



NEW YORK CITY LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Robert B. Tierney
Chairman

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RENOWNED MODERN INTERIOR OF FORMER MANUFACTURERS TRUST BANK NAMED A NEW YORK CITY LANDMARK

Celebrated for Its Transparency and Mid-20th Century Glamour, Midtown Building's Core Becomes City's 111th Interior Landmark

The Landmarks Preservation Commission today voted unanimously to extend landmark protection to the first and second floor interiors of the former Manufacturers Trust Bank building at 510 Fifth Avenue, a major example of mid-20th century Modernism. The building's exterior was designated a City landmark in 1997.

Located on the corner of West 43rd Street, the four-story glass and aluminum building was designed by the acclaimed architecture firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) and opened in 1954. Manufacturers Trust, which originated in Brooklyn in 1853 and pioneered such retail services as personal, construction and property improvement loans, commissioned SOM to design a new branch that could accommodate a high volume of clients in an inviting setting and be easily converted to another use.



"The interior is as remarkable from within as when you're standing on the sidewalk looking inside," said Commission Chairman Robert B. Tierney. "Its luminous ceilings, spacious floor plans, white marble piers and other minimalist features blur the distinction between inside and out, and in the mid-20th century set a new standard for American bank design."

The overall design of the Fifth Avenue branch resulted from a collaboration of SOM's architects led by the one of the firm's celebrated partners, Gordon Bunshaft. The firm hired an outside consultant, Eleanor H. Le Maire, who specialized in retail and hotel spaces, to design the bank's interior.

The centerpiece of the first floor on the building's Fifth Avenue side is a 30-ton circular stainless steel vault that's visible from the street, rather than sunk below ground, as was the standard practice among banks. Industrial designer Henry Dreyfus collaborated with the Mosler Safe Company on the design of the door, which is 16 inches thick, has a diameter of 7 feet and features a prominent bolt wheel and I-shaped hinge.



The 7,000-square-foot second level is recessed from the east and north walls, creating the impression that the floor is floating and both levels occupy the same volume of space. The second floor is linked to the first floor by two escalators that can be seen from Fifth Avenue.

Also visible from the street are a series of white marble piers and vast luminous ceilings that hover above both the first and second floors. In a 1954 review that appeared in the New Yorker,

critic Lewis Mumford said, “Viewed from the outside, the building is essentially a glass lantern, and, like a lantern, is even more striking by dark than daylight.”



The bank’s interior is the 11th Modernist site to receive landmark status from the Commission since 2003. Other recently landmarked Modernist properties include the Paul Rudolph House, the Look Building and the Springs Mills Building, all of which were designated last year and are located in Midtown Manhattan.

The building is currently owned by Vornado Realty Trust, which acquired the site in 2009 from J.P. Morgan Chase, the successor company to Manufacturers Trust.

An interior landmark is a space that not only meets the requirements for landmark status under the City’s landmarks law, but must also be “customarily” open to the public, which means it was originally intended for use by the public. The lobby of the Woolworth Building, the Oyster Bar at Grand Central Terminal, and the former Trans World Airlines Flight Center at John F. Kennedy International Airport are examples of interior landmarks.

In recent years, the Commission has given interior landmark status to the lobby of the former American Telephone & Telegraph Building at 195 Broadway in Lower Manhattan, the Loews Paradise Theater in the Bronx and the bath house at the Jackie Robinson Recreation Center in Harlem.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission is the mayoral agency responsible for protecting and preserving New York City’s architecturally, historically and culturally significant buildings and sites. Since its creation in 1965, LPC has granted landmark status to more than 27,000 buildings, including 1,279 individual landmarks, 111 interior landmarks, 10 scenic landmarks, 102 historic districts and 16 historic district extensions in all five boroughs. Under the City’s landmarks law, considered among the most powerful in the nation, the Commission must be comprised of at least three architects, a historian, a realtor, a planner or landscape architect, as well as a representative of each borough.

Contact: Elisabeth de Bourbon/ 212-669-7938