

**Hearing Date: 6/8/2004**  
**LPC Docket Number: 046412**  
**Manhattan, Block 1030, Lot: 58**

**240 Central Park South Apartments – Individual Landmark**

An Art Deco-Modernist style apartment building designed by Mayer and Whittlesey and built in 1939-40. Application is to establish a Master Plan governing the future installation of storefronts and windows.

**HDC Testimony**

240 Central Park South is one New York's key works of Modernist architecture. This subtle masterwork is sited at one of the city's most prominent intersections and HDC believes the Commission should consider its fate very carefully – on this relatively unadorned building, details are everything, and wrong decisions could dramatically alter its character forever. We are pleased that the applicant recognizes the importance of treating the building holistically and has chosen to pursue Master Plans for its storefronts and windows – we will address each individually.

The proposed storefront Master Plan demonstrates a clear concern for the preservation of the building's historic integrity at its commercial facades along Broadway and Central Park South. We believe that with some modification, this plan will return the storefronts to their original appearance and will greatly enhance the character of this unique streetwall. While we believe that the detailing and design proposed are very commendable, we are concerned that two elements of the original design will not be consistently reintroduced, thereby reducing the continuity of line that gives the storefronts there notable streamlined quality. Specifically, we believe that the cast bronze frieze and the storefront transom should be replicated at every storefront, rather than at selected storefronts as currently proposed. Historic documentation, along with the Commission's designation report, indicates that the frieze and transom were originally found along the full length of the storefronts. The lines established by these elements parallel those created by the signband and the bulkheads, therefore introducing the sense of horizontal flow that plays such an important role not only at the building's undulating base, but also at its angular upper floors. With so much care evident in the design proposed for the signband, the illuminated signage, the curved glazing, and the bulkheads, we hope that the Commission will ask the applicants to fully restore the original design intent of the commercial base by also including the frieze and transom at every storefront.

As much as we like so many aspects of the storefront Master Plan, we cannot support the proposed Master Plan for the windows. We firmly believe that implementation of this plan will radically alter the overall design intent of the building and significantly diminish the character for which the Commission designated the building just a few years ago. Quoting a 1940 article in the architectural press, the Commission's designation report states that, "the architectural character of these buildings stems directly from the plans as developed on different levels and from the delicate fenestration." No aluminum windows that are currently produced can match the delicacy and quality of line established by steel casement windows. We are particularly concerned that well-over half of the building's windows are original and that the sense of linear flow and overall character that they produce is largely intact. At comparable designated structures such as the Beaux-Arts Apartments and the Rockefeller Apartments, the Commission has viewed the steel casements as vital elements of the architectural composition. HDC believes this to be equally, if not more so, the case here. Ideally, a Master Plan should call for the restoration of all original windows and the replacement of non-original windows with new steel casements that match the originals in all respects. We do recognize, however, that it may not be feasible to efficiently restore 65-year old casement windows. Interestingly, manufacturers of steel sash have kept up with the times and now produce units that retain all historic sightlines but also have thermal breaks and can accommodate insulating glass units and efficient weatherstripping. The heat gain and loss, and air and water infiltration, that plague older steel units are readily cured by these developments. HDC strongly urges the Commission to ask the applicant to investigate restoring the historic windows; if this is impossible we hope that you ask the applicant to return with a building-wide proposal specifying the use of new steel windows that visually match the historic windows in all respects.

While we applaud the applicants' attempt to regularize the placement of air conditioning units on the building's facades, we believe one aspect of the proposal will significantly affect the building's character and the subtlety of the original design. The Master Plan calls for a larger pane of glass in the lower portion of many window openings that can be removed to accommodate a large air conditioner. Despite the fact that window units are smaller and more efficient than ever, the proposal calls for such a large opening that the lower horizontal mullion above this area will be considerably offset from the lower mullions in the rest of the window opening. This staggered effect is completely unacceptable, as it will disrupt the horizontal flow established by the upper and lower mullions as they consistently hug the ins and outs of the building's angular facades. We ask the Commission to have the applicant determine the minimum opening required to accommodate a unit that will cool the relatively small rooms in the building. Hopefully such a unit will fit below the historic lower mullion line and no alteration to the original proportions will be required. If this is not the case and the Commission approves the replacement of all windows, HDC believes that the placement of the horizontal mullions within the openings could be slightly altered to allow for the smallest possible AC unit while also maintaining the continuity of the lower mullion line across the building's facades.

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