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# Museum to Columbus Circle American Craft tops Trump

By ERIC HERMAN  
Daily News Business Writer

**A**fter seven years of weighing options for 2 Columbus Circle, the city has decided to sell the distinctive, nine-story building to the American Craft Museum.

The city chose the American Craft Museum over a higher bid from Donald Trump, who wanted to tear the building down and erect a luxury hotel.

The museum bid between \$15 million and \$20 million, a source said, "slightly less" than Trump.

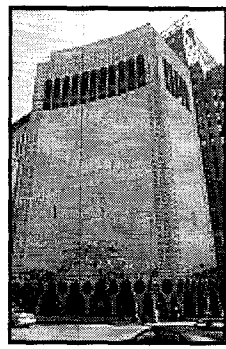
The museum also will spend about \$10 million to give the building a new facade and renovate its interior.

It will be the latest step in a renewal of Columbus Circle led by AOL Time-Warner's new headquarters rising next door.

"It's a good deal for the city, because we think this helps the continued revitalization of Columbus Circle," said Andrew Alper, president of the city's Economic Development Corp.

The selection marks a new phase for a building that evokes strong reactions in New Yorkers. With a windowless white facade and columns that resemble lollipops, it has its admirers and its critics.

Some, like architect Robert A. M. Stern, say 2 Columbus



Monaster NEWS  
**2 Columbus Circle's windowless facade will give way to what officials call a 'transparent' look.**

Circle is a masterpiece that should be landmarked. Others, like developer Douglas Durst, call the building "ugly as hell."

"If I put in a bid, it would be to tear it down," Durst told the Daily News.

Noted architect Edward Durell Stone designed 2 Columbus Circle, which opened in 1964 as the Huntington Hartford Gallery of Modern Art. Hartford's museum failed to catch on with the public, and the city later took over the building. The Cultural Affairs Department moved in but departed in 1998. The building has been vacant ever since.

Fans of the building supported a bid by the Dahesh Museum, which planned to restore the building and keep the facade. The Giuliani administration was said to have favored Trump's tear-down plan.

The American Craft Museum has charted a middle course. It won't tear the entire building down, officials said, but will tear off the unusual front and replace it with a "transparent" one. It has never been landmarked.

"If you make the building more transparent, you can really imagine being inside the museum looking at the park," Alper said.


Holly Hotchner, the museum's director, said an architect would soon be selected to develop a plan for the building, and that the redesign would be submitted for public review.

"We're in celebration mode," Hotchner said. "I think we can bring a lot of people and interest to Columbus Circle."

Trump called the city's pick "a terrible waste of a very good asset."

Alper countered that "we already have two hotels around the Circle. And our view was that a third hotel would have added less than a cultural institution."

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