DESIGNATION REPORT

Fashion Tower

Landmarks Preservation Commission

Designation Report
Fashion Tower
August 12, 2025

Designation List 546
LP-2688

DESIGNATION REPORT

Fashion Tower

LOCATION

Borough of Manhattan
135 West 36th Street
(aka 135-139 West 36th Street)

LANDMARK TYPE

Individual

SIGNIFICANCE

A distinguished 20-story garment industry showroom and office building designed by the prominent architect Emery Roth, displaying Renaissance Revival and Art Deco-style elements.

Fashion Tower, c. 1940
New York City Municipal Archives

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Fashion Tower

135 West 36th Street, Manhattan

Designation List 546
LP-2688

Built: 1924-26
Architect: Emery Roth

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan,
Tax Map Block 812, Lot 19

Building Identification Number (BIN):
1015239

Calendared: April 22, 2025
Public Hearing: May 20, 2025

On May 20, 2025, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of Fashion Tower as a New York City Landmark and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Two people, including representatives of the Historic Districts Council and the New York Landmarks Conservancy, spoke in support of designation. A representative of the owner testified in opposition.

Summary

Fashion Tower

Fashion Tower is a 20-story commercial building in Manhattan's Garment Center at 135 West 36th Street, midblock between Broadway and Seventh Avenue. Developer Mo-Ro Realty, headed by cotton dealer Morris Rosenstein, acquired the site in 1924 from the Church of the Holy Innocents, which stands directly behind it, on West 37th Street. Skillfully designed by Emery Roth, ribbed piers rise from a three-story base capped by a continuous window arcade to a series of shallow setbacks at the 17th, 18th, and 19th floors.

To promote the new building to garment manufacturers, the sandstone base incorporates the building's name in raised capital letters, as well as an eye-catching display of Renaissance Revival and Art Deco-style motifs. Highlights include brightly colored peacocks, feathery symbols of fashion and vanity, angels holding fabric shears and brushes, terracotta reliefs of women clutching mirrors and spindles, and rosettes draped with stylized ribbons. This kind of fashion-related symbolism was rare in the emerging Garment Center and by the time of the building's completion in early 1926 nearly all of the floors were leased to women's apparel firms.

Emery Roth was one of New York City's most important early 20th century architects. Born in what was Austria-Hungary, he emigrated to the United States in 1884. He produced some of Manhattan's best-known residential buildings, including such New York City landmarks as the Ritz Tower, Beresford Apartments, and San Remo Apartments. His son, Julian Roth, joined the firm in 1921. This is one of his earliest projects and he would later lead the firm with his brother, Richard, under the name Emery Roth & Sons.

The lobby entrance was significantly altered in the 1950s, removing the original address panel, a window, and terracotta reliefs. These changes were reversed by the current owner as part of a facade restoration by GRT Architects in 2013-14, recreating the original entrance arch and twin peacock relief panels. Fashion Tower remains one of the more memorable buildings in the Garment Center and is especially notable for the unique decoration that evokes its historic use.

Building Description

Fashion Tower

Fashion Tower is a 20-story commercial building on the north side of West 36th Street, between Broadway and Seventh Avenue in midtown Manhattan.

Primary (South) Facade

A three-story sandstone base incorporates similarly designed lobby and freight entrances, flanking a large center storefront. Above the arched entrances are scrolled reliefs with the building's address (left) and "freight" (right) indicated by incised capital letters, as well as square windows with decorative metal grilles flanked by mirror-image terracotta reliefs of peacocks. The storefront is divided horizontally into three sections. Between the first and second floor windows is a row of decorative metal panels.

Centered above the second-floor windows is a band of low relief that depicts winged angels opening a curtain that reveals the building's name in raised capital letters. This band of relief is flanked by small foliate squares. On the third floor, five Chicago-style windows alternate with slender polychrome terracotta reliefs. A round arch window arcade extends across the fourth floor. Consisting of ten openings with twisted moldings, it rests on a continuous raised lintel that has rosettes that align with piers that separate the double hung windows. The upper part of these piers incorporates raised scroll-like elements, as well as lion heads holding rings in their mouths.

Double height semicircular arches with ornate moldings extend from the fifth to the sixth floor. There are five bays, with three sets of double hung windows on each floor, separated by dark terracotta relief spandrels. Above the sixth-floor windows are low terracotta reliefs of ribbons and rosettes flanked by women holding mirrors (left) and spindles (right). While the cladding on the fifth-floor piers is smooth, the sixth floor has ribbed fluting.

Patterned brick piers rise from the 7th to 20th floor. While the wider piers align with the ribbed fluting on the sixth floor, the thinner piers align with the ribbon and rosette reliefs. These double-hung windows alternate with dark terracotta spandrels. Setbacks, trimmed with terracotta reliefs, occur at the 17th, 18th, and 19th floors. At the 17th floor, the three central bays are recessed, creating the impression of towers at each end. Piers and spandrels at the top of the 20th floor are embellished with terracotta reliefs and urn-like finials. Three recessed roof pavilions, clad with tan brick, are capped by simple terracotta elements. The taller west pavilion has a louvered opening and two squat finials.

Secondary (North) Facade

The north (rear) facade, partly visible at the upper floors behind the Church of the Holy Innocents on West 37th Street, is clad with tan brick. Divided into three bays, each bay contains three double-hung windows. At the northeast corner of each floor are open balconies that provide access to the fire tower stairs. The central bay rises to a three-story-tall pavilion capped by a pediment with simple finials.

Alterations

The two peacock reliefs, iron grille, and sunk reliefs above the lobby entrance (left) are replicas, based on the historic decoration above the freight entrance (right). Non-historic elements on the West 36th Street facade include: the glazed lobby entrance (left), metal freight doors (right), center storefront and store entrances, granite water table, security cameras. All of the double hung windows are likely to be non-historic. The various setbacks incorporate low metal barriers with vertical rails.

History of the Garment Industry[1]

By the end of the 1930s, New York City's garment workers produced "three out of four of the ready-made coats and dresses, and four out of five of the fur garments worn by American women."[2] Clothing manufacturing had long been a substantial industry for the city: in the 1840s numerous firms produced ready-to-wear men's clothing, and by the 1880s, women's wear industrialized and greatly expanded.[3] The city dominated the national women's garment industry for decades thanks to its position as a key entry point for immigrants – who were the majority of the workforce – a locus of transportation networks, a financial center, and a leader in fashion.[4] New York's garment industry was also nationally significant to the American labor movement due to the actions of immigrant women garment workers from the early to mid-twentieth century.

The 19th century saw massive changes to the ways that clothes were manufactured in the United States. As historian Nancy L. Green puts it, "home-made clothes gave way to store-bought ones, and sewing became the occupation of industrial homeworkers instead of individual homemakers."[5] By the 1880s there were three types of garment factories in New York City: inside shops where "employees worked directly for the manufacturer;" home shops where "workers, often assisted by family members, assembled clothing in their tenement apartments from cut goods supplied by manufacturers;" and outside shops where "a contractor acted as a middleman receiving orders from manufacturers, then hiring laborers to finish the garments either in their homes or in small workshops."[6] Many manufacturing buildings clustered in Lower Manhattan and examples are preserved in the SoHo-Cast Iron and NoHo Historic Districts.

A large portion of garment making took place in tenements and reformers were soon concerned by conditions in these sweatshops. They supported legislation to limit this practice, beginning with the 1892 New York State Factory Act.[7] In response, developers built loft buildings for the garment industry south of Union Square.[8] These structures varied in quality: some were fireproof and had large windows, marking a great improvement over tenement apartments. However, buildings that were less than 150 feet tall continued to have wood floors and there were loopholes that allowed owners to limit emergency exits.[9] Thus, the landscape of clothing manufacturing remained variable for workers even as reformers tried to regulate it.

Poor working conditions and pay fueled activism in the early 20th century, particularly after 146 workers, mostly women, died in the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire in the Asch Building (now the Brown Building, a New York City landmark).[10] This 1911 tragedy brought national attention to the dangers that industrial workplaces posed to their workers. Reformers passed regulations to improve health and safety requirements and in 1913 factory owners made an agreement with the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) leadership that, among other things, established minimum wages and allowed the Joint Board of Sanitary Control more power to enforce health and safety standards.

However, even subsequent advances in labor relations and workplace conditions did nothing to redress gender inequality, and in general only men could be hired to fill the highest-paid positions and only women could be placed in the lowest-paid

jobs.[11] In response, women garment workers created a particularly vibrant labor movement, which initiated important labor actions and distinctive cultural programs.

Women workers continued to be the militant rank and file of the garment unions well into the 1920s and 1930s, especially as the Depression era wore away at the gains that earlier generations of activists had won. Beyond their labor actions, women built on the approach of women activists who urged unions to provide educational, health, and cultural programs, as well as wage and hour benefits. Union organizers established wide-ranging clubs and cultural activities, and local chapters founded centers in their neighborhoods where members could attend various activities. The ILGWU offered centralized services at their Workers' University in Washington Irving High School near Union Square and in their Health Center at 275 Seventh Avenue in the growing Garment Center.[12]

The West 30s

Prior to the arrival of European settlers, the area that would become the Garment Center was part of a broader terrain inhabited by Indigenous Peoples known as the Munsee that spanned the lower Hudson to upper Delaware River valleys, and an Indigenous trail ran between what would become Eighth and Ninth Avenues and approximately from 14th to 42nd Streets, ending in a stream that ran into the Hudson River.[13] Following the nominal "sale" of Manhattan to the Dutch in 1626, the colonists drove the Munsee from Manhattan by the end of the 18th century.[14] Much of this western section of Manhattan, which today is the area from 25th to 42nd Streets and between Sixth and Ninth Avenues, became farmland during the 18th century and remained so until the early 19th century.[15]

Until the 1920s, the character of the West 30s was primarily residential. Elevated railways began to serve Ninth, and later, Sixth Avenue, in the mid-to-late 1870s. Hotels and theaters followed up Broadway, expanding Manhattan's entertainment district to the area that was formerly known as Longacre Square. During this period, important milestones included the opening of the Metropolitan Opera House (1883, demolished) at 1411 Broadway, between West 38th and 39th Streets, construction of The New York Times Building and IRT subway (1904) at 42nd Street, and the Mills Hotel (1906-07, a New York City Landmark) at Seventh Avenue and 36th Street.

By the 1870s, the vicinity of the new theater and hotel district and the area between Fifth and Seventh Avenues from 23rd to 42nd Streets became known as the "Tenderloin."[16] This area gained a reputation as a place of drinking, gambling, sex work, and graft. However, day-to-day life in the district was much more varied than the sensational depictions of vice that circulated in the popular media. There were churches, factories, small businesses, and the residences of low-income New Yorkers who worked in various occupations, such as dressmakers, clerks, and carpenters.[17] African American, Irish, German, and other immigrant families lived throughout the area.[18] In this period, the Tenderloin was one of few places in the city that offered a chance of social mobility to African Americans through its vibrant music scene, including at 47-55 West 28th Street Buildings, Tin Pan Alley, all New York City Landmarks.[19]

New York City's garment industry originated south of Canal Street in the 1850s. Manufacturers of men's and women's clothing gradually moved north after the Civil War, occupying work spaces that were close to department and specialty stores that congregated near Union Square and Ladies' Mile. At the start of the 20th century, Fifth Avenue became an important commercial corridor. The first fashionable retailer to

locate here was B. Altman & Company (a New York City Landmark), which opened at Fifth Avenue and 35th Street in 1906, followed by Lord & Taylor (1914, a New York City Landmark) and Arnold Constable & Company (1915).

At this time, factories began to simultaneously pack the area, crowding the avenue and adjacent streets with immigrant workers, particularly around lunchtime.[20] Bemoaned as a "factory invasion" and a "menace to trade," in March 1916 the Fifth Avenue Association placed advertisements in local newspapers asking: "Shall We Save New York?" Signed by merchants, banks and hotels, the campaign called for "cooperative action."[21] Much of West Midtown, from 23rd to 42nd Street, owes its character to a single commercial activity – garment manufacturing, built during a single decade of the 1920s, reflecting the success of this movement against the presence of factories in the vicinity of the Fifth Avenue shopping district.[22]

The New York City Board of Estimate passed a "Building Zone Resolution" in July 1916 to regulate the height and bulk of new buildings throughout New York City, as well as "the location of trades and industries and the location of buildings designed for specific uses."[23] The garment industry, which promised to leave the Fifth Avenue shopping corridor, supported the innovative districting scheme, anticipating lower factory rents and the convenience of commercial consolidation.[24] Industry leaders chose the West 30s, where less expensive sites could be assembled, and which was accessible to Pennsylvania Station, other transit, and hotels where out-of-town buyers stayed throughout the year.[25]

Plans to create a "permanent home" for the garment industry in the West 30s were announced in December 1919.[26] What followed was an extraordinary building boom. Approximately 100 buildings were erected in the West 30s over the next decade, peaking in 1924-25. Aside from a small group of low-rise structures that owners preserved to protect tenant views and light, the east-west blocks contain rows of 12 to 16-story setback structures, while the Broadway, Seventh and Eighth Avenues have towers that rise 20 or more stories.

The exterior cladding of most of the buildings was fairly conventional and uniform. Many have light-colored stone bases, with tan and beige brick elevations that incorporate complementary terracotta or cast-stone details. The first wave of buildings displayed varied ornamentation, such as classical or medieval style, while the structures erected later in the decade leaned toward stripped or "modern" Gothic and, finally, Art Deco.

The Garment Center's commercial heyday occurred in the 1930s. Though the overall percentage of American apparel manufactured in New York City had started to decline, the number of workers active in the area would continue to increase. Employment in the garment industry fell after World War II, however, as local labor costs and new highways encouraged apparel firms to relocate outside Manhattan.[27] With their gradual departure, the West 30s developed a more varied character. In 1972, to recognize the Garment Center's importance to New York City, Seventh Avenue was named "Fashion Avenue," with new signs installed between 34th and 42nd Streets.[28] The 25-block Garment Center Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2009.

Emery Roth

Emery Roth (1871-1948) designed many important early 20th century buildings in New York City. Best known for apartment houses and hotels, his career was a varied one that also produced a significant group of commercial structures.

At thirteen, Roth immigrated to the United States from Galzecs, Austria-Hungary (now Secovce,

Slovakia). After several years working with architects in Bloomington, Illinois, and later Kansas City, he moved to Chicago and joined Burnham & Root as a draftsman. At this time, Daniel Burnham was director of works for the World's Columbian Exposition, held in 1893, and Roth worked on the fair's Palace of Fine Arts, Administration Building, and two small pavilions.

Roth settled in New York City in 1895 and was briefly associated with the architects Richard Morris Hunt and Ogden Codman Jr. Around 1900, he began to practice independently, designing the Saxony Apartments (1901, part of the Riverside Drive West End Historic District Extension) on West 82nd Street, followed by the Hotel Belleclaire (1901-03, a New York City Landmark) at Broadway and 77th Street, his first celebrated work. Over the next two decades, his output varied greatly, producing residential, commercial and religious structures, such as the First Hungarian Reform Church (1916, a New York City Landmark) on East 69th Street.

After recuperating from glaucoma and influenza in the late 1910s, his career flourished. Roth remembered the 1920s as his "boom" years, and he later described himself as "perhaps the busiest architect in New York City."[29] He designed at least ten commercial buildings in midtown Manhattan in this period.[30]

During construction of Fashion Tower, Roth also built the Ritz Tower apartment hotel (1925-27, a New York City Landmark) on Park Avenue and East 57th Street, which "cemented his reputation as a designer of luxury housing."[31] From this project on, he mostly specialized in residential work, resulting in many notable towered structures in the Central Park West-Upper West Side Historic District, including the San Remo (1928-29), Beresford (1928-29), Eldorado (with Margon & Holder, 1931), and Ardsley (1931) apartments.

Roth had two sons who became architects. Julian Roth (1902-92), who attended Columbia University, joined the firm in 1921. He worked with his father on Fashion Tower and his initials (J. M. R.) appear on plans and section drawings. His expertise was in "materials, construction methods, cost estimates, and the technology of curtain walls."[32] Richard Roth (1904-1987) graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1928. Both sons became partners in the firm in 1932 and it was renamed Emery Roth & Sons in 1938.

Emery Roth died in 1948 and in subsequent years the firm changed course, specializing in mostly large office buildings. It designed the tiered Look Building (1948-50, a New York City Landmark), and, as collaborators, such high-profile projects as the Pan Am Building (1959-63), World Trade Center (1966-73), and Citicorp Center (1973-78, a New York City Landmark).

Planning and Construction of Fashion Tower

Mo-Ro Realty Corporation purchased the site from the Church of the Holy Innocents for $306,000 in December 1924. The sale was authorized by Supreme Court Justice Robert Wagner.

The 60-foot-wide parcel was occupied by three houses that were used as a rectory and rental properties. No. 135, for instance, contained garment manufacturers by 1915. These buildings were demolished in January 1925. To the west was the 22-story Herald Square Building (1911-12), one of the earliest tall commercial structures in the area, and to the east, rising at the corner of Broadway, was the 20-story Lefcourt-Marlboro Building (1924-25).

Mo-Ro Realty was headed by Morris Rosenstein, a cotton merchant.[33] Partners included his brother Meyer Rosenstein and Joe Lebang, a ticket agent who owned Broadway theaters. Under the corporate name Rose-Sil Realty, the Rosenstein brothers subsequently built and lived at 580-582 West End Avenue (1926, part of the Riverside Drive-

West End Historic District). At the corner of West 88th Street, this apartment building was likewise designed by Roth.

Roth began working on the Fashion Tower project as early as April 1921.[34] The design underwent multiple changes and plans were submitted to the Bureau of Buildings in March 1924 (NB 183-24).[35] The projected cost of construction was $600,000.[36]

The superintendent of buildings determined on April 3, 1924 that the height of the proposed structure was "excessive" and on April 8, 1924, Roth requested permission from the New York City Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA) to erect "a street wall, to exceed the height limit required by the zone resolution without a setback."[37] Though six people spoke in opposition to the request, the BSA granted a "variation" on July 8, 1924.

West 36th Street was part of a "two-times height district" where, according to the Building Zone Resolution, "no building shall be erected to a height twice the width of the street," which was 30 feet. However, due to the parcel's close proximity to the corner of Broadway and the "excess height" of the neighboring Herald Square building at 141 West 36th Street, which was constructed five years before the resolution was adopted, a "height district exception" was allowed and a taller-than-usual street wall was permitted.[38]

Fashion Tower's street wall would ultimately rise 194 feet. Above are three shallow setbacks and a penthouse, which was planned as offices "for the exclusive use of the owner."[39] The uppermost level contained the "motor generator room," as well as water tanks, which Roth enclosed because he found them "unsightly."[40]

Roth received a permit for the foundations in late March 1925 and the new building application was approved April 4, 1925. Later that month, Edbro Realty, owner of the adjacent Herald Square Building, who opposed the first BSA decision in 1924, unsuccessfully petitioned the Department of Buildings to revoke the permit because "there was no provision for a yard or court on the rear" and that the absence of side windows on the lower floors would "violate the zone ordinances."[41]

The absence of side windows may have been allowed because Fashion Tower's rear, north-facing, windows overlook the Church of the Holy Innocents, which rises only (in part) as high as the seventh floor. *The New York Tribune* praised the rear facade and *Architecture and Building* magazine reported it was "finished with some care so as to present a dignified and attractive elevation."[42]

Construction commenced in April 1925. Martin Silverman, who was described as "one of the youngest builders in New York," finished construction in "record time."[43] In June 1925, Roth requested permission for larger window openings on the first, second, and third floors. He argued against "strict compliance" with Section 264 of the Labor Law and Rule 503 of the Industrial code because smaller windows "would destroy the intended use of the lowest three floors and would also affect the architectural appearance of the building."[44] The BSA agreed, and a variation was granted on January 5, 1926.

A temporary Certificate of Occupancy was issued in December 1925, pending the second decision by the BSA, and the building was completed in February 1926. Fashion Tower was described as containing store, office, showroom, and factory spaces. There were three passenger elevators and two freight elevators. Most of the floors were designed to accommodate 70 workers, with an equal number of toilets for men and women. An additional toilet, labeled "private" on floorplans, was probably intended for management and clients.

Design and Decoration of Fashion Tower

Fashion Tower is a masonry-clad, fireproof loft structure. The West 36th Street elevation, facing south, is divided into four sections. While the base and arcades are richly embellished, the upper floors rise with minimal interruption, giving the structure a slight vertical thrust that draws the eye toward the top of the building.

Initial plans probably date to April 1923. Drawings in Columbia University's Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library show a multistory base with delicate neoclassical details. In contrast with what was ultimately built, the facade had no arched openings, and the lobby/freight entrances were double doors with swan-neck pediments. Subsequent plans gave the two entrances increased prominence, adding framed window openings and signage above the lobby and freight entrances.

Between the two entrances is a large storefront. As originally constructed, the store entrance was at the center of the facade, recessed between display windows. Above the door was a substantial sign that projected perpendicularly over the sidewalk.

The fourth floor has a continuous window arcade with round arches. Above this floor, the facade divides into five bays, containing three or two windows. Starting at the sixth floor are piers of alternating width, clad with tan-colored brick. The fifth and sixth floors fuse to form five double height arches, crowned by terracotta reliefs. Shallow setbacks begin at the 17th floor, where the three center bays create tower-like corners. Subsequent setbacks occur at the 18th and 19th floors. Above the 20th floor are recessed penthouse pavilions.

Each part of the facade originally had different types of fenestration. The base was mostly single pane windows, except for the third floor, which had Chicago-style windows with fixed center panes. The arched windows on the fourth, fifth and sixth floors were originally two over two, while the windows above the sixth floor were three over three. Most of the current windows have been changed and are now double hung.

Roth used decorative reliefs to emphasize the building's connection to the emerging Garment Center. Much of the facade is enlivened with glazed terracotta, except the base, which is sandstone.[45] Centered between the second and third floors is an unfurled banner that identifies the building's name in raised capital letters. This carved stone relief is held by crouching winged angels. The angel on the left side holds fabric cutting shears and the other grasps a palette with paint brushes.

Like many of Manhattan's midblock loft buildings, the lobby and freight entrances were placed far apart. Each entrance is arched and topped by sunk reliefs that may represent bay laurel, a symbol of wisdom or victory. Above the reliefs is a single window with decorative wrought iron, flanked by what may be the building's most memorable feature -- brightly colored upright terracotta panels that depict peacocks and their splendid tail feathers, a commonly understood symbol of fashion, luxury, beauty, and personal vanity.[46]

A window arcade divides the base from the upper floors. It rests on a continuous lintel and has arches trimmed with spiral moldings. At the top of each arch are pairs of small circular medallions, flanked by lion heads. Above this level, double-height arches display rose-colored reliefs that show seated women holding mirrors and spindles on either side of rosettes draped with ribbon.

The firm that produced these elements has not been identified, but it seems likely that Roth worked with the New York Architectural Terracotta Company, which recently produced a similar arcade for the Grosvenor (Emery Roth, 1922, part of the Greenwich Village Historic District), a residential hotel at 39 Fifth Avenue.[47]

Terracotta and brick piers rise from the fifth to 20th floor. The dark-colored, two-tone terracotta spandrels between the fifth and sixth floor display floral motifs framed by diamonds, while the spandrels above the seventh floor have floral motifs. At the apex, the setbacks have slightly-more ornate spandrels, terracotta panels, and simple pinnacles.

Later History

In March 1926, *Architecture and Building* magazine published an article about Fashion Tower. "Loft Buildings on Side Streets" addressed its design in comparison to 15-19 West 39th Street (Buchman & Kahn). Fashion Tower was praised by an unnamed writer for being an "elaborate design" and "highly ornamental" and both structures were described as "good buildings, highly to be commended as commercial structures."[48]

As Fashion Tower neared completion, a flurry of articles appeared in local newspapers. One "modern innovation" discussed was the availability of 24-hour passenger elevator service. *The New York Herald* reported it would:

> . . . give tenants a chance to "show the line" to visiting buyers at the psychological moment, even though it be after conventional business hours. The modern idea in business housing is to offer the business man the same conveniences and considerations he enjoys in his apartment house.[49]

Demand for space was strong and by January 1926 the building was fully leased.[50] Tenants included manufacturers of women's dresses, knitwear, sportswear, and novelties.

Though most, if not all, of the floors were occupied by firms involved in the design and production of women's clothing, the 6,000 square foot storefront and mezzanine level was occupied by Witty Brothers, a men's tailor. It was the firm's second retail location. Founded on Manhattan's Lower East Side in 1888, the company remained in Fashion Tower for about a decade.[51]

Witty Bros. placed an advertisement in the *Bayonne Evening News* that celebrated the store's new location. Featuring an image of Fashion Tower with men and women in historic dress, the text enthusiastically read:

> Uptown ho! The course of business takes its way . . . from a modest tailoring shop in 1900 to magnificent Fashion Tower in 1926! In one stride Witty Bros. span the progress of a quarter century – once more they join company with Kurzman and Lord & Taylor – neighbors all back in 1900.[52]

Mo-Ro Realty sold Fashion Tower to Leo Friedman of the Johar Realty Co. in 1926.[53] Following foreclosure in 1933, it was acquired in 1943 by Samuel Kaufman, of Kaufwein Realty, who owned "many Manhattan loft buildings."[54] Howard Warehouse Inc. acquired the building in 2002.

In the early 2010s, improvements were made to the lobby entrance, reversing various 1950s alterations that removed the original address panel, mosaics, and terracotta reliefs. In addition, roll-down gates and stucco were added that obscured some architectural details.[55] Designed to match the historic decoration that survives above the freight entrance, the restoration received awards from AIA New York State and the Marble Institute of America (now the Natural Stone Institute).

Writing in the *Architect's Newspaper*, Steven Thomson described how GRT recovered "the building's forgotten pageantry" using terracotta from Boston Valley Terracotta, near Buffalo, New York.

He wrote, this “sumptuous symbolism tells a largely untold story as Fashion Tower stands as the only building in the district with ornament that references the fashion trade.”[56]

Conclusion

In the heart of the Garment Center, Fashion Tower currently welcomes a varied group of office tenants. Significant for its distinctive design, it is one of the few buildings in West 30s that displays fashion-related imagery, including terracotta reliefs that depict women holding mirrors and spindles, as well as peacocks, a commonly understood symbol of beauty and personal vanity.

Endnotes

[1] This section was researched and written by Jessica Fletcher, LPC staff, with edits by author.

[2] Federal Writers' Project, *The WPA Guide to New York City* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1939), 160.

[3] Nancy L. Green, *Ready-To-Wear and Ready-To-Work: A Century of Industry and Immigrants in Paris and New York* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 45-46 and 214-215. Green explains that the origins of ready-to-wear men's clothing in the US can be traced back to the War of 1812 and the need for military uniforms, and she notes that westward expansion also fueled the men's wear market.

[4] Andrew S. Dolkart, "The Fabric of New York City's Garment District: Architecture and Development in an Urban Cultural Landscape," *Buildings & Landscapes: Journal of the Vernacular Architecture Forum*, 18, No. 1 (Spring 2011), 16. Green outlines the market share that New York City held of the garment industry and women's wear: "by 1890, 44 percent of all readymade clothes in the United States were produced in New York City… 65 percent of the total value of American-made women's wear came from the city in 1899 and 78 percent in 1925, far exceeding the role played by any other city." Green, *Ready-To-Wear and Ready-To-Work*, 214.

[5] Green, *Ready-To-Wear and Ready-To-Work*, 214.

[6] New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Brown Building (originally Asch Building) Designation Report*, prepared by Gale Harris (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2003), 3.

[7] Harris, *Brown Building*, 4. Harris notes that of subsequent laws, the 1901 Tenement House Act was particularly instrumental in shifting garment making from tenements to loft buildings.

[8] The term "loft" has a long history: "During the nineteenth century, the word "loft," previously meaning an unfinished upper story where work such as sailmaking was done, took on the definition of an upper story of a warehouse, a commercial building, or factory, as well as a partial upper area, such as a hay loft. Loft floors were used for a variety of purposes including storage, light manufacturing, showrooms, and offices. In addition, it was fairly typical for a building that was constructed for one purpose, such as storage, to have been occupied partially or totally by a different use, such as manufacturing or offices, within a few years of its completion. Such was the versatility of the large, open upper-story spaces, which could easily be adapted to suit a tenant's needs." New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Noho Historic District Designation Report*, prepared by Donald G. Presa (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1999), 10. New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *826 Broadway Building*, prepared by Margaret Herman (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2019), 13; New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *830 Broadway Building*, prepared by Marianne S. Percival (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2019), 9; New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *832-834 Broadway Building*, prepared by Jessica Baldwin (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2019), 10; and New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *840 Broadway Building*, prepared by Donald G. Presa and Matthew A. Postal (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2019), 9.

[9] Dolkart, "The Fabric of New York City's Garment District," 17.

[10] Based on Harris, *Brown Building*, 5-7. Harris' report offers a more detailed account of the 1909-1910 strike and Triangle Shirtwaist Fire.

[11] Orleck, *Common Sense and a Little Fire*, 76.

[12] Katz, *All Together Different*, 129-131 and 68, and *The Thread of Life; ILGWU Health and Welfare Services* (New York: International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, 1956), 38-40.

[13] *Archaeological Documentary Study No. 7 Line Extension/Hudson Yard Rezoning* (New York: New York City Transit and New York City Department of City Planning, 2004), III A-5. Robert S. Grumet notes the difficulty of assigning names to Indigenous groups because these names have been historically unstable. He uses the term Munsee to refer to the Delaware-speaking people who lived in this region and notes that the term "Munsee" refers to the specific dialect they spoke and was only introduced to refer to this group after 1727 in a period of mass dislocation from their ancestral lands by colonists. Robert S. Grumet, *The Munsee Indians: A History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2009) 3-4 and 13-14.

[14] *Archaeological Documentary Study 44th Street and*

Eleventh Avenue (New York: New York City Transit and New York City Department of City Planning, 2008), 7.

[15] *Archaeological Documentary Study No. 7 Line Extension/Hudson Yard Rezoning* (New York: New York City Transit and New York City Department of City Planning, 2004), III C-1-3. An 1815 map shows the division of this farmland and the presence of a few estates throughout the future Garment District, *Maps of Farms Commonly Called the Blue Book, 1815: Drawn From the Original on File in the Street Commissioner's Office in the City of New York* (New York: City of New York, 1868), plate 5. Although colonists forcibly dislocated the Munsee from the area, present-day descendants live among the Federally and State Recognized Stockbridge-Munsee Community Band of Mohicans, the Delaware Nation, the Delaware Tribe of Indians, the Shinnecock Nation, and the Unkechaug Nation

[16] The Tenderloin's boundaries of this district expanded over time west to Eight Avenue and north to Central Park, Landmarks Preservation Commission, *51 West 28th Street Building, Tin Pan Alley Designation Report (LP-2628)*, prepared by Sarah Moses (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 2019), 13.

[17] Gilfoyle, *City of Eros*, 206-7, 1880 United States Census, New York, Manhattan, Enumeration District 404, and 1900 United States Census, New York, Manhattan, Enumeration District 306.

[18] Gilbert Osofsky, *Harlem: The Making of a Ghetto* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971), 12, and Mike Wallace, *Greater Gotham: A History of New York City From 1898 to 1919* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 452 and 811.

[19] Within this broad category of working-class, African American residents of the Tenderloin had varying degrees of financial stability, and some lived in poverty. The historian Cheryl D. Hicks uses the terms working-class and impoverished when describing Black Tenderloin residents, see Cheryl D. Hicks, *Talk With You Like a Woman: African American Women, Justice, and Reform in New York, 1890-1935* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 56. Mike Wallace notes the concentration of the Black population around Seventh Avenue in the lower West 30s, Wallace, *Greater Gotham*, 269.

[20] In 1914 there were as many as 654 factories within a block of Fifth Avenue. See "Forcing Factories From Fifth Avenue," *The Sun*, April 1914.

[21] Advertisement, *The New York Times*, March 5, 1916.

[22] This section is primarily based on Anthony Robins, National Register Nomination for Garment Center Historic District (2008), Andrew S. Dolkart, "The Fabric of New York City's Garment District," *Buildings & Landscapes* (Spring 2011) and "Urban Fabric: Building New York's Garment District," virtual exhibit, Skyscraper Museum (2012-13), curated by Dolkart.

[23] Building Zone Resolution, 1916, see: https://www.nyc.gov/assets/planning/download/pdf/about/city-planning-history/zr1916.pdf

[24] Various other areas for new garment factories were discussed, in the former shopping district along Sixth Avenue, in Long Island City, and the Bronx.

[25] Surviving examples include the Martinique (begun 1897) and Aberdeen (1902-04, both are New York City Landmarks), as well as various hotels in the Madison Square North Historic District.

[26] "Create Garment Center of America," *Women's Wear*, December 8, 1919, 2-3.

[27] One exception was the Springs Mills Building at 104 West 40th Street (a New York City Landmark), built in 1961-63.

[28] *The New York Times*, June 8, 1972, 58.

[29] Emery Roth, "Autobiographical Notes," 1940-1947, unpublished manuscript, collection Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

[30] Roth's office was at 119 West 40th Street, between Sixth Avenue and Broadway, in 1924.

[31] "Ritz Tower" Designation Report, prepared by Virginia Kurshan (Landmarks Preservation Commission, New York, 2002).

[32] "Julian Roth, 91, Dies, Architectural Designer," *The New York Times*, December 11, 1992.

[33] Roth had many clients with ties to the garment industry. He wrote in his unpublished memoir: "Never turn up your nose at the little tailor. He may grow up to be a big real estate operator." Roth, "Autobiographical Notes," 264.

[34] Renderings for Fashion Tower are in the New York City Municipal Archives and at Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University. Both collections identify these drawings as "alterations" and/or an addition to the Holy Innocents Church, which owned the site when Roth applied for a new building permit.

[35] West 36th Street is 30 feet wide. It was first paved in 1917. See *Street Pavements of All Kinds* (Borough of

Manhattan), 1948, 132.

[36] Bureau of Buildings, New Building Permit 183-24. March 14, 1924; Certificate of Occupancy No. 10372, December 10, 1925.

[37] New York City's Building Zone Resolution was adopted in July 1916. It is well known for regulating Manhattan's tiered silhouette, but it also identified "use districts," which limited manufacturing to specific areas and streets. Fashion Tower was located in a "two-times height district." BSA Minutes, April 8, 1924 (523-24-BZ), 990.

[38] The 22-story Herald Square Building is 259' tall. See Resolution, BSA Minutes, (523-24-BZ), 990; "Height District Exceptions," *New York City Building Zone Resolutions* (1917), 8.

[39] BSA Minutes, April 8, 1924; Bureau of Buildings, Amendment to New Building Permit, submitted June 10, 1925, approved June 18, 1925.

[40] Roth, 276.

[41] "Mandamus Is Asked To Prevent Building," *The New York Times*, April 24, 1925.

[42] "Building on Inside Lot Has Front and Rear Facades," *New York Herald*, October 25, 1925, B16.

[43] *National Hotel Review*, May 2, 1925, 59.

[44] Roth filed for this variance during construction, on June 25, 1925. BSA Minutes, January 5, 1926 (659-25S), 47.

[45] According to *Architecture and Building*, March 1926, p 32, Roth used Briar Hill Stonework, a type of sandstone from Ohio.

[46] According to *Fashion Aesthetics and Ethics: Past and Present* (2023), peacocks "left a vivid mark on the era's fashion," citing multiple examples of jewelry and costume between 1900 and 1921.

[47] Susan Tunick, *Terra-Cotta Skyline*, 145.

[48] "Loft Buildings on Side Streets," *Architecture and Building*, March 1926, 32-41.

[49] "Building on Inside Lot Has Front and Rear Facades," *New York Herald*, October 25, 1925, B16.

[50] "Rentals Show Business Space in Big Demand," *New York Herald*, January 8, 1926, 29.

[51] Samuel and Henry Witty took over their father's clothing business in 1898, operating a factory at 50-52 Eldridge Street. In 1930, a third location opened on Pitkin Avenue in Brooklyn. Witty merged with Eagle Clothing in 1962. *Women's Wear Daily*, June 28, 1966.

[52] Henry Witty lived in Bayonne, New Jersey. Advertisement, *Bayonne Evening News.*

[53] "Fashion Tower on 36th Street Changes Hands," *New York Herald*, April 21, 1926, 40.

[54] "Kaufman Buys 21-story Lofts in West 36th St.," *New York Herald Tribune*, March 2, 1943, 30.

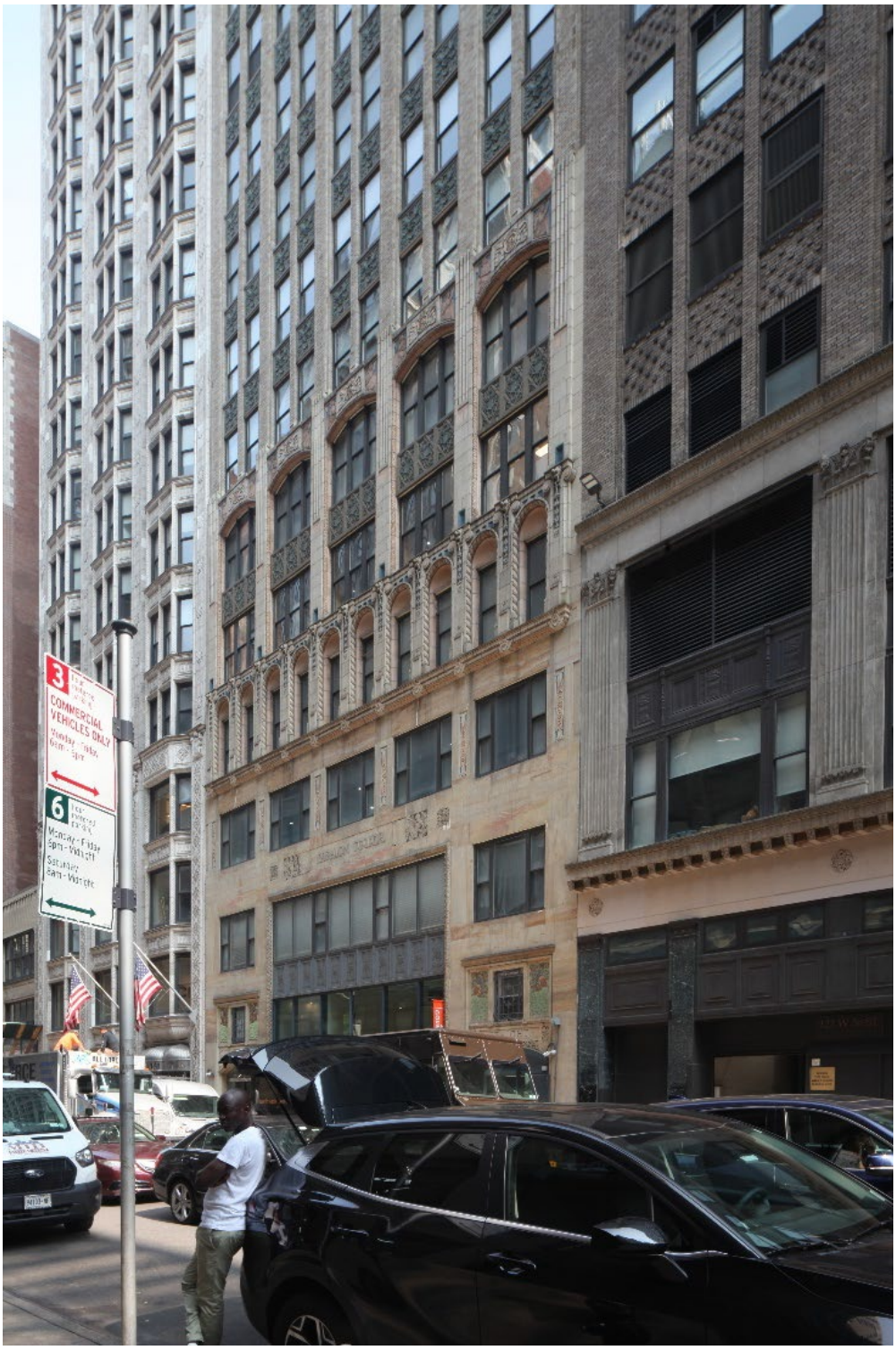
[55] For information about the restoration, see: https://grtarchitects.com/projects/fashion-tower

[56] "Fashion Preservation Police," *Architects Newspaper*, March 23, 2015, viewed online.

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 Fashion 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, state, and the nation.

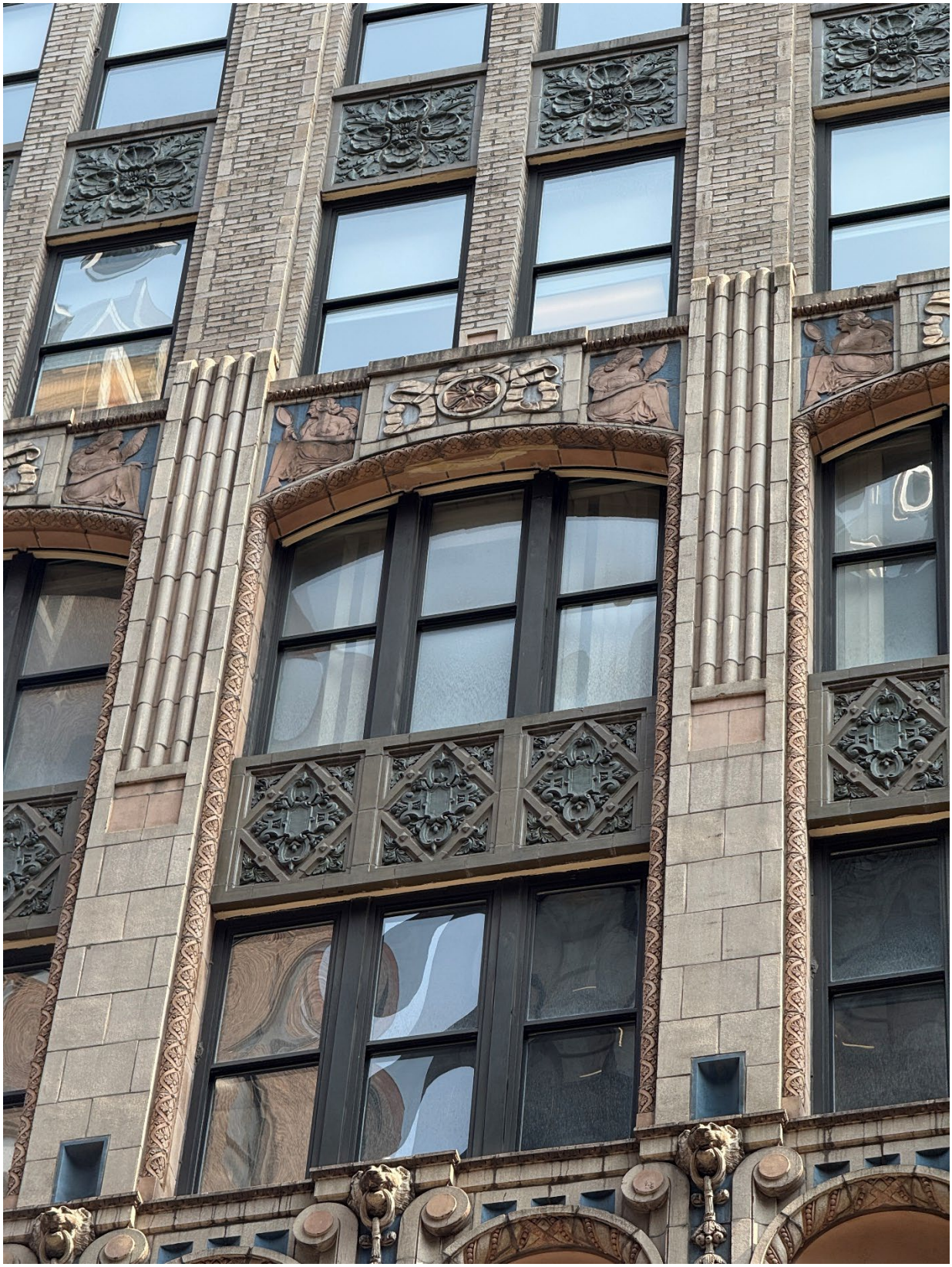
Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark Fashion Tower and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 812, Lot 19 as its Landmark Site, as shown in the attached map.

Fashion Tower, 135 West 36th Street
Matthew A. Postal, March 2025

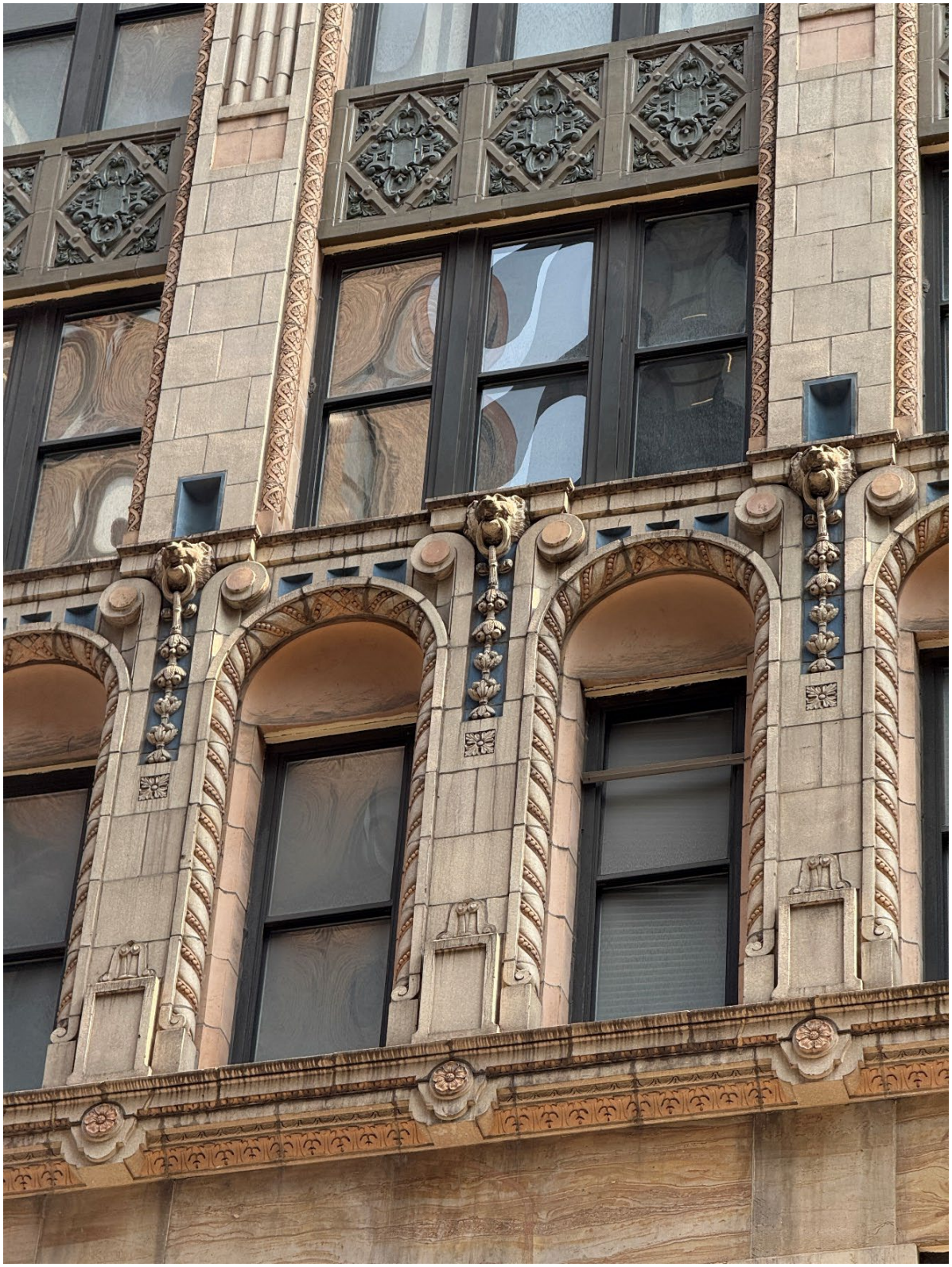


Fashion Tower, 135 West 36th Street
Sarah Eccles, August 2025

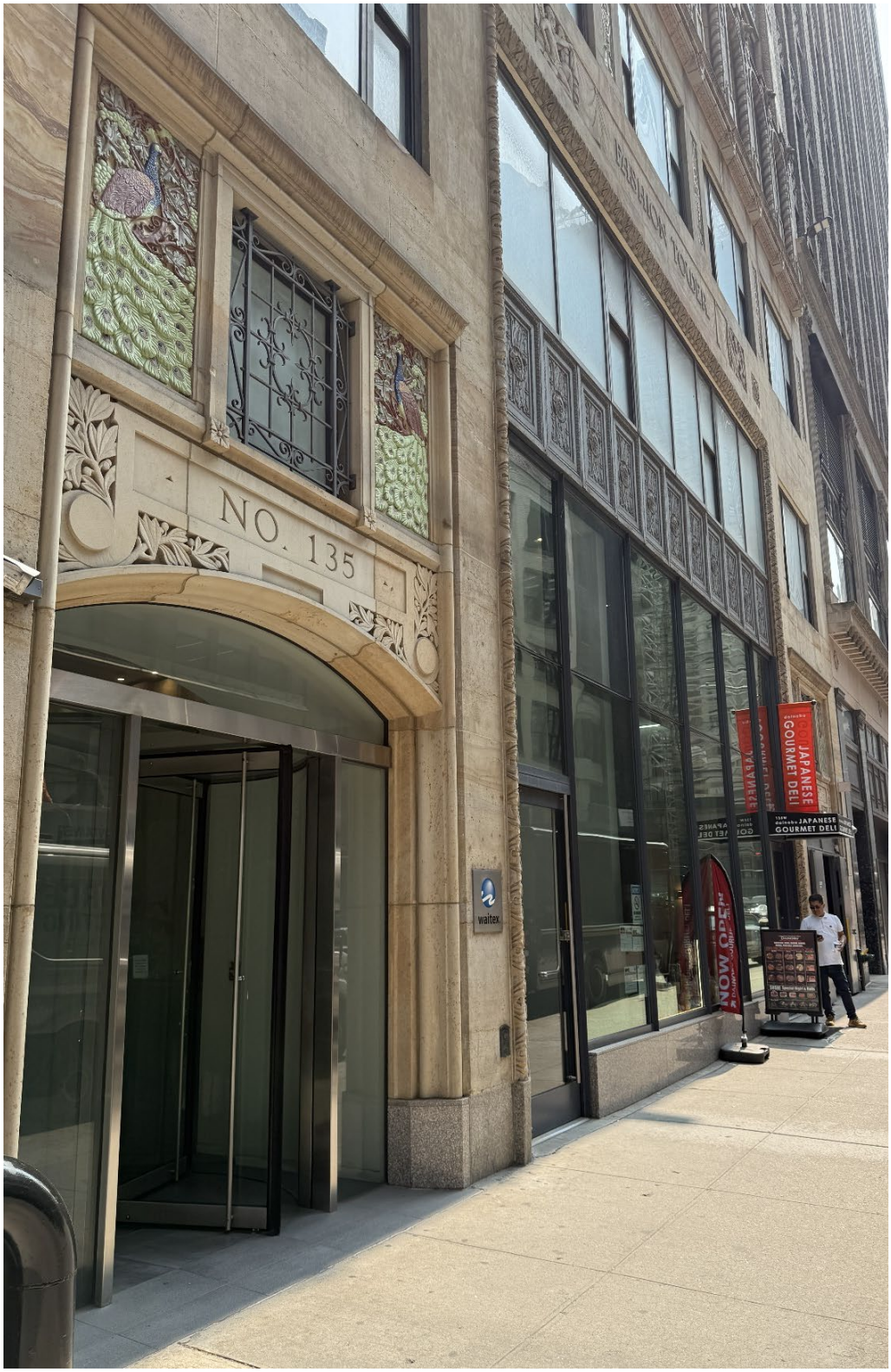
Fashion Tower, 135 West 36th Street
Sarah Eccles, August 2025



Fashion Tower, 135 West 36th Street
Sarah Eccles, August 2025



Fashion Tower, 135 West 36th Street
Sarah Eccles, August 2025



Fashion Tower, 135 West 36th Street
Sarah Eccles, August 2025

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NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission
Fashion Tower | LP-2688
Broadway
W 36 St
Legend
Proposed Landmark Site
Building Footprints
NYC Tax Lots
Address: 135 West 36th Street
Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 812, Lot 19
Calendared: April 22, 2025
Public Hearing: May 20, 2025
Designated: August 12, 2025
0
Miles
Graphic Source: MapPLUTO, Edition 22v1, Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, GE, Date: 03.20.2024