

A Reader's Digest

REPRINT

Coming:
The Most
Marvelous Fair Ever!

BY IRA WOLFERT



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A preview of the New York World's Fair, an impressive display of man's achievements and a dazzling vision of his prospects

Condensed from THE DIPLOMAT

BY IRA WOLFERT

Coming: The Most Marvelous Fair Ever!



THE MOST brilliant electric lights of all time are now being installed between the bases of three 120-foot-high pylons in New York. Developed to simulate the sun in space research, each lamp is less than three inches in diameter and 19½ inches long, yet produces a light as bright as 8,775,000 hundred-watt bulbs. Combined, the 12 searchlights will add up to 12 billion candlepower. Reflectors around them will concentrate this light into a single beam and direct it upward.

As night falls on April 22, jets of air will start streaming on the lamps to blow away their heat, and the lights will be turned on for the first evening of the New York World's Fair.

The fair will run until October 18, 1964, then be opened again in 1965 from April 21 to October 17. And every night of this run the beam of light will shine heavenward from the "tower of light" pavilion of the U.S. Electric Power and Light Companies.

"This fair can't get away with being merely marvelous," says Robert Moses, president of the Fair Corporation. "So much talent and economic power are being poured into this square mile of ground that if it

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doesn't produce the *most* marvelous fair ever, it will be a disappointment — like holding an Olympics without breaking any records."

Forty-eight nations (plus West Berlin and the crown colony of Hong Kong) will be represented. For reasons they have not made entirely clear, Russia, Britain and the Commonwealth nations (except India) are not showing at the fair. Russia had reserved for itself the largest space in the International Exhibition. When it backed out, the ground was taken over by one of the poorest nations in Europe—Spain. Japan has contracted for two pavilions. There will be exhibits by the U.S. government, 26 states and more than 80 industries representing more than 300 companies. The exhibitors and concessionaires are erecting 150 different pavilions and spending about 550 million dollars to put on shows in them.

Man in his bewildering variety—that's what the shows will present. For example: From General Electric is coming a demonstration of controlled nuclear fusion. In this first public unveiling of what scientists predict to be the most promising power source, fair visitors will watch fusion liberate pure energy from deuterium gas at a temperature of over 20 million degrees F. From St. Peter's Basilica in Rome is coming quite another kind of transcendent human achievement: the Pietà by Michelangelo, finished seven years after Columbus' discovery of America, depicting in white

marble, slightly larger than life-size, a crucified-Christ figure lying in the arms of His mourning mother. The Pietà will be viewed from four levels. The three lower levels are moving platforms that take those who want merely to look at the statue past it slowly and silently. The top level is motionless, for those who want to linger in contemplation of this profound study.

The space manufacturers are sending a full-sized space station and two orbital vehicles to simulate the rendezvous in space that will have to be accomplished for the journey to the moon. The Parker Pen Co., in conjunction with the People-to-People program, is sending a computer stocked with personal data on one million friendly souls. Tell the computer your interests and it will leaf through its innards for a congenial international pen pal and hand you the name and address printed on a special overseas postcard. Wisconsin is sending the biggest cheese ever made, a \$100,000 cheddar seven feet high, 9½ feet in diameter. Montana—\$1,000,000 in gold nuggets.

One unusual feature of this fair is the number of exhibits being staged by professional showmen. To see what a showman can do, I went to Thornwood, N.Y., to watch Raymond Lester complete an enormous scale model of the city of New York. It has taken two years, cost \$600,000 and was painstakingly worked up from more than 50,000 aerial photographs. On a floor 180 feet long, 100

feet wide, it shows every street in the five boroughs, every river and bridge, every window in every one of the city's 835,000 buildings. It even shows the 1000 vessels that can be found plying the harbor or tied up at the piers on an average day, all on a scale of one inch to 100 feet.

Usually such displays, however grand and lavishly detailed, are still just toys you're not allowed to play with. But Lester is letting the audience play with his toy. It works this way: You sit in a four-passenger car suspended on overhead rails. There is no sensation of movement until suddenly clouds start scudding past the windows. The clouds break and you are as in a helicopter flying at 2000 feet over lower New York bay. Actually, you are only 2½ feet up, but because the Statue of Liberty below you is little more than three inches high, the Empire State Building only 14 inches high and everything else in exact proportion, the illusion is perfect.

A tape recording explains the points of interest as you take a leisurely eight-minute "flying" tour around the city. As you approach La Guardia and Idlewild airports, beacon lights flash and planes take off and climb by you in the distance. Your own "helicopter" climbs, and the city falls away beneath you steadily until at last you can see it all from one end to the other. Then your copter lands you on a balcony and as a 15-minute recording tells the city's life story you watch one of the greatest spectacles on

earth—New York going from dawn to dusk, then to night and dawn and day again.

Another unusual feature of the fair is the amount of space devoted to religion—a total of seven acres and eight pavilions. Here will be found the Mormons' great Tabernacle Choir from Salt Lake City, a fourth-century carving that is one of the earliest known studies of Jesus, a Gutenberg Bible, the cross charred in the bombing of Coventry Cathedral, a computer used in translating the Bible into unwritten languages.

No pavilion is allowed to occupy more than 60 percent of its site; the remaining 40 percent must be landscaped. Since all the giants are going all out in this one, the competition to impress visitors is fierce. "As one of the smaller exhibitors we were assigned a limited amount of space," I was told by Walter Dorwin Teague, Jr., designer of the Gas Companies' exhibit. "We achieved the effect of spaciousness by running our 40 percent of landscaping right through the building as well as around it." This "little" exhibitor is spending \$5,500,000 for his show!

The fair will be easy on your feet. You will ride past, over or under practically everything. Outdoors, you ride from exhibit to exhibit in glass-topped sight-seeing buses, in open-sided trailer trains, or in a tiny four-passenger "taxi." You can even travel high above all the exhibits for a panoramic view from a Swiss sky ride or around the perimeter of the

Lake Amusement Area aboard one of the six air-conditioned two-car trains sponsored by AMF Monorail.

Indoors, you ride standing on moving walks and stairways, or sitting in cars, floating armchairs and space ships. At General Electric, the stage rides around you, while at IBM you ride in the theater itself, which is on rails.

At the 1939 New York World's Fair, General Motors' Futurama—a ride over the highways of the future—was the smash hit, playing to an average of 28,000 people a day. In the new 38-million-dollar GM Futurama, the audience (up to 70,000 a day this time) will ride around the world as it *could* be if the fair's theme of "Peace Through Understanding" is achieved and scientists and technologists can devote their energies exclusively to peaceful developments. "No fantasies, nothing that can't be backed up with hard facts as a definite, practical possibility," came the order to the designers from General Motors Chairman Frederic G. Donner.

What a world you'll see in GM's crystal ball! With underwater drilling already accounting for a substantial part of the world's oil supply and diamond miners taking an average of 100 carats a day from the floor of the ocean off South Africa, the underwater world, more certainly than space, is man's newest frontier. So the Futurama audience rides under the sea. New ways of underwater exploring, mining, farming and living are shown. Trains of

nuclear-powered submarine tankers fill up at wells on the ocean floor, speed to a seashore refinery, unload and return without surfacing.

Then the audience comes up to see what the future is doing to cope with its enormously increased population. They see a jungle cleared by a tree cutter that uses a laser beam as a saw. Behind it is a five-story-high road-building vehicle as long as three football fields. It makes a multi-laned concrete highway while you wait. The front end levels the cleared ground, the middle grades and installs a steel foundation, the hind end covers it with slabs of cement, plastic and other materials that the monster itself forms while the trucks that feed it raw materials drive up on the highway it is laying.

From this strange scene the audience rides on to a desert farmed by remote control: the mineral-rich desert soil is irrigated with desalted sea water, its flow regulated by moisture-sensing devices planted amid the crops. With push-buttons in his home at the edge of the fields, the farmer mixes fertilizers into the water and directs the vehicles that plow, seed, cultivate and harvest the land.

The U.S. government is bidding for the title of "Champ Crowd Pleaser" with a 17-million-dollar pavilion where a Cinerama movie tells the story of the development of the United States, using 30 projectors and 132 screens in what might be called a drive-along theater. The audience, seated in open-topped

buses, rides right along with Columbus, with the settlers, with the westering pioneers and the immigrants, while all around movie screens move aside, go up and down, even form a tunnel for the buses to drive through.

Four other challengers for the title have turned to one of Hollywood's most valuable natural resources, Walt Disney. Visitors to the Pepsi-Cola pavilion will be taken on a Disneyland-type tour of the world, and visitors to the Ford pavilion on a Disneyland ride through history. And both General Electric and the State of Illinois will use lifelike figures animated by Disney. At the Illinois pavilion, a figure six-feet-four-inches tall, with a face so homely it is beautiful, constructed with the help of a life mask of Abraham Lincoln, will rise, step forward and make one of the poet-President's immortal addresses. Disney says, "I'm doing everything I know how to give the audience the sensation of

being in the crowd the day Lincoln himself made the speech."

Fair authorities estimate that it would take 12 early-morning-to-late-night days and the constitution of a bulldozer to see everything that will be offered. That does not include what New York itself is planning for the visitor. Broadway, naturally, is going all out, and there will be special shows and concerts at Lincoln Center, special exhibits at the museums and libraries and trials for the American Olympic team.

But the fair's the main show, of course. And what you'll see there is man at his proudest. One day recently, carried away by the sight growing before his eyes, Robert Moses lifted up his gravelly voice and caroled, "Come in your helicopter. Land on our Helicopter Tower. You will be more filled with wild surmise than stout Cortez and his men gazing at the Pacific, silent upon a peak in Darien."