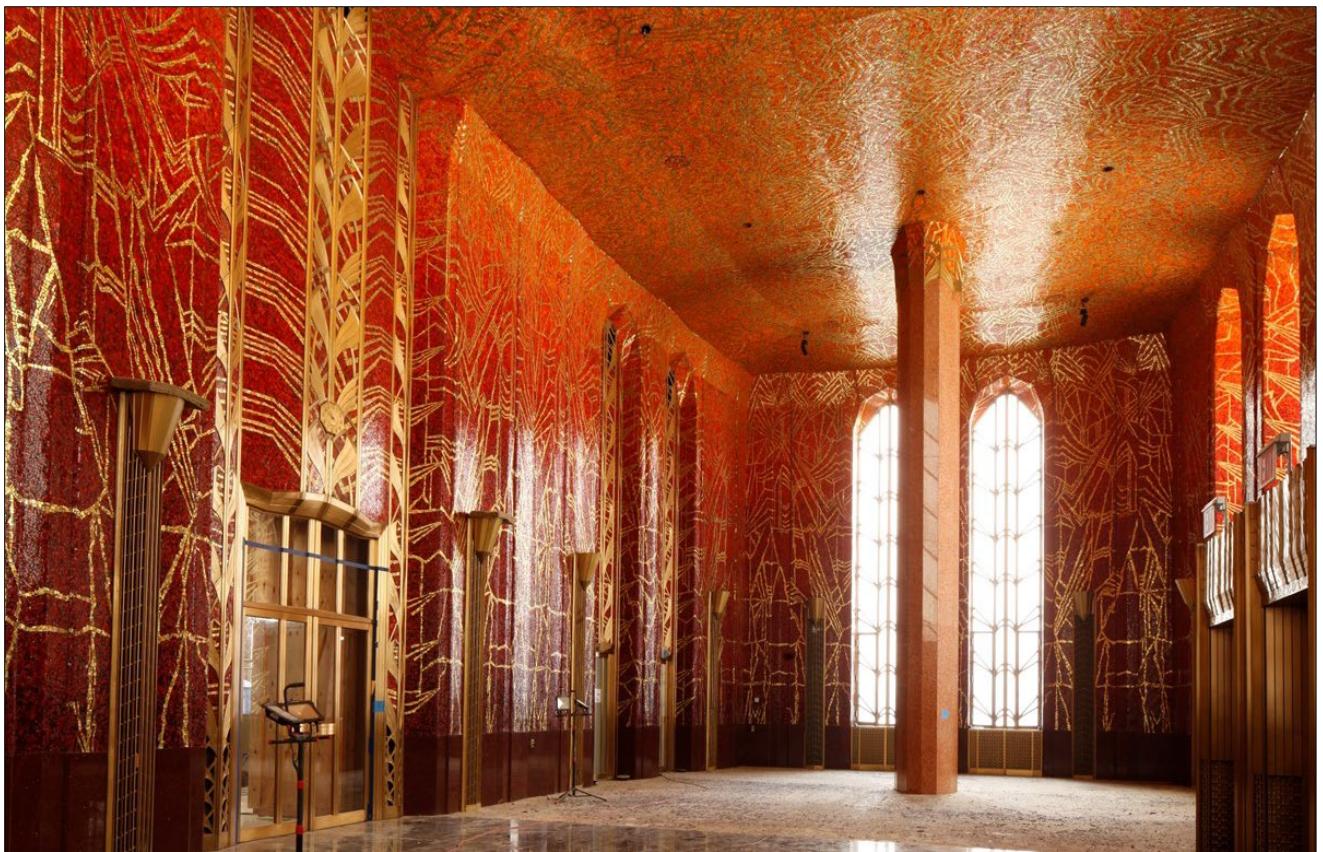


1 Wall Street Banking Room Interior



DESIGNATION REPORT

1 Wall Street Banking Room Interior

LOCATION

Borough of Manhattan
1 Wall Street

LANDMARK TYPE

Interior

SIGNIFICANCE

The stunning reception room and banking hall for the Irving Trust and Bank Company, this unusual and elaborately tiled space, completed in 1931, represents the work of two masters: architect Ralph Walker and muralist Hildreth Meière.



1 Wall Street Banking Room

2024

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1 Wall Street Banking Room

Interior

1 Wall Street, Manhattan

Designation List 542

LP-2679

Built: 1931

Architect: Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker

Designers: Ralph Walker, Perry Coke Smith, and Hildreth Meière

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 23, Lot 7501 (formerly Lot 7) in part, consisting of the former banking hall and reception room of the Irving Trust Company, located at the building's northernmost room, and its fixtures and interior components, which may include but are not limited to the historic wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, columns, vestibule, lighting fixtures, attached furnishings, doors, windows, decorative metalwork, and attached decorative elements.

Building Identification Number (BIN):

1000815

Calendared: December 19, 2023

Public Hearing: May 14, 2024

On May 14, 2024, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the 1 Wall Street Banking Room Interior as a New York City Interior 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. Six people spoke in support of designation, including representatives of the building owner, Manhattan Community Board 1, the International Hildreth Meière Association, the Art Deco Society, the New York City Landmarks Conservancy, and the Historic Districts Council.

Summary

1 Wall Street Banking Room Interior

Located at the intersection of Broadway and Wall Street in the heart of Manhattan’s financial district, the Banking Room of 1 Wall Street (colloquially known as the Red Room) was designed by architects Ralph Walker and Perry Coke Smith, and muralist Hildreth Meière as an impressive reception room and banking hall for the Irving Trust and Bank Company. This extraordinary and elaborately tiled space, completed in 1931, was the first of several interior collaborations between Meière and Walker and the only abstract mosaic mural by Meière, whose designs typically included allegorical figures executed in an Art Deco manner. The room’s undulating walls, ceiling, and columns sparkle with mosaic tile in warm colors that begin in oxblood red at the dado and fade upward to orange across the ceiling. These colored tiles are all intertwined with a web-like system of gold tiles that creates a striking verticality. The walls mimic the curved stone facades of the Art Deco skyscraper’s exterior. 1 Wall Street was designated an individual New York City landmark in 2001.

Ralph Walker (1889-1973), the architect of 1 Wall Street, was a principal of the firm Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker. Walker was one of New York’s most noteworthy designers of Art Deco high-rise buildings. He would go on to become the go-to architect for the American Telephone and Telegraph Company (AT&T). Perry Coke Smith (1899-1973) was the design

assistant to Walker on the project, including oversight of the Banking Room’s interior design. For the mosaics at 1 Wall Street, they engaged the renowned artist Hildreth Meière (1892-1961), an exceptionally talented and versatile muralist with an impressive body of work spanning churches, synagogues, and iconic landmarks such as the rondels adorning Radio City Music Hall's façade. With her mastery of various mediums, including intricate mosaics and vibrant painted murals, Meière was tasked with developing the color and scale of the stunning mosaics based on the architects' designs. Following their successful collaboration at 1 Wall Street, Meière's artistry was again tapped by Walker for the lobby at the AT&T Long Distance Building, cementing a partnership that extended to several subsequent projects.

The Irving Trust and Bank Company and its successor firms inhabited 1 Wall Street until 2014. In 2016, LPC approved work to enable the landmark building to undergo an office-to-residential conversion, which created 566 units of housing and ground-floor retail. As part of that work, the current owners undertook a full restoration of the banking room, utilizing a newly discovered trove of surplus original tiles. While temporarily used as the sales office for the condominiums on the upper stories of the building, the former banking room is being converted to retail space.

Representing the work of masters of their fields, the banking room of 1 Wall Street is a striking and rare example of an abstract mosaic interior by Meière and an elaborate stylistic departure from the typical stone-clad banking hall.

Building Description

1 Wall Street Banking Room Interior

Description

The Banking Room is entered from Wall Street to the north via a bronze vestibule and rises to a monumental height of three stories. The oblong room is symmetrical, with few, if any, right angles. The main entrance and interior doors are located at the center of the long north and south walls, and paired monumental gothic-arched windows are centered within the east and west walls. The soaring space is punctuated by two Verona marble-clad columns along the center east-west axis, topped with bronze caps that reflect the pattern of the tile.

Above red Verona marble wainscoting, intricate mosaic tile covers the faceted walls and undulating ceiling 30 feet above. The tile is of varying tones and textures and gradually transforms from a deep red at the wainscoting to a light orange as the elevation increases. Gilded tiles create web-like designs that glitter on the red background.

The tall, bronze-enframed windows reference Gothic lancet windows, and are set on deep sills. They are paired at the east and west ends and are arranged symmetrically on either side of the main entrance. The south (interior) wall features recesses that reflect the windows on the north wall. The mosaic wall treatment continues into the recesses to the window frames. Radiators are situated below the windows beneath elaborately patterned perforated bronze covers.

The room was historically illuminated by cast bronze torchiere lights that were spaced along the perimeter of the room.

North (Wall Street) elevation:

The north elevation contains the primary street entrance into the banking room. The elevation is bisected by an imposing embossed bronze entrance vestibule with a wide window above and two lancet windows on either side. Beneath each of the four window openings sit radiators that are enclosed by elaborate perforated metalwork.

East (New Street) elevation:

The east elevation is shorter than the north and south elevations. It is punctured by two tall lancet windows in deep Gothic-arched openings.

South (interior) elevation:

The south elevation is bisected by double-leaf glass doors leading to the former elevator lobby. These doors are flanked by four frosted glass doors set within tall, pointed niches, leading to utility and service areas. The tall gothic-arched niches mirror the windows of the north wall; metal grilles run from the center top of the doors to the top of the niches near the ceiling. A clock is incorporated into this detail above the center set of doors.

West (Broadway) elevation:

The west elevation mirrors the east elevation, with a pair of tall lancet windows set on deep sills.

Ceiling:

The ceiling pitches slightly upward at the center north-south axis above the two entrances. Its elaborate tile fades from light orange to yellow and silver mosaic that is a seamless gradation of the colors of the wall.

Alterations

Alterations and non-historic elements within the Banking Room include non-historic revolving doors in the entrance vestibule;¹ non-historic torchiere light fixtures and grilles installed in original locations; installation of downlights and sprinklers in the ceiling; historic flooring, consisting of marble mosaic tiles set in four-foot squares separated by bronze divider strips, coated in mastic and covered by carpet sometime in the 20th century (as of 2024 carpet has been removed); a wide path of polished stone flooring installed in center section of floor between vestibule and interior entry; non-historic window film at all windows; and the replacement of cast bronze radiator covers with non-metal replicas at the east elevation.

History and Significance²

1 Wall Street Banking Room Interior

Earlier Site History³

One Wall Street sits at the intersection of two of the oldest documented streets in New York City, Broadway and Wall Street, just inside the early perimeter of the Dutch settlement of Niue Amsterdam, established at the southern tip of Manhattan in 1624. Prior to European settlement, this area was home to Indigenous Peoples known as the Lenape, members of the larger Algonquin group who spoke a dialect called Munsee.⁴ Broadway followed the path of an Indigenous trail known as the Wickquasgeck trail, and Wall Street was established around 1653 along the palisade that marked the northern border of the Dutch settlement. After the Revolutionary War, the area served as the seat of government and finance for the new republic, and included institutions such as the customs house, the stock exchange and numerous banks and insurance companies.

By the early 20th century, the future site of 1 Wall Street at the intersection of Wall Street and Broadway was occupied by four buildings, some relatively new. At the corner was an 18-story building dating to 1906 known as the Chimney Corner. This parcel has been noted as the most expensive real estate in New York, according to the *New York Times*.⁵ Three additional buildings, including a 15-story, a 19-story, and an 11-story building were demolished to make way for the new full-block tower.⁶ In the financial world, the larger banks and financial institutions were

building their own large skyscrapers and locating them on or close to Wall Street. In his article on bank planning, Alfred Hopkins pointed out “how very important a good location for a bank is,” both for the convenience of providing service to its customers and for the advertising value. The prime building location available at this time was the corner of Wall Street and Broadway, for many years considered the most expensive real estate in New York. To create an impressive corporate image, no better site could be found than the head of Wall Street, across from New York's distinguished Trinity Church, (1839-46, a designated New York City Landmark).

Irving Trust Company⁷

The Irving Trust Company, as the bank which built the 1 Wall Street Building was known at the time, was formed primarily from two successful, independent institutions, the Irving Bank and the New York Exchange Bank. Each of these banks had existed independently for more than fifty years.

The Irving Bank first opened for business in March 1851, at 279 Greenwich Street, in the middle of New York's busy wholesale food market. The bank was named after Washington Irving, one of America's most admired and renowned authors, with the intention that this name would add to the bank's prominence and prestige. In April 1851, the New York Exchange Bank was begun at 187 Greenwich Street by Selah Van Duzer and five other businessmen as a currency brokerage, but almost immediately it began offering a full range of banking services.

Both banks expanded considerably during the 19th century, weathering several financial crises, including that of 1857, the Panic of 1873,

and the Civil War. By the early 20th century, these banks shared clients who were well-known and successful in local wholesale and retail markets, and a merger seemed practical. In 1907, the merged banks became the Irving National Exchange Bank. With this and subsequent mergers leading to an increased volume of business and a larger staff, the bank needed more space, which was available in the new Woolworth Building that opened in 1913. The Irving National Bank occupied a large banking room on the second story, reached by a grand staircase from the building's magnificent lobby, as well as vaults in the basement, offices on the third-story mezzanine, and a board room on the fourth story.

Another large merger occurred in 1926, between the Irving Trust and Bank Company and the American Exchange-Pacific National Bank. The increased size of the company led once again to overcrowded conditions at the bank's multiple lower Manhattan office locations, and the decision was reached to construct a new building to house the rapidly expanding conglomerate. The bank formed a committee to select an architecture firm to design a new headquarters in the Financial District. While the bank's president was intent on hiring Cass Gilbert, Ralph Walker, a new partner in the firm of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, was instrumental in swaying the committee with his innovative and modern skyscraper concept and won the commission for his firm.⁸

Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker⁹

Ralph Walker (1889-1973) was born in Waterbury, Connecticut. His unconventional architectural training included a two-year apprenticeship with the architectural firm of Hilton & Jackson, in Providence, Rhode Island, starting

in 1907. He then enrolled as a special student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. This was followed, in 1911, by a period of study with Francis Swales (1878-1962) in Montreal. In 1913, Walker practiced architecture with James Ritchie in Boston and three years later won the Rotch Traveling Scholarship enabling him to tour Europe. His trip had to be postponed because of World War I, during which time Walker served in France with the Army Corps of Engineers. Upon his return, Walker worked briefly in the offices of Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue, and York & Sawyer.

In 1919, when Ralph Walker joined the architectural firm where he would eventually make his name, it was known as McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin. This firm was established in 1910 with the partnership of Andrew McKenzie (1861-1926), Stephen Voorhees (1878-1965), and Paul Gmelin (1859-1937). McKenzie had previously been in partnership with Cyrus L.W. Eidlitz (from 1902 until 1909). Voorhees was a civil engineer trained at Princeton University, who had worked for Eidlitz & McKenzie as an engineer and superintendent of construction. German born and trained Paul Gmelin had worked previously for McKim, Mead & White, and Babb, Cook & Willard before joining with McKenzie and Voorhees. The firm of McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin did a considerable amount of work for the New York Telephone Company, an association that had begun with the designs of two downtown telephone company buildings by their predecessor Cyrus Eidlitz (in 1885-86 and 1890). The first structure that MacKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin, with Cyrus Eidlitz, designed for the company was the Long Distance Building at 32 Sixth Avenue (1911-14, a designated New York City Landmark). By 1912, the firm had completed

approximately thirty new telephone buildings in New York City alone (in addition to alterations and expansions). McKenzie, Voorhees, & Gmelin also designed other telephone company buildings in Albany and Buffalo, the New Jersey Bell headquarters building in Newark, New Jersey, the Brooklyn Edison Company Building, and the Brooklyn Municipal Building. They additionally designed a number of private residences and were active through 1925.

Walker's first assignment upon joining the firm of MacKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin, was the Barclay-Vesey Building for the New York Telephone Company (1923-26, 140 West Street, a designated New York City Landmark) which gained him immediate fame. Near the completion of this building and following the death of McKenzie in 1926, Walker became a partner in the firm, and its name was changed to Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker. The success of the Barclay-Vesey Building and subsequent commissions brought Walker recognition as one of the city's preeminent designers of Art Deco skyscrapers. Walker was a prolific architect, working almost exclusively for corporate clients, especially for AT&T, and becoming a specialist in the design of that company's buildings. Among his subsequent commissions were the Western Union Building, at 60 Hudson Street (1928-30, a designated New York City Landmark), an extension and rebuilding of the Long Distance Building of AT&T at 32 Sixth Avenue (1930-32, a designated New York City Landmark), and this building at 1 Wall Street. Walker also designed buildings for General Foods and IBM, and several pavilions at the 1939 World's Fair.

Active in professional circles, Walker served as president of several architectural

organizations, including the state and national levels of the American Institute of Architects. He was the recipient of numerous architectural awards and citations, and in 1957 the AIA awarded Walker the title of "architect of the century." In 1958 Walker resigned from active participation in the firm, then known as Voorhees, Walker, Smith, Smith & Haines, although he continued to lecture and serve on many professional and civic design committees. The architectural firm has continued under various names and is known today as HLW International.

Walker selected Perry Coke Smith as his design assistant for the 1 Wall Street project. Smith was educated at Columbia University and joined Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker in 1926.¹⁰ His notable works include the Mudd Engineering Building at Columbia University and 530 Fifth Avenue. Smith had oversight of the 1 Wall Street Banking Room's interior design and later became a partner in the firm in 1938.

At 1 Wall Street, Walker and his team sought to create a dramatic space to welcome clients of the Irving Trust and Bank Company, so they engaged Hildreth Meière, an accomplished muralist, for their team so that she could render the architects' nascent design into a fully realized installation, translating their initial vision into an intricately crafted mosaic-clad space. Meière developed the gradations of color and scale with Smith, who drew the pattern.¹¹ It was to be the first of several collaborations between the parties on buildings in New York City and beyond.

Hildreth Meière

Hildreth Meière (1892-1961) was born in New York City and was educated at the Arts Students League, the California School of Fine Arts (now

the San Francisco Art Institute), and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Because the Beaux-Arts Institute of Design in Manhattan did not admit women, in order to continue her studies Meière attended the School of Applied Design for Women, which offered instruction in trades such as textile design, wallpaper design, and interior design, pursuits deemed more suitable for a woman of the early 20th century.¹²

Highly accomplished in a variety of mediums, Meière began her professional work in the theater, where she designed costumes and sets, and soon received commissions for painted and mosaic murals in a wide variety of churches and synagogues throughout the country. Meière was admired for her ability to understand how to effectively collaborate with architects, which led to many successful commissions. Meière's work in the 1920s and early 1930s on the Nebraska State Capitol building embodied themes of classical and Native American imagery. The Bertram Goodhue-designed building incorporates decorative tile mosaics with Guastavino acoustic vaulting. Meière designed mosaics for the domes and the floor of the foyer. This noteworthy commission drew attention to Meière's stunning work. She was subsequently engaged to work on the Baltimore Trust Company building, designed by Taylor & Fisher in conjunction with the firm of Smith & May.¹³ In New York City, Meière's mosaics grace the apse, narthex, and stringcourse of Saint Bartholomew's Church, and the ark and arch of Temple Emanu-El. Perhaps her best-known works are the cast metal rondels on the facade of Radio City Music Hall (1931-1932, 1260 Sixth Avenue, Manhattan, a designated New York City Landmark).¹⁴

1 Wall Street, Meière's second corporate

commission, would become the first, and perhaps the most striking, of many collaborations between herself and the architect Ralph Walker of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker. She would next work with Walker on the lobby of the AT&T Long Distance Building (1911-14, 32 Sixth Avenue, Manhattan, a designated New York City Individual and Interior Landmark).

Meière broke many barriers for women in the field of architecture and design. She completed a fine arts education, despite exclusion from many institutions because of her gender. She later received a gold medal from the Architectural League for her work on the Nebraska State Capitol building, six years before women would be allowed to join the organization. She quipped that she was "the Founder and President of the Association of Lady Applicants."¹⁵ Ralph Walker was among her professional admirers, having been quoted in 1941 as saying, "I'd much prefer to work with Miss Meière than with any artist I know."¹⁶

Art Deco Style¹⁷

The Art Deco or Modernistic style of architecture primarily appeared in this country from the mid-1920s through the 1930s. It has been called an "avant-garde traditionalist"¹⁸ approach to creating a contemporary idiom for buildings of the period. Designers and critics of this time expressed the need for a new style that would be deemed appropriate for the period dubbed the "Jazz Age," and all its accompanying technological developments. Much of the architecture that we know as Art Deco was based on accepted, standard forms and construction techniques, which were given a modern cast through the use of a characteristic ornament, and a variety of materials,

some new and some simply used in a new way. In America, architects focused on linear quality, streamlined forms, and geometrically composed ornament. Naturalistic forms such as plants, animals, and human figures were also used, but were abstracted and incorporated into flattened patterns so as to detract from historical associations. Materials assumed an important role as well. The colors and textures of brick, limestone, highly colored marbles, bronze and other metals were juxtaposed in an attempt to create dramatic effects. In his 1928 book *New Dimensions: The Decorative Arts of Today in Words & Pictures*, designer Paul T. Frankl wrote, “Brick tapestries hung from the sky are as decorative as anything yet done on a large scale. Mosaics of colored stones or tinted bricks are being used most effectively in this new art, a ‘truly American’ style of skyscraper that was a monument of American business and enterprise.”

After the implementation of the 1916 New York City Building Zone Resolution, which regulated bulk and required buildings to be set back at specific heights, architects realized that the mandated building form required a new stylistic approach and combined the necessary setbacks with this emerging architectural style. The surfaces of these new buildings were treated with little depth, as a skin around the framework. This idea came from the work of architects of the Chicago School, which in turn can be traced back to the writings of German architect Gottfried Semper (1803-1879). In an essay he included as one of the four basic components of architecture the "enclosure of textiles, animal skins, wattle or any other filler hung from the frame or placed between the supporting poles." Reaching its zenith in popularity between 1928 and 1931 in New York

City, this new Art Deco style was used mainly for "modernistic" setback skyscrapers and their interiors.

For interior spaces, designers emphasized linear ornament, bold or contrasting materials, and the meshing of wall and ceiling surfaces. Many Art Deco-style interiors are irregularly shaped, in both plan and elevation. Most importantly, murals and elaborate surface treatments, often painted or executed in masonry or tile, decorate surfaces and fully integrate art with architecture, creating a seamless collaboration between artists and architects in creating monumental spaces and experiences, something lacking from post-WWII architecture, where art was often treated as separate from architecture. Often the result was the treatment of wall surfaces like woven fabric, a technique seen in many building interiors in New York during this period, including the Film Center Building by Ely Jacques Kahn (1928-29, 630 Ninth Avenue) and many of the interiors at Rockefeller Center such as the RCA Building (1932-33), the International Building (1933-34), and Radio City Music Hall (1931-32), all designated New York City Interior Landmarks. New materials such as metal alloys were used, but brick, terracotta, and tile were favorites because of their wide range of color and textural possibilities. Buildings were conceived as stage sets for daily living and were treated as such, with entrances taking on the form and function of the proscenium, and with walls that were made to look like curtains.

Outstanding Art Deco design is often associated with Ralph Walker, among New York's foremost architects who interpreted the modernistic skyscraper style in unusually stunning interiors. These interiors, though influenced by

diverse aesthetic models, are united by common features such as linearity, the melding of wall and ceiling planes, and the continuity of exterior architectural themes. The blurring of a clear division between wall and ceiling planes was an attempt to engender a sense of spaciousness, as seen not only at 1 Wall Street, but also in his reworking of the lobby of the Long Distance Building of AT&T in 1932 (1911-14, 32 Sixth Avenue, Manhattan, a designated New York City Individual and Interior Landmark), which, like 1 Wall Street, was adorned with Meière's murals.

Banking Halls¹⁹

The 1 Wall Street Banking Room interior was dramatically different from its predecessors. In the wake of the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 that spawned the Academic Classical movement throughout America, the neo-Classical style became the most common solution for bank design, motivated by the desire to project monumentality and permanence. Typical banking halls of the early 20th century drew from classical design principles, and often featured interior details such as columns, classical entablatures, domes, and rich materials such as marble. For example, the Williamsburgh Savings Bank (1927-29) and the National City Bank (1836-42, redesigned 1904-10), both New York City interior landmarks, relied on the symbolism of classical design referencing solidity and permanence. Also ubiquitously present are large volumes of space with high, often multistory interior spaces meant to impress those that entered the space.

The tendency to design banking rooms on a grand and theatrical scale persisted across shifts in style. Banking halls were meant to impress and welcome clients and evoke notions of permanence

and solidity. Art Deco-style bank interiors of the 1920s and 1930s relied on streamlined interpretations of classical elements, such as that of the Dollar Savings Bank (1932-33, 1937-38), a New York City interior landmark). Walker's design of the Banking Room of 1 Wall Street, however, broke with the references of the past, creating an entirely new type of bank interior more closely related to the eclecticism of 1930s cinemas. Because the Irving Trust was a commercial bank, fixed teller windows were unnecessary as no cash deposits were handled. Instead, Walker's banking hall was furnished with desks, and the furnishings were rearranged over the years as needed.²⁰

Design of the Banking Room

The Banking Room is entered from Wall Street to the north via a bronze vestibule and rises to a monumental height of three stories. The oblong room is symmetrical, with few if any right angles. The main entrance and interior doors are located at the center of the long north and south walls, and paired monumental gothic-arched windows are centered within the east and west walls. The soaring space is punctuated by two Verona marble-clad columns along the center east-west axis, topped with bronze caps that reflect the pattern of the tile. The tall, bronze-enframed windows reference Gothic lancet windows, and are set on deep sills.

The most striking feature of the room is the intricate mosaic tile covering the faceted walls and undulating ceiling 30 feet above. The tile is of varying tones and textures and gradually transforms from a deep red at the wainscoting to a light orange as the elevation increases. Gilded tiles

create web-like designs that glitter on the red background.

At the dawn of the 1930s, tile mosaic and other forms of mural art were in the midst of a revival in the United States. The popular Art Deco style integrated grand artistic treatments of surfaces, including painted and mosaic graphic artwork. Late in the 19th century, the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago had inspired a renewed interest in mural art in the United States. The Expo's campus of Beaux-Arts buildings that came to be known as "White City" afforded an abundance of otherwise unadorned walls that proved to be ideal substrates for muralists. The fair inspired civic beautification movements of all types throughout the nation, including mural programs. Brawer and Skolnik write in their book on the life and work of Hildreth Meière, "The demand for mural painters after the World's Columbian Exposition led to the rise of mural painting as a distinct profession."²¹ Mosaic tile had experienced a revival in Europe in the mid-19th century that reached the United States by the late 19th century. By the 1920s, when Meière's career was emerging, it was the dawn of a heyday of mural arts in America, with an established corps of muralists at work. A professional organization, The National Society of Mural Painters had been formed in 1895. While the profession was dominated by male artists, largely because of the physical challenges associated with working on ladders and scaffolds, women such as Violet Oakley were at work embellishing architecture.²² The 1924-1925 Paris Exposition marked another touchstone that furthered the popularity of Art Deco design worldwide.

In the late 1920s, Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker established a department of interior design

with the goal, according to historian Kathryn E. Holliday, to "humanize the work of the architectural designer."²³ Ralph Walker had previously used patterned brickwork in his lobby design for Western Union at 60 Hudson Street (1930) and included painted ceiling murals in the Barclay-Vesey building (1926), both New York City interior landmarks. For the Irving Trust Company, he departed from the popular stylistic modes for banks and chose to replicate the undulating texture of the building's exterior in this grand reception room, executed in richly colored tile instead of stone. According to Holliday, "the curtain wall metaphor extended beyond the dramatic portals and into the interior spaces as well."²⁴

Because of the collapse of financial markets in 1929, it was vitally important that Irving Trust project an image of solvency and intact wealth, and decadent finishes throughout the building's interior spaces were meant to convey this message. The result is Gilded Age opulence executed in a forward-looking new mode for the 20th century. In addition to the use of sumptuous architectural finishes, 1 Wall Street was noted for incorporating new technology such as high-speed elevators, pneumatic tubes, and impressive below-ground vaults. Its skyscraper design also demonstrated an innovative approach to creating setbacks in the building's form to comply with recently revised New York City zoning laws.²⁵

The planning for the Banking Room commenced in 1929 and construction was completed in 1931. The design concept was developed by Walker, who engaged Meière to implement the designs and plan the color gradations and scale of the artistic mosaic tile installation. In this commission, Meière departed

from her more typical figurative and representative previous work, much with religious themes and Byzantine overtones, to create a dazzling abstract design. She collaborated with Walker's assistant, Perry Coke Smith to implement her color concepts onto the irregularly shaped surfaces that form the room.²⁶ In his 1931 article, Eugene Clute wrote, "the bank authorities expressed to the architects their desire that this reception-room be made inviting and friendly, rather than austere monumental or over-impressive,"²⁷ contrasting with the cold marble of earlier banking halls. "Stone seemed too monumental, wood not sufficiently monumental, painted decoration in a purely ornamental design not sufficiently important, and figure subjects undesirable."²⁸

Once the concepts were developed, Lynn Fausett assisted Meière to paint the designs on scaled drawings of the room, and eventually, on full-scale sketches.²⁹ Meière worked with the Berlin firm Pühl & Wagner to manufacture the tile mosaics once the patterns were finalized. The designs were shipped in paper-backed panels, and each elevation was designated with an alphanumeric code, which was stamped on individual tiles to indicate their installation location.

The mosaics were to be installed by Pühl & Wagner's American affiliate Ravenna Mosaics Company, but progress was hindered by a threatened strike of the New York mosaicists' trade union because of its relationship with a competing New York City-based mosaic manufacturer. The rift was resolved by contracting six union tile installers to work on six pilasters alongside the Ravenna installers.

The effect of the tile mosaic is reminiscent of 19th century faux finishes modernized for the

machine age, meant to impress with their complexity and stunning replication of natural materials, but executed by precise human labor. Its dramatic atmosphere is also reminiscent of the grand movie palaces of the same era. The room features lancet windows echoing a Gothic aesthetic, and the gilded tesserae of the mosaic walls replicate the tracery of Gothic windows on a grand scale. Holliday notes that the "pattern of gold tiles suggesting Gothic window tracery divides the surface, echoing the view through the room's windows of Trinity Church across the street. The resulting space is at once dazzling and other-worldly, suffused with the rich, warm glow of a secular Gothic chapel."³⁰

Reaction to the banking room was diverse. Architecture critic Lewis Mumford called it, "pure swank, and unconvincing swank at that."³¹ The *New York Evening Post* declared it "one of the most costly and beautiful pieces of mural decoration ever attempted in the United States."³² After the room was opened to clientele on March 25, 1931, patrons were surveyed for their reaction. Holliday writes, "the majority of answers indicated that they seemed to like it, though some complained that it was excessive."³³

Later Building History³⁴

Throughout most of its history, the Banking Room, having no fixed furnishings, was furnished with desks and chairs. Early photographs show the room to have been sparsely furnished and the density of desks within the room increasing over time. At some point, the tile floor was carpeted and the historic tile, while still partially extant, was damaged by a mastic coating.

In 1987-88, the Irving Trust Bank Corporation was acquired by The Bank of New

York, New York City's oldest banking institution. Subsequent to the merger with Irving Trust, The Bank of New York sold its property at 48 Wall Street, moving its headquarters to 1 Wall Street.

In 2014, 1 Wall Street was sold to Macklowe Properties, which undertook one of the largest office-to-residential conversions ever in New York City. The former Banking Room was temporarily revived as a condominium sales office. Like much of the other ground-floor space of 1 Wall Street, the room will soon be converted to retail use for the French department store *Printemps*.

Conclusion

At the time of its construction, 1 Wall Street was iconoclastic in both its exterior design as well as its innovative interior design. The overall design solved the nagging issue of conforming with new zoning laws that required incremental setbacks while still appearing fresh and aesthetically appealing. This design ingenuity and use of soaring, faceted surfaces were carried into the interior of the Banking Room.

Representing the work of Art Deco masters, the Banking Room of 1 Wall Street is a striking and rare example of an abstract mosaic interior by Meière, coupled with the innovative designs of architect Ralph Walker. It is an elaborate stylistic departure from the typical stone-clad, neo-Classical banking hall.

The Red Room is a glittering, sculptural jewel box. Its designers intended it to be an inviting and warm reception area for clients of the Irving Trust Company, in every way impressive and unique. It is an outstanding example of design and craftsmanship, unlike any bank interior constructed in New York City before or since.

Endnotes

¹ Modification of the vestibule including the removal of the two non-historic revolving doors, replacing them with two bronze single-leaf doors with sidelights within existing exterior bronze jambs, and extending the bronze vestibule to accommodate the door modification and installing a granite threshold within the vestibule to match existing flooring was approved per LPC Certificate of Appropriateness 24-04889 issued in 2023.

² Information for this report was graciously provided by the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library at Columbia University, and the International Hildreth Meière Association's archives and website (www.hildrethmeiere.org). Many thanks to Hilly Dunn for her assistance.

³ Information about early development in Lower Manhattan was taken from Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *Stone Street Historic District Designation Report (LP-1938)* (New York: City of New York, date), prepared by David M. Breiner, page; Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *Street Plan of New Amsterdam and Colonial New York Designation Report (LP-1235)* (New York: City of New York, June 14, 1983), prepared by Robert W. Venables; and Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *1 Wall Street Building Designation Report (LP-2029)* (New York: City of New York, March 6, 2001), prepared by Virginia Kurshan, p. 2.

⁴ Anne-Marie Cantwell, "Penhawitz and Wampage and the Seventeenth-Century World They Dominated," *Tales of Gotham, Historical Archaeology, Ethnohistory and Microhistory of New York City*. (2014), p. 7.

⁵ "World's Costliest Realty Plot Sold," *The New York Times*, January 19, 1926.

⁶ Four buildings were demolished (as per *Bankers Magazine*, March 1929): 1 Wall Street (1906), an 18 story building known as the Chimney Corner; 7 Wall St, a 15-story building; 70-74 Broadway, a 19 story building; and 80 Broadway, the 11 story Central-Union Trust Company building. (*Real Estate Record and Builders Guide*, May 5, 1928), pg. 11.

⁷ Information about the Irving Trust Company was taken from Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *1 Wall Street Building Designation Report (LP-2029)* (New York: City of New York, March 6, 2001),

prepared by Virginia Kurshan.

⁸ Kathryn E. Holliday, *Ralph Walker, Architect of the Century* (New York: Rizzoli, 2012), p. 82.

⁹ Information about Voorhees, Gmelin and Walker was taken from Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *1 Wall Street Building Designation Report (LP-2029)* (New York: City of New York, March 6, 2001), prepared by Virginia Kurshan and *The Long Distance Building of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company Designation Report (LP-1747)* (New York: City of New York, October 1, 1991), prepared by David M. Breiner; and *The Barclay-Vesey Building Designation Report (LP-1745)* (New York: City of New York, October 1, 1991), prepared by Margaret M.M. Pickart.

¹⁰ "Perry Smith, 74, Architect, Dead," *The New York Times*, November 12, 1973.

¹¹ Catherine Coleman Brawer & Kathleen Murphy Skolnik, *Hildreth Meière and the American Mural Tradition* (New York: Andrea Monfried Editions, 2014), p.137-138.

¹² Celia McGee, "If These Walls Could Speak, They'd Say Her Name," *The New York Times*, May 1, 2014.

¹³ Brawer & Skolnik, p.133.

¹⁴ *Radio City Music Hall Designation Report (LP-0995)* (New York: City of New York, March 28, 1978).

¹⁵ McGee, "If These Walls Could Speak, They'd Say Her Name."

¹⁶ Holliday, p. 86.

¹⁷ Information about the Art Deco style was taken from Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *1 Wall Street Building Designation Report (LP-2029)* (New York: City of New York, March 6, 2001), prepared by Virginia Kurshan, and *The Long Distance Building of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company, First Floor Interior (LP-1748)* (New York: City of New York, October 1, 1991), prepared by David M. Breiner.

¹⁸ Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "The Art Deco Style," *Skyscraper Style, Art Deco New York*, p. 41.

¹⁹ Information about the design of Banking Halls was

taken from Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company Building Designation Report (LP-1633)* (New York: City of New York, 1988), prepared by Elisa Urbanelli, p. 3; *Bowery Savings Bank Building Designation Report (LP-1913)* (New York: City of New York, 1996), prepared by Charles Savage, p. 3-4; *Williamsburgh Savings Bank Designation Report (LP-1910)* (New York: City of New York, 1996), prepared by Gale Harris, p. 5.

²⁰ Historic images indicate that the banking room was sparsely furnished in the early years and the density of desks increased over the years.

²¹ Brawer & Skolnik, p. 25.

²² Ibid, p. 25.

²³ Holliday, p. 94.

²⁴ Ibid, p. 86.

²⁵ "Design Skyscraper for 1 Wall Street," *The New York Times*, October 23, 1928.

²⁶ Brawer & Skolnik, p. 138.

²⁷ Eugene Clute, "Glass Mosaic," *Architecture*, vol. 64

(September 1931), p. 141.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 141.

²⁹ Brawer & Skolnik, p. 138.

³⁰ Holliday, p. 86.

³¹ Louis Mumford, "The Sky Line," *The New Yorker*, (December 12, 1931), page 68.

³² McCarroll, Marion Clyde, "Noted Woman Mural Artist Finds Idea for New Design in Daily Routine of Average American Working Girl," *New York Evening Post*, (April 13, 1931).

³³ Holliday, p. 97.

³⁴ Information about The Bank of New York was taken from Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC), *(Former) Bank of New York & Trust Company Building Designation Report (LP-2025)* (New York: City of New York, 1998), report prepared by Gale Harris; and "The Bank of New York Company, Inc." *International Directory of Company Histories* (Chicago: St. James Press, 1990), v.2, 216-219; and *1 Wall Street Building Designation Report (LP-2029)* (New York: City of New York, March 6, 2001), prepared by Virginia Kurshan.

Findings and Designation

1 Wall Street Banking Room Interior

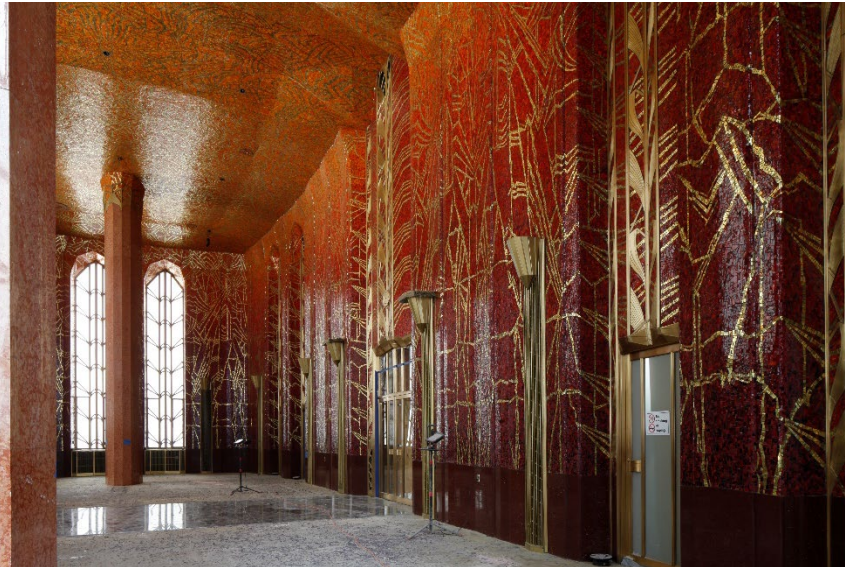
On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of this building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the 1 Wall Street Banking Room Interior has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part 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 an Interior Landmark the 1 Wall Street Banking Room Interior and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 23, Lot 7501 (formerly Lot 7) in part, consisting of the former banking hall and reception room of the Irving Trust Company, located at the building's northernmost room, and its fixtures and interior components, which may include but are not limited to the historic wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, columns, vestibule, lighting fixtures, attached furnishings, doors, windows, decorative metalwork, and attached decorative elements as its Landmark Site, as shown in the attached map.

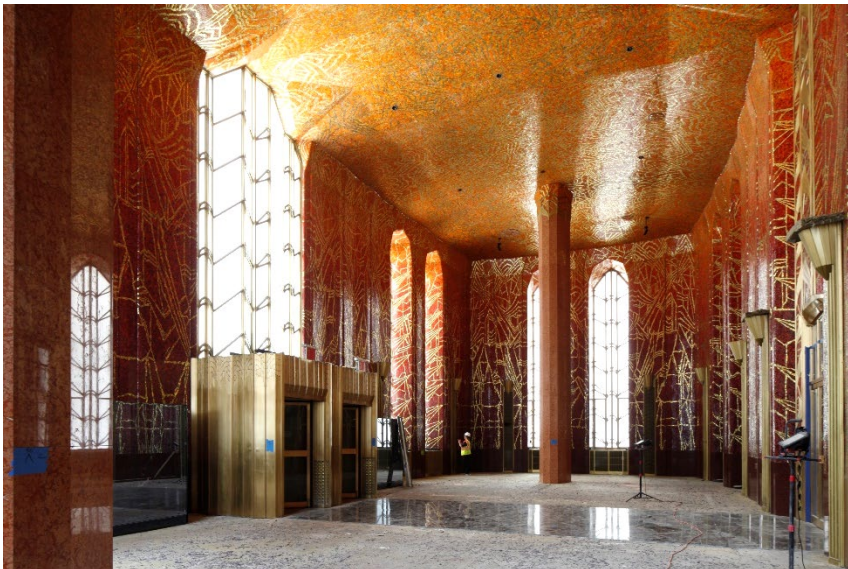


Banking Room, 1 Wall Street

Bilge Kose, June 2024



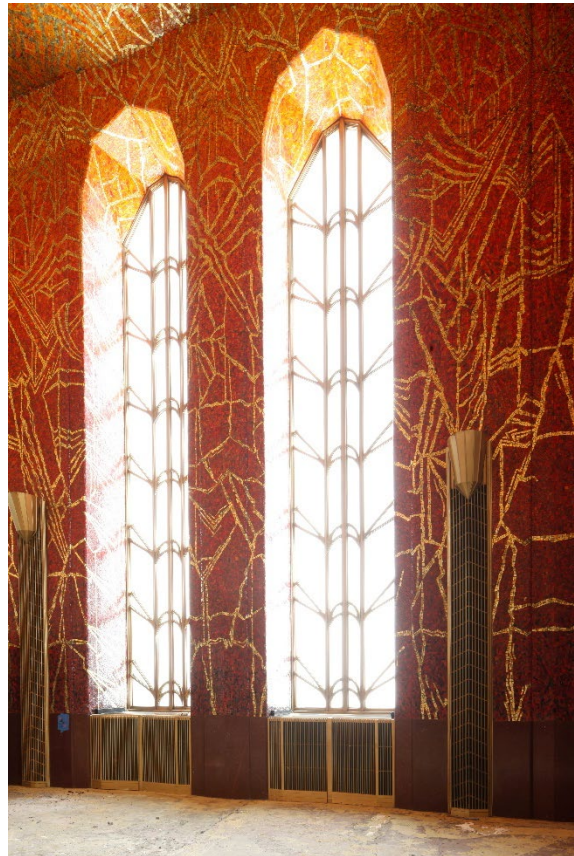
Banking Room, 1 Wall Street
Bilge Kose, June 2024



Banking Room, 1 Wall Street
Bilge Kose, June 2024



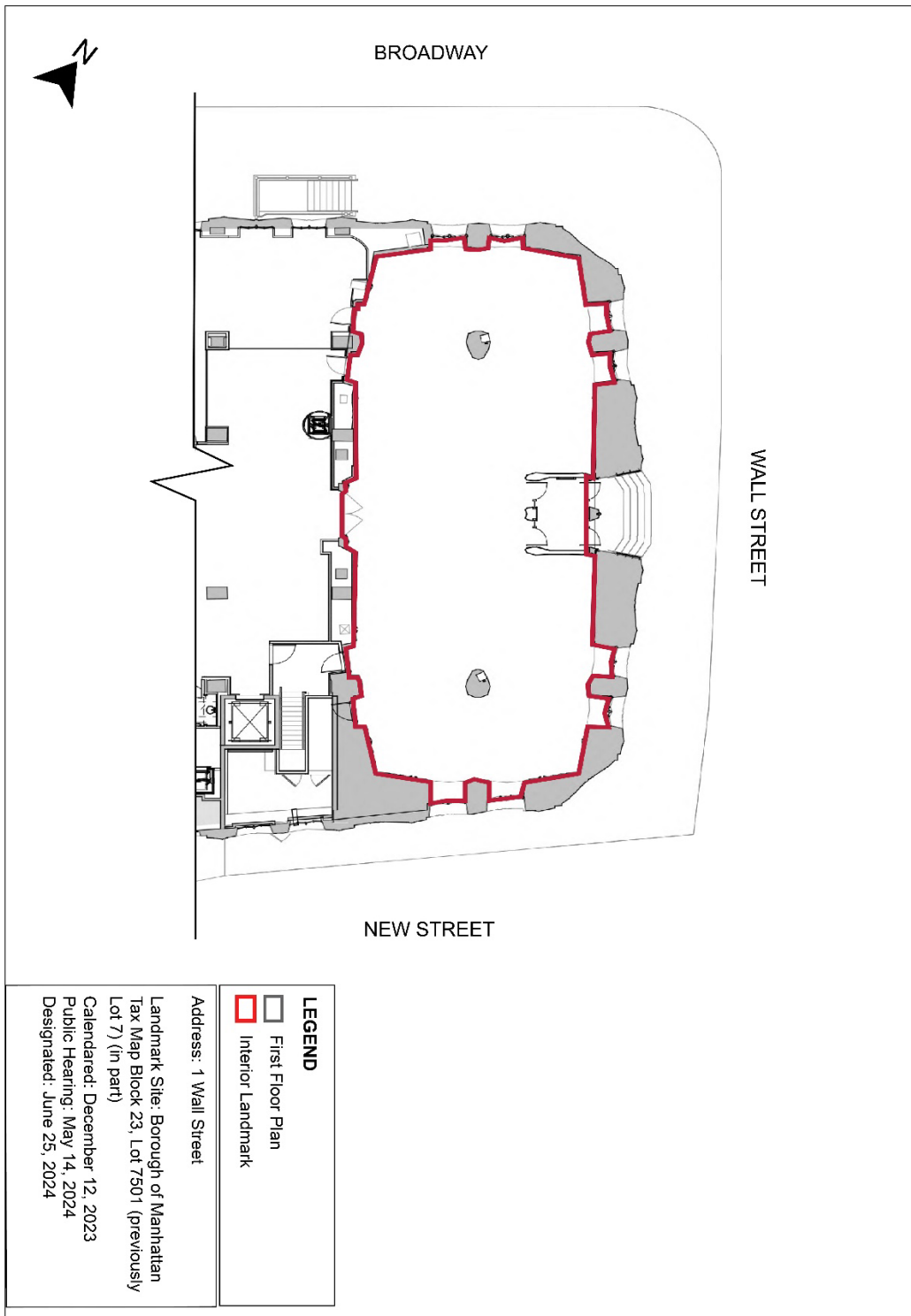
Banking Room, 1 Wall Street
Bilge Kose, June 2024



Banking Room, 1 Wall Street
Bilge Kose, June 2024



Graphic Source: MapR, UTO, Edition 20-2, Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, SE, Date: 06.25.2023



* Note that the Landmark Site plan shows the proposed door configuration, per LPC Certificate of Appropriateness 24-04889, issued in 2023.