

that were appealing to the wealthy women who played a major role in the creation of the new East Side residential district. For example, Charlotte Martin sponsored and largely funded Turtle Bay Gardens and wealthy single women, including Anne Vanderbilt, Anne Morgan, and Elizabeth Marbury, commissioned the design of new homes on Sutton Place and created its unique social ambience. Women also commissioned the redesign of many individual homes on the East Side, even when their husbands owned the property. Contemporary discussions often credit these women with the design of the interiors and gardens. It is, of course, not surprising that so many women were involved with the creation of these houses since in the early decades of the century the home was still considered the woman's realm. As Dorothy Draper, a prominent interior decorator who lived in a house on East 63rd Street designed by Frederick Sterner, noted, "it is a well-recognized fact that it is usually the woman of the family who has the determining vote in the choosing of the home."<sup>21</sup>

What is more noteworthy is the number of professional women who were key figures in the redesign of these East Side houses, including Josephine Wright Chapman, one of the first women registered as an architect in New York State, interior designers such as Draper and Elsie de Wolfe, and landscape designers such as Marian Coffin and Ruth Dean.<sup>22</sup> In addition, women photographers, including Mattie Edwards Hewitt and Frances Benjamin Johnston, documented these houses and gardens and writers, such as Helen Bullitt Lowry, Mildred Adams, and Minga Pope Duryea, commented on their design for popular magazines such as *House and Garden*, *Garden Magazine*, and *Town and Country*.

## "Eastward Ho"

Frederick Sterner's creation of stylish homes between Lexington and Third Avenues further broke down the psychological and economic barriers that had dissuaded wealthy New Yorkers from moving to the blocks east of Lexington Avenue. Nevertheless, "it remained for a few people of courage and vision to penetrate beyond Third Avenue and convert the shabby narrow brownstones of that district into Italian villas and French maisonettes and little London houses."<sup>24</sup> Thus, beginning in 1919 some prominent and wealthy New Yorkers took up "the new cry of 'Eastward ho'" by purchasing old houses east of Lexington Avenue, especially between Third and Second Avenues.<sup>25</sup> Although examples of remodeled houses could be found from the East 30s northward into the East 70s, this new movement centered on East 61st and East 62nd Streets, an area that would become known as "Treadwell Farm" in the late 1960s following its designation as a historic district by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission.<sup>26</sup> As



was typical of blocks east of Lexington Avenue, many of the Italianate brownstone-fronted row houses on East 61st, East 62nd, and other far East Side blocks had become rooming houses by the early twentieth century, occupied by large numbers of Irish and Central European immigrants.<sup>27</sup>

Between 1919 and 1921 almost every house on the two Treadwell Farm blocks changed ownership, and many had their facades altered to some extent, with additional alterations in the years that followed. In 1919 alone, at least thirty-three houses on these blocks were sold and at least fifteen were altered, with at least another twelve being altered the following year.<sup>28</sup> Each row house alteration was commissioned by an individual who hired his or her own architect. Since many architects worked on these two blocks and client requirements and budgets varied, the houses did not have the unity of design aesthetic and facade materials that exemplified Sterner's work on East 19th and East 63rd Streets, although many adopted the popular Mediterranean-inspired motifs that Sterner had used. Helen Bullitt Lowry commented that these East Side rehabilitation projects had created a "school of New Yorkized Venetian which is threatening to influence the whole modern trend of American city-bred architecture."<sup>29</sup>

Facade alterations ranged from the relatively modest stripping of window and doorway enframements to the total redesign of the front. Some owners kept the old stoops, but many either removed the stoop and provided

BELOW LEFT:

*Figure 3.1. Josephine Wright Chapman redesigned a brownstone-fronted house at 224 East 61st Street (center) for Richard and Sally Beckwith in 1919 (destroyed). Archives*

BELOW RIGHT:

*Figure 3.2. Polhemus, Mackenzie & Coffin removed most of the original detail from the facade of Edward and Maude Jewett's house at 245 East 61st Street (center). Archives*





basement entrances or rebuilt the stoop so that it ran parallel to the street and building line. Although many of the new homeowners were wealthy, work on the facades was generally planned in as economical a manner as possible, with most of the houses retaining their original fenestration pattern. Architect James Casale, a specialist in row house redesign projects, explained that “half the trick of this renovation work is making over old houses to new by the economy rules that prevail in the woman’s home magazine department entitled ‘making over last year’s wardrobe for the limited income.’”<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, *American Architect* editorialized, “it is amazing what may be economically and artistically carried forward in this direction, by simple changing of cornice heights, painting, the introduction of iron grills and window boxes, and the well-considered alteration of entrances.”<sup>31</sup>

An example of these more modest redesign projects, one that *American Architect* would have found to be suitably “artistic,” was architect Josephine Wright Chapman’s 1919 redesign, since destroyed, of 224 East 61st Street as a home for real estate agent Richard L. Beckwith and his wife, Sallie Monypeny Beckwith (figure 3.1).<sup>32</sup> This renovation was among several projects in the East 60s undertaken by Chapman. She removed the stoop, stripped the window trim, added multipane wood sash, and refaced the facade in white stucco. The focus of Chapman’s design was a new basement entrance dominated by a large wooden, medieval-inspired door adorned with an “old-fashioned bronze knocker” and capped by “a quaint lantern.” As on Sterner’s earlier redesigns, Chapman introduced window boxes to add color and texture to the facade. Chapman also converted what had become a two-family dwelling back into a single-family house. All this work was accomplished for an estimated cost of only \$4,000.<sup>33</sup>

Stockbroker Edward H. Jewett and his wife, sculptor Maude Sherwood Jewett (known professionally as Maude Sherwood), undertook a more expensive alteration than the Beckwiths, investing an estimated \$9,000 in converting 245 East 61st Street back into a single-family house (figure 3.2). The Jewetts hired Polhemus, Mackenzie & Coffin, a firm responsible for several row house redesign projects. The architects removed all of the original projecting detail and rebuilt the stoop so that it ran along the facade of the house. They also simplified the cornice, added a new studio (not visible from the street) on the roof for Maude Jewett, applied white stucco to the facade, installed multipane sash in place of large-pane windows, and placed flower box balconies on the second story. Although the Jewetts and their architects chose to preserve the original Italianate, multipaneled double doors, they embellished the entrance with what the *Times* described as “a large green lantern . . . surmounted with a plain shield bearing the



house number.” They also added “rich green blinds,” that the *Times* critic believed “reveal the possibilities of beautifying an old house without great expense.”<sup>34</sup> Among the most extensive exterior alteration of the postwar period was Frederick Sterner’s work for Robert P. and Beatrice Claflin Breese at 249 East 61st Street, with its white stucco front, red brick trim, flower box balconies, and sculptural accents (see figure 2.33).

Whether the exterior work was extensive or minor, almost every one of these houses was upgraded and reconfigured on the interior. The original floor levels were generally maintained to avoid major structural changes at great expense. However, all of the systems were modernized and in most of the houses partitions were removed, the stairway relocated, and interior rooms rearranged. Following Sterner’s precedent, the kitchens were moved to the front and major public rooms placed to the rear overlooking the garden. Josephine Wright Chapman, for example, created a spacious Italian Renaissance inspired living room in the rear of the old parlor floor of the Beckwith House, complete with rough plaster walls, stone fireplace, red tile floor, and blue plaster ceiling supported by dark wood beams, all with “the atmosphere of Italy . . . furthered by the harmonious mingling of rich reds and blues in the furnishings.”<sup>35</sup>

So many alterations had been made to the once deteriorated fronts along 61st and 62nd Streets by 1920 that the *New York Times* commented that these two blocks had “an appearance fully as neat and attractive as any residential block in the city.”<sup>36</sup> Although the largest number of changes occurred in 1919 and 1920, redesign projects continued through the 1920s and into the 1930s. In fact, the movement to redesign old row houses continued even after the housing crisis abated in the mid-1920s, and dozens of new luxury apartment houses were erected on or near Fifth and Park Avenues.<sup>37</sup> Undoubtedly some of the people who had commissioned row house redesigns during the housing crisis sold their houses and moved into apartments, but many other wealthy households were attracted to the alternative of the redesigned East Side blocks.

Among the most extensive of the redesign projects of the latter half of the 1920s was that at 230 East 62nd Street, designed in 1927 by architect Aymar Embury II for his own family (figure 3.3). Embury was both an architect and a scholar and, during the 1920s, was a leading proponent of neoclassical design. Embury created an extraordinarily refined facade for his house, stripping the old detail, stuccoing the front, and adding neoclassical rosettes and keystones in the form of covered bowls. In front of the house, he installed a Greek Revival cast-iron railing undoubtedly salvaged from a row house being demolished in Greenwich Village or Chelsea. A lushly planted garden was designed by Embury’s wife, landscape architect Ruth



Dean. A central feature of the garden was a cast-iron pergola probably salvaged from the veranda of an 1840s row house.<sup>38</sup>

The owners of the renovated row houses on the far East Side were intent on creating a socially acceptable upper-class neighborhood in an area that had only recently been seen as a deteriorated slum. By 1920, owners on East 60th, 61st, and 62nd Streets had established the East Sixties Property Owners Association to improve conditions on the blocks by raising funds to plant trees along the streets, hire street cleaners, and employ block watchmen. They also, of course, sought to protect their investments, in particular, an editorial in *American Architect* noted, by opposing apartment house construction, and, therefore, maintaining the low-rise residential character of the blocks by repelling “the invasion of the speculative builder, who has so often destroyed the domestic atmosphere of similar localities.”<sup>39</sup>

Individual East Side reconstruction projects were not limited to the blocks in the low 60s between Second and Third Avenues. Other blocks in the East 60s also attracted widespread redesign work. For example, so many houses were redesigned on East 64th Street between Lexington Avenue and Third Avenue that Helen Bullitt Lowry described it as a “fairy-book” street.<sup>40</sup> One of the most original of the redesigns on that block was Dr. Harold Mixsell’s at no. 161 (figure 3.4; destroyed). In

BELOW LEFT:

Figure 3.3. Aymar Embury’s refined neoclassical facade for himself and his wife, landscape architect Ruth Dean. The Greek Revival cast-iron railing was probably salvaged from an old house in Lower Manhattan. OMH, courtesy Edward C. Embury Jr.

BELOW RIGHT:

Figure 3.4. Frank Foster designed a lively and eccentric facade, since destroyed, for Harold Mixsell, 161 East 64th Street, in 1921. *American Architect* 124 (12 Sept. 1923); Avery

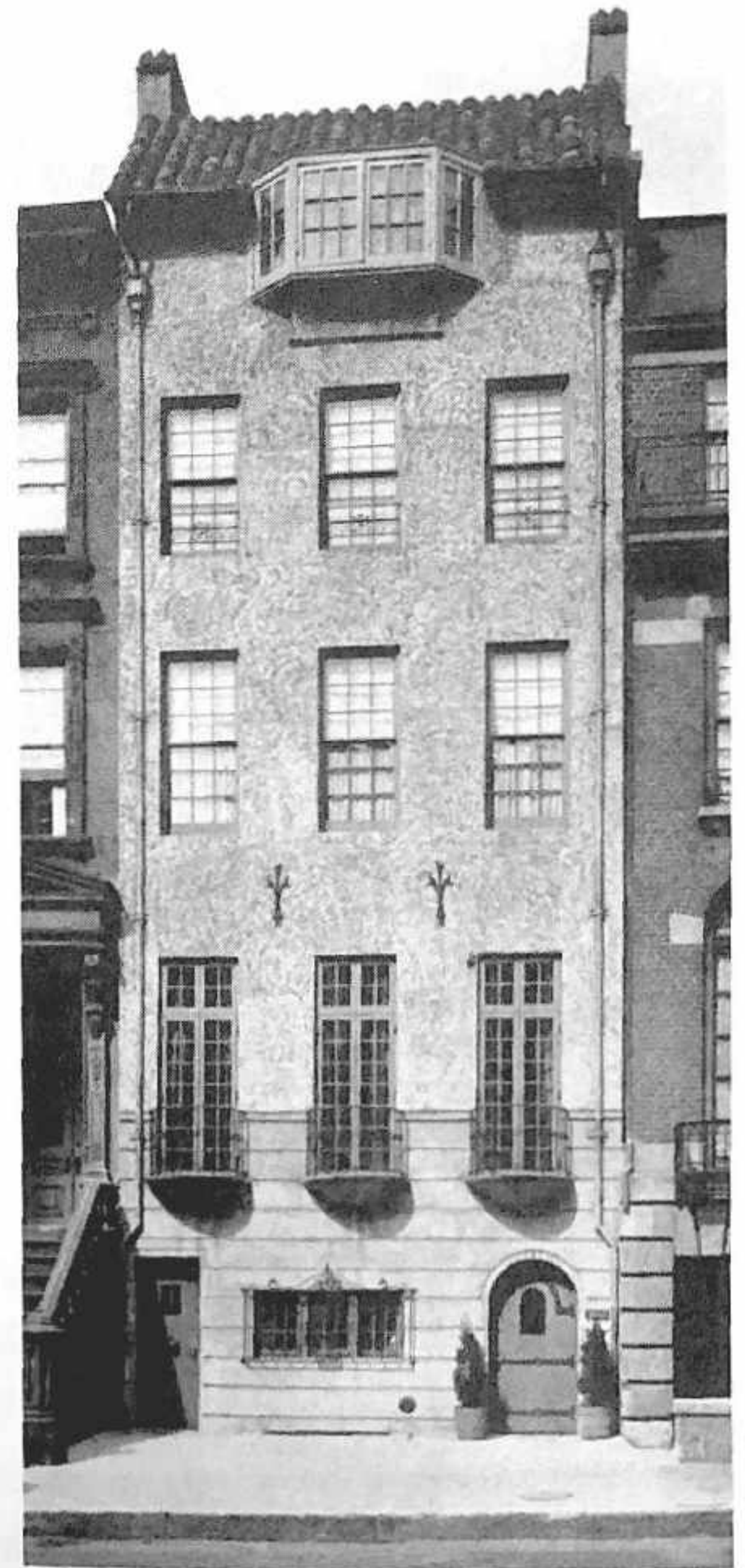




Figure 3.5. The J. Stewart Barney House on the southeast corner of Lexington Avenue and East 65th Street (demolished) was immediately across the street from Frederick Sterner's Parge House. The facade of the Lewis Stuyvesant Chanler House (left), at 132 East 65th Street, is embellished with pargetry. Gottscho; LC

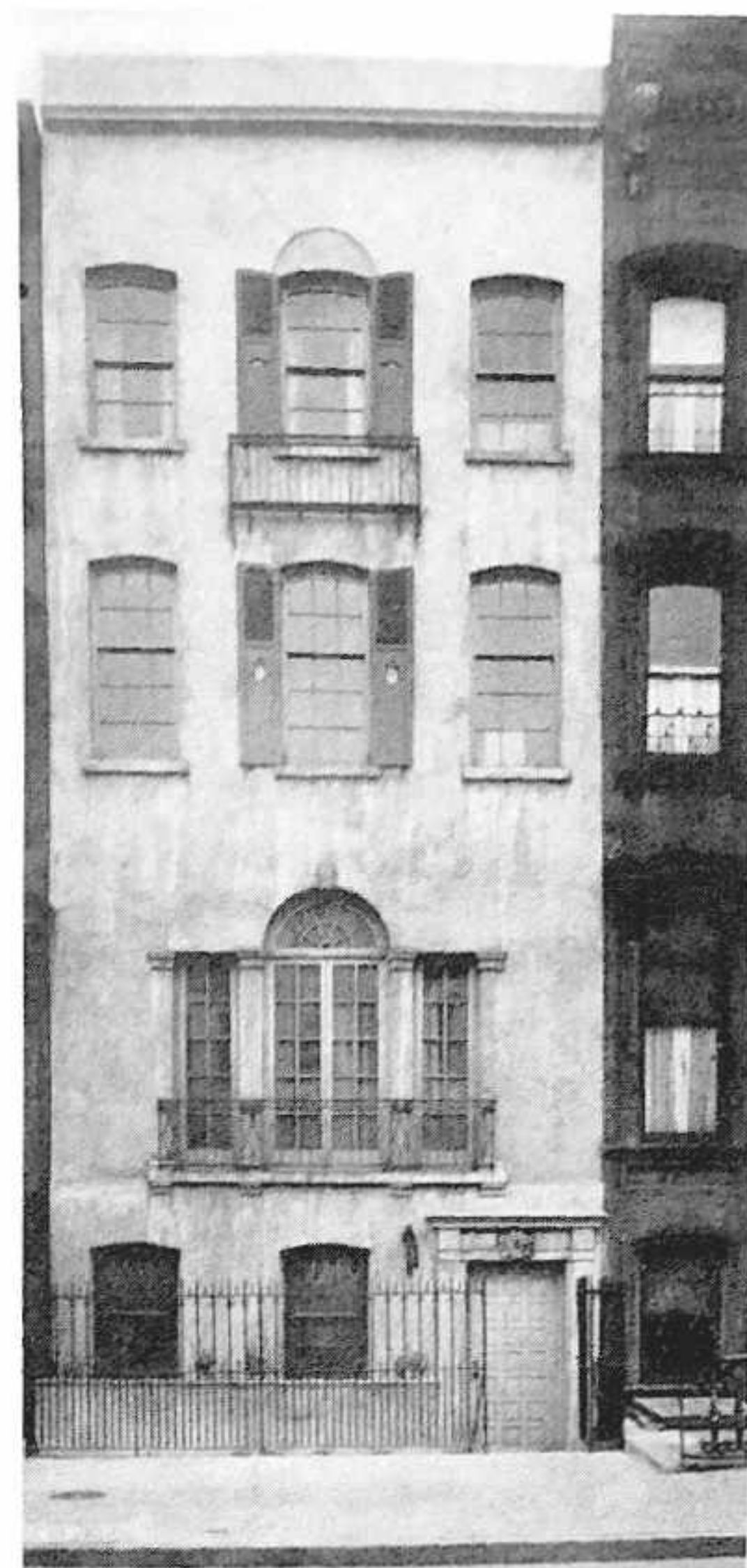


1921, Mixsell, a prominent pediatrician and champion squash player, hired architect Frank J. Foster, whose work here was clearly influenced by the model established by Sterner on the neighboring block to the south. Foster gave a Mediterranean air to the building's facade, with rough-textured, cream-colored stucco, basement entrances with turquoise doors and black hinges, multipane casement and double-hung windows, iron balconies and grilles, and reddish-brown Spanish tile roof. However, he also added several unusual features, including medieval-inspired faux-tie rods, and a quirky roofline oriel window that originally lit Mixsell's office. The Mediterranean character was continued on the inside with the walls of the main rooms covered in rough plaster tinted in tones of blue and brown.<sup>41</sup>

Sterner's influence is more clearly discernable in two adjoining houses on East 65th Street, just across Lexington Avenue from Sterner's Parge House. The corner house at 861–863 Lexington Avenue was the home of retired architect J. Stewart Barney, who in 1922 hired Terence A. Koen, partner in the firm of Hoppin & Koen, to combine and extensively redesign two row houses with a new stuccoed front, leaded-glass casements with leaded- and stained-glass transoms on the first story; multipane wood window sash on the second story; and red brick quoins around many of the window and door openings (figure 3.5; demolished). Hoppin & Koen also designed a rear addition with a prominent double-height studio window.<sup>42</sup>

Sterner's Parge House was clearly the inspiration for the new facade at 132 East 65th Street (figure 3.5) redesigned in 1922 by Schmitt Brothers, the decorating firm that had worked on the interiors of Sterner's Magee House. The client for this project was Lewis Stuyvesant Chanler, a former





lieutenant governor of New York State and the brother of Robert Winthrop Chanler, who had commissioned one of Frederick Sterner's earliest houses on East 19th Street. Schmitt Brothers created a false gable front, added a parlor-floor oriel, and applied stucco that was ornamented with pargetry. The similarity to Sterner's work on Parge House is so striking that this design was either inspired by Sterner's nearby house or the result of Sterner's uncredited advice to Chanler.<sup>43</sup>

The movement to reclaim old row houses also extended both south and north of the East 60s. To the south, a number of row houses were redesigned in Murray Hill in the East 30s and Turtle Bay in the East 40s. Examples include 130 East 37th Street in Murray Hill, where the architectural firm of F. Albert Hunt & Kline planned a complete redesign of a corner house in 1922 as part of a conversion of the house into a series of duplex studios (figure 3.6).<sup>44</sup> Both street facades were stuccoed, a studio window cut into the fourth story, and a sloping studio rooftop addition constructed. The facade was highlighted with brick and terra-cotta window details, iron balconies, and casement sash, as well as small panels attached to the Lexington Avenue elevation, including an owl and an eagle, in a manner resembling the sculptural attachments on some of Sterner's houses. In Turtle Bay, in 1922, Mr. and Mrs. Clayton Sedgwick Cooper had architect Dwight James

ABOVE LEFT:

*Figure 3.6. 130 East 37th Street is the most prominent redesigned row house in Murray Hill. Archives*

ABOVE RIGHT:

*Figure 3.7. The house at 242 East 48th Street was redesigned by well-known architect Dwight James Baum for Mr. and Mrs. Clayton Sedgwick Cooper in 1922. Arts & Decoration 19 (May 1923), 48; Avery*



Baum create a new street facade at 242 East 48th Street, employing Italian and Spanish Renaissance motifs, including a Palladian window on the former parlor floor and a multipaneled door capped by a molded cement escutcheon (figure 3.7).<sup>45</sup> To the north, wealthy New Yorkers redesigned row houses in the East 70s, such as Harry Allen Jacobs' 1922 stucco, red brick, and colored tile redesign at 130 East 72nd Street for tax and estates lawyer Mortimer Hess and his wife Marion Newman Hess.<sup>46</sup>

### Small Gardens in Town

Frederick Sterner's idea of creating rear-yard gardens became a key element of the rehabilitated East Side row houses of the post-World War I period. In the early twentieth century, however, Sterner's gardens were anomalies in New York's landscape—picturesque oases set amidst a sea of bleak utilitarian backyards that were, according to one critic writing in 1916, "in barbarous disarray and often in a frightfully unsanitary condition."<sup>47</sup> In contrast, ten years later a reviewer for *Figure* reported that "any open space on the ground in the rear of a made-over New York brownstone house is now being turned into a garden."<sup>48</sup> A garden critic Lucy Embury Hubbell commented, the term *city garden* had been transformed from an "absurd anomaly" into a familiar "term of every-day speech."<sup>49</sup> The redesign of house facades and the creation of the rear garden were so closely linked that Hubbell noted that a redesigned house with a colorful facade and window boxes announced that one would invariably find a "garden within."<sup>50</sup> The creation of small city gardens became so popular in the second and third decades of the twentieth century that they were introduced not only behind almost all of the row houses with redesigned facades discussed here but also behind houses that had their original facades completely removed and new, more traditional fronts erected.

Some of the new row house gardens were created by the architects who redesigned the houses, such as Sterner and Edward Hewitt, while others were the work of professional landscape architects, such as Ruth Dean, Clarence Fowler, and Marian C. Coffin, while still others were created by homeowners who were themselves amateur gardeners. Popular house design and garden periodicals, including *House and Garden*, *House Beautiful*, *American Home*, and *Garden Magazine*, and other publications such as the *New York Times Magazine* frequently described and illustrated these new city gardens. In 1923, painter, sculptor, and garden historian Minga Pope Duryea wrote *Gardens in and about Town*, the first book to offer design ideas to the owners of urban row house gardens.<sup>51</sup>

Since all of the private row house gardens were small, generally between eighteen and twenty feet wide and twenty-five to forty feet deep, it was