

## ***Glass-Fronted Room Glinting With Gold Lends Regal Air***

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

**W**HATEVER performance may be taking place on stage at the new State Theater at Lincoln Center, there will be an equally good show in the Grand Promenade.

This spectacular 50-foot high, 60 by 200-foot long glass-fronted "room" facing the plaza promises to be one of the most impressive public spaces New York has ever seen and it may become the theater's star attraction. Its extravagant size and height, with three suspended tiers of gold-screened balconies studded with faceted lights, glowing gold-leaf ceiling, shimmering gold-chain curtains and two huge, spun-sugar, white marble Nadelman sculptures giving scale and softness to the glittering whole will be formidable competition to anything going on inside.

Like the rest of the theater, the Promenade is sumptuous, elegant, sophisticated and sensuously beautiful. And it is the key to the architecture. This is a design concept that doesn't give a hoot about structure, except to make things more sumptuous, elegant, sophisticated and sensuously beautiful.

That's architectural heresy, of course, which makes Philip Johnson, the designer of the theater, Peck's Bad Boy.

Architecture is a structural art, and its most sacrosanct objective, according to its philosophers, is to express structure visually and esthetically.

This building doesn't do that, and the architect doesn't care. He has used his structure only to create splendid social areas and theatrical interior magic.

The result is a structural mixture in which concrete columns support a steel-framed roof that makes the dramatic interior spans of the Promenade and theater possible. To the purists, it's like mixing drinks or oil and water. Outside, there is the further camouflage of handsome honey-colored travertine specified for all Lincoln Center buildings, and there are pilasters and colonnades—also specified—smoothly buttered on.

This structural naughtiness is the building's first surprise.

The second is that a popular-price, popular-attraction auditorium that will be home for the New York City Ballet but may have a bread-and-butter diet of popular musicals, has turned out, in exquisite taste and execution, to be more suggestive of the royal amusements of the French court before the revolution.

Lincoln Center's democratic theater has been designed by an architectural aristocrat. He has given the public cake. Audiences will move from ground-level entrance to sweeping stairs to Promenade to auditorium and back through a subtle and splendid

manipulation of spaces, through marble, travertine, garnet and gold décor for a series of eye-filling ceremonial pleasures.

Since we have been growing accustomed to a diet of rugged black bread in some extremely lively, but pretty raw buildings, it is fine to know that a sackcloth esthetic is not an inseparable part of good intentions and moderate prices. The price of the theater was not too moderate—\$19.3 million well-spent.

All this may be naughty, but it's nice. The main show is the 2,729-seat house, a flattened horseshoe with five open rings of shallow balconies that give a remarkable sense of intimacy and some stratospheric seating.

The gold-rimmed proscenium is a grand and graceful 51 feet high. Petal-scalloped balconies are faced with softly rubbed gold leaf and accented by the subdued sparkle of faceted disks of light. These disks, already dubbed automobile headlights by some, are more like giant French paste brilliants, a contemporary version of traditional theatrical glitter. Clustered, they form a great central chandelier.

Every detail is classic theater in its function, freshly devised in its design. There is no false note, no wrong texture, no misstep in the complex relationships of surfaces and shapes. The key word is finesse. How it will all work, only use will tell.

What Mr. Johnson has recognized is that buildings must create ambiance. They must provide an active, not a passive setting.

The State Theater is just what it set out to be: social architecture. It may commit the sin of suppressing structure, but it looks like a smashing, soigné success.