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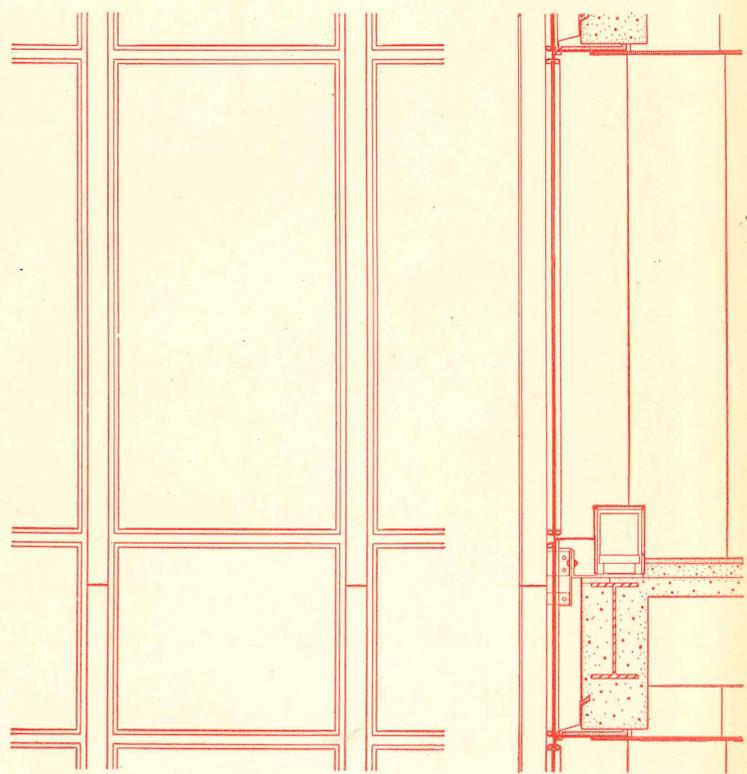
ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

7 July 1958

Building Types Study: Apartments 163

The Seagram Building 139

A New Expression in Japan 127





The Seagram Building at 375 Park Avenue is Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's first building in New York City. It is also his first large building in the United States to be executed with the fine materials and craftsmanship characteristic of his European work. But nothing about the building itself is more independent of commercial considerations than the generous use of the land on which it stands. That so great a departure from the commercial norm could happen at all is due to something besides the prestige of Mies van der Rohe. It is the product of collaboration between Samuel Bronfman, Chairman of the Board of Joseph Seagram and Sons; his daughter, Mrs. Phyllis Lambert; Mies; and Philip Johnson.

Intending to commission what would be regarded as an important building, Mr. Bronfman was persuaded by his daughter to accept the role of patron of architecture rather than client, a distinction which has practical consequences. That distinction has in fact guided this presentation of the building. Making no effort at all to claim this or that on functional or economic grounds, Mr. Drexler proceeds directly to describe Mies' approach as a creative artist working for a patron.—EDITORS

THE SEAGRAM BUILDING

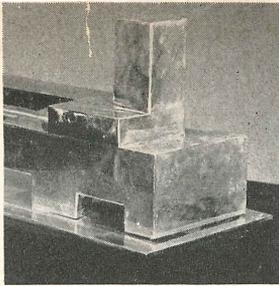
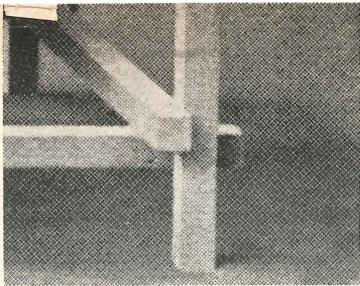
by Arthur Drexler

Like all of Mies van der Rohe's buildings the Seagram tower ought to be appraised as a work of art. This is worth emphasizing because of Mies' avowed concern for *Baukunst*—the craft of good building—as distinguished from the invention of abstract forms for which systematic and appropriate structure must be found (as for example Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum). Much of Mies' influence derives from the relative ease with which architecture as a disciplined craft, a skill, can be taught and practiced. With more success than any of his peers Mies has produced a school, but even the best of teachers may not altogether succeed in conveying to his students the exact nature of the logic by which he proceeds. There is still, of course, much intuitive Art in Mies' *Baukunst*. It is in fact central to his work, since it leads him to judgements and decisions which cannot be understood by logic alone. The massing of the Seagram building illustrates the point.

The aesthetic system supporting Mies' conception

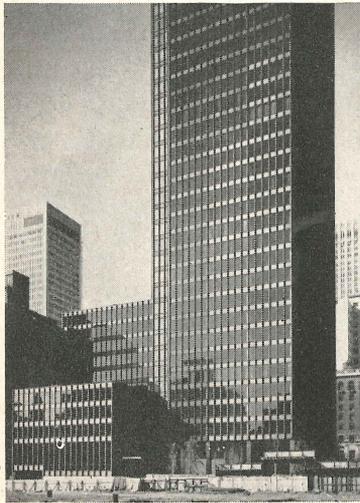
- ARCHITECTS: *Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson*
- DIRECTOR OF PLANNING: *Mrs. Phyllis B. Lambert*
- ASSOCIATE ARCHITECTS: *Kahn and Jacobs*
- CONTRACTOR: *George A. Fuller Company*
- MECHANICAL ENGINEERS: *Jaros, Baum and Bolles*
- STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS: *Severud-Elstad Krueger*
- ELECTRICAL ENGINEER: *Clifton E. Smith*
- LIGHTING CONSULTANT: *Richard Kelly*
- LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURAL CONSULTANTS:
Charles Middleeer and Karl Linn
- ACOUSTICAL CONSULTANTS: *Bolt-Beranek and Newman*
- GRAPHIC CONSULTANT: *Elaine Lustig*

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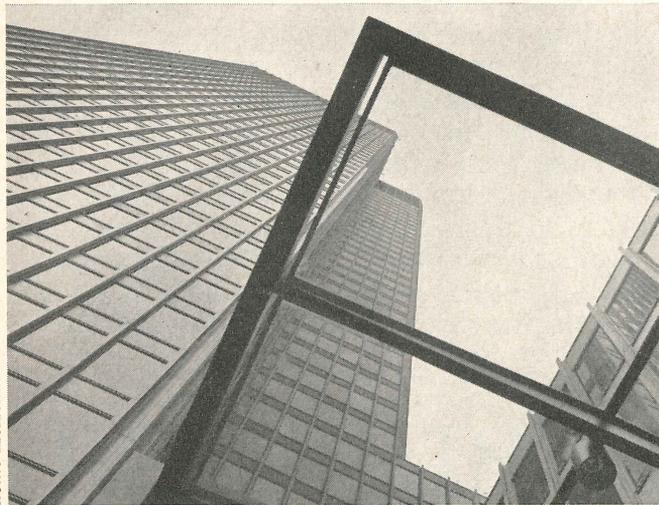
© Ezra Stoller



Jane Davis Doggett

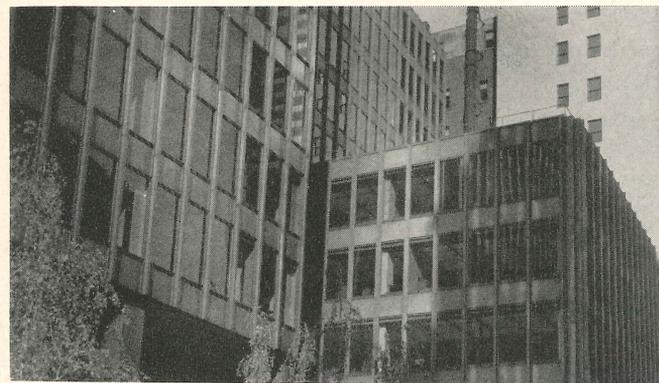
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Rollie McKenna



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Rollie McKenna

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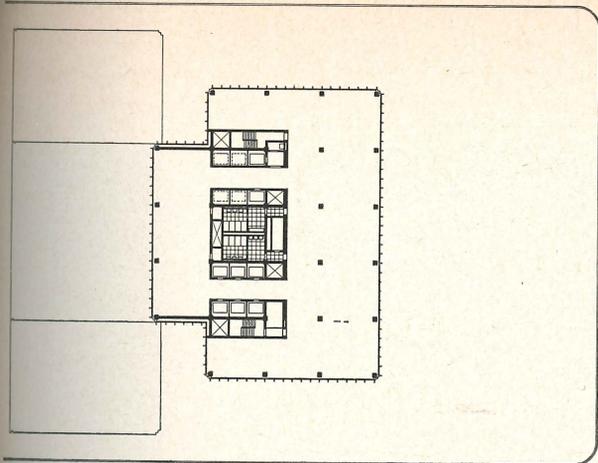
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of space, such the way a modified Cubism supplied Le Corbusier's, was proposed by a group of working in Holland from 1917 to around 1928. primary colors, clearly separated rectangular and asymmetrical balance substituted for traditional methods of axial composition, *de Stijl* sought to create a universally applicable theory of the arts. The intersection of supporting elements a chair designed by Gerrit Rietveld in 1919 (1) a detail from one of Georges Vantongerloo's architectural sculptures called "Aerports" (2) more closely related to Mies' work, if less known, than are the paintings of Mondrian.

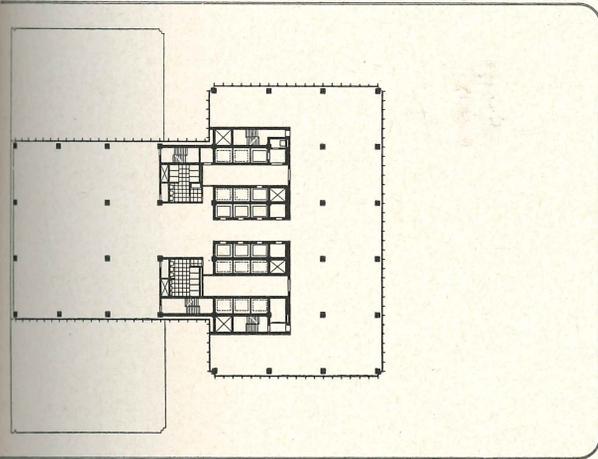
Since the war Mies has been concerned primarily with the articulation of structure, largely eschewing the pleasures of modulated space and light. renunciation is all the more curious because he himself contributed so importantly to the development of the open, freely composed plan. Nevertheless, *Stijl* esthetics still contribute to his buildings. The massing of Vantongerloo's sculpture in part offers an equivalent to the projecting spine and the wing rear wings of the Seagram tower (3, 4, 5, 6) the building differs from it in one obvious respect: it is bi-laterally symmetrical. In fact the Seagram building is the only skyscraper in New York to be organized while at the same time maintaining distinctly different front, back, and sides. The United Nations Secretariat, no less than Lever House or R.C.A. building, faces two directions at once. The Seagram's, no matter from which side it is approached, quite clearly faces one way. Like McKim, Mead & White's 1918 Racquet Club opposite, the Seagram tower is classically and hierarchically composed.

Five bays wide and three deep, the building sits on a pink granite podium bound on its sides by massive green marble parapets. Two pools and groves of weeping beech trees emphasize its separateness from the street. Dark against the walls of amber-gray glass and, on the sides of the projecting spine, gray-green marble are held in a net of dull brown bronze. Rubbed occasionally with oil, the bronze mullions, columns, and spandrels age to a still darker, richer color. At each floor level, recessed ceilings (not yet entirely equipped with diffusing panels) are kept lighted night and day. Beautiful as this controlled illumination appears at night, the effect is perhaps at its best when on certain late afternoons the glass walls glow softly from the offices this lighting counteracts the bright glare, and has the curious effect of making New York City seem like a photographic mural mounted on the other side of the glass.

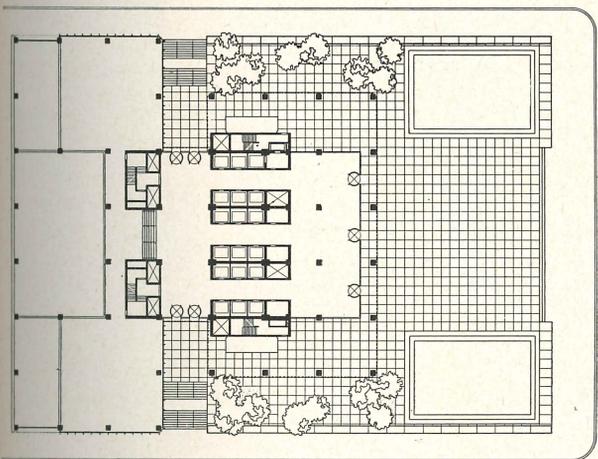
Like Lever House diagonally opposite (Seagram's predecessor in New York in the intelligent use of the grid) the building's window module derives from but is not altogether determined by—the most convenient dimensions for individual offices. It is all too human scale that leads directly to the monotony which many architectural humanists deplore, and it is an effort to overcome this monotony by making the whole more than the sum of its parts which explains perhaps more fully than structural logic alone the enormous impact of the bronze mullions sweeping from top to bottom in unbroken lines.



Plan at tower level

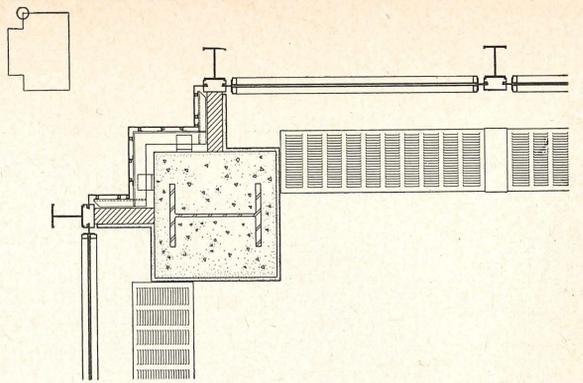
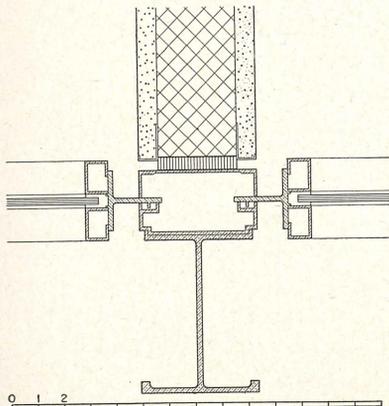


Plan at intermediate level

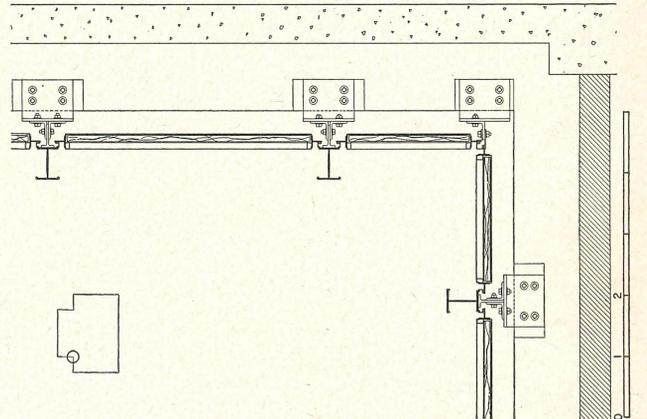


Plan at plaza level

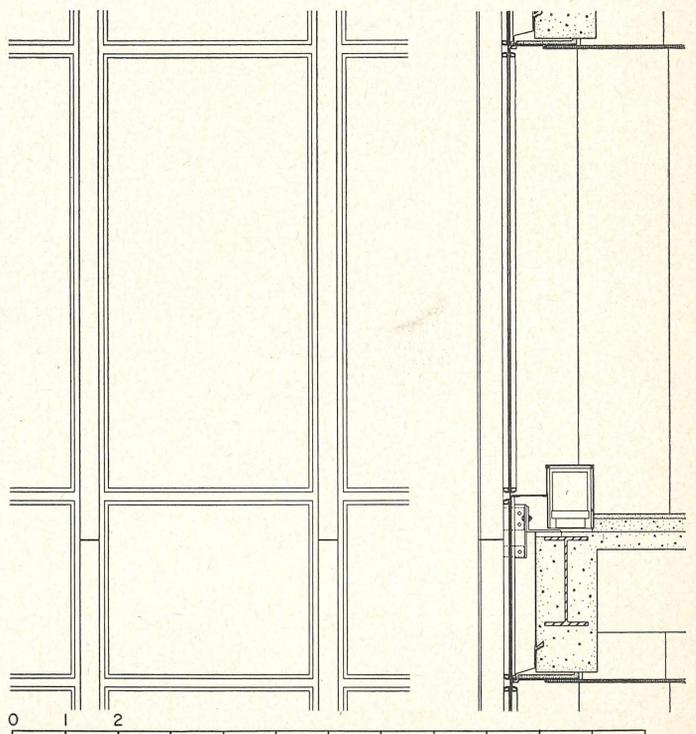
Typical intersection at mullion and glass



Above: outside corner detail. Glass is glare reducing pink which appears without color from inside. Bronze mullions were extruded from $7\frac{1}{2}$ in. diameter tubes which are $2\frac{1}{2}$ in. larger than the former maximum diameter available. Bronze covering columns was fabricated in long narrow extrusions fitted together. Extrusions were used because they wave less than plates.



Above: Inside corner detail showing serpentine marble facing. Solid concrete wall is part of wind bracing system. Below: elevation and section of window and spandrel. The section shows the special low profile, high pressure, high velocity air-induction units used on the periphery of the building. They are recessed in the floor construction to achieve an even lower profile.



Tower front echoes axial symmetry of McKim, Mead and White's Racquet Club on the opposite side of Park Avenue



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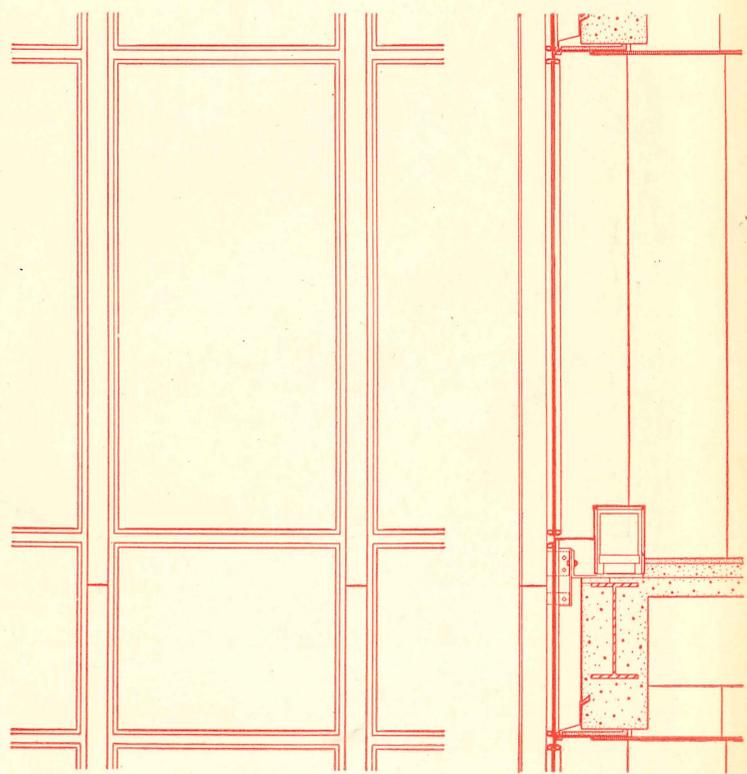
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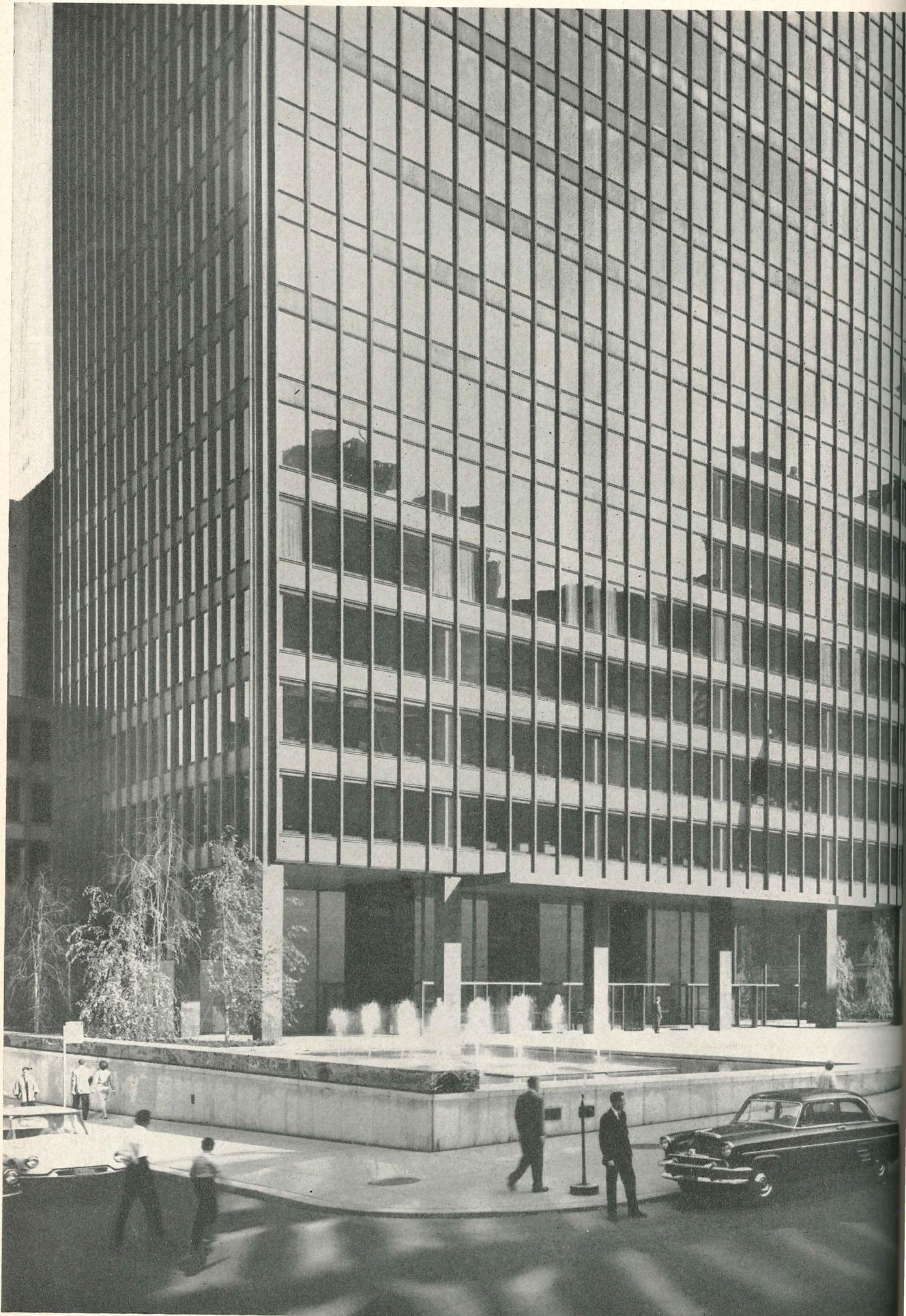
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Seagram tower, flanked by low rear wings, faces Park Avenue. Plaza is raised above street level



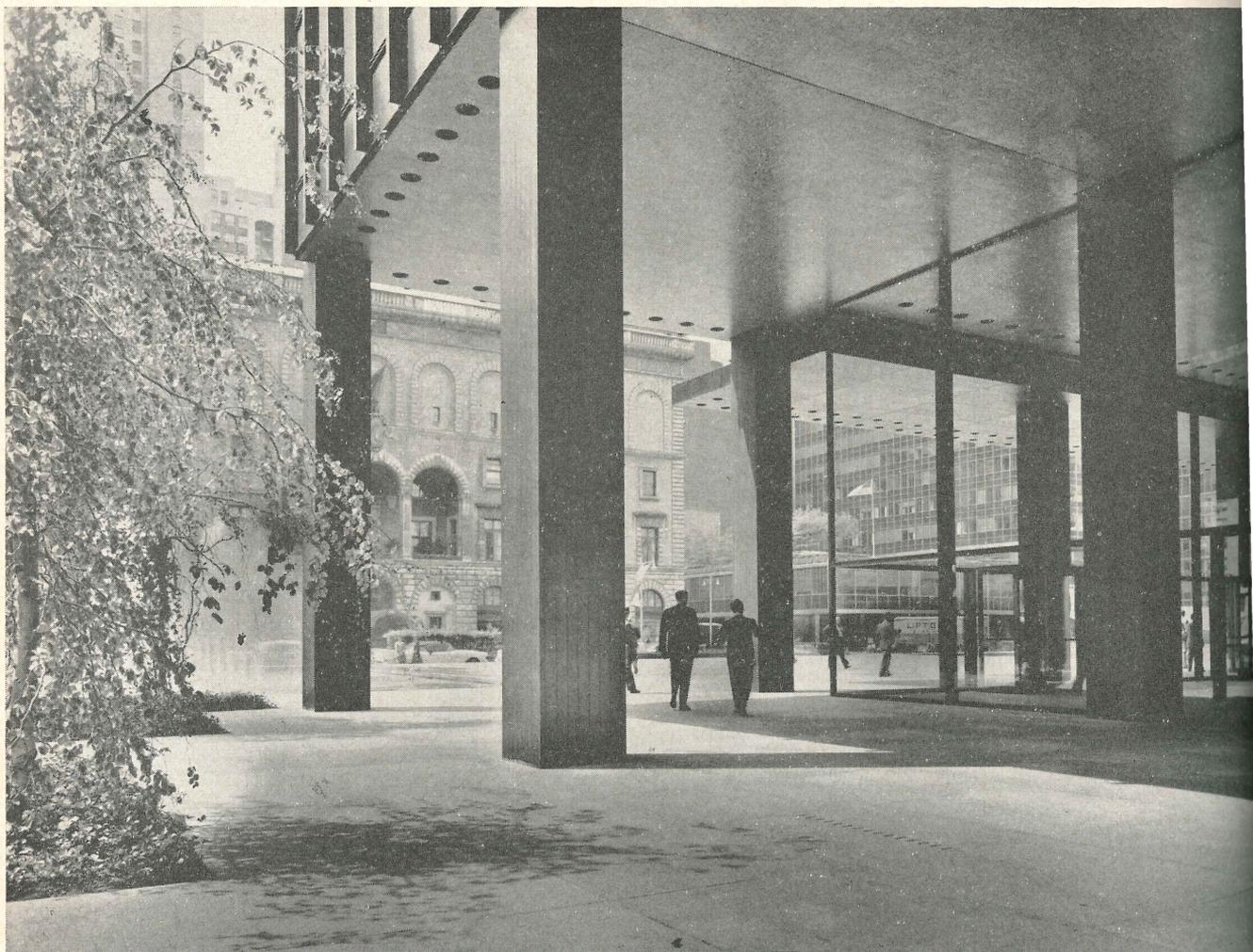
Plaza pools and fountains will eventually be ornamented with sculpture



Identical side entrances open on through gallery beneath the building's projecting spine



Top: bronze columned portico of tower. Soffit is of gray-brown glass mosaic. Bottom: lobby. Stone furniture to be added



Top: reception room for Seagram offices. Bottom: Seagram executive office. Furniture by Mies van der Rohe

