



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!  
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee  
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission  
303 West 90<sup>th</sup> Street  
January 20, 2009**

LANDMARK WEST! is a not-for-profit community organization committed to the preservation of the architectural heritage of the Upper West Side.

The Certificate of Appropriateness Committee wishes to comment on the application to construct rear yard and rooftop additions on this Elizabethan Renaissance-style rowhouse, designed by Clarence True and built in 1898-99.

Eight buildings situated on the corner of West 90<sup>th</sup> Street and West End Avenue, including 303 West 90<sup>th</sup> Street, pay homage to the legacy of talented Upper West Side residential architect Clarence True. On the facades, stepped gables, pitched roofs with dormers, and richly decorated bowed limestone fronts form a harmonious ensemble. The rear yards and façades prove no less cohesive and are no less deserving of our protection. Architecturally significant features and historically significant building layout must not be compromised by new additions. Our Committee feels that today's application would do so, and is thus inappropriate.

**Restoration of Front Façade**

We advise the applicant to separate their proposal for the restoration of the front façade of 303 West 90<sup>th</sup> Street from those for rooftop and rear yard additions. This would allow the applicant to more thoroughly address several points which our Committee found incompletely planned, including:

*Windows:* Additional research and testing should be undertaken to ascertain the possibility of restoration rather than replacement. This point carries on to the existing brickmolds, whose condition does not appear to have been adequately assessed. On this topic, our Committee welcomes the opportunity to collaborate with the applicant and to work towards a more responsible solution for preservation.

*Limestone:* While streaking is evident, a plan as to methods for cleaning and contingency measures for necessary patching was not made clear.

*Metal work:* Conditions and the potential for restoration of railing and fencing have yet to be fully explored.

*Over, please*

## **Rear Yard Addition**

The proposed new façade for the rear of this rowhouse diverts too greatly from the Commission's *Rules* governing rear yard additions. As our Committee has stated in the past, the Commissioners must ask why *should* they allow such extreme diversion from their guiding *Rules*, not why *shouldn't* they – particularly in light of the original vision of architect Clarence True, with regard to the overall cohesive design of the collective rear façades. Rising full height and stretching full width (in contradiction to two criterion), a multitude of significant architectural detail would be lost in addition to a considerable amount of original building fabric (contradicting another two – in total FOUR – *Rules* criterion).

A central feature of the rear façade of 303 West 90<sup>th</sup> Street is an original, pressed-metal bay window. This same feature carries across the façades of its westerly neighbors, Numbers 305 and 307. The applicant's proposal, if approved, means the destruction of this delightful feature, and the corruption of the rear façades' cohesion.

In addition, the chamfered corner of the building's rear façade must be protected. By averting a hard right angle, the chamfered corner allows the penetration of light and air to the deepest corner of these rear yards. Looking beyond the individual rowhouse at 303 West 90<sup>th</sup> Street to the larger ensemble of which it is a part is important on this topic. Satellite imagery of this collection of buildings reveals striking zig-zagging building walls and an interlocking lot disposition. As much as architecture is historically significant and to be protected, so is site planning.

## **Rooftop Addition**

Regarding the proposed rooftop addition, we find the current design to be stylistically incongruent with and visually overwhelming of the diminutive Renaissance rowhouse. The mansard roof-like covering is not in keeping with the functional rear façade of this building's row and is inappropriate. **NOTIFIED FRIDAY THAT MOCKUP IS IN PLACE – WILL VISIT AND PHOTOGRAPH ON MONDAY**

The unique siting of 303 West 90<sup>th</sup> Street is not a problem to overcome but a distinction to be treasured. We ask the applicant to rethink their modifications, and urge the Commission to deny this application.