

Architecture

How to Love the Boom

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

ONE of the more remarkable things about New York is that changes with the impact of, say, a volcanic eruption can go quite unnoticed.

Take, for example, Lower Manhattan. We are in the process of building a new kind of city from the Battery to Canal Street. But only those who give out the building permits and the zoning variances really know the story. There seems to be no wave length of public comprehension on which the idea or scale of such a physical upheaval can be picked up. If the picture is too big, it just doesn't register. Bear with us, please, and we will try to draw the picture for you.

Visualize the financial district bounded in a "V" at the Battery by Whitehall and Water Streets. This tight kernel in the center of Lower Manhattan contains the city's legendary skyscrapers.

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Carry that boundary north up Greenwich Street on the west and farther along Water Street on the east. This heart of Lower Manhattan will remain familiar, with a liberal salting of large new buildings.

Now comes the hard part. Imagine, surrounding that kernel at the center, an equal amount of new, unfamiliar city. Because that is exactly what we are going to have.

The stretch of Manhattan from Water Street to the East River, extending from the Battery to Brooklyn Bridge, with the exception, one hopes, of a few blocks for the South Street Seaport preservation project, is in the process of being totally rebuilt. The effect will be as if you were to drop a stage curtain on 19th-century New York and raise it on the city a hundred years later. The new construction is replacing what was left of New York's Greek Revival heritage. Roughly, it will occupy a strip of land about a tenth of a mile wide by a mile long, or about 55 acres. Double that figure for projected

landfill in the East River for just as much new building again, right out to the pier-head line.

Then picture virtually the same thing happening on the West Side: the wide swath of rebuilt city along the shore and an even larger landfill in the Hudson River extending from the Battery to Chambers Street.

This is Battery Park City, which will cost over \$1-billion and create what would be a respectable size independent city anywhere else, on 88 acres of landfill and 27 acres of air rights over the West Side Highway. You've heard about it, every time the Governor and the Mayor have squabbled over it. Political news is more easily grasped than planning news. It is being built by a State agency and master-planned by what might be called an architectural consortium — the Governor's man, Wallace Harrison, the Mayor's man, William Conklin of the Lower Manhattan Plan team and an architectural matchmaker, Philip Johnson. Among its landmarks will be a cluster of the city's largest new commercial towers.

Onshore, a strip up the West Side similar to the one on the East Side will contain the World Trade Center as its main feature. You know that one, too, because it will have the tallest buildings in the world, designed by Minoru Yamasaki and Emery Roth and Sons for the Port of New York Authority. One of the twin towers is rising now. Farther north, the Washington Market renewal area has been cleared for complete rebuilding.

To call what is happening to Lower Manhattan a building boom is a miserable understatement. It is more like an eruption, in which a new city is being heaved up. You might compare it to the combined rape of Park, Sixth and Third Avenues. The Pan Am Building was a toy compared to what is going up downtown. But somehow that one behemoth was graspable; the

explosive dimensions of what is happening here elude understanding.

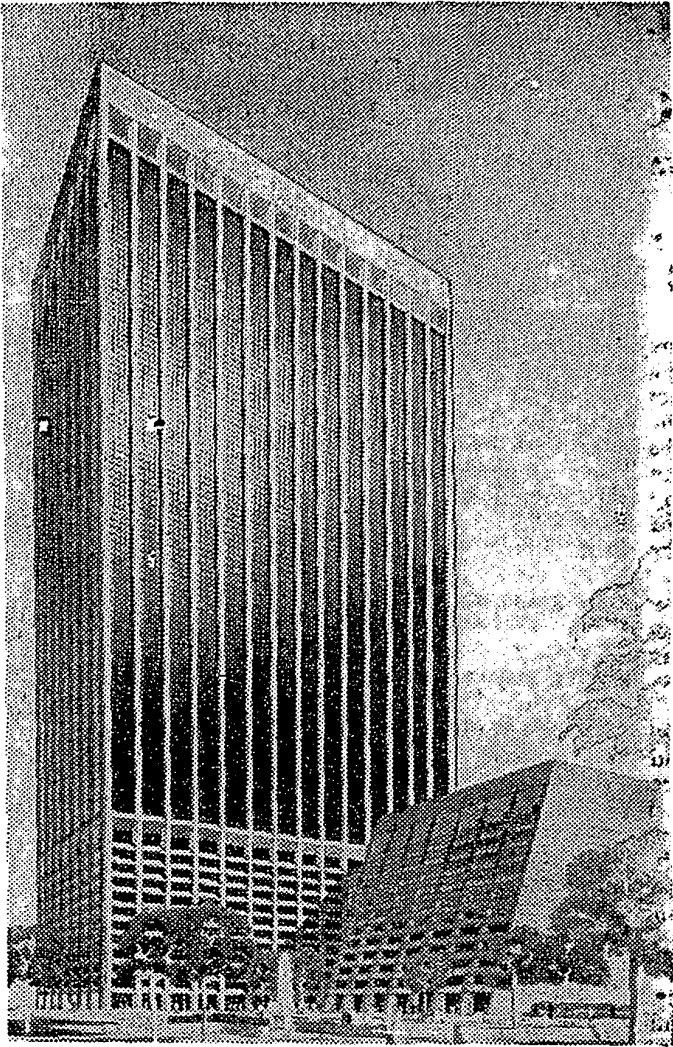
The renderings and models of 55 Water Street, for example, the largest of the superbloc-superbuildings that will go up along the East River, give absolutely no idea of its size and impact.

A Uris Buildings Corporation undertaking, with Emery Roth and Sons as architects, it will be the biggest privately constructed office building in the world. Its site is a four-block superbloc bounded by Water and South Streets, Old Slip and Jeanette Park, for which Coenties Slip and Cuyler's Alley and part of Front Street have been closed and eliminated by the city. It will have a 56-story tower with floors of 55,000 square feet and a 15-story wing; in its base will be several floors of a record-breaking 100,000 square feet.

Larger than Pan Am, it has received no public attention. And yet Pan Am created a furore from the time it was announced.

When building reaches this scale the question of esthetics ceases to be the main consideration. Architectural design of the individual structure almost becomes irrelevant in the face of what it does to the city, and what all of the new buildings together do to the city. What really matters is the planning that will make one building relate to another and to the area and its supporting facilities. Battery Park City will add 90,000 people to Lower Manhattan; the World Trade Center, 50,000; the Washington Market area, 15,000. And that is just the West Side development. The total East Side development will up that figure another 100,000 to 200,000, at a conservative guess.

It has traditionally been taboo for the city to interfere with private development. It has been equally traditional for each developer to put up his building in a vacuum. The rare contribution of even an extra subway entrance was largesse. Increased taxes



Lower Manhattan's 55 Water St. beats the Pan Am

were considered munificence enough. Opportunities for planning coordination were notoriously lost along Sixth Avenue, and were forfeited downtown as well.

It has been obvious for some time that simple sanity and self-interest dictate that the city must get into the act. It has done so, finally. The Office of Lower Manhattan Development was set up by Mayor Lindsay when the construction handwriting was already indelibly on the wall. It is headed by Richard Buford, who is also executive director of the City Planning Department. Dealing with the developers of 55 Water Street, the Office of Lower Manhattan Development has just given a significant demonstration of how to stop worrying and love the boom.

The Uris Buildings Corporation needed those street closings to make its building possible. The city had, on paper, an official Lower Manhattan

Plan. As a result of negotiation between the city's planners and the developer, New York won a number of important planning concessions and amenities—at the developer's cost. These include a more acceptable massing of the huge structure's bulky, a new park and an additional elevated plaza, where the city wants the open space, an underground parking garage, and provisions for connections to future rail and subway lines as part of a master transportation plan.

Uris is contributing all this, plus an enlarged and redone Jeanette Park designed by Lawrence Halprin and Associates, which the developer will also construct and maintain. It will be the first of the waterfront plazas called for by the Lower Manhattan Plan.

The negotiations between city and builder proceeded with mutual respect, toughness and speed. At millions of investment dollars a day, the city can not play its usual waiting game. Nor can it outlaw big buildings. The increase in automated business processes is creating a huge demand for bigger-than-ever commercial floor areas. Only through the city's realistic recognition of these needs and realistic bargaining with the builders can it control its destiny. It can do so by using its conventional tools of mapping and variances and its new ones of bonus or incentive zoning for a habitable New York. These tools contain the options for the future.

Downtown, the future is here. The break in scale and skyline now in process will make the familiar spires of Lower Manhattan pale into picturesqueness. In five years, New York will have a new profile. In ten, Lower Manhattan will have new physical boundaries. While the city puts its finger in the dike in a herculean professional effort and needs all the public support it can get, its citizen groups are busy chasing tangential political issues. Will someone out there please push the planning button? Is anyone tuned in?