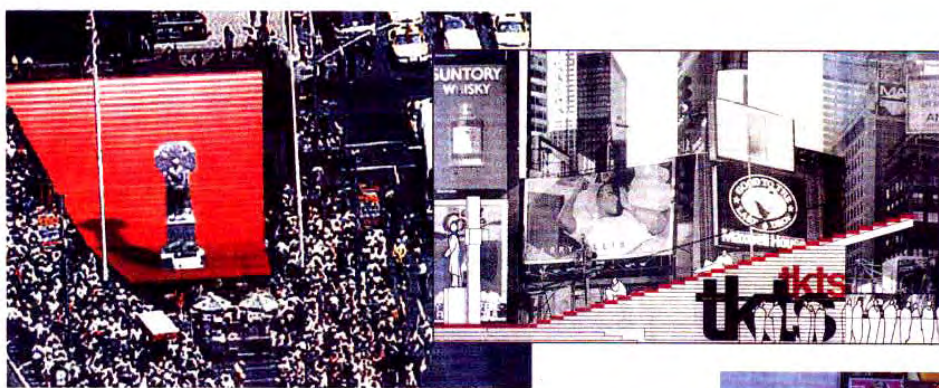


The New York Times

THE NEW YORK TIMES, WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 2000



Computer renderings, left, of the winning design for a new theater-ticket booth to be hidden beneath the high end of a stairway in Duffy Square. Below, the TKTS trailer in all its aging pipe-and-canvas glory.

Van Alen Institute (above and inset)



Nicole Bongiorno/The New York Times

Imagining a Ticket Booth As a Stairway to the Stars

A New Design for the TKTS Booth Off Times Square

By JULIE V. IOVINE

A familiar New York landmark, the ramshackle pipe-and-canvas TKTS booth at the northern end of Times Square, will be transformed into a bright red grand staircase that will provide visitors to the city with front-row seats to one of the best shows in town.

The stairs will rise gently from the base of the statue of Father Duffy, for whom the TKTS traffic island is named, and reach a height of 16 feet. The new sales booth for marked-down theater tickets will be tucked beneath the high end of the

stairs. After buying a ticket, theatergoers will be able to sit on the steps, bask in the sun and take in the ever-changing public theater that is Times Square itself.

The design, by the Australian architects John Choi and Tai Ropiha, was announced yesterday by Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani. Construction is to begin later this year.

The existing TKTS booth, an aging trailer adorned with bright red initials, was installed in Duffy Square 27 years ago. It sells more than \$1.7 million in discount tickets annually and is operated by the Theater Development Fund, a nonprofit performing arts organization. In

June the fund said it would sponsor a design competition to replace the old booth.

"It will add some beauty and some usefulness," said Mayor Giuliani.

Mr. Choi, 28, and Mr. Ropiha, 36, both of Sydney, had visited New York just once before coming to the city to receive their \$5,000 award for the design. They said they had based their impressions of Times Square on films, magazines and television coverage of New Year's Eve celebrations. "We were reacting to the visual buzz," Mr. Ropiha said, "and tried to create a strong singular image in contrast."

"We wanted something quiet that would act as a foil to all that energy," said Mr. Choi.

The staircase will be made of red resin planks. The TKTS logo, which is under copyright to the Theater Development Fund, will be embossed in black letters about five feet tall on the east and west sides of the structure. The ticket-buyers line will snake along the sidewalk around the statue of the Rev. Francis Patrick Duffy, the Roman Catholic priest, army chaplain and World War I hero.

Jack L. Goldstein, the executive director of the Theater Development Fund,

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Joan Marcus/Theater Development Fund

John Choi, left, and Tai Ropiha, of Sydney, Australia, creators of the winning design for the TKTS booth.

Ticket Booth as Stairway to the Stars

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said of the competition: "We wanted an image that was up-to-date and elastic and not so ad hoc. We were looking for something that had cleverness, visual economy and force."

The new design also had to provide a few more sales windows than the current eight and offer reasonable comfort for the ticket sellers within the artificially lit, no-frills space. The Theater Development Fund is also considering adding a public bathroom. The project is expected to cost as much as \$2 million, to be raised by the fund.

Prizes went to other designs selected from among 683 entries from 31 countries. The jury was made up of architects, designers, officials representing the Times Square business improvement district, and theater industry experts.

Second prize went to Thomas Phifer, a New York architect in association with the local engineering firm Ove Aup. His design calls for a raked glass roof extending over the entire square as well as over the statues of Father Duffy and George M. Cohan, who is also commemorated in the square. A raised platform will include concealed heating and air conditioning ducts for the comfort of ticket buyers as they wait.

Third place was shared by Piero Lissoni Associates, a group of 16 architects from Milan who proposed a minimalist box with a translucent

wall etched with a ghostly logo and with L.E.D. panels inlaid into the pavement, and Leo Miele, a Toronto architect who proposed a performance space on the roof. There were four honorable mentions: Rahman Polk and Byron Terrell of Chicago; Mauk Design of San Francisco; Lippincott and Margulies of New York; and U-Arc Studio of Seattle.

"There wasn't much room for an entirely radical solution," said Raymond Gastil, executive director of

A bright red 'foil' to the energy of Times Square.

the competition's organizer, the Van Alen Institute, a civic organization committed to improving the public realm through architecture. "But the entries say a lot about the raw energy and talent that's out there."

The range of the designs was considerable, from a booth conceived as twin green crystals to a three-dimensional rendition of Mondrian's painting "Broadway Boogie Woogie."

Marion Weiss, a New York architect who served on the jury, remarked on "the outpouring of innovation" reflected in the design entries. An exhibition of the top designs

and 32 other entries will open tomorrow at the Van Alen Institute, at 30 West 22nd Street. The institute has arranged for 200 more images to go on display today at the Urban Center at 457 Madison Avenue, between 50th and 51st Streets.

The search for a new TKTS booth did not go off without a hitch. No sooner was the competition announced than the Coalition for Father Duffy protested the very existence of the booth in Duffy Square. Maj. Gen. Joseph A. Healey, co-chairman of the coalition, wanted to ensure that any new booth would not stand taller than Father Duffy. He rallied his membership, "vets from Buffalo to Montauk," he said, who inundated the mayor's office with more than 7,000 postcards.

Representatives of the coalition was thus allowed to view the winning entries in advance of the announcement and to meet with Mayor Giuliani "to make sure we didn't make a flap" at the official announcement, General Healey said. He added that he liked the winning proposal. "The statue is singularly placed and totally visible and identifiable within a very busy setting," he said.

Mr. Choi and Mr. Ropiha will soon return to Sydney and their jobs as designers at Hassell, one of Australia's largest architectural firms. While visiting this week, they said, they did attend a couple of plays but never waited in line at TKTS: the Theater Development Fund supplied them with tickets.