

LANDMARK WEST!

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Subject: 2 Columbus Circle update

Last Wednesday (July 2) marked the end of two critical discussions regarding the future of 2 Columbus Circle. But that doesn't mean efforts to save this 1960s modern icon have run their course. Preservationists have been calling for the building's preservation since 1995 - and we're just getting warmed up.

City Planning Commission

The City Planning Commission (CPC) voted to approve the transfer of Edward Durell Stone's 1964 building to the Museum of Arts and Design, whose planned alterations to the facade and interior will erase Stone's world-renowned design for the site. Although the CPC's vote was unanimous, two commissioners couched their votes as "reluctant," questioning why the Landmarks Preservation Commission (the municipal agency charged with protecting New York's cultural heritage) had never held a public hearing to consider the building's historic significance. "Why would anyone think of destroying such a building?" asked Commissioner Dolly Williams, responding to what she recognized as the "overwhelming concern of speakers" at the June 18, 2003, CPC public hearing. "It should be a landmark," she continued. Indeed.

Unfortunately, the Landmarks Commission has not taken up the mantle. Others have noticed - in a July 8 *Newsday* article, NYC historian Jeffrey Kroessler writes: **"Despite the pleas of historians, preservationists and architects, the commission has pointedly refused to hold a hearing to consider 2 Columbus Circle, Edward Durell Stone's controversial 1965 museum (originally the Gallery of Modern Art). Few believed that this commission would have actually designated it, but three successive chairs have demonstrated a reluctance to let the process take its course."**

On-Line Panel Discussion

"Is the tradeoff worth it?" With this key question, Paul Goldberger concluded the 2 Columbus Circle on-line forum at www.collectorsworld.org. In the minds of many historians, preservationists and architects, the answer is resoundingly "no." And not necessarily because the Museum's planned replacement of E.D. Stone's building would be bad (it appears not to be), but because the original design is simply irreplaceable. (Note: "Protecting the Irreplaceable" is the motto of America's leading preservation advocate, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which has taken a strong stand for preserving 2 Columbus Circle.)

The forum transcript will remain on the CollectorsWorld website. Check it out. It concentrates into one uniquely fresh, frank exchange a full range of ideas about why 2 Columbus Circle should - or shouldn't - be preserved. Exactly the kind of discussion one would expect to take place at a public hearing before the Landmarks Commission. **What more will it take for 2 Columbus Circle to receive its official "day in court"?**