

WHEN ARCHITECT Edward Durell Stone's building at 2 Columbus Circle opened in 1964 as Huntington Hartford's Gallery of Modern Art, it was derisively dubbed the Lollipop Building by critic Ada Louise Huxtable. But like many now-famous landmarks, it has, over time, become an object of affection, even admiration, by many. So when its current owner, the Museum of Arts and Design, proposed four years ago to completely strip the building's exterior and replace it with a façade of terra-cotta and glass, the city's fiercest preservation fight in decades erupted. Suddenly, it seemed, the much-maligned Lollipop meant a great deal to certain people in high places. Former *New York Times* architecture critic Herbert Muschamp weighed in with a 6,000-word essay claiming the building, among other things, as a gay icon. (Who knew?) Robert A. M. Stern, the esteemed architect and head of Yale's architecture school, was—along with Muschamp and writer Tom Wolfe—among the most vociferous opponents of the museum's plans. Their side ultimately lost, however, and the renovation work is under way, scheduled for completion in 2008. Here, Stern talks about the lessons learned from this colorful battle and offers the last word—we promise—on the debate over 2 Columbus Circle.

How do you respond to those who say the building is of little consequence historically and culturally?

Not true. The Lollipop Building was done for a very important client for an important purpose on one of the great sites in New York. The design was intended as a deliberate criticism of prevailing style—a call to enrich architecture by referencing the past and by using ornament with confidence. It was a challenge against the International Style of building composition, which tended to be all right angles. Here was a structure that hewed itself to the curve of the circle.

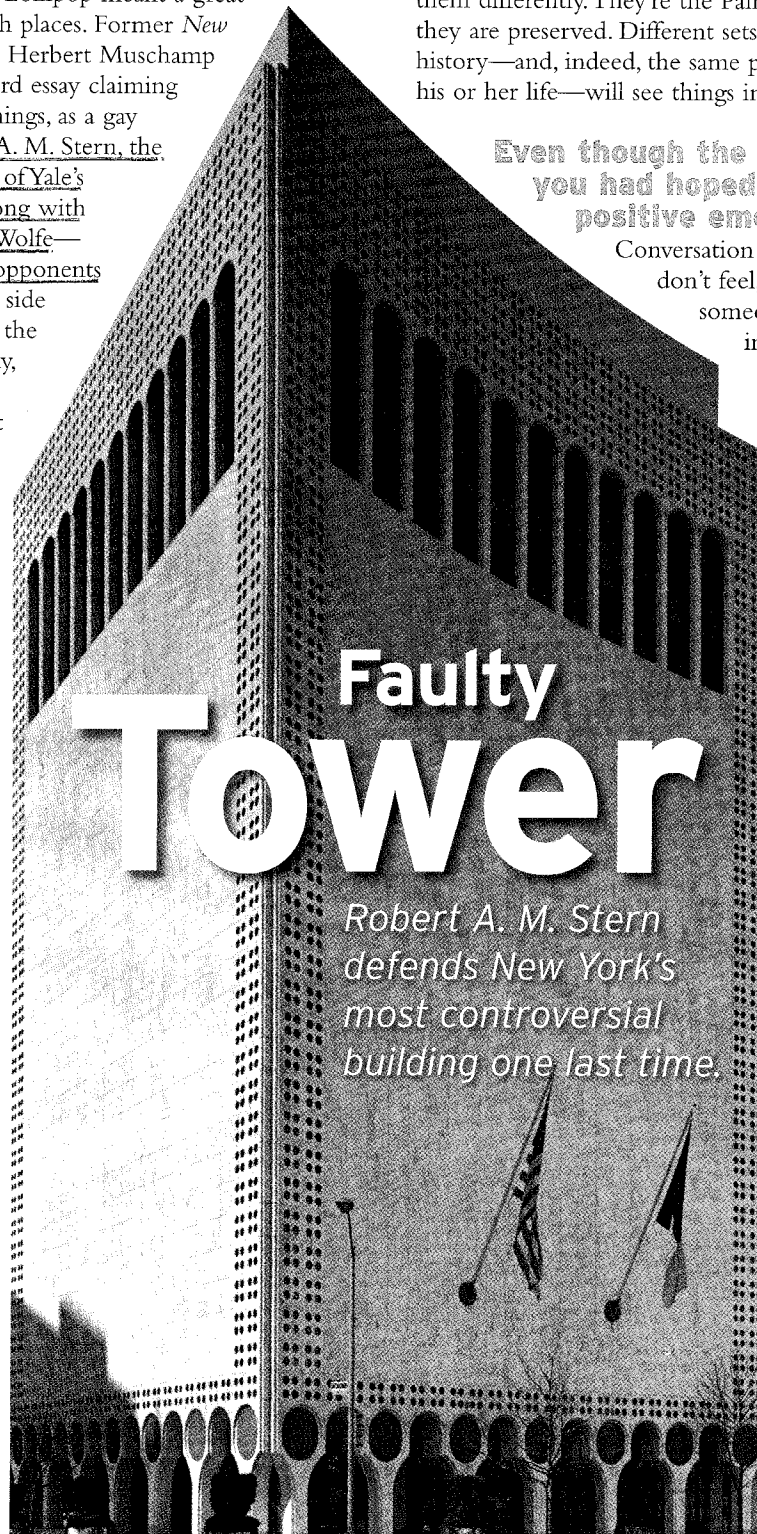
Is there room for preserving buildings that many—or even most—people think are not very good or attractive architecture?

Considering the history of the preservation movement in this country, the answer is yes. For example, the kinds of Victorian homes that are found in most American towns and villages—the high-mansarded porch houses that for a very long time were associated with Halloween, Charles Addams, and the movie *Psycho*—are preserved everywhere. Many people thought they were hideous. Now times have changed and people look at them differently. They're the Painted Ladies of San Francisco and they are preserved. Different sets of eyes at different times in history—and, indeed, the same person during various stages of his or her life—will see things in a particular way.

Even though the outcome wasn't what you had hoped for, did anything positive emerge from all this?

Conversation and debate is worthwhile. I don't feel, however, you have to murder someone in order to get a fair hearing on the proper way to carry arms. Maybe not such a great analogy, but too bad. This is killing a building. We lost

Pennsylvania Station a long time ago and it did galvanize opinion; the public woke up to the fact that the city was in danger of losing itself. And it's happening again. Many people argue that New York doesn't have enough great monuments. Well, great architecture is often quite eccentric. Take a look at the new Hearst Building [in Manhattan] by Norman Foster. You either love it or you hate it. The structure certainly sticks out, but it also makes a point about the kind of mealy-mouthed corporate office buildings we have had for a long time in New York. Thirty years from now people may not want to save it. But they hated the Chrysler Building for a generation. Now of all the skyscrapers in New York, it's the favorite. I wish the Museum of Arts and Design would not have as its first exhibit the destruction of a great work of architecture. —S.W.



Faulty Tower

Robert A. M. Stern defends New York's most controversial building one last time.