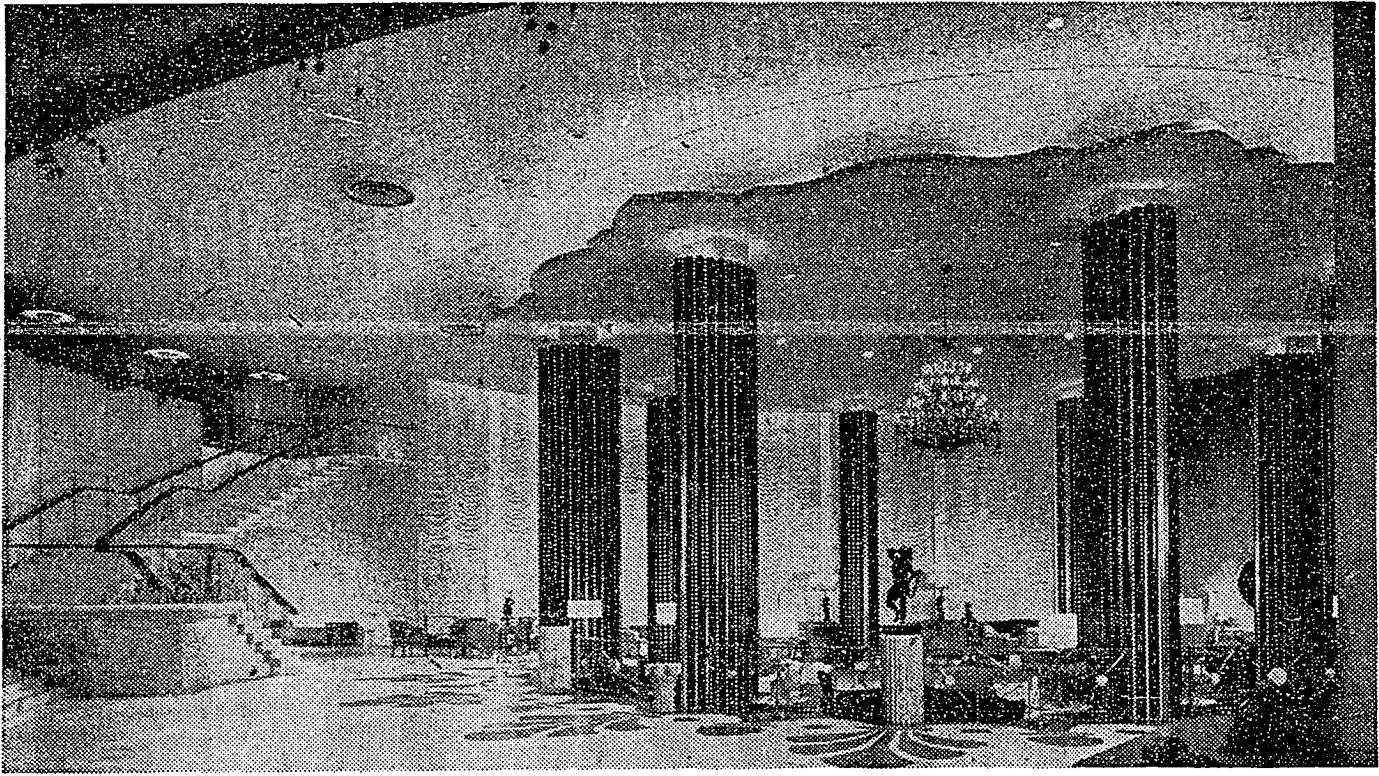


Show Offers 'Joy' of Hotel Architecture



The main lobby of the Eden Roc in Miami Beach, one of 68 hotels designed by Morris Lapidus

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

I had a much better time at the Morris Lapidus show that has just opened at the Architectural League than I've ever had at a Lapidus hotel. "The Architecture of Joy," a tribute of sorts to the High Priest of High Kitsch who virtually invented the Florida hotel (somebody had to), is an absolutely dandy little exhibition, compactly and impeccably installed in the league's tiny exhibition space at 41 East 65th Street, where it will run through Nov. 7.

The exhibition has been conceived and coordinated with a straight face by John S. Margolies, who made the selections with Billy Adler and Robert Jensen. The installation, with some killing critical quotes and text by Mr. Margolies, is by John Bowstead and Alan Lapidus. It is accompanied by the strains of Muzak and the outraged cries of those league members who feel that the show is an unpardonable breach of standards.

The show is being presented as an exercise in mid-American, mid-20th-century popular taste and art and what 90 per cent of the American public really likes and wants. (If three people say you're drunk, lie down, says Mr. Lapidus; if 90 per cent of the American people like these buildings they're right, says Mr. Margolies. Will the real American architecture please stand up?)

There are two neat, curving walls of photographic blow-ups of a selection of high spots from Mr. Lapidus's hotel career, an installation that echoes the architect's use of curves, which he credits to the influence of Mies van der Rohe's Tugendhat House. Other influences are Louis XIV, XV and XVI. From Fortunoff's rather than Versailles. Plus every movie of mythical high life that ever graced the silver screen.

Past the picture panels are several bland, tanned manikins in Lapidus-designed uniforms, with a token display of hotel plates and matches. They suggest, with wax museum impassivity, the stunning lengths to which the architect goes for consistency of style.

I regret that the purple and gold uniform of the Miami Americana bellboys is not included. The effect on arrival, still vivid after seven years, was like being hit by an exploding gilded eggplant. Unreality was reinforced in the scaleless, relentlessly adorned lobby, where two sluggish alligators dozed beneath a giant terrarium that burst through the roof with tropical chutzpah.

Beyond the uniforms is a simultaneous projection of stills and movies of some of the 68 hotels and 18,000 hotel rooms that Mr. Lapidus has designed.

These pictures detail every remarkable excess with a wickedly knowledgeable and sophisticated and—let us admit it—aristocratic eye. So much for the intellectually fashionable claim of democratic suspension of taste on which the endorsement of this work rests. Come off it, boys; you haven't dumped your cultural baggage. You've only dropped a few sterile taboos. Your value judgments are showing.

Every little room is Lapidus in bloom, as they sang at the Upstairs at the Downstairs or vice versa.

I must confess that I did not follow the Lapidus-designed carpet (striped, in accordance with Lapidus design principle No. 1, never leave anything alone) to the color photo of the main entrance of the Eden Roc. The label tells you that you have gone right to it in response to Lapidus design principle No. 2, the moth principle, which takes the viewer immediately to the brightest thing in the room.

I was too distracted by such true documents of American art and architectural history—and don't think they aren't—as those nonpareil cultural quickies: the polystyrene Venus next to the slot machines, the sweeping stairs going nowhere, the galleries of \$300 familiar great oil paintings commis-

sioned from copyists in European museums.

However, one man's joy is another man's hell. I have never felt more joyless than in Miami in the midst of all that joy. I was depressed in direct ratio of esthetic illiteracy and hokey pretensions to the shoddiness of the execution. I got a terrible case of the Fountainblues.

Undeniably, Mr. Lapidus has elevated a kind of taste to a kind of art, even if it is made of plastic, mirrors and spit. He is something of a genius, and how he does it

fascinates. It also instructs.

His work is often wonderfully pratfall funny—these are the best esthetic sight gags in the world—and its intimate revelations of the pop mentality are mind-blowingly fine. He can teach taste-straitjacketed architects a lot about human needs and responses to environment and design for public pleasure.

To those who have always loved what he does, it is superglamour. To the young and older professionals who

have recently come to love it, it is supercamp. They savor every nuance of legitimate psychology and outrageous parody and translate it into homilies about the pop scene that are sincere but not without the scent of patronage.

The current vogue is for turning an appreciation of the lessons of Lapidusland into a canonization of the results, elevating them to some kind of esthetic pantheon. That is intellectual baloney. It is still uninspired super-schlock.