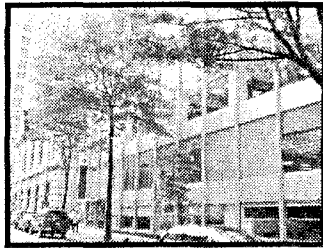


do-comomo
US.org
Summer 2003

K. RANDALL

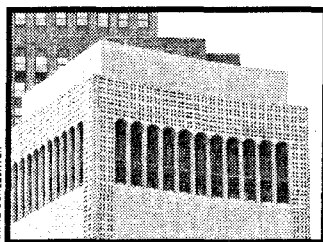


NEW YORK:
**GUARDIAN LIFE
INSURANCE ANNEX**
GORDON BUNSHAFT, 1960
SEEKING LANDMARK
STATUS

When many corporations were leaving the city in the 1950s to build new, larger headquarters in suburban pastures, the Guardian Life Insurance Company held its ground at Union Square and Park Avenue South. In 1960 the company commissioned Gordon Bunshaft of SOM to design a low-rise annex within the block of row houses on 17th Street behind its 20-story Beaux-Arts building. The four-story annex is a distinctly refined essay in the International Style, besides being one of the finest examples anywhere of an infill building. It is an incomparable asset to New York as a lesson in possibilities: Bunshaft produced an elegant Modern building, while respecting the low-rise character of the mid-block site and the existing street wall. The Guardian Life Annex's meticulously crafted curtain wall of aluminum spandrels set flush with large glass panels provides a time-stamp counterpoint to the neighborhood's 19th-century fabric.

Two years ago the Union Square Community Coalition along with other community organizations around the city started a letter writing campaign to secure a Landmarks Preservation Commission hearing for the Annex. The campaign started after the main building and annex were purchased by The Related Companies. No hearing has been scheduled despite a wellspring of support from community groups and politicians alike. Guardian Life's main building was landmarked in 1988. In 2000 its exterior and public rooms were restored as part of the redesign of the building for the W Union Square Hotel. The hotel's adaptive reuse project won a 2002 award for excellence from the Preservation League of New York State and was touted as an imaginative project juxtaposing a historic building with new design. Now it's time for the Bunshaft-designed annex to gain the same landmark status and protections as the building it complements. The Related Companies owns both buildings but leases each to sympathetic tenants. Air rights are not an issue as the annex tucks into a residential block zoned R-8B. Visit the Annex and join the campaign by writing to Commissioner Robert Tierney requesting a hearing.
-Caroline Zaleski

ANNIE SCHREIBER



NEW YORK:
**2 COLUMBUS CIRCLE/
GALLERY OF MODERN ART**
E.D. STONE, 1964
FACADE AND INTERIOR
REWORKING PENDING

On May 8th Community Board 5 approved the property transfer of 2 Columbus Circle from the City of New York to the Museum of Arts and Design despite public testimony during which the nays outnumbered yeas by five to one.

On June 18th the City Planning Commission (CPC) held its hearing on 2 Columbus Circle (2CC). Over 30 people testified in favor of holding a Landmarks Preservation Commission hearing before the building is transferred and subsequently modified beyond recognition. Testimony in favor was

diverse—from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, to state elected officials to the author Tom Wolfe. Two weeks later, during its July 3rd review session the CPC voted to approve the "disposition" of 2CC.

Landmark West! conducted extensive research into the history behind the City's deal with the Museum and has been following the ULURP process through which 2CC is winding. Executive Director Kate Wood and staff prepared a submission to the CPC, presented at the hearing, outlining among other things, errors and contradictions in the Environmental Assessment Statement (EAS) prepared by the Deputy Mayor's office. The EAS concluded that allowing the transfer and design overhaul to proceed would have no impact on any historic resource. (Under EAS guidelines, "historic resources" include properties that have *not* been identified by the Landmarks Commission, but meet eligibility requirements.)

Which leads to the real question surrounding 2CC: Why has there not been a Landmarks Preservation Commission hearing? The City's eligibility criteria encompasses any building that "has a special character or special historical or aesthetic interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, State or nation." On aesthetic *interest* alone 2CC squarely meets eligibility. A building is eligible for National Register listing if it "embodies distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction."

"Distinctive characteristics of a period" is 2 Columbus Circle's overriding contribution to New York's cultural and architectural history. Modern architecture is a broad and diverse body of work that cannot be defined by easy and obvious examples alone—the Lever Houses and the Guggenheims. The record must include later postwar buildings and work by Modern architects who sometimes sailed against the prevailing winds of taste and custom. Stone's building is such a record.

Unfortunately the process of determining 2 Columbus Circle's future use has been incredibly political from day one: A Freedom of Information Act request by Landmark West! was stymied by EDC; a former Chair of the LPC was hired as Director of the Museum of Art and Design's New Building Program; city planners have advised their friends in preservation to steer clear, "it's too political," the EAS was prepared by the city itself. Perhaps as important as saving 2CC, this is a test of a vital public process.

DOCOMOMO will continue to press for a designation hearing and beyond that, for a compromise that will preserve the primary facades of E. D. Stone's most talked about building.
-Kathleen Randall

ONLINE FORUM TACKLES 2 COLUMBUS CIRCLE, E.D. STONE AND MORE

The recent online discussion organized by Landmark West! and moderated by Paul Goldberger is still available for reading and public comment at www.collectorsworld.org. Panelists Terence Riley, Witold Rybczynski, Diane Lewis, Michael Sorkin, Thomas Mellins, Karrie Jacobs and John Kaliski provide thoughtful fuel for the no-middle-ground discussion surrounding the merits and shortcomings of E.D. Stone's building and even larger questions—as Goldberger asks: what is a fair definition of an iconic structure anyway?

The smart, sharp commentary from both sides is a very lively read. Where else have you heard 2 Columbus Circle noted "For the charms of its weeny aedicular verve" (entry #19)?

s
ts
om

lls
mit-
at
d-
stry
e.
cu-
nifi-
jister
to
nal
cor-
s and
f
are

MO's
ave
le

r
build-
imply
iting
please
repar-
MO/US
org) for
w
ditional
docomo-
gistry).