

# Nothing Inviolable Here

## Plan for Tower on Savoy Plaza Site Raises Some Questions of Esthetics

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

The single most important building planned for New York at present may well be the General Motors headquarters that will replace the Savoy Plaza Hotel on one of the city's most urbane and distinguished public plazas.

The new structure as planned will be a symbol of the relentless uptown march of commercial architecture and of equally

setbacks and plazas. The owners point out that by setting the building back from the street an economic loss is sustained by sacrificing shops along a streetfront building line, where the public must pass them. Here they will be placed in twin sunken plazas, which will take a little effort to reach.

At the same time, it becomes obvious that General Motors will have the prime commercial showcase in New York in its ground floor showroom, or "salon," as they prefer to call it, which fronts the plaza and Fifth Avenue. The rental income should be considerable.

The result is a delicate juggling act between esthetics and economics. High on the plus side: a facade that is being sensitively studied, with an emphasis on masonry rather than glass, to tie in with the surrounding stone-faced buildings.

### Possible Gains Cited

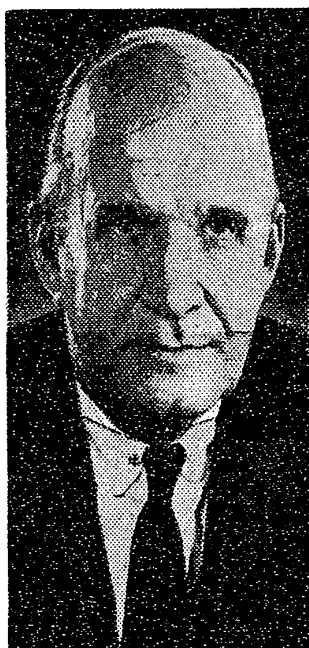
These range from Henry J. Hardenbergh's Plaza Hotel of 1907 in a sturdy "chateau" style through the towering hostilities of the nineteen twenties with the romantic stepped and spired silhouettes that were the popular expression of their day.

The doomed Savoy-Plaza, a 1928 design by McKim, Mead & White, was never the best example of that firm's work and the question, stylistically, is simply whether the replacement will be as good or better. Models in the architect's office at present show a facade of white stone or marble facing structural steel columns and service ducts on five-foot centers, with glass bay windows between. The studies suggest a color, scale, plasticity and contemporaneity that could be a definite addition to the area.

The new open space, on several levels, is also a potential amenity. The danger of overlarge or "formless" openness on a less-than-human scale is avoided by treating the new plaza completely separately from the existing, traditional one.

This is a big building, but New York absorbs big buildings well. Although the Sherry-Netherlands will be dwarfed against it, the straight-sided new tower could be an excellent backdrop for the earlier, more nostalgic skyscraper. Carried design and materials, it could extend the present group stylistically and historically with effective architectural continuity and additional pedestrian pleasures.

On the minus side, however, is the fact that this is an investment building, rather than a genuine corporate headquarters like Seagram or Chase Manhattan, and compromises



**COMMISSIONED:** Edward Durell Stone is taking part in designing of the building for General Motors here.

relentless changes in the New York scene, including the transformation of areas that have been hopefully con-

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sidered inviolate. Nothing is inviolate in New York, however, and next year will bring one of the city's most monumental demolition jobs when the Savoy Plaza is torn down. The building that will replace it, the combined effort of Edward Durell Stone and Emery Roth & Sons, poses two questions.

First, can this large new skyscraper in a strictly contemporary style take its place sympathetically in a particularly felicitous group of well-related structures that add up to one of the pleasantest spots in New York?

Second, can the sophisticated, cosmopolitan, old-world quality of the area be retained with the focus shifted to a 48-story office building with its ground floor devoted to an automobile showroom?

The answer to the first question is yes, the building can be acceptable on esthetic grounds, based on the fact that both the architects and the clients are keenly aware of the problems of environment and design. Conscientious attempts are being made to solve them.

### Stone Gives Some Details

Studies are still in a preliminary stage, and nothing is firm yet except concerning mass and site. Mr. Stone filled in clarifying details in an interview in his penthouse apartment above his offices. Surrounded by the appurtenances of elegance—red carpet, oversize sofas, hanging lights and plants and selected works of painting and sculpture—he spoke of architectural quality to the strains of softly recorded classical background music.

What is planned for the Savoy Fifth Avenue Corporation and its chief tenant, General Motors, according to Mr. Stone, is a "quality" building. Quality is the key to the design, but it is also apparent that excellence is being held within a tight commercial framework.

The building's shape and size represent the maximum envelope permitted by the new zoning law on a 200-by-400-foot lot, utilizing the bonuses given for

are already evident all down the line.

Originally, there was a much greater variety of levels in the plaza area of the building, with water as well as planting. There was the promise of considerably richer spatial experiences.

It was the tenant's wish, however, that a massive, monolithic showroom front the building. Only the architects' argument that opening the showroom further with double bays of glass would have been tantamount to removing the alternate columns of the Parthenon.

That argument saved the building's structural form.

Memories of the General Motors showroom in its World's Fair pavilion bring visions of artificial foliage and orientalia and ersatz elegance in the display area.

But finally, the realization of General Motors' corporate size and wealth raises the serious question of why it could not have chosen to ornament the city without compromise, in the manner of a Lever House or a Seagram Tower. The capacity to do so, financially, is certainly beyond question. Neither can it be questioned in this case that economics has the upper hand over esthetics, with the architects making a valiant case for good design.

### Man. Attacked, Payroll Taken

The 68-year-old owner of a Bronx undergarment company was struck over the head yesterday and robbed of an \$8,388 payroll. Max Goldman, owner of the Marlee Company of 505 Brook Avenue, returned to his office with the payroll at 10 A.M. and was stopped by two men, one armed with a lead pipe. One of the men struck Mr. Goldman on the head. The thugs then took the money he carried in a brown paper bag and fled on foot. Mr. Goldman was treated at Lincoln Hospital for a lacerated scalp.