



March 20, 2000

The Honorable Jennifer Raab, Chairman  
Landmarks Preservation Commission  
100 Old Slip  
New York, NY 10005

Dear Jennifer,

I am writing on behalf of the Society's Board of Trustees and members to ask you to hold a designation hearing on Two Columbus Circle. The Society's Preservation Committee considered the building as long ago as April, 1997. The majority believed it should be preserved, although a minority disagreed. In September 1998, the Society wrote to Charles Millard, then president of the city's Economic Development Corporation, recommending that the building be "restored and reused by a sympathetic new owner." A year and a half later, Two Columbus Circle remains controversial. Yet the arguments made by those committee and board members who favor designating it a landmark are certainly weighty enough to merit a public hearing. Meanwhile, the issuance of a new RFP and the threat of demolition have made the need for such a hearing urgent.

Issues of taste aside, the arguments for designating Two Columbus Circle are straightforward. The building was designed by Edward Durrell Stone, one of America's leading architects, at the height of his career, and at a time when American architecture was at the height of its international prestige. It was widely regarded as an important statement: it was clear then, and is so in retrospect, that it marked a significant move away from the pure international-style idiom of the post-war years. That movement has been one of the major themes - some might say *the* major theme -- of American architecture over the last four decades. Personal opinions may differ, yet the historical stature of Two Columbus Circle has been securely established.

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The history of architectural taste shows a series of cycles in which new buildings age, fall into disfavor, and eventually (if they are judged to be significant) are reevaluated and return to favor. This is the story of countless American gems: the now beloved salt-box houses of colonial New England; Victorian masterpieces like the Jefferson Market Courthouse; the Beaux Arts splendors of Penn Station; and Art Deco icons of New York like Radio City Music Hall and the Chrysler Building were all scorned and then rediscovered. It may be too soon to say whether Two Columbus Circle is a modern masterpiece, yet the arguments in favor of its importance suggest that such a reappraisal may well be under way. If history is a guide, then we can predict that New Yorkers of the future will like it more, not less, than those of today: few if any buildings, once returned to favor, have fallen out again.

Historic preservation is a way to pass on to future generations the best of what we have inherited from the past. Two Columbus Circle deserves its day in court. Future New Yorkers deserve no less. The Landmarks Preservation Commission has a responsibility now to bring the lively public debate surrounding Two Columbus Circle to a designation hearing, which is the only forum in which an informed, public decision on its future can be rendered. Without such a hearing, the building's fate may well be decided without any public consideration of its architectural merit or historical merit. And that, after thirty-five years of thoughtful landmarks protection in New York, would be a very great shame.

Yours sincerely,



Frank Sanchis  
Executive Director

cc: Ms. Peg Breen  
Mr. Michael Carey  
Mr. Philip Howard  
Ms. Vicki Weiner