

## **The Metropolitan Opera House**

Venue for: *The Metropolitan Opera, The Metropolitan Opera Guild, The Opera Club, Opera Shop and Grand Tier Restaurant*

Cost: \$46 million

Seating capacity: 3,788 (in auditorium), List Hall-144

Owner: Lincoln Center, Inc.

Lessor and operator: Metropolitan Opera Association

Total square feet: 97,700

First architectural schemes drawn: 1956

Groundbreaking: October 1961

Opening: September 16, 1966

Wallace K. Harrison (1895- ), the architect most instrumental to the Lincoln Center project, was responsible for designing the Metropolitan Opera House. As a young architect, Harrison studied in New York in the atelier of Harvey Corbett and in Paris at the atelier of Gustave Umbdenstock. Beginning in 1922 he studied at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux Arts in Paris for one year. Upon his return to New York, he became a highly successful architect designing a wide range of building types including apartments, houses, museums, college buildings and research buildings. He is most noted for his tall urban office buildings, which exhibit straightforward and functional design.

Harrison began the design for the Metropolitan Opera House in 1956 with aspirations of evoking the grandeur of traditional opera houses in contemporary terms. His primary concern was to provide the finest facilities for the production and enjoyment of grand opera. Both the Lincoln

Center Building Committee and Harrison felt the building should serve the arts by encouraging a wider public enjoyment of the arts. Both wanted the building to have a timeless enduring quality throughout its potentially long life as a vital and fitting home for the opera company and focal point of the Center as a whole.

The Metropolitan Opera House consists of the main auditorium, a smaller hall, and extensive lobbies, offices, workshops and backstage support areas as well as a restaurant and gift shop.

The Metropolitan Opera House is located on the east side of Amsterdam Avenue between West 62nd Street and West 65th Street. Its grand facade faces Columbus Avenue and serves as anchor to Lincoln Center and dramatic backdrop to Josie Robertson Plaza. The facade is composed of five barrel-vaulted arches reaching 96 feet in height. The arches rest on six rectilinear concrete columns clad in Roman travertine. Each arch is formed of 35-foot wide pre-cast concrete shells. The north, south and west elevations are faced with a series of pre-cast concrete fins set vertically, which lend a more textured appearance than the front. A promenade balcony paved in terrazzo sits one level above the plaza. Behind the balcony a second row of travertine-covered columns divide a bronze mullioned glass curtain wall.

The main entrance faces Josie Robertson Plaza. Patrons proceed through three sets of bronze double doors into a soaring lobby that runs the entire width of the building and contains the curvilinear double staircase illuminated by eight crystal chandeliers. The staircase is constructed of poured-in-place, pre-stressed concrete, which was highly innovative for the time. Master boat builders were used to prepare the form work. The staircase is finished in terrazzo and the steps are covered with a deep red woven carpet with an Italian marble border. A series of balconies providing circulation for the auditorium overlook the grand staircase. On either end of the lobby are two paintings by Marc Chagall titled *Summer* and *Venus Without Arms*. Each 30 x 60 foot

canvas was created as a custom piece specifically for the opera house lobby. Also in the lobby are sculptures by Aristide Maillol and Wilhelm Lemberck.

The main auditorium consists of a broad parquet with rows of orchestra seats punctuated by two sides and one central aisle and surrounded by five levels of horseshoe-shaped tiers. The walls are covered in West African Kewazinga wood and gold-leaf accentuates a ceiling of curvilinear scalloped panels from which hang 24 starburst-form chandeliers. These were a gift from the Vienna State Opera as repayment for American help in its reconstruction after World War II. The proscenium arch is framed by a textured, gilded plaster surround and topped by an untitled sculpture by Mary Callery selected by Wallace Harrison for the auditorium. Other decorative features include the bright red mohair plush upholstery and light satin swags draped across the balcony fronts.