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# THE NATIONAL BROADCASTING STUDIOS NEW YORK

## RAYMOND HOOD, GODLEY AND FOUILHOUX, ARCHITECTS

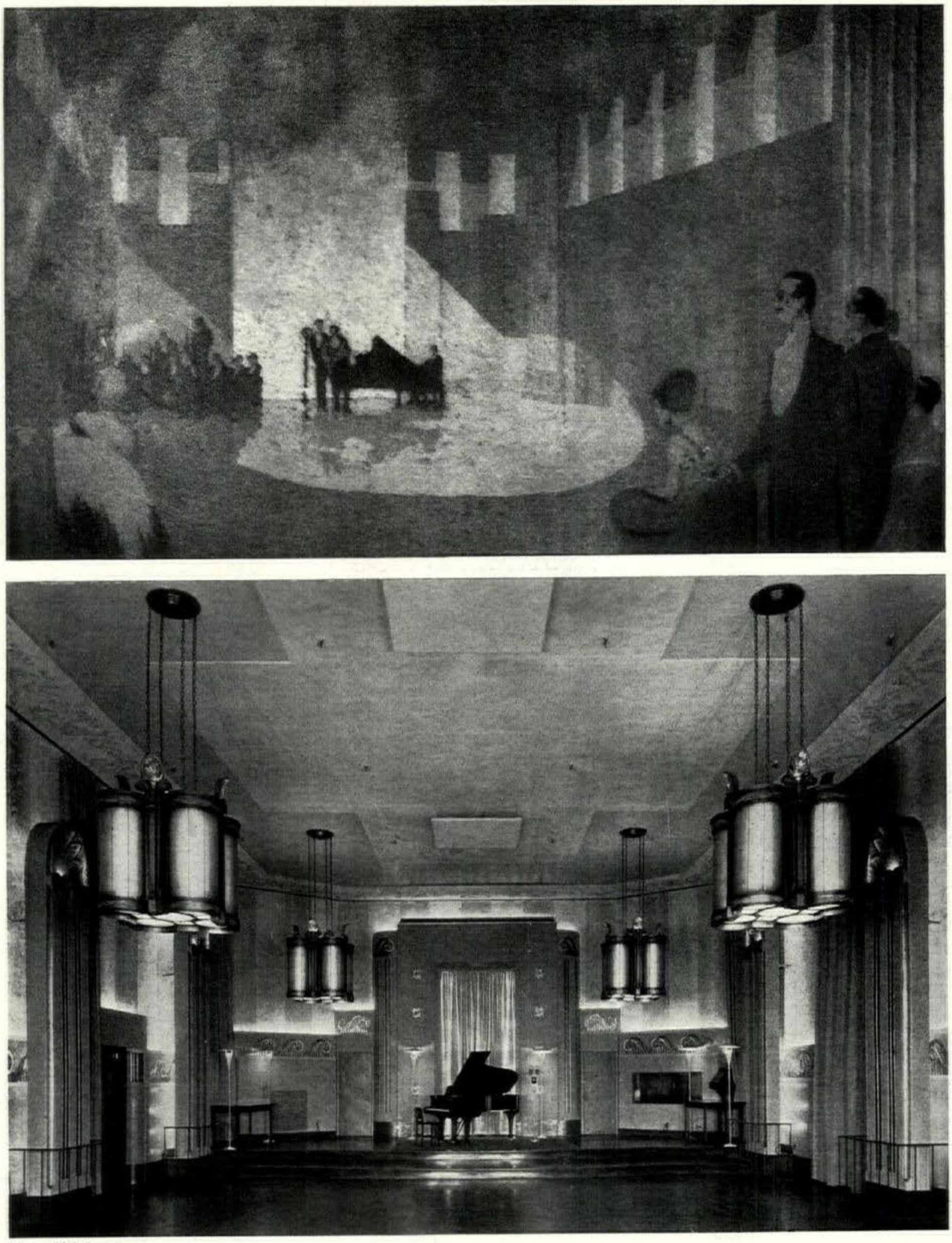
BY RAYMOND HOOD

THE KEY for the new quarters of the National Broadcasting Company was set in a conversation that I had with the President of the Company, Mr. Aylesworth, at the commencement of the job. It was his idea that the interiors should be of a sort to give a lift to the artist who performs, to the public that is curious to see from time to time the workings of its new toy, to the people who work there, and last and most important, to the directors and backers of the project.

It must be remembered that eighteen months ago, broadcasting on a national scale was an entirely new idea in business. Radio without interesting programmes on the air would soon go the way of the bicycle. Broadcasting could not be left to develop itself, and the National Broadcasting Company had, therefore, to be formed and backed by the companies that produced radios. Its costs were tremendous. There was at the time practically no direct revenue and no one knew whether its expenses could be absorbed in the cost of the radio set or how they should be allocated. Among those backing the project, there were some even who felt that there might be no solution to this problem and that broadcasting must eventually become a child of circumstance, depending on the initiative of the occasional concern who could find a reason or a profit in promoting it. So, Mr. Aylesworth hoped that his new quarters in their impression alone might be one of the factors to keep up and stimulate the interest of the powers behind.

The problem, therefore, was as modern as a problem could be. It was built around the latest marvel of our electrical age and on a foundation in which faith and American business optimism had to play a large part. Further, the space they were to occupy was leased and so rapid and changing had been the development of the organization that it was not known how long their new quarters would be adequate. One of the watch-words, therefore, was economy.

About the technical side there could be no discussion. We were to work with their engineers to make the studios as soundproof and as acoustically perfect as possible.



*Photo, Nyholm*

MAIN STUDIO

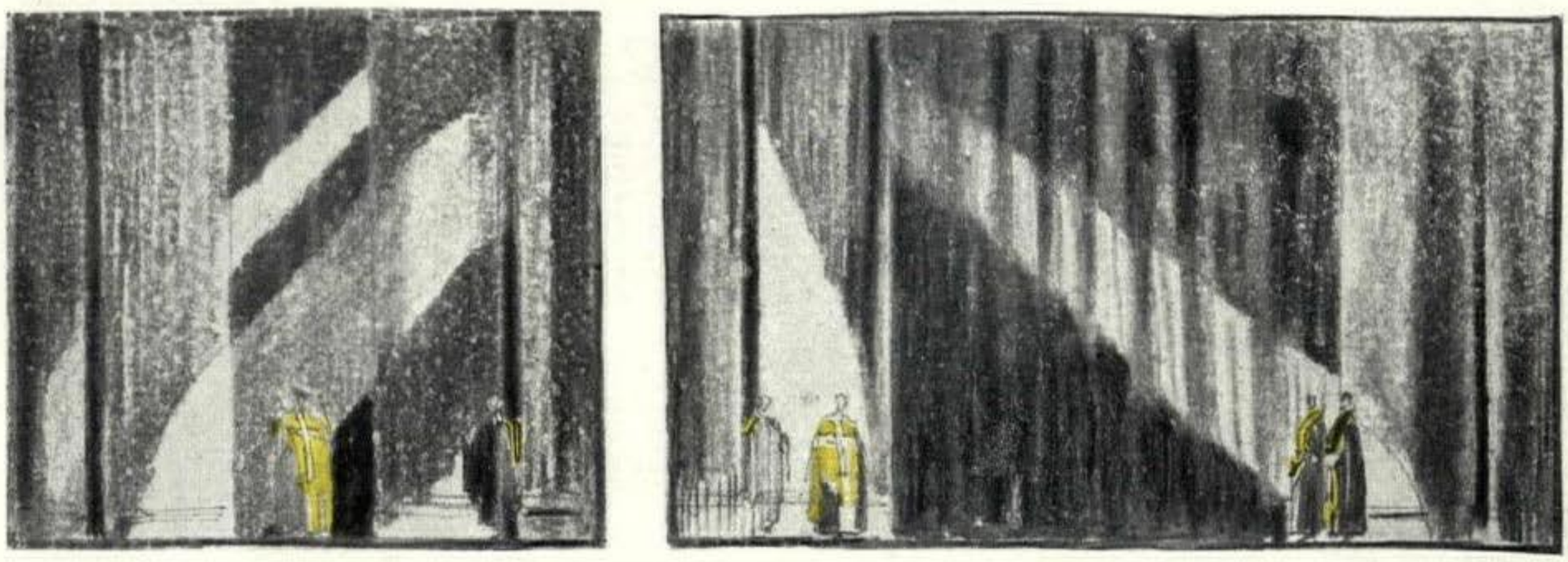
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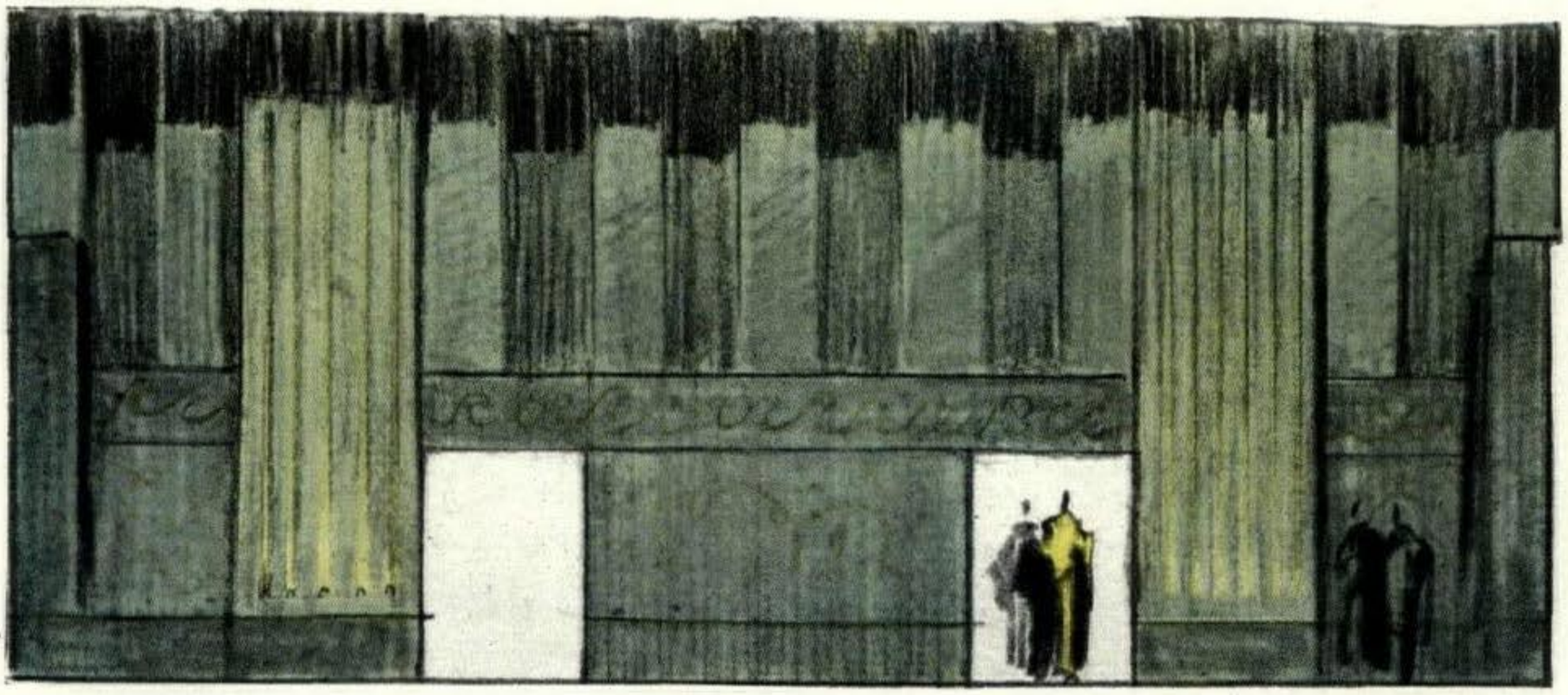
The success of radio depends on the quality of the broadcasting. On this part of the work no money could be spared. On the aesthetic side, obviously no money could be wasted and still the effect had to be stimulating.

"What style shall we make it?" asked Mr. Aylesworth like a dutiful, well-behaved client. "Pick out the style that is the best setting for broadcasting yourself," I suggested. "It might be made Francis I . . . or Louis XVI . . . Southern Colonial . . . Queen Anne . . . Feudal Gothic . . . or Early Christian."

I went through the whole list of styles in orthodox fashion, Mr. Aylesworth agreed that none of them seemed particularly appropriate. All that remained was to do the job without the aid of predigested ideas, as we are forced to do in so many of our vexatious modern problems,—to do it in the spirit of radio itself. The financial limitations of the problem fortunately were a help in this as we were bound to work with plain walls, color and simple paint decorations to get a maximum effect at the least expense.



PRELIMINARY STUDY FOR ONE OF THE MINOR STUDIOS



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The broadcasting studios themselves were treated almost wholly with reference to the impression they would make on the performer. A person who broadcasts has the

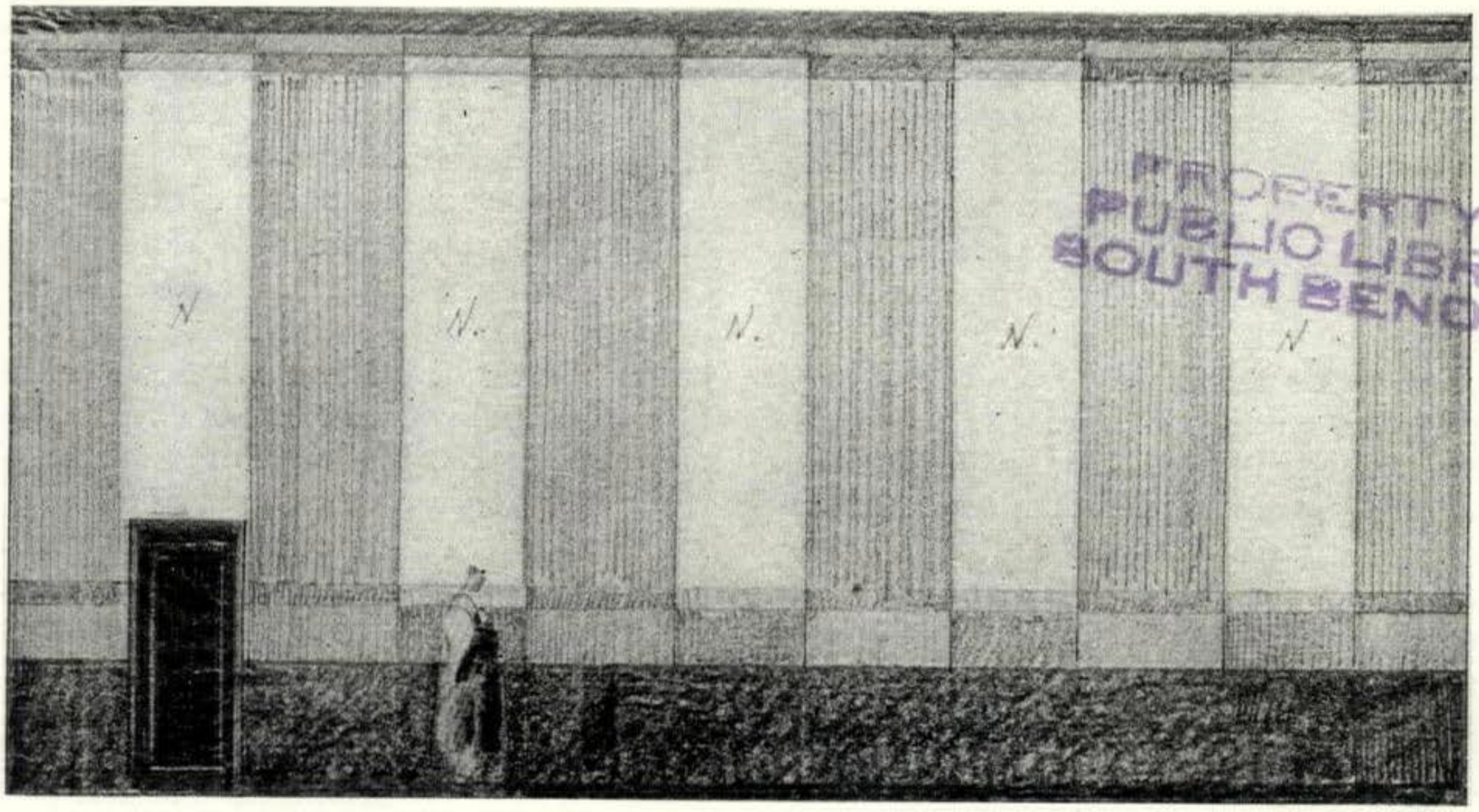


*Photo, Nyholm*

AN INTERMEDIATE STUDIO

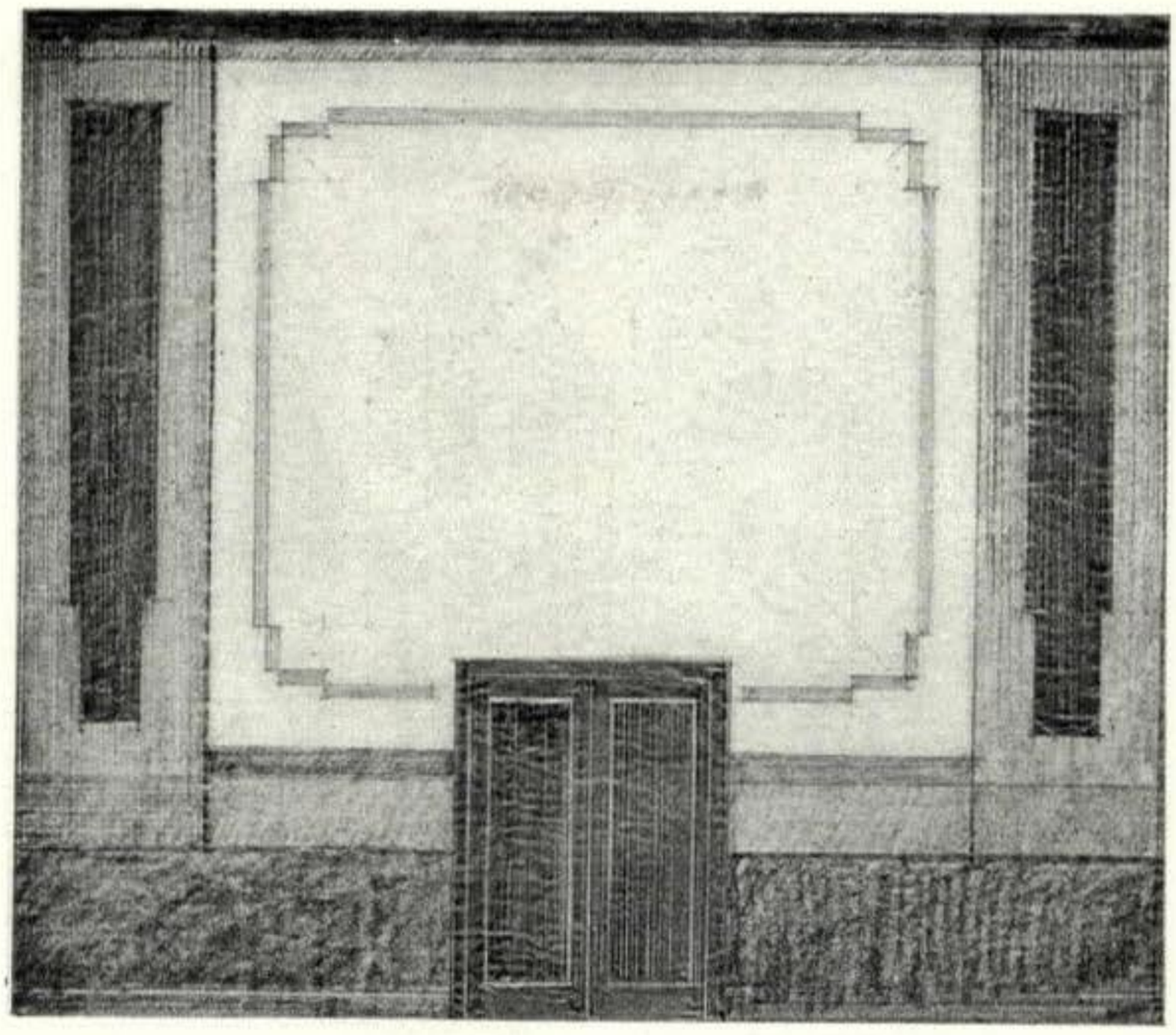
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PRELIMINARY DRAWING FOR STUDIO "A"
*(See plan on page 30)*



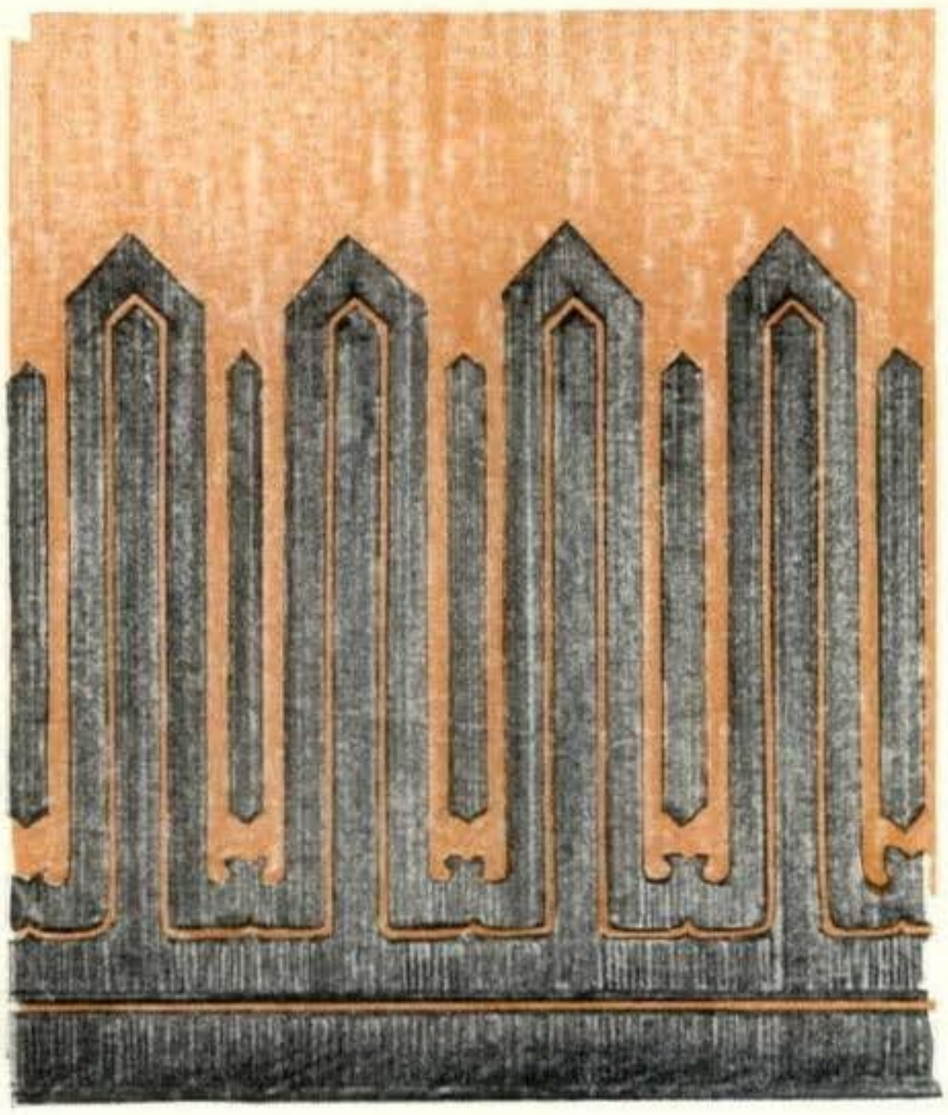
PRELIMINARY DRAWING FOR STUDIO "C"
THE NATIONAL BROADCASTING STUDIOS, NEW YORK
*(See plan on page 30)*

same troubles as has the moving picture actor. He cannot see or feel his audience. The singer in a concert or an opera is keyed up to a high pitch by the stimulation of his surroundings, the great orchestra playing in front of them, the sea of faces across the footlights, the applause and an occasional word of encouragement from the wings. The singer who broadcasts has nothing but a glittering, sinister-looking little microphone in front of him. When he arouses himself to a pitch of enthusiasm, he must do it alone, without a sound of applause. Such a seasoned artist, for example, as Cécile Sorel of the Comédie Française, on the occasion of her first time on the air, was so overcome by the atmosphere, or rather the lack of it, that she could not talk and had to be excused. In the movie industry this has long been recognized and music has been used to interest and stimulate the actor to do his best before the camera. In the radio studio there can be no such help for the person who talks or sings alone as every sound in the room goes out over the air. So to stimulate the performer, to fill, as

Ralph Walker would say, the idle corners of his mind, we resorted to light. With the help of Dr. Luckiesh of the Department of Research of the General Electric Company, we developed an architectural effect that depended almost entirely on changing lights. Sheets of light, changing in tone and color, stream up the wall from behind the wainscot. Other lights glow from behind great pilasters on the sides of the room. The fixtures themselves, gigantic for lighting fixtures, have inside of each one an almost complete stage electrical equipment. They can carry the room with lights from the top reflecting back from the ceiling or with direct lights diffused from the bottom. At the stage end, a glowing screen was ingeniously devised that has almost the qualities of a color organ. Practically, we adapted all of the tricks of stage lighting to the architecure of a room.

We may have failed in our effort to produce an effect that would fill the idle corners of the performers' minds, but at least the effect has interested the idle corners of idle minds. Necessarily, the whole problem from a psychological as well as a decorative point of view has been more or less speculative. It has been pioneering in a new field, so to speak. Fortunately, Mr. Aylesworth and his associates are tolerant and if the result is not as satisfying as it might have been, they find in it, at least, the value of an interesting experiment.

*(For further illustrations see pages 25-37)*



DESIGN FOR CURTAIN
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