

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

14 WEST 49TH STREET, NEW YORK

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNS FOR THEATRES

The Museum of Modern Art announces an exhibition of prize winning architectural designs for an ideal Festival Theatre and Fine Arts building projected for the campus of the College of William and Mary at Williamsburg, Virginia. The competition from which these winning designs have been selected was held by the American National Theatre and Academy from November 15, 1938 to the end of January, 1939. The specifications for the building were extremely complex yet 126 designs were received from all parts of the country. The prize winners are:

First prize: ~~Eero~~^e Saarinen, Ralph Rapson and Frederic James, Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit.

Second & Third prizes: Philip L. Goodwin and Edward D. Stone, Associated Architects, of New York City.

Honorable mentions:

1. Richard Neutra, Los Angeles, Cal.
2. Hugh Stubbins and Marc Peter, Jr., Boston, Mass.
3. Bissell Alderman and William Hartmann, Cambridge Mass.
4. Henry E. Hebbeln, Cranbrook Academy of Art, Bloomfield Hills, Mich.
5. Will Rice Amon, New York City.

The competition is the first step in the campaign of the American National Theatre and Academy to encourage the building of beautiful and technically efficient theatres as community centers all over the country. These buildings, adapted in different parts of the country to the specific needs and advantages of the locality, would not only be centers for all the arts but would fill a crying need throughout the country for adequate theatres to house Broadway's best theatrical stars and companies, which more and more are taking to the road after their New York seasons.

Such stars as Katharine Cornell, Lynn Fontanne, Alfred Lunt, Helen Hayes and Walter Huston must at present play in town halls, civic auditoriums, armories and even in barns when they are touring the country. In many good-sized cities the theatres have been converted into motion picture houses, and in such cities where play-

houses are still available their architecture is often so misconceived that fine New York stage sets must be cut up or used only in part. Exits and entrances must be juggled to the disadvantage of the play, and stars and company are hampered by extremely inadequate dressing rooms and backstage space and facilities.

Theatre architectural design, even up to the present time, runs into two principal difficulties:

- (1) tradition, stretching back with little change, to theatres built in the time of the Commedia dell'Arte
- (2) builder ignorance of architecture, particularly in relation to the practical needs of theatre production

Probably the most outstanding example of inadequate architectural planning for theatre needs is a theatre in a large city not more than two hours' train ride from New York. This theatre houses the best New York stars and productions, sometimes in tryout and oftener in tours. The theatre was almost completed before its builders realized that dressing rooms were needed. There was no more space on the site, and building had progressed much too far to make any changes in it. It was necessary, therefore, to buy a building back of the theatre and to equip it with dressing rooms, connecting them with the theatre proper by a tunnel. This seems incredible, but the theatre is in constant use in this large city and the actors and productions suffer accordingly.

In New York City itself one of the best and largest theatres, in constant use for high class productions, was designed without a box office. This omission was remedied at the last moment by inserting a small cave under the stairs, where tickets are sold with great inconvenience to the treasurer's staff.

The American National Theatre and Academy therefore decided to hold a competition in order to focus the best architectural intelligence of the country on the problem of stage design. The results of the competition in problems overcome and new ideas brought forth will be available on request to all architects in the country and to individuals or groups who contemplate the building of theatres.

The Museum is holding the exhibition of prize-winning designs to draw attention to the great need for good modern architectural planning in the building of theatres and to show several solutions

for such buildings. The jurors for the competition were:

Lawrence B. Anderson. Assistant Professor of Architecture, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Leslie Cheek, Jr. Head of the Department of Fine Arts, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.

Antonin Raymond. Architect of theatres, schools, commercial and residential buildings in the Far East.

Lee Simonson. Noted scenic designer and theatre consultant.

Roland A. Wank. Principal Architect, T.V.A.

The Professional Adviser was Kenneth Stowell, A.I.A. Editor of House Beautiful. The exhibition will be open to the public from Wednesday morning, March 1, through Wednesday, March 15. The hours are: 10 A.M. to 6 P.M. weekdays, including Saturdays; 12 Noon to 6 P.M. Sundays. Admission will be free at all times during the exhibition.

The American National Theatre and Academy was established in July, 1935 by a charter from Congress. Its Advisory Board includes Katharine Cornell, Alfred Lunt, Lynn Fontanne, Otis Skinner, Maxwell Anderson, Sidney Howard, Robert Sherwood, Arthur Hopkins, Guthrie McClintic, Robert Edmond Jones, Jo Mielziner and Lee Simonson.

Its directors are: A. Conger Goodyear, President; Edith J. R. Isaacs, First Vice-President; J. Howard Reber, Second Vice-President; Stanton Griffis, Treasurer; Miss Mary Stewart French, Secretary; C. Lawton Campbell, Richard F. Cleveland, Mrs. Frances Crane, Mrs. W. Murray Crane, Clayton Hamilton, Amory Haskell, Mrs. Amory Hare Hutchinson, Miss Anne Morgan, Mrs. Aubrey Morgan, E. M. M. Warburg, John Hay Whitney, Dr. Hugh H. Young.