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Summary

Skidmore, Owings and Merrill

The Chase Bank in New York

(pages 9—21)

The Chase Bank's new building has been standing for only a few months now, a few steps from Wall Street and Broadway in the classical New York financial district. Without being higher than its neighbours, it is nevertheless the most voluminous of the buildings in this area. The celebrated skyline of New York has changed in appearance notably since this colossus has arisen above the city. Whereas the skyscrapers of earlier date had a "cigar" shape, the new Chase Bank is perfectly cubical and vertical, which lends it a particularly monolithic character. In fact, the new building has a total height of 245 meters (thus the 6th highest building in the world), it has a volume of 206,037 cubic meters, hence the greatest building volume-wise that has been constructed in the last 25 years, and, moreover, it accommodates under one roof the largest bank in the world. The cost of the building is 138 million dollars, this sum being the largest investment ever effected in this line of business. The Americans hold the view that this capitalist cathedral is essentially a machine for making money "move". The building rests on 4 basement levels, where there are buried the treasure chambers of American high finance.

It should be noted that in general the site of the new building is the same as that of the old Chase Bank; this decision, a basic one on the part of the directors, was all the more crucial in that the skyscrapers of New York have shifted their centre of gravity decidedly toward the north, this being the case as well of the business once centered on Friedrichstrasse in Berlin, which has "escaped" in the direction of the zoo. This decision has, moreover, unleashed a new avalanche of skyscrapers in the "old" area. The son of John D. Rockefeller succeeded in getting the property owners of the district together; he became chairman of their association and he was successful in persuading the public authorities of the viability of his vast town-planning program. The Manhattan Expressway will be prolonged, the slum areas cleared, the old substandard housing razed to make way for business premises. Several hotels, restaurants and other enterprises serving the public are an integral part of the same program, the new district to be a centre of primary importance.

As in the case of the Union Carbide building, the owners have not had all the available area built up and have thus left space sufficient for the laying-out of a large public square. In addition, Chase made several sites available to the City of New York and this has made it possible for a number of vitally important pedestrian ways to be constructed. Certain of these ways have been built by Chase itself; it should also be pointed out that the first three storeys of the bank have been placed at the service of the public and for the greater part served by moving escalators.

The skyscraper itself is rectangular in shape, its sides being in the ratio of 1:3. The installation core is not sited in the very centre of the building. This core also serves a static function as the construction of the external elevations is very light. Each storey has a working area of about 2,750 m². The modular grid chosen is 1.45 m. All the fittings for the storeys have been scrutinized in model form. In this respect we should notice a fairly surprising point: out of a total area of 110,400 m² we find only 150 one-man offices. 7,500 employees in all work in the large offices. The offices of the upper members of he staff are on the 17th storey. On this floor we find a multitude of objets d'art as well as Rockefeller's personal office, the walls of which are hung with paintings from Mr. Rockefeller's private collection. The offices of other important figures are sometimes decorated on the basis of their hobbies; some of the furniture is not modern but is nevertheless in good taste. Nowhere can we find an antique fire-place or a sentimental piece of this nature. The employees in the middle echelons have been allowed to choose their furniture from a range of five types supplied in 60 different colours. Rockefeller has spent $ 500,000 on the interior decoration of his palace. The best workshops in the world (Italy, France and elsewhere) have fulfilled his orders. A team of specialists distributed the work to be done, did the buying and comparison. Each ash-tray, each dispenser, each detail was examined by the firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill before it was finally produced; nothing has been able to elude the scrutiny of the vigilant client.

On the 60th storey we find the firm's large restaurant, which commands a striking view of the whole of New York.

In conclusion, we should note the planning and building of the Chase Bank have taken 10 years. All the bearing sections of the building are made of steel, certain problems being extremely delicate, such as that of expansion and that of bracing. The upper-storey pillars were clad with foam-glass to prevent undue tension arising owing to changes in the temperature. In certain cases it was found necessary to test some of the constructional sections using life-size models. It would appear that aluminium and stainless steel were of inestimable value in this respect. In the end aluminium was chosen as this form of construction was best guaranteed by the makers.

The curtain wall, set back behind the main pillars, is handled in two colours and extremely light in appearance.

The perfection of the Chase Bank will undoubtedly occupy the attention of the architectural world.

Skidmore, Owings and Merrill

First City National Bank in Houston, Texas

(pages 22—27)

It is in the commercial centre of the city of Houston in Texas that the rectangular, street-framed plot of land the architects had to develop is to be found. The assignment in question is the First City National Bank, which at one corner has to be linked to another piece of land. The clients require 45 windows and 36 seats for the employees. Moreover the bank must also have 6 drive-in windows for motorists. The architects designed a 32-storey high-rise building and sited it in one corner of the plot of land. In this way the bank's halls link and offer easy access to all horizontal and vertical flow.

Reception in the main hall of the bank is fundamentally different from that found in European banks today. The employees who supply information are to be found in the middle of the hall. The other windows are grouped according to function and line the main hall. The drive-in windows face the main public entrance.

The basic plan of the high-rise building is that of a central core of installations surrounded by the effective office area.

The technical conception behind this building is rather exceptional. The curtain-wall technique frequently used by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill over the past few years has undergone certain changes. In this instance the elevations and slabs are carried by a faced skeleton construction. However, the slabs extend noticeably beyond the line of the elevation and this has given an entirely new aspect to the problem of window junctions and to that of illumination (sunbreaks, etc.) and heat insulation. The bracket slabs (vis-à-vis the window plan) allow the windows to be washed easily from the outside—a most definite advantage in the case of a 32-storey building. There are no external blinds (only internal blinds are to be found) and breast-walls have practically vanished. All in all, it can be said that the curtain wall is no more.

We should also notice that the flooring used in the halls is the same as that for the pavement to which it extends; this allows for an absolutely continuous flow surface. The ceiling of the hall is also worthy of attention. Artificial illumination and air-conditioning have been ingeniously combined.

Skidmore, Owings and Merrill

Union Carbide Building

(pages 28—34)

Certain pictures dating back to the beginning of the century show us Park Avenue with Grand Central Station in the background covered by a huge cloud of smoke. Today the glass Union Carbide Corporation building has replaced this picturesque view of the old station. As a matter of fact, the railroad areas of this station have been covered for some time now with an immense terrace. This now bears a number of large buildings, which add a proud touch to the Park Avenue of today. Thus we can find several illustrious veterans such as the Racket Club, Pepsi Cola, the majestic Lever building, as well as others.

It is only with difficulty that we can imagine that the 60-storey building in question is carried in its entirety by a station handling more than 500 trains a day. This is done by means of huge pillars set between the rails and enormous foundations laid beneath them. On the first underground level we find the long-distance expresses and on the second the subway. The working-area covers about 7,360 m² and is sited between Madison Avenue and Park Avenue. Here we are about three minutes away from the station. Of these 7,360 m², 3,200 m² are given over to pedestrians, which comes to about 44% of the total area. The high-rise building is noticeably set back into a corner of the site in such a way that the large open public halls assume considerable importance. Owing to this factor, it is obvious that it has not been found possible to use the site to its full extent. On the other hand, from the point of view of town planning, the solution is all the more fortunate a one and its publicity effect on the public all the greater.

Strictly speaking, the building consists of two sections, one carrying storeys with 1,610 m² working-area, the other bearing storeys with a working-area of 3,402 m². These two sections are linked by a junction wing. The public enters the building by way of two enormous tambours and is then taken on an escalator to the first floor. This is two storeys in height and also serves as a display hall. The first exhibition will be given over to atomic energy. The lifts start from this floor of the skyscraper and thus serve the final 51 storeys of the building. On the same floor we find a cafeteria, which can seat 1,306. Ten of the skyscraper's storeys have been let to other firms. They could be used by the clients, should they wish to extend their own premises.

The 12th, 34th and 51st storeys are reserved for the technical installations of the high-rise building. The bearings of the pillars and the 1.50 m module were dictated by the gauge of the rails in the subway. The architects have been successful in arriving at a modular unit that meets all requirements in every respect. The extremely individual air-conditioning system is worthy of study, as is the skeleton construction, which is similar to that found in the Chase Manhattan Bank building. In conclusion, we should like to point out the vertical slats, which act as sunbreaks.

Skidmore, Owings and Merrill

Administrative Building of the Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Co. in Toledo, Ohio

(pages 35—42)

This building is sited on a square lot in the centre of the small city of Toledo. Since the building is located in the very centre of this area, there is considerable space for pedestrian ways. The building itself also has a square plan. The installations core is not—as in certain similar cases—situated in the centre of the plan. Its asymmetrical arrangement has the advantage of allowing for more flexible planning. The reader will note the variant plans presented in this issue. The steel skeleton of the building has entirely fireproof cladding; the elevation is of glass and aluminium. The windows are glazed down to floor level and protected by vertical sunbreaks, which can be regulated. As in other buildings by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, the ceilings are luminous. As in the majority of cases, the detailing of this SOM building is expertly carried out.

Skidmore, Owings and Merrill

Parke Davis & Co., the pharmaceutical firm, at Ann Arbor, Michigan

(pages 43—50)

Parke David decided to have various buildings constructed on a plot of land approximately 20 ha. in area in the vicinity of the famous Michigan university town. The building complex envisaged comprises buildings for administrative purposes, clinical research, pharmacy and chemistry. A store for liquids and a power plant complete the complex. The five buildings are linked by means of a system of tunnels.

The architects' conception is "extremely open", the buildings all being clearly separated one from the other. The laboratory group has four storeys, the administrative section has two; the high-pressure laboratory has but one, whereas the power plant is equal in height to about six.

In addition to the offices envisaged the administrative building has an assembly hall seating more than 190, a cafeteria for about 70 and a library with 28,000 books and publications, as well as a clinical research institute.

The laboratory wing constitutes a 100 x 38 m rectangle. A corridor runs round the elevation, thus cutting off the laboratories from direct contact with the light and the windows. Half this building is given over to research, the other half to cages for the animals used in the experiments. A central corridor joins these two sections.

The high-pressure laboratory and the administrative building are both faced with prefabricated concrete slabs. The power plant is entirely glazed; it supplies heat, cold air and electricity.

The plan of the garden is worthy of our closest study.

Skidmore, Owings and Merrill

Savings and Loan Bank in Chicago

(pages 51—52)

The building of the Federal Home Savings and Loan Association promises to be the largest building erected on State Street in Chicago in the last 35 years. The utility surface planned is around 19,000 sq. meters, and the structure is 16 floors high. The owner will occupy only the premises from the first to the fifth floor. Those on floors 6 to 15 will be leased to tenants. The two main entrances are situated at street level (State Street and Adams Street). The safes, a cafeteria as well as an employees' lounge are located at basement level. In a supplementary basement there are housed shops, a post office, records and mechanical installations. The building is equipped with escalators. The upper floors are served by lifts. The building has a fire-proof steel skeleton. The sections measure 16.8 meters. The pleasant elevation is of very light construction.