

TO COLLEAGUES & FRIENDS IN THE ARCHITECTURAL COMMUNITY
(From Rolf Ohlhausen, June 2005)

Landmark West, which had no history of supporting the landmarking of modern buildings, has gone to the barricades to save the sad, idiosyncratic, dysfunctional and lifeless building that Edward Durrell Stone designed in 1964. That this building, considered a folly at the time, deviated from orthodox modernism, has made it an attractive poster-child to Landmark West. It remains a vacant presence at Columbus Circle, a mausoleum.

The building, which has been vacant since 1998, has a chance to be resurrected by the Museum of Arts & Design (MAD), which has bought the building and has plans to renovate it as a museum. By retaining its massing and introducing a cultural use at Columbus Circle, the Museum would maintain the scale of the building and add life and vitality to what is now, with the completion of Time Warner, a predominantly commercial center. The Museum of Arts & Design should not be constrained by the building's straightjacket façade. The new design, still in development by MAD, remains to be evaluated and judged on its merits.

Landmark West, in its effort to save the façade, which Ada Louise Huxtable characterized as a "die-cut Venetian palazzo on lollipops", has gone to court to challenge the legality of the proceedings leading to the sale of the building to MAD. The Supreme Court and the Appellate Court of the State of New York have both dismissed the petitioner's motions filed in 2003 and 2004. Landmark West has again filed lawsuits against the City and Landmarks Commissioner Robert Tierney in March and May of this year. In June the Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of the State of New York rejected the request by Landmark West to re-argue the twice previously dismissed petitions.

Having failed to convince the Court, (while effectively delaying the project), Landmark West has now gone to the media and to the streets in an effort to discredit the City and the Landmarks Commission.

We, as architects with a strong stake in the planning and design of our city, believe that the best prospect for a viable future for 2 Columbus Circle is to allow the Museum of Arts & Design to proceed with its plans. We also support and defend the Landmarks Commission, which has declined to hold a public hearing to consider this building for landmark designation, during the tenure of 3 Commission Chairpersons and two Administrations.

The Museum of Arts & Design will pay \$50-million to purchase the building from the City and renovate it, and it will invest millions more to 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 public use which has eluded it all these years.

This is a building of great potential value, but not in its present state.