Exterior Architecture of Office Buildings

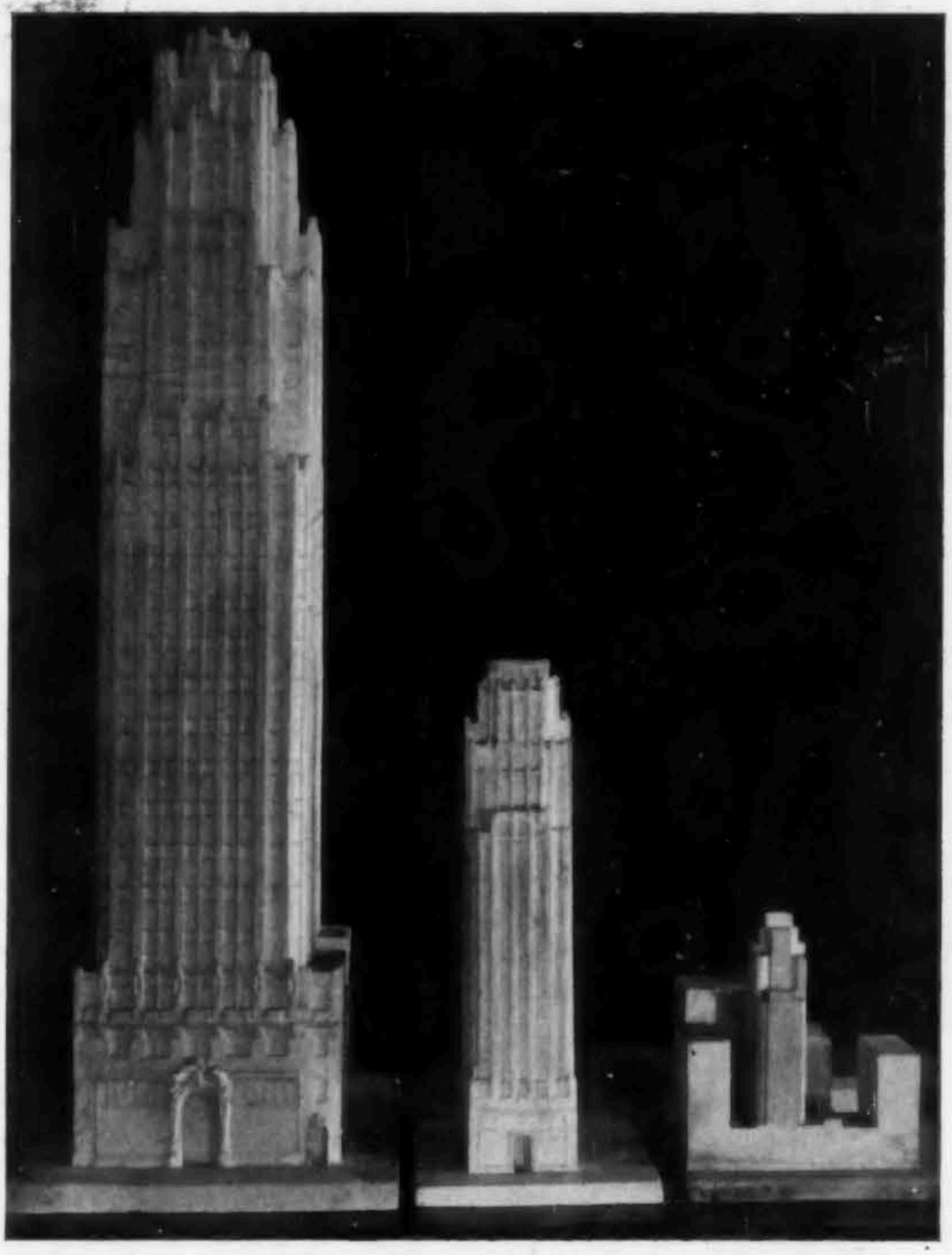
By RAYMOND M. HOOD, *Architect, New York*

WHEN asked to write an article on the exterior architecture of office buildings, I was at loss as to what to say, for the other articles in this same issue about window spacing, office arrangement, height of floors, and so forth, seem to cover all of the essential elements of exterior design. There remains only one thing further to say, and that is, take the exterior of your building, divide it into the proper number of stories, make an arrangement of windows that is dictated by the renting and lighting conditions, and then proceed to make the resulting mass attractive, by one means or another. This is the only way to go about it.

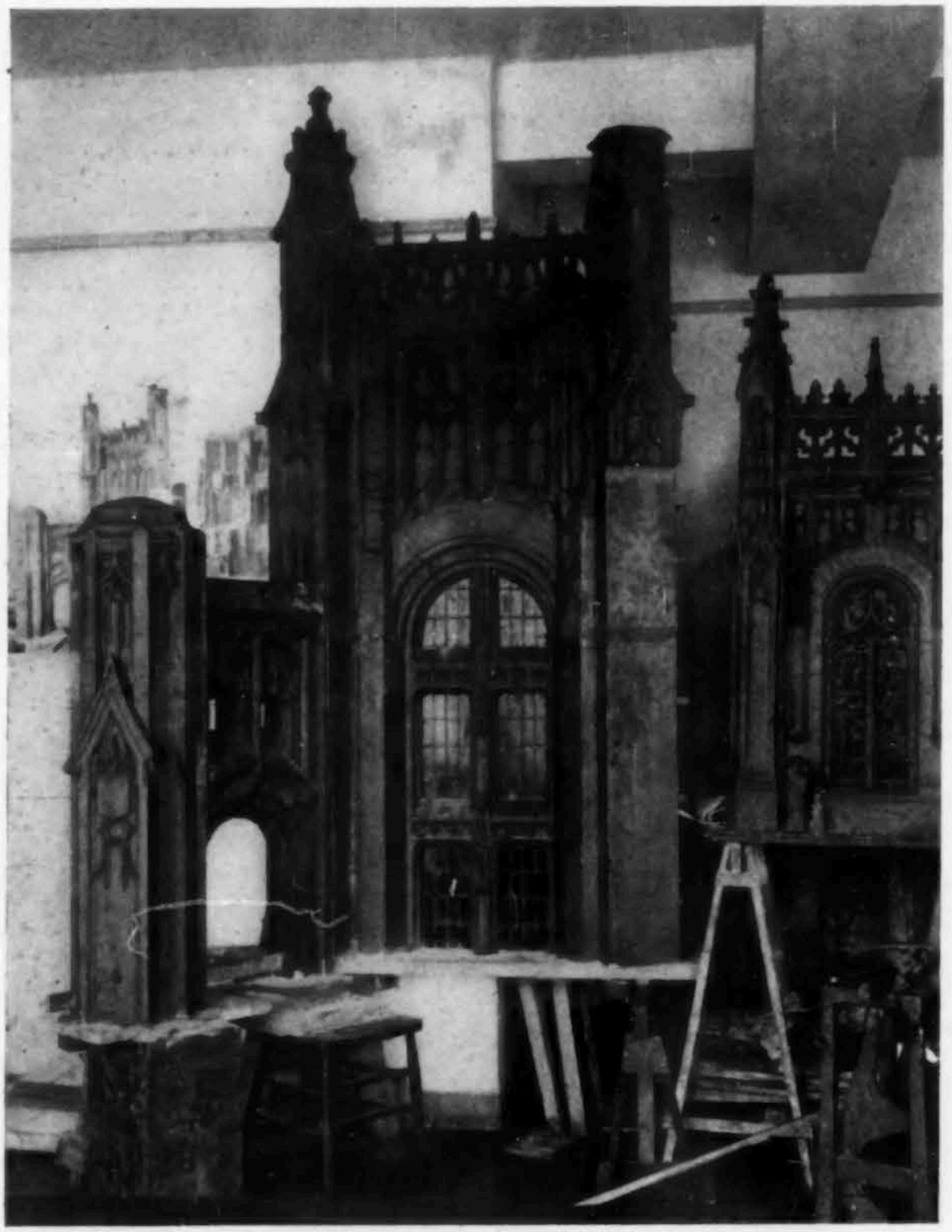
My experience, which in reality consists of designing only two skyscrapers, does not justify my expressing an opinion as to whether a building should be treated vertically, horizontally or in cubist fashion. On the contrary, it has convinced me that on these matters I should not have a definite opinion. To use these two buildings as examples, they are both in the "vertical" style or what is called "Gothic," simply because I happened to make them so. If at the time of designing them I had been under the spell of Italian campaniles or Chinese pagodas, I suppose the resulting compositions would have been "horizontal." I can see no reason in the world why there should not be as many horizontal or vertical lines in a building as a man wants, providing the horizontal lines do not waste floor height unnecessarily or the vertical lines sacrifice the window spacing unreasonably. The skyscraper problem is new; we have practically no traditions and, after all, serious architectural study is a new thing in this country; so it is fortunate that up to the present no one has formulated too strict a set of rules for our guidance. Another hundred years may, of course, change this; but if there is any one thing that gives reason to hope that a strong architecture will develop in this country, it is that we are all as free as the wind in trying out every idea that comes into our heads. Nothing but harm can result if at this stage in our development the free exercise of study and imagination should stop, and the standardizing and formulating of our meager knowledge and experience should now take its place.

It might be proper to say something precise about the different styles, but I am as much in the air about style as I am about everything else. At a dinner of architects at the University Club, Mr. Saarinen, after listening to one of our perennial discussions about style, the use of precedent, and plagiarism, in a delightful speech said that he could not understand why we discussed it so much, nor why a divergence in ideas should worry us. He spoke of the birds of the forest where each sings his own songs with a result which is not a discord but a harmony of beautiful melody.

After all, are any of our skyscrapers as slavish copies of any style as our critics like to think? Are the few ornamental details that may happen to be Henri II or Lucius the Great an essential part of the skyscraper problem? An office building is no more a slavish copy of the Chateau of Blois merely



Models Showing Development of American Radiator Co. Building
Raymond M. Hood, Architect



Models in Clay of Chicago *Tribune* Tower Details
John M. Howells and Raymond M. Hood, Associated Architects

because a little Francis I ornament is applied to it than an elephant with a yard of lace thrown over his back is a copy of a French manikin in a Paquin dress! Regardless of the amount of superficial ornament that may be copied, a first century Roman would at least be puzzled if he were placed in front of the Pennsylvania Hotel and told that it was a "Roman" building. Style and surface ornament are only the hooks on which critics hang their wares, and in reality, are they not a very minor and unessential part of the problem? I will admit that I have one aversion, which is rattling the bones of a five-story Italian palace and stretching them out to do duty for a 35-story office building. That aversion, however, is personal, and has no more value than the pet aversion of anybody else.

The Editor has suggested that I am supposed to have some particular theories about color. My convictions and theories on this phase of the subject are about as strong as my convictions on the other elements of the exterior design of office buildings. In fact, viewed from any angle, I feel that while there is a great deal for the architects who are building skyscrapers to do, there is very little for them to say. Nobody has as yet produced a building so beautiful that we can all peacefully settle down, write the rules of the game, and copy it through all eternity.

The laws controlling the exterior architecture of skyscrapers can go no further, I believe, than this: that the exterior should be big enough to cover the inside of the building, and thick enough to keep out the weather; or, to borrow a remark of another architect, the facade must be useful. The remark about the size of the exterior is not completely idiotic. Anyone who looks out over New York or any other American city, at the forest of roof tanks, elevater penthouses and bulkheads that jut up against the sky, or who keeps a weather eye out for fire escapes and other excrescences, must come to the conclusion that the practice of putting an undersized exterior on a building has become altogether too common. Every now and then, if you slip around and take a look at a building with a pretentious front, from another street, you may find the rear exposed in a rather indecent fashion. I will not discuss my contention about the weatherproof qualities of the exterior.

Fortunately, however, pretentious, false tops have gone out of vogue for office buildings, as well as the fashion of putting an ornamental front on one or two sides of a building, according as it is located in a block or in a corner. The zoning law in New York has done a great deal to revolutionize and improve the design of the exteriors of tall buildings. As the setback of the upper stories exposes more wall surface to the up-gazing public, architects have been compelled to devote more time and study to the treatment of these pavilions or towers as the case may be. The tendency of today is to treat the entire building as though it were a detached, free-standing structure, introducing a new spirit of truth and consistency in external structural expression, which is now evidenced in every successful building.

EDITOR'S NOTE

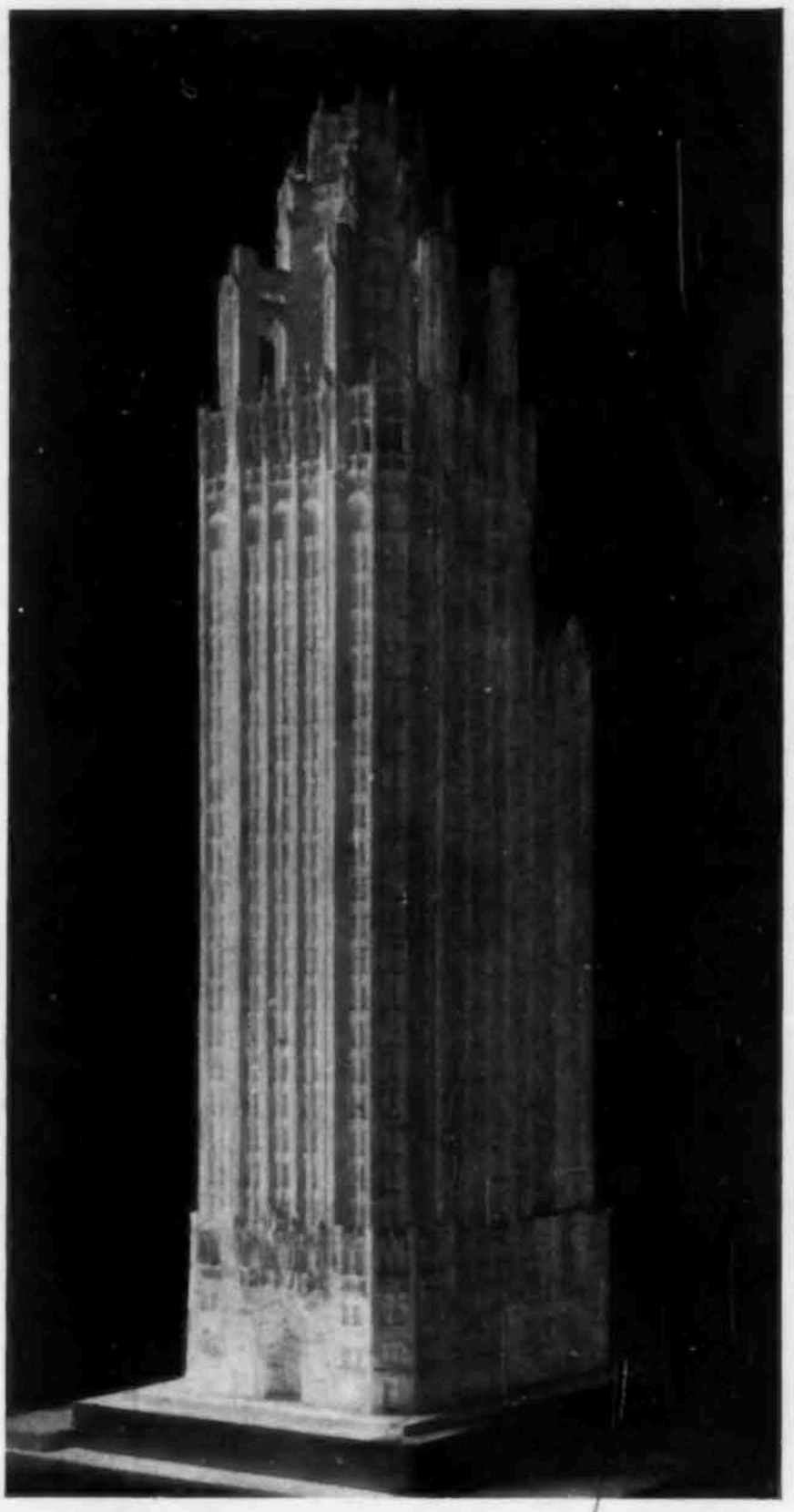
IN the brevity of his remarks on the Architecture of Office Buildings, Mr. Hood has apparently been influenced by his belief "that while there is a great deal for the architects who are building skyscrapers to do, there is very little for them to say." It is due to this modesty that the Editor feels justified in adding a brief note on the manner in which Mr. Hood studies the problem of office building architecture. He studies his problem in the round rather than in the flat; in three dimensions rather than in two. In other words, given the number of stories and the floor area required to produce an adequate return on the investment and the amount of open space required by law, small scale plaster models of the building are made. From the first model, which shows only the mass of the building and its relation to surrounding structures, the owners can obtain an adequate idea of the amount of light and air obtainable on all four sides of the building. This is particularly important in the case of structures located in a block rather than on a corner, such as the new American Radiator Co. Building, where an unusually successful plan has been evolved by treating the building as a free-standing square tower with all of the elevators, stairways, halls and toilets grouped at the center of one side of the building, leaving the other three sides open to the light and air. By this plan the entire rentable floor area is adequately lighted, and the semi-dark center, found in many office buildings, is completely eliminated.

From the small scale model, showing the mass of the building with blank wall surfaces, setbacks and projections, a larger scale model is evolved which carries the design into the field of exterior architectural expression. The general lines of the building are worked out in greater detail, and the windows and the floor levels are indicated, as well as the general decorative treatment. Finally a third model at a still larger scale is made, on which is shown quite accurately the architectural ornamentation. No line drawings or even colored perspectives can give the owners quite as definite a mental and visual impression of what the completed building will look like as does a carefully and accurately made scale model.

Mr. Hood carries this elimination of drawn elevations and details still further. Skilled modelers are employed who take from the scale model the suggested architectural detail and develop it at a large scale in modeling clay, from which the play of light and shade, relative projections and contours may be carefully studied. When these studied models are satisfactory to the architect, three-quarter and full-sized details are prepared from them by the draftsmen. In this way vigor and vitality are given to the detail, rarely attained by the old method of tracing paper study. It is said that Michaelangelo, in all his architectural work, first modeled the details from which his builders and stonecutters directly executed the work.

Illustrations of the models of Mr. Hood's two skyscrapers show that he has a deep appreciation of the importance of strongly marked vertical lines, emphasizing and indicating the steel frame which the exterior architecture protects and encloses. The termination of these vertical lines or piers in ornamental buttresses and finials is appropriately and successfully handled. In each design the lower stories form a projecting screen, back of which rises the towering bulk of the building. This treatment permits the introduction of large show windows on the sidewalk level, without detracting from the apparent structural strength of the base of the building. The use of two windows to a bay, rather than one or three, has been proved to be more practical for later interior arrangement as well as to be more effective in the exterior dividing of the facade. Attention should also be called to the pleasing treatment of the corners of the *Tribune* Tower and the American Radiator Co. Buildings, where quarter-hexagons fill up the angles formed by the center bays of each facade.

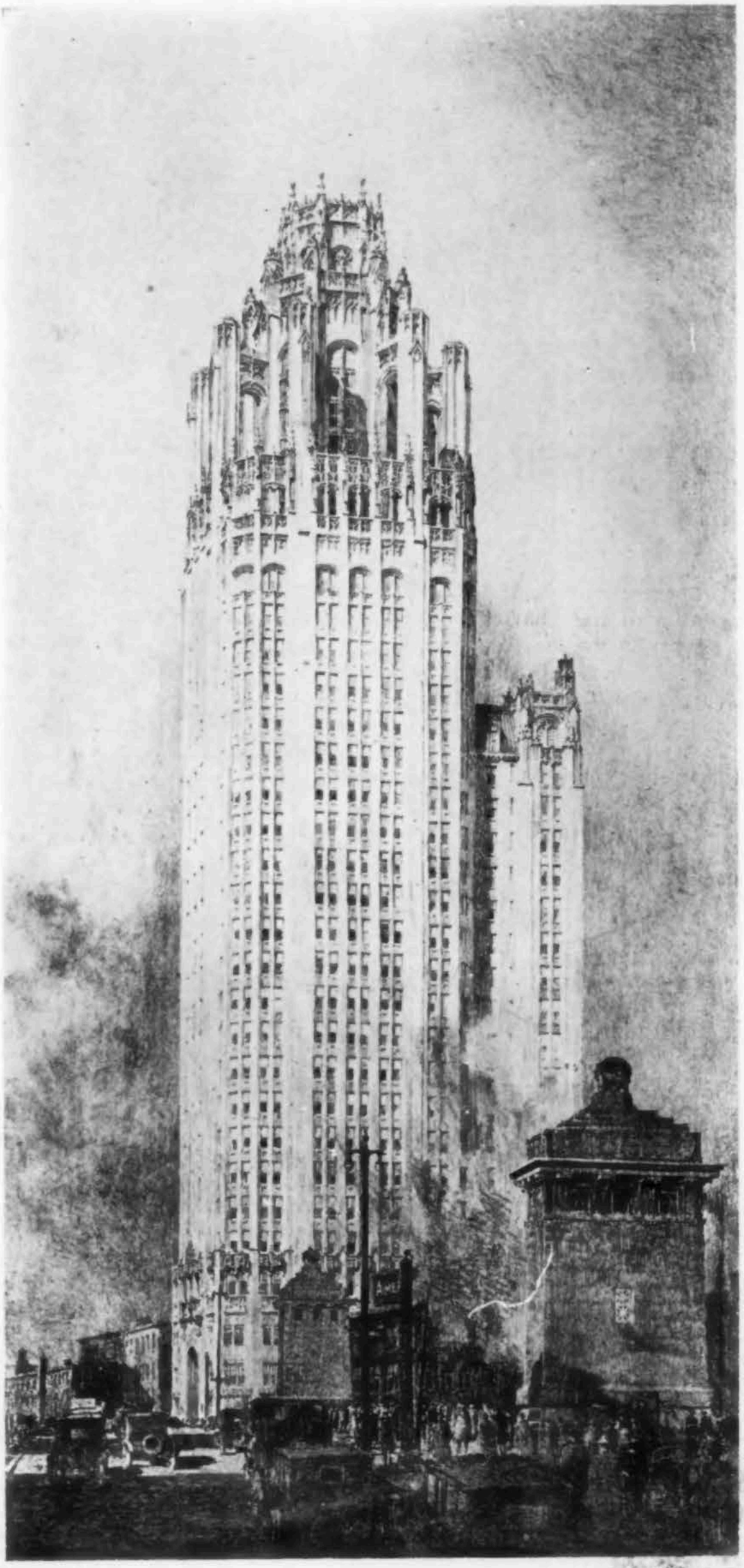
Although Mr. Hood may modestly refrain from expressing any definite opinion on the architecture of office structures, his work speaks for itself, showing as it does a grasp and understanding of the practical as well as architectural requirements of office building design and exterior structural expression.



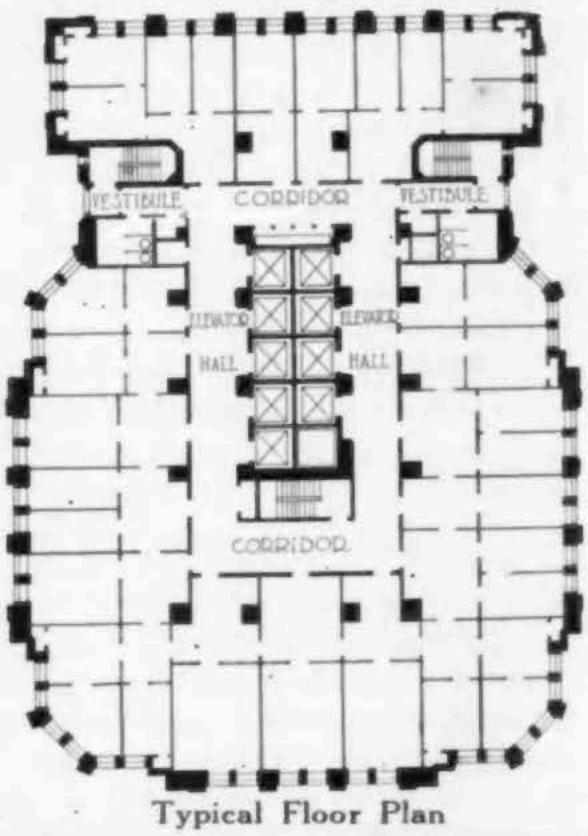
Model of The Chicago *Tribune* Tower, Chicago
John M. Howells and Raymond M. Hood, Associated Architects

The *Tribune* Tower Building, Chicago

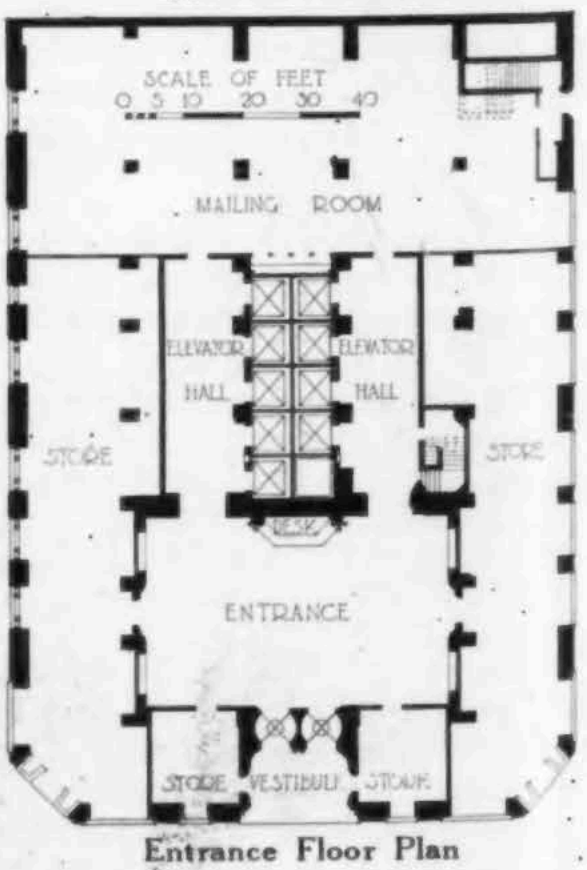
JOHN M. HOWELLS, RAYMOND M. HOOD, Associated Architects



AWARDED, after one of the most extensive competitions ever held, to John Mead Howells and Raymond M. Hood, Associated Architects of New York, the Tribune Tower Building is now in course of construction. Granite and limestone are being used to cover the steel frame construction. The floors are formed by concrete slabs. Steam water tube boilers will supply the heat. Electricity for power and lighting will be supplied by a service company. The electric elevators will be finished in steel, enamel painted. The windows will be metal frame and sash.



Typical Floor Plan



Entrance Floor Plan