

## EDITORIAL

# Troubles of a Would-Be Treasure

A city with a notoriously bad record of preserving its treasures should think seriously before allowing an historically significant structure to fall. Of course, deciding what's worthwhile remains a complicated – and usually controversial – matter. Get three New Yorkers in a room and you might come up with three different opinions about 2 Columbus Circle.

For decades, many critics disagreed about the value of a 10-story structure at the southwest corner of Central Park. Some thought it downright ugly. But architect Edward Durell Stone designed an unusual structure, and one that's won the support of West Side advocates who want it saved. Built by millionaire Huntington Hartford as an art gallery in 1964, the site later served as home to the city's Department of Cultural Affairs.

This prime Manhattan parcel has not, in recent years, received the kind of attention lavished on the New York Coliseum, a neighbor that recently gave way for the forthcoming, hugely-scaled AOL Time Warner building of the 21st century. But just because the case of 2 Columbus Circle seems at first glance to be more complicated doesn't make it any less compelling.

When Gulf and Western handed over control of the building to the city, a caveat was added that the site should be devoted at least partly to cultural endeavors. To this day, there's debate about the wisdom of maintaining that pledge.

Normally, the city would be expected to hold some sort of a public hearing about the building's fate. But the Giuliani administration hasn't acted much as if it wants the views of citizens as part of the planning process for Columbus Circle as a whole, and particularly when it comes to saving architecture. The administration may well see the site for its economic viability.

Still, the planning process should be as open as possible. Here's hoping that 2 Columbus Circle outlives the Giuliani administration and gets the fair hearing it deserves.

2 Columbus  
Circle