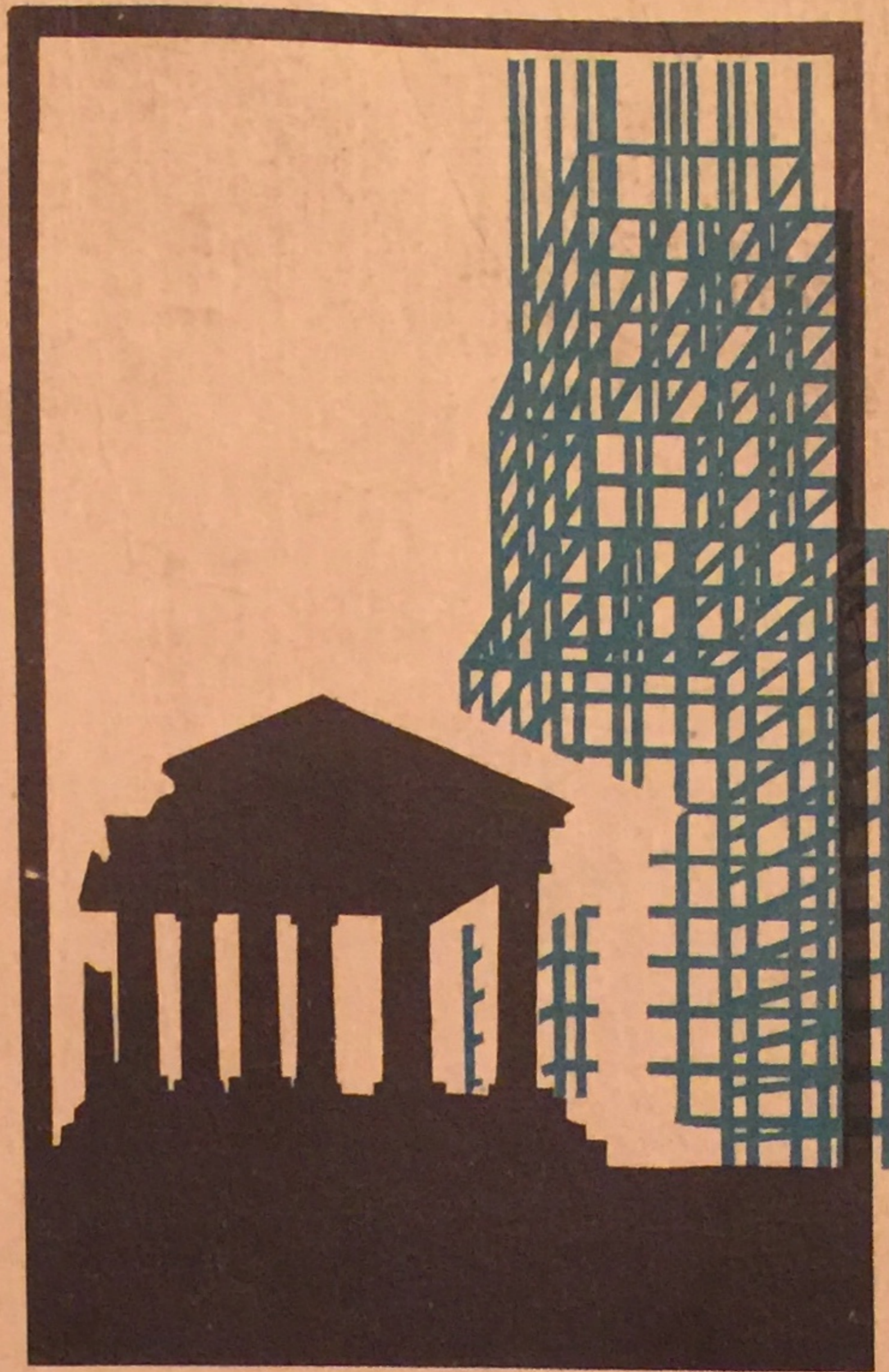


Samuel Gould

THE ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

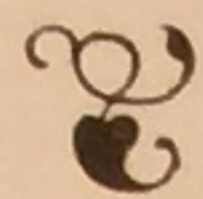


AUGUST
1929

BERN
HARD

THE ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

AN ILLUSTRATED MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF
ARCHITECTURE & THE ALLIED
ARTS & CRAFTS



VOLUME 66

AUGUST 1929

NUMBER 2

CENTRAL PARK CASINO

JOSEPH URBAN, ARCHITECT

PARK restaurants in the United States are something of a rarity. Road houses, night clubs, hotel dining rooms, "hot dog" and soda stands are more national expressions of eating out. The park restaurant is for most of us a European acquaintance. A few unimaginative attempts serve chiefly to emphasize the lack.

The old Casino in Central Park was such an essay. In make-up it was a compromise between a road house and a sort of Coney Island Winter Garden. The accommodations comprised two small dining rooms, a glassed-in conservatory covered with paint and a large, dark interior room, the middle of which was occupied by a steep stair to the basement. Outside, a tiled terrace covered with a low awning in summer provided out-of-door eating space. There was no resemblance to the outdoor restaurant of Europe similarly located, but in a rough and ready fashion it furnished some of the elements of an inn and something of the air of an amusement park. In the nineties, when New York was small and Central Park something of a drive, the Casino enjoyed a polite popularity.

The alterations by Joseph Urban place the Casino in the hotel class. Something of the old inn character was preserved with one

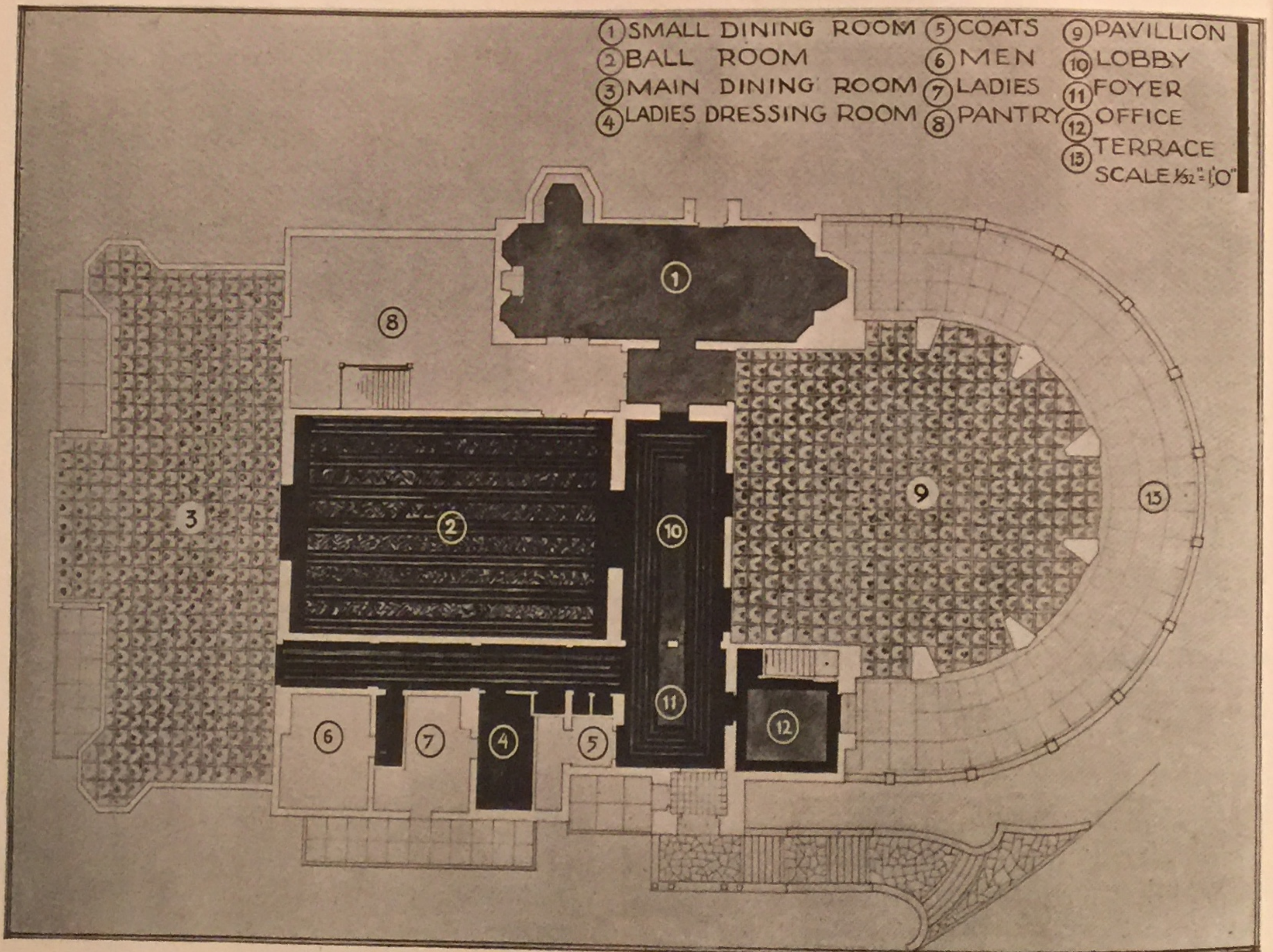
of the small dining rooms, at present the least used feature of the layout. The two most popular rooms are those where tables are set about the dance floor and the part of the main dining room where the ballroom floor is in view. Similarly, the first seats taken on the terrace are those where persons arriving can be seen. Seclusion can hardly be set at a premium at present, whatever its value to the Victorian diner.

The old building could have accommodated about three hundred and fifty persons shut off from one another in small and large groups; the altered layout provides for four hundred and sixty-eight. On the opening night this layout gave place to one for six hundred; tables for two were practically without demand and larger parties had to be accommodated. Such continues to be the case. Parties of six are a fair average. The original plan seated 114 persons in the pavilion, 96 on the terrace, 128 in the main dining room, 96 in the ballroom and 24 in the small dining room, at round tables 30 inches for two persons and 33 inches in diameter for four, accommodations which can be stretched to four and six covers. Twelve square tables in the main dining room were provided to be used separately, or combined as banquet tables.

The plan provides a clear traffic scheme emphasized by the carpet designs. Although it is in units based on a 27-inch width throughout, open in arrangement as the old building permits, its use and the comments of patrons suggest that still greater openness of arrangement would be practical. One of the excellences of the arrangement for social usage is the sense of pageantry and leisurely movement suggested in the traffic routing. A single, sweeping stair with an easy rise and many landings gives access through a porch and vestibule to the square foyer which distributes guests to the coat rooms, dressing rooms and main dining room, office and the lobby. The lobby in floor plan is a continuation of the foyer but mounts higher in volume. It gives access through two doors, six feet wide, to the pavilion and through a ten-foot folding door to the ballroom. At the other end of the ballroom a ten-foot door throws the main

dining room and ballroom together. The small dining room is entered directly from outside or through a small door and passage at the end of the lobby. This passage connects the pantry service with the pavilion. The terrace and pavilion in summer work as one room together through the use of seven ten-foot openings at the curved end. The glass doors fold back against the reveal of the walls and the pavilion becomes a room virtually out of doors. On the terrace the cantilevered awning gives shade but, instead of interposing supports between the people and the prospect, enframes the view in one sweeping, inclusive line. The bigness in effect of this device together with the unobstructed spaces of most of the rooms gives a grandeur to the scheme often lacking in arrangements of greater actual dimension.

The domed ceiling of the pavilion contributes to the airiness of this room, main-



tained by the delicacy of its lighting and decoration. The unobstructed space was attained through the use of *Lamella* construction, an invention used first for hangars and somewhat familiar at present in garage work. In Europe it has been developed also as a steel structure. Steel *Lamella* is not yet available in this country. The decorative qualities of this method of construction are shown in the room by Urban. Foreign photographs also show its decorative possibilities though the apsidal form is less usual. In order to preserve the unit scale of the construction Urban covered the under size intersections in the apse with plywood and formed a great six-pointed half star of streaming floral decoration. The dome itself covers the space like a tent; there is no air chamber, yet the room remains the coolest in the building owing to the openness of the door and window plan.

Acoustically the Pavilion is a sensation. When the orchestra placed in the central bay under the half dome plays, the music has a richness of tone seldom heard. There are no echoing surfaces owing to the broken ceiling and the wood construction seems to vibrate like a cello.

The ballroom, originally the interior space with the central stair already described, has a ceiling of black glass squares hung on a wooden framework from the old ceiling. By leaving the ceiling undefined in

this way height is given the room and the festive quality of the crystal chandeliers and the people below is doubled by reflections.

Opposed to the pavilion in tonal quality is the effect of the glass ceiling on the acoustics. Here the music has a sharp brilliance lacking, however, any metallic quality.

Such power is given the tone that it penetrates the whole building when not muffled by the presence of many people.

The main dining room occupies the former winter garden designed originally as a conservatory. Heat through the glass was always a drawback which had been formerly somewhat overcome by painting the roof. Urban dropped the ceiling at the sides and filled the central dome with a mural of purple and blue butterflies and flowers. The walls and low parts of the

ceiling were covered with silver leaf to provide a lively background for the magenta-stenciled decoration.

Lighting is for the most part handled in a flood-light system, either through glazed diffusing transoms, as in the lobby and main dining room, or in enameled metal diffusing fixtures, as in the small dining room and pavilion. Opal glass plates conceal the source and soften the light in the foyer and entrance vestibule. Down the corridor an extremely effective enameled metal fixture is used which gives a diffused illumination



Photo. Sigurd Fischer

CASINO IN CENTRAL PARK
JOSEPH URBAN, ARCHITECT



Photo. Sigurd Fischer

ALCOVE OFF SMALL DINING ROOM
CENTRAL PARK CASINO
JOSEPH URBAN, ARCHITECT

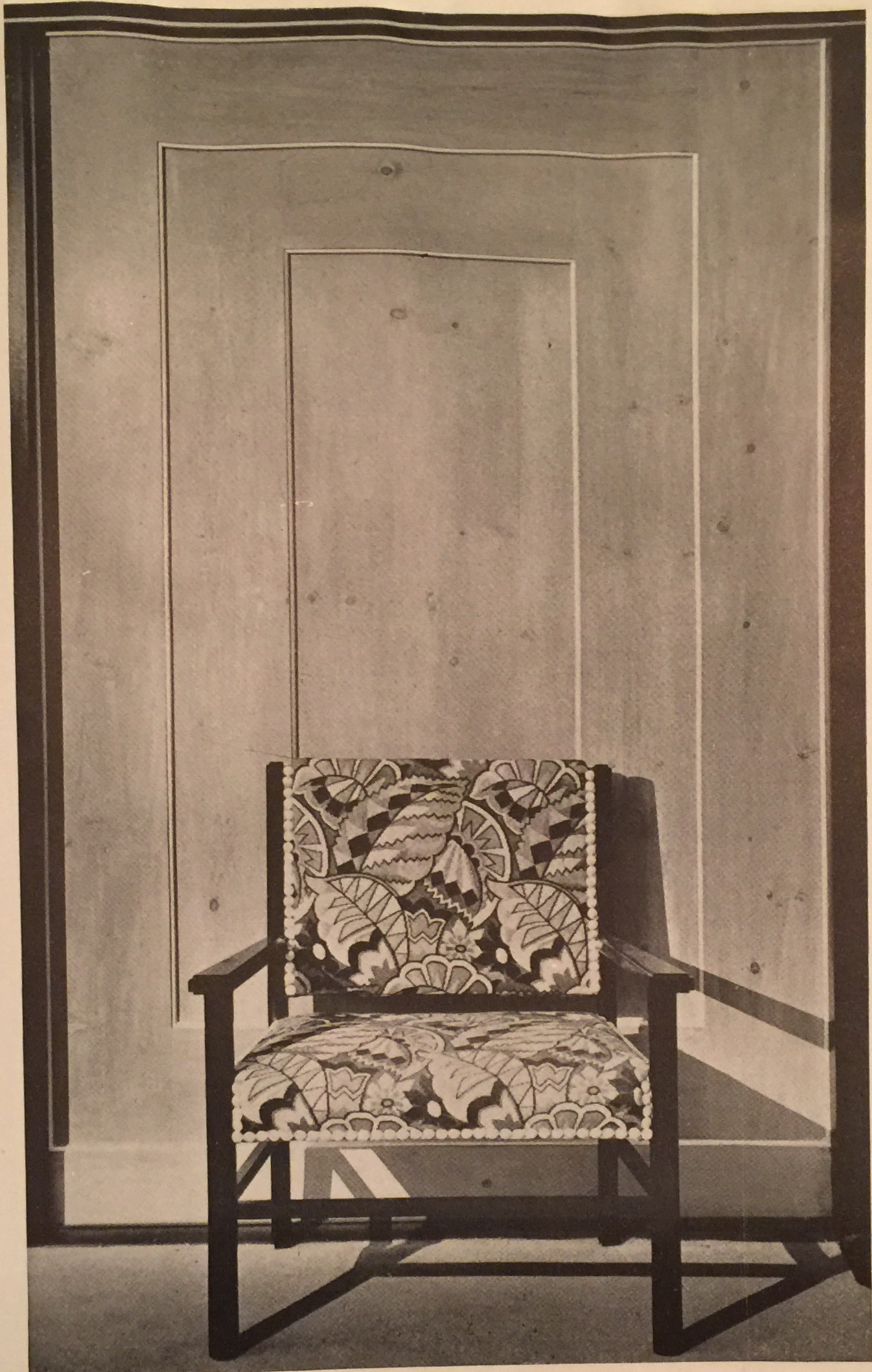


Photo. Sigurd Fischer

DETAIL, SMALL DINING ROOM
CENTRAL PARK CASINO
JOSEPH URBAN, ARCHITECT

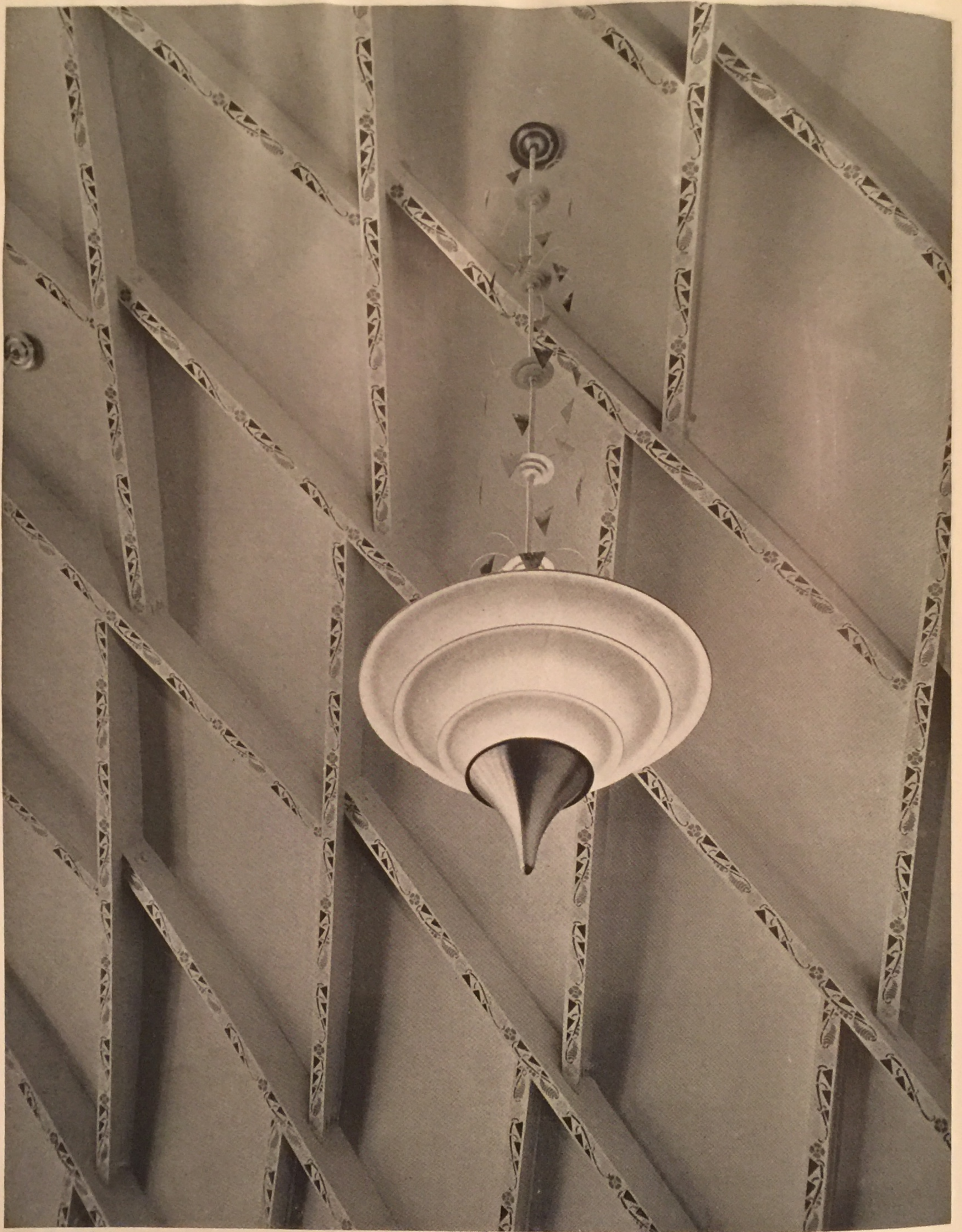


Photo. Sigurd Fischer

CEILING DETAIL, PAVILION
CENTRAL PARK CASINO
JOSEPH URBAN, ARCHITECT

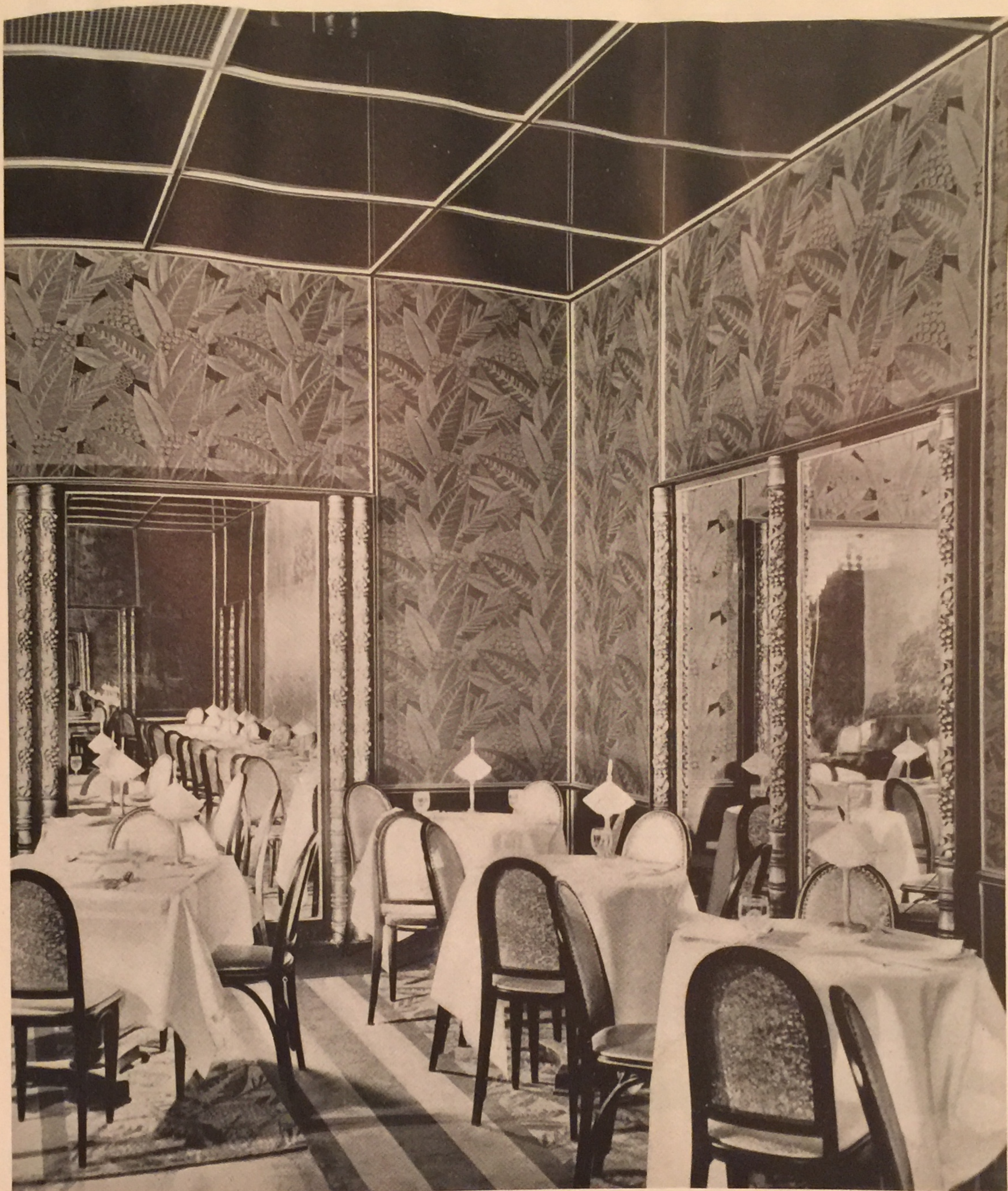


Photo. Sigurd Fischer

DETAIL, BALLROOM
CENTRAL PARK CASINO
JOSEPH URBAN, ARCHITECT



Photo. Sigurd Fischer

BALLROOM
CENTRAL PARK CASINO
JOSEPH URBAN, ARCHITECT



Photo. Sigurd Fischer

CEILING, BALLROOM
CENTRAL PARK CASINO
JOSEPH URBAN, ARCHITECT



Photo. Sigurd Fischer

CORNER OF PAVILION
CENTRAL PARK CASINO
JOSEPH URBAN, ARCHITECT

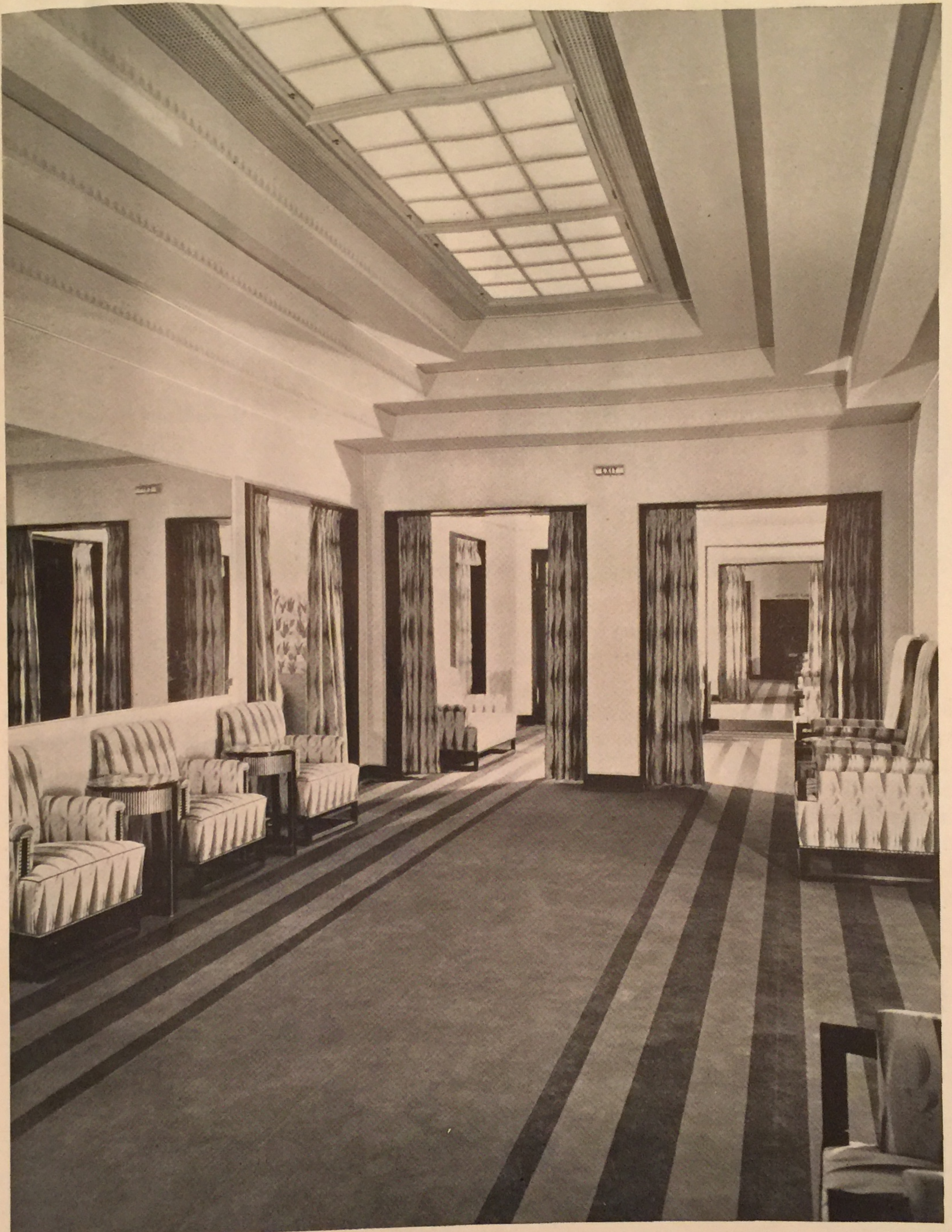


Photo. Sigurd Fischer

INNER LOBBY
CENTRAL PARK CASINO
JOSEPH URBAN, ARCHITECT



Photo. Sigurd Fischer

CORRIDOR
CENTRAL PARK CASINO
JOSEPH URBAN, ARCHITECT



Photo. Sigurd Fischer

LADIES' DRESSING ROOM
CENTRAL PARK CASINO
JOSEPH URBAN, ARCHITECT

leading to the main dining room. Brilliance was desired for the ballroom so crystal covered the shining metal reflectors and clear bulbs. A ring of unshaded candle lights finishes the fixture at the top and describes a circular constellation in the black glass above. All lighting fixtures, furniture and carpets were specially made.

The cretonnes of the pavilion were specially blocked in Urban's scenic studio. Precedent for the architect's universality, established in the Metropolitan Museum Exhibition, is continued in the Central Park Casino. New York now possesses a restaurant which, for versatility of design in varied media, can be compared with European achievements.

