

54-Story Hotel Expected to Revitalize Times Square: 54-Story Hotel ...

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

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New York's newest and most spectacular hotel moves closer to construction with the expected announcement of the project today by Mayor Lindsay and architect-developer John Portman of Atlanta.

Scheduled for the Times Square area on the west side of Broadway between 45th and 46th Streets, the \$150-million undertaking has been held up by land-assembly problems, which were resolved by the signing of agreements last week.

The new hotel will have glassed-in cafes at ground and roof level, a seven-story, self-contained retail-shopping center, revolving restaurants and an open, 35-story-high "atrium" or central court.

Construction is now scheduled to begin in 1974, after the project has gone through the necessary New York rituals of planning, zoning, Building and Fire Department and Board of Estimate approvals. The architect has been developing the design with city agencies and the financing package is being completed.

The new building will replace the Victoria movie theater on Broadway, and the Morosco and Helen Hayes Theaters and the Piccadilly Hotel on 45th Street. It will leave the 46th Street Theater on the east side.

The new hotel will be a major new theater.

The hotel is targeted for 1974 and will be operated by the Westover Hotel, a subsidiary of UAL, Inc.

The 54-story, 2,020-room convention hotel will be not only the city's tallest but also its most dramatic, repeating a formula already in operation in Atlanta, Chicago and San Francisco.

These hotels all have huge running the height of the building a core of carnival-lit glass elevators, ing through the open space, surrounded by balconied tiers of rooms. They are further enhanced by pools, playground sculpture and Buck Rogers touches, moon-saucer cocktail lounges and revolving restaurants.

The New York hotel will be the most theatrical of all—a design quality particularly appropriate to the Times Square area. It is expected to restore some of the functions and glamour that the old Astor Hotel provided in its palmy days. The style will be tomorrow, however, not nostalgia.

The Astor, which was one block south of the new hotel site, was demolished a few years ago, after a long slide into the littered porno-seediness of Times Square today. It was replaced by an office tower, One Astor Plaza.

The new hotel will be a major new theater. It will combine guest rooms, convention facilities with a 100,000-square-foot shopping center and a 1,050-seat theater.

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new social and commercial center for the West Side. The distinctive design is achieved through unusual and respectability was recently by office building side wings will contain new theaters. The first room corridors, bath-rooms have been made possible on the inner "atrium" by the city's creation of special theater-district zoning that encourages their construction. Renewal is now being planned for a convention center at the Hudson River between 45th and 47th Streets.

The concept and design of the hotel have been worked out according to a long-range view toward rehabilitation by the Office of Midtown Planning and Development. An 45th Street side, or walk to the Mayor's office, the city was formerly headed by Jaquelin T. Robertson and now directed by William G. Bardel.

Mr. Portman is a 48-year-old architect who has pioneered the combination of design and development within one organization, under the architect's control. He has been operating successfully in this fashion for the last 15 years, against a background of controversy in the architectural profession which has traditionally excluded business from its activities on the ground of conflict of interest.

The profession is now moving rapidly to back Mr. Portman's position as architect-investor-owner, influential by the superior product and higher profits obtainable when the architect has both design and financial responsibility.

In this case, John Portman and Associates is the architect of the hotel, and Portman Properties becomes the owner, with Peter Shure, New York real estate developer. The Tishman Construction Company will be the contractor.

Design Taboos Broken

Other Portman design and development projects are the \$200-million Peachtree Center, the rebuilt heart of downtown Atlanta; the \$250-million Embarcadero Center in San Francisco, financed jointly by Portman, Transamerica, Crow, David Rockefeller and Prudential Life; and Regency Center, a projected \$500-million, 32-acre riverfront plan for Detroit being sponsored by the Ford Motor Company and other investors.

Not only have Portman projects paid off financially, they have also broken the design taboos of conventional speculative construction. They provide unusual space and special design features of an architectural originality resisted by real estate developers who habitually insist on humdrum formulas for economic feasibility.

The New York structure's 35-story "atrium," extending the full height of the hotel section, is a kind of plan referred to by speculative builders as "waste space." It has become a Portman trademark that has helped to restore fading downtown areas to economic health.

With the startling interiors and stores and restaurants, the hotel is expected to be a sightseer's spectacular and a

rotating cocktail lounge at the back top of the shopping gallery will overlook the city and Times Square. The convention facilities are planned for the space between the shopping gallery and the 13th floor lobby.

The hotel guest would ascend from the registration area to a hotel room on the 14th to 48th floors, all of which surround the immense inner court. On the roof, a revolving glass-enclosed restaurant would have views of the city in all directions.

The Office of Midtown Planning and Development considers the hotel the key to the future of Times Square. The city's plans include revision of the special zoning that has created the new theaters, to allow transfer of air rights to other construction sites to preserve some of the older theaters. It would control the placement of signs and lighting by legislation. The objective would be to maintain and update the area's unique theatrical character.

In this case, the hotel appears to be the right building in the right place. Its flamboyance can bring back the kind of theater district glitter that the new theaters, understated to the point of dullness, conspicuously lack.

In Boston, a Portman hotel proposal is being opposed as aesthetically unsuitable for the taste and traditional stepped city. For Times Square, it can be the promise of appropriate new life.

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