

DESIGNATION REPORT

# Barkin, Levin & Company Office Pavilion



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LOCATION

Borough of Queens  
12-12 33rd Avenue, Long Island City

LANDMARK TYPE

Individual

SIGNIFICANCE

An elegant mid-20th century modern office building with an unusual umbrella-like structural system, designed by the German American architect Ulrich Franzen.



**Barkin Levin Plant, October 1958**

Ezra Stoller/Esto

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# Barkin, Levin & Company

## Office Pavilion

12-12 33rd Avenue, Long Island City, Queens

### Designation List 536

LP-2675

**Built:** 1957-58

**Architect:** Ulrich Franzen

**Landmark Site:** Borough of Queens

Tax Map Block 522, Lot 29 in part, consisting of the portion of the lot bounded by a line beginning at the northwest corner of the lot (at the southeast corner of 33rd Avenue and 12th Street), extending easterly along northern lot line of Lot 29 to a curb that forms a line that divides the landscaped area surrounding the office pavilion from the paved parking area to the east, then south along this curb line to the north wall of the existing factory, then west along the north wall of the existing factory to the western lot line of Lot 29, and then north along the western lot line to the point of beginning, as illustrated in the attached map.

**Building Identification Number (BIN):** 4440037

**Calendared:** October 3, 2023

**Public Hearing:** November 28, 2023

On November 28, 2023, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Barkin, Levin & Company Office Pavilion as a New York City Landmark and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 1). The hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Four people testified in support of designation, including representatives of the owner, Docomomo US/New York Tri-State, Historic Districts Council, and the New York Landmarks Conservancy. The Commission received an additional letter supporting designation from Queens Modern. No speakers or written submissions opposed designation.

## Summary

### Barkin, Levin & Company Office Pavilion

The Barkin, Levin & Company Office Pavilion is a distinguished example of mid-20th century commercial architecture. Located in the northernmost part of Long Island City, close to the Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park, this graceful minimalist structure was originally part of a factory that manufactured women’s coats. Set on a landscaped parcel bordered by three streets, the pavilion was the factory’s architectural highlight. Of particular interest is the unusual structural system – nine concrete pillars that support an umbrella-like roof canopy that extends up and outside the glass walls, shading the pavilion.

Ulrich Franzen designed and built the Barkin Levin factory complex in 1957-58. Born in Germany, he immigrated to the United States in the mid-1930s. Franzen attended Williams College, and after World War II, the Harvard Graduate School of Design. Following graduation, he worked with architect I. M. Pei for five years, establishing his own firm in 1955. The Barkin, Levin & Company Office Pavilion was one of the architect’s first independent works. In subsequent decades, Franzen worked in the Brutalist style, building prominent corporate and educational structures. Also of interest is his association with the Landmarks Preservation Commission. In addition to designing the first new building approved for an historic district, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society Dormitory in Brooklyn Heights, he served as a commissioner from 1992 to 1994.

Constructed for a successful manufacturer of women’s coats, *The New York Times* reported that

Barkin, Levin & Company’s factory was “the first major plant in the garment industry” to incorporate all stages of production. With basically a square footprint, the office pavilion’s glass walls and roof canopy expressed a stylish modern sensibility that reflected the company’s concern for fashion and the welfare of its employees. To illustrate a “well-designed single story ranch type” plant, the pavilion was featured in the August 1958 proposal to modify New York City’s zoning resolution, as well as in various newspapers and trade journals, such as *Women’s Wear Daily*, *The Architectural Record*, and *Progressive Architecture*. The Bethlehem Steel Company, which supplied the pavilion’s framing, praised the distinctive steel umbrellas in advertisements. In November 1958, this “ultra-modern-glass-wall clothing factory” was awarded “first prize in the industrial class” by the Queens Chamber of Commerce. Despite considerable praise, Barkin Levin closed the facility and began leasing the structure to the Structural Display Company in 1961.

Restored with minor modifications in 2009, the pavilion retains many of its original architectural features and design characteristics. Praised by critics and historians, this rare and little-known Queens building is an important and well-preserved example of mid-20th century modern architecture.

## Building Description

### Barkin, Levin & Company Office Pavilion

#### Description

The Barkin, Levin & Company Office Pavilion is located in Long Island City, Queens. It stands in the northwestern portion of a trapezoidal parcel bordered by 12th Street and 33rd Avenue, which runs east/west and then south, becoming 13th Street. The landmark site is a lot in part that includes the office pavilion and the lawns that surround it.

The pavilion has a nine-column structural system supporting a low, overhanging roof canopy, consisting of six ceiling vaults that resemble inverted pyramids. Beneath the roof canopy, the east, north, and south walls of the office pavilion are glass, while the lower part of the west wall (facing 12th Street) is stuccoed. Concrete pillars (square in plan and painted white) support the ceiling vaults and divide each facade into two large bays. While the lower wall panels are rectangular, the upper glass panels are trapezoids. The ceiling vaults project up and outside the walls. These vaults shelter a red brick pathway and corner concrete slabs that border the pavilion on four sides. A metal Queens Chamber of Commerce award plaque is attached to the concrete pillar in the northeast corner.

The pavilion is partly bounded by natural grass lawns. There are two freestanding brick walls beneath the line of the overhanging roof: the taller north wall faces 33rd Avenue, while the east wall, which adjoins a parking area (not part of landmark site) was rebuilt with a tan brick veneer in 2009. It has “hit and miss” brick work with vertical slots. A concrete path extends south from 33rd Avenue to several broad steps that rise from the parking area to

the office pavilion’s main entrance.

A one-story non-contributing enclosed corridor connects the pavilion to the one-story factory building to the south, which is not included in the landmark site.

#### Alterations

White metal fencing has been installed along 12th Street and 33rd Avenue. A flagpole, concrete wheelchair ramps with metal railings, the east entrance foyer with glass doors, and a small south facade extension date from 2009. The transparent glazing has been replaced but is similar to the original conditions. Silver mullions have been replaced with black.

Pairs of lighting fixtures attached to the piers are non-historic, as are the lighting fixtures adjacent to the flagpole. The wall adjacent to 33rd Avenue is painted yellow on the north side. Various drainage pipes, cameras, and electrical conduits are not original to the building.

Air conditioning units are on the roof, as well as on the brick path adjacent to the 12th Street (west) facade. Artificial turf is installed on part of the south lawn, between the pavilion and the former factory structure.

## History and Significance

Barkin, Levin & Company Office Pavilion

### Development of Long Island City

The Barkin, Levin & Company Office Pavilion stands several blocks from the East River in Queens on 33rd Avenue, one block south of Broadway. Today, the area north of the Queensboro Bridge is called Astoria, though at the time of the factory's construction it was generally described as Long Island City. Originally divided into five wards – the villages of Hunter's Point, Blisswood-Laurel Hill, Ravenswood, and two sections of Astoria – Long Island City was incorporated as a city in 1870.<sup>1</sup> It was the fourth independent municipality established within the current boundaries of New York City, following New York City, Brooklyn, and Williamsburgh.

Indigenous peoples have lived in Queens for many centuries. Sunswick Creek, which meandered north from Hunter's Point into Hallet's Cove at Ridge Street (now 33rd Avenue), was called "Sunkisq" by local tribes, meaning "place of the chief's wife."<sup>2</sup> A member of the Dutch West India Company, Jacques Benfyn, settled here in 1638. During Kieft's War (1643-45) – a series of confrontations between New Netherland and local tribes – Benfyn's plantation was destroyed. William Hallet acquired Benfyn's land in 1652.<sup>3</sup> Twelve years later, he expanded his holdings to include nearly all of present-day Astoria. In the 1670s Hallett dammed part of Sunswick Creek, erecting a grist mill near what is present-day Broadway and Vernon Avenue.

The village of Astoria was incorporated in 1839. Stephen A. Halsey, who moved from Flushing,

purportedly named the area Astoria to attract financial backing from millionaire John Jacob Astor, who made a donation to build St. George's Episcopal Church.

Ferry service connecting Astoria and New York City was introduced in the mid-1700s. Halsey was an investor in the Hell Gate Ferry, which connected East 86th Street in Manhattan with Fulton Avenue, one of the main thoroughfares in Astoria, until 1866, when the Manhattan terminal was moved to East 92nd Street. Service was provided by a succession of private firms, including the Astoria Ferry Company, the Queens County Ferry Company, and the New York & East River Ferry Company. New York City operated a municipal ferry from 1918 to 1936. On Vernon Avenue (now Boulevard) a street railway connected Astoria to Hunter's Point and Williamsburgh, and "fast steamers" served Harlem and Lower Manhattan from a dock close to Jamaica Avenue (now 31st Avenue).<sup>4</sup>

By the time of the Civil War, Long Island City was a prosperous suburb of New York City, with large houses lining the East River waterfront. South of Broadway, the area was known as Ravenswood, reportedly named for clergyman John Stark Ravenscroft in the 1830s.<sup>5</sup> This residential phase, however, was short-lived. The *Newtown Register* reported in 1877: "this aristocratic neighborhood ... [was] "beginning to be invaded by factories . . . we may suppose these temples of industry to be 'the beginning of the end.'"<sup>6</sup> Sunswick Creek gradually became polluted, causing frequent outbreaks of disease. When sewers were constructed in the 1890s, the surrounding marshes were drained, and the creek was covered and diverted into a brick sewer tunnel.<sup>7</sup>

Many factories were established near Broadway, both along the East River and inland. Scattered among yet-to-be developed sites was the Sohmer & Company Piano Factory (1886, 1906-07,

a New York City Landmark), Hughes & Scanlon Stone Yard, Astoria Carpet Mill, and Sunswick (Brunswick) Mills, an oil cloth factory. By the mid-20th century, there were numerous low-rise commercial structures and warehouses, often set within open lots and parking areas. Many firms were involved in building trades, including suppliers of marble, lumber, iron, and steel.

### **Barkin, Levin & Company**

New York City became an important center of garment production in the mid-19th century. Following the introduction of various sewing machines, starting in France in 1830, ready to wear clothing gradually gained popularity. Though initially marketed to working class Americans, by the start of the 20th century these garments attracted an increasing number of middle-class customers who tracked trends in magazines and shopped in department stores.

Barkin, Levin & Company, a successful manufacturer of women's coats, was founded in 1926 by Dan W. Barkin, David Levin and William Prokocimer, who were described as having "been identified with the cloak industry for a number of years."<sup>8</sup> The company received a trademark for "Lassie Maid," a line of women's, misses', and small women's coats, in 1927. Later, in 1940, the company introduced Lassie Junior, establishing a department for younger women.<sup>9</sup>

The 1920s was a particularly prosperous time for the garment industry, when designers began to adapt French fashion trends to American needs. During this period, manufacturers started to concentrate in midtown Manhattan's Garment District, settling between Fifth and Ninth Avenues. Most of these businesses leased space in recently constructed loft buildings that were close to major department stores, such as B. Altman & Company, Lord & Taylor, and Macy's.

Barkin Levin was initially located at 213 West 38th Street, followed by 246 West 38th Street. In July 1935, it moved to the recently constructed Navarre Building at 512 Seventh Avenue, where it operated for several decades.<sup>10</sup> An advertisement described the company's showroom headquarters as a "vast factory" where "you'll encounter a veritable army of dressmaker dummies."<sup>11</sup>

So that Barkin Levin could produce "high fashion at moderate prices" the designing staff traveled to Paris twice a year to study, adapt and modify current trends for the American market.<sup>12</sup> Throughout the 1950s, Barkin Levin was a leading firm. *The New York Herald Tribune* reported that it "supplies more than 2,500 customers, covering virtually every sizable community in the country, sells something more than a quarter-million garments a year."<sup>13</sup>

In 1956 the company purchased a large parcel in Long Island City to build a new factory and office pavilion. Dan W. Barkin (1899-1969), the company's long-term president, was probably responsible for hiring Ulrich Franzen to build the Long Island City factory. He was remembered as "an enlightened employer" who was "a key figure in handling the industry's labor negotiations."<sup>14</sup> Barkin was also a founder of the National Recovery Board (1935), later known as the National Board of the Coat and Suit Industry and was associated with the Merchants Ladies' Garment Association.<sup>15</sup>

Barkin Levin experienced a number of financial setbacks in the late 1960s and merged with the clothing manufacturer American Bazaar in 1974. At this time, it became known as Junior Lass. Sales, however, dwindled and in 1975 Lassie Junior closed the Manhattan showroom. The following year, Lassie Junior became part of Youthcraft Coats and Suits, which went out of business in 1983.<sup>16</sup>

## Architect: Ulrich Franzen

Barkin, Levin & Company opened “a consolidated garment factory”<sup>17</sup> in Long Island City in the fall of 1958. The complex was designed by Ulrich Franzen (1921-2012), a notable mid-20th century modern architect. It was one of his earliest works in New York City and one of his first commercial commissions.

Franzen was born in Dusseldorf, Germany. He immigrated to the United States in 1936. After graduating from Williams College (‘42), where he studied art history,<sup>18</sup> he attended the Harvard Graduate School of Design (‘48), where he studied under architect and Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius, who was chair of the architecture department from 1937 to 1952. Classmates included such innovative mid-20th century modern architects as I. M. Pei (‘46), Paul Rudolph (‘47), and Victor Lundy (‘48). These architects would later be recognized by architectural historian Michael Meredith for:

... their distinctive formal inventions, their skillful combinations of pragmatism and experimentation with figurative geometric shapes, innovative structures and a deep interest in materials and surfaces; in other words, their willingness to escape the “box.”<sup>19</sup>

Following graduation, Franzen worked for five years with Pei, who was then director of architecture at Webb & Knapp, Inc., a real estate development company owned by William Zeckendorf.

Franzen formed his own architectural firm, Ulrich Franzen & Associates, in 1955. The firm designed more than 60 houses, mostly in the suburbs of New York City. Like the Barkin Levin office pavilion, some were described as “exercises in structural expression,” such as his own house in Rye, New York, which was published in *The New York*

*Times* in November 1955.<sup>20</sup> Praised for its diamond-shaped roof system, the house contained eight slim posts and unbroken interior space. Other early residential commissions with a pavilion-like character include: the Beattie House (Rye, New York, 1958), the Weissman House (Rye, New York, 1958-59), and the Henry & Shavaun Towers House (Essex, Connecticut, c. 1957-61). These glass-walled residences were described in *Architectural Forum* as “open to their surroundings, imaginatively roofed, immaculately detailed.”<sup>21</sup>

Early in his career, Franzen designed a number of commercial buildings. In addition to Barkin Levin, he built Guilford Woolen Mills (1959) in Guilford, Maine, Helen Whiting Inc., a dress factory (1961) in Pleasantville, New York, and the Philip Morris Headquarters (1962) in Richmond, Virginia.<sup>22</sup>

Franzen won the Arnold W. Brunner Memorial Prize in 1962. He was praised for being “oriented toward quality work, personal service, and the assertion of humanistic values.”<sup>23</sup> In 1966-68 Franzen was president of the Architectural League of New York.

In subsequent decades, he adopted a heavier, vaguely Brutalist mode, designing masonry buildings in New York City for the Watchtower and Tract Society (1967-69), Harlem School of the Arts (1974-78), Hunter College (1975-84), and Phillip Morris (1983-84). Approved by the Landmarks Preservation Commission in 1967, the Watchtower project in Brooklyn Heights was the “first entirely new building to test the concept of ‘appropriateness’ in a New York City historic district.”<sup>24</sup> Franzen later served as a commissioner on the Landmarks Preservation Commission from 1992 to 1994.

## Choosing Queens

After World War II, a significant number of corporations moved from Manhattan to the suburbs,

such as General Foods, IBM, and Bell Laboratories. During this period, Barkin Levin outgrew the Garment District. Dan W. Barkin told *The New York Times* that manufacturing conditions had become “expensive, cramped and archaic.”<sup>25</sup> He was also quoted as saying that continuing there was “economically unrealistic.”<sup>26</sup>

Though some garment industry experts saw substantial benefits in relocating to “outlying metropolitan areas or to the suburbs,” *Women’s Wear Daily* reported in 1956 that there was no clear verdict. Rents were certainly lower outside New York City and working conditions sometimes improved, but labor costs were judged as comparable and the recruitment of skilled needle workers could be difficult, especially for seasonal businesses like coat manufacturers.<sup>27</sup>

Such factors shaped Barkin Levin’s decision to remain in New York City, where a two-acre site was acquired in Long Island City in June 1956. According to Morton S. Levin, vice president in charge of marketing, “extensive surveys were made before the site was selected.” This location was chosen because “we want skilled labor, and, in our thinking, the solution is to stay close to New York.”<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Long Island City is near major transit routes, less than two miles from the Triborough (now Robert F. Kennedy) Bridge, the Grand Central Parkway, and the Queensboro (now Ed Koch Queensboro) Bridge (a New York City Landmark). Despite being “just fifteen minutes away from Seventh Avenue,” *The New York Herald Tribune* claimed that Barkin Levin had “deserted midtown Manhattan.”<sup>29</sup>

## Design and Construction

Franzen filed for a building permit (NB 64/57) in early 1957 and construction of the 50,000 square-foot plant was completed in September 1958. The engineer was Seelye Stevenson Value & Knecht,<sup>30</sup>

and the contractor was Schumacher & Forelle, Inc., of Great Neck, New York.

The official opening took place on November 8, 1958. *Women’s Wear Daily* reported: “More than 2,000 buyers, fellow manufacturers, union officials, suppliers and associates” attended the ribbon cutting ceremony, including Queens Borough President John T. Clancy.<sup>31</sup>

A two-page advertising spread in *Women’s Wear Daily* celebrated the event, with a full-page image of the office pavilion accompanied by the following text: “This is Where Lassie Coats Are Made. It is a magnificent, modern structure . . . To all of you – our wonderful friends throughout every segment of this industry – who have made this program possible, this building is gratefully dedicated.”<sup>32</sup>

The Department of Buildings issued a certificate of occupancy a month later, in December 1958. The plant was described as: fireproof, one story tall, 17-18 feet high, incorporating a factory, office, and loading platform. Franzen divided the site into distinct sections. The south section was occupied by the factory (not part of the landmark site) – a one-acre concrete block structure that consolidated most stages of coat production, including storage, cutting, sewing, and warehousing.<sup>33</sup>

On the north part of the site was the office pavilion. Designed to read as freestanding, the entrance faced away from the factory and loading dock, toward a parking area and 33rd Avenue. This arrangement separated management from production, while also isolating the office pavilion from the immediate neighborhood. In effect, Franzen created a small industrial park, comparable to the larger ones that corporations were building in the New York suburbs.<sup>34</sup>

Franzen’s office pavilion expressed a stylish modern sensibility, one that reflected Barkin Levin’s

concern for fashion and the welfare of its employees. It contained the “cafeteria, library, reception, bookkeeping, and executive office areas.”<sup>35</sup> In contrast to the windowless factory structure, three of the four facades were glass.

The structural system is the building’s most unusual and visually distinctive feature. According to Bethlehem Steel, which supplied the “structural shapes,” the pavilion was constructed with “nine 30 ft by 30 ft lightweight steel umbrellas. Each umbrella is supported on a column.”<sup>36</sup>

Franzen used similar umbrellas in the house he built for Henry & Shavaun Towers.<sup>37</sup> Sometimes called the “Umbrella Pavilion,” *The Architectural Record* described this Connecticut home as “carefully engineered ... entirely free standing and self-bracing.”<sup>38</sup> Alan Dunn, a prolific cartoonist who often lampooned mid-20th century modern architecture, in an undated cartoon with two men discussing a similar house, mocked Franzen’s structural system with the following remark: “Well, all I asked for was a roof over my head.”<sup>39</sup>

Visible from the exterior and through the glass walls, the inverted umbrellas of the Barkin Levin building form a shallow, origami-like canopy. Despite having straight edges, they have a somewhat organic quality that recalls the thin concrete shell umbrellas that Italian engineer Giorgio Baroni devised in the late 1930s and the mushroom-like columns that Frank Lloyd Wright used in the S. C. Johnson Wax Headquarters (1936-39) in Racine, Wisconsin, as well as the concurrent Spanish Pavilion (Jose Antonio Corrales and Ramon Vazquez Molezun) at EXPO ’58 in Brussels, which was described as resembling a “forest of steel trees.”<sup>40</sup>

According to *The Architectural Record*, the vaults form “three-hinged arches with adjacent umbrellas at their common connections.”<sup>41</sup> This type of flexible arch was known for being strong and economical. Clad with gypsum formboard panels,

the vaults rise over the interiors and extend outside the glass walls, sheltering the pavilion and the red brick pavers that border the structure on all sides.

Franzen described Bauhaus alumni Mies van der Rohe and Marcel Breuer, who likewise immigrated to the United States in the 1930s, as “very important” influences on his work. His extensive use of glass recalls Mies’ minimalist Edith Farnsworth House (1945-51), near Chicago, while the angled ceiling vaults may have been somewhat inspired by Breuer’s “butterfly” roofs, which debuted in the Geller House (1945, demolished), in Lawrence, New York. Such choices for an office building were intended to improve working conditions, increasing the openness of the interior spaces and the amount of natural light.

## Reception

Barkin Levin’s new coat factory attracted considerable attention. The earliest image of the office pavilion appeared in the August 1958 publication *Zoning New York*, submitted to the City Planning Commission, under the heading “Proposed Manufacturing Districts.” In an “M1” district, the architects Vorhees Walker Smith Smith & Haines envisioned “well-designed single-story “ranch type” plants which are attractive in appearance, quiet in operation, and good neighbors to residential and business areas.” Barkin Levin’s office pavilion was chosen to illustrate this type of structure. The caption that accompanied the image read: “Attractive offices and employee lunch room give eye appeal to approach to nuisance-free industry.”<sup>42</sup>

Articles about the factory appeared in New York City newspapers, as well as trade publications. In anticipation of the November 1958 opening, *Women’s Wear Daily* described it in late October as “one of the most outstanding production plants in any field.”<sup>43</sup> Particular attention was paid to the plant’s anticipated efficiency. *The New York Times*

reported there had been “eight weeks of trial operations” and that the introduction of new methods “would reduce by as much as 80 per cent the time required to make a quality coat.” The company hoped the new facility would “turn out 4,000 coats a day at peak operation.”<sup>44</sup>

In November 1958, the Queens Chamber of Commerce awarded the Barkin Levin factory “first prize in the industrial class.” Among the ten winners, only the office pavilion was illustrated in *The New York Times*, which the reporter described, somewhat incorrectly, as an “ultramodern glass-walled clothing factory.”<sup>45</sup> A bronze plaque, probably installed on the exterior before 1960, states that the award was given “For Excellence In Design And Civic Value Of This Building.”

The factory and pavilion were discussed in many architectural publications. *The Architectural Record* claimed the complex established “a number of firsts in the garment industry,” such as its location outside the Garment District, for using “new basic research into industry problems,” and for turning to Franzen for “much more complete services than is usual.”<sup>46</sup>

The Bethlehem Steel Company, which supplied the steel framing, published a three-page advertisement in the July 1959 issue of *The Architectural Record* that highlighted Barkin Levin and the contrast between the office and factory structures. A caption read, “the office building was conceived as a glass-walled multipurpose pavilion, while the plant building is a conventional steel-framed structure.” The ad also stated that the steel umbrellas used in the pavilion were “unique” and “low cost.”<sup>47</sup>

## Later History

In December 1959, *Women’s Wear Daily* reported that Barkin Levin was adding 16,000 square feet of “loft space” to the Manhattan office and that the

Long Island City facility “may be sold.”<sup>48</sup> Though not sold at that time, Barkin Levin did close the less than two-year-old factory, announcing in June 1960 that the plant had been leased to the Structural Display Company.<sup>49</sup>

Established in 1945, this Queens design firm fabricated exhibition displays and commercial fixtures. A whimsical 1965 advertisement proudly featured a pencil sketch of the office pavilion, surrounded by people and cars, with an elephant standing on the roof. The company was described as having a network of affiliations in nine countries, with the memory of an elephant for “every small detail.”<sup>50</sup> The Structural Display Company purchased the building in 1989.

Every edition of the *American Institute of Architects Guide to New York City* has singled out the Barkin Levin office pavilion, with some entries specifically commenting on its physical condition and surroundings. In 1968 the authors Norval White and Elliot Willensky observed: “Crisp lines and sophisticated detailing somehow never mixed with the drab surroundings – actually seemed overwhelmed by them.”<sup>51</sup> The pavilion was described in 1978 as “ill maintained,” and in 2000, “Incomparably crisp architecture, poorly maintained, and moderately, but badly, altered.”<sup>52</sup>

*Queens Modern*, a website devoted to documenting mid-20th century architecture throughout Queens, singled out the pavilion for praise, calling it: “a tour-de-force of mid-century design hiding in plain sight ... very striking ... a definite highlight” in Franzen’s career.<sup>53</sup>

The current owner, Stimdel Properties, refurbished the pavilion in 2009. At this time insensitive alterations by the previous owner were reversed, including changes that expanded the pavilion’s footprint on the north side that enclosed exterior space beneath the roof. The renovation preserved the significant architectural characteristics

of the building including its structural system, umbrella roof, and fully transparent glass walls between columns. The design placed new glazed walls in their original plane beneath the overhanging roof, and inserted a new front entrance and a south-facing extension. These understated boxy additions are clad with horizontal wood lattice and project below the cantilevered roof canopy, without disrupting significant architectural features.

## **Conclusion**

The Barkin, Levin & Company Office Pavilion is an unusual and distinguished example of mid-20th century modern office design. Designed by the noted German American architect Ulrich Franzen, this elegant building features an eye-catching roof canopy supported by an innovative umbrella-like structural system that is unlike any in New York City.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> “The New Long Island City,” *The New York Times*, February 20, 1870.

<sup>2</sup> Sergey Kadinisky, *Hidden Waters Blog*, <https://hiddenwatersblog.wordpress.com/2017/06/13/sunswick/>

<sup>3</sup> See <https://archaeology.cityofnewyork.us/collection/nyc-timeline/kiefts-war>

<sup>4</sup> *New York As It Is* (1876), 262.

<sup>5</sup> F.Y.I, *The New York Times*, see: <https://www.nytimes.com/1995/06/11/nyregion/fyi-811695.html>.

<sup>6</sup> “The Fall of Ravenswood, Old Aristocratic Queens” *The Bowery Boys*, <https://www.boweryboyshistory.com/2017/09/fall-ravenswood-old-aristocratic-queens.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Sergey Kadinsky, *Ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> “Barkin-Levin & Co. is New Cloak Concern,” *Women’s Wear*, August 19, 1926, 23.

<sup>9</sup> “Young Coats Priced for Volume,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, January 4, 1940, 9.

<sup>10</sup> The receiving and shipping branch was at 3 West 61st Street. See “Robot Put To Work on Coat Making,” *New York Herald Tribune*, August 14, 1955. A6.

<sup>11</sup> “He Has You Sized Up,” *Logansport Pharos Tribune*, March 15, 1955.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>13</sup> “Robot Put To Work on Coat Making,” *The New York Herald Tribune*, April 14, 1955.

<sup>14</sup> “Dan W. Barkin,” obituary, *Women’s Wear Daily*, December 24, 1969

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>16</sup> “Youthcraft Coats, Junior Lass merge,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, January 16, 1976.

<sup>17</sup> “Garment Maker Find 7th Ave. Archaic, Moves,” *The New York Herald Tribune*, November 7, 1959, B5.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Meredith, “Ulrich Franzen,” *Art Forum* (January 17, 2014), viewed online.

<sup>19</sup> Michael Meredith, “Beyond the Harvard Box,” (2006), see: [https://www.gsd.harvard.edu/exhibition/beyond-the-](https://www.gsd.harvard.edu/exhibition/beyond-the-harvard-box/)

[harvard-box/](https://www.gsd.harvard.edu/exhibition/beyond-the-harvard-box/)

<sup>20</sup> Peter Blake, *The Architecture of Ulrich Franzen: Selected Works* (Birkhaeuser Verlag,1999), 44.

<sup>21</sup> “Ulrich Franzen: Architecture in Transition,” *Architectural Forum* (May 1963), 142.

<sup>22</sup> “Ulrich Franzen: Architecture in Transition.”

<sup>23</sup> “Winner of the Brunner Prize Named,” *The New York Times*, April 17, 1962, 27.

<sup>24</sup> *Context/Contrast: New Architecture in Historic Districts 1967-2009* (New York Landmarks Preservation Foundation, 2013), 13.

<sup>25</sup> “New Integrated Garment Plant Starts Output Today,” *The New York Times*, November 7, 1958, 37.

<sup>26</sup> “Garment Maker Finds 7th Ave. Archaic, Moves.”

<sup>27</sup> “Plant Expansion Discussed,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, April 17, 1956,

<sup>28</sup> “Barkin Levin & Company Opens New Million Dollar Plant,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, November 7, 1958, 11.

<sup>29</sup> “Garment Maker Finds 7th Ave, Archaic, Moves.”

<sup>30</sup> Founded in New York City as Elwyn E. Seeley & Company in 1912, this structural engineering firm is currently called STV.

<sup>31</sup> “Modern Era Factory,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, November 10, 1958, 10.

<sup>32</sup> Advertisement, *Women’s Wear Daily*, November 7, 1958, 12-13.

<sup>33</sup> “Garment Maker Finds 7th Avenue Archaic, Moves.”

<sup>34</sup> James Byron Kenyon, *Industrial Localization and Metropolitan Growth* (1963), 150-156. The author also mentions Barkin Levin’s “consolidated” scheme on page 150.

<sup>35</sup> Bethlehem Steel advertisement, *The Architectural Record* (July 1959), 288.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>37</sup> Breuer designed the Preston Robinson House (1947-48) in Williamstown, Massachusetts. Franzen spoke of visiting it in a 2012 interview. Like the Towers house, part of the angled roof extended beyond the glass walls,

shading an adjacent terrace.

<sup>38</sup> *Architectural Record Houses of 1960*, May 1960, 98, viewed at <https://ofhouses.com/post/178626133768/597-ulrich-franzen-shavaun-and-henry-towers>

<sup>39</sup> The cartoon probably appeared in the *Architectural Record*. Though a date has not been determined, it was also published in *Architecture Observed* (Architectural Record Books, 1971), 25.

<sup>40</sup> *Curator* (Autumn 1958), 43.

<sup>41</sup> “Fresh New Concept For Garment Manufacturing Plant and Office Building,” *The Architectural Record*, February 1959, 202.

<sup>42</sup> *Zoning New York City* (August 1958), 177, viewed at Googlebooks.com

<sup>43</sup> “Seen and Heard in the Market,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, October 30, 1958, 44.

<sup>44</sup> “New Integrated Garment Plant Starts Output Today.”

<sup>45</sup> “Airport Building Receives Award,” *The New York*

*Times*, November 30, 1958, R1. The airport building was the arrivals building at New York International (now Kennedy) Airport.

<sup>46</sup> “Fresh New Concept,” 198.

<sup>47</sup> Bethlehem Steel advertisement.

<sup>48</sup> “Barkin Adds Loft Space,” *Women’s Wear Daily*, December 1, 1959, 11.

<sup>49</sup> Research for this report did not reveal a clear reason for closing the Queens plant.

<sup>50</sup> Structural Design advertisement, *Sales Management* (November 19, 1965), 325.

<sup>51</sup> Norval White and Elliot Willensky, *AIA Guide to New York City*, First edition, 1968, 355.

<sup>52</sup> *AIA Guide to New York City*, Revised edition, 1978, 507; *AIA Guide to New York City*, 4th edition, 2000, 804.

<sup>53</sup> For the entry on the *Queens Modern* website, see <https://queensmodern.com/project/barkin-levin-co-inc/>

## Findings and Designation

### Barkin, Levin & Company Office Pavilion

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of this building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Barkin, Levin & Company Office Pavilion has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City, state, and the nation.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 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 as a Landmark the Barkin, Levin & Company Office Pavilion and designates Borough of Queens Tax Map Block 522, Lot 29 (in part) as its Landmark Site, consisting of the portion of the lot bounded by a line beginning at the northwest corner of the lot (at the southeast corner of 33rd Avenue and 12th Street), extending easterly along northern lot line of Lot 29 to a curb that forms a line that divides the landscaped area surrounding the office pavilion from the paved parking area to the east, then south along this curb line to the north wall of the existing factory, then west along the north wall of the existing factory to the western lot line of Lot 29, and then north along the western lot line to the point of beginning, as shown in the attached map.



**Barkin, Levin & Company Office Pavilion, east facade**

**12-12 33rd Avenue, Queens**

LPC, December 2023



**Barkin, Levin & Company Office Pavilion, east facade, view south**  
**12-12 33rd Avenue, Queens**  
LPC, December 2023



**Barkin, Levin & Company Office Pavilion, east facade, view north**  
**12-12 33rd Avenue, Queens**  
LPC, October 2023



**Barkin, Levin & Company Office Pavilion**  
**west facade, facing 12th Street**  
LPC, December 2023



**North facade, facing 33rd Avenue**  
LPC, December 2023



**North facade and wall, view west**  
LPC, December 2023



**South facade and east path**  
LPC, December 2023



**East facade and wall, south corner**  
LPC, December 2023



Graphic Source: MapPLUTO, Edition 22v2, Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, DHW, Date: 12.19.2023