

OCULUS

on current new york architecture

The New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects

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266 East 78th Street exemplifies the new Sliver Building concept.

Photo: Stan Ries/ESTO

OCULUS

Editorial

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Oculus

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**Computer Publication:
 "Automated Applications in the Design
 Office"**

The Computer Applications Committee has available to members a 400-page compendium of recent articles on computer applications for design offices. The reprints cover applications from computer-aided design and drafting to applications of the personal computer. The collection will provide a rapid and comprehensive view of computer technology hardware and software applicable to architectural office use.

The cost of this material is \$20 to cover printing. Members desiring this material should request copies from Cathanne Piesla at the Chapter offices no later than March 1st. Copies will be mailed out by March 15th.

The Fisher Brothers are at it again, showing their honorable intent of preserving the context of New York architecture and the history of building. A couple of years ago they wanted to take down or build through part of the Racquet Club on Park Avenue between 52nd and 53rd Street.

Now they have moved their intentions a block north and propose to demolish Lever House—that first corporate metal-and-glass curtain wall building in midtown. It was finished in 1952 by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill with Gordon Bunshaft as chief designer.

The most insidious rationale offered by the Fisher Brothers for this destruction of a landmark in the history of architecture is the implication that they would restore the continuous Park Avenue street wall that was first interrupted by Lever House. At least this is the reasoning set forth in a White Paper prepared in support of the Fisher Brothers by Swanke Hayden Connell Architects. In this they are mistaken in attempting to correct history.

History needs no correcting—history is. This attempt is mistaken because the Park Avenue street wall, consistent as it was in its 1950s apartment-building phase, had always been interrupted: first at a lower scale by churches such as Saint Bartholomew's, Central Presbyterian, and the Christian Science Church; and second by such towers as the Ritz Tower and Delmonico's, which thrust their campaniles skyward. The mistake in proposing to restore the street wall is double because the building that the Fisher Brothers propose, seemingly without realizing the irony, is to be similarly set back from the street. This seems to us to cancel out their main argument.

The fact is that Lever House is a historic landmark—in the history of architecture, in the history of building design, and in the history of urban design—that should be preserved at all costs as a work of original invention and vanguard achievement.

The problem with changing cycles of taste is that the pendulum swings with an often ruthlessly over-compensating thrust—almost every 30 years. To make clear a new viewpoint in time, the ideas of the previous generation are presented as worthless. It happens generation after generation, so that when the cycle comes round again, many once-revolutionary and optimistic innovations are thrust aside by another new vanguard, by another freshman class, and there is a new freshman class every year.

Now, judged by today's new standards—to say nothing of today's business opportunism—it is the turn of Lever House to be thrust aside rather than being recognized for the fresh view it epitomized in its own day. Lever House was a fresh new vision of sunshine on Park Avenue in 1952, and the Fisher Brothers are old enough to remember its effect. It let light into the cityscape. It brought the new industrial image to corporate architecture. In this it was the first venturesome pioneer. It was new, romantic in its asymmetrical balance, and pioneering in its break from strict Bauhaus principles of curtain wall expression.

If a thing is once good, it is forever good—in its own terms at least, in the terms of its first day. Many make the mistake of evaluating yesterday to today's standards. "How tinny the harpsichord sounds," they say, judging it by ears accustomed only to the pianoforte. The White Paper judges Lever's plaza by today's all too slowly evolved regulations.

Lever House is a first for New York City—for corporate architecture, for the urban design vision of the 1950s, for SOM, for Gordon Bunshaft, for corporate clients, for Charles Luckman, for the curtain wall industry. For history, therefore, Lever House is a landmark of indisputable "special historical or aesthetic interest."

If it were not of such interest, how
cont'd. p. 6, col. 3

Chapter Statement to the Landmarks Preservation Commission

by Charles K. Hoyt

The Historic Buildings Committee of the New York Chapter wishes to support the proposed designation of the Lever Building, 390 Park Avenue, Manhattan.

The Lever building is certainly a City landmark in the popular sense. Almost every New Yorker knows it by name, and it occupies a prominent position where it is often seen.

Far more important, the Lever building is a definitive landmark of modern architecture on an international level. A stellar design performance coupled with a prominent location and client assured that its novel glass curtainwalls and slab form would become a model for commercial construction world wide. Its influence during a period that shaped the current skylines of cities is incalculable.

Almost every important analysis of architecture since Lever's construction recognizes its significance. In 1956, it was picked by a panel of the foremost architectural critics as one of seven of the most significant American commercial buildings of the previous hundred years. The building has received almost every possible major design award, including the American Institute of Architects' highest national award at the time that it was built.

Moreover, the Lever building anticipated amenities of skyscraper design that we see coming to fruition only today. The form recognizes its context, by the placement of the low base toward the adjacent and distinguished Racquet Club. And the street level welcomes the pedestrian, instead of presenting a formidable barrier to the sidewalk.

Our recollection of this building's once-startling effect may be clouded by a proliferation of bad copies. But there can be little doubt that this building can be argued as one of New York's most significant architectural works.

Chairman, Historic Buildings Committee

White Paper on Lever House

by Swanke Hayden Connell

The following is excerpted from "White Paper: The Redevelopment of 390 Park Avenue for Fisher Brothers" prepared by Swanke Hayden Connell Architects and dated October 25, 1982. Omitted from the 30-page document are sections on the history of Park Avenue, history of Swanke Hayden Connell, and witness derived from the writings of architecture historians.

"In the view of Swanke Hayden Connell, Lever House does not merit designation as an individual landmark under the terms of New York City's Landmark Preservation Law (Chapter 8-A, Section 205-1.0 *et. seq.* of the Administrative Code).

"New York City's spatial plan, economy, and architecture are constantly evolving. Under the Landmarks Preservation Law, structures may be designated only if they satisfy stringent standards of 'special historical or aesthetic interest or value.' To do otherwise threatens to turn vital stretches of the city into a 'museum village' like Williamsburg, contrary to the law's stated purpose to 'strengthen the economy of the city.'

"Lever House occupies a pivotal location. It is part of the extraordinary dynamic stretch of Park Avenue running from the Grand Central Terminal to East 59th Street . . . As an individual structure, Lever House lacks sufficient 'interest or value' to risk disrupting the further evolution of upper Park Avenue. Although its original green opaque spandrel and clear vision glass is pleasantly proportioned, it lacks the clarity of structure to make it a truly distinguished example of the International Style. The Seagram Building and the United Nations Secretariat are, in contrast, truly landmark quality examples of that style. Other contemporaneous glass curtain wall buildings abound in the city and are in no danger of disappearing.

"Lever House's plaza is an unsuccessful public space, cold, gloomy, and little used. As for its

break in the street-wall and slab structure, it is indeed ironic to propose memorializing this flawed urban design at the same time that the recently enacted Midtown Zoning Regulations encourage a return to the street-wall and urban plazas with strict and detailed design criteria to remedy the defects of Lever House-type plaza spaces.

"Perhaps most tellingly, Lever House has failed to stand the relatively modest test of 30 years time . . . Its glass and stainless steel curtain wall, perhaps its most striking element, is now a patchwork quilt of three generations of replacement glass which is neither warm nor inviting. Its shimmering quality has long since disappeared due to broken panels from a severe maintenance problem which has necessitated replacement of 55% of its spandrel panels and 15% of its vision panels.

"In sum, criteria of architectural design, urban ecology, and economy development argue against elevating Lever House to Landmark status . . .

"As we explain in the balance of this paper, judged in terms a) architecture, b) urban design, c) streetscape and landscape, and d) materials and methods of construction, Lever House does not warrant landmark designation. In addition, its designation might have a significant negative impact on the future development of upper Park Avenue, one of the most dynamic and critical urban spaces in the city.

Lever House in the context of the Landmarks Preservation Law

"The Landmarks Preservation Law provides for the protection and preservation of buildings and places more than 30 years old which have 'special historical or aesthetic interest or value' (Section 207-1.0[n]). We are not the first to observe that the language is not very precise and does not aid in identifying which structures are likely to be designated as landmarks . . .

"Particularly in locations such as

Lever House Received AIA Twenty-Five Year Award in 1980

White Paper

In its nomination of Lever House to receive the AIA Twenty-Five Year Award, the New York Chapter/AIA stated:

After 25 years, the Lever House remains the best example of urban sophistication, positive corporate image, and human scale perfectly fit in its context. The structure influenced a building prototype internationally, but stands on its own as an object of art, technology, and planning.

Its innovative site planning contributed to the evolution of a new urban context. Its building concept became a formal statement of public awareness. This creative contributory vehicle of architecture served as a symbol of corporate interests, yet its effective impact went beyond advertising to become a special place in New York.

Its window wall detailing defined methods of fabrication for a whole industry to follow.

Lever House has been the recipient of other awards since it opened in 1952 including an AIA First Honor Award in 1952. In 1956 *Architectural Record* selected Lever House as the third most significant building erected in the past 100 years. In 1961 the Architectural League cited Lever House as one of the 10 outstanding examples of architecture built in New York State during the previous 15 years, calling it "the modern office building which became a landmark for creating its own open plaza in the city landscape."

Lever House Designated a Landmark

In an executive session on November 9, 1982, the Landmarks Preservation Commission voted to designate Lever House, at 390 Park Avenue in Manhattan, a New York City Landmark.

upper Park Avenue, which are integral to the City's economic health, landmark deliberations which do not take into account the potential effect of designation of a site upon the 'standing of the city' or the 'economy of the city' in our view contravene the purpose of the Landmarks Preservation Law. In this stretch of Park Avenue, which has already undergone two major transformations of use since Grand Central Terminal opened in 1913, it is essential not to freeze or impede further salutary evolution of uses and physical and economic development.

"If the apartments and hotels of the 'City Beautiful' era had not been permitted to be replaced, then Park Avenue could not have become the corporate headquarters sector it is today. It is not possible to predict what direction future use of this area will take, but what should be apparent is the potential harm to the fabric of the city which could result from interfering with further changes there. It might, for example, on certain critical locations such as this, block the construction of the vanguard 'Lever House' of the next generation of development.

"Lever House, then, under the standards of the Landmarks Preservation Law, cannot be considered as a disembodied form existing in a void. Some of its alleged design significance involved its relation to other structures, in breaking the continuous street-wall on Park Avenue. By the same token, the effect of its landmarking must also take account of what this might do to other structures, in potentially disrupting the integrated axis of development from Grand Central Terminal along upper Park Avenue. This concern with the relation of a landmark to its urban space is surely a proper concern under the Landmarks Preservation Law.

"We conclude that, as is discussed below, Lever House lacks sufficient 'interest or value' as a structure to offset the negative effect of creating a landmark in its site. We are not

arguing that a landmark can never be created on this stretch of Park Avenue, only that Lever House does not warrant that status.

Lever House as Architecture

"... Though it caused much comment when it opened in 1952, viewed critically it is not a great or even a very successful example of the 'International Style.'

"In terms of quality and architectural innovation, New York City's true giants of the International Style are the United Nations Secretariat and the Seagram Building. Each represents great refinements in the articulation of the International Style. Beside them, Lever House is a mere footnote in architectural history...

"One is hard put to find a clearer American interpretation of the principles of the International Style from the Philadelphia Savings Fund Society Building, 1931, until 1958 and the arrival of the Seagram Building, a building of grace, warmth and simple elegance.

"... The first modern New York skyscraper of glass curtain wall came in 1950 in the form of the 39-story U.N. Secretariat Building, a pure, almost abstract 'slab' building, unbroken by wedding cake setbacks, void of decoration, having been clad in sleek green glass set in thin aluminum frames on its long (east and west) facades. It represents a fundamental innovation in the design of the skyscraper in New York which was destined to transform the city's skyline.

"What followed was Lever House, the first major skyscraper by Skidmore Owings and Merrill under the design direction of Gordon Bunshaft. Lever House was different in that it took the abstract slab a small step further; setting the glass box vertical slab on a horizontal slab base raised above the street on columns, thus appearing to float. Interestingly enough, even though the original green opaque spandrel and clear vision glass is pleasantly proportioned, there is little

Lever House by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, 1952. (Photo: Stan Ries/ESTO)



of the pure International Style vocabulary of architectural design that would make Lever House distinguished. The sleek, shimmering transparency when Lever was new would not in and of itself put Lever in the landmark category.

"The facade, now a patchwork quilt of three generations of replacement glass is neither warm nor inviting, and the shimmering quality has long since disappeared in broken panels from a severe maintenance problem, which we will discuss later.

"Nor is there any clarity of structure or so-called 'structural honesty' found in the International Style vocabulary. The opaque spandrel covers the floor slab with glass, so the building takes on the appearance of a single plastic-like curtain of icy blue-green glass.

"If we are now to look at premier examples of International Style architectural solutions that fit the landmark definition of 'special character or aesthetic interest' look beyond Lever to the Inland Steel Building by SOM in 1957, the Pepsi-Cola Building also by SOM in 1958-59, and of course, the Seagram Building by Mies van der Rohe in 1958, the high point of architectural design statements in the International Style . . .

Lever House as Urban Design

"Ironically, although Lever House is

frequently cited as exemplary and innovative urban design, it is in fact fundamentally flawed and hardly precedent-breaking . . .

"Given the scale of Rockefeller Center and the U.N. and their proximity to the Park Avenue site, one realizes that in its urban context, Lever House was of only minor importance in the way it broke the Park Avenue tradition of the street-wall. In fact, even this effect is overstated since the west side of Park Avenue remains unbroken to this day from 72nd Street to 54th Street and on the south to 48th Street, save for Lever . . .

"In a sense, Lever House illustrates a negative chapter in New York's urban design history. The new Midtown Zoning Regulations repudiate the visual and functional disruption caused by set-back slab buildings and barren and foreboding plazas. The new Regulations encourage a return to the street-wall of before, and introduce urban plazas with strict and detailed design criteria as the major development incentive, in an effort to achieve inviting urban spaces.

" . . . Rather than be preserved, it ought now to give way to a space arranged according to a higher standard of urban design, which is not an abstract and self-indulgent statement, but is truly designed for people.

Lever House as streetscape and landscape

"The plaza and arcade area at Lever House is cold and uninviting. It is located underneath the building's horizontal slab . . .

"There is not a single bench, chair, or table in the entire plaza. The walls surrounding the small planting bed were not designed as seating areas. There is a striking difference between the gloomy feeling of the Lever House plaza and active, magnetic, inviting urban parks such as Paley — one block away on East 53rd Street — or Greenacre, another midtown vest pocket park. Each was designed for people, each is used by people . . .

"Similarly, on Park Avenue on a sunny day, any sunny day in June, September, January, or March, people by the hundreds will be found on the walls, steps, and plazas of the Seagram Building or next door to the south at 345 Park Avenue, while but a handful gather at the windy, dark, and dingy Lever House flower box. This is the real failure in the urban environment of the plaza at Lever House.

"The Lever House plaza fails to satisfy almost all the standards for urban plazas in the new Midtown Zoning Regulations, with respect to frontage, dimension, shape, seating, lighting, and plantings. The scale of its very small landscape planting bed is disproportionate to its surroundings, in that it occupies by $\frac{1}{12}$ of the entire plaza level, while the hole in the doughnut of the 2nd floor floating slab above that allows sunlight to pass through to the plaza is barely 25% of that mass. Very little sunlight filters down. The real landscaping (what there is of it) is on the second floor available not to the public but only to Lever Brothers employees.

"As it falls drastically short of today's standards for urban space, it would be unfortunate to landmark and preserve this unfriendly, uninviting void in the human experience of midtown Manhattan.

White Paper

Lever House's materials and methods of construction

"The simple fact is that Lever House is falling apart. Many of the significant features of the design of Lever House have failed to withstand this relatively modest test of 30 years time. It is only half the building originally built in 1952 and without major remedial work it is legitimate to ask whether there will be a Lever House in another 30 years.

"The extent of Lever House's deterioration has been documented fully in the *Retrofit Study of Lever House* (August 12, 1982) prepared by Welton Becket Associates, Architects, and Meyer Strong & Jones Engineers, and previously submitted to the LPC. SHCA concurs with its technical findings.

"According to the *Retrofit Report*, the technology of the glass, stainless steel, aluminum curtain wall skin, and the polymer sealants was untested prior to its use in Lever House. 'After some 30-plus years of occupancy . . . time and environment have substantially deteriorated the curtain wall and caused maintenance and replacement costs of \$955,000 over the course of the last 7 years alone. During those 7 years, a total of 2,328 panes of spandrel glass and 255 panes of vision glass have been replaced.' *Id.* at p.3. This means that 55% of the spandrel panels and 15% of the vision panels have been replaced in Lever's first 30 years of existence.

"The spandrel panels which are being installed today are drastically different in color from the original tinted wire glass and the original colored opaque glass. There are now 3 distinct colors of spandrel glass giving a spotty, patchwork quilt appearance to the once shimmering glass and steel curtain wall.

"Because the original fixed framing system made no allowance for the release or weeping of water that penetrated the enclosing system, the ferrous metal sub-frame behind the panels is also gradually rusting away and it must be replaced as the

spandrel and vision panels are replaced . . . In addition, continuing breakage of glass throughout the building is expected, due to the continual movement of the metal skin in response to solar heat gain or heat loss; the process of embrittlement of the polysulfide sealant as it becomes older; and the inherent weakness of the nicked edges of the wire spandrel glass. *Id.* pp. 3-4.

"The *Retrofit Report* concludes that despite the conscientious effort of the owner to remedy the problem, the curtain wall and its glazing will have continuing problems which will undoubtedly escalate in the future. *Id.*, p. 5. The cost of retrofitting Lever House is estimated to be \$12,000,000. SHCA believes this is a very conservative figure.

"It should be emphasized that the UN Secretariat is not falling apart and it was completed during the same technical period. The Seagram Building is only 5 years younger, yet it is executed in a manner that will withstand the test of time. If the subframe and encasement steel of Lever House require replacement with a contemporary curtain wall system, in the process destroying the aesthetic appearance of its most striking element, we ask just exactly what is being landmarked? . . .

Conclusion

"Lever House does not belong in the company of such undeniable landmarks as the Flatiron Building, the University Club, Grand Central Terminal, the New York Public Library, the Chrysler Building, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the Empire State Building.

"Nor does it rank in significance with New York City's true landmarks of the International Style, the United Nations Secretariat which was the first modern glass curtain wall skyscraper here, or the Seagram Building which transformed the modernist glass box into a vertically standing sculptural body.

"Substantially compromised from its

original appearance by the deterioration and replacement of its glass panels, and with a gloomy and unsuccessful plaza and arcade space, it lacks sufficient 'interest or value' as a structure to offset the negative effect of creating a landmark on its site.

"Major commercial buildings in midtown should not be considered for landmark status unless they are true architectural monuments. To apply a more casual standard threatens to turn our most vital commercial area into a mausoleum.

"Lever House is part of the integrated axis of development which runs from Grand Central Terminal along Park Avenue to 59th Street. This critical stretch has already served this century as midtown's most important residential and then office enclave. To sever this axis with an undeserving landmark on a catalytic site is both a major planning blunder and contrary to the Landmarks Preservation Law."

Editorial

cont'd. from p. 2

could the White Paper — nay black, black paper — call upon so many critics of architecture as witnesses? Has anything of so little interest ever before captured the, dare we say, "interest" of so many architectural historians?

Finally, wouldn't you think that after all the flack the Fisher Brothers got from trying to destroy the Racquet Club that they would have learned to investigate the potential of preserving Lever House and building behind it with benefits of its unused development rights? Why is that possibility not addressed in their arguments? As George Santayana taught us, "Those who do not remember history are destined to relive it." The Fisher Brothers must want to relive it again.

If Lever House has ever captured your interest, *Oculus* encourages your comments now.

CRS

Chapter Reports

by George Lewis

Headquarters Remodeling

The staff expects to move back on March 1, when committees will again be meeting there, but the headquarters will not be complete until the new furnishings are in place, we hope by May.

By "we hope" is meant that, whereas the \$160,000 pledged or in hand to date will cover the construction contract, we are not assured at this writing of the necessary funds to bring off the complete design, which is what everyone who has already contributed is expecting to see. The total budget is \$254,000, including fees. We think we can secure further pledges — almost all the larger firms have expressed interest — but small contributions from individual members and small firms are what can put us over.

While the Chapter's fund raising has been low-key — no teams of volunteers on the telephone — and the response has been broad and heartening, there must be many who have intended to contribute but have put it off. This is an appeal to everyone to take part in creating a worthy headquarters for our profession.

Documents and Publications

The remodeling disruption has not only had the staff and committees spread all over town, but our publication sales have slipped. Publication sales continue at the same counter at the Urban Center, 457 Madison, 1-4:00 p.m., telephone 759-5485. That sales desk is an important source of non-dues income, and it is hoped that Chapter firms and individuals will go there.

Chapter Review of Planning Commission Zoning Proposals

The article on Sliver Buildings elsewhere in this issue describes how a special Chapter committee, Stuart Pertz, Chairman, very significantly influenced proposed CPC legislation. This is another example of how the CPC and the Chapter have developed a relationship whereby special Chapter committees of experienced

professionals have worked closely and constructively with CPC staff. The recently enacted Special Midtown District and the zoning amendments passed in conjunction with establishing the Upper East Side Historic District were both subject to intensive Chapter review as to how effective they would be in actual practice: major adjustments were effected in both cases. Our members who have to live with the Zoning Resolution welcome the opportunity to participate in how it is amended, but whether the pendulum of responsibility has swung too much toward the Chapter is perhaps a question.

Custom House

Our national headquarters advises that Senator Moynihan has expressed himself on the floor of the Senate as "shocked and appalled to learn yesterday that there is a proposal afoot on the executive branch to declare as surplus the U.S. Custom House on Bowling Green in New York City — and to sell it to private interests." He stressed that "the Congress authorized a \$29 million renovation of the building" and that "the General Services Administration has not been able in all this time to get the renovation under way." The Senator wrote to the Administrator of GSA saying, among other things, "Now, the executive director of the Property Review Board absurdly suggests that one reason the building is considered susceptible to sale is that it has remained vacant for so long."

The AIA has taken a strong overall position in regard to Federally occupied space that the government should own it, not lease it, and the AIA — with Chapter support — is opposing this proposed disposition of the Custom House. As Senator Moynihan points out, it would be cheaper to house 800 Federal employees there than in leased space.

Names and News

Nathaniel Alexander Owings, co-founder of Skidmore Owings & Merrill, will receive the American Institute of Architects' Gold Medal at the 1983 National Convention in recognition of "most distinguished service to the architectural profession and to the Institute" Gerald Allen has announced that William Hubbard is now associated with his firm, Gerald Allen & Associates The New York City Historic Properties Fund has begun a pilot program of revolving loans and loan guaranties for the restoration, rehabilitation, and preservation of historic properties in New York City. Preliminary applications (available from NYC Historic Properties Fund, Inc., 330 W. 42 Street, 736-7575) are due by February 15th Michael Rubin has opened a new architectural office at 200 Park Avenue South The Eggers Group has been retained by PepsiCo, Inc. to design a 500,000 square foot office building in Somers, New York George Lewis was presented the Kideney Award for 1982 at the annual convention of the New York State Association of Architects in October for "his leadership roles not just in the profession of architecture but also in professional society and the community." Rizzoli commissioned architects Thomas Beeby, Michael Graves, Stanley Tigerman, Robert A.M. Stern, and Richard Haas to design decorative folding screens, which were shown at the Rizzoli Gallery last month Architectural Education, a new international journal of practice, theory, and history, is published by RIBA Magazines Ltd. 66 Portland Place, London W1N, 4AD, England Theoharis David, chairman of Graduate Architecture at Pratt, has received a New York State Council for the Arts Grant to curate a major exhibition dealing with contemporary Third World Architecture, which is expected to open in New York in the Fall of 1983 Interiors done by several NYC/AIA architects are represented in *The New York Times Home Book of Modern Design, Styles, Problems, and Solutions* by Suzanne Slesin The National Trust for

cont'd. p. 10, col. 1

OCULUS NYC/AIA FEB 83

CONTINUING EVENTS

Oculus welcomes information for the calendar pertaining to public events about architecture and the other design professions. It is due by the 7th of the month for the following month's issue. Because of the time lag between information received and printed, final details of events are likely to change. It is recommended, therefore, that events be checked with the sponsoring institutions before attending.

Send Oculus Calendar information to:
New York Chapter/AIA, 457 Madison Avenue, N.Y. 10022.

LANDMARKS THAT AREN'T
Exhibition of Unprotected Treasures from the Big Boroughs. The Municipal Art Society, 457 Madison Ave. 935-3960. Closes Feb. 19.

TRANSFORMING CITY SPACE
Exhibition of an F.I.T. project for W. 27th Street, designs by Piero Sartogo and Jon Michael Schwartz. The Municipal Art Society, 457 Madison Ave. 935-3960. Closes Feb. 19.

DAVID MACAULAY REVISITED
Exhibition of drawings from *Cathedral, Pyramid, City and Castle*. SPACED Gallery of Architecture, 165 W. 72 St. 787-6350. Closes Feb. 25.

SLIVER BUILDINGS: THE PLANS TO STOP THEM
Exhibition sponsored by the Municipal Art Society. Upstairs at the Urban Center, 457 Madison Ave. 935-3960. Closes Feb. 26.

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT
Exhibition of architectural drawings, furniture, ceramics by Wright in conjunction with the installation of the architect's living room from the Francis Little House, The American Wing, Metropolitan Museum. 879-5500. Closes Feb. 27.

AMERICAN PICTURE PALACES
Exhibition of "Golden Age" of movie houses. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, 2 E. 91 St. 860-6868. Closes Feb. 27.

LOUIS COMFORT TIFFANY: THE QUEST OF BEAUTY
Exhibition presenting a survey of Tiffany designs for domestic use. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, 2 E. 91 St. 860-6868. Closes April 17.

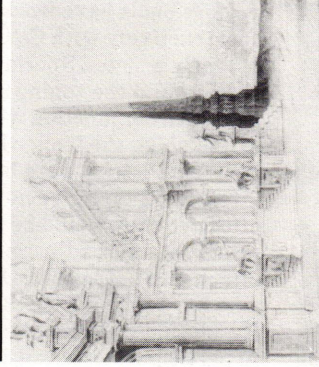
WEDNESDAY 2

THREE NEW SKYSCRAPERS
Exhibition of models, drawings, and construction photographs of: Hongkong and Shanghai Banking Corporation by Foster Associates in Hong Kong; National Commercial Bank by SOM; Gordon Bunshaft, in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia; International Place at Fort Hill, Boston, by Johnson/Burgee. Museum of Modern Art, 18 W. 54 St. 708-9400. Closes March 29.

THE OTHER NEW YORK
"From Planned Suburb to Melting Pot: Queens," last of three slide lectures by the Municipal Art Society's Barry Lewis. 6-7:30 pm. The Urban Center, 457 Madison Ave. 935-3960. Members \$5, nonmembers \$10.

MICHAEL KIRKLAND
Lecture. 6 pm. Wood Auditorium, Graduate School of Architecture and Planning, Columbia University. 280-3414.

THURSDAY 3



FRIDAY 4

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT ART IN DESIGNS, OPENS SATURDAY, FEB. 5
Exhibition of the architect's designs inaugurates the new gallery Hirsch & Adler Modern, 851 Madison at 71 St. 744-6700. Closes Feb. 26.

WALKING TOUR ON FEB. 5
"Art Deco and Eclecticism: Movie Palaces of the Twenties and Thirties," including tour of Radio City Music Hall. Meet at Cooper-Hewitt, 2 E. 91 St. 860-6868. Members \$25, nonmembers \$30.

TUESDAY 8

CARNEGIE MANSION 'EMBELLISHMENTS'
Exhibition. Fascinating modifications of a line drawing of the south facade of the Carnegie Mansion by painters, graphic artists, designers, and public personalities. Cooper-Hewitt Museum, 2 E. 91 St. 860-6868. Closes May 1.

WEDNESDAY 9

RAFAEL VINOLY
Lecture. 6 pm. Wood Auditorium, Graduate School of Architecture and Planning, Columbia University. 280-3414.

NEW YORK FUTURES: VISIONS FOR THE CITY
Lecture by Lex Lalli on "Urban Design Goes Underground: Public Private Partnerships in New York's Subways," in the Municipal Art Society's Club Mid series. 12:30-1:30 pm. The Urban Center, 457 Madison. 935-3960.

THURSDAY 10

NYC/AIA COMPUTER SEMINAR
Lecture by Graham Copeland, HLW, on "Operating a CADD System—Design and Drafting Applications." 5:30 pm. The Urban Center, 457 Madison Ave. 838-9670.

JOHN HEJDUK
Exhibition, "Solopacan Variations." Max Protetch Gallery, 37 W. 57 St. 838-7436. Closes March 5.

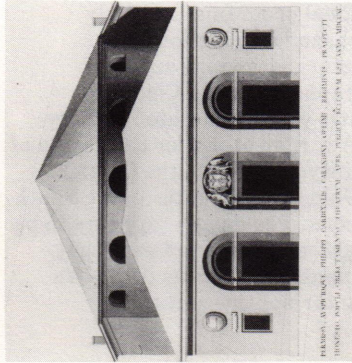
FRIDAY 11

THE ART OF WOODTURNING
Exhibition of historic and contemporary work in wood. American Craft Museum II, International Paper Plaza, 77 W. 45 St. 397-0632.

MONDAY 7

ITALIAN MARBLE SEMINAR
A special program about Italian marble hosted by the Italian Trade Commission for architects and designers. 5:30-7 pm, the Trade Center, 499 Park Ave. 980-1500.

MONDAY 14



PRINCETON UNIVERSITY LIBRARY. COURTESY: GREENBERG, RAUSCH, PRINCE/PTI
PHOTO: DAVID SHATTUCK/PTI. DRAWING: VITO TALENTI. COURTESY: LEO AIDUN

TUESDAY 15

WEDNESDAY 16

JOSEPH RYKWER
Lecture 6 pm. Wood Auditorium,
Graduate School of Architecture and
Planning, Columbia University.
280-3414.

**NEW YORK FUTURES:
VISIONS FOR THE CITY**
Lecture by Suzi Forbes and Bill
Harris on "The New York Convention
Center - The New Crystal Palace" in
the Municipal Art Society's Club Mid
series. 12:30-1:30 pm. The Urban
Center, 457 Madison. 935-3960.

THURSDAY 17

ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN
Lecture by Jeff Osborne on New
Furniture from Knoll, third in seven-
Thursday series sponsored by NYC/
AIA and Metropolis Magazine. 6 pm.
Urban Center, 457 Madison Ave.
838-9670. AIA members free.
Nonmembers \$5 per lecture. \$10 for
series.

DESIGNERS LIGHTING FORUM
Lecture on "Environmental
Psychology as a Design Resource" by
Dr. Richard Olsen, Director
Environmental Research, Bellevue
Hospital Center. 6 pm. New York
School of Interior Design, 155 E. 56
St. 914-941-0878.

THURSDAY 17

LOUIS SULLIVAN AWARD
Deadline for mailing submissions:
American Institute of Architects,
1735 New York Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20006.

FRIDAY 18

MONDAY 21

TUESDAY 22

WEDNESDAY 23

NYS-AIR PROGRAM
Deadline for architects to submit
registration forms, resumes, and
attached materials to participate in
the 1983-84 New York State Artists
in-Residence (NYS-AIR) program
administered by the New York
Foundation for the Arts. Information:
Linda Davidson. 233-3900.

ANTHONY VIDLER
Lecture. 6 pm. Wood Auditorium,
Graduate School of Architecture and
Planning, Columbia University.
280-3414.

THURSDAY 24

ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN
Panel discussion on Getting Published
with Suzanne Slesin, Martin Filler,
Mildred Schmertz, moderated by
Sharon Lee Ryder in seven-Thursday
series sponsored by NYC/AIA and
Metropolis Magazine. 6 pm. Urban
Center, 457 Madison Ave. 838-9670.
AIA members free. Nonmembers \$5
per lecture. \$10 for series.

FRIDAY 25

THE VATICAN COLLECTION OPENS
SATURDAY, FEB. 26
Exhibition. Metropolitan Museum.
Tickets through TELE-TRON
947-5850.

MONDAY 28

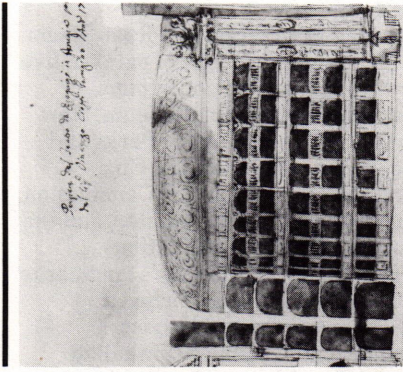
NYC/AIA INTERIORS COMMITTEE
General meeting followed by a
presentation by Beverly Russell,
editor of *Interiors*, of the magazine's
1982 Interior Design Awards
competition. 6 pm. The Urban Center,
457 Madison Ave. 719-3828.

TUESDAY 1 MARCH

**19TH-CENTURY AMERICAN
FURNITURE**
First session of a 5-Wednesday
course. 6:15 pm. Cooper-Hewitt
Museum, 2 E. 91 St. 860-6868.
Members \$40, nonmembers \$50.

ELLIOT SCLAR
Lecture. 6 pm. Wood Auditorium,
Graduate School of Architecture and
Planning, Columbia University.
280-3414.

WEDNESDAY 2 MARCH



Robert Rauschenberg, *Detail of a drawing*, 1965.
N.Y.C. City University of New York, 1965

Names and News

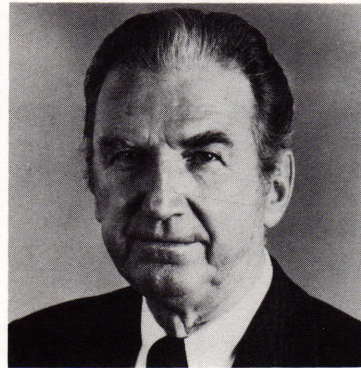
1. Frank Waehler (Photo: Keith Mascheroin)

2. Progress on SOM's 780 Third Avenue (Photo: Stan Ries/ESTO)

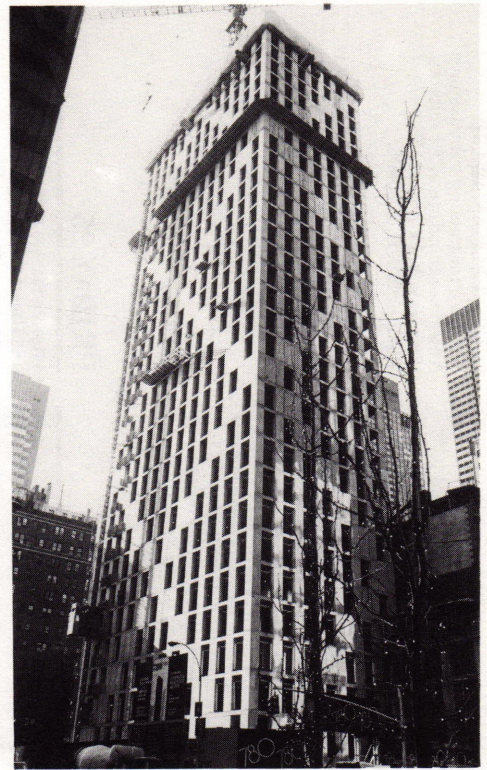
3. Owen F. Dolan Golden Age Center by John Ciardullo Associates.

cont'd. from p. 7

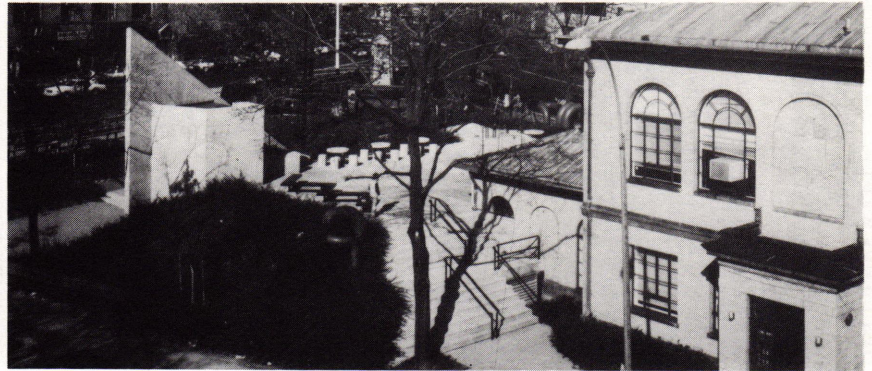
Historic Preservation and Rust-Oleum Corp. has given 80 tons of paint to five New York preservation groups—South Street Seaport Museum, New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, Snug Harbor Cultural Center, and the Intrepid Museum Foundation—to brighten some of the City's landmarks . . . FACT/USA has launched a television spot/public service announcement competition called "Archi-Spot" for architectural and planning themes. Submission deadline is March 1, 1983. Winning spots and films will be aired in New York City in May in association with the 4th International Festival of Films on Architecture and Planning . . . We regret the death of Alan J. Freedman, leading figure in New York City cultural affairs and president of the Municipal Art Society, who died of a heart attack on December 15th, a little more than a year after the death of his wife Doris Chanin Freedman (*Oculus*, January, 1982) . . . The opening of Frank Lloyd Wright's Little House living room at the Met in December has set off a run of FLW exhibitions including "Frank Lloyd Wright Art in Design," which launches the new Hirsch & Adler Modern gallery on February 5th (see calendar); and "Frank Lloyd Wright: Early Years, Early Associates," which opens at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum on May 17th . . . Partners for Livable Places presented its first National Award for Civic Leadership to Nancy Hanks. Word came of her death as *Oculus* was going to press. She had served as chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts 1969-77, and as a member of the President's Committee on Arts and Humanities . . . Stuart Pertz has been appointed chairman of the Urban Design Department at Pratt Institute . . . Giovanni Pasanella and J. Arvid Klein have announced that F. Thomas Schmitt has joined them in partnership . . . NYC/AIA Chapter Director Joseph Bresnan has been promoted to Deputy Assistant Commissioner of Planning and Preservation at the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation;



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he will make a presentation on the preservation of City monuments at the Urban Center on March 9 . . . Frank J. Waehler has retired as senior managing partner of Haines Lunberg Waehler at the end of 1982 but will continue his connection with the firm as director of the newly-created HLW Development Corporation to analyze and develop New Jersey real estate . . . G.E. Kidder-Smith has written a 9-page article, "Manhattan: Some Architectural Pleasures" for the 1983 edition of *Fodor's New York City Guide* . . . Emilio Ambasz, William Conklin, Hugh Jacobsen, Helmut Jahn, Vincent Scully, and Stanley Tigerman are to be guest lecturers for the 6-session course "Architecture Now" conducted by Barbaralee Diamonstein at the New School for Social Research (Feb. 2-May 11) . . . The Landmarks Preservation Commission has voted to designate as New York City Landmarks: in Manhattan, the High School of Performing Arts (120 W. 46th Street), Hamilton Fish Park Play Center (130 Pitt Street), the house at 17 E. 128th Street and, in the Bronx,

the Morris High School Historic District and the interior of the Morris High School Auditorium (East 166th Street and Boston Road . . . An unframed color poster of Richard Morris Hunt's watercolor drawing of his design for the New York Stock Exchange, circa 1873, is available for \$20 from The American Institute of Architects Foundation (1799 New York Ave. N.W., Washington 20006); half the proceeds from the sale goes to the AIA Foundation's \$2.5 million endowment campaign, which has undertaken to support exhibits, educational programs, scholarly research, and a collection of architectural drawings and photographs . . . John Ciardullo Associates won a Concrete Industry Board Award of Merit for the design of a two-story addition to the Owen F. Dolan Golden Age Center in the South East Bronx. The design "appears to be an attractive landscaped park that compliments the architecture of an existing turn-of-the-century structure".

Sliver Buildings

The building at 328 East 86th Street by Architects Design Group for Anthony Pastigliano exemplifies the new Sliver concept. (Photo: Eleanor Burns)

by Stuart Pertz

Tall thin residential towers or "sliver buildings" have begun to rise well above their neighbors on the avenues and midblocks of neighborhoods in the Upper East Side of Manhattan.

The buildings are seen as a threat to the scale and character of the communities in which they are built. In response to pressure brought from residents of Community Board 8, changes in the zoning texts and maps of the City have been proposed by the City Planning Commission.

In most cities in the country where zoning guides and controls development, height, bulk, and setback limits are used with reasonable success to assure that buildings are built "in context" with their neighbors, limiting buildings on small assemblages of land to looking like the buildings adjacent. In New York City before 1961 building heights were limited by street widths. With the new 1961 Zoning Resolution came the concept of development control through density limits, limiting new construction to a fixed ratio between the usable floor space and the site assembled (floor area ratio or FAR).

Although bulk controls and building setbacks were added to these density limits, there are no actual height limits and nothing in the 1961 regulations that anticipated real estate so valuable as to make tall buildings on small sites economically viable. At least a dozen developers have found that it is viable on sites, mostly in Community Board 8, but the phenomenon could clearly spread to any number of City neighborhoods.

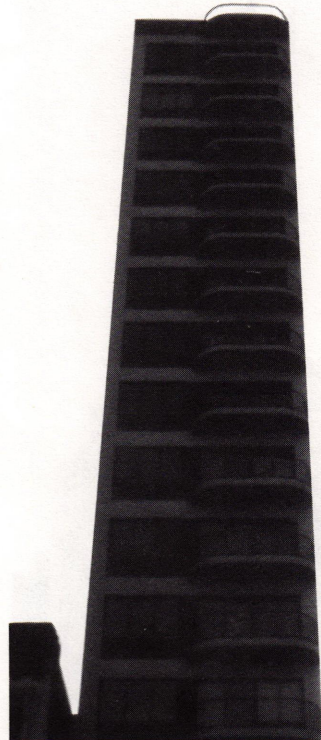
The defensive remedies proposed by the Planning Commission include three: 1) a map change reducing Lexington and Park Avenues zoning depth in part of the Upper East Side; 2) a new 9 FAR zoning district; 3) a city-wide height limit on narrow buildings.

The CPC Explanation

"This map change deals with the many narrow residential sites that lie between 100 and 125 feet (sometimes 150 feet) from Park and Lexington. These lie in the high-density zone, but behind high buildings on the Avenues. Because they face the narrow streets and are built low, they are perceived as midblock and therefore low density sites and should be developed as such. Because the bulk regulations on Park and Lexington either do (in the case of Park) or will (in the case of Lexington) require high-coverage streetwall buildings, 100 feet of high density designation is felt to be enough for appropriate Avenue development. These changes constitute a reduction of density from 10 to 6 FAR. This makes these narrow sites, by definition, no longer available for sliver development. The changes, the Commission feels, do not encourage more development nor higher streetwalls at the street line, and they cause little non-compliance.

"The second change would establish a new zoning district (R9A/C1-8A) on Lexington Avenue in Community Board 8 that would mandate a streetwall to the property line with a setback at 110 feet, and limit the density to 9 FAR. (N 830112 ZRM)

"All of the ingredients for sliver development are found on Lexington Avenue in Community Board 8—location, many low-rise small-site buildings, and a high density (R10 or equivalent) zoning designation. Indeed, several proposed sliver buildings are found here. Lexington also has a very special character. It is very narrow as avenues go (75 feet wide), and there are no post-1961 towers and plazas. The alternate height and setback and tower regulations have never been used. About 60 per cent of its streetwalls are low-rise, and about 40 per cent are built to roughly 1½ times the width of the Avenue (about 110 feet). The Lexington Avenue proposal is meant to insure that new construction be in this context. (It is a simpler version of the controls recently enacted for Madison Avenue.) a 9 FAR ceiling on



Lexington would, at the same time as it reduces incentive for sliver development, allow a contextual streetwall building to a height of 110 feet. This will not apply to the corners where Lexington crosses wide streets (72nd, 79th, 86th, and 96th). This proposal will not encourage development on Lexington, but when it does occur streetwalls at the street line will be 30 per cent higher (110 feet instead of 85 feet). However, these buildings will be 25 per cent smaller (9 FAR instead of 12 FAR).

"The third change would limit the height of a development or enlargement less than 45 feet wide in all R10, R10 Infill, R9, R8, R7-2 zones, their equivalent C1 and C2 zones, and the Park Improvement District, to the height of its tallest abutting building, or to the width of its street, whichever is greater (N 830112 ZRM)

"This proposal is generic to all potential sliver-building sites although the problem is presently limited to high density. This "generic"

Stuart Pertz is chairman of the Chapter's Ad Hoc Committee on Sliver Buildings and Partner and Director of Design for HLW.

Sliver Buildings

2. Between 81st and 82nd Streets, 1080 Madison Avenue is another unexpectedly squeezed in and set back residential project.

3. Although not in a residential neighborhood and with a street frontage wider than 45 ft, 150 East 52nd Street, by Fox & Fowle, Architects, is the biggest sliver to be shoehorned in—so far.

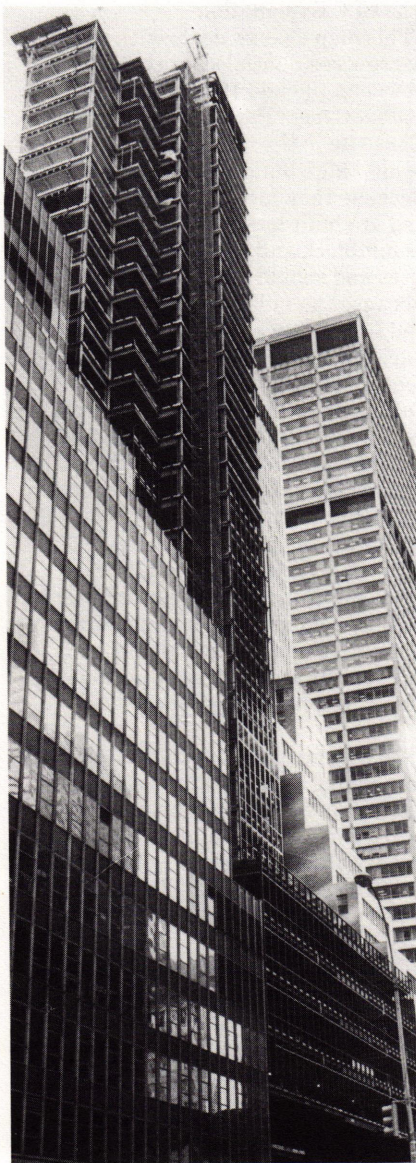
1. 926 Second Avenue by Architects Design Group is 25 ft wide and 23 stories high. This same building has the additional address 303 East 49th Street. (Photo: Stan Ries/ESTO)



1.

regulation insists that *developments* or *enlargements* (new construction) on sites 45 feet wide or less not be grossly out-of-scale with its neighbors. (The 45 feet dimension requires that two old law tenements or three brownstones be assembled if this regulation is to be avoided.)

"On one of these small sites a height would be allowed of at least equal to the width of the street that its narrow streetwall faces. This is 60 feet on a side street and up to 100 feet on an



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avenue. If there is an abutting building higher than this, the new construction could go to that height, thus allowing it to "infill". In only one case could the underlying bulk or density regulations be superseded. If an abutting building on a 100-foot street sets back from the street line at a height between 85 feet and 100 feet, the new construction can do likewise. The generic proposal expressly denies the use of the alternate height and setback regulations and tower regulations on these small sites. The



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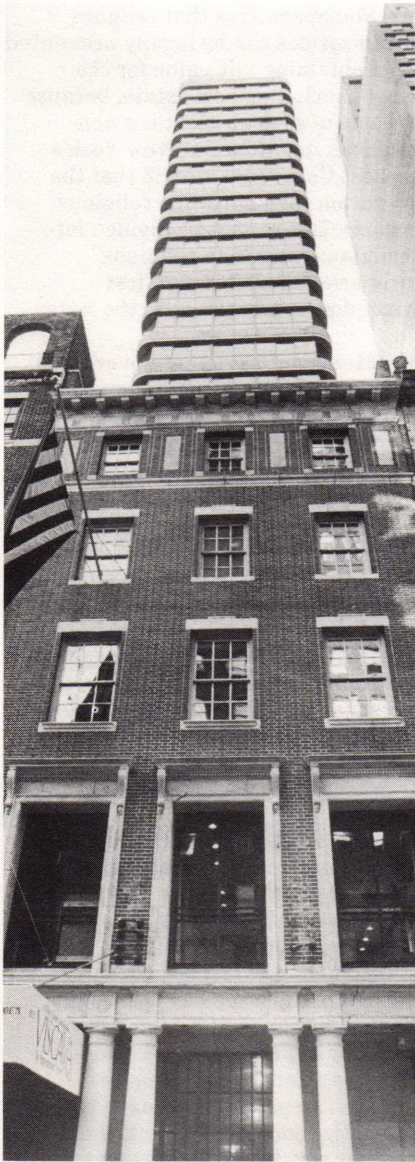
generic regulation is simply a reduction in potential density based on context. It does not encourage development, nor does it allow streetwalls at the street line to go higher than is presently allowed except in the one case above. Since Sliver Buildings are appearing because sites larger than 45 feet cannot be assembled, it will not lead, the Commission believes, to more demolition."

4. *The Viscaya at 110 East 71st Street by Architects Design Group.*

5. *1190-92 Lexington Avenue, at 81st Street.*

6. *328 East 86th Street.*

Photos: Stan Ries/ESTO



4.

The Chapter Committee

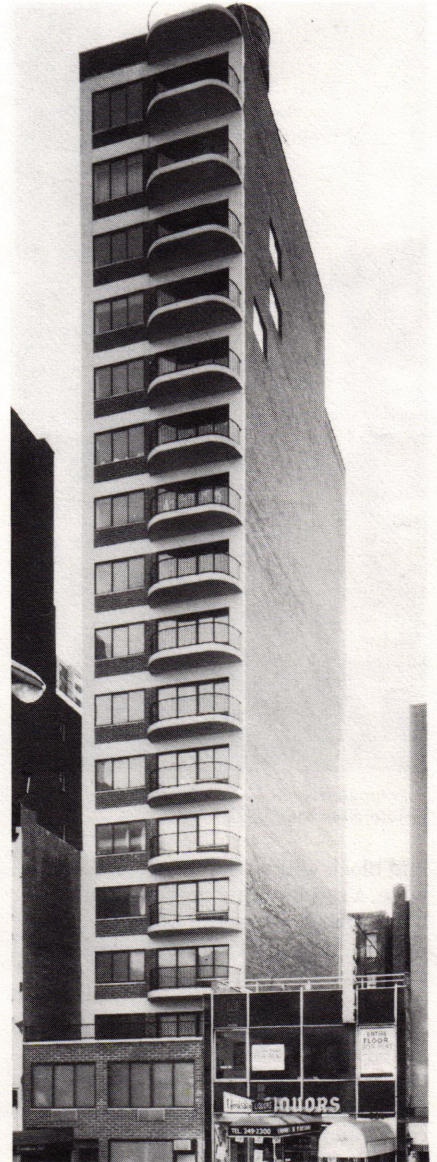
An Ad Hoc Committee on Sliver Buildings set up by the Chapter and chaired by Stuart Pertz, with Ted Liebman, Warren Gran, and David Kenneth Spector, has, over the past few months, worked with Lauren Otis and Dennis Ferris of the Planning Commission in reviewing the proposed changes, and the proposals presented here reflect suggestions of the Ad Hoc Committee primarily in the area of height limits (long anathema to the Planning



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Commission). A letter from the Ad Hoc Committee in October, said, "The context issue on mid-block is (primarily) height. We urge a height limit mid-block. The 'policy' established by the Planning Commission of no non-landmark height restrictions makes no sense if the height limit directly and easily solves the problem." In response to our letter, a height limit was instituted.

Although the Ad Hoc Committee was



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generally supportive, the zoning changes seemed single-issue solutions, and changes confined to buildings 45' or less at best seemed "half a loaf."

On a block with no tall buildings, any narrow building if tall enough, will seem out of context unless it steps up from adjacent buildings. An ordinance that dealt with stepping or setting back would be far more effective than a minimum width.

At 46' or even 60' wide, a tall building

Sliver Buildings

Letters



Site for a Sliver at 14 East 96th Street.
(Photo: Stan Ries/ESTO)

mid block will be inappropriate. At 16' wide, a tall building on an avenue block among other tall buildings may well be quite appropriate and well in context.

It is a matter of distance to the nearest tall building and the continuity of a pattern that makes for context. The maintenance of that continuity came down to rest on what initially might seem a minor issue: the definition of "abutment" in the new zoning change. The committee, with George Lewis, found at least four conditions in which abutment could be construed to undermine the law. Unless a proposed building's "abutment" with a taller neighbor was defined as being along the streetwall and contiguous the full height, the new rules would not work.

The Committee agreed to support the changes as appropriate and effective, however limited with the proviso that the definition of abutment be clarified.

Dear Editor:

Your evenhanded handling of the Landmarks in *Oculus* [December 1982] is just great — no matter which side anyone is on. However, there are many who feel that anyone who evaluates the problem in public is an agent of the devil

Edgar Tafel

Dear Editor:

A corrective is called for to the article on the landmarking of religious properties by Ralph C. Menapace, Jr. in your December issue. The basic point at issue is whether the understandable desire to preserve a distinctive building should be allowed to incapacitate the religious mission and ministry of a synagogue or church, the beneficiaries of which are primarily the poor and the downtrodden. By making no mention whatsoever of this fundamental point, Mr. Menapace assumes that architects, like some preservationists, are totally unconcerned about the anti-social affect of landmarking on the poor and underprivileged who, in disproportionately large numbers, look to our churches and synagogues for support.

Our architectural community is not so callous as to insist that preservation of distinctive buildings always and everywhere constitutes a higher social value than the elemental needs of so many of our fellow citizens. Mr. Menapace gives the false impression that our court decisions have held just that — making further discussion superfluous. He says, for example, that a 1980 decision of the New York's highest Court renders "groundless" any claim that the First Amendment concept of religious freedom can apply in the landmark area. In fact this decision dealt only with "charities" which are not "religious" organizations and which therefore do not receive First Amendment treatment. In 1982 this same Court reaffirmed the sharp distinction between charities and religious organizations.


Mr. Menapace says that religious organizations can be legally prevented from obtaining fair value for their assets, including real estate, because the sale of such an asset is a non-religious function. But New York's highest Court said in 1982 that the operations of a bona-fide religious organization cannot be divided into "religious" and "non-religious" categories so as to deny First Amendment treatment to the latter.

Mr. Menapace says that government can control religious ministry just as it can control commercial operations, citing the regulation which govern gambling, including church bingo. This is deceptively distractive because no one denies that synagogues and churches and their buildings are and ought to be subject to the laws governing public morals, health, and safety, as well as to the zoning laws which limit the size of buildings. The question is simply whether government ought to have the power to divert assets dedicated to religious purpose to the non-religious cause of architectural preservation.

To read Mr. Menapace's article one would think that the courts have left us nothing to discuss and that our legislative bodies have gone into permanent recess! In fact, discussion of this fundamental social and constitutional issue has just begun. Against our ancient common-law tradition of protection of basic liberties, there is no reason to suppose, no matter how much the aesthetic community might desire it, that our courts and legislatures will suddenly start to put architectural preservation above the Bill of Rights or the needs of the poor. I do not think our architectural community would want that either.

George J. McCormack

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