

LANDMARK WEST!

From: "LANDMARK WEST!" <landmarkwest@landmarkwest.org>
Sent: Thursday, September 01, 2005 4:43 PM
Subject: NY Daily News Features Continuing Debate Over 2 Columbus Circle

The widespread public discussion over **the future of 2 Columbus Circle** (Edward Durell Stone, 1964) continues to play out in the press. See below for the latest "pro" and "con" debate between **Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation**, and **Rolf Ohlhausen, a former president of the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects**, featured in *The Daily News* this past weekend.

The timing of this debate is noteworthy, coming on the heels **David Dunlap's two New York Times stories (August 9 and 18, 2005), which discredited statements by former Landmarks Commission Chair (LPC) Sherida E. Paulsen** mirroring Mr. Ohlhausen's arguments - that the LPC has decisively determined that 2 Columbus Circle does not merit a public landmark designation hearing. In fact, at least 7 former (plus one current) landmarks commissioners have expressed their support for a public hearing. During her tenure, Ms. Paulsen herself reversed the LPC's position against holding a hearing on 240 Central Park South, a now-landmark 1941 Modern apartment building designed by Mayer & Whittlesey (right next door to 2 Columbus Circle), proof that the LPC is subject to the same shifts in architectural taste as the public at large. Mr. Moe alludes to these shifts when he cites previous generations' aversion to Victorian and art-deco design.

Maybe it's a matter of taste. Or political networking, as the back-door email communications between current LPC Chair Robert B. Tierney and former Chair Laurie Beckelman (now on the Museum of Arts and Design team) suggest. **Bottom line: Why are Mayor Bloomberg and the LPC continuing to ignore this issue of tremendous public interest?** Now that the City Council has entered the fray with the proposed "Landmarks Hearing" bill (Intro. 705), it should shape up to be an interesting fall...

New York Daily News - <http://www.nydailynews.com>

Landmark 2 Columbus Circle? Yes

By RICHARD MOE
 Saturday, August 27th, 2005

The building at 2 Columbus Circle deserves to be designated a landmark, and therefore preserved in its current form.

As a work of architecture, the structure is admittedly quirky - but it's also very much a product of its time, an important part of the fabric of our culture and, in the opinion of many critics, an icon of midcentury modernism. This gives the building a historical importance that makes it worthy of a landmark designation.

The pedigree of 2 Columbus Circle includes a prominent architect - Edward Durell Stone - who often employed white marble surfaces and pierced screens (as in the exteriors of Washington's Kennedy Center and the U.S. Embassy in New Delhi, as well as 2 Columbus Circle). His distinctive style offered a classically inspired alternative to the raw brutalism adopted by many of his contemporaries, such as Marcel Breuer with his 1966 Whitney Museum.

The city has shown commendable vision in seeking a reuse for this remarkable building instead of flattening it. The good news is that an appropriate use has been identified, as a new home for the Museum of Arts and Design.

The bad news is that the Landmarks Preservation Commission has refused to hold public hearings that might lead to landmarking.

As a result, there is nothing to prevent the new owner from making extensive alterations that will rob 2 Columbus Circle of the very features that make it unique. While the building certainly needs some work, it is far too important for this kind of extreme makeover.

Opponents of preserving the structure often sum up their position in two words: "It's ugly." The same argument was used to justify the widespread (and tragic) destruction of Victorian and art deco buildings.

These structures, like 2 Columbus Circle, are part of America's architectural heritage, a rich tapestry in which each element helps us understand how the nation has grown and developed and how our own tastes have changed over time.

Most of us have only recently recognized the importance of saving treasures of the modern era. It would be a tragedy to lose places such as 2 Columbus Circle just as we are beginning to appreciate them.

Moe is president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Landmark 2 Columbus Circle? No

By ROLF OHLHAUSEN

Saturday, August 27th, 2005

While I am not opposed to landmark preservation - I oversaw the renovation of the Astor Place subway station - 2 Columbus Circle is a sad, idiosyncratic and dysfunctional building. Designed by Edward Durrell Stone in 1964 and considered a folly at the time, the building is a vacant presence in the newly invigorated Columbus Circle neighborhood.

Perhaps best-known for the design of the Museum of Modern Art, Stone produced a large body of modernist work. The building at 2 Columbus Circle was considered an aberration, which the American Institute of Architects' "AIA Guide to New York City" describes as a "white marble confection with vaguely Middle Eastern motifs."

Designed as a museum to house the Huntington Hartford collection of art, the building closed after five years. It has had four owners in its 41-year history and has been vacant much of that time. It has a chance to be resurrected by the Museum of Arts & Design (MAD), under a contract to purchase the building from the City of New York.

The museum would maintain the building's existing comfortable size and add cultural activity to what is now, with the completion of Time Warner, a predominantly commercial center. MAD has retained an architect who, in the process of developing a design, must be allowed to meet the museum's functional requirements, including the introduction of light and air into the building. The architect should not be constrained by the building's opaque straightjacket facade.

The Landmarks Commission has over a 10-year period declined to consider 2 Columbus Circle for landmark status. That has enabled the city to enter into an agreement with MAD, which takes into account social and economic values, as well as preservation and design, in planning for 2 Columbus Circle. The Museum of Arts & Design will pay the City of New York \$17 million to purchase the building, and it will invest millions more to renovate it and extend its useful life.

If MAD does not proceed with its plans, then 2 Columbus Circle will continue in its dormant, lifeless existence, waiting for a viable use that has eluded it all these years. This is a building with great potential public benefit, but not in its present state.

Ohlhausen is a past president of the New York chapter of the American Institute of Architects.