

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

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FOR WEDNESDAY RELEASE

MUSEUM EXHIBITS MODEL AND 4 ORIGINAL COLOR RENDERINGS BY
FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT OF HIS DESIGN FOR A NEW THEATRE FOR HARTFORD

The famous modern architect Frank Lloyd Wright has realized a lifelong ambition to design a theatre to be built this summer near Hartford, Connecticut. His large scale model of this unique theatre, which has no proscenium and no overhead stagehouse, and 4 original color renderings will be on view in the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from April 6 to April 17, 1949.

The design makes a clean break with all past traditions in theatre building. Of light weight, simple, metal frame construction, the new legitimate theatre will seat 1,000. It achieves a radical solution of many of the physical problems that have inhibited legitimate theatres in the past. To be erected on an 8-acre site of rolling meadowland, the building will be hexagonal in shape with sheer walls free of ornamentation. To relieve the problem of congestion, two lobbies will be provided on opposite sides of the structure. The stage entrance will be at the front of the building. Around the entire outside of the theatre will be a terrace at balcony height where the audience may gather during intermissions without the crowding that occurs in a confined lobby. The auditorium floor will be steeply graded so that the heads of the spectators will always be below the line of vision from behind.

The stage will be apron-like, without proscenium, although provision will be made for conversion to a picture-frame stage for conventional offerings. The proximity of the actor to his audience was calculated by Mr. Wright to increase the directness and impact of performance by giving the spectator an increased feeling of participation.

An outstanding feature of the design is the elimination of the familiar above-stage gridiron through a unique handling of staging facilities. Instead of the usual heavy backdrops cumbersomely suspended among steel girders over the stage, the scenery will be assembled, demounted and stored either in the backstage area or underneath the stage. The elimination of the complicated aerial storage simplifies construction and operation and reduces costs.

Mr. Wright states the aim of his theatre design as follows:

"To free the so-called legitimate stage from its present peep-show character and high-overhead (or gridiron) as now like a painting: a scene-drop behind a frame (or proscenium) - performance in one room, audience in another...establishing a simple, workable basis for presenting plays as a circumstance in the round, performers and audience in one room, more like sculpture...."

"By means of ... simple organic changes in the now dated technique and obsolete traditions which have held the stage behind the screen in any popular realization of what we ought still to call the drama, a new life for the theatre is likely."

Mr. Wright says that all his early training with the well-known Chicago architects Sullivan and Adler seemed to point to his doing a theatre one day. His first job with Louis Sullivan was to help with the rich interior detail of the monumental Chicago Auditorium. His plans for the New Theatre, his first complete theatre design, stem from earlier and more tentative projects that date back to 1920 when he made preliminary drawings for a theatre in Los Angeles. In 1932, in Taliesin, he worked out plans for another small theatre project later incorporated into his great Broadacre City project, exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in 1940. It is upon this design that much of this theatre is based.

There will be wide use made of automatic devices, including elevators and revolving stage. Two small balconies on either side of the forestage and auditorium can be used by either musicians or actors. The theatre will be in operation all year around and will have a system of floor heating with exhaust ducts located under the seating.

The New Theatre has been designed by Mr. Wright for Paton Price, well known in the Hartford area as director of the Canton Summer Theatre. Mr. Price, a member of the faculty of the American Academy of Dramatic Arts, plans a distinct summer and winter season of the best in dramatic literature. The theatre will also be available to community activities, special touring companies and musical events.