



THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE

**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
249 Central Park West
September 11, 2007**

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 and create a curb cut at 249 Central Park West, a Queen Anne-style rowhouse designed by Edward L. Angell and constructed in 1887-1888, in the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District.

History of the Building and Architect

Constructed in 1887-1888 as one of a row of nine houses, 249 Central Park West marks the beginning of Edward L. Angell's fruitful career, having established his architectural practice only a few years prior. Angell designed residential buildings in a range of popular historical styles, including neo-Grec, Queen Anne, Romanesque, and Renaissance Revival, and his commissions quickly proliferated across the Upper West Side. In a 1975 article for the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, New York University professor, former landmarks commissioner and current board member of LANDMARK WEST! Sarah Landau described his Central Park West rowhouse commission as presenting "an impressive chateausque façade, perhaps intended to emulate the Dakota, with richly carved Renaissance details of considerably more elaboration than was usual for side street houses." Indeed, Angell's most prominent project, the Hotel Endicott (1890-1891) at West 81st Street and Columbus Avenue, was aimed at an upscale clientele and was posited as a rival to Henry J. Hardenbergh's Dakota apartments (1880-1884).

Angell followed this commission with another rowhouse series – this time comprising eleven residences – on Manhattan Avenue between 104th and 106th Streets, recently designated as part of the new Manhattan Avenue Historic District. Though designed for a more middle-class homeowner, these later residences further illustrate the architect's propensity towards picturesque assemblages, featuring scalloped Flemish gables, distinctive decorative cornices, textured stone, and bricks of various colors. As the Manhattan Avenue Historic District designation report states, "all [of Angell's work] is extant and," with the recent designation of this historic district (designated 2007), all are "located in historic districts on the Upper West Side."

This row of nine houses on Central Park West, described as an "ornament to the avenue" in the *Real Estate Record & Guide*, has changed dramatically over time. As Christopher

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Gray noted in a 1990 *Streetscapes* column, rowhouse developments on Central Park West were “scarce,” as the avenue was and continues to be predominantly lined with apartment houses. In 1930-31, the six southernmost rowhouses succumbed to market pressures and were replaced with an Art Deco tower designed by Schwartz and Gross. The remaining three buildings were eventually divided into apartments. Just prior to landmark designation, Department of Buildings-ordered maintenance at 249 escalated into an “accidental restoration,” as Gray termed it, returning Angell’s corner design to state closer to its original appearance, and this richly detailed rowhouse managed to escape the devastating 1990 fire that gutted 248, its neighbor to the south.

Analysis of the Proposal

As mentioned, the Queen-Anne styled 249 Central Park West was constructed as part of a larger development of nine rowhouses, which stretched from West 84th to 85th Streets, and is the anchor of the three remaining structures. Cited in the Commission’s designation report as “rare examples of single-family residences” on Central Park West, 249 occupies a prominent location at Central Park West and West 85th Street and is highly visible from Central Park.

There are three distinct elements to this Certificate of Appropriateness application: 1) construction of a rooftop addition, 2) creation of a curb cut, and 3) a rearyard addition.

In the past we have testified in opposition to continual rooftop additions on these refined structures and, in the July 11, 2006 landmarks hearing for 248 Central Park West, urged the Commission to put “a halt to additional top-heavy alterations that have overwhelmed these handsome structures.” While the currently proposed rooftop addition is more than minimally visible from Central Park, our Committee is not opposed to its approval. Through its materials and massing, this addition recedes behind the elaborate roofline of this Queen Anne-structure and does not compromise the picturesque rise and fall of the rowhouses’ gables.

The Committee does not feel that the proposed curb cut, by itself, would have a negative impact on the site since it does not appear to threaten a nearby street tree. However, as a policy matter, we do not want to see the curb-cut trend proliferate throughout the district.

With respect to the rear yard addition, it is important to distinguish that the open space behind this house functions as a service court that is separate from the block’s rear yard doughnut. Because this addition will not infringe on the rear yard doughnut, we are not opposed, in principle, to building into the rear court. Of greater concern is the proposed removal of original fabric at the building’s brownstone base. The 85th Street façade consists of a series of nine archways that, while varying in size, are appropriately proportioned for their respective positions along the base. To accommodate a single-bay garage, the westernmost arch (currently a gated entrance to the rear court) would be destroyed and replaced with larger, clumsier opening that is disproportionate to the

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existing building and rhythm of arched openings. Furthermore, this series of arches is complemented by the sloping, curved wall that joins the main house to the rear extension and a curved notch that joins the house to its neighbor on 85th Street. The proposal changes the notch and its relationship with the westernmost arch; the resulting proportions are off balance. Also of concern is that original wrought-iron grillwork, a signature feature of this façade, would be removed, without a proposal for reuse in the proposed design. The addition of an automobile garage does not justify destroying 249 Central Park West's original fabric. The Committee urges the applicant to reconsider methods by which they might meet their programmatic needs without sacrificing original architectural elements of this "ornament on the avenue".



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**Testimony of LANDMARK WEST!
Certificate of Appropriateness Committee
Before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
143 West 69th Street
September 11, 2007**

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 alter the facade, enlarge the areaway and install storefronts in this Renaissance Revival flats building designed by James Edward Ware and constructed in 1895.

Through his designs of the Osborn, at Seventh Avenue and 57th Street and one of the city's early high-end apartment buildings, and City and Suburban Apartments, the model tenement complex at York and 79th Street, and Mohonk Mountain House in New Paltz, James Ware was a design innovator.

As one of the district's loveliest blocks, West 69th Street between Broadway and Columbus Avenue features a pleasing mix of large, ornate apartment buildings, picturesque row of restored brownstones and diminutive Christ and St. Stephen's Episcopal Church (1880). We are pleased to see interest in applying some T.L.C. to 143 West 69th Street, a long-neglected structure by an important architect. That being said, contemporary intrusions on this Renaissance Revival flats building must be sensitive and appropriate to the original structure. Our committee would like to comment on the three elements of this application: 1) alterations to the façade, 2) enlargement of the areaway and 3) installation of storefronts.

Façade Alterations

143 West 69th Street occupies a pivotal location on the block as a transition building between the highrise, commercial melee of Broadway and the elegant composition of brownstone stoops, chapel and verdant churchyard.

The corrugated metal fence that currently shields the areaway wall from the sidewalk is in derelict condition and in no way complements the ornate façade of 143 West 69th Street, and the Committee is pleased that the applicant is proposing to replace this feature. That being said, we are concerned that the proposed combination of glass pony wall and granite piers that envelope the areaway and entry stair strikes a discordant glass note on an otherwise solid, masonry block and will not enhance the block. In addition to its showy dissonance with the main Renaissance Revival flats building, concerns were also raised that the glass pony wall would quickly become scratched and unsightly.



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A simple pipe rail would meet safety concerns by protect the areaway and also allow visibility between the sidewalk and the proposed commercial space.

Storefront Design and Enlargement of the Areaway

Of great concern is the significant removal of original fabric in order to shoehorn commercial uses into the building's basement. As presented, the proposal would remove much of the building's masonry base to be replaced with large glass commercial windows and doors and enlarge the areaway. Such an extreme measure will create the impression of a cantilever of this solid 5-story structure over its narrow areaway. Instead of effectively kicking the legs out from under 143 West 69th Street, our committee would like to see a stronger design that would tether this flats building back to the ground. We are not opposed to adding commercial space in the building's basement, but would like to see the windows reduced and masonry piers added to unify the new commercial space with the original structure.

Another element of this proposal is to remove the rolled course in the building's watertable, but the profile of the new course is not provided. It is essential that the profile of this element should exactly duplicate the original element. Furthermore, on principle, no original fabric above this element should be removed.

In conclusion, elements of this proposal should be rethought to result in a more sympathetic treatment of the original structure.