

RITZ TOWER, 465 Park Avenue (aka 461- 465 Park Avenue, and 101 East 57th Street), Manhattan. Built 1925-27; Emery Roth, architect, with Thomas Hastings.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1312, Lot 70.

On July 16, 2002 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Ritz Tower, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No.2). The hearing had been advertised in accordance with provisions of law. Ross Moscovitz, representing the owners of the cooperative spoke in opposition to designation. At the time of designation, he took no position. Mark Levine, from the Jamestown Group, representing the owners of the commercial space, took no position on designation at the public hearing. Bill Higgins represented these owners at the time of designation and spoke in favor. Three witnesses testified in favor of designation, including representatives of State Senator Liz Kruger, the Landmarks Conservancy and the Historic Districts Council. In addition, the Commission has received letters in support of designation from Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney, from Community Board Five, and from architectural historian, John Kriskiewicz. There was also one letter from a building resident opposed to designation.

Summary

The Ritz Tower Apartment Hotel was constructed in 1925 at the premier crossroads of New York's Upper East Side, the corner of 57th Street and Park Avenue, where the exclusive shops and artistic enterprises of 57th Street met apartment buildings of ever-increasing height and luxury on Park Avenue. Designed by the inventive and prolific architect Emery Roth, who was responsible for many luxury apartment buildings throughout Manhattan, the Ritz Tower was intended to be the *ne plus ultra* of apartment living. Thomas Hastings, the surviving partner of the prominent architectural firm of Carrère & Hastings helped to create the classically-inspired design. The developer, journalist Arthur Brisbane, hoped to increase the building's appeal by hiring the Ritz-Carlton Company to manage the building and its restaurants, as well as by lending use of its famous name. Constructed as an apartment hotel, with rooms for transients as well as long-term residents, the building provided food service from central kitchens via dumb waiters serving pantries on each floor. The absence of individual kitchens allowed the developer to increase the height of the building since it was then not subject to the height regulations that applied to standard apartment buildings. At the time of its construction, the Ritz Tower was the tallest residential building in New York, with panoramic views in all directions. The lower floors, which are more easily visible from the street, are enriched by highly sculptural ornament, including putti, urns and rusticated stone. Each setback of the tower is marked by pilasters, pediments and balustrades and is highlighted by large stone fleches which carry the viewer's eye upward along the buildings's height. The tower, crowned by a pyramidal roof with a tall obelisk, further increases the sense of height which was such an important factor when the building was constructed. Throughout its history, the Ritz Tower has been home to wealthy and well-known residents, as well as famous commercial enterprises, including William Randolph Hearst and Marion Davies, Charles of the Ritz House of Beauty, and Le Pavillon, one of America's first authentic, and most influential French restaurants.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Neighborhood¹

The Ritz Tower is located on the corner of East 57th Street and Park Avenue, two streets that epitomized Manhattan's gilded life in the 1920s.

*In the golden 1920s the favorite nesting place ... was Park Avenue, where apartment house living reached something like social elegance. The vogue for mansions on Fifth Avenue has passed; but two blocks east there had arisen super-apartment houses subject to rigid social selection...Therefore the "swank" set took naturally to Park Avenue; and the "swank" shops followed them uptown.*²

The idea of Park Avenue as "the street par excellence for fashionable apartment houses"³ was quite new in the 1920s. The street was originally a noisy and smelly passageway for steam trains in transit to Grand Central Terminal, and therefore considered liveable only for those who could not afford to go elsewhere. A deadly train accident in 1902 led to a changeover to electrified trains, a major rebuilding of the terminal, and an extensive redevelopment of the area north of Grand Central. The train tracks were buried underneath Park Avenue, allowing for a broad, landscaped street without steam and smoke, finally suitable for residential building.⁴ The development of Park Avenue occurred mostly during the second and third decades of the twentieth century by which time apartment dwelling had become the norm. Since the New York Central Railroad continued to own the property north of the Terminal, this organization controlled what was built there. Both sides of Park Avenue gradually filled with luxury twelve- to twenty-story elevator apartment houses, creating solid street walls along the broad thoroughfare.

Fifty-seventh Street was a particularly wide cross-town street filled with elegant buildings, which came to be known as New York's "Rue de la Paix."⁵ West of Fifth Avenue, the street was dominated by arts-affiliated organizations, such as Carnegie Hall (1891, William B. Tuthill), the American Fine Arts Society building (1891-92, Henry J. Hardenbergh), Steinway Hall (1925, Warren & Wetmore), and the Chalif Normal School of Dancing (1916, G.A. & H. Boehm). In addition there were numerous places for artists to live and work, including studio apartments such as the Osborne (1883-85, James E. Ware), those at 130 and 140 West 57th (1907-08, Pollard & Steinam) and the Rodin Studios (1916-17, Cass Gilbert). (All these

buildings are designated New York City Landmarks.) East of Fifth Avenue the character of the street changed to "high-class commercial development."⁶ After the First World War, the elegant late nineteenth century mansions that centered around Fifth Avenue began to be replaced by office buildings and retail stores, such as Warren & Wetmore's Heckscher Building of 1923, the Bergdorf Goodman block in 1928, and two buildings by Cross & Cross: the New York Trust Company Building of 1930 and the Tiffany Store (1940). Between Fifth and Madison Avenues, 57th Street had become the commercial center of the American art world and the epitome of good taste with its numerous art galleries and antique shops, followed slightly later by interior decorators. Exemplars included the galleries of dealers such as Joseph Duveen, M. Knoedler & Company, Parke-Bernet, and Frederick Keppel & Company. The Todhunter Company, located in its own unusual building with a facade reminiscent of medieval England, carried mantels, fire screens and other products associated with the hearth. From Fifth to Madison Avenues, 57th Street was also the location of a number of exclusive women's specialty shops catering to New York's wealthiest clientele, including Jay-Thorpe, Milgrim's and L.P. Hollander & Company. While there were many elegant residences interspersed with the commercial buildings throughout its length, 57th Street from Third Avenue east to the river became almost exclusively residential, and even more elite the farther east one traveled.

Developer Arthur Brisbane⁷

In 1925, as New York's economy was expanding and its office towers were rising higher and higher, the well-known newspaper columnist and editor Arthur Brisbane began building New York's tallest apartment hotel on the corner of Fifty-Seventh Street and Park Avenue. Brisbane (1864-1936) was the editor of the New York daily *The Evening Journal*, and later the *Mirror*, part of William Randolph Hearst's widely read chain of newspapers which spread from coast to coast.⁸ Brisbane also wrote an extremely popular column "Today," which ran on the front page of all the Hearst-owned newspapers in the country, while his other column, "The Week" was carried by 1200 newspapers nationwide. At the height of his career, Brisbane's ideas were followed avidly throughout America and he was one of the highest-paid journalists of his time.

Brisbane's father, Albert Brisbane had written a popular column for *The New York Tribune* for many years, and influenced his son to choose the same profession. Arthur Brisbane began as a reporter for *The Sun*, later becoming that paper's London correspondent. He worked as managing editor for several other newspapers before being hired in 1897 by William Randolph Hearst for his new newspaper, *The Evening Journal*. Brisbane's commentaries were extremely popular and helped propel the newspaper to having one of the highest circulations in New York City. Brisbane's columns treated current events, interspersed with "Sociological discussions," on wide-ranging topics. "By reducing his column of editorial comment to the utmost of simplicity in choice of words he readily conveyed what he had to say to his readers."⁹

In addition to being a valued employee, Brisbane became Hearst's good friend and socialized with him. Hearst's example led Brisbane into real estate investment, in New York and at other locations along the East Coast. At the time of his death, Brisbane's holdings included three large properties in Manhattan, several blocks in Queens, and a spacious estate in New Jersey, as well as a house on Long Island, and estates in the Catskill Mountains and in Florida. Together, (under the name of the Hearst-Brisbane Properties) the two men developed several projects, including the Ziegfeld Theatre (demolished) and the Warwick Hotel, both on Sixth Avenue at 54th Street. The Ritz Tower enterprise was Brisbane's alone, however and he began to acquire lots on 57th Street and Park Avenue as early as 1920.¹⁰ Brisbane borrowed \$4 million to finance this building and determined to create the largest and most luxurious apartment building in New York. Emery Roth, an architect whose important career as a designer of luxury apartment buildings was in its early stages, was chosen as architect. According to Roth, "It is Mr. Brisbane's intention to make this building a monument in which the citizens of New York shall take pride, and he will spare no expense commensurate with the purpose of the building to produce this result."¹¹ For reasons that are not entirely clear, Thomas Hastings, the surviving partner of the prominent architectural firm of Carrère & Hastings was brought in later to contribute to the design.

Emery Roth¹²

Emery Roth (1871-1948) was born in Galzecs, Hungary to a Jewish family of ample means. Their circumstances changed dramatically after the death of

his father when Emery was thirteen and his mother decided that her son should emigrate alone to America. With painting and drawing as his hobbies and no formal training, he found work with an architect in Bloomington, Illinois. He spent three years there, where he learned the classical orders by copying plates, and worked with a local builder to learn construction as well. Roth eventually accepted a position as a draftsman with Burnham & Root, working on the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Roth assisted Jules Harder with the drawings for the celebrated Palace of Fine Arts, and drew plans for two other small pavilions. He also assisted Richard Morris Hunt with modifications to his plans for the Administration Building, impressing the architect so much that Hunt promised him a job if he ever came to New York.

Unable to get work in Chicago after the fair, Roth moved to New York and was hired to work in Hunt's office. While drafting interior perspectives for The Breakers, the Newport, Rhode Island mansion of Cornelius Vanderbilt, Roth became acquainted with Ogden Codman, a noted architect, interior designer and socialite. After Hunt's death Roth accepted a position with Codman under whose tutelage he became more familiar with historical styles.

In 1898, Roth purchased the architectural practice of Theodore G. Stein & Eugene Yancey Cohen for \$1,000. Their agreement allowed Roth to represent himself as a partner in Stein, Cohen & Roth in order to capitalize on the established name of the firm; in reality, Roth worked on his own. The firm is credited with the Irving Place Theater (1899-1900, demolished) and the Saxony Apartments (1901, 250 West 82nd Street), Roth's first apartment house design.

Roth's first major commission under his own name was the Hotel Belleclaire (1901-03, 2171-2179 Broadway, a designated New York City Landmark) which exhibits elements of the French Beaux Arts and Viennese Secession styles. Shortly thereafter he was commissioned by the real estate developers Leo and Alexander Bing to design a series of apartment buildings in Washington Heights, beginning a close association and enabling Roth to continually refine his apartment house designs. During the 1920s, with an apartment building boom occurring in New York, Roth created numerous small hotels and apartment buildings, for the Bing brothers as well as larger ones for other developers such as Samuel Minskoff and Harris H. Uris. During this time his designs became more classically-inspired, while also incorporating elements of the Art Deco style.

The grandeur and lavishness, as well as the huge size of the Ritz Tower cemented Roth's reputation as a designer of luxury housing. After this project, Roth went on to create a host of luxury residential skyscrapers, including the Oliver Cromwell Hotel on West 72nd Street (1928, located within the Upper West Side/ Central Park West Historic District), the San Remo Apartments (1929-30, 145 Central Park West, a designated New York City Landmark), the Beresford (1928-29, 211 Central Park West, a designated New York City Landmark), the Eldorado Apartments (1929-31, 300 Central Park West, in association with architects Margon & Holder, a designated New York City Landmark) and many other buildings within the Upper West Side/ Central Park West Historic District as well as the Riverside/ West End Historic District and the expanded Carnegie Hill Historic District.

After 1932, the name of the firm changed to Emery Roth & Sons to reflect the addition of Roth's two sons, and later his grandson. The Normandy Apartments (1938-39, a designated New York City Landmark) was created by this firm and is considered one of Roth's last great apartment house designs. The younger Roths continued a prolific and successful practice after Emery's death in 1947, creating numerous office towers in the contemporary idiom.

From the 1920s on, the signature of a major Roth apartment house was its tower(s). Initially designed to conceal water tanks, the towers evolved into a major design element, fusing the functional with the aesthetic. In another innovation, Roth's sons credit their father with the creation of the foyer plan for his apartments. In Roth's best designs the rooms seem effortlessly interlocked, with wasteful corridor space reduced to a minimum, and spacious well-lit rooms.

Thomas Hastings¹³

Thomas Hastings (1860-1929) was the primary designer for the architectural partnership of Carrère & Hastings, one of the most distinguished firms in the United States during the early twentieth century. John M. Carrère and Thomas Hastings began working together in 1885, after both men had returned to New York from study in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux Arts and had been employed in the office of McKim, Mead & White. Their first commissions were in Florida, where they worked for Henry Flagler in his promotion of the development of that state. They designed numerous hotels, churches and houses in Florida, as well as in Virginia and New Jersey. After winning the competition for New York's Public Library (1898-1911, a designated New York City Landmark) with a

French Renaissance design, Carrère & Hastings became recognized as one of the country's leading architectural firms. Their work spanned many types of structures and included public buildings, such as a number of the Carnegie-funded branch libraries in New York (many are designated New York City Landmarks), the Staten Island Borough Hall (a designated New York City Landmark), and the House and Senate Office Buildings in Washington, D. C., churches, and institutional structures, including those for Yale and Cornell Universities, as well as the Carnegie Institute, and residences for clients such as Eli Root, Henry C. Frick, and Murray Guggenheim.

Due to their early training, the firm espoused the classical tradition and most of the buildings designed by Carrère & Hastings were in the French Renaissance style, although Italian and English Renaissance precedents were also used occasionally. Hastings was a prolific author as well as a designer and wrote many articles about the appropriateness of the French Renaissance style for contemporary buildings. His rationale was that American life of the period was still motivated by the same forces that had brought about the Renaissance and therefore, this style of architecture could still meet the current needs.

After Carrère's death in 1911, Hastings continued to work under the firm's name. His later career included the design of several large office buildings in New York, often in conjunction with other architects, and included the Standard Oil Building (1926, a designated New York City Landmark), the Macmillan Building (1924), and the Cunard Building (1919-21, a designated New York City Landmark).

Hastings was brought in to collaborate on the design of the Ritz Tower after Roth had created preliminary plans. Hastings was known for his great skill at decorative details and is probably responsible for many of the ornamental features on the lower floors, including the classical cartouches, urns and putti. In addition, Hastings designed the duplex apartment for Arthur Brisbane on the nineteenth and twentieth floors.

Apartment Hotels¹⁴

The Ritz Tower was designed as an apartment hotel, a hybrid type that provided attractively furnished public rooms and restaurants on the lower floors, and suites of private rooms (sitting rooms, chambers and bathrooms, but no kitchens) above. This type of building first appeared in the 1880s when apartments were just beginning to be more common in Manhattan. Apartment hotels helped city residents accept the

necessity of this new type of living arrangement, when it became clear that multi-family housing was the only practical way to house the large numbers of people who wanted to live on the small island. Wealthy families in particular, were reluctant to give up their privacy and individuality to live in large buildings with numerous other families. Elegant hotels however, with their high level of services and splendidly decorated public rooms had long been acceptable for travelers. Apartment hotels usually served a permanent residential population, but sometimes had facilities for transients as well. In the 1880s, this type of building was sometimes called a “home club” and combined elements of hotel and cooperative living.¹⁵ After the First World War, when many people arrived in New York and needed housing, this type of arrangement grew in popularity. Apartment hotels were convenient for the large numbers of people who had higher incomes during the 1920s and wanted more luxurious living quarters. Since it was becoming more and more difficult to retain the numerous servants who were needed to make a grand household work, the idea of a building that required less private domestic help was very attractive. Developers tried to capitalize on this problem by providing centralized services along with luxurious decor. In apartment hotels one could still have a large and elegant suite without the need for a large staff of servants to keep it up, since meals came from a central kitchen, and laundry and cleaning services were provided.

From the developers’ point of view apartment hotels were attractive because they circumvented New York’s Tenement House Law, which included strict requirements for the height of an apartment building in relation to the width of the street on which it was located. No such restrictions were placed on apartment hotels and thus a developer could erect a much taller building than would otherwise be allowed. In addition, the Tenement House Law regulated how much light and air were necessary for interior rooms (often necessitating a different and more costly configuration of interior space) and required that apartment houses include at least one interior fire stair for each two families (which took up a large amount of interior space). Since these stairwells were not required in apartment hotels that did not have kitchens, developers found that apartment hotels allowed them to include a more “efficient” use of the space they provided.¹⁶

The Transitional Role of the Ritz Tower

World War I and an economic recession in the

early 1920s limited new building activity in New York City for several years. By the mid 1920s, demand for space was again strong and many older structures were replaced by new, taller ones, especially in the commercial and industrial centers. Modern steel-framing technology allowed buildings to rise to ever greater heights and architects debated over what form these skyscrapers should take. New York’s Building Zone Regulation of 1916, required setbacks as buildings became taller, to allow light and air to reach the streets around the towers. In a series published in *Pencil Points* in 1922, Hugh Ferriss showed how these setback laws could be implemented to produce successful designs. He and most other architects generally used traditional, classical motifs for their buildings, including columns, temples and strong cornices but stretched the spaces between the motifs vertically as the building heights grew. At the same time, new approaches to modern design were appearing in this country, beginning with the competition for Chicago’s Tribune Tower in 1922. Later in the decade, under the influence of European designers, American architects started to create designs in a simplified, and abstracted style, either Art Deco or Modern Classical.

The Ritz Tower was designed just at this turning point in American architectural design, so that it looked backward and forward at the same time. The same trends that were influencing the designs of new, tall office towers also helped to shape this residential skyscraper with its series of setbacks rising to a tall, thin tower. Nonetheless, the designers Emery Roth and Thomas Hastings were both thoroughly committed to classicism and believed strongly in its applicability to modern life. They clad the structure in traditional limestone, brick and terra cotta, with decorative details derived from the sixteenth century Italian Renaissance. The Ritz Tower’s classical cartouches, urns and pediments decorate a building which, because of modern steel framing technology was also the tallest residential structure in New York when it was built. Above the highly ornamented lower floors, the tower’s facades are quite plain, reflecting the skeletal structure, with squared window openings set in plain brick walls. On the upper floors, the ornament is used to highlight and emphasize the setbacks and the roofline, incorporating vertical fleches and small obelisks to counter the horizontality of the stringcourses and balustrades.

There were also other ways in which this building was transitional. Although the overall massing of the building with its variety of setbacks was developed

because of the requirements imposed by New York's 1916 zoning law, the architects used this necessity to create numerous terraces which enhanced the living quarters of residents. The entire concept of an apartment hotel, however, came from the previous century and although it provided the utmost in service and convenience for its patrons, it was soon to be abolished as a building type in New York.¹⁷

The Ritz Tower¹⁸

On Park Avenue the three-story rusticated Indiana limestone base of the Ritz Tower is symmetrical, with entrances in the north and south bays which flank three large, round-arched openings. The base is topped by an impressive parapet and balustrade and is embellished by cartouches, garlands, cherubs and urns in a fine display of well-carved classical detailing at a height easily visible to pedestrians. In addition to the entrances and elevator hall, the ground floor originally had a large banking office, several small shops, and a restaurant and tea room for residents. Other services, including a grill room, kitchens, barber shop and vaults were located in the basement and sub-basements.

Above the base, the Park Avenue facade sets back, rising for fifteen stories in a solid brick-faced mass, with single window openings arranged symmetrically across the facade. The second through fifth floors held administrative offices for the building, single rooms for service staff, and small suites for short-term guests. From the sixth through the eighteenth stories, each floor had two, three, and four room apartments. Centrally located were dumb waiters and service pantries with equipment to keep food hot or cold as it was received from the basement kitchens.

Above the first setback, on the nineteenth and twentieth stories, was an eighteen-room duplex apartment for Arthur Brisbane, designed and decorated especially for him by Thomas Hastings. It contained a two-story living room with wood-burning fireplace, the building's only full kitchen and living space for domestic help, as well as a full terrace made possible by the wrap-around setback.

Further setbacks occur on the twenty-first and twenty-fifth stories, leading to a tower which reaches to forty-one stories and is crowned by a standing seam copper hipped roof with a limestone lantern and an obelisk. Each setback is marked on the exterior by band courses executed in terra cotta with classically-inspired moldings, while obelisks and finials crown each corner and emphasize the overall verticality of

the building. The apartments in the tower consisted mostly of duplex and studio arrangements, with four to twelve rooms each. Those located at the setback floors had tiled outdoor terraces.

Throughout the 400 rooms of the building, the interiors were fitted with deluxe materials, such as wood paneled walls and parquet floors, in keeping with the intentions of the developer to create New York's most prestigious apartment hotel. To further this goal, Arthur Brisbane hired the Ritz-Carlton Company to manage the building, and lend its caché through the use of its well-known name.¹⁹ Cesar Ritz had established a reputation for running the most elegant and luxurious hotels in the world, beginning with his first hotel in Paris (which opened in 1898) and including New York's Ritz-Carlton which had opened on Madison Avenue and Forty-Seventh Street in 1910. The hotel management firm of Brown Wheelock: Harris Vought & Co. was also employed to aid the Ritz-Carlton Company with general management and day-to-day operations.²⁰

On October 15, 1926, the opening of the building was celebrated by an elegant dinner in the Ritz Tower's dining room.²¹ Present at the glittering occasion were city officials such as Mayor Jimmy Walker and President of the Board of Alderman, Joseph V. McKee, as well as Duncan Harris, President of the Ritz-Carlton Companies, and the two architects. While those who had already taken leases on apartments were in attendance, the guests also included many of the city's prosperous businessmen and journalists who could publicize the new venture.

After the completion of the building, critics were impressed by its great height and classical detailing. In Chase's *The Wonder City*, the Ritz Tower was called "just a little bit of Paris,"²² while Fiske Kimball wrote,

*It is such works that have emboldened imagination to conceive a city with lance-like towers set in open plots of greenery. Such an extreme will doubtless never be attained, but it augurs that many new visions still lie hidden in the future.*²³

It was also noted that "Even the 'professional' New Yorker, who has ceased to be awed by the wonders of the present building age, stops to view and contemplate the actual arrival of 'the home 500 feet high.'"²⁴

Important Tenants²⁵

A wealthy, and often famous list of tenants were attracted to the luxurious Ritz Tower. They included

such well-known names as actress Greta Garbo, “the flamboyant English author Elinor Glyn, whose short story ‘It’ had been the basis of the Hollywood hit starring Clara Bow,”²⁶ and James Seligman of the famous banking family, as well as publisher Hearst’s son, William Randolph Hearst, Jr. and his wife. Other celebrated residents included actresses Paulette Goddard, Kitty Carlisle, Deborah Kerr, and Arlene Francis, designer Valentino, and TV producer Norman Lear. Before becoming a successful playwright, Neal Simon had once visited the Ritz Tower apartment of radio comedian Goodman Ace and decided that he too would live there one day. He and his wife Marsha Mason had an apartment there in the 1980s.²⁷ The building was also home to William Hays who, as president of the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America ran the powerful “Hays Office” which could censor movies in the U.S. Amelie Baruch Banks, niece of financier Bernard Baruch lived there, as did George Gustav Heye, a wealthy banker whose private collection was the basis for what would become the Smithsonian Museum of the American Indian. The majority of the Ritz Tower’s tenants however, were prosperous businessmen and professionals whose names are less familiar today.

In the first three floors of the Ritz Tower were many small businesses, especially art galleries, art dealers, and interior decorators, including the Museum of Irish Art. The National City Bank was the earliest tenant in the large, ground floor banking space, while the well-known beauty salon, Charles of the Ritz had a site here as well as at the Ritz-Carlton, the Plaza, and the Barclay Hotels. Their retail store at the Ritz Tower closed in 1975, the last survivor of the chain. The ground floor originally housed two restaurants run by the hotel for its tenants, but they were also open to the public and accessible through an entrance on 57th Street. Murals on the restaurant wall were created by noted artist Willy Pogony, who designed sets and costumes for numerous ballets and operas of the period. In the mid-1950s, the large restaurant space was leased for the “elegantly impeccable” French restaurant, Le Pavillon. This restaurant originally opened in New York on East 55th Street and was modeled after the successful restaurant in the French pavilion at the 1939 World’s Fair. Developed by chef Henri Soulé as the premier location for French haute cuisine in America, the restaurant moved to the Ritz Tower after a dispute with the owners of the 55th Street building. *The New York Times* restaurant critic Mimi Sheraton said of Le Pavillon, “No single establishment, before or since, has done as much to

influence standards and taste in luxury restaurants in the United States.”²⁸ Although Le Pavillon maintained a successful restaurant here until 1972, it was never quite as popular at this location, partially because it was harder for limousine drivers to drop their passengers off and wait at such a busy intersection.²⁹ After the restaurant closed, the space was converted, in 1975, to the First Women’s Bank, a financial institution run by and for women.

Subsequent History³⁰

Arthur Brisbane had taken out a mortgage of \$4 million to finance this expensive building. Within three years he found he could no longer manage the heavy debt. He offered the property to his friend William Randolph Hearst who purchased it (against the advice of his financial advisors) in 1928. Brisbane gave up his luxurious duplex apartment for less ostentatious accommodations. From 1935 until 1938, Hearst lived there with actress Marion Davies (in Brisbane’s old apartment) after leaving his California residence because of the imposition of income taxes in that state. By 1938 Hearst was taking huge yearly losses on the building, and he tried to sell it but found no buyers. He discontinued mortgage payments and the Ritz Tower was taken over by the bank, as the rest of his newspaper and real estate empire also collapsed.³¹

In 1952, the property was purchased by the Sonnabend hotel chain. They hired the famous designer Dorothy Draper in 1955 to redecorate the interior, and then converted the building to co-operative apartments. There were 135 suites, ranging in size from one room studios to Brisbane’s 18-room duplex. Several apartments were kept for transient use while most were sold to residents and investors. Although co-operatively owned, the building continued to provide luxury hotel services.³²

Transient rentals were discontinued at the Ritz Tower in 1987. The building was converted to a two-unit condominium in 1991 with the upper floors residential and the retail space in the basement through third floors a commercial condominium, now a retail bookstore.

Description

The Ritz Tower is located on the northeast corner of 57th Street and Park Avenue, with its main entrance on Park. It has a three-story limestone base with tan brick above, highlighted by terra-cotta ornament on the upper stories. The building is articulated on all four facades above the adjoining buildings and rises to

a pyramidal roof above the 41st story. Setbacks occur at the 4th, 19th, 21st, 25th, and 33rd stories and are highlighted by terra cotta string courses and ornament. The commercial space on the ground story has been altered, with new windows and doors and most of the windows in the upper stories are not original.

Park Avenue Facade: The three-story, rusticated limestone base is five bays wide, with three, double-height, round-arched windows in the center. The outside bays have squared doorways, each capped by a full stone entablature carried on stone brackets. Small, squared window openings are located above these entrances. The door on the north serves as the main pedestrian entrance to the building and is fronted by a sidewalk-spanning fabric awning. The double glass and bronze doors are original. The opening on the south allows access to the main ground floor commercial area, now occupied by a large bookstore.

The windows have replacement glass but retain the bronze decorative trim at the second story level. Narrow fabric awnings are attached to each window. The third story has smaller, squared window openings with three large stone cartouches between them, centered above each of the large, arched windows. The cartouches alternate with flat stone panels between the windows. Above the third story is a stone parapet and balustrade, ornamented by carved putti and topped by urns. Two large flags fly from the balustrade. This facade sets back from Park Avenue for one bay above the third story.

The fourth story is faced with brick and is eight bays wide. Each window of the fourth story is surrounded by stone quoins and is topped by a flattened stone disk, while a terra-cotta string course runs above this level. The two end bays project slightly from the more closely arranged center grouping of windows, with quoins outlining each projection. There are also small cartouches above the end windows.

Above the fourth story the building is faced with tan brick and extends straight up with identical floors from the fourth through the eighteenth stories without a setback. The windows on the end bays of the fifth story are topped by pediments carried on flat stone pilasters, while the rest of the windows have plain, squared openings. The end bays of this section project out slightly from the center section.

The eighteenth story is double-height and sits on a pronounced terra-cotta string course. The windows of the two end bays are elaborately ornamented by a cartouche, and enframed by a double-height, broken pediment supported on brick piers. Between these two

ends bays, the squared windows share a continuous lintel. Three rectangular vents set in terra-cotta frames are located in the upper portion of this central section. Above these vents is another cornice capped by a balustrade. Stone bases are located above the brick piers and each is topped by a truncated stone obelisk.

Above the eighteenth story, the building sets back on all four sides. The next section is two stories high, (comprising the nineteenth and twentieth stories) with six plain window openings across the width of the Park Avenue facade. The windows of the nineteenth story have a continuous lintel while those of the twentieth story have individual, projecting sills. Another cornice topped by a balustrade concludes this section, marked again by a single stone obelisk at each corner.

The building then sets back again on all four sides. The next section, running between the twenty-first and the twenty-fourth stories, is five bays wide. At this section, several of the window openings have air conditioner grills cut through the wall below them. A string course with a flat stone band separates the top floor of this section, which is then crowned by another cornice and a balustrade.

Above the twenty-fourth story, the building sets back again. The next section of the building runs from the twenty-fifth to the thirty-second story and part of the terrace at the twenty-fifth story has been enclosed. The windows are paired horizontally, with two windows in each of the three bays. Several have air conditioner vents cut through the wall beneath them.

Above the thirty-second story is another broad string course topped by a balustrade. The thirty-third and thirty-fourth stories have three bays with paired windows, each bay flanked by pilasters and slightly recessed spandrels between the floors. Another string course crowns this section, which also has a balustrade and an ornate central pediment. The three bays of paired windows at the thirty-fifth story are linked by a continuous lintel. A narrow string course marks the thirty-sixth story, where plain, paired window openings rise from it. At the thirty-seventh story, the northernmost pair of windows have been joined into one opening. Another string course and railing distinguish the thirty-eighth level which also has three bays. The center bay is surrounded by elaborate terra-cotta ornament. Above this level a hipped roof recedes toward an even more narrow tower. A single bay with a double, arched window opening surrounded by terra cotta is centered in each facade. Each corner of this part of the tower appears to be rounded. A string course sets off another story, with three small

openings. The corners are capped by four large finials. A final, standing seam copper hipped roof rises above the walls, receding to a point at the top of the building which is emphasized by a large obelisk at the highest point.

57th Street Facade: The three-story, rusticated limestone base (as on Park Avenue) carries around to this facade, which is eight bays wide. It also has three, double-height, round-arched windows, with five smaller, squared windows spaced between them. There is an entrance to the bookstore in the western bay that is identical to that on the Park Avenue facade, with its ornamented frieze and full entablature. All the windows and doors to the bookstore have fabric awnings. In the eastern bay is a service entrance, while the next bay in from the east was originally a secondary entrance, serving the building's restaurant and has a flat metal awning, but it has been converted to another service entry. At the third story, there are plain, rectangular windows with flat stone panels between them. Centered above each large arched window is an ornate cartouche, similar to those on the Park Avenue facade. A cornice and a broad stone band mark the fourth story level. Above this, the facing changes to tan brick and the twelve plain rectangular windows are flanked by stone quoins with flattened stone disks above each window. The end bays project slightly, with stone quoins marking each edge, and ornament above.

The rest of the building is similar to that on Park Avenue, except that it is wider, beginning with twelve bays at the lower stories. Air conditioner vents are cut in the wall beneath numerous windows. Above the twenty-fourth story the building sets back, but the corners of the twenty-fourth story are built out, rather than recessed. The center section of the facade from

the twenty-fourth through the thirty-second story has three pairs of plain rectangular windows with a recessed bay holding a single window on each side. In general, the bandcourses, window patterns, setbacks and ornament is the same on both main facades. The only exception is the thirty-seventh story where the three pairs of double window openings have been reconfigured to three large window openings, two of which have air-conditioner vents beneath them.

Northern Facade: The northern facade of the Ritz Tower is visible above the fifteen-story building to the north. Its configuration follows that of the 57th Street facade, beginning with twelve bays and gradually setting back to three in the upper stories. At the thirty-seventh story, each of the three bays has a single large window opening, as on 57th Street.

Eastern Facade: The eastern facade is visible above the six story building to the east. It is similar to the Park Avenue facade with the following exceptions. It is nine bays wide at the lower stories, before it steps back at the same levels as the other facades. At the double-height eighteenth story, the upper section has five openings rather than the three on Park Avenue. The nineteenth and twentieth stories have eight bays and the twenty-second story has three large, multi-paned window openings. At the thirty -seventh story are three bays, each with a single, large window opening.

Report researched and written by
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NOTES

1. Kenneth Jackson, Ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1008; *New York City Guide*, (New York: Octagon Books, 1970, reprint of 1939, Federal Writer's Publication), 231-239; Robert A. M. Stern, *New York 1900, Metropolitan Architecture and Urbanism (1890-1915)* (New York: Rizzoli, 1983), 353-358; Robert A.M. Stern, et al, *New York 1930, Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), 357-367, 390, 395; Arthur Pound, *The Golden Earth, The Story of Manhattan's Landed Wealth* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 148-151; Carl Condit, *American Building Art: The Twentieth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1961), 74-76.
2. Pound, 149.

3. Pound, 148.
4. This development was made more feasible when it became clear that by constructing new buildings on columns over the tracks, they would be unaffected by the movements of the trains.
5. Stern, *New York 1930*, 357.
6. Stern, *New York 1930*, 359.
7. "Arthur Brisbane, Editor, Dies at 72 of Heart Attack," *The New York Times* (12/26/1936), 1. "Arthur Brisbane's Death Ends a Notable Newspaper Career," *The New York Times* (12/26/1936), 7.
8. The Hearst chain had a circulation of more than 1 million by 1900.
9. *The New York Times*, (12/26/1936).
10. New York County Register's Office, Liber Deeds and Conveyances. Brisbane's first purchase was lot 3, which he bought from Henry Anderson on March 4, 1920, Liber 3134, page 272. The other lots were purchased in 1923 and 1924, and in November, 1924, lots 2,3, 3 ½, and 4 ½ were transferred to Brisbane's holding company, Parkab Corporation. Brisbane however, was never able to purchase lot 1 which ran for 17 feet on 57th Street and 100 feet on Park Avenue. The family of William T. Roome, which occupied a brownstone on the property did not want to sell, holding a ground lease on the lot and accepting \$15,000 yearly rent from the Ritz Tower. They wanted to be able to return to the site if the property should "revert to the landlord," hence the three-story section of the Ritz Tower over this part of the property. (See Christopher Gray, "Streetscapes," *The New York Times* (2/24/02), 7.
11. *The Real Estate Record & Guide* 114 (Sept. 13, 1924), 7.
12. Steven Rutenbaum, *Mansions in the Clouds, The Skyscraper Palazzi of Emery Roth* (New York: Balsam Press, 1986); "Emery Roth Dies; Noted Architect," *The New York Times* (8/21/1948); "Emery Roth and Sons Mark 60th Anniversary," *Architectural Record* 113 (May, 1963), 26; "Emery Roth" research files, Landmarks Preservation Commission.
13. See Landmarks Preservation Commission research file, Thomas Hastings. Also, Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Tribeca West Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1713), "Architects' Index"; LPC, *Staten Island Borough Hall Designation Report* (LP-1207) (New York: City of New York, 1982).
14. Stern, *New York 1930*, 206-08; The Albert Pick-Barth Companies, "Modern Apartment Hotels," *Hotel Planning and Outfitting, Commercial, Residential, Recreational* (Chicago: Albert Pick & Co., 1928), 75, 99, 107. For discussions of early apartment development in New York, see also Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Osborne Apartments Designation Report* (LP-1770) (New York: City of New York, 1991), and LPC, *Gainsborough Studios Designation Report* (LP-1423) (New York: City of New York, 1988), both reports prepared by Virginia Kurshan.
15. The Hubert Home Clubs, begun by Hubert Pirsson and Associates were established throughout New York, with a cooperative economic arrangement as added incentive to get wealthy residents to join.
16. While apartment hotels became very popular during this time, they were also the source of some controversy as it came to be realized that many people used the "serving pantries" to do some of their own cooking. There was much discussion in the press regarding this issue and the desire of many to change the application of the Tenement House Laws. [See "Apartment Hotels Hope for New Law," *The New York Times* (10/8/1926), 25; and Arthur Gross, "The New Multiple Dwelling Law in New York," *The Architectural Forum* 53 (Sept., 1930), 271.]
17. A public discussion of abuses of apartment hotels, especially cooking in the "serving pantries" by residents led to the abolition of this category of buildings with the Multiple Dwellings Law of 1929.

18. There is much information available about this building, including a chapter in Ruttenbaum's book on Emery Roth (see above) and a descriptive article by Roth himself, "The Ritz Tower, New York," *Buildings and Building Management* 26 (June 21, 1926), 47-53.
19. While most sources simply state the connection with the Ritz-Carlton Company, in his account of the building Emery Roth explains that they did not do it all. "This arrangement places the Ritz Tower cuisine under the immediate direction of Albert H. Keller, of the Ritz-Carlton Hotel, while the general management and operation is under the supervision of Duncan G. Harris, vice president of Brown Wheelock: Harris, Vought & Co., Inc. Roth, "The Ritz Tower, New York," 48.
20. Roth, 48.
21. "Ritz Tower Gives Dinner," *The New York Times* (10/16/1926), 47.
22. W. Parker Chase, *New York: The Wonder City* (New York: Wonder City Publishing Co., 1931), 135.
23. Fiske Kimball, "The Family Tree of the Skyscraper," *The Forum* 79 (March, 1928), 403.
24. "World's Tallest Hotel is Nearing Completion," *Real Estate Record & Guide* 117 (May 1, 1926), 11.
25. Information on Ritz Tower tenants comes from numerous sources, including: telephone directories for New York City, *The New York Times*, *The National Cyclopaedia of American Biography*, James Trager, *Park Avenue, Street of Dreams* (New York: Atheneum, 1990) 135-137.
26. Trager, 135.
27. "Luxury is Boundless For Some in Hotels," *The New York Times* (5/11/1980), R1.
28. Mimi Sheraton, "An Old Favorite Returns in Style," *The New York Times* (5/2/1980), C15.
29. Pierre Franey, *A Chef's Tale, A Memoir of Food, France and America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 89-90, 110-111.
30. Information about the ownership history comes from: W. A. Swanberg, *Citizen Hearst* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), 406; Ruttenbaum, 100-01; New York County Register's Office, Liber 3644, p. 202, February 6, 1928; and Trager, 135-37. " 'Cop-op' Plan Set for Ritz Tower," *The New York Times* (2/6/1955). Other history includes a 1932 fire which broke out in the sub-cellar paint shop of the Ritz Tower. Eight firemen died fighting the blaze while many residents of the upper floors knew nothing about what was happening.
31. Swanberg, 487; New York County Office of the Register, foreclosure, May 6, 1940.
32. William Robbins, "More Luxury Hotels Expected to Switch to Cooperative Plan," *The New York Times* (12/6/1964), R1.

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 Ritz Tower 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.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Ritz Tower was designed in 1925 by two of the most prominent and well-respected architects of the period, Emery Roth and Thomas Hastings; that the architects used classical detailing based on the Italian Renaissance style with a modern steel-frame structure to create the tallest residential building in New York; that the Ritz Tower was the first residential tower to both capitalize on recent construction techniques, and to be influenced by the 1916 zoning rules that were then effecting tall office towers; that by creating an apartment hotel without kitchens, the developer was able to avoid the height restrictions imposed by the Tenement House Law; that the developer, Arthur Brisbane, was a famous journalist for the Hearst chain who, like his employer, invested heavily in real estate; that the Ritz Tower was too weighty a debt for Brisbane to carry, and after three years he sold the building to William Randolph Hearst; that Hearst owned and resided in the building for several years until he suffered his own financial reversals; that Brisbane hired the Ritz-Carlton Company to manage the building, lending its name and caché to establish the tone he sought for his new enterprise; that the building's sumptuousness, as well as its location on the corner of Park Avenue and 57th Street, one of the city's most elegant addresses, helped to attract many wealthy and famous residential and commercial tenants, including New York's first authentic French restaurant, Le Pavillon; that the Ritz Tower, now a co-operative apartment building, continues today as one of New York's most desirable residential locations.

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 Ritz Tower, 465 Park Avenue (aka 461- 465 Park Avenue, and 101 East 57th Street), Borough of Manhattan, and designates Manhattan Tax Map Block 1312, Lot 70, as its Landmark Site.



RITZ TOWER

465 Park Avenue (aka 461-465 Park Avenue and 101 East 57th Street)

Manhattan:

Photo: Carl Forster



RITZ TOWER
Northern façade of tower
Photo: Carl Forster



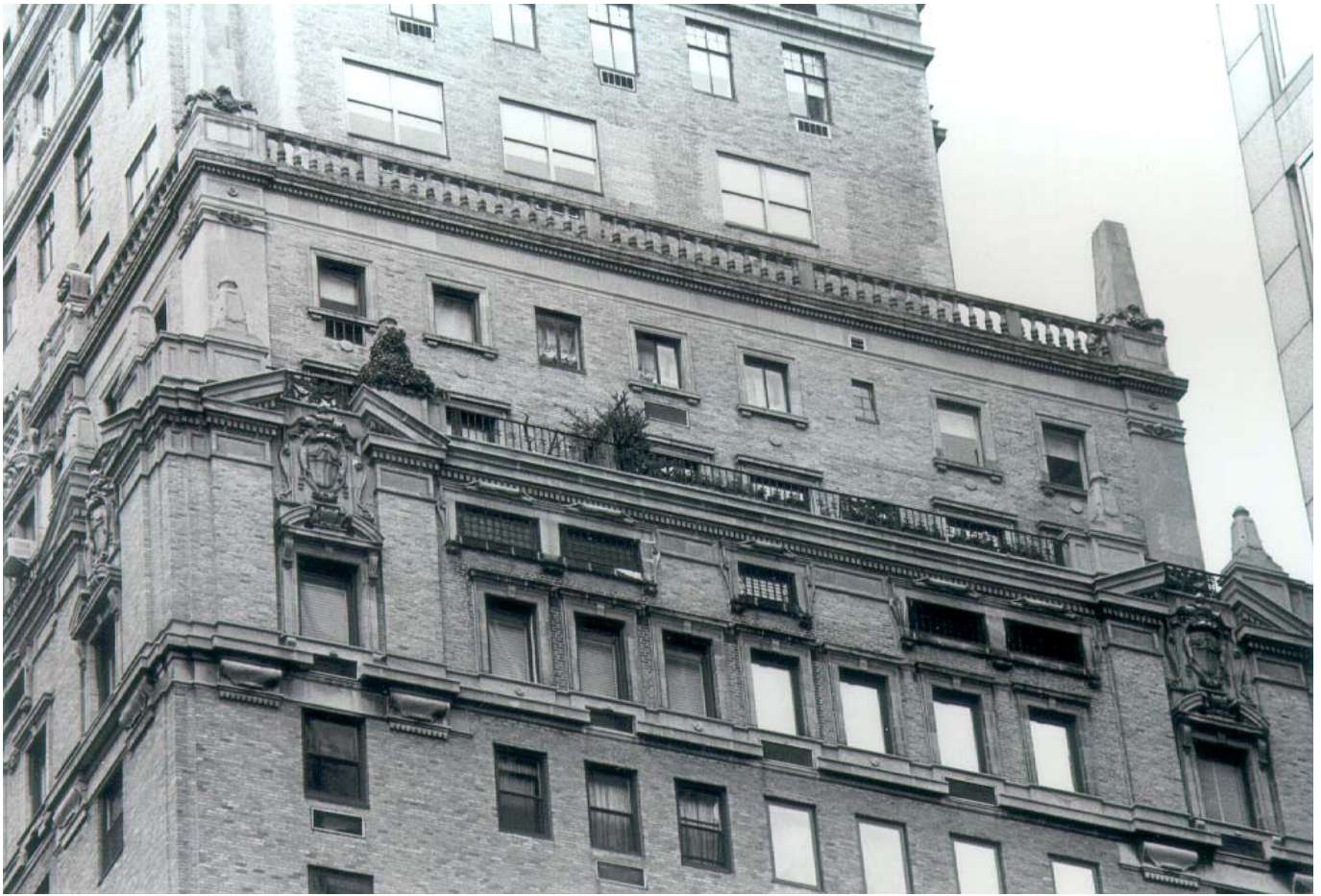
RITZ TOWER
Western façade of tower
Photo: Carl Forster



RITZ TOWER
Photos: Carl Forster



RITZ TOWER
Ground floor, Park Avenue façade
Photo: Carl Forster



Eastern façade details

RITZ TOWER
Photos: Carl Forster

Ground floor details, 57th Street facade





Roof detail, southern facade



Commercial entrance, 57th street facade

RITZ TOWER

Photos: Carl Forster

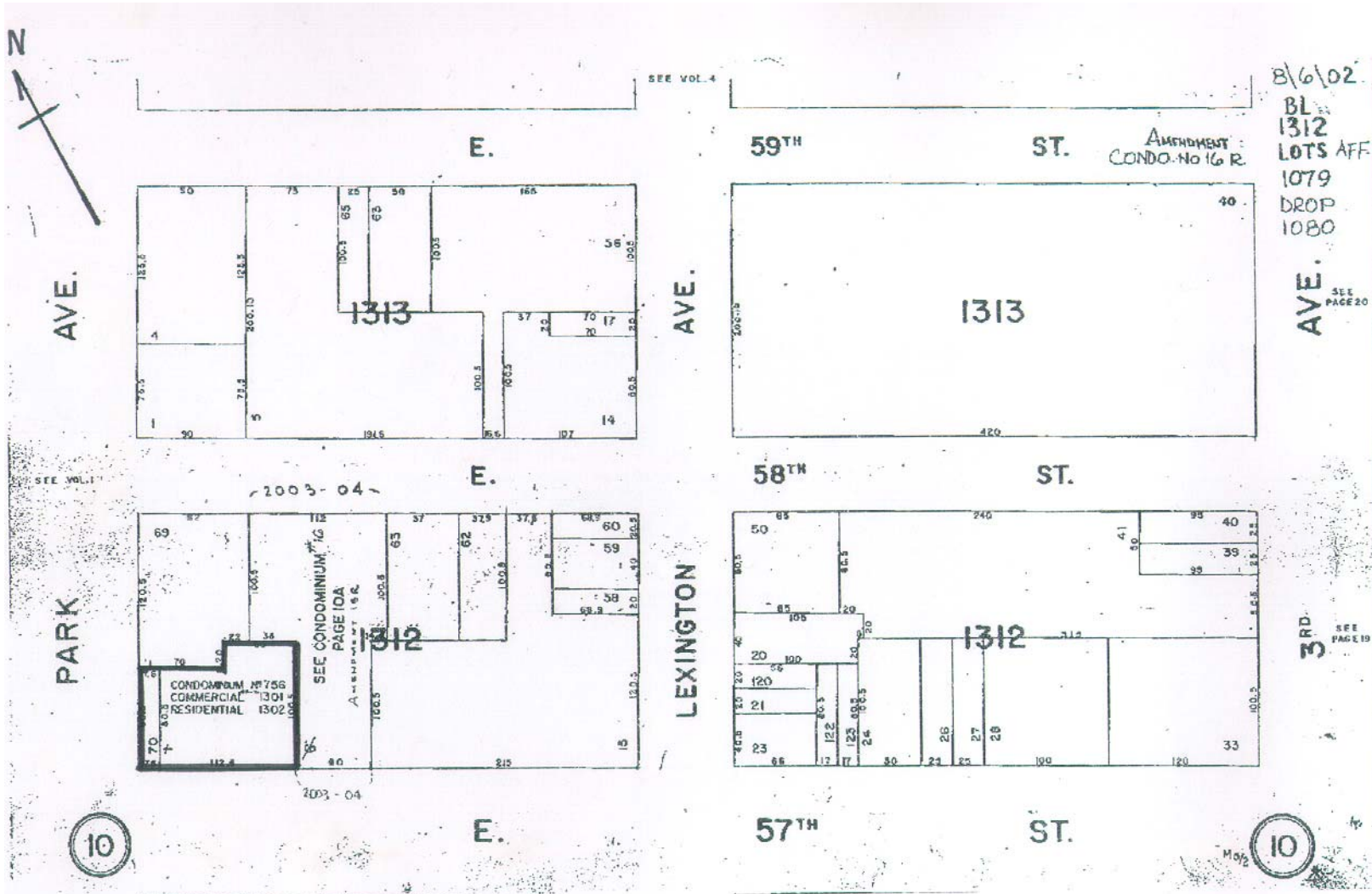


RITZ TOWER
Photos: Carl Forster

Setback detail, southern facade



Setback detail, western facade



RITZ TOWER
 465 Park Avenue (aka 461-465 Park Avenue and 101 East 57th Street), Manhattan
 Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1312, Lot 70
 Source: New York City Department of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map