

LANDMARK WEST!

From: "LANDMARK WEST!" <landmarkwest@landmarkwest.org>
Sent: Monday, August 08, 2005 5:25 PM
Subject: Landmarks Commissioners Speak Out Re: 2 Columbus Circle

From the *New York Times*: Commissioners Set the Record Straight Re: 2 Columbus Circle

Challenging the assertion that 19 members of the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) from 1996 to the present had each come to a negative decision about the merits of 2 Columbus Circle for landmark designation, **former LPC Chair Beverly Moss Spatt** and **current commissioner Roberta Brandes Gratz** have responded to an op-ed piece by former Chair Sherida E. Paulsen ("The Black Hole of 2 Columbus Circle," *New York Times*, July 30, 2005). See below for Spatt's and Gratz's letters to the editor, printed in Saturday's *Times* (August 6, 2005, pA12). Paulsen's op-ed is included at the end of this message.

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August 6, 2005
2 Columbus Circle (2 Letters)
To the Editor:

Re "The Black Hole of Columbus Circle," by Sherida E. Paulsen (Op-Ed, July 30):

Ms. Paulsen, chairwoman of New York's Landmarks Preservation Commission from 2001 to 2003, is entitled to her opinion that Edward Durell Stone's design for 2 Columbus Circle does not merit landmark designation.

But given widely divergent opinions in the public at large about the importance of this building, I find it difficult to believe that the 19 commission members since 1996 could have reached absolute consensus that the building is unworthy of even a public hearing to weigh its merits.

The commission has explained that the building was considered in 1996 by an internal "designation committee," which to comply with open-meeting laws would not have involved more than five (less than a quorum) of the commissioners.

If such overwhelming consensus is indeed the case, where is the public record of this decision? The failure to hold a hearing is a distressing sign of how out of touch the current commission is with the public it serves.

Such an important issue should be aired not behind closed doors, but through the formal, open and democratic landmarks review process.

Beverly Moss Spatt
Brooklyn, Aug. 1, 2005

The writer was chairwoman of the Landmarks Preservation Commission from 1974 to 1978.

To the Editor:

Sherida E. Paulsen writes that "2 Columbus Circle simply does not qualify" to be designated a landmark. She says, "That is the professional judgment of the 19 people, myself included, who have served on the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission since 1996."

Neither I as an individual commissioner nor the current commission as a whole has rendered a "professional judgment" on whether there should be a hearing or a designation.

Roberta Brandes Gratz
New York, Aug. 4, 2005

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The **New York Times**

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LENGTH: 726 words

HEADLINE: The Black Hole of Columbus Circle

BYLINE: By Sherida E. Paulsen.

Sherida E. Paulsen, an architect, served on New York's Landmarks Preservations Commission from 1995 through 2004 and was its chairwoman from 2001 to 2003.

BODY:

FOR the last two years, ever since it was announced that **2 Columbus Circle** would be extensively renovated and turned into the new Museum of Arts and Design, preservationists have pressed with new urgency to have the building designated a landmark. But **2 Columbus Circle** simply doesn't qualify. That is the professional judgment of the 19 people, myself included, who have served on the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission since 1996.

In order to be considered a landmark in New York City, a building must meet certain criteria. It must be at least 30 years old, and it must have contributed to the city's development in the fields of architecture, history or culture. **2 Columbus Circle** fails all but the age test.

To be sure, a significant architect, Edward Durell Stone, designed 2 Columbus Circle. But the building is not one of Stone's notable works. It does not compare to his original Museum of Modern Art building, his United States Embassy in New Delhi or his fanciful Pepsico campus in Purchase, N.Y.

What's more, the Columbus Circle building is of little consequence historically or culturally. It was built

to house the Huntington Hartford Museum, which existed for just five years, from 1964 to 1969. No occupant since has developed a lasting attachment to the space, and as a result the structure has become known as the black hole of Columbus Circle.

Moreover, the museum's design did not influence the work of other architects or the look of other institutions. The building's defenders claim that Stone's work on this building was a milestone in architectural design, intended as a critique of orthodox modernism. They contend that his use of marble and decorative details was an innovative response to the more straitlaced modern designs of the 1950's.

But this is preposterous. Luxurious materials were used in modern buildings throughout the 20th century. The Barcelona Pavilion, the Seagram's Building, and the later Rockefeller Center buildings of Wallace Harrison and Max Abramowitz are just a few that come to mind. Decorative geometric forms were relatively common in the West Coast office buildings designed by Charles Luckman and John Carl Warnecke -- to say nothing of Frank Lloyd Wright's works of the 1950's. In fact, the 2 Columbus Circle building has no one-of-a-kind architectural qualities.

On the historical, cultural, and architectural merits, then, 2 Columbus Circle doesn't make the cut for landmark status. But rather than accept this judgment, preservationists have accused the Landmarks Preservation Commission of ignoring their requests and concerns. But we've done no such thing. When we receive a request to evaluate a site, every one of our commissioners is required to consider the building's importance, determine its probable status and recommend the review process that should follow. The review of 2 Columbus Circle has been conducted under the stewardship of three different chairmen and reflects the opinions of 19 commissioners, including six architects, four historians, two planners and three realtors.

Critics have suggested that the landmarks commission in general ignores postwar architecture. On the contrary, the commission has led the way in protecting the later 20th-century landmarks, beginning in the early 1980's with the designation of Lever House, the Seagram's Building and the TWA terminal at Kennedy Airport. Since 1996, the same commissioners who have repeatedly declined to designate 2 Columbus Circle a landmark have happily designated many other postwar buildings, including Marcel Breuer's Begrisch Hall in the Bronx, Eero Saarinen's CBS headquarters, Kevin Roche and John Dinkeloo's Ford Foundation Building, and 240 Central Park South.

The building at 2 Columbus Circle was so unlikely to qualify for landmark status, however, that after careful consideration, the commission determined that it did not merit a public hearing. If we were to hold such hearings simply upon request -- rather than reserving them for buildings that meet the criteria -- they would become exercises in theater that would not fulfill the intention of the New York City landmarks law.

In the last four decades, New York has protected 23,000 structures and landscapes that meet the law's standards for landmark designation. Two Columbus Circle is just not qualified to be one of them.

URL: <http://www.nytimes.com>

LOAD-DATE: July 30, 2005

LANDMARK WEST!

From: "LANDMARK WEST!" <landmarkwest@landmarkwest.org>
Sent: Tuesday, August 09, 2005 3:08 PM
Subject: Landmarks Commission Stirs on 2 Columbus Circle

Landmarks Commission Stirs on 2 Columbus Circle

“The debate over whether **2 Columbus Circle** merits consideration as an official landmark is playing out on the Landmarks Preservation Commission itself,” reports David W. Dunlap in today’s *New York Times* (“Unanimity on a Building Is a Façade, Insiders Say,” 8/9/05, pB3, link to full text below). At long last! Recent rumblings suggest that the discussion about the future of 2 Columbus Circle may finally be taking place where it belongs, among the current 11 members of the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC).

Dunlap writes that a letter from Landmarks Commissioner Roberta Brandes Gratz to the editor of the *Times* (printed 8/6/05, pA13, copy included below) **“suggested that at least some of the 11 commissioners favor a public hearing, as did telephone interviews yesterday with several members.”**

Link to Dunlap’s article: <http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/09/nyregion/09circle.html>?

Reading tea leaves is not our specialty, but one can only hope this news augurs well for 2 Columbus Circle and, more importantly, for the wisdom, integrity and independence of the LPC itself. An LPC spokesperson states that Chair Robert B. Tierney is "not inclined to revisit this question." Why not, if former Chair Sherida E. Paulsen's claim that 19 commissioners since 1996 exercised their "professional judgment" that 2 Columbus Circle fails the test for a hearing turns out to be untrue?

Ask Mayor Bloomberg! Call, email, fax him **today** to let him know that in New Yorkers' minds this is definitely not a closed case. Contact information below:

Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg

Email: go to <http://www.nyc.gov/html/mail/html/mayor.html> and type your message in the space provided

Phone: 212-788-3000

Fax: (212) 788-2460

We appreciate receiving blind copies of your letters - please send to landmarkwest@landmarkwest.org.