



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
55 Central Park West
December 9, 2008**

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 rooftop additions at 55 Central Park West, an Art Deco-style apartment building designed by Schwartz & Gross and built in 1930.

The Art Deco apartment houses of Central Park West (of which there are 6) are iconic symbols of the Upper West Side and New York City's skyline. Soaring verticality is a hallmark of their design, and is achieved in significant part by their propensity for continual "wedding cake" setbacks. The proposal before us essentially asks to remove one of these defining setbacks on the West 65th Street façade of 55 Central Park West.

Rooftop Addition: 19th Story

55 Central Park West is neighbored to the south by the diminutive Holy Trinity Church, leaving the south façade entirely exposed from the 9th floor up. The proposed addition at the 19th story would be entirely visible from West 65th Street and portions of both West 66th Street and Central Park West. This is contrary to Rule 2-19(e)(2)(iii), which dictates that rooftop additions be invisible from the public thoroughfare, and is, thus, inappropriate. Building out the 19th story setback would clearly interrupt the delicate massing that is so important to the building's character.

Precedence becomes an important issue here: If the Commission approves the infill of this setback, what is to stop the residents of the 11th, 13th, 15th, or 17th floors, where other setbacks occur, from proposing the same thing? Or residents of the Art Deco-style Century or Majestic apartments, for that matter? Little by little, setback by setback, the stepped quality of 55 Central Park West and other apartments could disappear. We urge the Commission to deny this first of the two rooftop additions proposed on this important principle.

Our Committee was also disappointed by the lack of information made available about materials. The color of the brick, the configuration of the windows, and the color of the window framing are not inconsequential. Their qualities must be carefully reviewed for appropriateness alongside the original building fabric. Though the proposed windows are said to conform to the windows master plan for 55 Central Park West, this plan was approved almost two decades ago in 1991 and amended just two years after that, in 1993. What version of Hopes windows are currently approved for this building? If the windows proposed today are indeed in line with the master plan, it is apparent to our Committee that a re-evaluation of the master plan is in order.

Over, please



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For one, Rule 3-04(c)(2)(iii)(A) directs that replacement windows must match the historic windows in terms of both configuration and finish. Further, the *Rules* identify the original steel casement windows as “special,” as outlined in the definitions (Section 3-01), adding another layer of significance. The proposed replacement windows do not satisfy the *Rules* and should alert the Commission to the possible inappropriateness of the existing windows master plan.

Rooftop Addition: 20th Story

The applicant also proposes an addition on the 20th story. Our Committee does not object to this aspect of the proposal, since it would be minimally visible – not until one stands 375 feet within Central Park does the new roofline begin to appear – and would not adversely affect the building’s historic character.