

What More Will It Take?: Save 2 Columbus Circle

by Nina Gray

In December 2003, *NY Times* architecture critic Herbert Muschamp wrote, *"The refusal of the NYC LPC to hold hearings on the future of 2 Columbus Circle is a shocking dereliction of public duty. Unacceptable in itself, this abdication also raises the scary question of what other buildings the commission might choose to overlook in the future."*



2 CC advocates Tom Wolfe & preservationist Margot Gayle

These fightin' words rode fast on the heels of Tom Wolfe's excoriating 2-part *Times* Op-Ed piece, which appeared in October and, in turn, cited architect and premier NYC historian Robert A.M. Stern's description of 2 CC as a "masterwork," "a landmark in the history of architectural taste," and an "embodiment of artistic risk-taking."

So, why is 2 CC still in peril? When countless numbers of architects, historians, urban planners, design professionals, and civic organizations call for a public hearing to discuss the merits of a signature building by a world-class architect, isn't it the LPC's mandate to spring in to action? Apparently not in this administration (see Mayor Bloomberg's "report card", p. 4).

Bloomberg and his appointed LPC Chair, Robert B. Tierney, have each turned a deaf ear and a blind eye to architect and pioneer modernist Edward Durell Stone's controversial but undeniably significant Gallery of Modern Art (a.k.a., 2 CC). As a result, this unique work of mid-20th-century Modernism may soon be replaced with a new design proposed by the Museum of Arts and Design (MAD), a cultural institution vying to re-use, but not restore, the building. And in another 30 years, who knows? One recalls yet another *NY Times* editorial, mourning the demolition of Pennsylvania Station: "We will probably be judged not by the monuments we build but by those we have destroyed."

On May 24, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, America's leading preservation organization, added its considerable voice to the multitude of local, state, national, and international organizations lobbying to preserve 2 CC, naming the building to its 2004 list of "11 Most Endangered Places." Last November, the Preservation League of New York State placed 2 CC on its "Seven to Save" list. Meanwhile, LW! has taken our case to NY State Supreme Court, challenging the City's failure to analyze the building's historic importance, as legally required. We are supported by affidavits from renowned architectural scholars and structural engineers who assert that, under proper stewardship, 2 Columbus Circle could be restored and revitalized. As this newsletter went to press, we learned that our court petition had been denied. Never fear, the legal battle will continue!

The City, the State, and the Nation are watching and waiting.

WHAT MORE WILL IT TAKE? It's time to schedule a hearing!

Let the Mayor and LPC Chair know where you stand on 2 CC. Write to: Mayor Bloomberg, City Hall, NYC 10007. fax: 212-788-2460 or go to <http://nyc.gov/html/mail/html/mayor.html> to post an e-mail message

LPC Chair Robert B. Tierney, 1 Centre Street, 9th Fl., NYC 10007, fax: 212-669-7955, comments@lpc.nyc.gov

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