

MODERN ARCHITECTURE

ON THE

UPPER EAST SIDE

LANDMARKS
OF THE
FUTURE

Modern Architecture on the Upper East Side: Landmarks of the Future

Presented by FRIENDS of the Upper East Side Historic Districts

September 20, 2001 – January 26, 2002

On view at the New York School of Interior Design

170 East 70th Street, New York, NY 10021

Gallery Hours: Tuesday through Saturday, 10:00 a.m. – 5:00 p.m.

INTRODUCTION

The Upper East Side, stretching from East 59th Street to East 96th Street and from the East River to Fifth Avenue, is best known for its historic buildings. The area's mansions, townhouses, and apartment buildings were erected for some of New York City's wealthiest and most prominent residents, and its tenements housed tens of thousands of immigrants. These historic buildings form the core of the neighborhood and are rightly a source of pride and interest. But the Upper East Side also boasts a surprisingly large number of outstanding modern structures.

With this exhibition, we hope to promote a greater appreciation and understanding of modern architecture on the Upper East Side by highlighting distinguished modern buildings located outside the area's historic districts. These buildings are diverse, ranging from examples of the early diffusion of European modernism in the United States following World War II, to the expressive use of concrete in the 1960s, to the Post-modern historicism of

the 1970s, to more current approaches to architectural design. We have included private homes, apartment buildings, theaters, and institutional and public buildings, designed by little-known architects as well as some of the masters of our era.

There is an urgent need to appreciate and protect our modern architectural heritage. Even as we planned this exhibition, the facade of one of the buildings we intended to feature—the private residence at 525 East 85th Street designed by Paul Jean Mitarachi in 1958—was removed. While none of the buildings in the exhibition are designated New York City landmarks, fifteen of the twenty-two structures chosen are more than thirty years old and therefore could be considered for landmark designation.

We hope this exhibition will focus attention on the often-forgotten modern architecture of the Upper East Side and lead to the designation and preservation of this important legacy.



1| Office Building

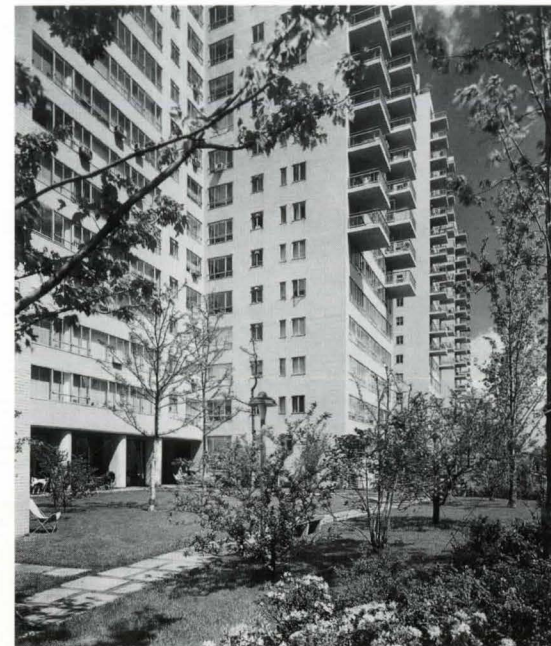
1114-1116 First Avenue

Date Completed: 1947

Builder: First Avenue Realty Corp.

Architect: Horace Ginsbern & Associates, Architects

This building at First Avenue and East 61st Street reflects the modern ideas developed at Germany's Bauhaus School in the 1920s. The goal of the International Style that the Bauhaus promoted was the creation of a rational environment, based on principles of design and modern technology. On this building, the mass-produced brick and glass block, horizontal banding, and ribbon windows exemplify principles of the International Style. This Modern work indicates the changing character of the architecture of Horace Ginsbern, who had previously specialized in Art Deco apartment buildings, most built in the Bronx.



2| Manhattan House

200 East 66th Street

Date Completed: 1950

Builder: New York Life Insurance Co.

Architects: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill and Mayer & Whittlesey

Erected as part of an urban renewal project by the New York Life Insurance Company, Manhattan House is New York's first "white brick" apartment building, though the brick is in fact a self-cleansing light gray. In this neighborhood formerly defined by tenements, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill provided a precedent-setting, light-filled building. Its innovative H-plan—as opposed to the standard inner courtyard—allows for greater light and cross-ventilation to 95 percent of its apartments. The Bauhaus-style balconies and International Style glass lobby further provide access to light. In 1952, Manhattan House was awarded the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects award for outstanding apartment house.

LANDMARK



LOST

3| **Beekman Theater and Block**

1242-1258 Second Avenue

Date Completed: 1952

Builder: New York Life Insurance Co.

Architects: Fellheimer & Wagner for the building and for the interior of the Corn Exchange Bank

John J. McNamara—associate architect for the Beekman Theater

J. M. Berlinger—associate architect for the Excelsior Bank

This Second Avenue blockfront was planned by the New York Life Insurance Company as a modern shopping center to supplement the ground-floor shops in Manhattan House across the avenue. International Style features include the horizontal orientation of the building, the glazed corner on East 66th Street, and the ribbon windows on East 65th Street. The building's design and gray brick cladding relate to and complement Manhattan House.

The Beekman Theater, built as an art-film house, is one of the few such theaters remaining in Manhattan. The International Style design is enlivened with a tilted glass facade and sloping streamlined lounge ceiling that refers stylistically back to the Moderne style of the 1930s. Design features like the continuation of the marble entry frame and terrazzo flooring from the exterior into the interior and the placement of a window between the lounge and theater break down traditional divisions of space.



4| **Public School 6**

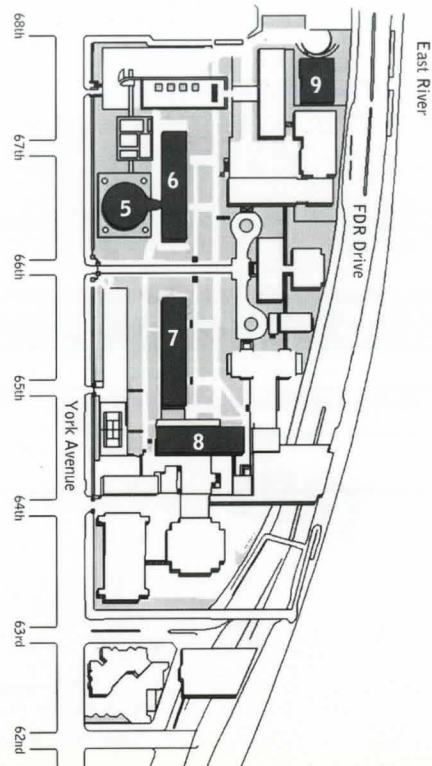
45 East 81st Street

Date Completed: 1953

Builder: New York City Board of Education

Architect: Eric Kebbon

Eric Kebbon was the architect to the Board of Education and Superintendent of School Building Design from 1938 to 1951. In his design for P.S. 6, he rejected the idea of building a monumental school in favor of a more human, childlike scale. The school is oriented horizontally rather than vertically and includes large, innovative classrooms. Delicate detailing in the form of etched-glass window panels provides additional visual interest to this Modern red brick school.



ROCKEFELLER UNIVERSITY EXPANSION BUILDINGS

York Avenue between East 64th and 68th Streets

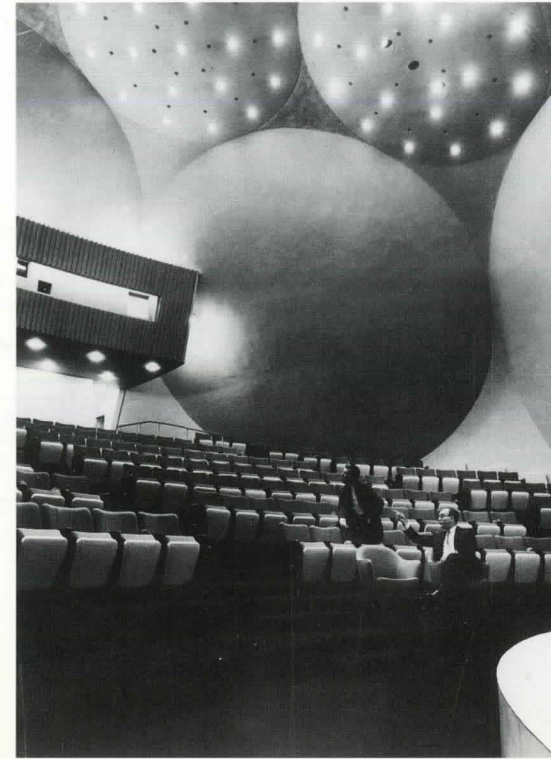
Date Completed: 1957–1958

Builder: Rockefeller University

Architect: Harrison & Abramovitz

Rockefeller University was founded in 1901 by John D. Rockefeller as the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research. During the 1950s, the institution expanded its Beaux-Arts campus, and the firm of Harrison & Abramovitz was chosen to design five new buildings. Harrison had a close association with the Rockefellers, having worked at Rockefeller Center and other projects.

Designed in the International Style, these structures were placed in the Beaux-Arts plan, with Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Hall/Caspary Hall and the Graduate Students Residence on either side of the entrance drive and the Detlev W. Bronk Laboratory at the southern terminus of a new mall. The President's House was located above the East River and Caspary Auditorium south of and connected to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Hall. Dan Kiley, the landscape architect, designed the paving materials; gardens, including the magnificent Philosopher's Garden; and the paved marble and slate esplanade at the northern end of the campus.



5| Caspary Auditorium

Caspary Auditorium was designed to provide state-of-the-art acoustics as a lecture hall, movie theater, and concert hall. Echoing the shape of a Greek amphitheater, Harrison & Abramovitz enclosed the space in a hemispheric shell measuring 99 feet in diameter and 40 feet high. Acoustics were provided by Bolt, Beranek & Newman, resulting in an interior with a sloping floor and a ceiling with large plaster discs that act as acoustical enhancers. The exterior was originally clad in Italian mosaics in varying blue and yellow tones, but these deteriorated and have been removed.



6| **Caspary Hall and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Hall**

Caspary Hall and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Hall make up a single interconnected structure. The four-story streamlined building is set on a rough stone base, with rounded corners at its southern end. Its west facade is clad in limestone and has ribbon windows, and the east facade is clad in a glass and metal curtain wall. The open patio at the northern end of the building has a cut-out limestone frame that blurs the division of indoor and outdoor space. A circular hole in the floor permits views to a lower patio level. Caspary Hall is connected to the auditorium by an enclosed bridge.



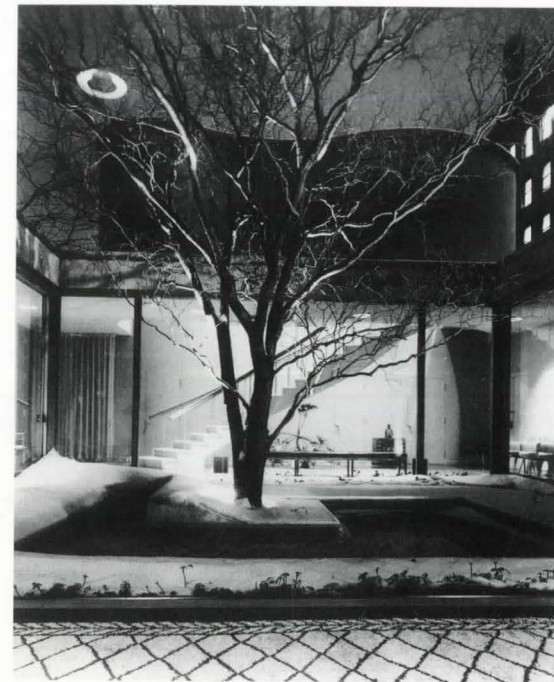
7| **Graduate Students Residence**

The Graduate Students Residence is arranged in a similar manner to Caspary/Rockefeller Hall. It has a fieldstone base and upper walls composed of glass, metal, and limestone. The rounded corners on its northern end mirror those of Caspary Hall. A perimeter walkway at the southern end of the building permits views into a landscaped lower court and links the Graduate Students Residence to the Detlev W. Bronk Laboratory directly south.



8 | Detlev W. Bronk Laboratory

Oriented east-west, the Detlev W. Bronk Laboratory serves as a terminus of the mall at the southern end of the campus. Facing north, the Bronk Laboratory is clad in a glass and metal curtain wall. To the south, the limestone-clad facade is pierced by small, uniform square windows. With a reflective facade facing into the campus and a more austere facade facing out, the building defines the original boundaries of the Rockefeller University campus.



9 | President's House

Built along the edge of a bluff on the East River, the one-and-a-half-story President's House has thirteen rooms designed around an interior atrium with a small pool. The entrance feature on the north facade is composed of a curvilinear roof supported by thin columns. The house is set on a fieldstone base, visible on its north facade, and its limestone cladding, stark geometric forms, and cut-out framework relate to Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Hall and the Graduate Students Residence.



LOST?
*HEAVILY ALTERED

10| Cinema I and II (now Cinema 1, 2, 3 Third Avenue)

1001 Third Avenue

Date Completed: 1962

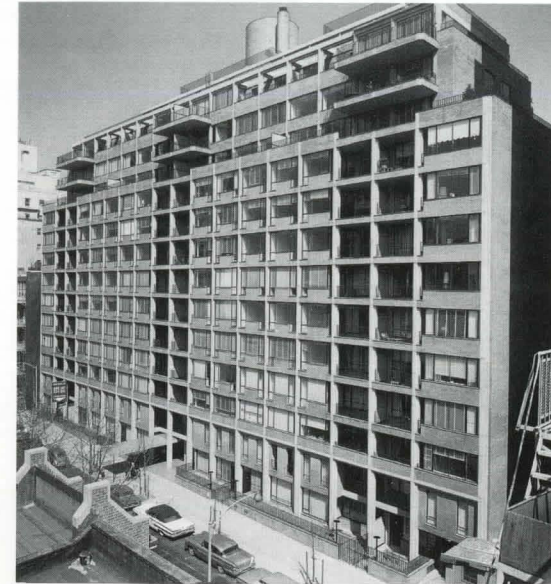
Builder: Rugoff Theaters

Architect: Abraham W. Geller Associates

Consulting Theater Architect: Ben Schlanger

This award-winning art film theater was the first duplex, “piggy-back” movie theater built in the United States. The piggy-back idea was developed by Ben Schlanger, who had pioneered a back-to-back duplex theater for the Information Center at Colonial Williamsburg. Cinema I and II was built by Rugoff Theaters to serve as the core of an East Side International Film Center and as a crosstown complement to Lincoln Center, which was being built at the same time but did not include a movie house.

Artwork was an integral part of Abraham Geller’s International Style design. The interior spaces designed by Geller, James McNair, and Norman Ives include a sloping barrel-vaulted ceiling, Danish copper-leaf chandeliers in the upstairs lounge, and an abstract mural by Ilya Bolotowsky in the ground-floor lobby. In 1983, Geller was again hired to divide the larger upstairs auditorium into two, making the theater a triplex.



11| The Premier

333 East 69th Street

Date Completed: 1963

Builder: 333 East 69th Street Corp.

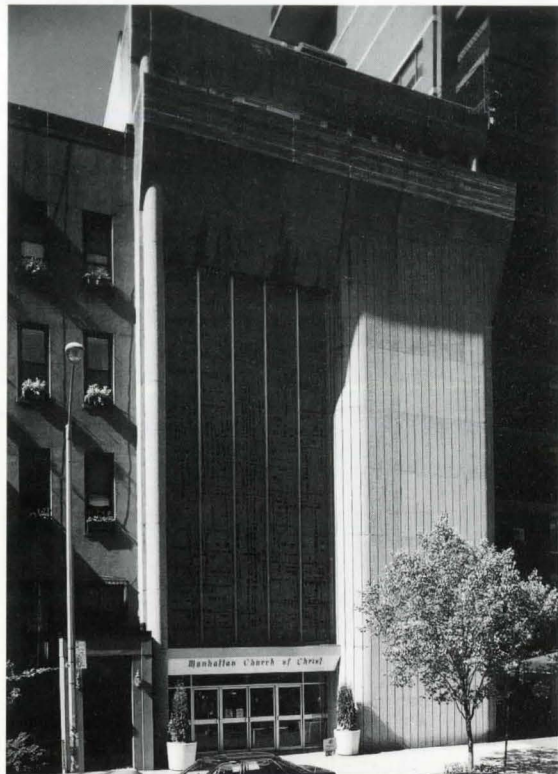
Architect: Mayer, Whittlesey & Glass, Architects; William Conklin, Partner

This mid-block apartment house recalls Le Corbusier’s 1953 Unité d’Habitation in Marseilles. Like Le Corbusier, Mayer, Whittlesey & Glass sought to reconcile high-density urban living with amenities like light, air, commodious living arrangements, and greenery. With its rooftop sun patio and glassed-in recreation room, the Premier also recalls Le Corbusier’s vision of communal living. The facade of vertical concrete piers and recessed balconies create a play of light and shadow. In 1974, Mayer, Whittlesey & Glass received a First Honor award from the American Institute of Architects for the exceptional planning and design of these apartments.

- 1 Office Building
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- 3 Beekman Theater and Block
- 4 Public School 6
- 5 Caspary Auditorium
- 6 Caspary Hall and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Hall
- 7 Graduate Students Residence
- 8 Detlev W. Bronk Laboratory
- 9 President's House
- 10 Cinema I and II (now Cinema 1, 2, 3 Third Avenue)
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- 12 Manhattan Church of Christ
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- 14 Richard Feigen Gallery (now Hanae Mori Boutique)
- 15 Intermediate School 29 (now Hunter College Campus Schools)
- 16 Roosevelt Island Tramway Manhattan Station
- 17 Ruppert Towers
- 18 Apartment House
- 19 Islamic Cultural Center of New York
- 20 Asphalt Green AquaCenter
- 21 Private Residences
- 22 Private Residence



12| **Manhattan Church of Christ**

48 East 80th Street

Date Completed: 1967

Builder: Manhattan Church of Christ

Architect: Eggers & Higgins

This house of worship was built by the Manhattan Church of Christ, a nondenominational Protestant congregation. The expressive design of the church is a departure from traditional Gothic and Classical ecclesiastical architecture. An asymmetrical massing, composed of textured precast concrete blocks, frames a 38-by-20-foot abstractly designed stained-glass window. The New Brutalism of the 1960s is expressed by the church's volumetric design and concrete structure.



13| **Group Residence for Young Adults**

217 East 87th Street

Date Completed: 1968

Builder: Jewish Board of Guardians

Architect: Horace Ginsbern & Associates, Architects

Built as a nondenominational home and school for troubled teens, this building is a rare example of New Brutalist architecture in Manhattan. It echoes Le Corbusier's pioneering treatment of raw concrete, or "béton brut," in the 1950s at such works as the Convent of La Tourette near Lyon, France. Brutalist design incorporated a new philosophy toward materials, rejecting the International Style's "veneer-like" treatment of facades in favor of celebrating the textured quality and dynamic massing that can be achieved through the plasticity of concrete. Horace Ginsbern & Associates Architects received a certificate of merit for the project from the New York Association of Architects in 1969.

LOST



14| Richard Feigen Gallery (now **Hanae Mori Boutique**)

27 East 79th Street

Date Completed: 1969

Builder: Richard L. Feigen

Architect: Hans Hollein

Consulting Architects: Baker & Blake and Dorothy Alexander

In 1969, Richard Feigen commissioned the Austrian architect Hans Hollein to redesign an 1887 row house and convert it into a two-story gallery and residence for his own use. The gallery has changing floor levels and ceiling heights and a balcony overlooking the ground floor. The sinuous staircase rail linking the gallery spaces has an ocean liner quality. This nautical theme is carried over in the stainless steel capsule bathroom, hidden behind a hatch. The finely crafted materials and elegant fixtures contrast effectively with brightly painted steel air-conditioning pipes. As described by the architect, the gallery is a "very active place" and proclaims, "I'm living in 1970." Although now used as a women's clothing boutique, the gallery interiors are largely intact.

LOST



15| Intermediate School 29

(now **Hunter College Campus Schools**)

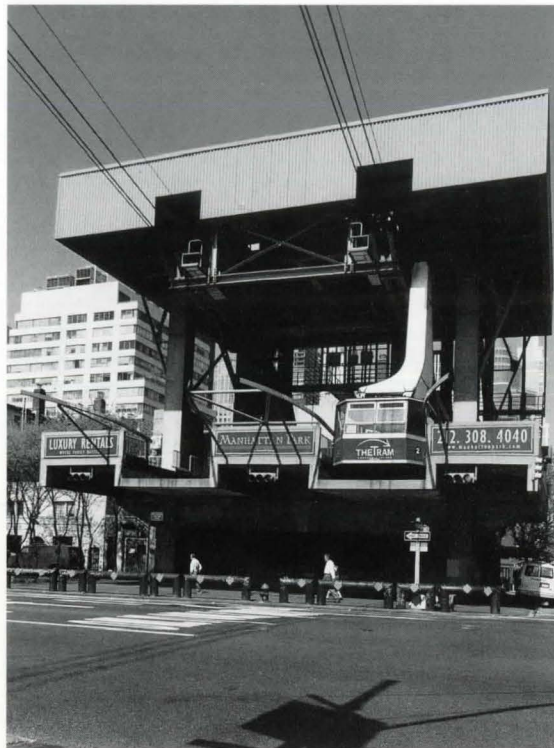
Park Avenue between East 94th and 95th Streets

Date Completed: 1969

Builder: New York City Board of Education

Architect: Morris Ketchum, Jr. & Associates

In 1966, the 1895 Squadron A Armory was partially demolished to make way for a new junior high school. The project was not realized, however, because the newly formed New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission intervened and halted the armory's demolition, designating the remaining Madison Avenue facade. Morris Ketchum's school is an early example of contextual design, echoing the spirit of the castellated armory by employing adaptations of medieval crenelations, corner towers, and slit windows. The school is linked to the old armory via an outdoor recreation area.



16| Roosevelt Island Tramway Manhattan Station

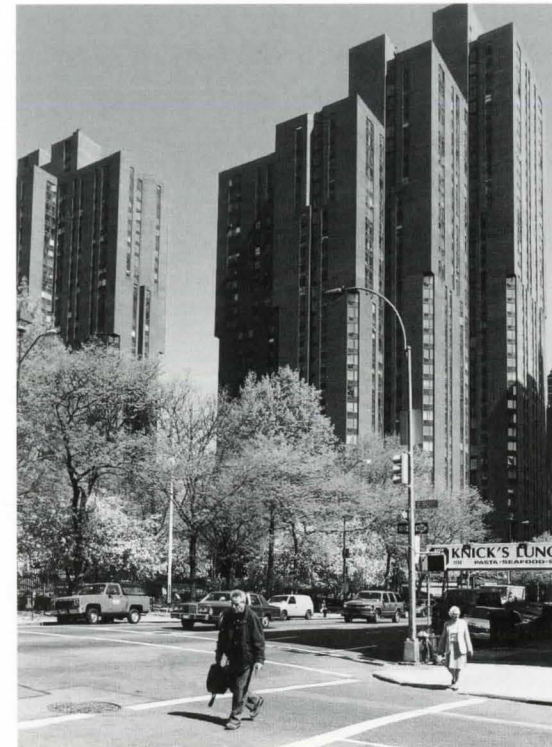
Second Avenue and East 60th Street

Date Completed: 1976

Builder: New York State Urban Development Corporation

Architect: Prentice & Chan, Ohlhausen

Plans for the Manhattan station for the world's first mass-transit aerial tramway were first developed in 1973 by the chief engineer of the New York State Development Corporation, which sought a way to connect Manhattan and Roosevelt Island after completion of a subway station on the island was delayed. The six-story tramway structure is supported on 40-inch steel-and-concrete columns designed by Prentice & Chan, Ohlhausen to bear the load of a 32-story tower, which was never built. The tramway structure reads as a free-standing, three-dimensional contemporary sculpture.



17| Ruppert Towers

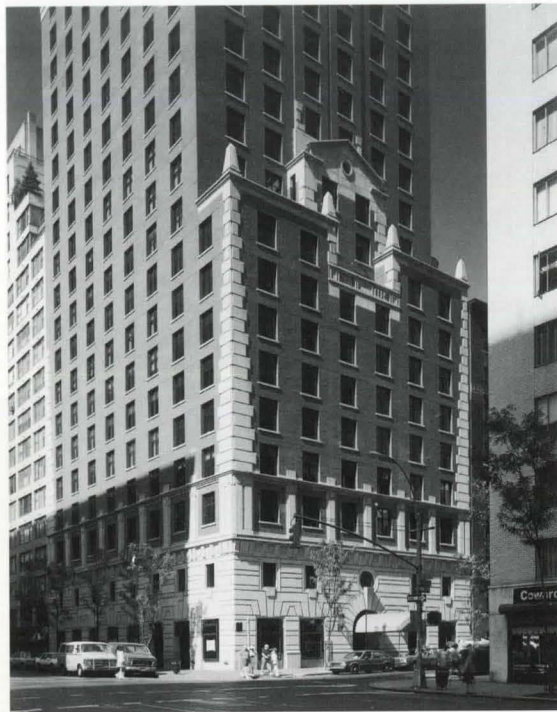
Between Second and Third Avenues from East 90th to 92nd Streets

Date Completed: 1976

Builder: DeMatteis Organization

Architect: Davis Brody Bond

Ruppert Towers were built as an urban renewal project on the site of the old Ruppert Brewery, which closed in the 1960s. The complex consists of three 24- to 42-story brick-clad towers set on a landscaped site, unified by a consistent design highlighted by narrow vertical windows and chamfered corners with cantilevers. The buildings' height, irregular massing, and dynamic design create a visual landmark on the Upper East Side.



18| Apartment House

188 East 70th Street

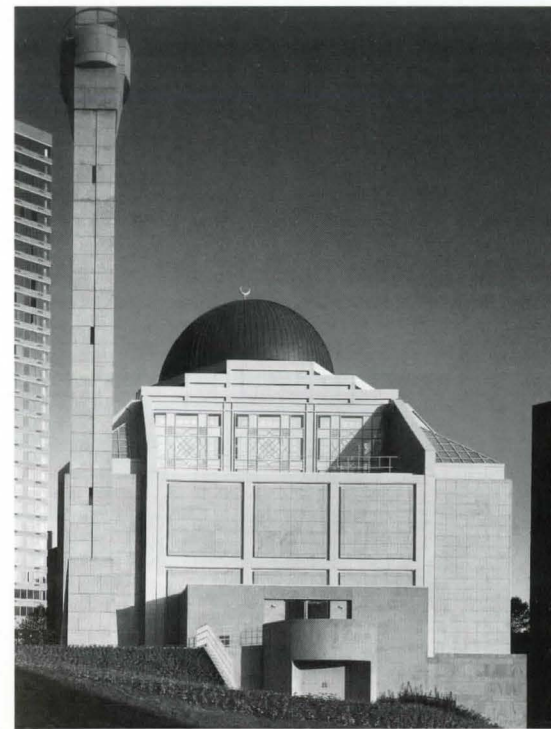
Date Completed: 1986

Builder: Trafalgar House Real Estate Inc.

Architect: Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates

Associated Architect: Arthur May

This apartment building in the Post-modern style references classical architecture in an exaggerated, playful manner. Post-modernism arose in the 1970s in reaction to the austerity of International Style design and sought to promote the contemporary validity of classicism. Oversized and abstracted classical features, which on this building include the rusticated stone base, quoins, and pilasters, are hallmarks of the style, but also make reference to the fabric of the area's historic buildings. The year it was built, Paul Goldberger, *The New York Times* architecture critic, dubbed it "among the finest postwar apartment houses on the Upper East Side."



19| Islamic Cultural Center of New York

201 East 96th Street

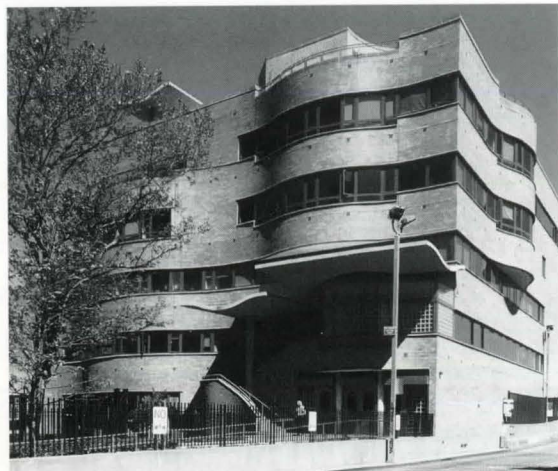
Date Completed: 1989

Builder: Islamic Cultural Center of New York

Architect: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill

Architect for the minaret: Swanke Hayden Connell

The Islamic Cultural Center was the first building erected as a mosque in New York City. It contains the two primary elements that traditionally compose an Islamic house of worship: a mosque and a minaret. Within the mosque, the mihrab, or alter niche, faces Mecca, dictating the mosque's 29 degree angle from the Manhattan street grid. This alignment creates a traditional exterior court for worshipers to gather before services. The geometric form of the mosque, based on a recurring theme of square units, follows Islamic law, which prohibits the depiction of natural forms since they are made in the image of God. The result is a striking blend of ancient Islamic tradition and contemporary design and materials.



20| Asphalt Green AquaCenter

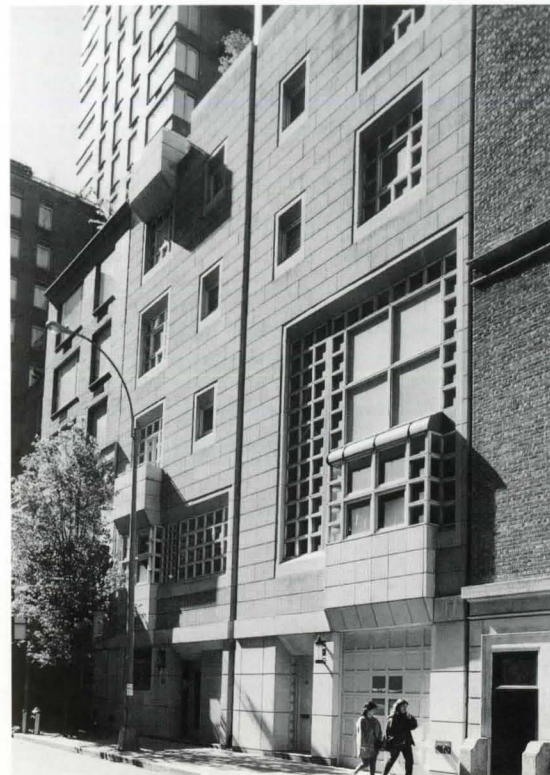
1750 York Avenue

Date Completed: 1993

Builder: Asphalt Green Inc. and the City of New York

Architect: Richard Dattner Architect

Richard Dattner's Asphalt Green AquaCenter contains New York City's first Olympic size swimming pool. The design of the AquaCenter relates both to its function and its immediate context: the size of the Olympic pool dictated the building's plan, while wave-like swellings on the facade and wavy entrance and roof canopies indicate the building's use as a swimming facility and its proximity to the East River. Curved trusses supporting the pool roof create a link between the AquaCenter and the parabolic arch of the neighboring Municipal Asphalt Plant, built in 1942.



21| Private Residences

16 and 18 East 85th Street

Date Completed: 1996

Builder: Phyllis Rosen

Architect: Gwathmey Siegel & Associates Architects

Gwathmey Siegel's twin houses relate as a pair through the use of the same materials and austere geometric modernist design, though each is subtly different. The houses are tied together by a central chimney and are identical above the second story. Irregular and varying window sizes on the lower floors create additional visual interest and indicate that the houses are separate structures. The scale and stone cladding, which echo that of the surrounding historic residences, accord with the architects' belief that "a building must be contextually sensitive without being stylistically dated."



22 | **Private Residence**

176 East 72nd Street

Date Completed: 1996

Architect: Tod Williams Billie Tsien & Associates

Tod Williams Billie Tsien & Associates designed this private residence to accommodate an art collection and the requirements of a one-family home. The design reveals a minimalist aesthetic by its use of lightweight industrial materials, monochromatic colors, transparency, and subtle asymmetries like the facade's off-center floating limestone panel. The scale—five stories capped by a glass mansard roof—make subtle reference to the neighborhood's historic private residences. This spectacular new building has become an icon of contemporary architecture on the Upper East Side.

ABOUT FRIENDS

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.

In addition to safeguarding the future of the Upper East Side's six historic districts and 125 individual landmarks, FRIENDS is a vocal advocate for sound preservation policies for the city. It also seeks to maintain and improve the zoning laws governing the area's avenues and residential side streets. The organization is particularly proud of its efforts to downzone the side streets' midblocks to protect them from harmful high-rise development. **The New York Times** hailed the successful result as "the most sweeping zoning change in the area since 1961."

FRIENDS regularly attends and testifies at hearings before city agencies and Community Board #8 to encourage appropriate development on the Upper East Side.

FRIENDS' most popular education program is a three-part course for children on learning to appreciate the built environment. The organization also offers walking tours and regular newsletters

—for children and adults. Annual awards are given for outstanding preservation projects and extraordinary community service.

To further educate the public, FRIENDS offers two publications: its award-winning **Preservation Manual: A Guide to Working on New York City Landmarks** and **WALK with FRIENDS** (an architectural and cultural map and guide).

FRIENDS' previous photographic exhibition, "The 11 Most Endangered Places & The Other Upper East Side: A Diverse Architectural Heritage," was widely shown in 1993.

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Thanks to the members of the Board of Directors of FRIENDS for their invaluable comments and advice.

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