

WSA

JULY 1980 WISCONSIN ARCHITECT

MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS



A Publication of the Wisconsin Society of Architects, American Institute of Architects

MADISON CIVIC CENTER

In 1910 landscape architect John Nolen suggested that the city of Madison build an auditorium on the shore of Lake Monona at Law Park. In 1980 that vision is a reality on busy State Street connecting the Capitol and the University. Steeped in controversy for the past 25 years, a Frank Lloyd Wright project for Law Park was rejected time after time. Today the Madison Civic Center is an urban renewal project, a home for the arts, and a regional entertainment center.

It is a people place as well. The opening festival in March brought 100,000 people to the center city complex. They found an inviting, exciting structure as well as comfortable theatres and modern art center.

It is a unique blend of old and new — preserving and celebrating the past and using contemporary realities of design, texture and color. Hardy, Holzman, Pfeiffer Associates of New York created the Oscar Mayer Theatre within the "interpretive restoration" of the old Capitol Theatre movie and vaudeville house and accommodated the Madison Art Center within an adapted Montgomery Ward department store. They united them with new construction for the Isthmus Playhouse, the media center, support space, conference rooms, and the Crossroads.

The architects designed the Civic Center around the "Crossroads", an interior street which serves as a thoroughfare of theatres, art center, and service or support spaces. The multi-level walkway is also a people place with informal performances and social activities. It draws people from busy State Street with its openness and visible architectural highlights: walls of oak flooring are set off by a salmon pink backgrounded lighting strip featuring fluorescent rings, plexiglass covers, and extruded aluminum in an art deco fashion. Exposed structural and mechanical details from fans to light tracks to heating and air conditioning systems represent the architect's high tech style. The carpeting is reflected by placement on the ceiling, and revamped Montgomery Ward art deco light fixtures complete the atmosphere of the Crossroads.

Performing is separated from the Crossroads by a sound lock lobby which makes no architectural statement, but serves as a bridge to the restoration of the Rapp and Rapp designed vaudeville-movie palace. Built in 1928, the Capitol Theatre provides an excellent framework and superior concrete acoustics. The last row in the balcony is 107 feet from the stage. The semi-circular horseshoe shape remains; all plastered walls, ceilings, and balcony surfaces were painted and stenciled

to evoke the mood of the art deco period. The colors in the Mayer Theatre are reminiscent of the 20's and 30's as they are throughout the Civic Center but have a subtle quality better suited to the performances which occur there today. Two Tiffany style chandeliers were created from five which glorified the halls of the Capitol Theatre. The Oscar Mayer Theatre can now handle the greatest variety of professional productions with an increased stage depth of 40 feet, a 56 foot wide hydraulic elevator that serves as a stage apron, a 100 person orchestra pit, or as an added ring of patron seats as well as all new lighting, rigging projection and acoustic equipment.

The Isthmus Playhouse is of wholly new construction. Technically well equipped, the playhouse has state of the art lighting and sound, all computerized. The stage floor is fully equipped and the rear stage wall can be removed in modular sections to suit varying productions; a visible catwalk lighting grid covers the area and aisles and exits provide performing space as well as the thrust stage. The thrust is surrounded closely by carpet covered bench style seating. A balcony with individual chair seats completes the capacity for 370 people. Yet no seat is more than 7 rows from the stage. It provides the flexibility needed by the serious theatre company, the casual entertainer, recitals, lectures, or group meetings. The Isthmus Playhouse functions well as a studio for live radio and television production which incorporates attractively with the media center studios planned for completion in later 1980.

Visitors to the Civic Center Crossroads are immediately drawn to the Madison Art Center gallery on the main floor, separated from the public area by a 20 foot glass wall. Modular display units create varied arrangements for exhibitions in the State Street Gallery. A mezzanine in the gallery affords space for small exhibits and beneath it a Gallery Shop offering fine arts publications, and commercial space for the rental and sale of artists' works.

The lower level provides the Art Center with four rooms devoted to storage, conservation, and two smaller exhibit rooms as well as administrative space and workshops. Above the main gallery, the Education Center will be used for classroom space, exhibits, and in the future a 99 seat multi media theater equipped with sound, film and video facilities.

A conference room finished as a Garden Room with a gazebo decor by the Greater Madison Foundation for the Arts provides a sparkling meeting or party room with its fine stained glass art work by Dennis Pearson.