

## 2 COLUMBUS CIRCLE'S FUTURE AND LATE AUGUST STRATEGIES

After a lull of over a year in the public review process for the sale of 2 Columbus Circle to the Museum of Arts and Design, Manhattan Borough President C. Virginia Fields scheduled the board's public hearing for 8:30 a.m. August 24th with scant public notice. The Borough Board was the last stop in the review process and its 9-1 vote to approve the sale (at a negotiated price of \$17 million) means the future of E.D. Stone's iconic building hinges on what happens in the courts and continued public pressure.

Mocking standard notions of public process, most of the 10 Borough Board members sent staff as proxies. Fields, who chairs the Board was also absent, and adamant the prior week about not rescheduling to a date after Labor Day when more people would participate. Councilmember Bill Perkins, who supports a designation hearing for 2CC, had his proxy argue for a postponement before casting the dissenting vote. A public hearing with no one to "hear" is, well, what? Common political knowledge says if you want to avoid meaningful public involvement on an issue schedule it for late August.

Every major preservation group in the city supports a Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) designation hearing on 2 Columbus Circle (2CC), as does the Preservation League of New York State and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Aware of the Board's calculated timing, a host of preservation organizations and over 100 individuals still in town, signed a letter of protest read at the hearing in lieu of testimony at a public forum where only proxies would be present. Testimony was also read on behalf of the over 1,000 people who since June have signed the "Silent Majority" list—a public list that includes artists, architects, scholars, media types, elected officials and others who support a LPC hearing.

This is not to say the summer was quiet. Advocacy for 2CC was running high. On June 29th Landmark West!'s cocktail and auction event benefiting the Save 2 Columbus Circle Fund raised

\$50,000. Supporters and arts and architecture notables—often the same—packed the Liz O'Brien Gallery on 5th Avenue. Bidding was fun and furious; conversation was abuzz with Edward Durell Stone.

Playing on the nickname "Lollipop Building", candy lollipops with custom wraps depicting Stone's portholed façade were distributed at events and on street corners to bring attention to the building's at-risk status.

Even those who don't consider Stone's architecture their favorite are signing up to support due process in landmarking and preservation.



*On the left, 2CC in 1964. What it could very much be. On the right, the Museum of Arts and Design's facade proposal as published in the January 7 Wall Street Journal.*

*The Museum's public relations contact said in late August that the design is still "evolving" and that a more current proposal was not available for review.*

*It is also worth noting that City Councilmember Gale Brewer, in whose district 2 Columbus Circle resides, stated in an influential memo to the Borough Board that "the Museum's proposed renovations of 2 Columbus Circle will save the building."*

*Coming from a self-proclaimed pro-preservation politician, this is certainly an interesting use of the word "save."*

While the Commission holds fast to its position that in 1996 a sub-committee decided 2CC did not warrant a hearing, much has changed in the reception of Modern architecture in those eight years. Precedent indicates such initial committee judgments can be revisited. For example, 240 Central Park South is now a designated NYC landmark once pronounced unworthy of a hearing by an LPC committee.

Recently, past LPC commissioner Anthony M. Tung fired off a long letter to current commission Chair Robert Tierney in support of calendaring a designation hearing. He

noted that in his 26 years of involvement in preservation matters he had "never seen the Commission turn its back on such a widely supported and substantive argument for a hearing."

Meanwhile, the legal team that prepared the lawsuit against the City of New York based on a flawed public review process is working on an appeal of Judge Walter Tolub's May decision in favor of the City. Outreach to the media and preservation networks continues. DOCOMOMO US President Theo Prudon penned thoughts for a commentary article on 2CC to appear in the forthcoming



PHOTO, LEFT: EZRA STOLLER © ESTO; RIGHT: WSJ

## Coming Soon

### TWA Takes Off

"Terminal 5: A Project for Air Travel at JFK" opens October 1 in Eero Saarinen's TWA Terminal. This international exhibition, curated by Rachel Ward, meshes air flight, architecture and contemporary art through works by artists invited to respond to the site and the concept of air travel. "Arrivals", a series of live events and lectures, archival material, and video presentations in the historic VIP lounge add to the program, which will run through January 31.

"Terminal 5" has major support from JetBlue Airways—the new lessee of the Terminal, The Port Authority of NY & NJ and many corporate and consulate entities.

For more on the exhibition and events: [www.terminalsfive.com](http://www.terminalsfive.com)

### MIES, CONTINUED

career began in 1919 in his native Germany, where he designed a truly revolutionary skyscraper, sheathed wholly in glass and stripped almost to the structural skeleton....He spent 20 years advancing his avante-garde theories....At the Illinois Institute of Technology, he blanketed the campus with his architectural X-ray look....His two apartments on Chicago's Lake Shore Drive resembled upended ice-cube trays, a slenderella approach which elicited huzzahs from many of Mies's confreres in the field....Seagram represents an architecture for the 'whole man' of the 20th century.

Whatever would we have done without you, Hugh?

issue of *Preservation* magazine.

The work of bringing attention to 2 Columbus Circle and the City's handling of the sale to the museum bashes on. Landmark West!'s competent team is providing most of the leadership and labor, but yours is needed too. Contact [landmarkwest@landmarkwest.org](mailto:landmarkwest@landmarkwest.org) for details. Or visit [www.save2columbus.org](http://www.save2columbus.org) to sign in support of a hearing and to donate to the work ahead. Please also take a moment to write a polite personal letter on the subject to public officials and your favorite newspaper.

—Kathleen Randall and Kate Wood