




Architecture


Rockefeller Center®

New York City, New York, USA



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John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

John Davison Rockefeller, Jr. (January 29, 1874 – May 11, 1960) was a major philanthropist and a pivotal member of the prominent Rockefeller family. He was the sole son among the five children of businessman and Standard Oil industrialist John D. Rockefeller and the father of the five famous Rockefeller brothers. In biographies, he was invariably referred to as “Junior” to distinguish him from his more celebrated father, known as “Senior”.

After graduation, Rockefeller, Jr. joined his father's business (October 1, 1897) and set up operations in the newly-formed family office at Standard Oil's headquarters at 26 Broadway. He became a Standard Oil director; he later also became a director in J. P. Morgan's U.S. Steel company, which had been formed in 1901. After a scandal involving the then head of Standard Oil, John Dustin Archbold (the successor to Senior), and bribes he had made to two prominent Congressmen, unearthed by the Hearst media empire, Junior resigned from both companies in 1910 in an attempt to “purify” his ongoing philanthropy from commercial and financial interests.

During the Great Depression he developed and was the sole financier of a vast 14-building real estate complex in the geographical center of Manhattan, Rockefeller Center. He probably gave more attention to the development of Rockefeller Center than to any other project.

John D. Rockefeller, Jr., leased the space from Columbia University in 1928 and began development in 1930. The land was cleared of more than 200 browstone houses and other antiquated buildings. Rockefeller initially planned a syndicate to build an opera house for the Metropolitan Opera on the site, but changed his mind after the stock market crash of 1929 and the withdrawal of the Metropolitan from the project. Rockefeller stated “It was clear that there were only two courses open to me. One was to abandon the entire development. The other to go forward with it in the definite knowledge that I myself would have to build it and finance it alone.” Negotiating a line of credit with the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company and covering ongoing expenses through the sale of oil company stock, he took on the

enormous project as the sole investor, entering into an 87-year lease agreement with Columbia. It was the largest private building project ever undertaken in modern times. More than 75,000 people worked on the construction of the Center during those Depression years.

The name “Rockefeller Center” was first suggested for the complex in 1931 by Ivy Lee, public relations pioneer and prominent adviser to the family. Junior initially did not want the Rockefeller family name associated with the commercial project, but was persuaded on the grounds that the name would attract far more tenants.

Within its first decade, the complex had attracted exciting tenants such as the RKO Pictures, the French bookstore *Librairie de France* and the brand new publication *News-Week* (as it was originally called). The Center’s western side was home to many show business firms, but movie history was also made in one of the Fifth Avenue buildings, where John Hay Whitney and David O. Selznick decided to produce *Gone with the Wind*.



John D. Rockefeller, Jr.

Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, photograph by Harris & Ewing,
[reproduction number, e.g., LC-USZ62-123456]

Building Rockefeller Center

Construction of the 14 buildings in the Art Deco style (without the originally proposed opera house) began on May 17, 1930 and was completed on November 1, 1939, when John D. Rockefeller, Jr. drove the final (silver) rivet into 10 Rockefeller Center.

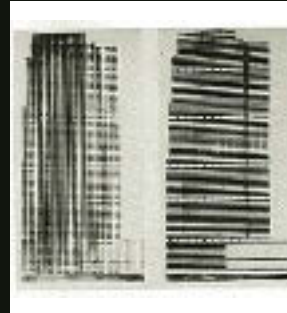
Built between 1932 and 1940, the original buildings have a similar architectural vocabulary that features gray Indiana limestone, simple geometric forms,

and bold facades with little decoration except for vertical lines used to emphasize the height of the buildings. The central focus of the project is the former RCA building, a tower rising 70 stories above the Channel Gardens, which serve as a monumental passage to the building from Fifth Avenue.

Seventy-five thousand construction workers made the site a center of activity so attractive to passers-by that



The final design of Rockefeller Center was unveiled to the press on March 5, 1931. (Image: Wired New York)



During the preliminary design phase in 1931, Hood experimented with many ideas for the facade of the RCA Building. (Image: Wired New York)

an official “Sidewalk Superintendents’ Club” was established, complete with membership cards providing access to a viewing platform.

The principal builder and “managing agent” for the massive project was John R. Todd and the principal architect was Raymond M. Hood, who worked with and directed a team from three different architectural firms. Hood was the greatest skyscraper architect of the 1920s, embodying and inspiring the evolution of skyscraper design in America during the decade, and the Rockefeller Center was his last major project. Though the actual design was the work of a consortium of architects, he has been described as the “key man” in its development, and the massing of the buildings, their monochromatic exteriors, and their rooftop landscape gardens almost certainly reflect his influence.

Construction of the RCA Building and Lower Plaza in progress in September 1932. The Center Theatre, on the left, and the RKO Building, rear right, were already complete. Next to the RKO Building, the Radio City Music Hall was nearing completion. (Image: Wired New York)



Rockefeller Center

Rockefeller Center is a complex of 19 commercial buildings covering 22 acres (89,000 m²) between 48th and 51st streets in New York City. Built by the Rockefeller family, it is located in the center of Midtown Manhattan, spanning the area between Fifth Avenue and Sixth Avenue.

Rockefeller Center represents a turning point in the history of architectural sculpture: It is among the last major building projects in the United States to incorporate a program of integrated public art. Sculptor Lee Lawrie contributed the largest number of individual pieces—twelve—including the statue of Atlas facing Fifth Avenue and the conspicuous friezes above the main entrance to the RCA Building.

The Center is a combination of two building complexes: the older and original fourteen Art Deco office buildings from the 1930s, and a set of four International-style towers built along the west side of Avenue of the Americas during the 1960s and 1970s.

Art Deco was a popular international art design movement from 1925 until the 1940s, affecting the

decorative arts such as architecture, interior design and industrial design, as well as the visual arts such as fashion, painting, the graphic arts and film. At the time, this style was seen as elegant, glamorous, functional and modern. The movement was a mixture of many different styles and movements of the early 20th century, including Neoclassical, Constructivism, Cubism, Modernism, Art Nouveau, and Futurism. Its popularity peaked in Europe during the Roaring Twenties and continued strongly in the United States through the 1930s. Although many



Bullocks Wilshire in Los Angeles, California. (Image: Wikimedia Commons)



City Hall in Buffalo, New York, an Art Deco building.

design movements have political or philosophical roots or intentions, Art Deco was purely decorative.

Art Deco experienced a decline in popularity during the late '30s and early '40s but experienced a popular resurgence in the graphic design of the 1980s. Art Deco had a profound influence on many later artistic movements, such as Memphis and Pop art.

Surviving examples may still be seen in many different locations worldwide, in countries as diverse as China (Shanghai), the United Kingdom, Spain, Cuba, Indonesia, the Philippines, Argentina, Romania, Australia, New Zealand, India, Brazil and the United States (primarily in Miami, Los Angeles and New York City). Many classic examples still exist in the form of architecture in many major cities. The Empire State Building, Rockefeller Center and Chrysler Building, all in New York City, are some of the largest and best-known examples of the style.

The centerpiece of Rockefeller Plaza is the 70-floor, 872-foot (266 m) GE Building at 30 Rockefeller Center ("30 Rock")—formerly known as the RCA Building—centered



Rockefeller Center 1933. (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

behind the sunken plaza. The building is the setting for the famous “Lunchtime atop a Skyscraper” photograph, taken by Charles C. Ebbets in 1932 of workers having lunch, sitting on a steel beam, without safety harnesses.

Unlike most other Art Deco towers built during the 1930s, the GE Building was constructed as a slab with a flat roof. The Center’s newly-renovated “Top of the Rock” observation deck, dating originally from 1933, is located on the GE Building roof.



Roof garden of Rockefeller Center buildings. (Image: Wikimedia Commons)



Lower Plaza of Rockefeller Center. (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

At the front of 30 Rock is the Lower Plaza, in the very center of the complex, which is reached from 5th Avenue through the Channel Gardens and Promenade. The acclaimed sculptor Paul Manship was commissioned in 1933 to create a masterwork to adorn the central axis, below the famed annual Rockefeller Center Christmas Tree, but all the other original plans to fill the space were abandoned over time. It was not until Christmas Day in 1936 that the ice-skating rink was finally installed and the popular Center activity of ice-skating began.

Radio City Music Hall at 50th Street and Avenue of the Americas was completed in December, 1932. At the time it was promoted as the largest and most opulent theater in the world. Its original intended name was the “International Music Hall” but this was changed to reflect the name of its neighbor, “Radio City”, as the new NBC Studios in the RCA Building were known. RCA was one of the complex’s first and most important tenants and the entire Plaza itself was sometimes referred to as “Radio City”.

The Music Hall was planned by a consortium of three architectural firms, who employed Edward Durell Stone to design the exterior. At the urging of Junior's wife Abby, the interior design was assigned to Donald Deskey, an exponent of the European Modernist style and innovator of a new American design aesthetic. Deskey, who believed the place could be enhanced by sculpture and murals, commissioned various artists to create elaborate works for the theater. The Music Hall seats 6,000 people and after an initial slow start became the



*Radio City Music Hall at 50th Street and Avenue of the Americas.
(Image: Rockefeller Center)*

single biggest tourist destination in the city. Its interior was declared a New York City landmark in 1978. Painstakingly restored in 1999, the Music Hall interior is one of the world's greatest examples of Art Deco design.

The Center Theatre, seating 3,500 people, was located at the Southeast corner of Sixth Avenue and 49th Street. Originally designed as a movie palace in 1932, it later achieved fame as a showcase for live musical ice-skating spectacles. It was demolished in 1954, the only building in the original Rockefeller Center complex to have been torn down. The Center Theatre was originally called the RKO Roxy Theatre and opened on December 29, 1932. It was intended as a smaller sister to the 6,000-seat Radio City Music Hall one block away, which at first did not show films. A successful lawsuit in 1933 by the owners of the original Roxy Theatre on Seventh Ave., claiming ownership of the "Roxy" name, caused the new theater to be re-named the RKO Plaza.

After its demolition, the Center Theatre was replaced by a 19-story office building.

Center Art

Paul Manship's well-known bronze gilded statue of "The Titan Prometheus recumbent, bringing fire to mankind", depicting the Greek legend, features prominently in the sunken plaza at the front of 30 Rockefeller Center.

A large number of other artists contributed work at the Center, including Isamu Noguchi, whose gleaming stainless steel bas-relief "News", placed over the main entrance to 50 Rockefeller Center (the Associated Press Building), is particularly outstanding. At the time it was created it was the largest metal bas-relief in the world. Other artists included Carl Milles, Hildreth Meiere, Margaret Bourke-White, Dean Cornwell, and Leo Friedlander.



*A selection of the art at Rockefeller Plaza.
["Wisdom" and "Sound" – Photos courtesy of Tishman Speyer/Photographer Denis Vlasov. "News" and "The story of mankind" – Photos courtesy of Tishman Speyer/Photographer Nick Wood. "Friendship between America and France", "Prometheus" and "Atlas" – Photos courtesy of Rockefeller Center Archives.]*

Facts about Rockefeller Center

Location:..... Midtown Manhattan,
New York City, NY

Architect:..... Raymond Mathewson Hood
was a senior architect on a
large design team

Style:..... Modern, Art Deco

Materials:..... Limestone

Construction:..... Limestone cladding, 4 to 8 inches
thick, fastened to a masonry
backing, which is itself supported
by a structural steel frame

Date:..... From 1930 to 1939 (the original
14 buildings)

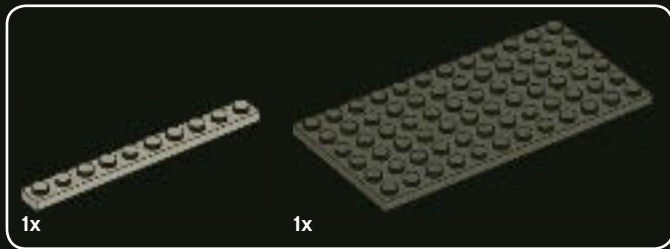
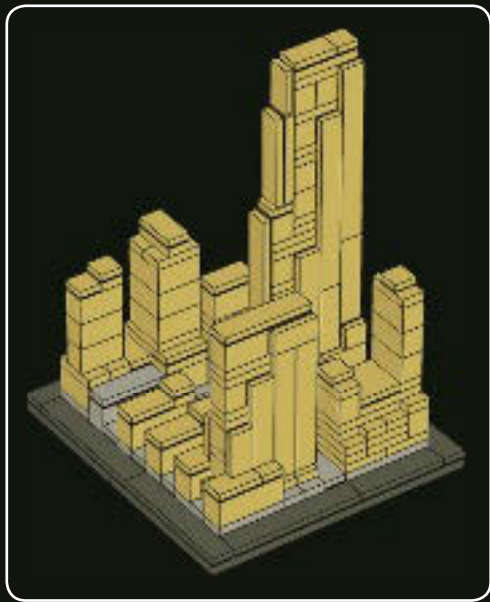
Footprint:..... 19 commercial buildings covering
22 acres (89,000 m²)

Height:..... 872 ft. (266 m.) (GE Building)

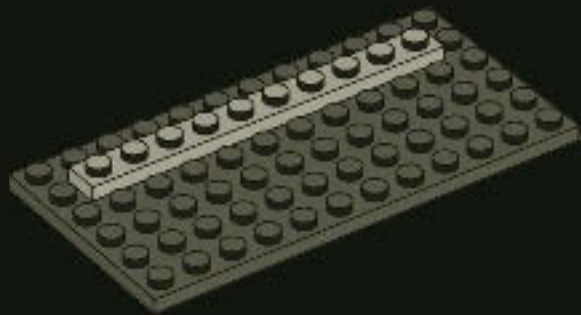
Stories:..... 70 (GE Building)

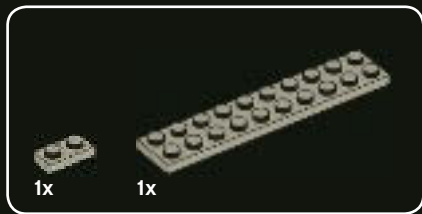


Rockefeller Center. (Image: Wikimedia Commons)

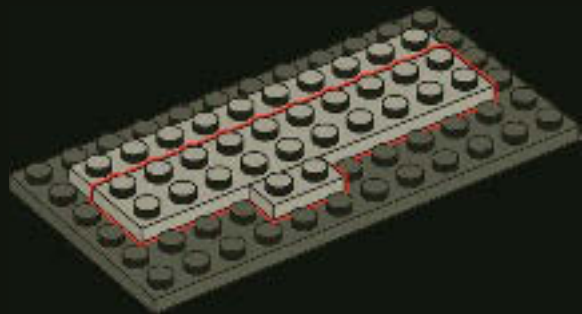


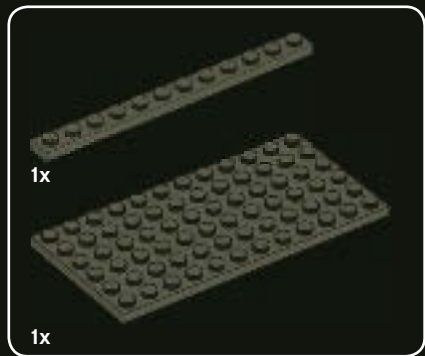
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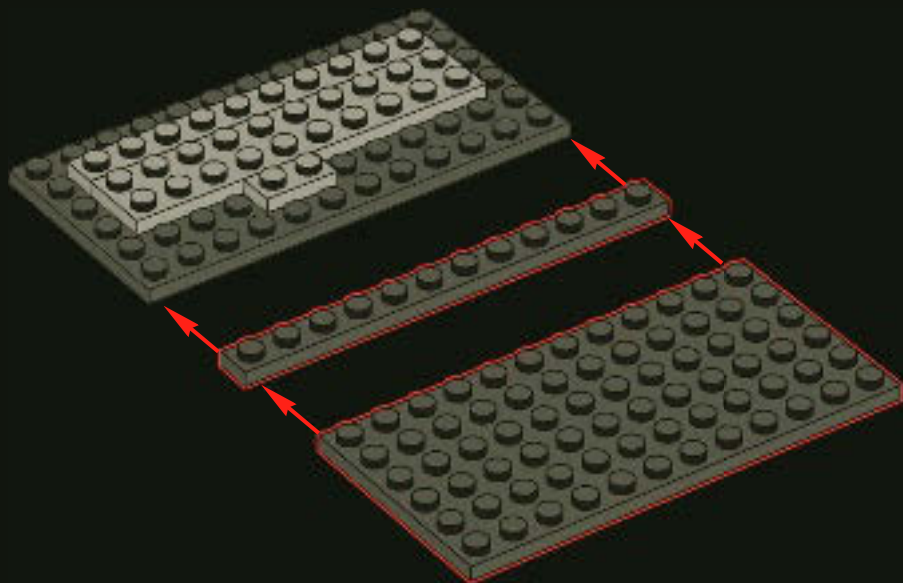


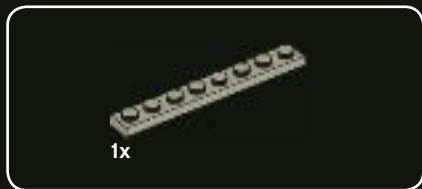
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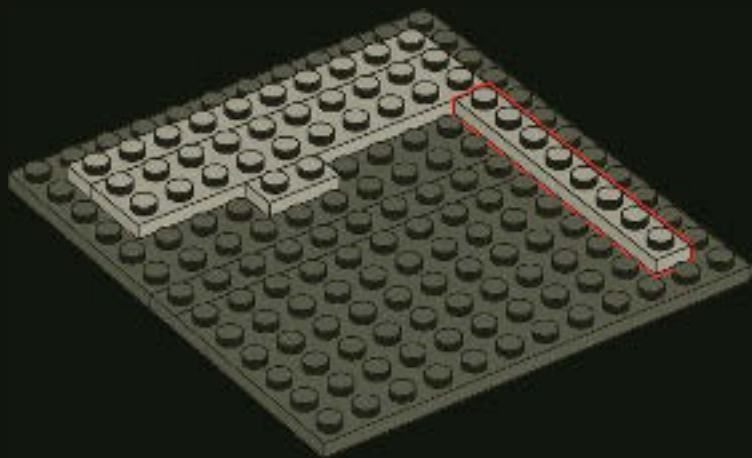


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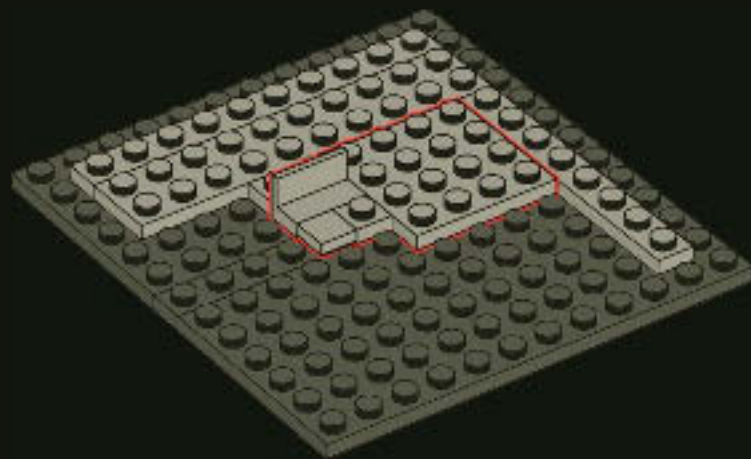


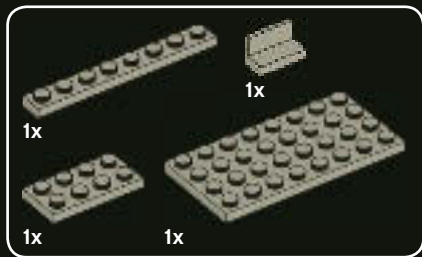
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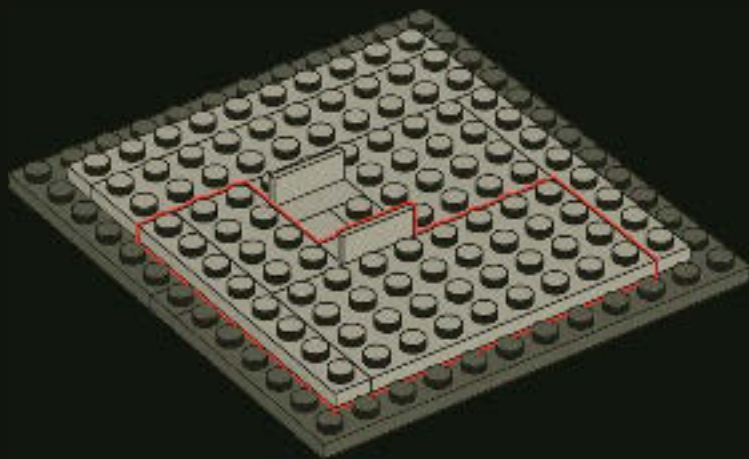


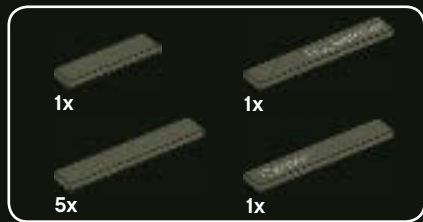
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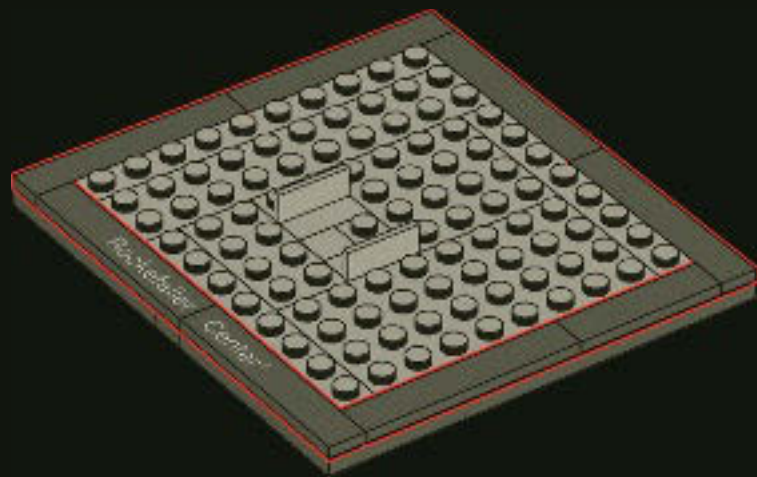


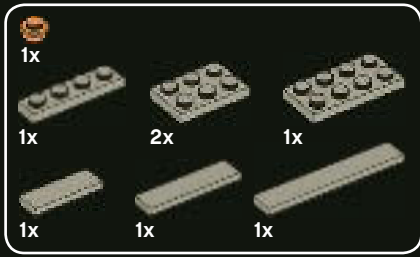
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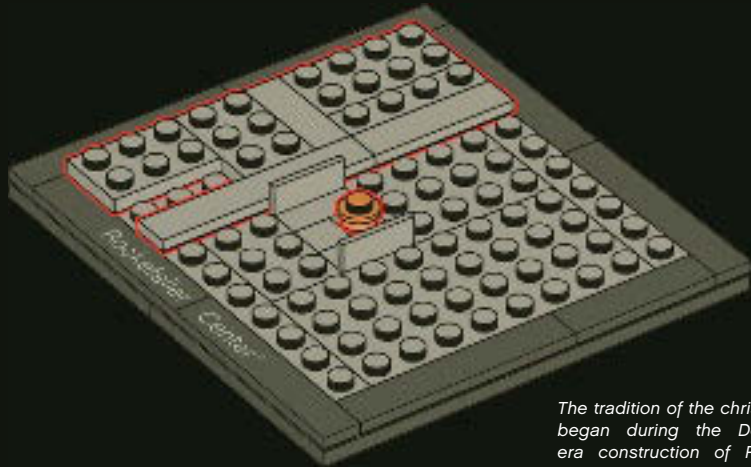


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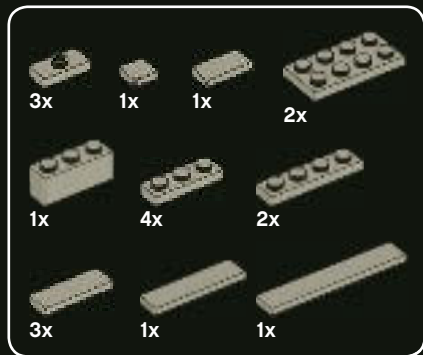


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The tradition of the christmas tree began during the Depression-era construction of Rockefeller Center, when workers decorated a small balsam fir tree with strings of cranberries, garlands of paper, and even a few tin cans on Christmas Eve, December 24, 1931.





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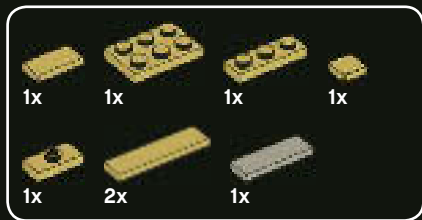
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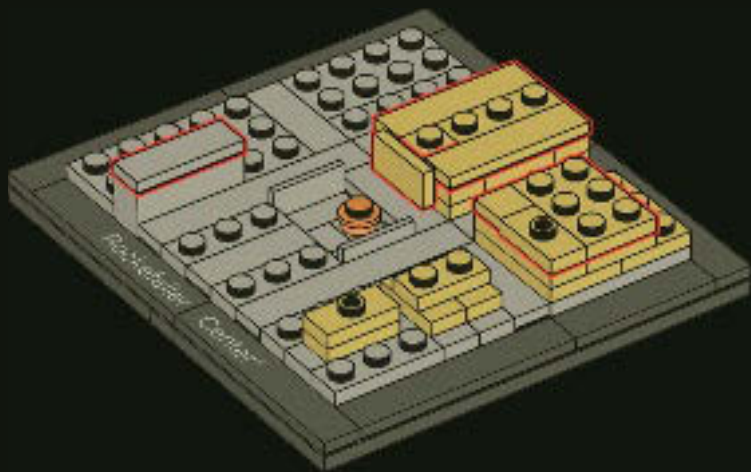
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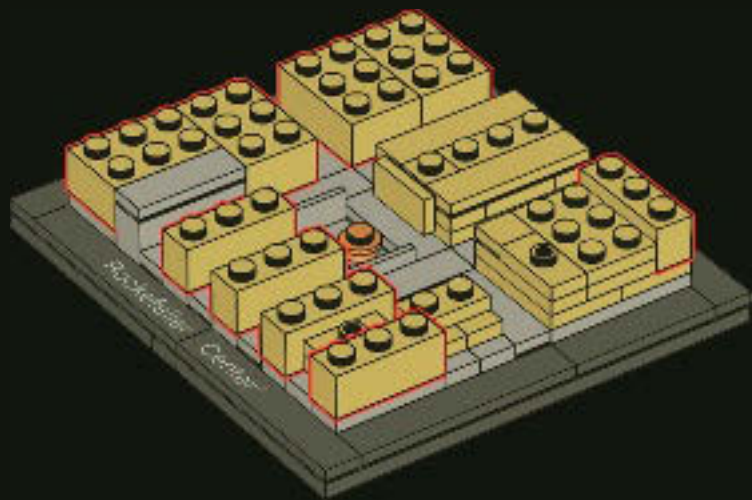


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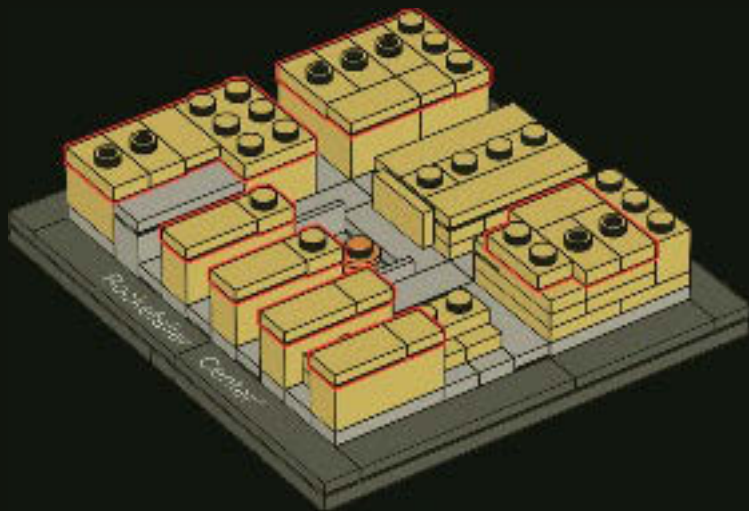
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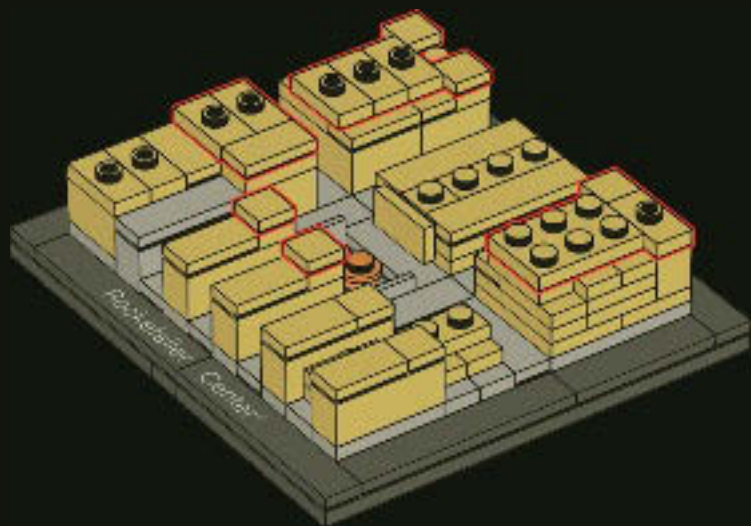


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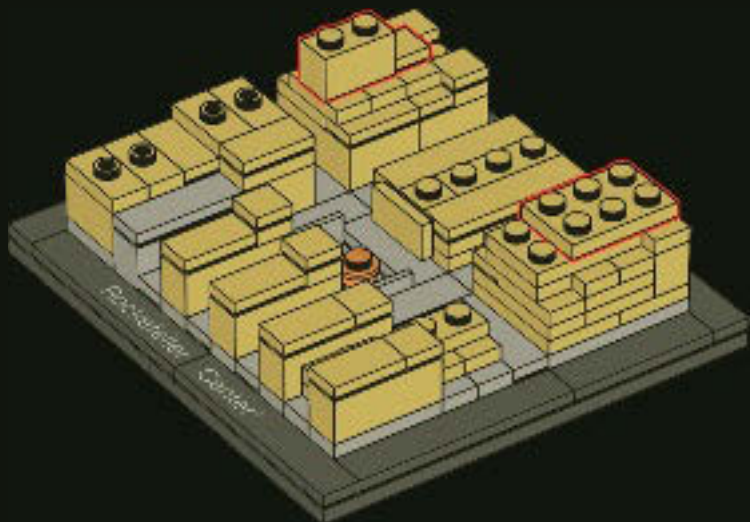


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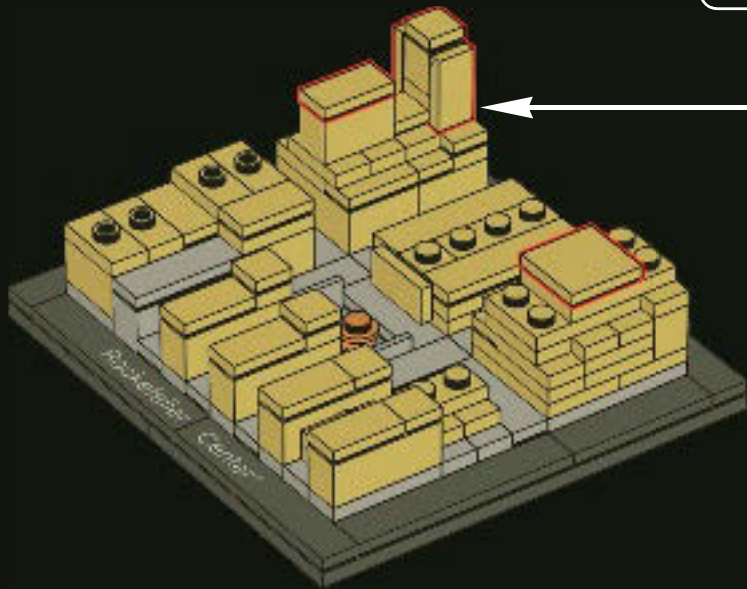
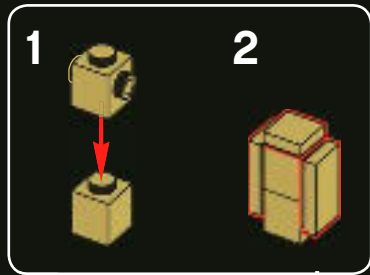


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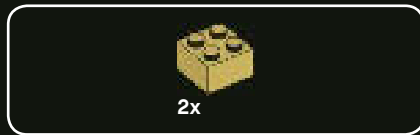
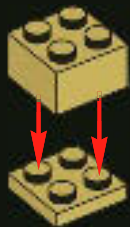


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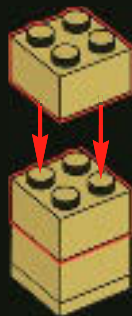




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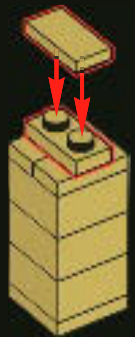


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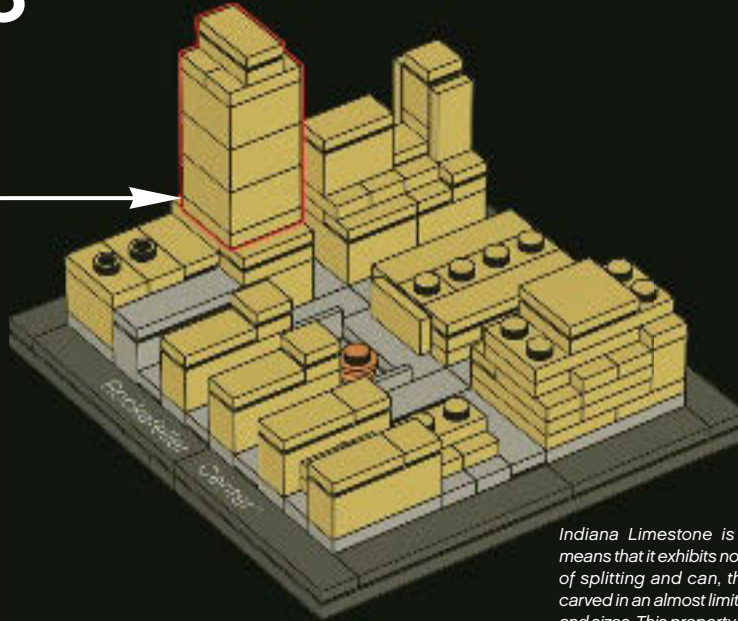


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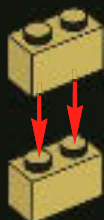
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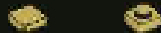
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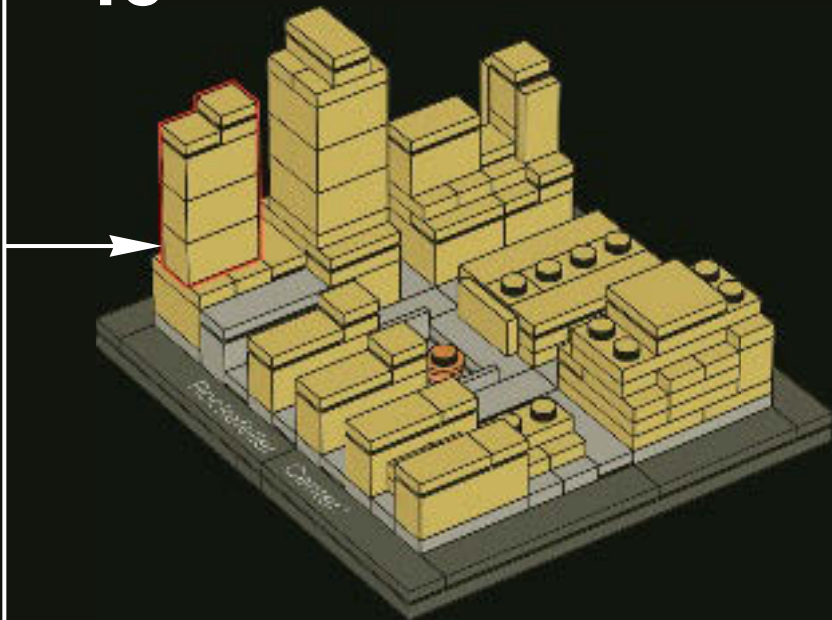




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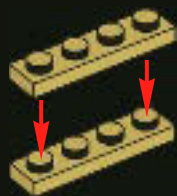
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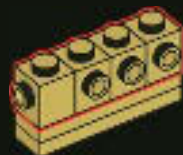
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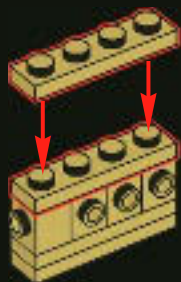
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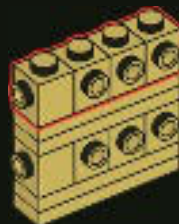




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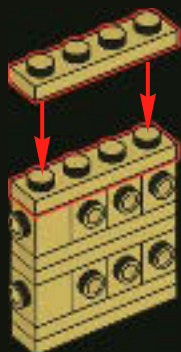
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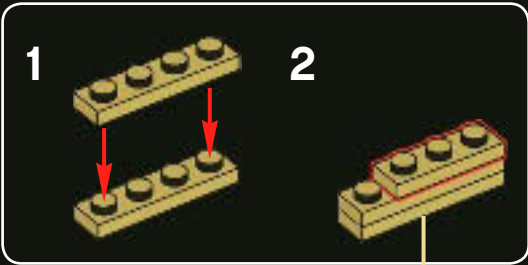
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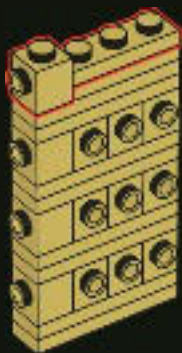


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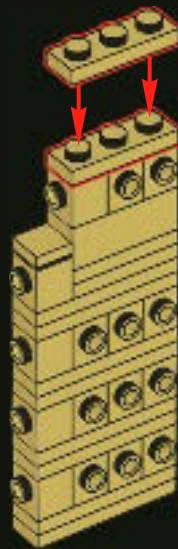
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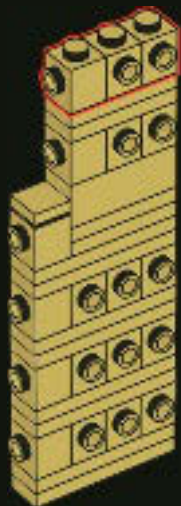


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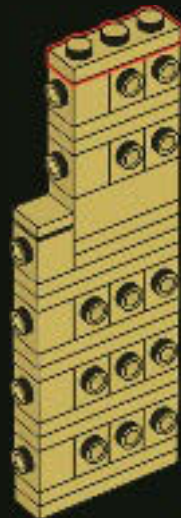
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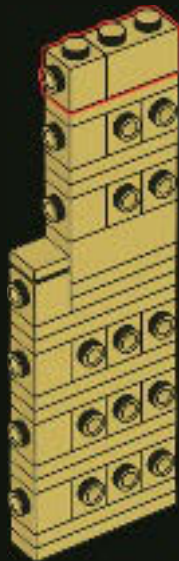


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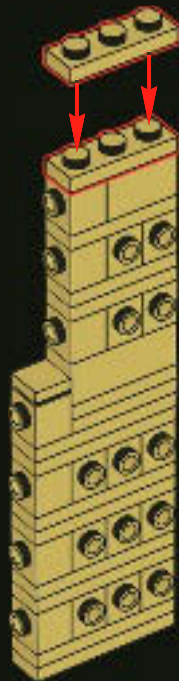
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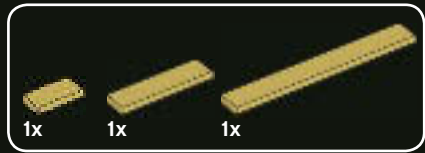
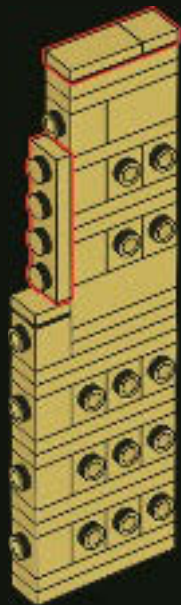
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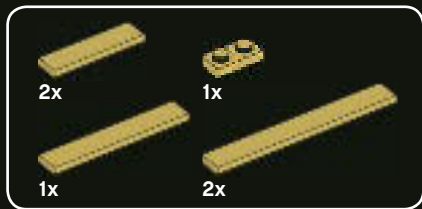


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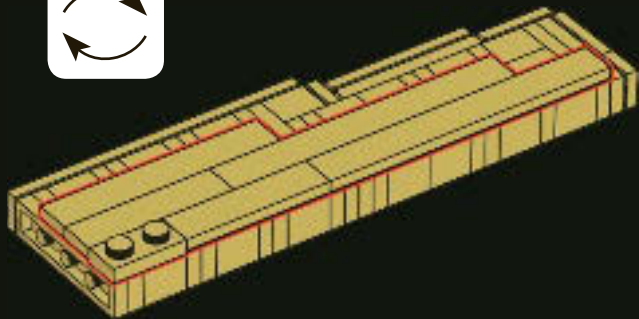


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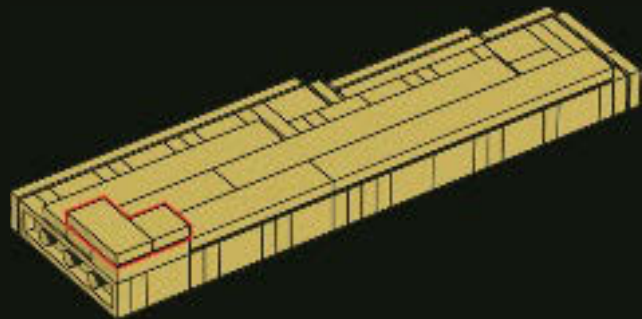


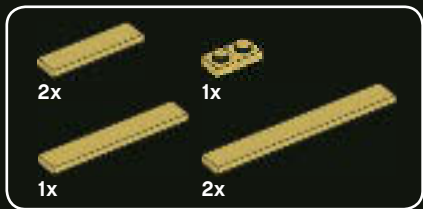


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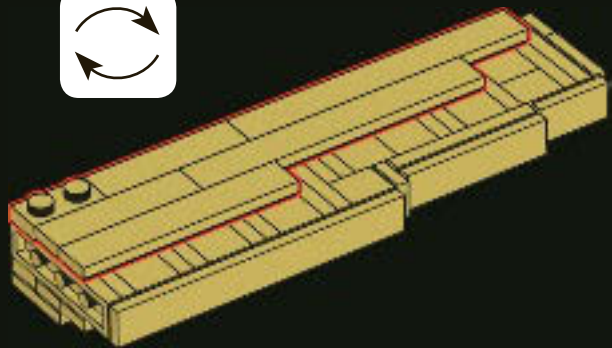


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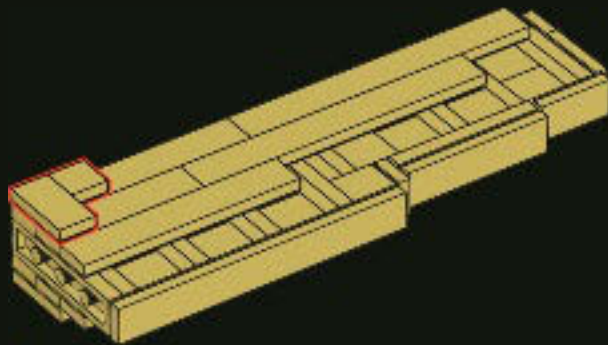




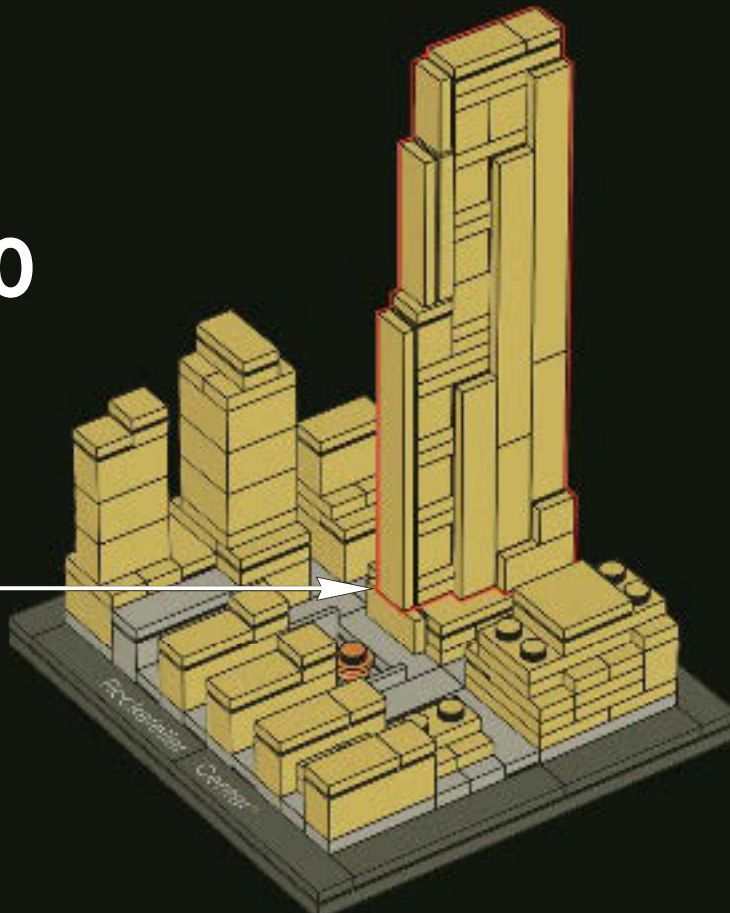
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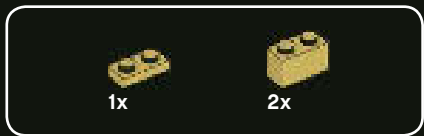


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With the country facing economic catastrophe and the world between two wars, John D. Rockefeller's vision for his center never wavered. Rockefeller Center and the observation deck were his gifts to Manhattan—a place for locals and visitors to marvel at the city he loved.



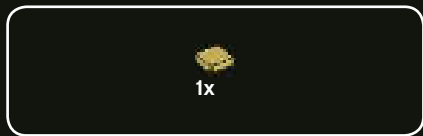


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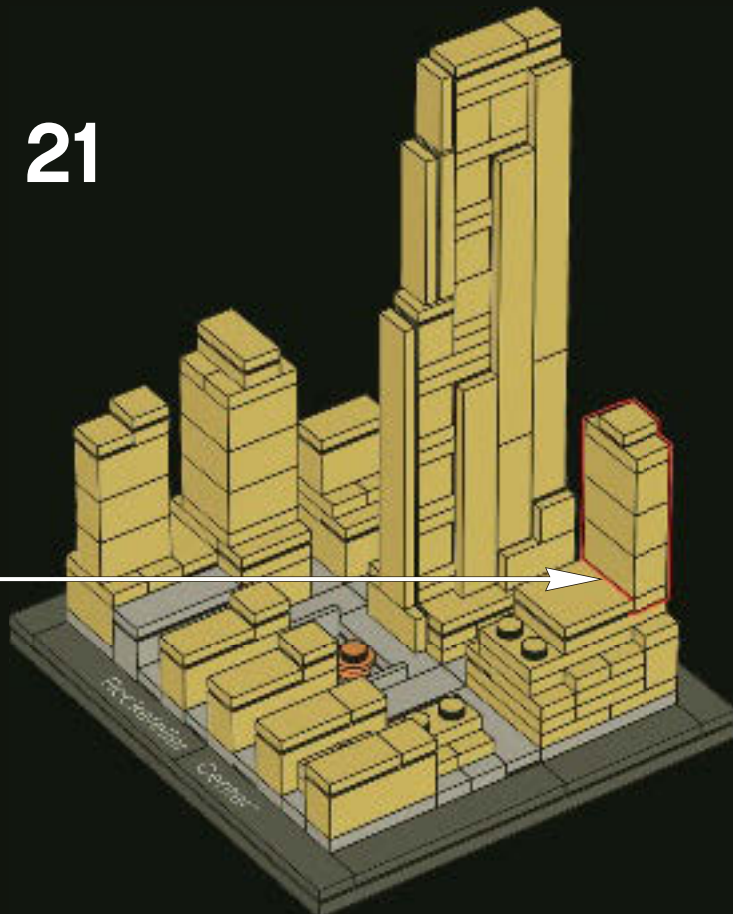




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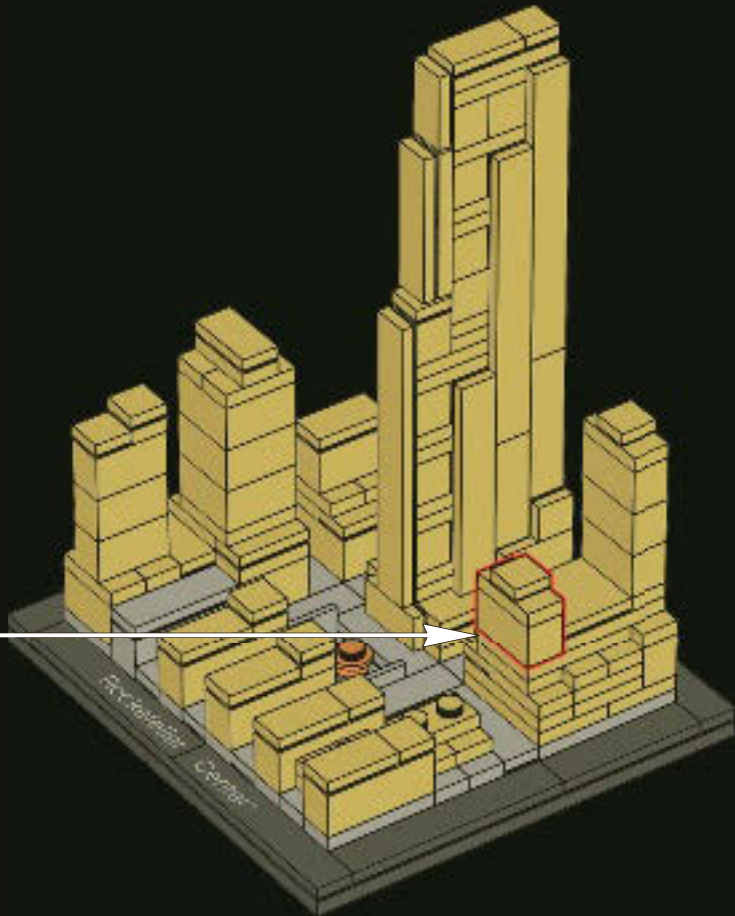
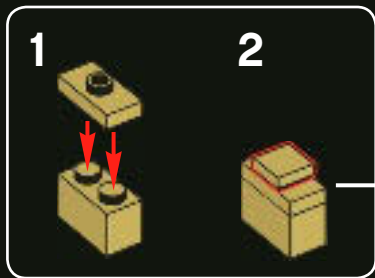


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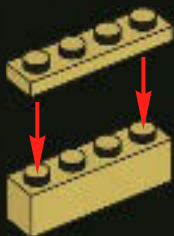


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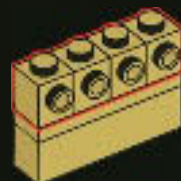




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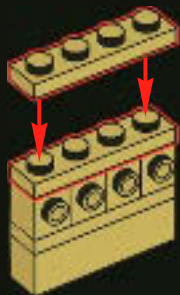
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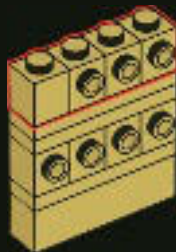


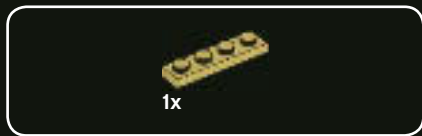
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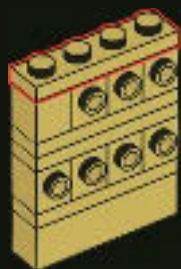
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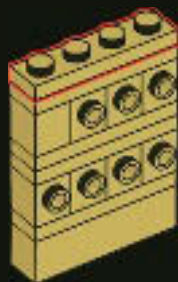




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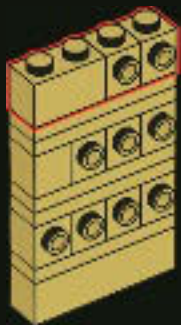


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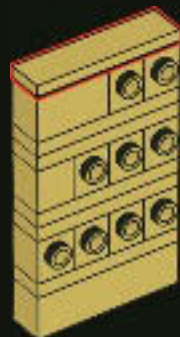
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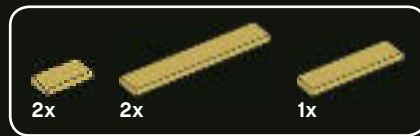
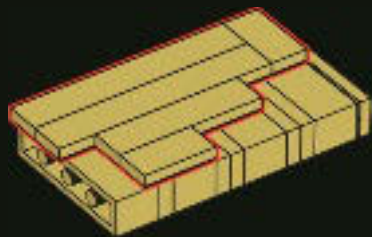
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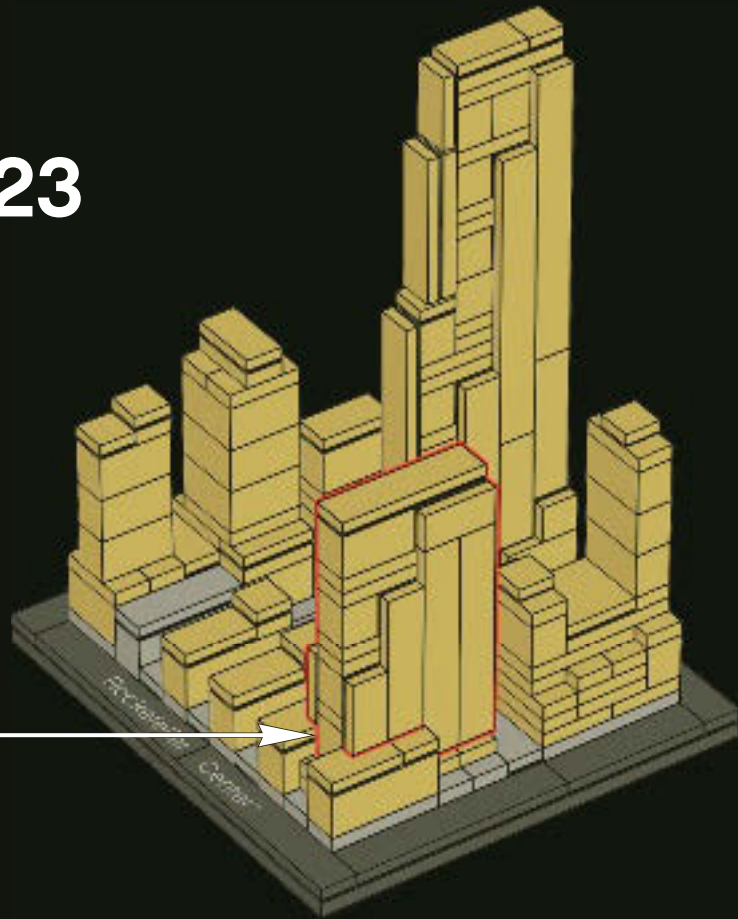
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23



Rockefeller Center through the 1930s

“Don’t give the people what they want,” said S.L. “Roxy” Rothafel, the man who created Radio City Music Hall. “Give ‘em something better.” Throughout the 1930s, Rockefeller Center steadily improved, including some accidental innovations like the Christmas Tree tradition in 1931 and the skating rink in 1936. By 1939, more than 125,000 people were visiting Rockefeller Center daily; on its own, it would have been the 51st largest city in the U.S.

1930: Construction of the “city within a city” begins, employing over 75,000 people.

1933: Following the completion of 30 Rockefeller Center in May, Rockefeller Plaza opens for business.

1934: The Rainbow Room opens on the 65th floor of 30 Rock; Noel Coward is among the first patrons.

1935: More than 2,100 people are using the Rockefeller Center post office every day.

1936: The skating rink opens just in time for Christmas.

1937: A “sports garden” is created on the roof of the Rockettes, the orchestra and other staff members.

1938: The Associated Press Building, at 50 Rockefeller Plaza, is the first Plaza building to operate profitably the year it opens.

1939: John D. Rockefeller Jr. drives “The Last Rivet” at a ceremony marking completion of the Center’s original buildings.



Rockefeller Center was declared a National Historic Landmark in 1989. (Wikimedia Commons)

A Word from the Artist

As an Architectural Artist my desire is to capture the essence of a particular architectural landmark in its pure sculptural form. I first and foremost do not view my models as literal replicas, but rather my own artistic interpretations through the use of LEGO® bricks as a medium. The LEGO brick is not initially thought of as a material typically used in creating art or used as an artist's medium. However, I quickly discovered the LEGO brick was lending itself as naturally to my applications as paint to a painter or metal to a blacksmith. As I explore how to capture these buildings with the basic shapes of the bricks and plates, I find the possibilities and challenges they offer almost magical.

Rockefeller Center

Unlike the other models in this series, Rockefeller Center celebrates a gathering of buildings. With this in mind, the essence of this landmark had to be thoughtfully expressed to convey both the art deco styling and its function as a center of commerce. Before concepts were explored I had to first determine what elements needed to be included to best

represent the spirit of the Center as a whole and in detail. The heartbeat of the Center can be defined where the social activities intersect, the plaza highlighted by the sculpture & waterfall feature. How to represent these small details next to towering buildings was the challenge. Using a simple 1 x 1 round plate to represent the Prometheus statue was how the entire design concept came to be. From there laying out the streets and buildings quickly took shape defining the perimeter of the overall model. Applying the art deco styling to the buildings was done using half plate techniques and smooth tiles in a monotone color to allow the subtle forms to speak more clearly.



– Adam Reed Tucker



“Architecture—a wonderful game”

This was the title, or rather a paraphrase of the French title (“L’architecture est un jeu ... magnifique”) of a 1985 exhibition hosted by the Pompidou Centre in Paris, where 30 young European architects were given the opportunity to play with the famous Danish LEGO® bricks. The original idea was actually Dutch, Rotterdam’s Kunststichting arranging a small event the previous year where ten local architects were let loose on a large number of LEGO bricks. Such was the success of this first initiative that the Pompidou Centre decided to expand the idea to include 30 young aspiring architects from across Europe—their goal: to each draw an imaginary villa which would then, brick by brick, be built at LEGO HQ in Billund.

During the event, many a quotation was made from the history of architecture. For example, the Italian Renaissance architect Palladio was quoted alongside modernists such as Mies van der Rohe and Gerit Rietveld, the quotes relating to architectural projects from oil platforms to romantic ruins. It was a case of no holds



barred and, even though some of the projects produced by the 30 talents ended in weird and wonderful pseudo-philosophical comments on opportunities, or rather the lack of same in the Eighties, it was all, nevertheless, a wonderful game.



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23x
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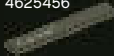
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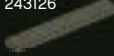
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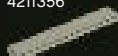
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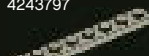
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References

Text credits:

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www.wikipedia.org

Photo credits pages 19, 31 and 45:

Rockefeller Center

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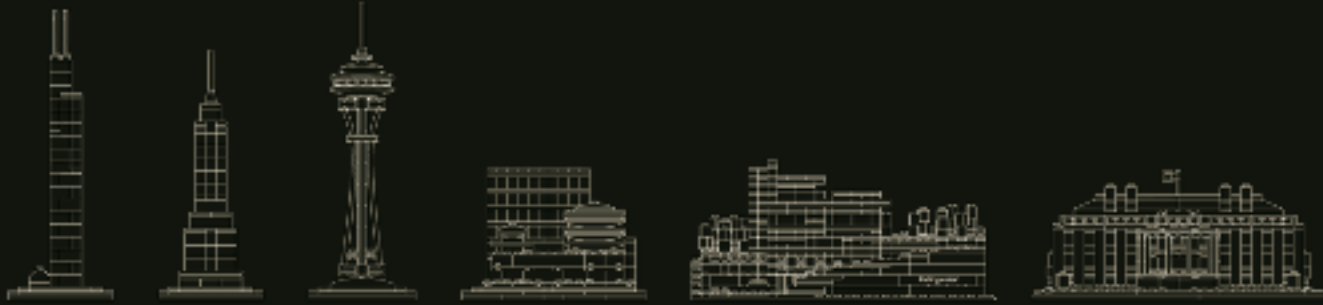
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