

LANDMARK WEST!

From: "LANDMARK WEST!" <landmarkwest@landmarkwest.org>
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Subject: Landmarks Commission Too Late to Save Modern Masterpieces

Landmarks Commission Too Late to Save Modern Masterpieces

In case you missed Robin Pogrebin's *New York Times* piece this morning on the demolition and radical alteration of two of New York City's most acclaimed buildings by Modern master architect Morris Lapidus, the link is included below ("Wrecking Ball Dashes Hopes for a Lapidus Work," 3/9/05). This report on the fates of the 1949 Paterson Silks building on Union Square and the 1961 former Summit Hotel on Lexington Avenue and 51st Street is required reading – that is, if you can bear yet another tale of an 11th-hour (make that 12th-hour) preservation attempt when it is all but too late. <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/09/arts/design/09mode.html>

Yesterday, after the first blows had already fallen, the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) calendared both buildings for public hearings to consider designating them as official Landmarks. Perhaps late is better than never. Unfortunately, it is this kind of reactive effort that gives the LPC – and, by extension, all preservationists – a bad name.

The truth is, preservationists have long advocated for the designation of these buildings (which LPC had said they intended to calendar for public hearings some time ago), along with other as-yet unprotected Modern icons like **2 Columbus Circle** (which LPC has pointedly refused to calendar for a hearing). Hoping to protect these sites well before the bulldozers arrive, experts such as DOCOMOMO (the international advocate for the study and preservation of Modern architecture), the World Monuments Fund, the Municipal Art Society, Historic Districts Council, and Robert A.M. Stern have formulated lists of buildings deserving landmark designation. For years, these lists have been presented and discussed repeatedly with the LPC.

Question of the hour: Why didn't the LPC act sooner to calendar a hearing for these landmark-eligible buildings? How many more buildings will be lost because LPC cannot – or will not – move quickly enough to save them? What neighborhood will not be affected by losses like these?

The LPC points to limited resources and staff. This is surely a problem, suggesting that the Bloomberg administration places an alarmingly low priority on landmarks preservation. A harsher analysis is that the problem is willful neglect. **Either way, New Yorkers and our landmarks deserve better.**

If you share our deep concern about the future of the landmarks process in New York, then Mayor Bloomberg and the LPC need to hear from you! Send them an email, fax or letter (with a copy to landmarkwest@landmarkwest.org for our files):

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg
 City Hall
 New York, NY 10007
 F: 212-788-2460
<http://nyc.gov/html/mail/html/mayor.html> (go to this website to type your email message)

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