

Federal Pavilion for New York World's Fair Is Nearing a Decision

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

Plans for the United States Pavilion for the New York World's Fair of 1964-65 are about to be disclosed after three months of sharp professional controversy about a design that has never been published.

The building has been surrounded by confusion and secrecy since the announcement of the selection of the architect, Charles Luckman Associates of New York and Los Angeles, on Aug. 8. The announcement was made by the General Services Administration, which is responsible for all domestic Government buildings, as well as Federal structures at fairs here and abroad.

Federal participation in the New York fair is under the direction of the Department of Commerce, for which G.S.A. is to produce the building. Liaison between the two Federal departments and the New York fair itself is performed by the office of the United States Commission to the New York World's Fair. Norman K. Winston is the commissioner, and a special New York group is charged with developing the exhibition plans to fit the building.

A meeting of all parties concerned, including Presidential advisers who have entered the picture because of the controversy, is scheduled to be held in Washington on Tuesday. The meeting is to give final approval to the design, which has changed considerably since the first announcement.

The Government agencies officially involved assert that the changes are normal procedures; other sources in the Government and the architecture profession say that the changes were forced by widespread criticism of the design, in which Presi-

dent Kennedy finally played a part.

The situation has become something of a cause célèbre in the architectural world.

The most curious fact is that the much-criticized building design was never released. Descriptions were privately circulated, however. The first reaction was aroused by the realization that the design was completed even prior to the General Services Administration's publication of the name of the architect chosen for the job.

Practice Is Questioned

This practice is questioned by the architecture profession, which calls it "freezing" a design before the architect's name is officially announced. The G.S.A. said this was a logical and necessary procedure.

Because a Congressional appropriation of \$17,000,000 for Federal participation in the New York fair was delayed until August, there was little time left to design and execute the building. Therefore, special prior funds made available by the Department of Commerce at an earlier date were used by the G.S.A. for "feasibility studies"—in this case, the actual commissioning of designs from Mr. Luckman. Twenty-five to 30 studies were ready when Congress finally took action, the service agency made its announcement and the storm broke.

By the time a model of the design had been presented to the New York fair for approval, descriptions and rumors were circulating freely. A leading professional periodical, The Architectural Forum, printed an indignant editorial in its September issue. In it the building was described as "three giant flying saucers, seemingly suspended in mid-air, and looking

rather like the familiar pawnshop sign known to every inhabitant of Skid Row."

It questioned both the quality of the design and the procedure by which the architect was selected.

This broke the news to the profession and the public. Almost simultaneously, the commissioner's office, charged with fitting an exhibition into the building, found it virtually impossible to do so and requested a hearing on the problems involved. The hearing was held at the Department of Commerce, the objections were rejected, and the design was retained.

Advisers Are Summoned

The criticism and controversy reached a Presidential adviser, Arthur M. Schlesinger, who remarked, "a number of people recoiled from the original design." The problem was then passed to William Walton, artist and friend of President Kennedy, who was responsible for the solution of another contro-

versial architectural matter, the redevelopment of Washington's Lafayette Square.

Mr. Walton saw a photograph of the model of the proposed pavilion, which he called "a weird-looking thing, like a giant plant-stand—the kind that has three levels for pots." The matter was then taken directly to the President.

Advisers from the architectural field were called in. They recommended reviewing Mr. Luckman's other proposals for a more acceptable solution. A much less extreme building, virtually a raised box on columns, was substituted for the flying saucers. This, also, has not been seen except by the intimate participants, but it is expected to be released after the conference Tuesday.

Bernard L. Boutin, administrator of the General Services Administration, denies that this sequence of events, with Presidential intervention, ever took place. He asserts that the initial design was only "recom-

mended," rather than chosen, and that it "was actually under review here at G.S.A. and at the Department of Commerce."

"When we have a recommended design we take it out and talk to experts," he said. "We found the recommended initial design questionable from a practicable point of view and proceeded to review others. This was done in my office in September. We went over all of Luckman's designs and picked the present one as the most practical. Either that afternoon or the next day, I took the final design to the President, who expressed approval and pleasure."

Four Choices Studied

He said emphatically, "This has followed an absolutely normal course."

Herbert Klotz, Assistant Secretary of Commerce, said, "No one in his right mind should comment on a design that isn't completed."

George Rothwell, Deputy United States Commissioner to

the New York World's Fair, said that the first choice design was one of four major choices, all of which were being considered in terms of cost, traffic control and other problems.

Reactions to the substituted design were generally favorable. Mr. Walton characterized it as "quite nice" and "simple." Mr. Klotz said, "I think we're going to have a very fine building." Mr. Boutin said, "It is of the greatest importance that we have the best design because of the great national and international interest in the fair."

Many members of the architecture profession, however, are still discontented. They cite two earlier Federal pavilions—Edward Durrell Stone's building at the Brussels fair of 1957 and the Science Pavilion at the Seattle Fair this summer, by Minoru Yamasaki—as examples of the kind of distinguished fair architecture that the Government should promote. Both were commissioned by the G.S.A.