



EMPHASIS ON VARIETY: Model of prize-winning design for East Harlem renewal project demonstrates juxtaposition of towers and low-rise buildings in confined urban area.

Design for Progress

Novel Concept for East Harlem Project Is a Break From Tired Boxes of Past

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

The results of the Ruberoid marked trend toward "busy" Design Competition for a mid-facades, rich in balconies, window patterns and complex shapes that often approached abstract sculptural effects. Sometimes it was architecture for sculpture's, rather than for people's sake, to the jury's distress.

attack this year.

The board's search for new approaches through competition coupled with the fact that its own latest designs are also moving toward more imaginative solutions, could mark the beginning of the end of the era of municipal mediocrity that brought on the city's civic architecture controversy last spring.

Competition is a procedure that is costly and time-consuming, but it has the virtue of producing fresh, imaginative ideas in a field stale with repetition.

A competition produced the design for Boston's new City Hall, now under construction, by a team of New York architects previously unknown to the political establishment. It is an electrifying scheme not unrelated to LeCorbusier's precedent-setting government buildings at Chandigarh in India.

San Francisco's Golden Gateway competition resulted in housing designs for urban renewal that opened the eyes of many other cities to desirable alternatives to uninspired buildings.

New York has been one of the last communities to learn. The underwriting of prizes and expenses by a business corporation is one excellent answer to the city's current lack of finances to pay the costs of good design.

The contest results represent an architectural breakthrough for the city on several counts. They disclose much of significance that is going on in the field today, very little of which has filtered through to bureaucratic circles. There is a strong new style in building quite different from the standardized product that characterizes so many official undertakings.

All of the prize-winning designs showed it. There was a

But one conclusion was inescapable. Based on new structural techniques increasingly common in private practice, there is a whole range of technological possibilities and esthetic effects that is not being tapped in the housing field. Most of the entries dealt with these larger ideas, creatively and experimentally concerned with construction and site use, which could then be interpreted for individual neighborhood needs.

Certainly the difficulty of adapting these valid and progressive trends to the financial and code limitations that the city must deal with cannot be minimized.

Good Design Costly

The fact that Milton Mollen and the Housing and Redevelopment Board are willing to take on these headaches, when it is so much easier to keep turning buildings out of the same tired, but tested, mold is perhaps the most significant gain of all.

Economics are not on the side of architectural excellence in housing with a tight cost ceiling. Good ideas take time, and time is money. New solutions, properly thought through, are never as cheap as the rubber stamp. Stripping a building to a box, using minimum standard materials and putting the greatest possible number of units into it is the most economical solution. But this solution is a sure contribution to the city's progressive deterioration.

The Housing and Redevelopment Board is still handicapped by its past image, which sits firmly and depressingly in the public eye on almost every urban renewal site. To change the image it will have to deal with other restrictive factors—costs, financing and codes—beyond architectural design.

Its apparent willingness to seek new ideas and face these problems is the real prize that came out of the competition.