



NEWS *from* FRIENDS

Spring 2011

UPPER EAST SIDE LANDMARK THREATENED WITH DEMOLITION!

In the coming weeks, FRIENDS will be confronted with one of our greatest preservation challenges to date. The owners of the individually designated City and Suburban Homes First Avenue Estate (the full-block complex from First to York Avenues between East 64th and East 65th Streets) have submitted an application for the demolition of 429 East 64th Street and 430 East 65th Street on the ground that they do not generate a sufficient economic return.

As you may recall, the owner's opposition to preservation began over two decades ago. In August 1990, in one of its last moves before being dissolved, the Board of Estimate overturned the designation of 429 East 64th Street and 430 East 65th Street, two buildings in the complex. At the urging of FRIENDS and Council Member Jessica Lappin, the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) began the process of re-designating these two properties in 2006. The owner then defaced the subject buildings by stripping them of their architectural details and resurfacing the exterior with garish red stucco. Despite these disfiguring alterations, the LPC re-designated the buildings, citing their



City and Suburban Homes First Avenue Estate, ca. 1919-1923

seminal importance in the history of the development of affordable housing. The owner sued to overturn the designation, and subsequently lost their final appeal in June of last year. Following their defeat in the courts, the owner submitted their application for demolition on the basis of an economic hardship.

This is only the 18th hardship application that has been submitted to the LPC since the Landmarks Law was enacted in 1965. The LPC should only be asked to grant the demolition of a landmark under the most strenuous of circumstances, when the economic hardship is genuine and all other possible solutions have been

exhausted. This application does not meet those criteria.

As stewards of the architectural legacy of the Upper East Side, we must do everything in our power to fight this hardship application. And now, we need your financial support to continue this endeavor. Please make a contribution to protect the First Avenue Estate, and the future of every landmark building in New York City. ■

Visit www.friends-ues.org
to make a contribution
online, or send a check to:

FRIENDS
20 East 69th Street, #4B
New York, NY 10021

RESTORED: 720 PARK AVENUE



720 Park Avenue soon after completion

Located at the northwest corner of Park Avenue and East 70th Street, in the heart of the Upper East Side Historic District, 720 Park Avenue was designed by eminent architect Rosario Candela in conjunction with the firm Cross & Cross. Completed in September 1929, a month before the stock market crash, this luxury apartment building epitomizes the architectural exuberance of the late 1920s and is a prime example of the development of Park Avenue in the early twentieth century. It was during this period that Park Avenue was transformed into an elegant boulevard, its apartment buildings creating the uniform street wall that is characteristic of the avenue today.

Above the 12th floor, the prim brick-and-limestone base of 720 Park Avenue devolves into a cacophony of setbacks, bay windows, chimneys, parapets and buttresses, evoking a Tudor-style manor house that has developed over centuries. Unfortunately, this

idiosyncratic design allowed several opportunities for moisture infiltration, causing corrosion of the ferrous steel in the building's skeleton. For the last eighty years, much of this structural steel framing had only been protected by a single layer of paint. Where the paint failed, the expansive forces of rust began to displace brickwork, limestone ashlar, and even entire parapets.

Walter B. Melvin Architects (WBMA) was retained by 720 Park Avenue to address these issues throughout the building. Repairs were initially performed on a triage basis but as more and more deterioration was discovered, WBMA soon recommended a full-scale restoration. This work eventually included reconstruction of parapets and building corners, masonry re-pointing, crack repairs, and cleaning. The decorative limestone – which exhibits a rich variety of preserved marine life remains – was salvaged, repaired and reinstalled. Work also included replacement of skylights, the repair of original iron drain pipes, and replacement of roofing and quarry tile at terraces.

The restoration of 720 Park Avenue was aided by the discovery of a



720 Park Ave under construction

collection of photographs in the building's cellar. During initial construction, the building was photographed on a weekly basis, capturing the steel frame and masonry skin in various states of completion. The photographs also show original configurations of decorative masonry which have since been altered, possibly by Candela



Detail of setbacks overlooking Park Avenue

himself after the building was completed. This collection of photographs also helped establish the age of later additions, such as a terrace greenhouse. Project-related demolition work also revealed interesting historic artifacts such as steel hoisting clamps and cables that had not been removed post-construction, period newspapers within walls and traces of the original blue-green mortar.

Despite the intrusive nature of the restoration, the building has not been radically changed, a testament to the careful and thoughtful work that WBMA accomplished. The integrity of the building has been restored, without any detriment to its remarkable appearance. Both the building owners and Walter B. Melvin Architects should be applauded for their investment in the future of 720 Park Avenue. ■

TWENTY-EIGHTH ANNUAL AWARDS

Each year FRIENDS recognizes fine restoration, renovation, and advocacy work on the Upper East Side, both in and out of the historic districts. FRIENDS held its Twenty-Eighth Annual Meeting and Awards Ceremony on March 15, 2011 at The New York School of Interior Design. Hermes Mallea, a board member at FRIENDS, gave a dynamic presentation of this year's awards. After the ceremony, honorees and guests headed to the adjacent art gallery for a spirited reception.



Emily Rafferty
(Renaissance Award Presenter)



Council Member Daniel Garodnick (Advocacy Award Recipient) and Landmarks Preservation Commission Chairman Robert Tierney (Advocacy Award Presenter)



Judith Berdy
(Restoration Award Recipient)

- The **RENAISSANCE AWARD** was presented by Emily Rafferty to the Central Park Conservancy for the Ancient Playground & the Osborn Gates.
- The **ARCHI-TEACHER AWARD** was presented by Andrew Dolkart to Jane Cowan.
- The **SUSTAINABILITY AWARD** was presented by Lisa Kersavage to Regis High School for their Green Roof.
- The **ADVOCACY AWARD** was presented by Landmarks Preservation Commission Chair Robert Tierney to Council Member Daniel Garodnick.
- The **RESTORATION AWARD** was presented by Jane Swanson, on behalf of Council Member Jessica Lappin, to the Roosevelt Island Historical Society for the Roosevelt Island Visitor Center Kiosk.
- The **TECHNOLOGY AWARD** was presented by Christopher Gray to the Museum of the City of New York for their online Collections Portal. ■

Young Friends

As summer approaches, we are wrapping up our busiest school year to date, on target to reach a record number of students and schools! From lintels, gargoyles and stained glass to brownstone, limestone and brick, the buildings of the Upper East Side and East Harlem have functioned as an outdoor classroom for over 950 first and second graders this school year!

Some of our success can be attributed to the expansion of our partnership with the Museum of the City of New York. Schools participating in our three visit program have the opportunity to follow up with a bonus session at the museum to as part of their "Grid" program. This optional course reinforces architectural concepts and explores how city planning helps ensure that communities serve the needs of their residents. Students learn the various zones of the city and construct a model neighborhood based on community needs conforming to Manhattan's grid system. Many of our schools have enjoyed this new offering and the feedback from teachers and parents has been outstanding.

We love returning to our neighborhood schools each year, as we have become an integral part of their study of New York City. This year, we have encountered many new classrooms and hope they, too, will become old friends in the years to come. ■



An East River View

Join FRIENDS for an exclusive tour of the Upper East Side from the waters of the East River aboard the aptly-named *Lexington*. With gleaming wooden handrails, teak decks and mahogany interiors, you could not ask for a more stylish or unique perspective of the Upper East Side. Francis Morrone, renowned architectural historian, will lead this special tour of the landmarks that line the river's shore, including rarely seen views of the United Nations, Sutton Place, Rockefeller University, New York Hospital, the Queensboro Bridge, and Gracie Mansion. As the

yacht circles Roosevelt Island, enjoy the sunset, socialize, and listen as the city's history comes alive over cocktails, hors d'oeuvres, and a buffet dinner. ■



Tuesday, June 14th, 5:30pm Boarding, 6:00pm Departure, 9:00pm Return
Boat departs and returns to the NY Skyport Marina, East 23rd Street & FDR Drive
\$150 members, \$175 non-members

Save the Date! *Thursday, September 15, 2011*

Join FRIENDS for an exciting evening as we proudly honor Richard Ravitch at our Eighth Annual Ambassador to the Upper East Side Award Dinner on Thursday, September 15th.

Richard Ravitch, long-time resident of the Upper East Side, has been engaged in both private and public business for more than 40 years. In 1975, at the request of Governor Hugh Carey of the State of New York, Mr. Ravitch assumed the Chairmanship of the near-bankrupt New York State Urban Development Corporation, successfully keeping the corporation solvent and completing construction of 30,000 low-income housing units. He served as Chairman of the Metropolitan Transportation Authority for five years, reorganizing the MTA and improving

the region's transportation infrastructure. In 1988, he was the Chairman of the Charter Revision Commission of the City of New York.

In 1999, Congress created the Millennial Housing Commission to examine the federal government's role in meeting the nation's growing affordable housing challenges. Mr. Ravitch was appointed to serve as Co-Chair of the Commission which led a diverse group of 22 housing experts in an intensive 17-month process to rethink America's affordable housing policy. In May 2002, the Commission presented its report to Congress, recommending a series of initiatives to create new housing tools, reform several current programs and streamline existing programs.

In 2008, at the request of Governor Paterson, Mr. Ravitch chaired a commission that designed a plan to finance the MTA. Most recently, Mr. Ravitch served as Lieutenant Governor of the State of New York.

With such outstanding company, this is sure to be an evening to remember! For inquiries please call 212-535-2526 or email info@friends-ues.org. ■



Richard Ravitch, 2011 Ambassador to the Upper East Side

A LITTLE HELP FOR FRIENDS

Last fall, thirteen students from the Department of Architectural Technology, New York City College of Technology participated in the FRIENDS survey of Yorkville. Working in pairs, the students were responsible for surveying and photographing all the buildings on an assigned block.

The students were enthusiastic about their assignment. In the words of one, this "was the first time when I actually stood in front of a building trying to figure out the style, structure, materials, components, and conditions of a structure. It made me realize that I live in a city full of architectural history and that I knew so little about it. For me the survey was a great experience for the simple reason of actually realizing the beauty of each building."



Professor Barbara Mishara and her CUNY students preparing to embark upon the Yorkville survey

The experience also encouraged close observation of the built environment, an important skill for architects in training. Students learn more by doing than by merely reading. One student summarized, "In the beautiful skylines of our New York City, we can appreciate the contrast in style and age of buildings, and is a sight that enables us to go back and forth in time, a view that tells us where we have been and where we are at the moment. And that is why it is important to preserve historic landmarks, structures that

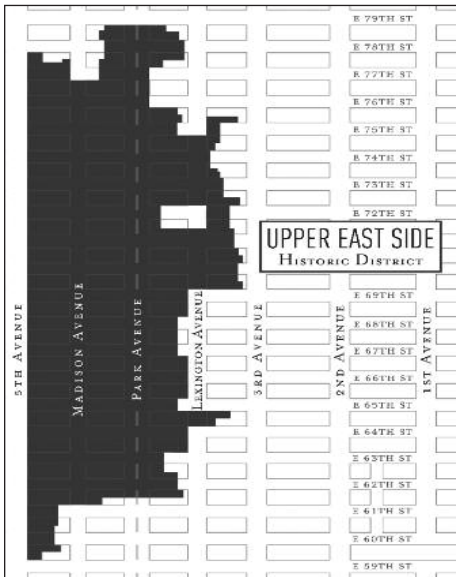
remind us of our past achievements and serve as a source of identity and pride."

New York City College of Technology, a unit of the City University of New York, is located in Brooklyn. City Tech, as it is commonly known, serves 15,368 full and part-time students; with approximately 900 students in the department of Architectural Technology. The overall student population reflects the immigrant experience of New York City: 41.7% were born outside of the United States; 60.8% report a language other than English spoken at home. Thirty-four per cent of the students are Black, 31.7% Hispanic, 18.5% Asian and 11% White. Fifty-two percent of the students report household incomes of less than \$30,000; 63.9% of continuing students receive need based aid.

The project was a resounding success and I hope to find more eye-opening experiences for my next class of students. ■

by Barbara Mishara
Assistant Professor, New York City
College of Technology

A NEW Walk with FRIENDS



Last fall, the National Trust for Historic Preservation announced that Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts was awarded a grant from the Elizabeth and Robert Jefferies Preservation Fund for New York City. This generous grant will help us redesign and print *Walk with Friends*, our architectural and cultural guide to the Upper East Side.

Since it was originally produced, *Walk with Friends* has reached thousands, introducing visitors and reacquainting long time residents to the cultural and architectural gems of our neighborhood. It features detailed maps of each of the Upper East Side's historic districts, descriptions of all 126 individual landmarks, and bits of fascinating history. However, with the 2010 expansion of the Upper East Side Historic District, *Walk with Friends* is now out of date. To celebrate this monumental accomplishment, we have begun to redesign and update our map and guide.

Thanks to the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Elizabeth and Robert Jefferies Preservation Fund for New York City, our new version of *Walk with Friends* will reach your mailboxes this fall! ■

FRIENDS of the Arts

This winter FRIENDS hosted a group of students from Columbia University's School of the Arts who are currently developing multi-disciplinary arts projects focusing on Museum Mile. The class, entitled *Multi-Arts Incubator*, is working alongside the *French Institute Alliance Française (fi:af)* to create four unique artistic responses to the area and its history, architecture and culture. Under the guidance of professor Gideon Lester, the goal of the class is to develop work collaboratively, presenting these projects at *fi:af's* annual fall festival: *Crossing The Line*.

Working at an early stage to formulate their artistic angle, executive director Tara Kelly gave a thorough history of the neighborhood to thirteen members of the class. Caroline Prugh, an artist with a background in playwriting, is collaborating with three fellow students from differing disciplines to realize

their film installation entitled *How Long Are You Going to Be Here?* Their plan is to edit many filmed interactions that take place on the steps of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, highlighting intimate stories and the improvised community life of the venerable institution. Prugh credits the visit to FRIENDS as "extremely helpful to have early in our creative process...Ms. Kelly gave us an overview of the history of the district and helped provide a distinctive lens to view both architecture and community." ■

by Jimmy Maize
Columbia University,
MFA Theater '12

To learn more about *fi:af* visit www.fiaf.org, and to read about last year's *Crossing The Line Festival*, visit www.fiaf.org/crossingtheline.

LETTER from the PRESIDENT

With the pending hardship application at the City and Suburban First Avenue Estate, FRIENDS continues to be at the forefront of preservation concerns on the Upper East Side. This is a critical issue that threatens the very existence of each one of our beloved landmark buildings. Rest assured that we will be as vigilant as ever in this fight.

On a happier note, I am delighted to report that we had a very successful Annual Meeting and Awards Ceremony. Our vast array of presenters and awardees made for a truly extraordinary evening in celebration of the Upper East Side's significant preservation accomplishments over the last year.

I am also pleased to announce that we have a new addition to our team. Our Education Director Sarah O'Keefe Greig gave birth to a beautiful baby girl on March 23rd. Born on the anniversary of the designation of the Upper East Side Historic District Expansion, it is obvious that we have a tiny preservationist on our hands!

As you depart for your summer travels, don't forget to mark your calendar for this year's Annual Ambassador Award dinner. We are thrilled to be honoring Richard Ravitch on September 15th and we hope to see you there!

Sincerely,

In Gratitude

FRIENDS of the Upper East Side Historic Districts wishes to acknowledge the generous support of: Joan K. Davidson (J. M. Kaplan Fund), The Gilbert & Ildiko Butler Family Foundation, The National Trust for Historic Preservation's Elizabeth and Robert Jeffe Preservation Fund for New York City, The New York City Department of Cultural Affairs, Manhattan Chamber of Commerce, State Senator Liz Krueger, Council Member Daniel Garodnick and Council Member Jessica Lappin through the Department of Cultural Affairs. ■



Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, founded in 1982, is an independent, not-for-profit membership organization dedicated to preserving the architectural legacy, livability, and sense of place of the Upper East Side. We safeguard the future of the Upper East Side's six historic districts and 126 individual landmarks, acting as an advocate for sound preservation policies for the city. FRIENDS has also been a leader in successful efforts to improve dramatically the zoning laws governing the area's avenues and residential side streets.

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