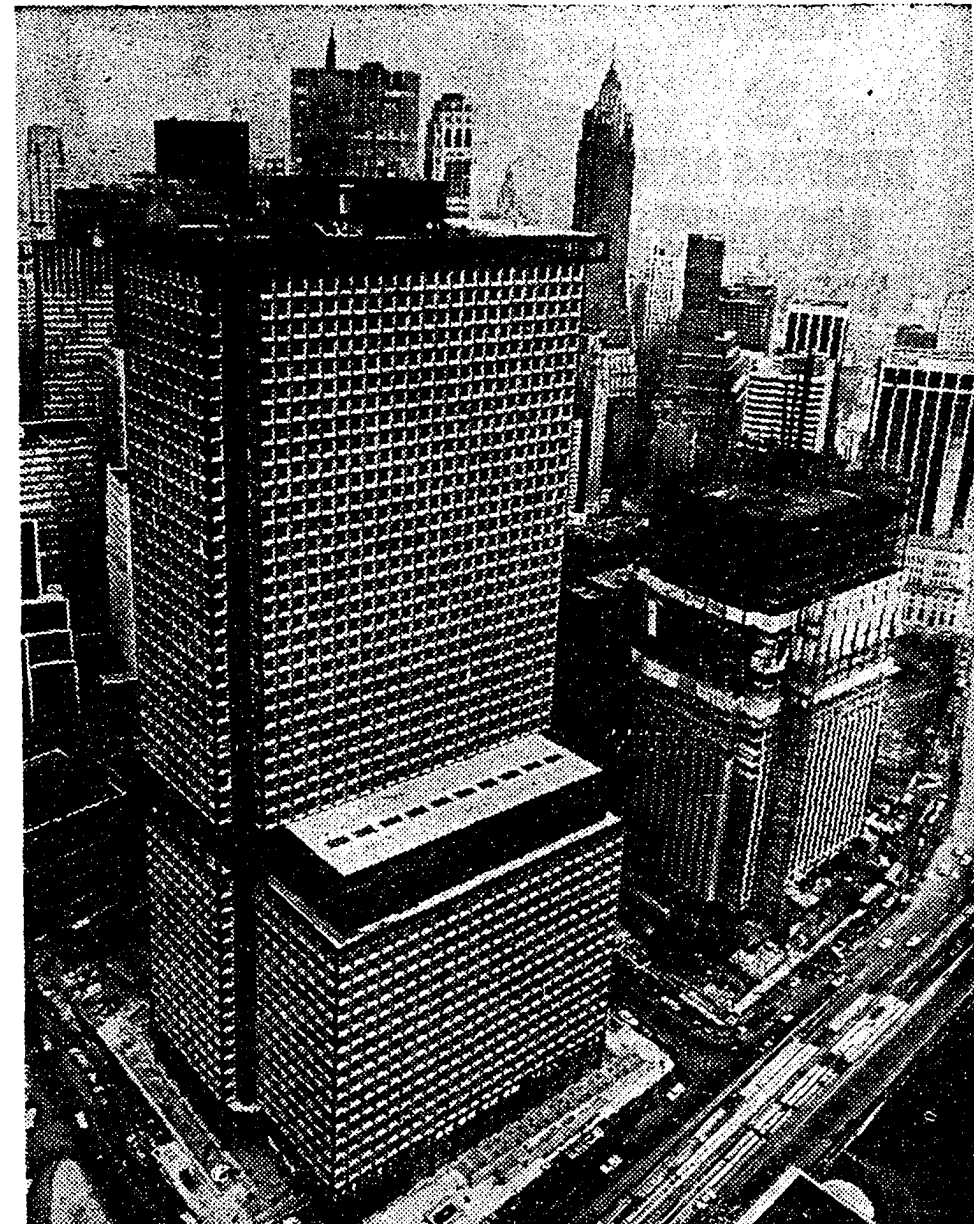
of 486,000 square feet for Sylvan Lawrence. Also completed are 100 Wall Street, with 474,200 square feet for A. Bienstock and 111 Wall Street, a Uris building of 1,010,300 square feet. That is a lot of square footage in exchange for the demolition of historic Water and Front Streets.

This Roth enclave ranges in architectural quality from the standard commercial container with which Roth has blanketed the city to a small gem at 77 Water Street, a sleek glass and aluminum "skin" structure of considerable finesse.

Curiously, the developer who sponsored this uncompromising bit of first-class modernism is also the builder of the chichi kitsch at 437 Madison Avenue, and Helmsley Spear, scheduled for a quite ordinary structure on Hanover Square, put up the city's most distinguished speculator building at 140 Broadway. "They'll consider a good building if it's someplace where they think it shows," says Richard Roth, Jr.

The new Stock Exchange, in design now by Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, will be on landfill at the East River end of Wall Street. The architects of the city's Lower Manhattan Plan, Conklin and Rossant, are objecting to the building's siting on the street's direct axis, where the plan calls for a waterfront plaza and river view. The city's own planners suggest that the termination of the street by the Exchange may be equally good and very symbolic New York urbanism; they seem to be caught in an owner-architect squeeze play with the muscle on the Stock Exchange side.

The Water Street stretch was subject to considerable City Planning Commission negotiation in the process of getting the zoning variances that builders want for the smaller plots of Lower Manhattan. In this case, the muscle was on the city's side. Setbacks and open space requirements were deliberately waived to keep a continuous, unbroken street line and related building masses. The buildings are all of a roughly matching size and scale that minimizes differences in



The New York Times (by William E. Sauro)
One New York Plaza, left, was designed by the firm of the late William Lescaze. Kahn & Jacobs were the architects of the structure at right that is still rising.

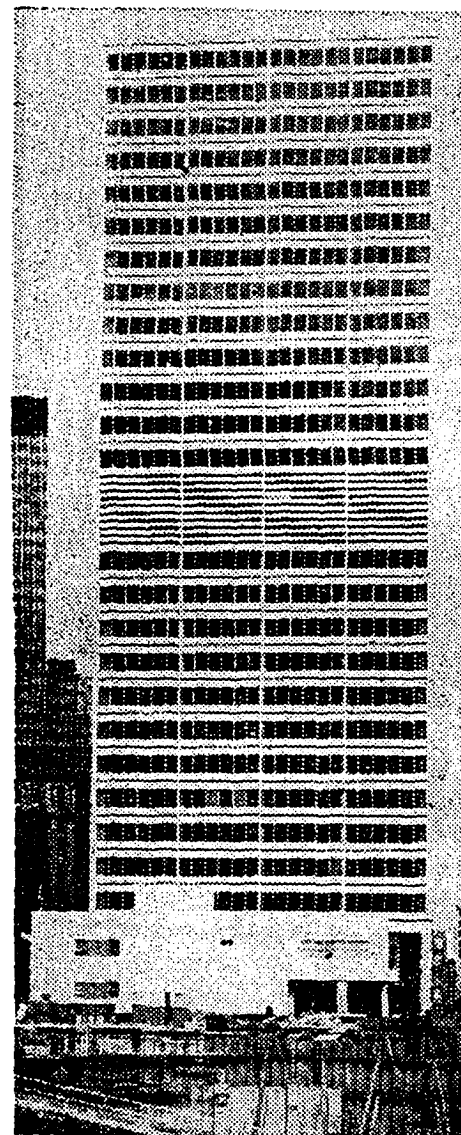
quality and style.

The smaller size of the buildings and the narrow streets of the old downtown pattern, converging toward the Battery, are particularly successful in urban design terms, creating a pleasant awareness of the shape of the island and the proximity of the water. There will be pedestrian arcades to emphasize this feature. Another planning plus is a system of provisional underground connections for the scheduled Second Avenue subway.

Water Street will continue with another new building by I. M. Pei at 160, and a 50-story, two-million-square-foot structure by Atlas-McGrath from

John to Fulton Streets. In one of those "deals" with the city, Atlas-McGrath was persuaded to accept Davis-Brody as designers. The site was also negotiated after Atlas-McGrath had bought the early 19th-century South Street Seaport row at Fulton Street for demolition and challenged its landmark designation. They lost the challenge and gained an architect.

The Seaport will remain. Above it are the soaring Tishman apartment towers of the Brooklyn Bridge Southwest redevelopment, and the new Pace College, nestling against the bridge. Don't look for little old New York. It isn't there anymore.



The New York Times
Emery Roth & Sons were architects for 50-story tower at 77 Water Street.