

June 1, 2005

The Whitney Brownstone

To the Editor:

Re "Commission Preserves the Past at the Cost of the Future," by Nicolai Ouroussoff (Critic's Notebook, May 26):

The Landmarks Preservation Commission is wrong for not holding a public hearing on 2 Columbus Circle, but it is right to stand up for the Whitney Museum of American Art's brownstone.

What the writer calls "an undistinguished brownstone" is an integral part of the Upper East Side Historic District. The threat to this and all of our city's beloved historic districts is death by a thousand cuts, not by a single blow.

The city can survive nicely without an unrestrained Renzo Piano design for the Whitney's expansion. But it cannot thrive without its historic neighborhoods.

Landmarks Preservation's role is not to determine "when rules should be broken for the benefit of the city's cultural well-being," which I see as a unique reading of the law. Its job is to protect the city's landmarks great and small.

Arlene Simon
President, Landmark West!
New York, May 26, 2005