

N.Y.C. ARCHITECTURAL UPS AND DOWNS

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

IN the last two weeks, New York has achieved the heights and the depths, architecturally, with the announcement of two new projects for the city's West Side.

The heights were reached literally by the Port Authority's gigantic proposal for the World Trade Center in lower Manhattan, a 14-block, \$350 million project, which will include the world's tallest buildings and represents an outstandingly serious and searching attempt to put together a supercolossal complex on a superior level of structural and esthetic design.

The depths were represented by a typical speculator's spectacular, considerably gaudier than most, called Film City, to rise on the east blockfront of 11th Avenue between 44th and 45th Streets.

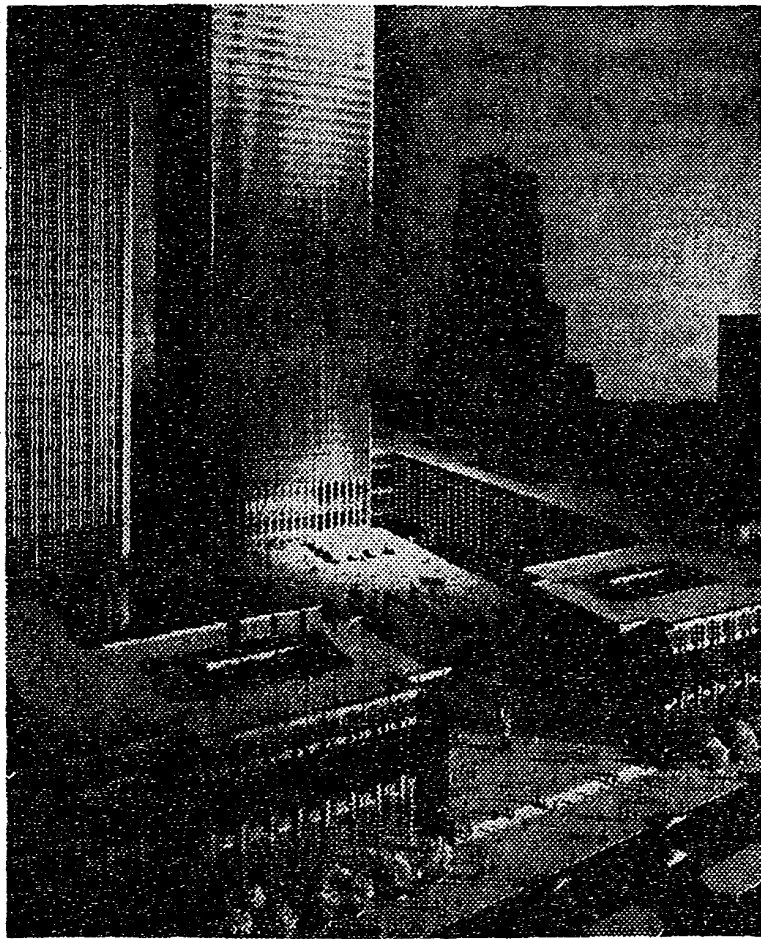
The two are at such opposite poles of thought and taste and demonstrate so clearly what architecture is and is not about, that they could be built on different planets, and it might be a fine thing if they were.

Departure

The Trade Center faces the problems of big city building head-on, and does so with a civic conscience and an imaginative search for new and better solutions. Its twin towers, 110-stories high, 100 feet higher than the Empire State, are a giant step forward in the near-miraculous modern structural techniques that are surely and inevitably reshaping our environment and leading architecture to breathtaking new achievements.

These new skyscrapers are ribbed with delicate icicles of steel that are actually the strong exterior columns that bear the building's weight and rigidize it against winds. There will be no pinnacles or spires on the tops of the soaring structures—even if today's costs did not outlaw them—for the buildings are really square beams on end, designed for strength and economy, and the architect has provided lacy and graceful details within the framework of the striking engineering. The huge towers are planned as the stupendous focus at the end of a handsome plaza surrounded by lower, arcaded buildings conceived on a sensitively human scale.

So large and novel a scheme must be something of a gamble, since its real impact can never be visualized from a model. Unpredictable elements, such as its eventual relationship to the cityscape and surrounding neigh-



ENGINEERING FEAT—The Trade Center will have giant towers with open plaza and low buildings on human scale.



A BUSY BAG OF TRICKS—The proposed Film Center will be latest example of Manhattan's Miami-motel-modern.

borhoods, will be resolved only with construction. For the Trade Center will do what New York building has always done: dwarf all that came before it. And its daring concept and unusual structural design engender a powerful excitement promising the kind of architectural drama, both brutal and beautiful, that produces such mixed feelings in New York's critics, and will undoubtedly be the city's enduring claim to fame.

Minoru Yamasaki, the colla-

borating architect on the Trade Center, is a man of personal style and strong architectural convictions. He was one of the original members of the Pennsylvania Avenue Commission entrusted with restoring Washington's grand axis to glory. When he felt that his ideas were not in tune with the group approach he resigned with the well-known comment that a committee designing a horse produced the camel. Washington's loss was New York's gain.

The lesson of the Trade Center, and Washington, is obvious: a first-rate talent given the creative green light and proper technical collaboration—in this case, the Emery Roth firm's expertise in New York office construction—will produce a first-rate design. It is a particularly pertinent lesson for another New York institution, the Stock Exchange, which will soon be unveiling a building of no less importance and, it is to be hoped, of no less quality.

Film City, to return to the depths, is a different kind of lesson. It is a typical example of New York's speculative construction, or nonarchitecture. Next to the Trade Center, Film City is a pygmy, but in a more ordinary perspective is seen as a full blockfront building, and no small thing.

It promises to be the flashiest example yet of the Miami-motel-modern school, a style that would sit unhappily in New York even if there were palm trees, and even if it were good. There are three or four varieties of fancy exterior sheathing and a snappy circular penthouse cantilevered with more vulgarity than logic over a split-level shaft on a tricky textured base. This busy bag of tricks bears little resemblance to the sensitive expression of progressive engineering. It is not architecture; it is jazz.

Danger

Film City replaces nothing but a parking lot. But the Trade Center must solve serious problems of relocation, for it threatens a thriving community of small businesses on the site. It also indirectly threatens one of the city's landmarks. The possibility that the United States Customs will consolidate all of its activities in the Center raises the question of what will happen to the handsome Beaux Arts Baroque Custom House of 1907 by Cass Gilbert at the Battery. Visions of Penn Station dance in the head.

We raise the question now, far in advance, to avoid the chorus of "Too late!" heard repeatedly as Bowling Alley Baroque has replaced Beaux Arts Baroque in recent years. Nothing could point up the remarkable modern revolution in structure and style more clearly than the dramatic difference between monuments like the Custom House and the Trade Center. These are the stunning, enriching contrasts that New York needs to set off the brittle brilliance of its best modern buildings, for the architectural synthesis that makes a city great.