

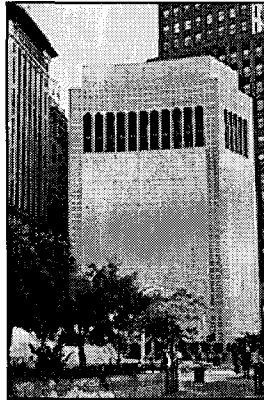
## Threatened: 2 Columbus Circle, New York City

In New York City, the battle wages on for 2 Columbus Circle, the Edward Durell Stone-designed art museum built for eccentric supermarket heir Huntington Hartford in 1964. This battle began when the city decided to sell the building to the Museum of Arts and Design (formerly the American Crafts Museum), an institution whose mission is to preserve and interpret significant American design. The Museum immediately announced its intention to completely re-clad 2 Columbus Circle, destroying its distinctive marble façade.

The City of New York, the building's current owner, has expressed a strong desire to sell 2 Columbus Circle to a cultural institution. For many years, preservation organizations in New York City have advocated for the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) to hold a designation hearing on the building. The LPC, charged with protecting New York City's historic resources over thirty years old, has continually refused this request.

Over the last couple of years, many architectural historians, critics, columnists, and essayists have written about the significance of this building. Edward Durell Stone, a major twentieth-century architect and one of the designers of the 1938 Museum of Modern Art building, along with Philip S. Goodwin, designed the building at a time when he began to shift "from a somewhat severe modernism toward the more ornamental formalism of his later career."

Once word of the Museum of Art and Design's intentions spread, the preservation community gathered. While some (such as RPPN, DOCOMOMO, and Landmark West, a local preservation non-profit) feel that this building is undeniably significant and surely landmark worthy, the broad consensus is that - at the very least - the building deserves its day in court. Even those who dislike it from an aesthetic perspective cannot deny that by the very virtue of the controversy and heated debate that has arisen, this building by a major 20th-century architect needs to be objectively evaluated by the governmental commission formed precisely to protect such landmarks.



Landmark West, along with a coalition of preservation organizations, has led the effort with an enormous public education initiative. They started with a symposium on the building in February 2003 and a mass letter-writing campaign to New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and the LPC Commissioner Robert Tierney. The press has also entered the arena, albeit with mixed opinions.

### Preservation Efforts

As the coalition's entreaties to the LPC to hold a public designation hearing for 2 Columbus Circle fell on deaf ears, a lawsuit was initiated in November, 2003, by Landmark West, DOCOMOMO, the Historic Districts Council of New York City, et al, claiming the New York City Planning Commission should have more thoroughly reviewed the Museum of Art and Design's proposal and its impact on 2 Columbus Circle as an historic resource as part of the Environmental Impact Statement.

Kate Wood, the Executive Director of Landmark West, says she "doesn't want preservation by litigation," but that "2 Columbus Circle is a part of a larger picture where the Landmarks Preservation Commission is not doing what they should. If they [the LPC] were, we would not be in court."

Because New York State's Historic Preservation Officers has not made any National Register eligibility determination for 2 Columbus Circle, the lawsuit claims that the burden was on the City of New York to go to the

Keeper of the National Register for an eligibility determination. Although a lower court dismissed this lawsuit in April, 2004, the group has appealed the decision, this time with corresponding amicus briefs by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Preservation League of New York State to support their cause.

To help fundraise and organize this and other efforts, the Save 2 Columbus Circle Fund ([save2columbus.org](http://save2columbus.org)) was created, spearheaded by Landmark West. Fundraising was kicked off in June, 2004, with a silent auction that raised over \$50,000 for the Save 2 Columbus effort.

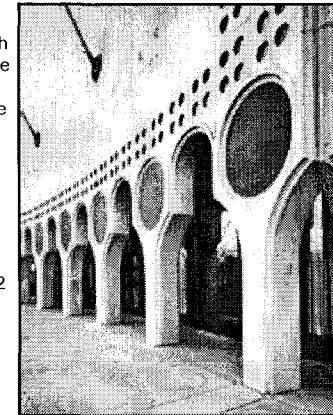
Despite the fact that the city seems determined to pretend this Edward Durell Stone building is nothing more than a 1960s box, the Save 2 Columbus movement and litigation has successfully delayed the process, and has spent down a large portion of the Museum of Art and Design's money.

At this point, the Museum of Art and Design has had a difficult time fundraising for their acquisition and redesign of 2 Columbus Circle. According to Kate Wood, museum representatives have argued that the litigation "is casting a pall over fundraising efforts and causing a withdrawal of major gifts."

### Museum of Art and Design

It is hard to imagine that the Museum of Art and Design, supposedly charged to protect and preserve significant works of art and design, would destroy such a monumental piece of 20th-century design. Of course, it would be wonderful to have a museum such as MAD in this space, and it would be fitting for such an iconoclastic 1960s piece of architectural design to house the museum.

The Museum of Art and Design claims that it is only the architectural "elite" who want to save Edward Durell Stone's design. A look at the myriad of groups, members of the media, and individuals who support 2 Columbus' preservation calls this accusation into question. Neighborhood groups like Coalition for Livable Westside and the Clinton (neighborhood) Special District to national preservation organizations such as DOCOMOMO-US and the Recent Past Preservation Network, have voiced their support for the Landmarks Preservation Commission to hold a public hearing on the designation of 2 Columbus Circle. One of the first "mainstream" preservation groups outside of New York City to call attention to the threat to 2 Columbus Circle, the Preservation League of New York State named 2 Columbus Circle to its "Seven to Save" list in 2003, injecting new life into the preservation battle. In 2004, 2 Columbus Circle made it on the National Trusts 11 Most Endangered list, bringing national attention to the building.



### What can be done in the future?

We do not want to lose the architectural legacy of Edward Durell Stone. Regardless of one's personal aesthetic opinion of 2 Columbus Circle, it is indisputably an important, paradigmatic example of the latter phase of Edward Durell Stone's career. Despite all the publicity and organizational support surrounding the preservation efforts for 2 Columbus Circle, this building will only be saved if the preservation community puts sufficient, unified, pressure upon the City of New York.

The failure of the preservation community in this case is that we failed to raise public and, more importantly, professional awareness of 2 Columbus Circle before it was threatened. We, as preservationists, must actively - not reactively - educate ourselves, as well as the public at-large, about architects and styles of the recent past. Particularly difficult are buildings such as 2 Columbus Circle, whose construction and era are so much a part of some preservationists and architects' living past, that individual opinions about a point in time cloud professional judgment.

Buildings must reach a certain age prior to landmark consideration for excellent reason. Time provides distance, and distance allows for an objective appreciation of the past. Preservationists also need to learn from their own history - looking back to when the City of Philadelphia razed several banks

by the eclectic late-nineteenth-century architect, Frank Furness, to make room for Independence National Historical Park, building imitation Federal-style buildings in their place. Now very little of Frank Furness' architectural legacy remains.

We cannot permit the same fate to befall Edward Durell Stone. Yet at the same time we advocate for the preservation of 2 Columbus Circle, we must re-double our education efforts about the recent past so that, regardless of the outcome of this battle, future ones might not need to be fought at all.

Erin Tobin Bearden  
RPPN New York Representative