Landmarks Preservation Commission
October 3, 1989; Designation List 221
LP-1666

FOUR SEASONS RESTAURANT, GROUND FLOOR INTERIOR consisting of the entrance lobby and the staircase leading from the entrance lobby to the first floor interior; FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR consisting of the restaurant lobby including the freestanding piers, the Pool Room vestibule, the Pool Room (dining room) including the marble pool, the staircase leading to the mezzanine dining room, the mezzanine dining room, the Bar Room/Grill Room vestibule, the Bar Room/Grill Room (dining room) including the bar, the staircases leading to the balcony level, and the balcony, and the balcony level dining rooms; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall surfaces, floor surfaces, ceiling surfaces, doors, railings, hanging sculptures, and metal draperies; 99 East 52nd Street, Manhattan. Designed by Philip Johnson. Built 1958-59.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1307, Lot 1.

On May 17, 1988, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as an Interior Landmark of the Four Seasons Restaurant ground floor interior consisting of the entrance lobby and the staircase leading from the entrance lobby to the first floor interior; first floor interior consisting of the restaurant lobby including the freestanding piers, the Pool Room vestibule, the Pool Room (dining room) including the marble pool, the staircase leading to the mezzanine dining room, the mezzanine dining room, the Bar Room/Grill Room vestibule, the Bar Room/Grill Room (dining room) including the bar, the staircases leading to the balcony level, and the balcony, and the balcony level dining rooms; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall surfaces, floor surfaces, ceiling surfaces, doors, railings, hanging sculptures, and metal draperies; and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 3.) The hearing was continued to July 12, 1988 (Item No. 1.) Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Twenty witnesses, including the operator of the restaurant, spoke in favor of designation. Three witnesses, all representatives of the owner of the Seagram Building, spoke in opposition to designation. The Commission has received many letters in favor of designation, and several letters against designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

An integral component of the highly-acclaimed International Style Seagram Building designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (a designated New York City Landmark), the Four Seasons Restaurant Ground Floor and First Floor Interiors have been praised by architectural critics as among the finest International Style interior spaces in the United States. Designed in 1958 by celebrated architect Philip Johnson and built in 1958-59 as an innovative first-class restaurant for Restaurant Associates, it opened amid much fanfare and was at that time the costliest restaurant ever constructed. The

interiors produced by Johnson and a stellar team of consultants are considered to be among Johnson's last projects to mirror the architectural theories of his mentor Mies van der Rohe. The designers used rich materials, installed with expert craftsmanship to accentuate their inherent beauty, innovative technology, and distinctive architectonic elements to shape the understated and elegantly proportioned interiors, which reflect the modular system employed in the design of the Seagram Building. The operations of the award-winning Four Seasons Restaurant were taken over in 1972 by Tom Margittai and Paul Kovi, who have kept the interior spaces in virtually intact condition and have been faithful to their original, influential design. Among the creative features of the restaurant is its seasonal theme, which inspires the meals served as well as plantings and color-coded appointments. A cultural magnet for tourists and the city's elite, it is one of New York's premier dining spaces due to the architectural preeminence of its design, the richness of its exquisite interiors, its location in the the Seagram Building, and the restaurant's exceptional culinary reputation.

History of the Seagram Building[1]

The Seagram Building, erected in 1956-58, is the only building in New York City designed by architectural master Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Carefully related to the tranquil granite and marble plaza on its Park Avenue site, the elegant curtain wall of bronze and tinted glass enfolds the first fully modular modern office tower. Constructed at a time when Park Avenue was changing from an exclusive residential thoroughfare to a prestigious business address, the Seagram Building embodies the quest of a successful corporation to establish further its public image through architectural patronage. The president of Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, Samuel Bronfman, with the aid of his daughter Phyllis Lambert, carefully selected Mies, assisted by Philip Johnson, to design an office building later regarded by many, including Mies himself, as his crowning work and the apotheosis of International Style towers. The innovative, modular design of the building was a feat furthered by a coalition of talented consultants, a successful collaboration rarely realized in twentieth-century architecture, and by pioneering efforts of research and fabrication. Still virtually intact due to the foresighted maintenance plan of the Seagram Company, the building and plaza have inspired the work of many subsequent designers, affected New York's zoning regulations and real estate tax assessment, and provided a favorable environment for work and repose.

As one of the amenities of the building, the Seagram management from the beginning had the intent to provide large, elegant interior spaces with public access from the lobby. In discussions as early as 1956, several options were considered: a museum of crafts, a stylish automobile showroom (along the lines of Frank Lloyd Wright's Mercedes-Benz showroom further north on Park Avenue), and a first-class restaurant. Mies and Johnson began preliminary work on the overall design of the interior spaces prior to the selection of Restaurant Associates as the tenant.[2]

Restaurant Associates

The Seagram Company decided that a first-class restaurant should occupy

the space adjacent to the lobby of its new building, and in 1957 Seagram's leasing agent, Cushman & Wakefield, made arrangements with the firm of Restaurant Associates.[3] Restaurant Associates, Inc. was founded in 1947 by A.F. Wechsler, leader of one of the world's largest companies which roasted coffee for commercial use. Holding a substantial interest in the restaurant chain that owned Rikers restaurants, Wechsler selected his son-in-law Jerome Brody (born c.1924) as the president of R.A. Mr. Brody expanded the company's activities to include the operation of snack bars and cafeterias for outside interests; he also negotiated contracts to operate the food services at Newark Airport and the Lexington Hotel in New York, and purchased the tourist-enticing Leone's. After their successful expansion into the first-class restaurant business with the Forum of the Twelve Caesars, Brody and vice-president Joseph Baum (born c.1921), a prominent American restaurateur, dedicated themselves to establishing the Four Seasons Restaurant in the Seagram Building as a first-class restaurant with a seasonal theme.[4]

Philip C. Johnson[5]

When approached by Lambert regarding who should design of the restaurant interiors, Mies recommended Johnson. Critic, historian, and architect Philip Johnson (b. 1906) was graduated from Harvard University and became associated with the Museum of Modern Art soon after its founding in 1929, directing its innovative department of architecture and later designing its sculpture garden (1953) and two additions (1950, 1964). With the critic and historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock, he organized the momentous exhibition, "Modern Architecture" (1932), and coauthored The International Style (1932), a manifesto for the vanguard architecture of Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, and Mies van der Rohe. Johnson was responsible for inviting Le Corbusier and Mies to the United States. Completing his professional degree in architecture at Harvard in 1943, he subsequently designed several influential residences, including his own Glass House (1949). His association with Mies on the Seagram Building, particularly his design for the Four Seasons Restaurant Interiors (1958-59), was recognized by architectural critics as a highlight in Johnson's career. His later work includes many New York projects: Asia House (now the Russell Sage Foundation/Robert Sterling Foundation Building), 112 East 64th Street (1958-60), located in the Upper East Side Historic District; New York State Theater at Lincoln Center (1964); New York State Pavilion (1964, with Richard Foster) for the World's Fair in Flushing; Elmer Holmes Bobst Library and Tisch Hall, New York University (1972, both with Richard Foster); and the American Telephone and Telegraph Building, 550 Madison Avenue (1980-84, with John Burgee). In 1978 the American Institute of Architects awarded him its highest honor, the Gold Medal.

Design Consultants

Johnson selected a stellar team of design consultants to work with him on the Four Seasons Interiors; in addition, he was aided by William Pahlmann, who was the principal designer for Restaurant Associates.

A graduate of the Parsons School of Design in New York and the Parsons School in Paris, leading interior designer William C. Pahlmann,[6] F.A.I.D., (1900-87) worked as a stage designer and in 1931 established a New York office as a private interior consultant. He became head of the decorating department at Lord & Taylor in 1936; his designs there earned him the reputation as "the best known department store decorator in the U.S."[7] Praised for his colorful designs, he then became a military camoufleur as a captain in the Army Air Corps. Noted for both his eclecticism and innovativeness, Pahlmann "exercised a pervasive influence on American taste"[8] and helped turn interior designing and decorating into an important component of the multi-billion-dollar home-furnishings industry. At the Four Seasons, he is credited with proposing the marble pool for the north dining room, its placement in the room with four trees at its corners, and the floral festoons at the windows. The New York chapter of the American Institute of Interior Designers granted him the Elsie de Wolfe Award in 1964.

Architect and lighting consultant Richard Kelly[9] (c.1911-1977) designed the lighting for the Seagram Building and the Four Seasons Restaurant Interiors. While studying at Columbia College, Kelly supported himself by designing and selling light fixtures; after graduating in 1932, he opened his own office as a lighting consultant. During his career, Kelly, the "most outstanding lighting consultant in the country,"[10] collaborated with such prominent architects as Louis I. Kahn and Eero Saarinen, as well as Mies and Johnson. He produced many exceptional lighting designs, including those for: the Seagram Building; Lincoln Center (except for the Metropolitan Opera), New York (1962-64); Dulles Airport, Chantilly, Va. (1958-62); General Motors Technical Center, Warren, Mich. (1945-56); Sculpture garden at the Museum of Modern Art, New York (1953); Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, or St. Louis Arch (1948-64); Philip Johnson Glass House, New Canaan, Conn. (1949); Eric Boissonnas House, New Canaan, Conn. (1956); Kneses Tiferith Israel Temple, Port Chester, N.Y. (1956); Toronto City Hall (1961-65); Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Conn. (1951-53); Mellon Center for British Art and Studies at Yale University, New Haven, Conn. (1969-74); Corning Glass Center, Corning, N.Y. (1950-51, 1955-56); Lake Shore Drive Apartments, Chicago (1948-51); and the Kimbell Art Museum, Fort Worth, Tex. (1966-72). Kelly also published extensively on illumination.

Other consultants were Karl Linn, the landscape architect and a professor at the University of Pennsylvania; Everett Lawson Conklin,[11] the horticulturist and award-winning floral designer; and Marie Nichols,[12] a weaver who designed the aluminum chain draperies for the Four Seasons Interiors and had collaborated with Richard Kelly on several projects. Artist Richard Lippold[13] designed the suspended gold-dipped brass sculptures in the Bar/Grill Room.

Still others were selected for their designs of movable features which, although significant to the history of the Four Seasons, are not included in this designation.[14] The chairs were designed by Mies much earlier in his career and originally shown in Czechoslovakia in 1927. Additional chairs were designed by Charles Eames (1907-78), pull-up hassocks and small

tabouret tables by Eero Saarinen (1910-61), two prominent architects and designers who collaborated on furniture designs for Knoll Associates as well as on architectural projects. Ada Louise and L. Garth Huxtable produced over sixty special designs for the silver holloware, glassware, and silver services--which are still in use at the Four Seasons.

Design and Construction[15]

Having provided the Seagram Building with a unity between indoor and outdoor spaces, Mies carried the modular design, clearly evident on the building's exterior, into the interiors of the grand public rooms. Johnson used the structural system and generously proportioned volumes as his point of departure for the design of the restaurant interiors, substantially completed in 1958. His design took advantage of the space to create dramatic effects and elegant proportions achieved through varied ceiling heights, a controlled system of circulation through the rooms, and architectonic elements, such as the pool and the bar, which further define distinct volumes within the larger spaces. The interplay of solid and void is artfully exemplified by the sturdy bar with its delicate sculpture above. These large public spaces were conceived to have elegant interiors to complement the Seagram Building itself: walls of the spacious rooms covered with expensive wood paneling washed in light from invisible sources and floor-to-ceiling windows screened by metallic chain curtains which ripple when the ventilation system is operating. The restrained ceiling, elegant staircases, ingenious lighting scheme, sculpture, and furnishings were carefully designed to create the sophisticated simplicity associated with the International Style. Johnson's early works were noticeably indebted to Mies's architectural theories, and this design is generally regarded as Johnson's last such project.

The Four Seasons Restaurant

Five dining rooms accommodate 400 persons. Its two wine "cellars" permit the Four Seasons to boast one of the largest wine collections in the country. Upon the opening of the restaurant in July of 1959, first-class service was assured by daily indoctrination for waiters by James Beard, the famous wine and food authority.[16]

The seasonal theme inspired the Four Seasons to maintain its own herb garden, an innovative venture in American restaurants. Eclectic menus combine American bounty with international culinary concepts and techniques, making the Four Seasons a pioneer of what would later be called the "New American Cuisine." These concepts are reflected visually in the restaurant's decor. Rotated seasonally, the four trees at the corners of the marble pool complement the restaurant's logo, which determines the color scheme for each season. Thus auxiliary planting as well as appointments such as uniforms, menus, and even ash trays were originally rotated every three months: pink for spring, green for summer, burnt orange for autumn, and brown for winter.[17] Establishing an optimum micro-climate for plant survival allowed the designers to

THE FOUR SEASONS

integrate interior planting from the beginning of the project.[18]

The total cost of approximately $4.5 million for the Four Seasons, making it at that time the costliest restaurant ever built, included architectural alterations and furnishings, linens, uniforms, art, kitchen equipment, silver, service carts, china, glassware, menus and other printed matter, plants and flowers, and design and consultation fees. The Seagram Company underwrote part of the cost, including the installation of the air conditioning system, the walls, and the partitions.

The Seagram Company enhanced the International Style interiors by lending the restaurant several masterpieces of modern art.[19] These features, while long associated with the restaurant spaces, are not part of this designation. Pablo Picasso's "The Three-Cornered Hat," a painted curtain completed in 1919 for Diaghilev's ballet "Le Tricorne" hangs in the restaurant lobby. This dedication to modern art, continued over the years, includes works by Frank Stella and Jackson Pollock. In 1984 the current restaurant owners commissioned James Rosenquist for a painting later titled "Fish, Flowers, and Females for the Four Seasons," now displayed in the mezzanine dining room overlooking the Pool Room.

The Four Seasons opened to the public in July, 1959, and was followed, in the subsequent year, by a neighboring restaurant, The Brasserie, also designed by Johnson and Pahlmann (not included in this designation).

Description

Located on portions of the first floor and the ground floor at the eastern end of the Seagram Building, the Four Seasons Restaurant Interiors are composed of several interior spaces, each with a distinct character and spatial quality but united by certain design elements. The Interiors of the Fours Seasons Restaurant include two major dining rooms, the Pool Room at the north side of the building and the Bar/Grill Room at the south side, linked by an Entrance Corridor/Lobby which adjoins the Lobby of the Seagram Building. The East 52nd Street Entrance Lobby located at the ground floor provides access to the Bar/Grill Room by means of a broad staircase. Two small, adjoining private dining rooms are situated behind a balcony that overlooks the Bar/Grill Room. Another dining room is located at the mezzanine level of the Pool Room. The restaurant is furnished with movable custom furniture, fixtures, and accessories which still adhere to the original designs.

The Entrance Corridor/Lobby:

The entrance to the Four Seasons Restaurant Interiors from the Seagram Building Lobby (a designated New York City Interior Landmark) is reached by broad travertine steps. A glass wall provides visual continuity between the two spaces, which share certain design features: walls and floors lined in travertine, ceilings composed of gray glass mosaic set in black cement, and engaged bronze piers of the building's structural system. The bronze-framed tripartite glass wall is bisected by a central meeting rail and contains paired glass doors. A flat bronze band intersects the lower portion of the wall. Bronze piers are located near the eastern wall of the corridor,

flanking Picasso's painted curtain, "The Three-Cornered Hat" (not subject to this designation). Designed to be illuminated from below, a row of raised alabaster panels, framed in bronze and protected by posts with suspended chain, is located along the floor beneath the curtain. Recessed light fixtures illuminate the space and incandescent recessed troffer lighting fixtures wash the eastern wall with light. Metal-framed glass doors at each end of the corridor lead to vestibules serving the major dining rooms. The vestibules have dropped ceilings formed by brass-colored egg-crate grids illuminated from above. The glazed eastern wall of the Pool Room vestibule reveals a wine "cellar," and the eastern wall of the Bar/Grill Room vestibule is lined in French walnut with openings to accommodate a coat-check area.

The Pool Room:

A lofty, square space with a twenty-foot high ceiling, the Pool Room is dominated at the center by a table-height twenty-foot square pool of white Carrara marble filled with continuously bubbling water. Cylindrical bronze planters holding trees sit on the floor at each of the four corners of the pool; the trees, which change seasonally, are illuminated from below with bucket lights set into the planters.

The western and northern walls are composed of continuous windows which rise above low travertine ledges. The windows are divided into vertical panels by bronze mullions; metal draperies of thin anodized aluminum chains are fitted into vertical channels in the mullions. The chains, in shades of brass, bronze, and copper, subtly ripple with the movement of air from diffusers set into the ledges below. Bronze bowl planters are suspended in front of the windows from nearly invisible wires. The southern wall, pierced by openings for the entrance and the kitchen, is lined with rectangular rawhide panels set on walnut. The bottom row of panels is gray, and those above are natural. Each wall in the room is punctuated by engaged bronze piers.

At the eastern end of the Pool Room is a rectangular mezzanine-level room reached by a broad central staircase. The base of the mezzanine is paneled in gray rawhide. The stairs and the edge of the mezzanine are lined with bronze railings composed of thin staggered rods, which, when viewed as one passes them, create the effect of movement. Panels of French walnut, designed and crafted to emphasize the prominent grain of the wood, are set behind the railings; they also pivot so that the mezzanine-level room may be either closed off or function as an extension of the Pool Room. The glazed northern wall is continued in the upper room, while the eastern wall, dominated by a large painting by James Rosenquist (not subject to this designation), and the southern wall of that room are covered in beige carpet panels.

The specially-designed ceiling is composed of square off-white panels of perforated aluminum layered over a recessed grid; the intersections of the grid are fitted with "darklites," a recessed incandescent fixture from which light is directed by bronze-finished reflectors. Recessed troffers wash the southern wall with light. The wall-to-wall carpeting has a grid pattern which echoes the overall geometry of the room. (Although not

original, it was designed under the direction of Philip Johnson).

The Bar/Grill Room:

The Bar/Grill Room is divided into several different areas. A small lounge area located at the northwest corner of the room is separated from a bar area at the southwest corner of the room by a large, broad stairwell linking the space with the East 52nd Street Entrance Lobby. A dining area occupies the center of the room and a narrow balcony-level dining area, reached by stairs at each end, spans the eastern side of the room.

The Bar/Grill Room has some of the many architectural elements as the Pool Room, including the twenty-foot high specially-designed ceiling, window walls with metal draperies rising from travertine ledges at the west and south, French walnut paneling lining the northern and eastern walls, wall-to-wall carpet, and the balcony. The face of the balcony is now washed with light from below by a bay of incandescent lamps covered by a grid. Engaged bronze piers punctuate the walls. The carpeting is a darker version of the same design used in the Pool Room.

The stairwell between the bar and lounge areas is lined in bronze railings of thin, staggered rods. The bar area is dominated by a square walnut bar fitted with leather panels and surrounded by an ebonized oak floor. Two sculptures by Richard Lippold, composed of delicate groups of gold-dipped brass rods of varying lengths, are suspended from the ceiling by nearly invisible wires. Following his usual procedure, Lippold designed the sculptures specifically for their present locations to enhance the organization of the Bar/Grill Room. The larger sculpture contrasts dramatically with the solid walnut bar directly beneath it, creating an intimate space within the larger limits of the room. This juxtaposition is balanced by the smaller sculpture over the balcony.[20] The bar is separated from the dining area by a partition of laminated, cracked glass; this was installed in 1983 under the direction of Philip Johnson and replaced a trellis of climbing ivy. A French walnut service desk to the east of the entrance from the Corridor/Lobby and round planters (which replace the original wood planters) between the service desk and the partition also serve to define the dining area.

Two adjoining rooms are situated behind walnut-paneled doors at the northern and southern ends of the balcony; these doors have an ebonized surface on the side of the rooms. The rooms are smaller and more intimate than the large rooms. A vestibule behind the northern end of the balcony leads to the larger of the two rooms, which is rectangular, and joins the smaller, square room to the south by a wide doorway with a sliding ebonized door. Except for the outer wall of the southern room which has continuous windows and metal draperies, the walls are lined with rectangular panels of highly-polished hardwood set onto a dark wood surface. The ceiling is of the same grid-and-panel design used in the larger rooms, except that the surface is black and the panels are pierced with holes roughly one-inch wide and spaced apart in a random pattern, which are illuminated from above. The floors are carpeted. The vestibule at the northern end is similarly finished.

The East 52nd Street Entrance Lobby:

The lower Entrance Lobby is reached at its southeastern end from East 52nd Street through two sets of glass doors separated by a vestibule with a brass-colored egg-crate grid ceiling. The outer doors are etched with vertical stripes. The floor and walls are travertine and pierced with openings along the eastern, southern, and northern walls for restrooms, an office, and a coat-check area. The space is illuminated by recessed fixtures set into a low white ceiling. Engaged bronze piers and a ceiling beam bisect the room on a north-south axis. At the western side of the lobby is a broad staircase with one landing; this links the Lobby and the Bar/Grill area. It is lined with bronze railings. The two round planters replace the original wood planters.

Subsequent History

Immediately after its opening the Four Seasons received enthusiastic reviews, both architectural and culinary; critics said that the "spectacular, modern and audacious"[21] restaurant design "combines its exceptional sumptuousness with exquisite refinement."[22] When it opened, the restaurant had no peer "in conception, in scale, in the wealth of talent behind it."[23]

In the early 1970s, Transylvanian-born Tom Margittai, then vice-president of Restaurant Associates, was given the responsibility of selling off the business of a foundering Four Seasons Restaurant. Instead, he and the director of the Four Seasons, Hungarian-born Paul Kovi, jointly purchased it from R.A. in 1972 with the goal of reviving the restaurant. They hired chef Joseph Renggli, a Swiss native, and soon the restaurant became, as "one of America's leading symbols of good taste,"[24] extremely popular with New York's elite. A recipient of twenty-two major awards, the Four Seasons has hosted many memorable parties for national celebrities, international gourmet societies, and wine inaugurals.

Experts Ada Louise and L. Garth Huxtable, involved with the restaurant from its planning stages, have noted that the new owners "have been faithful to the [original] concept."[25] The design of these famous International Style interiors has been caringly maintained. Among the handful of physical changes was the removal of an ivy-covered screen and its replacement in 1983 by a laminated, cracked glass partition designed by Johnson.

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NOTES

1. This section is taken from LPC, Seagram Building Designation Report, report prepared by David M. Breiner (New York, 1989). Additional information about the Four Seasons Restaurant Interiors project was provided in a telephone conversation with Phyllis Lambert Sept. 25, 1989.

2. This information was provided in a telephone conversation with Phyllis Lambert, Sept. 25, 1989. The information was also confirmed by Philip Johnson through a telephone conversation on Oct. 2, 1989 with Carla Ash, curator for the Seagram Company, who passed the information to the LPC.

3. Ibid.

4. Craig Claiborne, "$4.5 Million Restaurant to Open Here," New York Times, July 16, 1959, p. 33; "Modern Living," Time, July 27, 1959, pp. 61-65; Karen MacNeil, "Business," Avenue (Sept., 1980), 30.

5. "Johnson, Philip," Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects, vol. 2, 499-501; Encyclopedia of 20th Century Architecture, gen. ed. Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, rev. ed. (New York, 1986), 181-82; American Architects Directory, 2nd ed., ed. George S. Koyl (New York, 1962), 354; LPC, Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report, vol. 1 (New York, 1981), 188.

6. William Pahlmann, "Viewpoints: A Series of Interviews with Architects, Interior Designers, Product Designers, and Observers of the Design Scene," Interior Design 43 (Sept., 1972), 143; "Exit Taxidermist Enter Couturier," Interiors 107 (Nov., 1947), 82-87; "American Art and William Pahlmann," Interiors 100 (May, 1941), 24' "Pahlmann's Private Practice," Interiors 102 (Sept., 1942), 44; Claiborne, $4.5 Million Restaurnat to Open Here," p. 33; O[lga] G[ueft], "The Four Seasons," Interiors 119 (Dec., 1959), 170; William C. Pahlmann obituary, NYT Nov. 11, 1987, sec. 2, p. 8.

7. "Pahlmann's Farewell," Interiors 101 (July, 1942), 34.

8. William C. Pahlmann obituary, p. 8.

9. Betty Kelly, "Richard Kelly, a Bibliography," American Association of Architectural Bibliographers 20 (Spring, 1961); "Lighting Start with Daylight," Progressive Architecture 54 (Sept., 1973), 82-85; Richard Kelly, "Lighting as an Integral Part of Architecture," College Art Journal 12 (Fall, 1952), 24-26; O[lga] G[ueft], 168; Richard Kelly obituary, NYT July 12, 1977, p. 32.

10. William B. O'Neal, foreward to Betty Kelly, n.p.

11. Everett Lawson Conklin obituary, NYT, Mar. 22, 1985, sec. 2, p. 5. Horticulturist and award-winning floral designer Conklin (c.1908-1985) installed floral displays in many prominent New York restaurants--including the Four Seasons, the Philharmonic Cafe at Lincoln Center, and the Promenade Cafe at Rockefeller Center--and other public locations, such as the Ford Foundation Building. Organizing Everett Conklin & Company International in 1957, he served as president and chairman until his retirement in 1982. A board member of the International Flower Show of New York, 1958-70, Conklin's positions included chairman of the floral decorations committee for President Nixon's inaugural balls (1969 and 1973) and horticulture adviser for the Lake Placid Winter Olympics (1980).

12. Betty Pepis, "Curtains of Steel Help to Improve Lighting in Room," NYT, Sept. 19, 1955, p. 20. These draperies are occasionally repaired with new chains of the same type.

13. Educated in industrial design at the School of the Art Institute, Chicago, Lippold left that field in the early 1940s to become a sculptor. His wire constructions, found in many private and museum collections, are acclaimed for their treatment of space and incorporation of rich materials. Lippold's abstract constructions for the Bar/Grill Room of the Four Seasons Restaurant Interiors (1958-59) were among the first of many designed for public spaces, including those at: Philharmonic Hall (now Avery Fisher Hall), Lincoln Center (1962); the Hyatt Regency Hotel, Atlanta (1966); St. Mary's Cathedral, San Francisco (1971); and the National Air and Space Museum, Washington, D.C. (1976). See "Art in America: An Artist's Point of View," Architectural Record 164, no. 8 (Dec., 1978), 69-71, 73 and "St. Mary's Cathedral, San Francisco," Architectural Record 150, no. 3 (Sept., 1971), 113-20.

14. Claiborne, "$4.5 Million Restaurant to Open Here," p. 33; "The Four Seasons Story," typescript, 1-2; Ada Louise and L. Garth Huxtable, Letter to LPC dated May 11, 1988. See also "Eames, Charles O.," Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects, vol. 2, 1-3 and "Saarinen, Eliel, and Saarinen, Eero," Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects, vol. 3, 625-33.

15. Claiborne, "$4.5 Million Restaurant to Open Here," p. 33; O[lga] G[ueft], 80, 166-68; "New York's New 4 1/2 Million Dollar Restaurant," Look, Oct. 13, 1959, pp. 58-60; "More Elegance at the House of Seagram," Architectural Record 126 (Nov., 1959), 202; "The Four Seasons Story," (typescript in LPC files), 2-3; James Villas, "The Season of the Four Seasons," Town & Country (Sept., 1983), 218-19; Charles Noble, Philip Johnson (New York, 1972), 122. For The Brasserie, see "The Brasserie, in the Seagram Building, New York," Interiors 120 (Dec., 1960), 94-95.

16. A thorough training manual is used today to continue high standards of service and foster employees' appreciation of the history of the restaurant. See a photocopy of the manual in LPC files.

17. Today, instead of seasonal changes, the Four trees logo in four colors decorates appointments.

18. Portable mercury vapor lamps have been used to provide intense light for the trees while the restaurant is closed. See "The Four Seasons: Collaboration for Elegance," Progressive Architecture 40 (Dec., 1959), 142. The annual budget for planting alone was $50,000. Claiborne, "$4.5 Million Restaurant to Open Here," p. 33. Permanent plantings include ornamental fig and ficus trees. Seasonal plantings have consisted of azaleas and white birch trees in the spring, philodendrons and cocos palmosa in the summer, burnt orange and yellow chrysanthemums and oak leaf branches in the autumn, and white chrysanthemums and white birch in the winter with red poinsettias added during the Christmas season. "The Four Seasons Story," 3.

19. Claiborne, "$4.5 Million Restaurant to Open Here," p. 33; Ann Landi, "Art a'la Carte," Manhattan, Inc. (June, 1988), 133.

20. In early correspondence from Arthur S. Margolin, vice president of the Seagram Company, in a letter to Gene A. Norman, dated July 7, 1988, it states that the sculptures belong to Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, and that the company "has no intent of removing...the Lippolds, so long as the use and character of the space...remains substantially the same as now." Subsequently, the LPC has received a letter from Phyllis Lambert on the behalf of the Seagram Foundation, dated Sept. 29, 1989, advising the LPC that the Seagram Company has agreed that the sculptures would "remain permanently on display in the Grill Room for so long as the Four Seasons remains a designated [New York City] landmark." In a letter from Richard Lippold to the LPC, dated Sept. 11, 1989, the artist states that "...my sculptures...are built into the room and technically virtually impossible to reinstall elsewhere." He adds that the materials, proportion and scale of the sculptures are closely related to the materials, proportion and scale of the room.

21. Craig Claiborne, "Food News: Dining in Elegant Manner," NYT, Oct. 2, 1959, p. 22.

22. O[lga] G[ueft], 80-81.

23. See MacNeil, 30.

24. MacNeil, 35.

25. Ada Louise and L. Garth Huxtable, Letter to LPC dated May 11, 1988, n.p.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Four Seasons Restaurant ground floor interior consisting of the entrance lobby and the staircase leading from the entrance lobby to the first floor interior; first floor interior consisting of the restaurant lobby including the freestanding piers, the Pool Room vestibule, the Pool Room (dining room) including the marble pool, the staircase leading to the mezzanine dining room, the mezzanine dining room, the Bar Room/Grill Room vestibule, the Bar Room/Grill Room (dining room) including the bar, the staircases leading to the balcony level, and the balcony, and the balcony level dining rooms; and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall surfaces, floor surfaces, ceiling surfaces, doors, railings, hanging sculptures, and metal draperies; has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City, and the Interior is one which is customarily open and accessible to the public, and to which the public is customarily invited.

The Commission further finds that, among their important qualities the Four Seasons Restaurant Interiors, integral components of the architecturally preeminent Seagram Building, are among the finest International Style interiors in the United States; that they were designed in 1958 by celebrated architect Philip Johnson and an accomplished team of consultants and built in 1958-59 for the expanding firm of Restaurant Associates as an innovative first-class restaurant; that innovative technologies and architectonic elements were incorporated to achieve the desired aesthetic and spatial effects; that the modular design of the exterior of the Seagram Building is carried into and helps to define the interior spaces; that the spacious, understated, and elegant rooms of exquisite proportions are excellently maintained; that they are outfitted with finely crafted rich materials such as bronze, white Carrara and travertine marbles, rawhide panels, French walnut and ebonized oak, and anodized aluminum; that these materials are installed with expert craftsmanship to accentuate their inherent beauty; that the distinctive design of the interior spaces and the exceptional culinary reputation of the Four Seasons make it a cultural magnet for tourists as well as New York's elite.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates an an Interior Landmark the Four Seasons Restaurant ground floor interior consisting of the entrance lobby and the staircase leading from the entrance lobby to the first floor interior; first floor interior consisting of the restaurant lobby including the freestanding piers, the Pool Room vestibule, the Pool Room (dining room) including the marble pool, the staircase leading to the mezzanine dining room, the mezzanine dining room, the Bar Room/Grill Room vestibule, the Bar Room/Grill Room (dining room) including the bar, the staircases leading to the balcony level, and the balcony, and the balcony level dining rooms; and the fixtures

and interior components of these spaces, including but not limited to, wall surfaces, floor surfaces, ceiling surfaces, doors, railings, hanging sculptures, and metal draperies; 99 East 52nd Street, Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1307, Lot 1, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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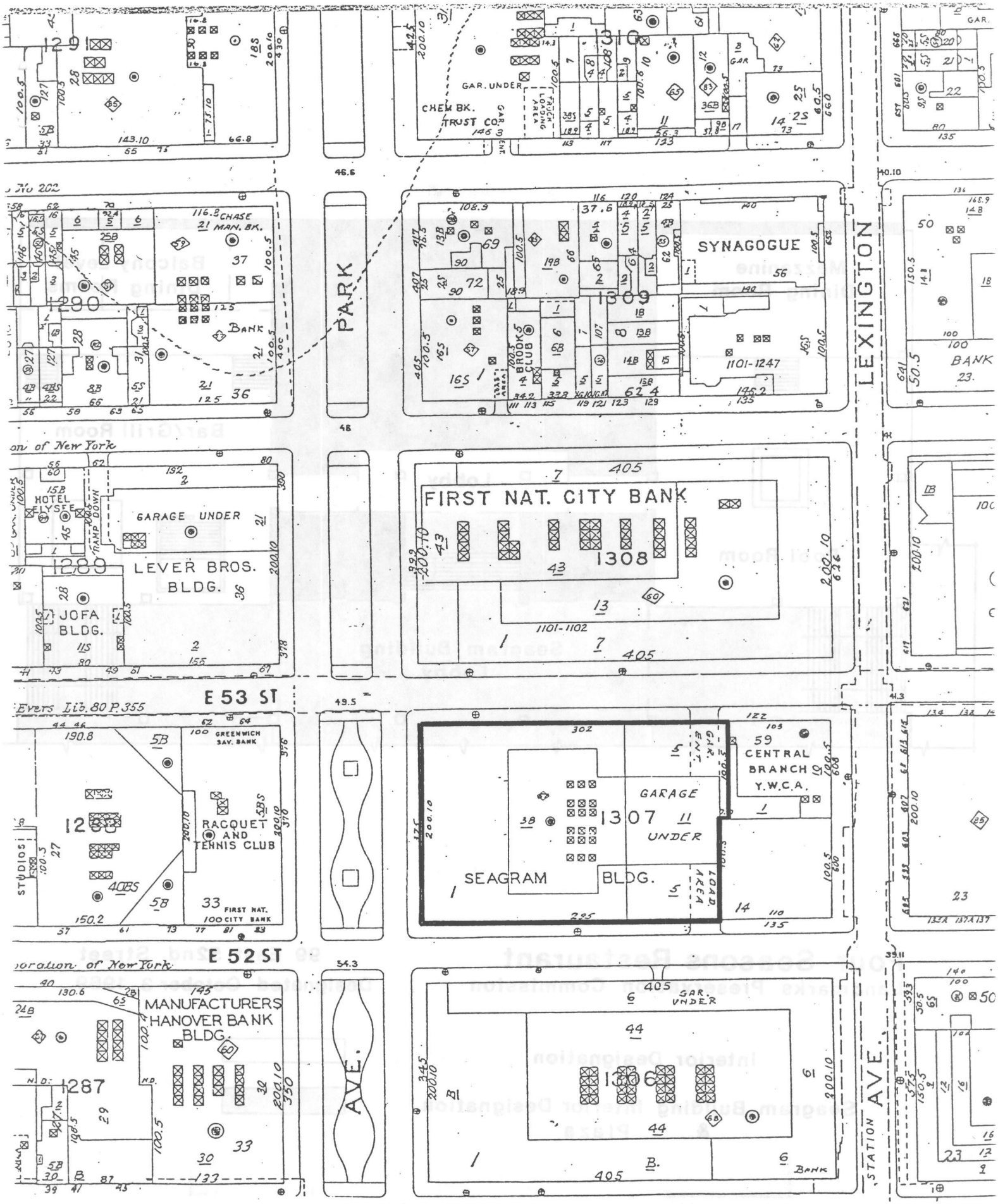

FOUR SEASONS RESTAURANT
99 East 52nd Street

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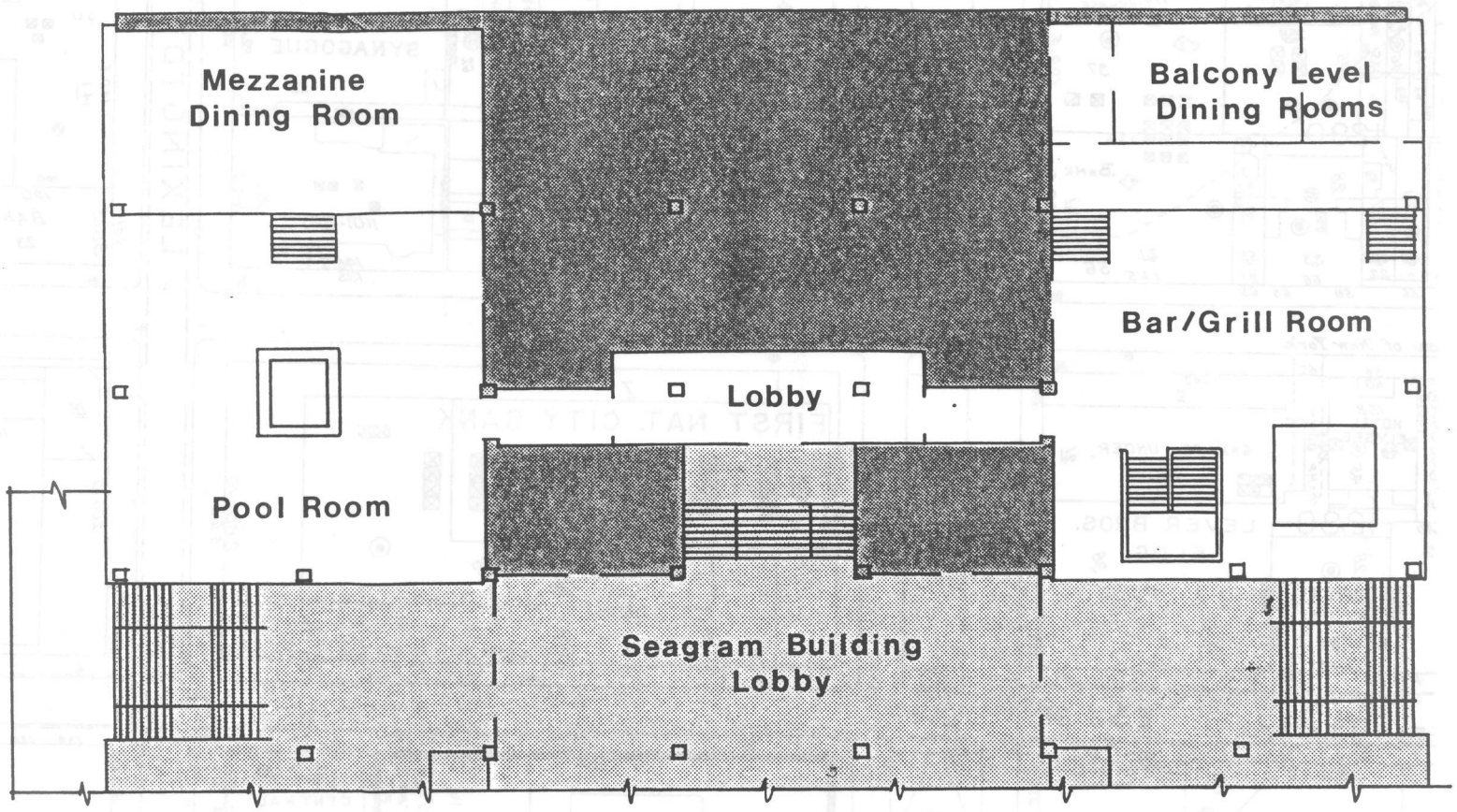
Source: Sanborn, Manhattan Land Book, 1988-89, pls. 78, 84



Four Seasons Restaurant

Landmarks Preservation Commission

99 East 52nd Street

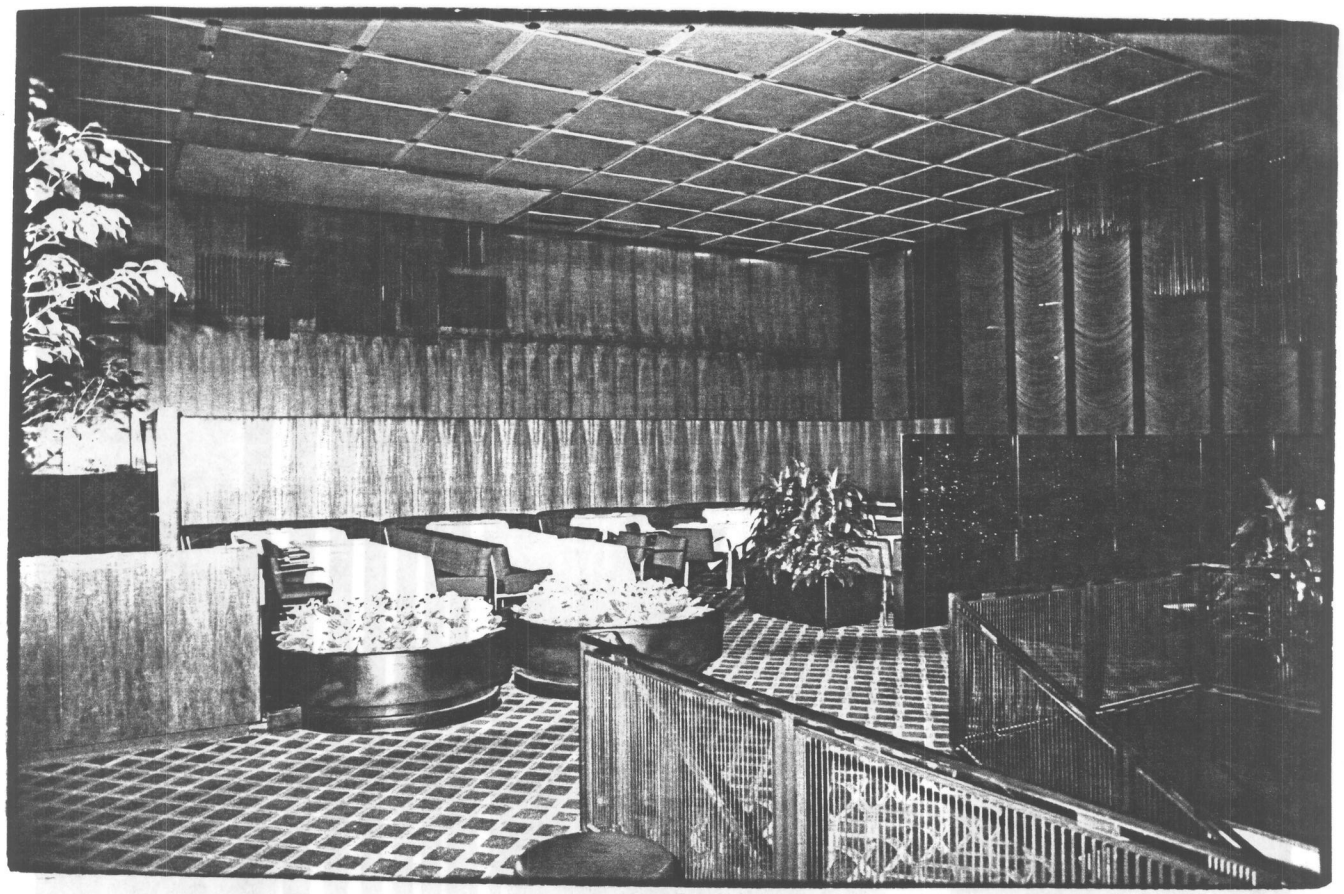
Designated October 3, 1989

Interior Designation

Seagram Building Interior Designation & Plaza

FOUR SEASONS RESTAURANT View of Lobby from Seagram Building Lobby
FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR

Photo credit: Carl Forster

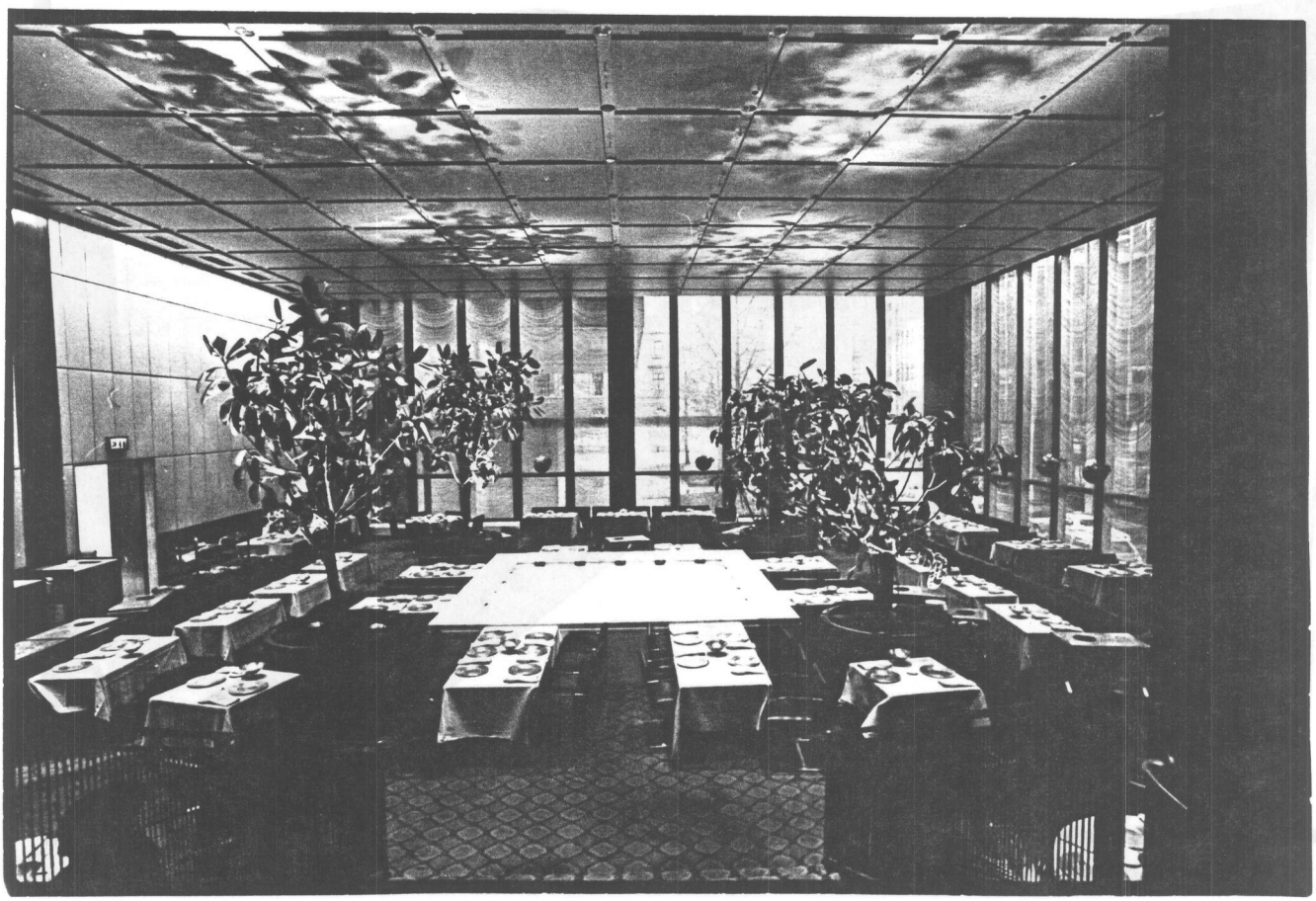


FOUR SEASONS RESTAURANT Bar/Grill Room
FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR

Photo credit: Carl Forster

FOUR SEASONS RESTAURANT Pool Room

FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR Photo credit: Carl Forster



FOUR SEASONS RESTAURANT Private Dining Room

FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR

Photo credit: Carl Forster

FOUR SEASONS RESTAURANT East 52nd Street Lobby

GROUND FLOOR INTERIOR

Photo credit: Carl Forster