

Face lift on Grant Street

Larrimor's part of new look

By Donald Miller
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Part of Grant Street is torn up, and more will be, before its face lift is complete. Scaffolding festoons Two Mellon Bank Center, formerly the Union Trust Building, and will until September. But Carl Schlesinger is bullish.

The owner of Larrimor's, the well-known Downtown clothing store for men and women, he has moved his 45-year-old emporium into elegant new quarters in Two Mellon Bank Center at a cost of \$750,000. He also predicts that Grant Street, before too long, will be Pittsburgh's most beautiful, most prominent thoroughfare.

"I have expectations, not just hopes, for Grant Street," he said. "I wouldn't have made this move if I hadn't been confident. The move has been a great success. The traffic in store hours has been incredible.

"In my mind, Grant Street is like Chicago's Michigan Avenue or New York's Fifth Avenue. It will also resemble Market Street in San Francisco with similar brick and markers. People will come to see this street.

"The proposed Moshbacher luxury hotel in Steel Plaza will be in the construction phase in 18 months. By the end of 1988, Grant Street will be almost a promenade — a street where people will want to walk, shop and be seen," said Schlesinger, a quiet and sensitive-looking man of 46. Larrimor's was founded by his father in 1939.

He sees Grant Street as the center of the old and new. "The Porter Building's first floor space will be far more valuable with the new hotel. Street fronts used to be rented by airlines and banks. Now airlines can't afford that and first floors now are rented by shops of quality. I'm told our store will help to attract a superior store to the empty space on the first floor of the Frick Building across from us.

"There is room on Grant for a luxury hotel and luxury businesses. It includes three new office buildings plus a 1,000-

car parking facility. If there is one drawback to success, it would be handling and availability of parking.

"I feel strongly that if the Port Authority can project an image for park-and-ride (lots) it can win new transportation users. The subway will increase pedestrian traffic on Grant enormously. A lot of my customers will be using it. I think once people try the subway they'll like it."

Schlesinger chose L.P. Perfidio Associates as architects for the new store. The owner's only recommendation to the architect was that he learn what Larrimor's needs were. An outside store consultant was brought in for a briefing session.

Perfidio chose to keep as much of the former Mellon Bank branch's amenities, such as tan marble walls, light gray marble floor and plaster ceiling, as possible.

To that elegant background, Perfidio, who recently redesigned Pittsburgh Public Theater's interior, brought a post-modern classically British ambience with walnut-stained millwork and stacked display tables. He and lighting consultant John Maguire designed a battery of postmodern spool-shaped sconces for bright illumination. This is the first time that new mercury bulbs, color-corrected, have been used, creating a light, airy look.

The room is dominated by a number of square columns. Perfidio set the store's traffic spine on the diagonal from entry stairs off Grant to polished brass-and-glass doors near the building's central rotunda.

The purpose was to build a pedestrian passage through the store, Perfidio said, so that the large amount of clothing is not overwhelming. The store will hold 2,500 suits, 2,000 sports jackets and 2,000 trousers in addition to accessories.

The ceiling was dropped and fitted with special insets; there are 400 low-voltage lights with individual transformers for accurate pinpointing. Emergency lights, public address and music systems are concealed in the ceiling.

Why didn't Schlesinger move into a



Bill Lewis/Post-Gazette

Larrimor's owner Carl Schlesinger in a section of new store.

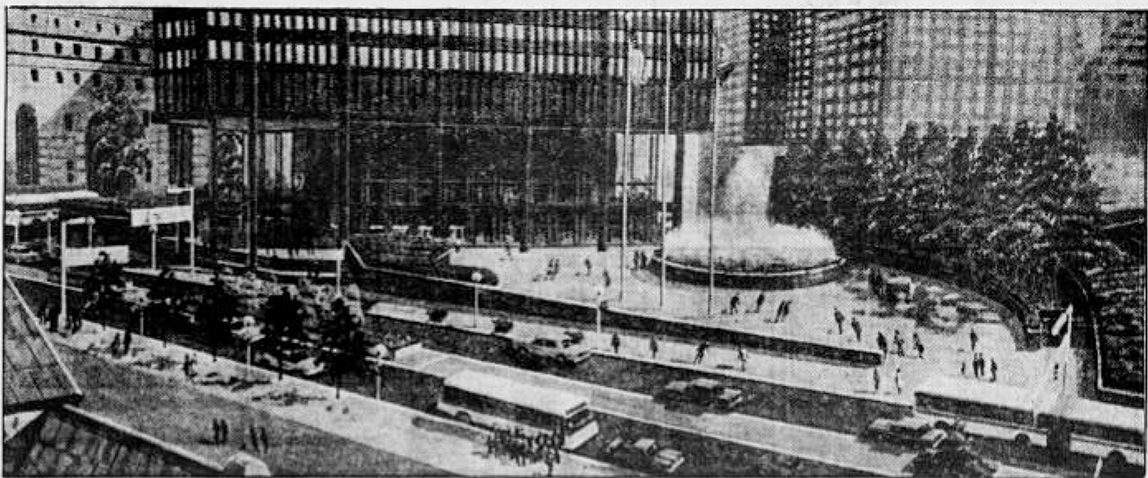
newer space, such as One Mellon Bank Center? "I like conservative things and I wanted to stay in the building where we had been for so long. This building is a jewel. We didn't want our customers to feel they were in a store that was too different from the old one."

Besides upgrading sprinklers and other technical improvements, Larrimor's enlarged its women's department, headed by Carol Schlesinger, Carl's wife, and added an area for Burberry, the British clothier. "We are Burberry's shop in Pittsburgh. That's the way Burberry wanted it."

One change Schlesinger insisted on was "high touch," as he calls it, not high

tech. "I want customers to walk up to a shelf or display area and touch anything they want to. We have no counters. Shelves have been specially measured to contain dress shirts, sports shirts or pajamas. Soon, every garment will be exposed."

When salespeople show clothing off racks and shelves, they can pull hidden boards from Perfidio's tables where garments can be placed to be teamed up with accessories. Perfidio Associates designed these tables with an open leg for lightness. The legs stand on postmodern balls. Chairs and sofas are reproductions of furniture designed by Viennese architect Josef Hoffman in this century's first decade.



Drawing shows how revamped Grant Street will look in vicinity of USSteel Plaza.