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October 15, 1990

## At Guggenheim, Changing the Changes

By GRACE GLUECK

**LEAD:** A dramatic change in plans has been proposed for the new annex of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. The change, which gives much bolder emphasis to the facade, is highly unusual for a building already under construction. But for this particular structure, which was sent back to the drawing board once by critics' objections and attended by years of hotly debated passage through New York City agencies, such an additional change in mid-construction comes as a bombshell.

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The proposed modifications, which are intended to increase the heights of interior galleries, would result in a marked expansion of the current window treatment. The four rows of asymmetrically placed slits that now discreetly punctuate the facade would become three bold and diverse bands of windows much larger in scale. In the eyes of critics, they would give the facade, intended as a quiet backdrop for the strong forms of the museum designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, an aggressive and competing new presence.

The facade changes, which have been presented to the Landmarks Preservation Commission for approval, are defended by Thomas Krens, director of the Guggenheim, and Charles Gwathmey, architect for the project. Mr. Gwathmey insists that the changes are in "the spirit of Frank Lloyd Wright," based - as is the entire annex - on a drawing by Wright for a backdrop building to be used for artists' studios.

Those who oppose the new treatment - neighbors, architects and others - say that the windows are too big and that their central placement and design variations will distract from the museum itself.

'Eye-Catchers'

"It seems like a disaster," said Marjorie Iseman, a member of Guggenheim Neighbors, a group that opposes a large-scale addition and alteration of the Wright building. "The windows are such eye-catchers that they destroy the intent of a neutral wall and instead compete with the original structure. It's like adding a jazz quartet to some background choir music and claiming that nothing had been changed."

Richard Grimm, a lawyer and another leader of the Guggenheim Neighbors, said, "The new windows may turn out to give the Guggenheim management and staff good views of Central Park, but that's a pretty poor reason to compromise the backdrop concept."

Review of the window treatment is the landmarks commission's first chance to comment on the annex since it assumed jurisdiction over the Guggenheim in August, when the building achieved official landmark status. The plans for the 10-story annex - which will considerably expand the Guggenheim's office and gallery space - had previously been approved by the Board of Standards and Appeals and the Board of Estimate. The landmarks commission held a hearing on the window proposal Sept. 25 but is reserving decision pending further comment from the local community.

Mr. Krens said the other day that although the plans were in place when he took office in July 1988, "it seemed clear to us, when we looked at them from a curatorial perspective, that the ceiling heights of the galleries would be too low to hang works of large dimension."

"It made sense to us to try to maximize the height of some of these spaces," he continued. "When that happened, the slit windows on the facade no longer related to the gallery spaces."

When the plans were approved by the Board of Standards and Appeals, he said, a note had been appended that the final window placement was subject to change.

### Expensive Renovations

"When we changed the floor heights to provide what we all felt was a more flexible and expanded space for temporary exhibitions," Mr. Gwathmey said, "we felt an obligation to re-look at the existing windows. They would not have been anyone's first choice who believed that the interior plan and the facade were co-existent." He added, "We think the new facade is actually more sympathetic and more in the spirit of the original annex proposed by Frank Lloyd Wright."

The facade revisions will be expensive, said Jacob Alspector, senior associate at Gwathmey Siegel & Associates, Mr. Gwathmey's firm. "They involve renovating the wall of an existing building," he said. But he would not comment on the actual cost. Asked about this, Mr. Krens said, "I don't know the details, and I don't think it's a major point here."

Nevertheless, construction of the annex is proceeding. If the landmarks commission approves the changes, Mr. Alspector said, "we'll stop working on that particular area of the facade and make plans for revision." The museum is scheduled to reopen in the fall of 1991.

Mr. Krens said: "If the plans are not approved in time, it will not affect the opening of the building. We can't afford a delay in that."

### Conforming With Interiors

The 10-story annex provides for four floors of gallery space and two office levels, on the eighth and ninth floors. The interior changes made by Mr. Krens sacrifice several mezzanines and shrink some of the office space to allow the raising of ceiling heights in three galleries to an average of 18 feet.

Conforming with the original interior arrangement, the architects placed four thin rows of horizontal windows asymmetrically on the gridded limestone facade. Under this scheme, three of the four slits of windows directed light to an atrium, now eliminated, within the office floors.

The new plan calls for three extended and enlarged bands of windows, symmetrically located on the facade. Each band is different. The lowest, now corresponding to the seventh floor, a gallery level, is a recessed narrow slit deriving from the present arrangement; the top band, corresponding to the ninth

floor, an office level, forms a wider recessed slit topped by a slab slanting inward from the facade.

The middle row, the most objectionable to the critics, consists of 4 10-foot glass squares that carry the grid pattern, set flush with the facade. Mr. Gwathmey refers to the large squares of glass as "studio windows"; the opposition calls them "storefronts," and points out that they are all on the eighth floor, the administrative area containing the director's office.

### Once More Into the Breach

The flap over fenestration rekindles the long battle against the annex by a group of opponents whose joined forces defeated the first design for the building. In 1986, because of community and professional pressure, the architects revised their original plan for a much larger cantilevered tower at the north end of the Wright building.

One of the most intense critics, Michael Kwartler, an architect who is the director of the historical preservation program at Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, recently wrote a letter to the landmarks commission citing the proposed window arrangement as ill-conceived. He added that the changes would "transform the tower annex into an aggressive and singular architectural element in the overall composition."

In a separate statement, Giorgio Cavaglieri, an architect known for his work on historic buildings, said: "The varied shapes and sizes of the windows are jarring. They make the annex too assertive."

And other opponents are chiming in. "The new windows are hideous," said Halina Rosenthal, president of the Friends of the Upper East Side Historic District, which was active in defeating the first Gwathmey Siegel plan. "Once again, this building is upstaging Wright's Guggenheim. When you look at the building, those windows are all you'll see." Mrs. Rosenthal said that she and other members of her group would attend a meeting today of the landmarks committee of Community Board 8, at which a presentation of the plan modifications will be made by the architects. "We're going to ask that they go back to the drawing board and come up with another proposal," she said.

Laurie Beckelman, chairwoman of the Landmarks Preservation Commission, said that the commission would not make its decision until at least the end of this month.