



PETER PENNOYER ARCHITECTS  
432 Park Avenue South, 11th Floor, New York, New York 10016

October 12, 2006

Arlene Simon  
President  
Landmark West  
45 West 67th Street  
New York, NY 10023

Dear Arlene:

I am enclosing a letter that Anne Walker and I have written in opposition to Aby Rosen's proposed tower at 980 Madison Avenue.

I hope that Landmark West will recognize the perils of endorsing any version of a development in the air rights over this building.

That Aby Rosen has been a generous supporter of almost all of the groups that should stand against this project would make capitulation even more damaging to the preservation movement.

Yours sincerely,

Peter Pennoyer



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432 Park Avenue South, 11th Floor, New York, New York 10016

October 10, 2006

Chairman Robert Tierney  
Landmarks Preservation Commission  
1 Centre Street  
New York, NY 10007

Re: 980 Madison Avenue

Dear Chairman Tierney:

As a practicing architect and an architectural historian, we are writing in opposition to Sir Norman Foster's proposed design for 980 Madison Avenue. Through our experience designing in the Upper East Side historic districts as well as studying the architects who worked within them, we strongly support maintaining the distinct and historic character and architectural quality of the Upper East Side.

We hope that Sir Norman Foster's proposed 30-story tower on top of the original Parke-Bernet Gallery will follow the path to oblivion in the parade of ill-conceived towers designed to occupy the airspace above New York City's landmarks. The procession began with Marcel Breuer's office tower atop Grand Central Terminal (1968). It has continued with such proposals as a 23-story tower above the New York Historical Society (Hardy Holzman Pfeiffer, 1984), a 59-story office tower above the community house of St. Bartholomew's (Edward Durell Stone Associates, 1984), and a 37-story tower designed to hover over the Metropolitan Club (James Polshek, 1987) and, more recently, a 15-story building by Platt Byard Dovell White to cantilever over the Congregation Shearith Israel Synagogue on West 70<sup>th</sup> Street. All proposals were rejected outright by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. In each case, even when the architect designed the extension to relate to the building below, the Commission concluded that the development would irrevocably compromise the character of the landmark.

Unlike some of its predecessors, Foster's design offers no relationship to the scale, materials, or character of the landmarks district where it has landed. In fact, the architect seems unable to deal with the basic issue of connection, choosing the hackneyed modernist strategy of floating the structure; in this case, exposing an 'underbelly' thirty feet above the Parke-Bernet roof. In addition, the proposal completely disrupts the rhythmic scale and quality of Madison Avenue's low-rise buildings and high-rise apartments and hotels. The importance of this quality is described in the Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report (1981) as follows:

As a result of the development patterns on Madison Avenue, the vistas up and down the avenue are characterized by an irregular skyline caused by the combination of tall apartment houses and low rowhouses and commercial buildings. . . . a modular rhythm is maintained that is derived from the basic 20–25 foot width of the rowhouses. This module corresponds to the party walls of the rowhouses and the bay system of the apartment buildings. The storefronts with their variety and the rowhouses and apartment



house facades with their greater uniformity and intricate stylistic detail each have their own architectural ambience. Together, they coexist and contribute to the Madison Avenue streetscape.

The Landmarks Commission has increased its scrutiny of even small rooftop additions in historic districts, recognizing that the character of a district is more than the sum of its individual parts and that increased bulk can undermine the scale of an entire neighborhood. This proposal completely ignores those concerns, violating the scale of Madison Avenue, as well as undermining the iconic presence of the Carlyle Hotel.

The ephemerality of the proposed tower, as expressed in the developer's rendering produced by Foster & Partners, is fraudulent and deceptive. The glass curtain wall blends into the sky and the top of the towers melts into a conveniently placed cloud. These agglomerated towers would not, when built, melt benignly into the blue sky and appear soft and transparent next to its masonry neighbors. For example, the dark and gloomy Time Warner towers were originally presented as crystalline clear forms, glowing from within.

In 1949, architect William Adams Delano singled out the Parke-Bernet Gallery (Walker & Poor, 1949) as a building that "combines all the best of traditional and modern schools of architectural thought" and "demonstrates to others that distinction in commercial building pays." (William Adams Delano Papers, Yale University). The Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report (1981) described it as a "significant post-war addition." Given the building's significance and quality, we hope it won't become a base for Sir Norman Foster's proposed tower.

Sincerely,

Peter Pennoyer

Anne Walker

Parke Bernet Gallery  
William Adams Delano Papers, Yale University

It is unusual in this era of stark, utilitarian building that an architect has the good fortune to design for a client of imagination - who realizes that man cannot live on rents alone - and for that client to find tenants of like mind.

As the result shows, it has been a particularly happy conjunction of the stars. Speaking of constellations, I am told that another star - the sculptor Wheeler Williams - who designed the distinguished group over the entrance, has had trouble with his breastworks; that the City Fathers demand a considerable sum in rent for the lady's bosom, which projects beyond the authorized building line. They are, I am told, the most expensive - or should I say extensive - in New York but they will pay rich dividends in the quality they give to the facade. I rejoice that Anthony Comstock is in his grave!

I must confess to a certain envy. I should have been very proud to have designed this building, for it combines all the best of traditional and modern schools of architectural thought. It will, I feel sure, appeal to the public.

I had not been so far north on Madison Avenue for some months so I took a taxi and said to the driver, "I want to see a new building on Madison Avenue between 76th and 77th Streets." He replied, "Oh, you mean the Parke-Bernet's new gallery; it's the best damn building in New York." If that be the judgment of a taxi-driver, I am sure it will make even stronger appeal to that decreasing number of our citizens who do not drive taxis.

May I say a word about the value of this building as an example to other owners of real estate. For thirty years I have served on art commissions and planning boards in Washington and here, and I am convinced that under our democratic form of government such bodies can accomplish little except on government-owned property. As Mr. Elihu Root once said, when I asked him if the Fine Arts Commission in Washington had not the power under the law to stop a particularly atrocious building that had been laid before us - "I'm prouder of that Bill, which I drafted when I was Secretary of State, than almost any other, for it gives the Commission no power; it can only advise. If the Bill had been given veto powers, it would have been abolished by Congress inside of six months."

The Art Commission of the City of New York, unlike the National Fine Arts Commission, has greater power under its charter but if it seriously takes issue with any of the City Departments it is likely to have rough sledding. No commission would be tolerated that governed the appearance of privately-owned property. It takes an Emperor and a Baron Haussmann to create a Paris.

Civic pride, public sentiment and well directed publicity may have some value but I believe that examples speak louder than words. I hope, therefore, that this building dedicated today may demonstrate to others that distinction in commercial building pays.

As many words are a weariness to the flesh, I close with sincere congratulations to Mr. Dowling, the owner; Walker and Poor, the architects; Wheeler Williams, the sculptor; City Construction Co., the builders; and to Parke-Bernet Galleries for having found such a distinguished home.

November 2nd, 1949.