THE EXHIBITION AS LANDSCAPE

On the following pages the reader is taken for a tour round the South Bank exhibition in search of the subtleties of landscape planning that give it so much of its distinctiveness, but whose full significance is not necessarily apparent at the first glance. For in town planning much of the art lies in concealing conscious intention—in contriving the happy accident—and it is as a highly successful exercise in the art of the town-planner that the exhibition should first of all be regarded. It makes a real contribution to town-planning technique, and as the visitor walks round it, with its thematic story unfolding before him, he might well be exploring a subtly designed town. He is led from point to point and his interest is continually renewed by the skillful use of the devices the town-designer, as well as the exhibition architect, exploits—or should exploit—in order to heighten vitality and underline the personality derived from the nature of his site: expectation and suspense, the relaxation provided by the quiet enclosure, the shock of the surprising view, the contrast of the familiar with the unexpected, changes of level, tempo and scale. These are all employed in the exhibition, both indoors and out, and are analysed on the following pages with an eye on their permanent application in town building. The itinerary followed in this tour of the exhibition in its guise of a newly planned section of London conforms roughly to the sequence in which the exhibition buildings are officially supposed to be visited. It is shown by the coloured arrow on the map of the exhibition below.

Inside the Chicheley Street entrance you are in a different world from London, but not in one of those formal layouts that generally accompany the architecture of display. You might be in a permanent town, a town designed to satisfy the multiple needs of daily life yet with an eye for all the incidental effects that the informal type of planning allows and that add so much to the vitality of the whole: changes of scale and texture; unexpected contrasts between the hard geometry of buildings and natural greenery; movement and mystery and the gradually unfolding view.

Consider the entrance courtyard—the Fairway, B—as a small-town piazza, planned for pedestrians only. The multi-coloured screen on the York Road side, A in the sketch above, might be the façade of an office building or department store. At its foot is a recessed sidewalk, B, somewhat raised, serving a terrace of shops, and in front a row of little kiosks, poised over pools of water whose reflections add more sparkle to the scene. The building at the end, E, also has a recessed lower storey, suggesting that the pedestrian will find the barrier there not final. Between them, in the corner, is a small café, enclosed within transparent walls and extended in the form of an open terrace only separated from the pavement of the piazza by low-high boxes of flowers—an agreeable adjunct to any town square. Liveliness is given to the other side of the piazza by