



## tkts2k Competition

Two Australians, Tai Ropiha and John Choi, have won the international design competition for the redesign of the Times Square centrepiece, the 'tkts' ticket booth. **Helen Kaiser** spoke with the young architects about their proposal.

● **HK** I'm interested in the references you've drawn on to develop this concept. In particular, what is the significance of the colour? Is it a reference to the red carpet or is it a bold statement and reaction to the context of the site?

**C/R** Yes, the colour is a reference to red carpet and red curtains hopefully generating a sense of drama and a sense of occasion. The concept of the red steps was appealing to us because of these associations and also because it would provide a memorable identity. Until now, tkts has traded on its simple red helvetica logo and we wanted to relate to this history but also expand tkts' identity to enable legibility at an urban scale (that is, on a postcard). The singularity and simplicity of the red steps is a deliberate contrast to the chaotic surrounds of Times Square. It also forms a backdrop to the Father Duffy statue.

**HK** Obviously this site serves as a hub for ticket sales, is a major meeting point, and so on, but, in NYC's urban fabric, what is its broader relevance? Does it have a deeper significance for New Yorkers and, more importantly, how do you think your design will influence or change that relationship?

**C/R** Times Square is a place of heightened urban activity, where

people, traffic, entertainment and information converge. Similar to the way in which New York is viewed as the pinnacle of urban development, Times Square is seemingly representative of the aspirations of a nation, displaying the achievements of American culture. Telecommunications and entertainment businesses dominate the surrounds with giant billboards and electronic screens creating a surreal, electronic, futuristic atmosphere. Both New Yorkers and tourists alike flock to Times Square to witness 'live to air' television news and music shows in glass-fronted studios.

Times Square also exists in the minds of people around the world, as it is represented in films, magazines and television coverage of New Year's Eve celebrations. Its virtual image is ever present and contributes to the identity of New York. (Times Square is considered to be the "crossroads of the world" – how very NY!) Currently Times Square is very much a space that you move through. Cars and pedestrians converge and flow through the space without interruption (like a venturi effect). The tkts steps will provide a refuge for people to pause and observe Times Square. Sitting on the steps places the observer slightly above the movement

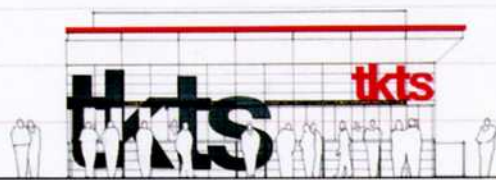
of people and cars, like sitting on a large stone in a river. We also hope that the steps will signal a sense of arrival at Times Square and the Broadway theatre precinct.

**HK** You mentioned that much of your research was done on the net. How did this means and other technology enable you to develop your concept?

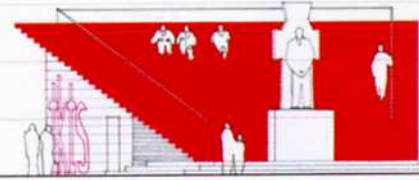
**C/R** We obtained useful background information from the net, such as historical information on Father Duffy and George Cohen. We were also able to download images of Times Square, which helped our understanding of the space. After hearing that we had won the competition, we researched information about the various stakeholders, which gave us insight to the political context surrounding the project.

With regard to the use of digital technology in architecture, we used Giant Squid Multimedia to help us develop a compelling image. Although the image was more conceptual than those developed in other entries, it strongly conveyed the essence of the idea. Sometimes the technology available can become the focus, overpowering the idea itself.

**HK** What were your impressions of the competition process itself? What likelihood is there that



north elevation scale 1" = 4'



south elevation scale 1" = 4'



**political or external meddling could negatively influence the realisation of your design?**

**C/R** We believe that there are several key factors that have contributed to a positive outcome in this instance. Firstly, the competition was initiated by a client group who was committed to finding a design by this process (TDF Theatre Development Fund). Secondly, the competition was administered by an independent body – the Van Alen Institute, a non-profit organisation that exists for the betterment of the public domain. Thirdly, the jury comprised members from design professions as well as key stakeholders who have an influence on the future of the project. The benefit of the competition organiser and the jury being independent of the client group is that it allows the judging process to be impartial. The inclusion of the stakeholders in the jury has allowed them to input to the decision making and through this process gain an understanding of the issues surrounding the selection of the winning entries. A competition that is judged largely by design professions runs a risk of meeting resistance by the stakeholders and the approval authorities when they are presented a radical design with little understanding

of the background. Van Alen Institute and TDF worked hard to form an atmosphere of mutual respect among the jurors, ensuring design agendas are the focus but informed by the issues that the stakeholders bring to the judging process. Due to their effort, we are fortunate to have the public support of Mayor Guiliani, the Parks Commission of New York, Times Square BID (business group) and the Coalition for Father Duffy. Hence, we feel that we are well advanced to having a 'palatable design' that can be built. The client will have the final say about the future of our design. Their board, of 26 members, is currently reviewing our design along with the other entries. They have, however, indicated that they would like to be building by the beginning of 2001. We have our fingers crossed.

The eleven member jury, comprising architects, designers, urban planners, city officials and theatre industry executives, chose a total of eight winning designs:

**Second place:** Ove Arup & Partners/Thomas Phifer and Partners, New York

**Joint third place (of equal rank):** Lissoni Associates, Italy, and Leo Miele, Canada

**4 honorable mentions (of equal rank):** Byron Terrell, Rahman Polk, Illinois; Mauk Design, California; Lippincott & Margulies, New York; U-Arc Studio, Washington



This energetic expression in form is capable of becoming an icon for the New York Theatre District.

facing page: A photomontage of the east elevation. this page, top: Diagrammatic development of the scheme. above: An evening perspective.