

A Gallery of Apartment Doodles Lies Just Below the New Paint

By MARK HAWTHORNE

The apartment buildings going up all over the city have a personal touch that would probably amuse their designers, dismay their doormen, and surprise their tenants—if any of them were aware of it.

The little-known feature is wall-to-wall doodling. It lies just beneath each building's smart decorator colors.

It is there because, during a building's construction, walls are more than just intersecting planes enclosing space. To a worker eating lunch, an apartment hunter waiting for the elevator, or a project engineer struggling with a problem, the unpainted walls are, variously, bulletin boards, scratch pads and drawing tablets.

Each new building is a gallery of construction-project expressionism. A visit to a new twenty-story apartment house at 175 West Twelfth Street, at the corner of Seventh Avenue, before it was painted officially, revealed some interesting work in the field.

Many of the inscriptions were business-like. "Leak on hot" complained the wall of a kitchen on the sixteenth floor. "No good" said a note on the tenth floor, pointedly referring to the elevator button.

"All done 10th. Al." said a two-foot scrawl down the hall.

Nor was Al the only one done. On other floors Frank, Tony, and Ralph had also written and moved on.

"Apt F patch elec work" said someone in yellow crayon to someone else on 18. "Hot" said a penciled warning alongside an electrical outlet on 11.

Other notes were more mysterious. "Center boops job" said a message on 10. "Typical G" said a brisk item on 17. "Cloat bottom" said a wall on 18.

One note on 15 approached the ominous: "M—last stop."

Other work was unflinchingly informal.

"Caesar was here" proclaimed a section of wall on 18 in brown crayon. "Charlie Rottensocks" said a pencilled item on 2. "Emergency" said a carefully drawn button on 5.

The Artist Breaks Out

The visitor might be left almost completely in the dark by some of the building's more cryptic entries. "Yes" said 11. "Springtime in the park" said 12 near the elevator. And on 15, a short story: "Nick, No." had been crossed out, and "Yeah" crayoned in.

Artistic as well as cryptographic talents were displayed by doodlers. "Hello there" said a smiling figure, three feet high, on 7. Ten floors above, on 17, Thurber-like dogs romped across the walls of a service room. On 10 a figure labeled "Tom" was equipped with a radio receiver and radar antenna. On 6 a well-drawn Popeye sucked on a corn-cob.

Amateur cartographers had projected the eastern United States and Africa onto the wall of 11. Marked for particular attention were the Congo and Tallahassee. Why Tallahassee? "Home" said a thoughtful footnote.

Pencil portraits, caricatures, and tic-tac-toe games dotted the building. The occasional obscenities had been erased or smudged. There wasn't a Kilroy in the building.

Persons with a problem also turned to the wall, the exhibition at the Twelfth Street gallery suggested. Many walls displayed engineers' sketches, equations and sums. "Accom-

Continued on Page 4, Column 2

DOODLE GALLERY UNCOVERED HERE

Continued From Page 1

modation" was written three different ways on 12 before the author hit upon the right version. On 5 the creator of "ap-pelation" fell short.

The elevator received attention at several levels. "For best results push this button" suggested the disgruntled designer of a pencilled button on 8. On 15 a tombstone was dedicated to "those who died waiting for the elevator."

Like sky-writing and stone skipping, however, construction project doodling is a fleeting art form. Fast-moving painters cover it with a stain killer, generally pasty white shellac. If the doodle is thick, they scrape it first. The shellac dries immediately. The usual prime sealer is applied to the entire wall, followed by paint.

Then the tenants move in, unaware that a fraction of an inch beneath the surface of their living room wall is notice that Caesar was there first.