

New York State Theater

Venue for: *The New York Ballet* and *The New York City Opera*

Cost: \$26 million

Seating Capacity: 2,779

Owner: City of New York (The New York State Theater was built with New York State funds appropriated for the 1964 World's Fair. Title was transferred to the City of New York after the fair.)

Manager: City Center of Music and Drama

Total square feet: 284,000

First architectural schemes drawn: 1957

Groundbreaking: September 1961

Opening: April 23, 1964

The New York State Theater was designed by Philip Johnson. Johnson (1906-) is an American architect whose unconventional designs are a union of neoclassicism and modernism inspired by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. He was educated at Harvard University, where he studied under Walter Gropius. Johnson began designing buildings in 1942. His work is typically luxurious in scale and materials with expansive interiors and classical symmetry. His many important works include the Glass House (1949) in Connecticut and the Seagram Building (1958) in New York City, designed in collaboration with Mies van der Rohe. In designing the New York State Theater, Johnson strove to express a classical arrangement of elements while maintaining a formal stylistic cohesiveness with the Metropolitan Opera House and Avery Fisher Hall.

The New York State Theater consists of an auditorium, lobby and Promenade containing bars, gift shops and a seasonal cafe. The Promenade is a celebrated and popular venue for special events in New York City.

The New York State Theater occupies a prominent location on the northwest corner of 62nd Street and Columbus Avenue. Like the Metropolitan Opera House and Avery Fisher Hall, its primary facade faces Josie Robertson Plaza. This temple-like north facade, comprised of a low, covered arcade with a 45-foot high loggia above, conforms to the dimensions of Avery Fisher Hall opposite but with an obvious Classical influence. The principal facade is divided into seven bays by eight columns arranged in pairs. The octagonal concrete columns are clad in Roman travertine and topped by a simple, classically inspired travertine entablature. The open-air promenade behind the columns shelters four vertical clusters of faceted light fixtures.

The main lobby is accessed from the Plaza. Once inside, the patron experiences a carefully orchestrated series of spaces. The lobby has low ceilings and is flanked by monumental stairs rising a half flight to the orchestra level. Installed symmetrically on the stair landings are pieces of art commissioned by Philip Johnson for use in the New York State Theater. An abstract wall relief titled *1964* by Lee Bontecou is housed in the eastern stairwell while a low-relief sculpture by Jasper Johns titled *Numbers*, is mounted in the western stairwell.

The Promenade, considered to be one of the greatest interior spaces in New York City is located on the level above the lobby. It extends the full width of the building and is surrounded by three levels of balcony. On one side, patrons are treated to a full-height view of the plaza through the glass wall of the main facade; on the other side, the curving profile of the auditorium. The Promenade boasts a gold-leaf ceiling, ornamental metal railings, and a stone floor of travertine and red Rosso Merlino marble to create an elegant and sophisticated room. Through a fluttering

curtain of fine stainless steel chain hung vertically, patrons can spill out onto the loggia terrace, which overlooks the Plaza.

The New York State Theater auditorium is considered an equally spectacular space. The orchestra floor is surrounded by five levels of horseshoe-shaped balconies. The seating arrangement is noted for its "continental" configuration of wide spacing between each row of seats enabling the elimination of the traditional center aisle. With this plan, the best floor space is used exclusively for seating while minimizing overcrowding. Working with John Balanchine, director of the New York Ballet, Philip Johnson designed the proscenium stage to meet the choreographer's technical specifications. The 51-foot high proscenium arch is finished in gold leaf as well as are the scalloped parapets of the balconies and the large spherical chandelier hanging from the ornamental metal ceiling.