

A Theatre Planned for House Appeal on Future Possibilities

THE theatre-building boom that has characterized activity in and around Detroit for the past several seasons finds another expression in the new Civic Theatre, opened the last week in May by Joseph Miskinis. Indicative of smart foresight on the part of its planners, this new modern theatre is located in the center of a probable residential development for new National Defense workers.

The location is perhaps almost accidentally fortunate in this respect, because the site was chosen for a theatre long before National Defense became an important phase of the planning. It is actually in a steadily-growing residential neighborhood. Houses in the immediate vicinity are still few, with fields visible in most directions, but there is to be noted a distinct fringe of building development in all directions.

The risk of the venture is materially reduced, in event the present defense emergency is terminated, because in the planning of the Civic Theatre the owners wisely created a pole star of permanent attraction that will serve to revive interest in moving picture-going for miles around.

The site of the project is an irregular-shaped block adjoining the intersection of Hayes Road with three other principal arteries of northeast Detroit—Kelly, Houston and Whittier Avenues—making it well-located for traffic from all directions in this growing community. The residences nearby in several fairly well-defined zones are mostly of the working-

class type, ranging from about the \$4,000 cottage-style home to the \$7,500 six-room brick house, with one section on the east having a bordering of higher-priced houses toward the \$12,000 bracket. Most residents of the neighborhood, however, are factory workers, with a fair sprinkling of office employees, and their typical patronage will be in theatres playing key or subsequent runs, rather than the higher-priced first and second runs.

LITTLE BOOMTOWNS

Just two miles north of the theatre is the county line, along and beyond which lie numerous major new factories such as the Chrysler Tank Arsenal and a large area of slightly-developed subdivisions and "little farm" sections. In this strictly industrial-class residence district the coming of "boomers," as slang elsewhere (not here) persists in calling them, is already a problem. As this story was being written, a contract was announced for two housing projects comprising 700 home units for anticipated National Defense workers in this general area.

The Civic is the first large theatre erected in this area in two years, and thus stands to prosper from the growing population. Three or four other houses, most-

There is an impression of mass in repose gained by the long, low lines of the Civic Theatre building located in a rapidly developing residential district of Detroit. The theatre building contains two stores with offices above, to form the core of a growing community. Its brilliant lighting and spectacular display assure its dominance of the entire surroundings.

ly smaller, are planned for the more or less remote suburbs in this section, but none at present in the city proper. Architect Kenneth S. Frazier of Detroit was responsible in great measure for the new Civic's efficiency and adaptability to conditions.

Driving up to the Civic, as most patrons will, the visitor can see the house from a considerable distance, particularly at night when the marquee and roof-signs are illuminated. The irregular angles of the main arteries centering at this point give it increased visibility.

Basically, the house is fairly simple in architectural treatment. There is an impression of mass in repose, gained by the long, low lines of the building, which differs notably from most contemporary theatre design in making no attempt to give an effect of towering height at a distance. It is a thoroughly modern building, with the impression of clean modernity and mass augmented by the light tone of its face and principal side.

A COMMUNITY CORE

The structure fronts 110 feet on Kelly Road, and is 181 feet deep, with the north side running along Alma Avenue. The south side faces a vacant lot which will be built up in the future, and the rear faces a large and well-organized parking lot. There are two other principal store structures in this community center at present, each one story high, so that the theatre clearly bulks above them.

An unusual feature of the building is that it has a peculiar trapezoidal effect as the walls at the rear for about 30 feet are about 20 degrees off the angle of the rest of the side, following the curve of the auditorium itself, and partly determined by the irregular lot lines. There is a store room on either side of the theatre entrance, with a six-room suite o





offices arranged over each store with separate street entrance for each. The north side, toward Alma Avenue, has a slight "L" effect, projecting beyond the auditorium proper to the sidewalk line for the store portion.

The front of the building is of a modern glazed finish structural material, as is the portion of the north side nearest the front. It has a chocolate brown base, 18 inches high, with coping and trim of the same color, but the predominant color is a light speckled cream.

Half-round windows are used notably at the ends of display windows in the lobby, and in both ends of the large windows in each office suite above. The trim in general follows the window lines in wide bands. The store window on the northeast corner runs full to the corner in modern style, joining with the window facing the side street. Basic construction is of cinder block, which is clearly visible in the exterior of the auditorium block.

The front has quarter-round sections receding from each store to the theatre entrance, while the doors themselves are at a slight angle to the building front, providing an unusual effect. The boxoffice is the direct center is half-round in construction, with a stainless steel top and chocolate brown base striped with cream-colored trim.

DISTINCTIVE DISPLAY

The marquee is basically triangular with modifications required by the quarter-

The combined appeal of comfort and beauty is immediately evident in the Civic Theatre's auditorium, front and rear views of which are pictured above. Simple decorative treatment which serves functionally as a background for proper lighting and air conditioning diffusion and comfortable seats of the full-upholstered, automatic hinge type are outstanding provisions. Strikingly finished in gold mohair with standards in red with gold trim, the seat selected is shown in close-up at right. (All photos courtesy Ideal Seating Co.)

round and forward swelling front sections. It is of porcelain enamel with a white soffit and trim in straw yellow, orchid and blue. Two hundred feet of interchangeable lettering space is provided, with each of the two sides having four banks, each 25 feet long.

Distinctive in this theatre's design is the tower with fluted front, which serves inside as the front wall of the lobby and rises slightly above the second-story height of the rest of the building front. It gains in impressiveness by the rounded and fluted treatment when viewed from directly in front but does not conflict with the general impression of low bulk or flatness at a distance. Half-round sections on each side of the tower base serve as supports for the sign.

The name "Civic" appears in two roof-signs, one on either side of the tower, in red neon lettering five feet high on an orchid background. The signs are round-

The lobby of the Civic Theatre, which was pictured on the frontispiece of *The Modern Theatre's* last previous issue, is unique in layout, with a wide stairway on either side leading to a service balcony on which are located the lounges, restrooms and various offices.

ed so that each is at least partially visible from two directions.

The lobby of the Civic Theatre is unique in layout, with a wide stairway on either side leading up to a seven-foot wide balcony. Inasmuch as the auditorium is all on one level, this service balcony is unusual in its fine appointments for a house of this character. It contains the manager's office, projection room and usher's room, with lounges and smoking rooms on either side. The men's smoking room is decorated in orchid, and the ladies' in



blue, while both rest rooms have maroon tile treatment.

The lobby wall is in a light maroon color, with several vertical panels in a modified geometric pattern reminiscent of Mayan treatment. Large blue oval panel decoration is used on the ceiling. Outstanding decorative emphasis is given by the aluminum handrails on the stairways and along the front of the balcony. A bleached birch candy counter is at the right of the entrance, under one stairway.

A vertical mural adorns the back of the boxoffice between the entrance doors. This is a symbolic representation of the theatre's name with a number of symbolic elements, typically a public building

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IDENTIFICATION

(Civic Theatre)

ARCHITECT: Kenneth S. Frazier.
CARPETS: Alexander Smith & Sons Carpet Co.,
thru National Theatre Supply Co.
DECORATING: T. Jagmin & Co.
DRAPERIES: National Theatre Supply Co.
FRONT MATERIAL: United Cost Stone Co.
GENERAL CONTRACTOR: Philip Gorelick.
PROJECTORS: Motiograph, Inc., thru McArthur Theatre Equipment Co.
SEATS: Ideal Seating Co.
SIGN & MARQUEE: Long Sign Co.
VENTILATING: Supreme-Aire, Inc.

Additional particulars on the project may be secured upon request to The Modern Theatre Information Bureau.



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dome and an allegorical figure of a woman awaiting two ships coming in from the sea.

The carpeting is in a single pattern in the lobby, foyer, auditorium, stairways, balcony, manager's office and smoking rooms. Of modified geometrical pattern, it is basically red in effect, utilizing three shades of red, two shades of cream, blue

and black. Inner doors leading to the foyer are of bleached birch, decorated with a black lacquer trim, chiefly in columns of thin restrained symmetrical curves.

FUNCTIONAL FINISH

The foyer and auditorium were given practically identical decorative treatment. The finish is cinder block, at present not treated for acoustic purposes, as this has been found unnecessary. The use of a series of setbacks about every three feet along the tapering sidewalls from the stage to over half-way down the length of the auditorium gives a suitable sound directional effect for sound originating on the stage. This effect appears to be com-

parable to the extremely satisfactory sound-carrying qualities observed in a basilica-type church.

The cinder block is finished in a basic color, with decorative effects in various patterns, including stripes horizontally down the sidewalls in a variety of predominantly pastel colors. The ceiling is sky-blue with stars at intervals. It is interspersed by three disc-type light units about 12 feet in diameter, and six openings which are six feet in diameter in the air-conditioning installation. Another distinctive touch is the use of a series of four cove offsets down each sidewall, with the three inner offsets emphasized by borders in a dark brown, maroon and silver conventional pattern.

Red fluorescent lighting is used with the foyer and some other lights are located behind ground glass screens. The sidewalls are broken by three dimly-lighted vari-colored panels with a blue rosette having a red center in each. These sidewall effects are so controlled that they tend to disappear when the house lighting is on full.

The four aisles—two center and two along the sidewall—and the two openings from foyer to auditorium between each aisle are enhanced by red velvet draperies fringed with gold braid. The house has 1,400 seats, arranged in three banks, each consisting of 14 seats to a row at the rear, with the two side banks tapering toward the stage. Full visibility is assured by the parabolic arrangement of the floor, with a reverse incline at the front of the house.

SEAT COMFORT FEATURED

Seats are of the automatic lift-up hinge type with relaxing spring backs. They have full-upholstered backs, seats and arms, strikingly covered in gold pastel mohair. The steel portions are dark red with gold trim on the aisle ends.

The stage is 15 feet deep with a proscenium opening 42 feet wide by 22 feet high. The screen is 18 by 24 feet in size. No provision has been made at present for dressing rooms, but they may be constructed in the basement if desired, and the stage is of adequate depth for some types of stage shows. The stage is equipped with three sets of travelers and valance. Main draperies and valance are of red velvet and there are also blue and gold full curtains, each with matching valance.

Heating and ventilating fans are mounted on a platform over the stage, which is the only portion of the building excavated for a basement. The building is heated by forced air steam heat, operated by an oil burner and pressure boiler.

The new Civic Theatre was planned obviously with a view to enticing patrons among the incoming defense workers who are settling in and about its neighborhood. But just as obviously, this new house is not a "boomer." It is a permanent institution in every sense of the word and quality of both design and construction throughout make this highly evident. The community which it serves now as well as the expected influx of greater population undoubtedly will be permanent in scope, hence the new theatre's planners wisely took their cue by building quality into their new venture.

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