

ARCHITECTURE VIEW

ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

Sprucing Up The Bank Of Tokyo

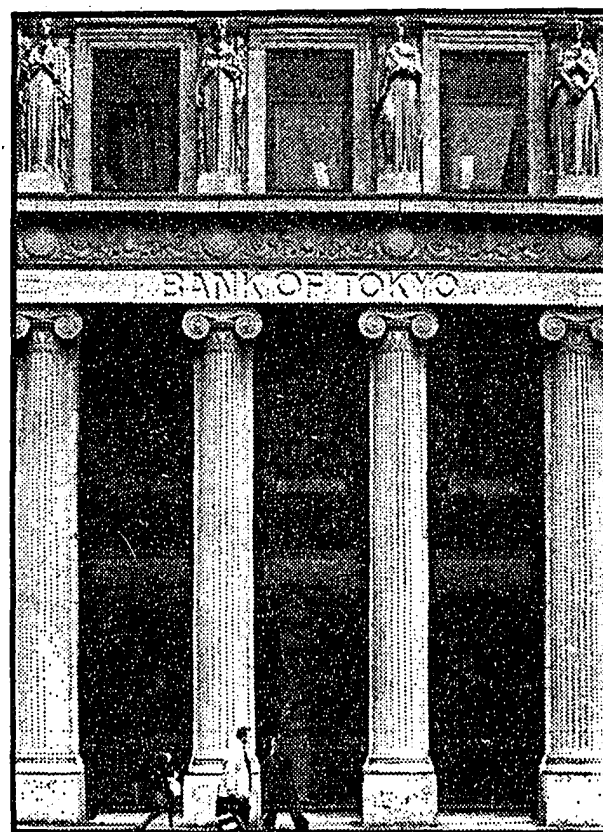
Now that it is popularly believed that New York is on its way to becoming a crumbling ruin and the corporate flight to the suburbs appears to be jet-propelled, it is instructive to note two substantial new commercial undertakings in Lower Manhattan: the major renovation of 100 Broadway for the Bank of Tokyo and the new 40-story Bankers Trust Building on Greenwich Street.

I have not selected these buildings to be upbeat; they would have been written about at this time in the normal course of events. There is, needless to say, no longer any normal course of events in New York. That means that you may look at these buildings as total aberrations or routine examples of the city's development processes. They are neither. Both are outstanding for unusual reasons, under any circumstances. One represents a particularly advanced kind of urban planning pioneered in New York (Bankers Trust), and the other is an interesting and effective recycling of a fine 80-year-old structure (Bank of Tokyo). The Bank of Tokyo will be dealt with today; Bankers Trust will be the subject next week.

Both buildings could be held up as a vote of confidence in New York, but what they actually indicate is that New York has not ceased to be the banking headquarters of the country and a pivotal financial center of the world, whatever fiscal emergencies plague City Hall and Albany. The Bank of Tokyo and the building's owner, Sylvan Lawrence, have jointly invested about \$11 million in the prestigious conversion of 100 Broadway to this international bank's American headquarters. The new Bankers Trust building represents a \$76 million investment in New York. Both are clear indications that their tenants are here to stay.

The Bank of Tokyo has a particularly fine location, just above Wall Street, facing Trinity Church and its historic churchyard, which includes among its markers and pleasant greenery a row of cherry trees given by the bank some years ago. The Bank of Tokyo has occupied offices at 100 Broadway as a rental tenant since 1952, first as an agency of the parent bank in Japan, later as the New York-chartered Bank of Tokyo Trust Company.

At one point in the building boom of the 1960's, the bank arranged to put up its own new building a bit farther down Broadway, but the plans fell through. When the 100 Broadway lease came due in 1973, the bank decided on a long-term lease based on renovation, with costs to



"A handsome, recycled structure"

be shared by owner and tenant. The owner improved all basic services, and the bank embarked on total remodeling of the interiors as well as exterior renovation with its own architects, Kajima International, Inc., under the direction of Nobutaka Ashihara. (Mr. Ashihara, who had worked for Roche, Dinkaloo Associates, credits Kevin Roche with sympathetic advice about respecting the old building's style and integrity.)

At present, the Bank of Tokyo occupies 13 of the 21 floors, with options for the rest of the space in the next 10 years, and it has tailored all of its floors to its specific needs. As Jiro Ishizaka, general manager of the main office, says, "Where would we get a better address?"

Nor could they easily find a better building. One Hundred Broadway is one of those sleeper landmarks (undesigned) of which New York has so many more than anyone realizes—an outstandingly fine early skyscraper built from 1894-96 as the American Surety Building by Bruce Price, one of the better known architects of the time.

Price called his Beaux Arts design a "rusticated pillar," and it followed the popular esthetic conventions of the day. The new, steel-framed tall building was treated as a classical column on a vastly enlarged scale, its height divided into proportionate approximations of base, shaft and capital. The white marble facade, newly cleaned and extraordinarily rich, features a row of two-story, attached Ionic columns at the base, a shaft of 12 rusticated stories, and an increasingly ornate top seven stories with pilasters, pediments and a coda

of cornices. Above each of the ground floor columns is a full-scale, sculptured classical figure, and two more figures rise above the first of the cornices to embrace a central window with a fine French flourish.

This facade has been beautifully cleaned and restored. The visible changes are new windows and a modernized ground floor. Where the front of the building was originally flush with the backs of the columns, it is now set back a few feet to create an arcade. This passageway is a genuine amenity in Lower Manhattan's congested streets. It also represents a sacrifice of store space for a civilized urban gesture.

The new, setback front is of clear glass, without mullions, its crystalline modernity a striking contrast to the classical marble columns. The space behind the glass has been completely opened up for a stylishly contemporary banking floor in stark white marble, with accents of black, dark brown and emerald green. This 320-foot-high banking floor is surrounded at its periphery by a mezzanine and second floor, open to view through dark gray glass.

But the most spectacular contrast is where part of the former lobby area has been retained as a kind of central "court," in the all-white open space, marked off only by immense, round, brownish-gray marble Corinthian columns which rise the full 32-foot height to an intact, elaborately coffered bronze-gold ceiling. Suspended from this ceiling, in a deliberate contrast of style, is the sharp geometry of a large brushed aluminum sculpture in the form of a warped rectangle, hanging point downward, by Isamu Noguchi. It is a studied and stunning transition from 19th to 20th century. The total effect is a dramatically successful counterpoint of new and old.

The separate office entrance, at the south end of the arcade, is a long, narrow space that retains a superbly ornate, black and gold coffered ceiling and upper walls; the lower walls are now faced in more of the pure white marble, with elevator doors of mirror-finished aluminum. Above these plain, polished, light-reflective surfaces are the gilded masks, putti, acanthus motifs, wreaths and arabesques, theatrically illuminated on a dark ground.

Strict preservationists will probably cavil at the loss of all but selected parts of the original ground-floor interior and their calculated combination with starkly contrasting surfaces, rather than more faithful restoration. I find the result a model of a sensitive, sophisticated, rational solution for contemporary use and the bank's particular needs, with maximum architectural and cultural impact and a heightened sense of past and present. It works, and so does the building. The floors above are simple and standardized, with lighting designed for energy conservation. The bank is operating on these floors now, with an auditorium and restaurants still to be completed. The street-level banking space will open to the public in mid-January.

There are a few unfortunate touches and design uncertainties; the newly gilded and incised exterior lettering, for example, is not as good as the former signs, although the building directories inside are elegant graphics. But what counts most is that the Bank of Tokyo has opted for a handsome, recycled structure rather than the standard anonymity of most new buildings. The combination of the tastes, crafts and uses of two different eras has resulted in maximum stylistic drama. The bank has gained a sense of quality and identity. It has made a gesture of art and urbanity that reflects well on both the client and the city.