

# Revitalization of Cleveland at a Turning Point: A City Divided The ...

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLESpecial to The New York Times

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## Revitalization of Cleveland at a Turning Point



Photographs for The New York Times by GARY SETTLE

Arcade in downtown Cleveland, between Superior and Euclid Avenues, helps preserve pedestrian scale. It was designed by Eisenmah & Smith in 1890.



Chester Commons, a new park in Cleveland's financial district. The Diamond Shamrock Building is at rear.

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE  
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CLEVELAND — Jazz at noon fills the Cleveland Arcade. Three tiers of ornate late 19th-century balconies come to life as figures drift out on them, drawn by the mellow sound that floods the truss-spanned, skylit street from Superior to Euclid Avenues. The lights are on again in Playhouse Square, where the theaters have been dark. The nearly complete Huron Road Mall in front of it is receiving trees. Young people are walking downtown again, from the modern, mushroom-growth of new construction at Cleveland State University just beyond. An apartment complex of 1,000 suites is renting in the nearby financial district where a new park, Chester Commons, attracts local crowds.

### An Appraisal

These are the signs, watched with as much care as the first spring robin, that downtown Cleveland may be coming back to life. This city, which shares and almost epitomizes the urban ills of middle America, including the dying downtown, is at a tipping point right now. The battle for center-city survival will be won or lost in the next few years.

No one is taking any bets. The future rides on a handful of major projects that may or may not get off the ground. Clevelanders, the last to be optimistic, have tradi-

tionally written off their city as Nowheresville, U.S.A., successor to Philadelphia and Buffalo in urban jokes. The power structure made its fortunes downtown and then turned its back on the city's needs from the lush suburbs just beyond its limits. More out-of-town than local money is invested in the new growth.

### A City Divided

Cleveland is a city of 750,000—down from 850,000—divided by more than the Cuyahoga River that separates it into two parts. The split is geographical, social and racial: east against west, suburbs against core, Wasps against ethnics, black against white.

Constructive change is immobilized by revolving door politics and planners. But for the first time, there is a noticeable shift in attitudes from total apathy to cautious hope.

A first flush of revitalization has appeared with a construction boom that began about 1970 in the city's commercial core. There is now a glittering row of tall new buildings along Superior Avenue in the central business district. Cleveland's much-delayed, 163-acre urban renewal project, Erieview I, is nearing completion.

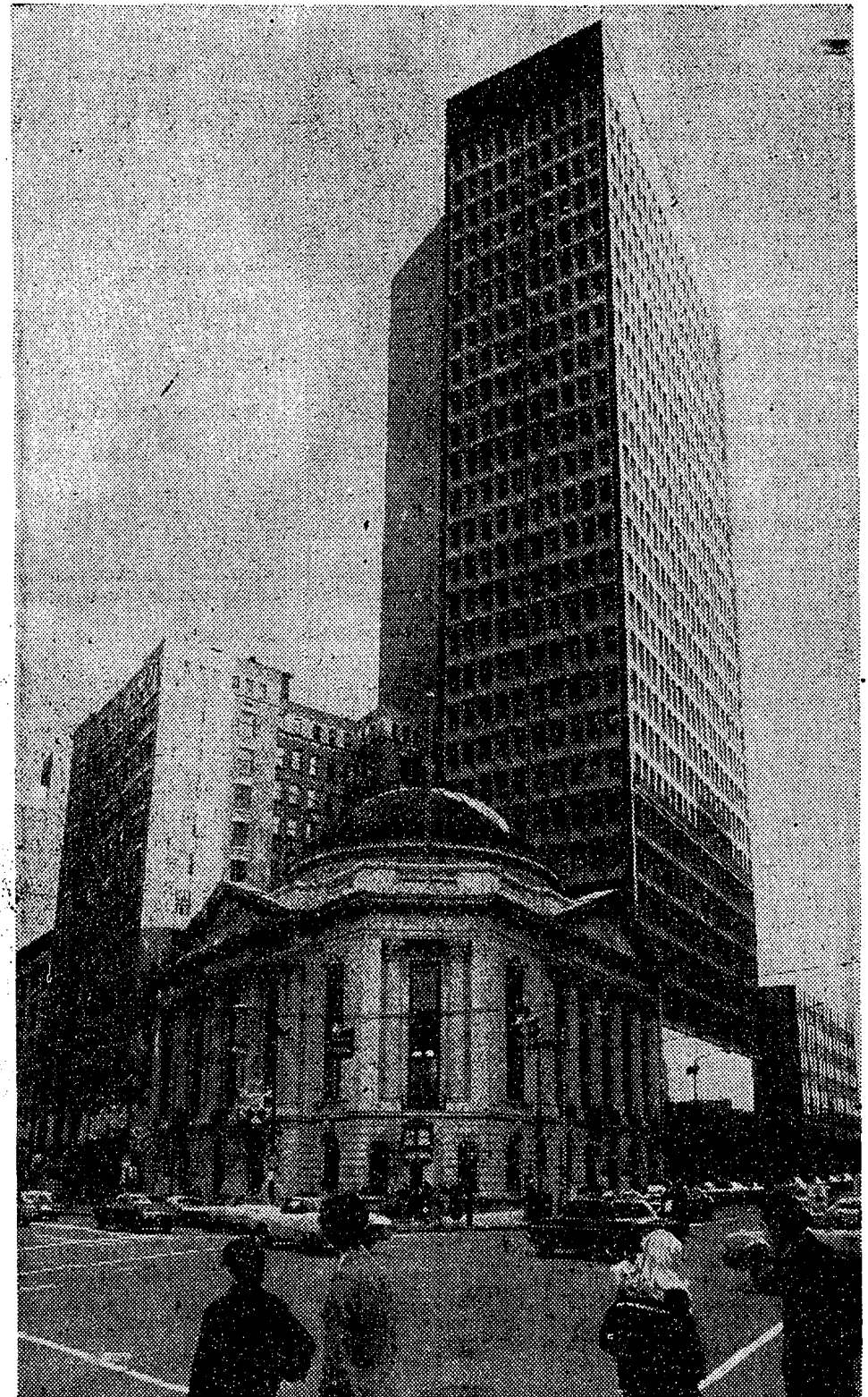
But at night the area is empty; it is a surreal wasteland of deserted towers and echoing spaces from Public Square and the Beaux Arts mall overlooking Lake Erie to Erieview Plaza. It is as if catastrophe struck at sundown.

The Erieview project

stands as a kind of monument to everything that was wrong with urban renewal thinking in America in the 1960's. There is a large, abortive plan by the architect I. M. Pei, long on desolate, overscaled spaces, destructive of cohesive urbanism and defiantly antihuman.

There is a nearly full complement of bland new buildings stamped out of a common commercial mold. At pedestrian level, their ground floors offer the less-than-riveting amenities of banks and institutional offices. They surround a huge, bleak, near-

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The Cleveland Trust on Euclid Avenue. Behind it, its tower, by Marcel Breuer and Associates, considered to be a successful contemporary addition.

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empty plaza with a complete set of non-working fountains and drained pools, focusing on a routine glass tower by New York architects Harrison and Abramovitz, known to Clevelanders as the "jolly green giant."

At present, this vast, open space is made worse by vast, open parking lots on either side, scheduled for development in Erieview II, the city's continuation of renewal, yet to be unveiled.

Superior Avenue is a kind of architectural pot luck. The new construction ranges from Charles Luckman's conventionally pleasant red brick Central National Bank Building to the dully pedestrian East Ohio Building. There is some uninspired flash, in G. S. Rider and Associates Investment Plaza and some suave sophistication, in Skidmore, Owings and Merrill's sleek-skinned Diamond Shamrock Building.

## Luring People Back

Fortunately, this is not all. A concerted attempt is being made to lure people back downtown. Adjacent to both Erieview and the Superior Avenue financial strip is Park Centre, a 1,000-apartment, \$34.5-million residential and commercial development.

An \$11-million, 20-story, luxury apartment house is already in operation across the street. Next to Park Centre is a \$5.5-million, 250-unit apartment building for the elderly. Close by is Chester Commons, the newly created vest pocket park of far-above-average city design.

This attempt to lure people back downtown to live, consciously linked to the commercial revitalization and the revival of Playhouse Square, is planning brinksmanship. It is Cleveland's big gamble.

A functioning, healthy downtown will depend almost completely on the success of this initial residential effort, and whether other housing and support facilities will follow. All of this rests more on patterns of viable investment economics than on sociological intentions.

Three pivotal projects are on the drawing boards now. These major proposals would surround the area in a kind of linking operation, provid-

ing the necessary human activities that are so conspicuously missing, as well as substantial investment. They are in varying touch-and-go phases of financing and design.

## Big Projects Pending

These are large projects, of greater-than-usual urban interest. One, called Tower City, is a \$250-million, community-size, commercial-hotel apartment complex centering on Cleveland's landmark Terminal Tower, the skyscraper built in 1929 by the Van Sweringen brothers as part of the city's useful and superior rail transportation system. The architects are Dalton, Dalton, Little, Newport.

This competent, but conventional commercial proposal could not do the revitalization job alone. The two other projects offer more varied, small-scale, downtown activities.

The second plan, known as the Gateway project, is a highly imaginative and still unresolved \$38-million proposal to use lakefront land for people, in a development emphasizing housing and recreation.

Gateway could be a trend-setting demonstration of new development techniques. It is based on rental of city-owned land by a private development corporation called Norcom, using an ingenious system of financing in which improvements would substitute, at least in part, for rental. This encourages the building of parks, pedestrian walkways and public features, usually not part of the speculative development package. The architects are Ross and Yamane.

## Preservation Concept

The third proposal, backed by Higbee's department store, deals with the Flats, a stretch of industrial land bordering the west bank of the river, where a kind of Bohemia has already sprung up.

The plan is an unusual \$17-million preservation and development project in which the old brick buildings would be restored and used, much as Ghirardelli Square has been revived in San Francisco. They would be supplemented by new, glassy buildings of similar size and scale, for a complex of commercial, cultural and entertainment facilities. Higbee's has al-

ready-purchased the land and committed itself to construction. The architects are Lawrence Halprin and Associates.

These projects, if carried out, would provide the kind of humanization and around-the-clock life that the inner city desperately needs.

This would not be true of a fourth project, the \$94.5-million Justice Center by architects Prindle, Patrick and Partners, which will take a substantial piece of downtown land for courts and a jail. Pressures from Cleveland's advisory Fine Arts committee brought in Pietro Belluschi as consultant and produced an acceptable, but average design.

One important thing that downtown Cleveland has going for it is a fortuitous rarity — a genuine pedestrian scale. Existing facilities and proposed new projects are all within pleasant walking distance. This cannot be underestimated as the basis of a viable urbanism. It could be the catalyst to make the center city work.

## Existing Assets

The city also has some fine old buildings and spaces and a galaxy of top cultural institutions. It has the Arsenale, designed by Eisenman and Smith in 1890, one of the best buildings of its kind in the country.

Beyond the monuments of the past and the signs of life in downtown, Cleveland is still

very, very sick. In recent years, neighborhood erosion has been epidemic. The slums have spread, and the Hough area became a national byword for racial tragedy in the 1960's.

Today, Hough contains a sprinkling of new socially oriented structures such as health and day-care centers, but shell-shocked wrecks of blocks still stand vacant, and empty lots testify to surgical clearance.

This land, close to both downtown and the cultural institutions of University Circle, goes begging. And the flight to the suburbs, fueled by fear and dropping property values, has not been reversed.

There are bootstrap holding and preservation efforts in other "in town" neighborhoods, almost identical to Hough in character.

On the near west side, Ohio City and Tremont are the object of paint-up, fix-up programs by preservationists who are acquiring the small, late 19th- and early 20th-century houses, in part because they are close to town. In spite of neighborhood deterioration, there is a remarkably fine city-wide school construction program that is part of a superior school system.

Today, Cleveland is in uncertain transition. The city as a whole will be profoundly affected by the success or failure downtown, which hangs in the balance now.