

1/2004

11 Most Endangered

The National Trust for Historic Preservation

America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places

2004 Nomination • 2 Columbus Circle, Manhattan

Preservation League of New York State • Historic Districts Council • LANDMARK WEST!



1. General Information

Name of Site: 2 Columbus Circle
 City: New York
 County: New York
 State: New York
 Zip Code: 10019
 U. S. Congressional District and Representative: Rep. Jerrold Nadler, NY-8

2. Overview Summary

History

The former Gallery of Modern Art at 2 Columbus Circle has been loved, loathed and hotly debated since its opening in 1964. Although it has no official designation, its prominent location and iconic visual quality make it universally recognizable as a "landmark" at this bustling Manhattan crossroads where Midtown meets the Upper West Side.

Edward Durell Stone designed 2 Columbus Circle to house the art collection of A&P supermarket heir Huntington Hartford. Questioning the European-style modernism favored by corporate America in the mid-20th century, Stone referenced historical and classical architectural themes. Architect and historian Robert A. M. Stern has called 2 Columbus Circle a forerunner of Post-Modernism and one of Stone's masterworks.

Threat

2 Columbus Circle is threatened by wholesale renovations that would obliterate Stone's original design. The presumptive owner, the Museum of Arts and Design, has announced plans to gut the interior and replace the building's white marble façade (including its signature arcade, porthole windows, and upper loggia) with new materials configured to render the structure more transparent and "ephemeral."

Solution

Radically altering 2 Columbus Circle would create a gaping void in the record of design and urbanism in the city, state, nation, and world. Despite claims (arguably overstated) that the façade is irretrievably deteriorated, the owners could adopt a modified design approach that would lessen the impact on the exterior fabric of the building, and make renovations that will not jeopardize future landmark listing. The technology and design experience exist, but – to date – the will is lacking.

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3. Additional Site Information

3.1 *Date of Construction:* 1964

3.2 *Type of Structure:* Commercial Building

3.3 *National, state and/or local landmark designation:* not yet determined

3.4 *Who is responsible for sustaining the site financially?*

The site is currently owned by the City of New York. In March 2003, the City began the formal process (Uniform Land Use Review Procedure) for transferring the site to the New York City Economic Development Corporation (EDC), a quasi-government agency. Final approval of the transfer is expected in Spring 2004. The EDC will then sell the site to the Museum of Arts and Design (formerly the American Craft Museum), which plans to make 2 Columbus Circle its permanent home. (Note: The City has indicated that payment for the property would be deferred for several years to allow the Museum to focus its fundraising on the redevelopment program for 2 Columbus Circle.)

3.5 *Who has legal control and/or the authority to approve projects related to the site?*

2 Columbus Circle is not a New York City landmark; therefore, plans to alter this building do not trigger review by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. However, since it is a city-owned site, its sale must be subjected to ULURP review (as noted above). Through this process, the redevelopment project has been exposed to scrutiny by various agencies since it would result directly from the sale of the building to the Museum (via the Economic Development Corporation). So far, these agencies have included Manhattan Community Board 5, the Manhattan Borough President, and the City Planning Commission. All approved the sale. The Manhattan Borough Board is scheduled to review this project in March or April 2004. Their approval is necessary before the sale to the EDC can be finalized; then, EDC's board must meet to approve the sale to the Museum. Once the transfer is complete, the Museum's re-design is expected to be "as-of-right", requiring no further formal approvals beyond building permits.

3.6 *Have you previously nominated this site to the National Trust's list of **America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places**?*

No

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4. Description of the Site's Significance

- 4.1 *Describe the site's significance, including its historic, cultural, artistic, social and/or architectural value. Specify if the property is unique or is representative of many similar types of sites and, if applicable, what other sites could easily be compared to it.*

According to the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, properties that have achieved significance within the last 50 years may be listed in the National Register of Historic Places when it can be demonstrated that they are of exceptional importance. The New York City Landmarks Law calls for a 30-year "waiting period" for buildings to be considered for landmark designation according to the Commission's usual procedures. Two Columbus Circle appears to readily meet the criteria for both local and national designation. However, in 2004, the 40th anniversary of its completion, 2 Columbus Circle faces alterations so extensive and irreversible as to eliminate the architectural integrity that distinguishes Edward Durell Stone's masterwork. The controversial proposed renovation of the 1964 Gallery of Modern Art to the new Museum of Arts and Design would be implemented without a thoughtful and thorough study of rehabilitation options and design solutions guided by contemporary preservation practice. The destruction would occur just as an increasing number of organizations and individuals are calling for official recognition of 2 Columbus Circle as an important work of an internationally acclaimed architectural master which exemplifies the shift from modernism to post-modern design.

Edward Durell Stone (1902-1978) is acknowledged as "one of the earliest American exponents of the International Style."¹ He is credited with helping "transform the International Style modernism of the 1950s into the postmodernism of the 1960s and 1970s by substituting formalism for functionalism."² According to DOCOMOMO, "Edward Durell Stone is one of the very few American architects to have enjoyed an international practice. His designs were radical, poetic and polemical in their references to European tenets within the American context."³

Stone "developed a decorative style that incorporated neoclassical elements. Delicate screens, rich materials and bold colors became his trademarks."⁴ His use of luxurious materials and a wide variety of ornamental detail expanded in the 1960s.

Trained at Harvard University and MIT and apprenticed in the offices of Henry R. Shepley in Boston and Schultz and Weaver in New York City, Stone's work reflects his Beaux Arts-based education and interest in the traditional designs of other nations. This is especially evident in his Cold War-era government commissions, including embassies. Among his most important projects are:

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- The Richard Mandel House in Mount Kisco, NY (1933)
- The first Museum of Modern Art in New York City (1939)
- The Conger Goodyear House on Long Island (1939)
- The US Embassy in New Delhi (1954)
- The US Pavillion of the Brussels World's Fair Exposition (1958)
- The National Geographic Building in Washington DC (1964)
- The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington (1971), and
- The Gallery of Modern Art/2 Columbus Circle (1964).

Two Columbus Circle has been favorably compared to Stone's other projects and to the work of other contemporary architects. According to DOCOMOMO, 2 Columbus Circle embodies the "distinctive characteristics of a period"⁵ in the design history of New York City. Architect and architectural historian Robert A.M. Stern has called 2 Columbus Circle a forerunner of post-modernism and one of Stone's "masterworks."⁶ Architectural critic Tom Wolfe offered his perspective on the building's cultural and architectural significance and praise for its innovative design in two articles on the editorial pages of *The New York Times*, calling it "one of the most important buildings in the history of 20th century architecture."⁷

Architectural critic Michael Sorkin identifies 2 Columbus Circle as "a critical hinge in Stone's career"⁸ while the Municipal Art Society of New York compares it favorably to the TWA Terminal and Lincoln Center as prime examples of late Modernism. "Put in a larger context, even people who dislike the building are realizing that it represents a significant moment in the history of Modernism and the styles that followed it."⁹ These and other statements by leading historians and critics argue for 2 Columbus Circle's landmark qualities, official designation, and preservation.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Edward D. Stone biographical entry at <http://www.greatbuildings.com>.

² *ibid.*

³ Letter, Caroline Zaleski, Director of Advocacy, DOCOMOMO, to Hon. Amanda Burden, NYC Planning Commission, June 18, 2003.

⁴ David Griffin, Preservation Online, National Trust for Historic Preservation, August 1, 2003.

⁵ Letter, Kathleen Randall and Theodore Prudon, DOCOMOMO, to the Hon. Amanda Burden, NYC Planning Commission, June 18, 2003.

⁶ Letter, Robert A.M. Stern, to Landmark West!, February 12, 2003.

⁷ Wolfe, Tom, "The Building That Isn't There," *New York Times*, op-ed page, October 12 and 13, 2003.

⁸ Online forum, hosted by www.collectorsworld.org, June 16 - July 2, 2003.

⁹ Letter, Charles A. Platt, Chairman, Preservation Committee, Municipal Art Society, to Hon. Robert Tierney, June 30, 2003.

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5. Description of the Site's Threat

5.1 *Indicate up to five principal threats to the site in descending order of magnitude.*

Human Threats

- ① Inappropriate renovation / gross alteration
- ② Lack of public awareness
- ③ Inadequate maintenance / neglect
- ④ other: Lack of due process

5.2 *Select the one that best describes the type of urgency.*

Threat is imminent

5.3 *Describe the current physical condition of the property, the threats to the property and the rate of deterioration. Describe how this deterioration is negatively affecting the site. Explain the obstacles to implementing effective site protection.*

Inappropriate Renovation/Gross Alteration

2 Columbus Circle is imminently threatened by massive renovations that would utterly destroy E. D. Stone's original design for the building. In 1996 and 1999, the Economic Development Corporation issued two separate Requests for Proposals to facilitate the sale of the property (now owned by the City) and encourage its redevelopment by a private developer. In June 2002, Mayor Michael Bloomberg announced the Museum of Arts and Design as the designated recipient of the site. In April 2003, the Museum announced plans to radically alter the building by gutting the interior and replacing the building's white-marble façade (including its signature "lollipop" arcade, porthole windows, and upper loggia) with new materials configured to allow the facade to appear more transparent and "ephemeral." The Museum launched a \$50 million capital campaign to cover the property purchase price and the new building program.

Lack of Public Awareness

The Museum has demonstrated no willingness to consider preservation and restoration of the building as part of their adaptive reuse plans, despite efforts in public and one-on-one meetings to convince them of the building's historic significance. In fact, the Museum has publicly stated that the cost of re-designing the building would exceed that of restoring it and that cost is not driving their decision to do away with Stone's original design. Instead, it claims that transforming the building will help the institution project a new identity (in keeping with its recent name change from "American Craft Museum" to "Museum of Arts and Design.") This plan has been endorsed at

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the top level of city government (see Mayor's April 2, 2003 press release, enclosed).

Like any development project in New York City, this one is rife with politics. However, 2 Columbus Circle's strong identity as a product of unorthodox 1960s modernism has cast a particularly dark shadow on its future. A 1997 *New York Times* article noted that "the scorn heaped upon [2 Columbus Circle when it opened in 1964] and on Mr. Hartford's gallery certainly derived, in part, from the strangle-hold that orthodox modernism had on critical opinion at the time." In a 1997 *New Yorker* article about 2 Columbus Circle, architecture critic Paul Goldberger wrote, "That tastes change, and have always changed, is the premise on which landmarks laws are based," noting the rise of public interest in preserving the recent past, including so-called "ugly ducklings" that are slow to find friends even among preservationists (article enclosed). In the ten years since 2 Columbus Circle became eligible for landmark designation (it turned 30 in 1994), appreciation for the significance of the recent past has deepened. Today, preservationists are united in the belief that 2 Columbus Circle deserves fair consideration of its merits for formal, regulatory protection.

Inadequate Maintenance/Neglect

2 Columbus Circle has been vacant and virtually abandoned since the late 1990s, when the City evicted the Department of Cultural Affairs and Convention & Visitors Bureau. (These agencies had occupied 2 Columbus Circle since 1980, when the building was given as a "gift" to the City on the condition that it function as New York's "principal public facility for visitors' services and cultural affairs.") In March 2003, an engineering firm commissioned by Allied Works Architecture (the architect enlisted by the Museum to re-design 2 Columbus Circle) issued a report detailing the condition of the building's exterior cladding and offering recommendations for addressing existing problems. The report noted evidence of cladding deterioration—including shifted, cracked and spalled marble and precast concrete panels—but also noted that many panels appear to be in good condition. The report concluded that the cladding system was subject to "inherent performance problems" and that, although "it may be possible to maintain the existing façade through a program of reactive repair...the progressive deterioration of the existing cladding will eventually require complete replacement."

The Museum has used this information—and their argument has been reiterated by others, including Ada Louise Huxtable in a recent *Wall Street Journal* article—to support its re-design approach. However, according to architectural and engineering firm Wiss, Janney, Elstner (WJE), wholesale replacement is not a foregone conclusion. (WJE has extensive experience in the study and repair of thin stone veneer façades and special experience with the buildings of E.D. Stone. WJE has developed successful repair designs for several of Stone's buildings, including the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington, D.C.) In a letter dated October 15, 2003, WJE architects

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Kyle Normandin and Harry Hunderman offered to review existing documentation about the building's condition and conduct an independent investigation to confirm the nature of required repairs (letter enclosed). Based on prior experience with similarly constructed buildings, WJE believes that the deterioration issues observed at 2 Columbus Circle might not be insurmountable.

Other: Lack of Due Process

Despite changing attitudes towards modernism, 2 Columbus Circle continues to be misunderstood and rejected by local political leadership. In 2000, the *New York Observer* quoted a former New York City official pronouncing what other sources have widely held to be true, that then-Mayor Rudolph Giuliani "hates the building". Arguably, this sentiment set the tone for the Landmarks Preservation Commission's refusal to hold a public hearing on the building's potential for landmark designation, despite numerous requests from experts in the architecture, design, preservation and planning fields and members of the general public (copies of sample nomination letters enclosed).

This lack of due public process also extends to the City's efforts to sell the building. In 2002, *New York Times* reporter David Dunlap wrote, "For seven years, the government has revealed almost nothing about its ever-changing plans for the building, instead handling the matter behind, well, marble walls" (article enclosed). Dunlap referred to a 1996 deed between the City of New York and the Viacom Foundation, which held a reversionary interest in the property, that was intended to position the Economic Development Corporation so that it could dispose of 2 Columbus Circle without any public review. LANDMARK WEST! hired an attorney to show that the property was not exempt from ULURP, and the City finally began the review procedure in March 2003. However, in July 2003, the City Planning Commission approved an Environmental Assessment Statement and Negative Declaration that failed to identify 2 Columbus Circle as a historic resource that would be impacted by the sale of the property to the Museum. This is the subject of ongoing legal action, brought by local preservation organizations, arguing that "the City's economic objectives infected the process for considering the potential landmark status of the building and subsequently tainted the environmental analysis that it performed in order to gain legal authorization for the sale." (For further explanation of the property's ownership history and efforts to dispose of it, please see enclosed Timeline).

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6. Description of Action Plan

- 6.1 *Describe any previous measures that community activists, government officials, and other groups have taken to protect the site, and note the reasons these measures have not been fully successful.*

Since 2 Columbus Circle became eligible for landmark designation in 1994, preservationists—in unity with many other voices in the architecture, art, history, planning and design fields—have persistently called for its protection (sample letters and testimony enclosed). The following timeline chronicles past and present efforts to preserve the building. Throughout this period, the nominating groups and others have galvanized support through regular e-mail alerts and newsletter articles. These measures have been largely successful in raising awareness and fueling ongoing discussion, although the Landmarks Commission and State Historic Preservation Office continue to resist establishing a framework to formally protect 2 Columbus Circle.

- | | |
|-----------|---|
| Mid-1990s | NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission receives first letters requesting evaluation of 2 Columbus Circle for potential landmark status. |
| 1996 | Dahesh Museum (an institution devoted to 19 th - and 20 th -century European academic art) announces its bid on 2 Columbus Circle, stating that “2 Columbus Circle was purposely built as a museum...it is ideal in scale and layout. We will not so much change as upgrade and renovate the site. Edward Durell Stone designed an elegant structure, forward-looking for its time, that deserves to be preserved and restored” (press release enclosed). The Dahesh hired preservation architect Hugh Hardy to restore and renovate the building.

Robert A.M. Stern promulgates list of 35 Modern buildings, including 2 Columbus Circle, worthy of landmark status (copy of <i>New York Times</i> article enclosed). |
| 1997-2003 | Prominent individuals, including Brooke Astor and J. Carter Brown, write to Mayor Rudolph Giuliani in support of the Dahesh Museum’s bid. Civic groups call for public review of proposed sale and continue advocacy for a landmarks hearing. |
| 1999-2003 | Letters to New York State Historic Preservation Officer Bernadette Castro supporting a determination of “eligibility” for the State and National Registers of Historic Places (In 2003, LW! received a response from Commissioner Castro stating, “Since we have not been informed of any state or federal involvement in the rehabilitation, we prefer not to issue a formal determination of eligibility at this time, but rather to try to affect a satisfactory outcome by working with the new owners in a positive manner. Should there be state or federal involvement at a future date, we will proceed with an eligibility determination...,” copy of letter enclosed.) |
| 2000 | Robert A.M. Stern and Tom Wolfe join preservation groups for a rally in front of 2 Columbus Circle.

<i>Wall Street Journal</i> and <i>New York Observer</i> publish editorials calling for preserving 2 Columbus Circle. |

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- March 2001 NYC Council Member Ronnie Eldridge calls a City Council hearing to allow for public testimony on future of 2 Columbus Circle. Raised profile results in a February 2002 letter to Mayor Michael Bloomberg from 9 elected officials, including local council members and state senators and assembly members (copy of letter enclosed).
- Oct. 2002 After Mayor's announcement of the Museum of Arts and Design as the recipient of the site, LANDMARK WEST! representatives meet with Museum leadership to discuss significance of 2 Columbus Circle. An October 27, 2003, *New York Times* article reports Museum's intention to alter the building, citing its "poor condition" and the need for the new museum to have windows.
- Dec. 2002 LANDMARK WEST! launches postcard campaign (sample postcard enclosed). Mayor Bloomberg receives hundreds of cards calling for him to urge the Landmarks Commission to schedule a hearing for 2 Columbus Circle.
- Feb. 2003 LANDMARK WEST! and the American Institute of Architects New York Chapter co-sponsor a panel discussion on the future of 2 Columbus Circle at Steelcase (4 Columbus Circle), attended by over 200 people (see www.preserve.org/lmwest/2ccpanel.htm for more information and list of participants).
- March - July 2003 Hundreds of individuals and civic groups participate in ULURP process, testifying at public hearings and writing letters in support of preserving 2 Columbus Circle.
- June 16 - July 2, 2003 LANDMARK WEST! and *Western Interiors* magazine co-sponsor on-line forum on 2 Columbus Circle, moderated by architecture critic Paul Goldberger (see www.collectorsworld.org for more information and list of participants).
- Sept. 2003 - present Representatives from LANDMARK WEST! and Historic Districts Council meet with NYC Council Members in preparation for Manhattan Borough Board hearing, which must take place before final sale of 2 Columbus Circle is approved.
- Oct. 2003 Tom Wolfe writes extensive Op-Ed piece for *New York Times* (copy enclosed) calling 2 Columbus Circle "one of the most important buildings in the history of 20th-century architecture" and lambasting the Landmarks Commission for not taking action to preserve it.
- Nov. 2003 Preservation League of New York State includes 2 Columbus Circle on its "Seven to Save" list. The listing is supported by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, LANDMARK WEST!, Historic Districts Council, Municipal Art Society, New York Landmarks Conservancy, and DOCOMOMO.
- LANDMARK WEST!, Historic Districts Council, DOCOMOMO New York Tri-State, Juliet Hartford (daughter of Huntington Hartford) and neighbors file Article 78 petition in New York State Supreme Court contesting City Planning Commission's approval of 2 Columbus Circle disposition on basis of inadequate assessment of historic resource impacts.
- Dec. 2003 *New York Times* architecture critic Herbert Muschamp cites the failure of the Landmarks Commission to hold a hearing on 2 Columbus Circle on of the architectural "Lows" of 2003.

Handwritten signature: Herbie Muschamp

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6.2 *Has a preservation and/or management plan been prepared for the property?*

No

6.3 *Excluding financial support and publicity, describe how inclusion on the list of **America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places** might assist in the efforts to safeguard the site. Include any ideas for possible forms of collaboration between the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the site nominator — including outreach to non-preservation organizations and diversity groups.*

Given its prestige and track record of success with "11 Most" properties, direct National Trust involvement with 2 Columbus Circle would greatly enhance the visibility, legitimacy and prospects for success of the current local and state level preservation efforts. There are two broad strategies for the Trust's activities. One is to negotiate quietly, behind the scenes, with the major decision-makers. The other is to collaborate with organizations, agencies and individuals in a highly public campaign. These two approaches need not be fully mutually exclusive and depend on the status of the threat near and at the time of the release of the 2004 "11 Most" list. Possible activities associated with these two strategies are described below:

Quiet Negotiation

Given the National Trust's well-deserved reputation for excellence and accomplishment, Trust leadership could convene meetings with officials of New York City and the Museum of Arts and Design to ascertain what circumstances would allow the current plan to be put aside and the issue of building design be reopened. Similarly, the Trust could further explore the idea of landmark designation (see 6/16/03 letter from the Trust calling for the City's Landmarks Preservation Commission to hold a designation hearing). The goal would be for the National Trust to assist in finding a face-saving way for the City and the Museum to change their minds and emerge as civic design and preservation heroes. The redesign could be accomplished quietly and involve municipal, Museum and Trust leadership, Museum donors and design professionals. Direct Trust involvement would help assure that preservation objectives and practices are integrated with the Museum's goals and needs. The results of the new preservation design would be the subjects of the Museum's new fundraising and public relations campaigns and should be linked to national and international acclaim in the form of positive media responses (news stories, op-ed pieces, etc.) and architectural and preservation awards (AIA, National Trust, etc.)

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Although the nominators of this listing believe that 2 Columbus Circle is of landmark quality, the effort to secure a preservation solution for the building's rehabilitation and new use could be accomplished without seeking official landmark designation from either the City or the State Historic Preservation Office. However, the final results would need to be of a caliber of work that would not jeopardize future listings.

Public Campaign

Building on the National Trust's efforts on behalf of 2 Columbus Circle in 2003, the Trust could join with other groups to better educate the public and community leaders about the significance of the building, strive for achieving landmark designation, and lead public forums aimed at developing preservation approaches to the current design. Specific steps include:

- 1 Use of the Trust's extensive communication program to publicize the threat to the building and its importance (website, "Forum," Preservation magazine, op-ed pieces by Richard Moe);
- 2 Support efforts by local and state sponsors: 1) to secure a determination of State and National Register eligibility and 2) to schedule a public designation hearing by the City's Landmarks Preservation Commission. The Trust could participate in the hearing process and express support for landmark designation;
- 3 Participate on the City's public review process regarding the transfer of the building from the municipality to the Museum;
- 4 Include one or more sessions on 2 Columbus Circle and other buildings of the recent past at the 2004 National Trust's annual conference;
- 5 Sponsor a design charrette or competition with rehabilitation and preservation as stated objectives. Invite national and international participants (individuals, firms, and organizations and agencies including the Association for Preservation Technology and the National Park Service).
- 6 If deemed helpful in the future, sponsor a nomination to the World Monuments Fund's list of **100 Most Endangered Properties**; and
- 7 Provide the services of the Trust's legal staff and possibly participate in on-going or potential future litigation.

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7. Nominator Information

Reflecting the local, citywide and statewide implications of this nomination, 2 Columbus circle is co-nominated by Landmark West!, Historic Districts Council, and The Preservation League of New York State. The web site of each organization includes information on the site nominated.

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Discussed nomination with a National Trust representative? Yes

This nomination has been discussed with and is supported by Trust Advisors Richard Hawks (1/2/04) and Anne Van Ingen (1/8/04), and Northeast Regional Office staff Marilyn Fenollosa (1/5/04). Executive Director Wendy Nicholas encouraged the nomination (email to Scott Heyl, President, Preservation League, 12/19/03).

The undersigned hereby gives to the National Trust for Historic Preservation a non-exclusive license to use, and to allow others to use, in whole or in part, in whatever manner the National Trust may desire, including (but not limited to) use for publicity, audiovisual presentation, and/or promotion, all photographs, videos, and other materials submitted to the National Trust in connection with the America's 11 Most Endangered Places nomination. The National Trust is hereby given permission to make any editorial changes and/or additions to the materials referred to herein as it may deem necessary or desirable for production purposes. The undersigned hereby agrees that it has the authority to grant these rights, that it has obtained any such rights necessary from third parties, including without limitation, models, creators, photographers, writers and producers, and that it will hold harmless and indemnify the National Trust from and against any claim brought against the National Trust from third parties that may arise out of the violation of this paragraph.

Signature Scott P. Heyl President Date 1/20/04
Preservation League of New York State (JW)

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8. Owner Information

*Is the owner of the property aware of the nomination to **America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places**?*

No

*Does the owner endorse the nomination to **America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places**?*

No

City of New York

www.nyc.gov (does not include information on 2CC)

Office of the Mayor (lead agency)

Robert Kulikowski, Assistant to the Mayor (NYC Office of Environmental Coordination)

100 Gold Street, 2nd Floor

New York, NY 10038

Tel: 212-788-2937 Fax: 212-788-2941 (e-mail unavailable)

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9. Media Contact Information

(Same as #7, nominator information)

10. Photography Release

All images submitted with this nomination must be free of copyright restrictions. Securing reproduction rights and permissions is the responsibility of the nominator. The National Trust for Historic Preservation reserves the right to reproduce and make available to the press all images submitted. Images will not be used for commercial purposes. Photographic material cannot be returned.

I hereby give my permission for these images to be reproduced to publicize America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places.

Nominator's printed name Scott P. Heyl, President, Preservation League of New York State

Signature Scott P. Heyl, President, Preservation League of New York State (New)

Date 1/20/04

(Erica Stoller, who controls copyright permissions for Ezra Stoller's photographs, will send written permission to the National Trust under separate cover.)

11. Checklist

Indicate which of the following items are contained in your nomination package:

Required Materials

- Complete nomination form, signed by nominator
- Unbound, single-sided on 8.5" x 11" paper
- Images: at least three color images — individually labeled

Optional/Supplemental Materials

- Sketches or architectural drawings
- Technical reports or other reports
- Detailed preservation plan if applicable
- Selected bibliography
- Videos, CD-ROMs, etc.
- Additional photographic documentation
- Letters of support
- Site locator map
- Other

List of Enclosed Supplementary Materials

- **Letters of support** for 11 Most Endangered nomination (additional letters to follow in separate mailings):

Tom Wolfe – writer, author of *From Bauhaus to Our House*

Robert A.M. Stern – founder and senior partner of Robert A.M. Stern Architects and Dean of the Yale School of Architecture

- **List of supporters** for preserving 2 Columbus Circle, or at least a public landmarks designation hearing, plus sample letters
- **News release and press clippings from Preservation League of New York State's "Seven to Save" designation**
- **Map of site location**
- **Timeline of 2 Columbus Circle**
- **Letter from Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates re: building condition**
- **January 6, 2003 letter from New York State Historic Preservation Officer Bernadette Castro**
- **Weblinks:**
 - www.collectorsworld.org - June 16-July 2, 2003, on-line forum sponsored by LW! and Western Interiors magazine (press release also enclosed)
 - www.preserve.org/lmwest/2ccpanel.htm - Transcript of February 12, 2003, panel discussion sponsored by LW! and AIA New York Chapter
 - www.archnewsnow.com/features/Feature111.htm - Description of proposed re-design by Allied Works Architecture
 - [www.wirednewyork.com/forum/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=584;](http://www.wirednewyork.com/forum/topic.cgi?forum=4&topic=584)
 - www.felixsalmon.com/000199.php - On-line forums demonstrating broad nature of discussion generated by 2 Columbus Circle and efforts to preserve it
- **Relevant press clippings**
- **2 Columbus Circle postcards**
- **CD-ROM** containing digital images of 2 Columbus Circle

List of Images

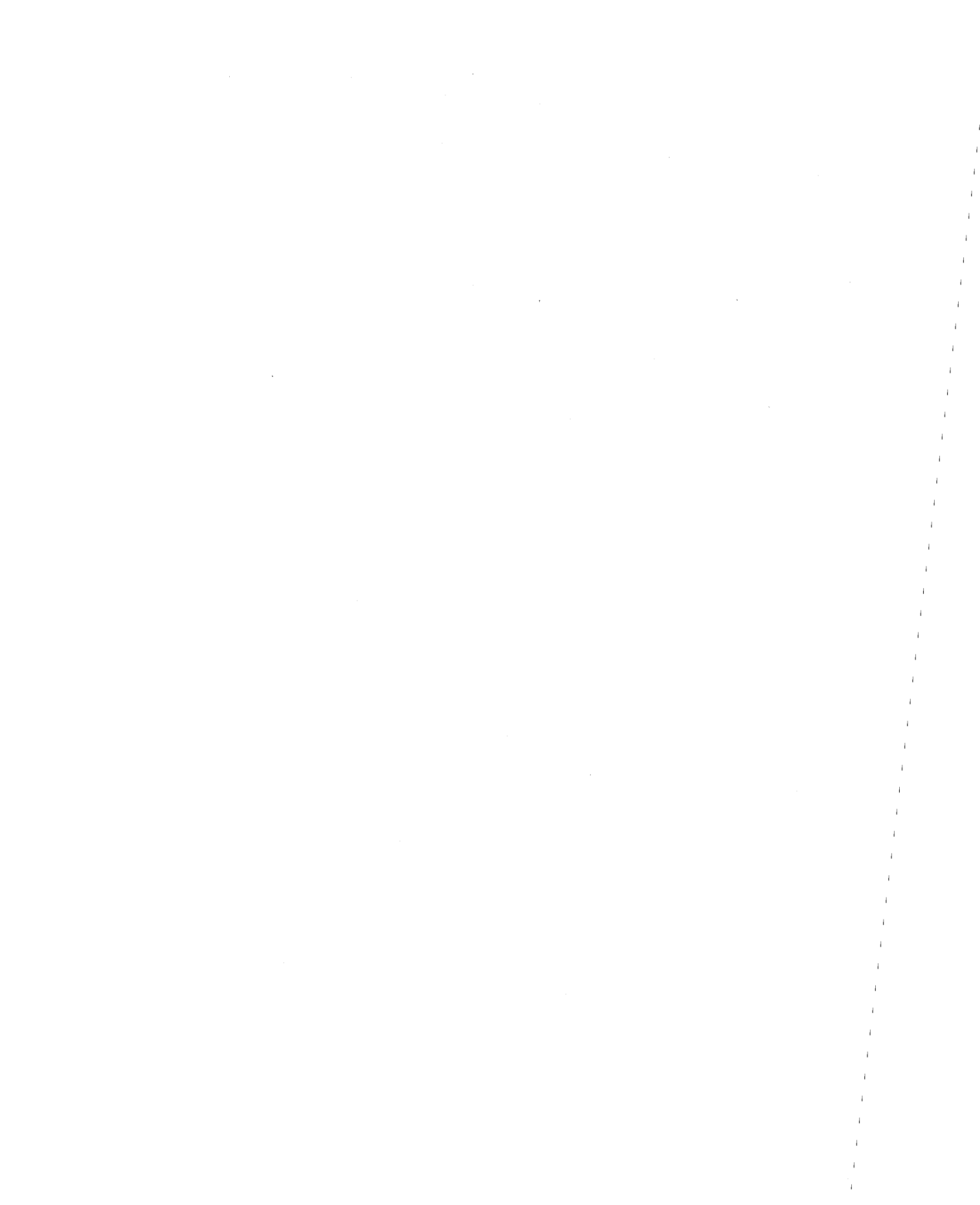
Primary images:

Credit - Ezra Stoller, 1964 ©ESTO. *Permission obtained to use for advocacy purposes.*

- 1) 2 Columbus Circle, ca. 1964 – view taken soon after the opening of Huntington Hartford's Gallery of Modern Art
- 2) 2 Columbus Circle, ca. 1964 – color image with automobile in foreground
- 3) 2 Columbus Circle, ca. 1964 – view of "lollipop" arcade
- 4) 2 Columbus Circle, ca. 1964 – view from U.S.S. Maine Memorial
- 5) 2 Columbus Circle, ca. 1964 – interior gallery
- 6) 2 Columbus Circle, ca. 1964 – interior auditorium

Supplementary images:

- 1) 2 Columbus Circle – recent view from north side of Columbus Circle (2002), photograph by Kate Wood, Landmark West!
- 2) E.D. Stone, 1933 – Mandel House
- 3) E.D. Stone, 1939 – Museum of Modern Art, NYC
- 4) E.D. Stone, 1954 – United States Embassy, New Delhi, India
- 5) E.D. Stone, 1956 – E.D. Stone residence, 130 E. 64th Street, Manhattan
- 6) Huntington Hartford at 2 Columbus Circle, ca. 1964





Dear Mr. Moe,

Even the slightest chance of 2 Columbus Circle's making the Eleven Most Endangered List is an exciting prospect; so much so that I'm taking the liberty of sending you the enclosed two-part piece I wrote for the *New York Times* op-ed page three months ago.

But first, a précis:

This is a new story with an old plot: Principle and Principal grapple on the edge of the roof of a ten-story building. The ten-story building is the former museum at 2 Columbus Circle. One of the two wrestlers is City Hall.

Edward Durell Stone designed the museum, and Huntington Hartford built it, paying for it entirely out of his own pocket in perhaps the most extraordinary act of absolutely private patronage in New York in the 20th century. Few, if any, private patrons have ever constructed a building of this magnitude for the general public in New York without the help of other donors in building or maintaining it, not even Carnegie. It opened in 1964. Hartford named it the Gallery of Modern Art. He meant it as a counterthrust against the Museum of Modern Art and the by-then three-decades-old orthodoxy of French and German Modernism in American art and architecture that it championed. Stone had been one of the handful of major American Modernist architects. In fact, he was co-architect of the Museum of Modern Art. But now he watched with contempt as an unvarying crop of glass-box towers spread across America. He was determined to offer a dramatic remedy for this affliction.

The result was a gleaming white marble monolith with a façade that curved inward, concavely, precisely following the curve of Columbus Circle. The interior was put together as finely as the workings of a watch. It was even more ingenious than the interior Frank Lloyd Wright designed later for the Guggenheim Museum. It had the calm, posh, luxurious atmosphere of a private club. Yet the lounge and the restaurant on its top two floors were the only place where the public has ever been able to gaze down upon the entire three-mile-long sweep of Central Park, from Central Park South to 110th Street.

The Gallery of Modern Art set off the greatest furor in American art and architecture in the second half of the 20th century. European Modernism had become literally, not metaphorically, a religion among the most influential

American artists, architects, and critics. Hartford's museum was worse than heresy. It was apostasy.

Stone and Hartford lost the revolution, and Hartford had to give the building up. By and by Viacom became the owner. In 1994 Viacom gave it to the City in a "retention" deal that brought the corporation breath-taking tax breaks and other emoluments.

That year, 1994, was the first year the museum became eligible for landmark status. City Hall informed the Landmarks Preservation Commission that the building was invisible. To this day no one from Landmarks has ever so much as discussed the building publicly, much less held a hearing. This has of course rendered the very principle of preserving historic landmarks null and void.

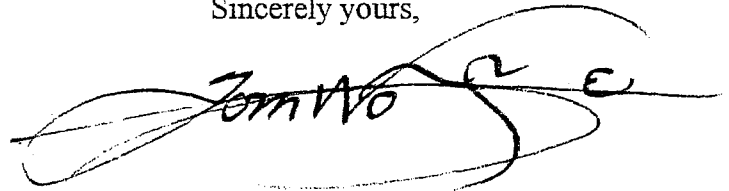
City Hall saw the possibility of a windfall in which some developer would pay untold millions for the location—and generate more millions in taxes. This turned out to be a delusion. The site is too small for commercial development. Only another non-profit, such as another museum, could make use of it.

Today the American Craft Museum on West 53rd Street, recently re-named the Museum of Arts and Design, has the inside track. Obviously what they should do is restore the building exactly as Stone designed it. It would be perfect for their collection—and public enjoyment—and the architectural heritage of New York.

Instead, I'm afraid, they want to erect a building in a formerly faddish glass-box style, "Ephemerism," that was born, done to death and buried in the 1990s. The removal and disposal of the existing marble would, by itself, cost more than restoring this supremely historic gem of a building.

Over the past several months, at the eleventh hour, as it were, a movement to save 2 Columbus Circle has begun to gather momentum, in no small part thanks to the passion and tenacity of Kate Wood and Landmark West. I can scarcely tell you what a tremendous difference your support would make.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tom Wolfe", with a large, sweeping flourish extending to the right.

TOM WOLFE
21 EAST 79TH STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10021-0125
JANUARY 6, 2004

January 15, 2004

National Trust for Historic Preservation
Offices of Communications
11 Most Endangered
1785 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20036

Robert A.M. Stern Architects

Dear Selection Committee:

I am writing to strongly urge the National Trust for Historic Preservation to place Edward Durell's Stone Two Columbus Circle (1964), the former Huntington Hartford Gallery of Modern Art, on this year's list of America's eleven most endangered historic places. Two Columbus Circle is without question a landmark that is immediately threatened by a proposal from the Museum of Arts & Design that would destroy the building completely.

Even though many greeted Stone's museum initially as kitsch or a bad joke, just as they greeted Robert Venturi's and Frank Gehry's early buildings, or heaven only knows how many other genuinely and meaningfully provocative, iconoclastic works, Two Columbus Circle was and is now a serious piece of work with an important point to make; and it is also a fine complement to its important and challenging site. Like so many bold inventions that fly in the face of prevailing norms, Stone's building is rarely examined on its own merits, never allowed to escape the endless style wars that so waste the profession's time and try the public's patience and thereby reduce architecture's importance to the margins of fashion.

Stone's building is sheathed in a beautiful material --marble--that takes the light. It is shaped to reflect and reinforce the space of the Circle. It defines the Columbus Circle. Inside it has some quite nice galleries and a glorious penthouse restaurant. In short, it was, and is, a very good building, one well worth keeping, which would be obvious to many if real estate considerations and personal egos were put aside for civic values. With lessons learned from the past, Two Columbus Circle challenges the architectural culture of our time. Stone's building is equally important and equally valid as Eero Saarinen's contemporaneous TWA Terminal at John F. Kennedy International Airport. Saarinen's building is saved for the future. Stone's deserves no less.

Stone's pioneering work in International Style Modernism in the 1930s included the Museum of Modern Art, designed with Philip Goodwin. In the 1940s he designed a series of houses in the manner of Frank Lloyd Wright, but by the mid-1950s he saw clearly that Modernism was virtually bankrupt, with a vocabulary of forms so small that, as a critic remarked about the early work of the actress Katherine Hepburn, it ran the gamut of emotions from A to B. To Stone, as to Philip Johnson and many others at that time, post-war Corporate Modernism had become a straightjacket. Aesthetic freedom was in the air. Or, to use the phrase that Stone himself then employed in describing his break from Modernism's grip, "I'm going to bat for beauty."

Aside from politics, the main stumbling block to the building's preservation is not the fact of its landmark quality; it's the issue of taste. Where would our High Victorian buildings be today if they were preserved on the basis of prevailing taste or even so-called good taste? Victoriana is kitsch, but is kitsch really bad? And is there bad kitsch and good kitsch, and fabulous kitsch? In other words, is taste absolute? Can we not be mature enough to acknowledge the varieties and vagaries

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Robert A.M. Stern Architects

of good and bad taste? Is beauty an absolute?

Some argue that Two Columbus Circle is too idiosyncratic a building to deserve to be preserved. But I think that's just why it needs to be preserved. Think of today's most admired buildings: so many of them are also idiosyncratic, to say the least, leaning, swooping, and blobbing about as they challenge our preconceived notions of beauty. Are they also doomed to destruction as tastes change? Will today's bold protests against yesterday's aesthetic last only a generation and be pulled down because they no longer conform to the prevailing ideology?

We must take the long view and not give in to the changing winds of architectural fashion and the tendency to eliminate what is no longer fashionable. Aesthetic cleansing is no more defensible than ethnic cleansing or any other kind of simple-minded exclusionary behavior. Two Columbus Circle must be preserved for future generations to consider, debate, learn from, and, heaven help us, actually enjoy.

Sincerely,



Robert A. M. Stern, FAIA

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