

on the below-grade shopping concourse and, directly north in a pedestrian route below grade that will eventually link with the City Hall five blocks to the north. Above grade, a public space on the west side of the building links the Royal York Hotel to the bank plaza.

The link between the towers — the urban room — is described by the architect as a "monumental space". The critical question here is whether the urban room is a stimulating space — or an overblown exercise in volume. The architects see it as a focal point, not only for the building but for the surrounding financial district.

"Even though the hall's scale is larger than necessary for the function it houses, the quality of light and spatial excitement make it an attractive, all-weather place to meet or do business. The bank functions in the low-ceiling areas under the tower or on the mezzanines, and the larger public volume is shared by both north and south office space — seven floors of each tower overlook the urban room and the shopping concourse through a central garden court. The wall of the office towers flanking the urban room on the east and west are granite-clad; the north-east and south-west glazed exterior walls are formed by bronze-coloured, steel wall trusses, whose box-beam members give scale and create linear patterns to enliven the entire composition."

Is the urban room overblown? Or is it, as the architects assert, "A space where the heroic volume of the urban room was conceived from the start to house a major work of art by Jesus Raphael Soto."? Is it monumental? Perhaps the best answer to this is from Philip Johnson, who, in a sentence remarkable for its clarity, honesty and lack of jargon, declared: "I think we're sick of low ceilings." It was also Johnson who reminded us that monumentality is not necessarily an obscenity; Hitler's post offices and Mussolini's town halls were ugly — not monumental, and it is within this context of the use of the word that the Royal Bank's urban room is a monumental, beautiful space. At the risk of becoming over-lyrical, it could also be described as a cathedral-like space which breaks away from the Miesian box with a brilliant use of voids to break open the volume and displace the mass. The Soto sculpture is superb. Thousands of white and yellow aluminum rods hang from the ceiling, complemented by a 60 x 20 foot tapestry by Mariette Rousseau-Vermette, "Reflection of Sun."

