HUNTINGTON HARTFORD: A MOST UNUSUAL CLIENT

This month, George Huntington Hartford II will once again find himself in the limelight. His new museum, the Gallery of Modern Art (before whose polka-dot portholes he proudly stands in the photo at right), will open March 16 on Manhattan's Columbus Circle. Not long after, his first book, *Art and Armageddon*, will appear on the bookstands. Inspired by these events, television will bring him into millions of homes, where his casual good looks, his earnest manner, and his plea for more simplicity and wholesomeness in the arts should be well received.

Publicity, of course, is nothing new to Huntington Hartford; he has been described variously and often in print. To feature writers, he is a "melancholic man," spending his time by spending his money. To society reporters, he is the thrice-married, 52-year-old A & P heir. To art critics, he is a "dilettante" best known for his dislike of Picasso, de Kooning, and abstract art in general. Whatever merit these epithets may contain, they ignore one determinant of Huntington Hartford's life: the enthusiastic, almost boyish devotion to the arts that has made him one of the last big individual patrons in the U.S. today.

Amply backed by a fortune estimated at anywhere from $70 million to $500 million, Hartford has indulged in an impressive list of building projects. Though he plans and builds mainly to house his own ideas, he has gotten more than one monument in the process. "The more Hunt builds," says ex-wife Marjorie Steele, "the more he wants to build."

Projects all over

To date, Hartford has built an artists' colony, a theater, a museum, a computerized garage, a small office building, and a plush Bahamian resort. He has also planned a vast hotel-country club for Hollywood, a Manhattan restaurant, a hotel, and other structures either still in project form or abandoned for various reasons. He has worked with architects from Frank Lloyd Wright to Edward Durell Stone, and with engineers, students, and decorators from coast to coast.

Hartford's building career began in 1945 when he met Frank Lloyd Wright's son, Lloyd Wright. Hartford had just terminated what some future biographer might call his "playboy period," and was turning his attention and his fortune to more lasting things.

His first major project was an ambitious scheme for a country club and resort in a canyon close to Hollywood. For the architect, he chose Lloyd Wright. It was such a big job that Wright brought in his father, and one of FLLW's most spectacular projects came out of this collaboration. The whole canyon was to be decked out with sport facilities, a cottage center, a domed house for Hartford himself, as well as a clubhouse resembling several saucers cantilevered from a central concrete shaft. FLLW's vision exceeded even Hartford's; the project was never built. "It was terribly expensive," recalls Hartford, "and very cold up on the hill."

Meanwhile, Hartford had Lloyd Wright design some actual buildings for him: a private chalet, and a group of spacious studio-homes for The Huntington Hartford Foundation at Pacific Palisades, 20 minutes from downtown Los Angeles.

The Foundation marked Hartford's first important venture as a patron of the arts. Set up in 1948, its purpose was to "stimulate creativity in the arts through providing painters, writers, and composers with an opportunity to concentrate upon their work under ideal conditions." Hartford spent some $600,000 setting up these "ideal conditions," in the form of 17 studio-cottages, some remodeled buildings, and a huge swimming pool—all spread over 154 acres in Rustic Canyon.

While still in Hollywood, which he increasingly regarded as a cultural wasteland, Hartford decided to give the community a repertory theater. He was determined, he says, "to shove culture down [Hollywood's] throats."

The $1 million Huntington Hartford Theater, however, was more successful as a building than

as a cultural stimulus. (He and designer Helen Conway remodeled the old Lux Radio Theater and the result has been praised as "one of the best theaters in the U.S.") His plan was to use local talent in the production of classic plays and new dramas. But as time went on, the management discovered that if the theater were to survive, it would have to put on road shows of Broadway hits.

A museum in New York

Eventually, Hartford left the West Coast to come to New York. By this time, he had developed a keen interest in—and even firmer ideas about—painting. And out of these came the scheme for the Gallery of Modern Art.

He purchased the tiny (4,600 [illegible] Circle in 1956 for $1.5 million. Then he began shopping for an architect. For a while the front-running candidate was Hanford Yang, a Chinese-born architectural student at M.I.T. Yang devised an 11-story scheme of interlocking concrete cylinders sheathed in opaque plastic. Because Yang was not registered as an architect in New York, Hartford asked Edward Durell Stone to take the job, with Yang kept on for a short while as "Project Manager."

Stone became fascinated with what had to be, because of the plot size, a "vertical museum." Architect and client worked closely to achieve the design they wanted, spending ten days on refining the model alone. They agreed on a final scheme that would look like an oversized Venetian palazzo (photo, right).

This, however, was just the beginning. Hartford had trouble evicting the tenant of the old building on the site. Construction lagged behind schedule, partly because of the museum's difficult shape (a trapezoidal plan and a curving façade), partly because of the smallness of the site (few workers could be on the job at the same time and large deliveries of materials were impossible). All the while, the cost of the building rose. It is now estimated at close to double the $3.5 million budgeted in 1958.

For his pains and money, however, Hartford got his most elegant monument to date. Though he left the construction problems to the contractors, he took great interest in design details. "He objected to 'those bronze things on the walls,'" recalls Construction Chief Gilbert Parker, "things like thermostats and fire alarms." Hartford also suggested to Stone such embellishments as keeping the "porthole" discs cut from the white marble façade and incorporating them in the floor of the lobby, and having the elevators open, for variety's sake, directly into the galleries on alternate floors.

Stone's design for the Gallery is an ingenious one that makes the most of the limited space. [illegible] for changing exhibits and an intermediate level to house a 23-foot-high Aeolian Skinner organ. The fourth and fifth floors will be devoted to Hartford's own collection, which ranges all the way from Guardi, Courbet, and Burne-Jones to Orozco and Dali.

Each of the exhibit floors has a large gallery on the Columbus Circle side, and two small, windowless side galleries toward Broadway and Eighth Avenue. The sixth through ninth floors contain, in order, a storage area, offices, a lounge for coffee and snacks, and the "Gauguin Room," a Polynesian-style restaurant.

In 1959, when the Gallery was just a set of working drawings, Hartford decided that he would like to give New York something else it "needed badly"—an indoor-outdoor café on the southeastern corner of Central Park.

Having put up $862,500 for the project, Hartford asked Stone to design a building where New Yorkers, like Parisians and Romans, could savor an aperitif while watching the passing scene. Stone responded with an elegant, two-story pavilion and the Municipal Art Commission promptly approved it. For its part, the City reserved a 240 foot by 80 foot plot in the park across the street from the Plaza Hotel.

A group of nearby property owners, however, were incensed. They had no quarrel with Stone's design, but they insisted that the building would constitute an illegal encroachment on municipal park land. The whole scheme is now in the New York courts.

Meanwhile, in 1962, one of Hartford's least known New York building projects opened. It is a rather sleek structure on West 43rd street which houses "the world's first fully automated garage," Speed-Park. Hartford—who probably has been approached with more fantastic inventions than the U.S. Patent Office (e.g., a cigarette that lights itself, a bottled Mint Julep), picked up the idea four years ago when a Rumanian-born engineer named Mihai Allmanestianu proposed a solution to the parking crisis in [illegible] and-pigeonhole system run by a single employee (FORUM, Feb. '63). Hartford backed it to the tune of $2 million, and although the garage is operating, neither it nor the system has made much money so far.

At play and at home

Hartford's most glamorous project to date is Paradise Island, a resort in the Bahamas. For this he selected Architect John L. Volk, best known for his stuccoed Regency mansions and clubs around Palm Beach. Volk designed a 52-room hotel, and remodeled existing buildings on what used to be the estate of Swedish Financier Axel Wennergren near Nassau. Hartford bought the 700-acre tract (two-thirds of the island) for $14 million, has invested more than $6 million in it. He now plans to expand it with a large and moderately priced hotel. No matter what he builds on Paradise Island, Hartford intends to stick by his original concept: "Everything should be done right, in good taste without being snobbish."

Hartford himself tries to live up to this dictum. His insistence on doing things right, however, has often meant that he has spent much more money than he intended. "Let's get this straight," he told a reporter who asked about his fortune not long ago, "I'm not a bottomless well."

In the unlikely event that the bottom should be reached, Hartford has protected three of his pet projects with a $9 million trust fund: the Foundation, the Gallery, and something called The Handwriting Institute in New York (which, among other things, holds that cancer can be spotted in its earliest stages by studying handwriting specimens). Other projects depend more on Hartford's backing than on their own commercial success. One of these is *Show* magazine, a glossy, handsome publication devoted to the performing arts. Hartford houses it in a five-story Manhattan building, remodeled by Designer Melanie Kahane.

Meanwhile, Huntington Hartford has plenty of other ideas to occupy his time, and that of a staff which tends to his projects, and his seven residences scattered across the U.S., the Caribbean, and Europe. Ideas and objects, in fact, clutter his 13-room duplex apartment on New York's Beekman Place; there are paintings, papers, and sculpture piled in every corner. But for him the focal point is none of these, nor even the view over the East River. It is the telephone, where his ideas and his buildings continue to take shape. What's next? Hartford's eyes gleam and his voice drops: "I suppose it's no secret," he says. "I'd like to put up a gambling casino on Paradise Island—if we can get the necessary legislation. After that, we'll think of an architect." —P. H.