

Greetings, Neighbor...



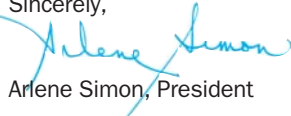
By now, it's no secret that our covers are designed to attract your attention (after all — you get a lot of mail) and focus your interest on our preservation issues. This past spring, Knickerbocker's Dodo Bird; today R.O. Blechman's Christopher Columbus, against a backdrop of plans for the "New (West Side) World."

Within 1,000 feet of our Christopher Columbus, four sites of current interest may be found: the Coliseum site; the 63 Street West Side Y; the Mayflower Hotel and its backyard; 1926 Broadway (the Saloon/World Gym building). So what? Read Updates.

Rounding out our traditional balance of articles, we tout our exciting West 72 Street retail rejuvenation pilot project (pg. 2); elevate the mundane to the interesting (Heavenly Hardware, pg. 11); celebrate the ubiquitous, if under-appreciated (Terra Cotta, pg. 9); introduce one of the newer stewards of our collective heritage (Landmarks Preservation Commissioner Jan Pokorny, pg. 8); and highlight one of the Upper West Side's architectural gems, and outline its struggle for restoration funds (the Rice Mansion, pg. 10). We also advocate for a threatened building being considered for landmark status (the East River Savings Bank, pg. 4).

Columbus may (or may not) have discovered the western passage to the East — but he surely points the way for our intrepid reader.

Sincerely,


Arlene Simon, President

Great News!



The Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC) and Department of Buildings have settled a lawsuit to remove this billboard (B'way and 72 St.) in January '98 and to collect a substantial monetary penalty. Pending physical removal of the billboard, it's advertising is now covered over. The message from the LPC's director of enforcement and LW! to owners who disregard the landmarks law—we're watching!

Illustrations by R.O. Blechman, back cover photograph John Hart.

72nd Street: Back to the Future

by Kristen Prachar

Rejuvenation of a troubled retail district + restoration and enhancement of landmarked structures = a win-win situation for the neighborhood and merchants. In our spring 1997 newsletter, we announced that LW!'s Retail Assistance Program (RAP) selected 72nd Street from Columbus to Broadway as a pilot project to prove this equation. We are happy to report that progress has been quick and impressive.

This summer, under Councilmember Eldridge's leadership, the City Council appropriated \$300,000 to jump start LW!'s project, providing initial financial support for major improvements to the streetscape. In an encouraging spirit of cooperation, RAP, Eldridge's office, Con Edison, the Departments of Transportation, Buildings, Parks, Business Services, and Design and Construction and CB7 have been working together to complete most of the improvements by fall 1998. Numbers of owners and merchants are also involved.

The landscape of W. 72 St. tells a classic Upper West Side story: real estate and transportation evolving in tandem. Initially developed in the 1880s with elegant private rowhouses after the Columbus Avenue 'E' was built, the street was exceptional enough to justify inclusion in the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District. But over time, whatever unique "sense of place" that existed had been replaced with a visual cacophony and aura of deterioration. There are dueling canopies (many illegal) and screaming, competing signs and banners; a daunting number of parking meters and street furniture; and sidewalks and curbs in terrible disrepair.

In addressing these issues, the City Council's seed money will go toward new trees and landmark-quality granite curbs; new sidewalks; replacements of the existing cobra-headed streetlights with double the number of historic Bishop's Crook lights (six installed this fall); and installing a discreet six "muni-meters," which will increase the number of parking spaces and reduce clutter on the street. Bike racks, additional mid-block garbage receptacles, and an "Adopt-a-Box" program to foster participation in street furniture maintenance are other items under review.

But experience tells us that infrastructure is not enough. And so further good news is that an association will be formed by property owners, merchants, and residents to help maintain the improvements, and restore and maintain the buildings. In addition, LW! is working with the Landmarks Preservation Commission and the Departments of Transportation and Buildings to provide information to owners and merchants on the laws - and, importantly, marketing strategies - of signage and construction.

Since our last newsletter, several articles have appeared in the New York Times, and readers have contacted us regarding their pleasure in the progress of the pilot project. All of us involved in this project believe that it will serve to boost the 72nd Street retail market and will provide a successful example for other mixed-use corridors in the city. We still need more help. Give us a call — and stay tuned.

Kristen Prachar is a graduate of Columbia University's Historic Preservation Program.



Updates: Every “Boom” Brings its Neighborhood “Busts”

Once again, the booming economy and the resurgence of NYC’s real estate market have raised the spectre of inappropriate development in and around our landmarked buildings and historic districts.

The Coliseum Site, the gateway to the Upper West Side, has long been the subject of planning, financial conniving, governmental bumbling, community activism, and political posturing. One of these days, it will move beyond a bi-annual press event to a mammoth new multi-use development, shaping the West Side experience. Will this site - as now threatened - be developed with the sole motivation of securing top dollar for the treasuries of the City and the Metropolitan Transit Authority, city planning be damned? Will Millennium Partners - the developers of the three new towers marring the Lincoln Square area - ruin yet another keystone site?

The Mayflower Hotel and its backyard - a vacant fenced-in Broadway blockfront (61-62 St.) - have long been objects of concern (bordering the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District). The real estate market abhors a vacuum. When will the Mayflower’s owners - and their architect, Cesar Pelli - surface a plan? When they do, will they welcome responsible public participation?

The “Y” redux: a plan to build a 41-story apartment tower on top of the old McBurney School, next to the landmarked West 63 Street YMCA, has resurfaced after 11 years. The board of the Y has approved a proposal by Vornado Realty Trust to erect this tower, claiming - as usual - that it is “as-of-right,” requiring no new public review or approvals. The Y is to receive \$9 million for its “air rights” if the plan is implemented. Another instance of “as-of-right” being “as-of-wrong.”

“The Missing Block.” Landmark West! has launched a campaign to extend the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District to include 64-65 Streets from Central Park West to Broadway (see our spring 1997 newsletter). Thousands of postcards (with a wonderful reproduction of a 1909 watercolor of 1926 Broadway, the Saloon/World Gym building opposite Lincoln Center) have been mailed to Mayor Giuliani, requesting a hearing before the Landmarks Preservation Commission (LPC). We need your help!

Normandy Victory: Our spring 1997 newsletter detailed the trial court victory by the Normandy (a co-op on Riverside Dr., W. 86-87 St.) preventing the erection of a 13-story, 190-foot sliver tower on top of the adjoining 5-story mansion at W. 86 St. On September 11, the Appellate Department of the New York Supreme Court ruled unanimously, 5-0, to uphold the Normandy’s significant legal victory, and endorsed the lower court reasoning of Judge Louise Gruner Gans. Landmark supporters had been singularly impressed by Judge Gans’ recognition of the importance of the Riverside-West End Historic District, and the individual landmark status of the Normandy. While the litigation continues, this is a victory of major significance in the effort to preserve the integrity of this important landmark.

“Exhortations to the Thrifty”: Now to the Preservationists

by Andrew Scott Dolkart

The future of one of the Upper West Side’s finest buildings is in doubt. The magnificent Classical Revival style East River Savings Bank building on the corner of Amsterdam Avenue and West 96th Street, most recently a branch of Marine Midland Bank, will soon be vacated. Landmark West! is continuing to advocate for its designation as a city landmark, as we have since 1986.



The East River Savings Bank is an outstanding example of the monumental classical-inspired bank buildings erected in America during the early decades of the twentieth century. East River was in the vanguard of local savings banks; it was one of the first banks

to advertise for customers, and sponsored legislation that permitted savings banks to open branches. The 96th Street bank was one of the first branch savings banks in the city when it opened on March 5, 1927. The bank was such a success that the building had to be enlarged in the early 1930s.

The prestigious architectural firm of Walker & Gillette designed the bank with the same sophisticated design sense that it employed on townhouses, country estates, and other buildings – including the wings of the New-York Historical Society on Central Park West. Walker & Gillette’s imposing limestone building, with its tall Ionic columns, reflected current ideas in savings bank design. Since savings banks relied on the small deposits of large numbers of patrons, their buildings were often impressive structures that would attract the attention of local residents and draw them into the spacious and richly appointed interior. Here, they could open an account with the assurance that in such a grand building their money would be safe. The exterior decorative details were also intended to persuade passers-by, with pithy comments extolling the high virtue of saving money. The former East River Savings Bank occupies a key corner, one block from the subway, and it continues to be one of the most important buildings on the Upper West Side.

We now have the opportunity to help save this building from an uncertain future. The Landmarks Preservation Commission has calendared a public hearing on the proposed designation of the East River Savings Bank as a city landmark, to be held on November 18, 1997. We need your help to preserve this important structure. Please support this effort by attending the hearing and speaking in favor of the bank’s designation, or by writing a letter before or after the hearing to Jennifer Raab, Chairman of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 100 Old Slip, New York, NY 10005.

Andrew Scott Dolkart is an architectural historian, professor, writer and LW! board member.

EAST RIVER SAVINGS BANK, 743 AMSTERDAM AVE. AT 96 ST.; FROM THE FIRST 100 YEARS

Books in Brief

Terra-Cotta Skyline



Terra-Cotta Skyline: New York's Architectural Ornament by Susan Tunick, photographs by Peter Mauss, 1997, 176 pages, \$45.00. "[Terra-Cotta Skyline] elevates architectural terra cotta to its rightful place front and center...Susan Tunick's prose and Peter Mauss's photographs breathe life and excitement into the story of the silent clay that has brought unsurpassed vitality and exuberance to New York's cityscape. Susan Tunick takes us on a riveting safari through [a] "clay jungle" and in the process reveals the exotic, enchanting, and energetic realm of New York's architectural terra-cotta heritage." -Anthony C. Wood, preservationist.

Noteworthy

LANDMARK WEST!'s first annual awards ceremony, "Unsung Heroes of the Upper West Side", is coming in March 1998. In the first of what we hope will be an annual event, we will honor some of those individuals and organizations whose often overlooked efforts help to preserve, maintain and enhance the Upper West Side's architectural heritage and unique urban character. In addition, the awards program, encompassing a range of categories, will serve to highlight some of the key architectural and "quality-of-life" issues currently facing our community. Join us in celebrating the victories!

A West Side house/walking tour now being organized for Spring 1998. Start at an Aphorp apartment (79 & B'way); finish at a West 67 Street Studio Building (where refreshments will be served). Please let us know if you're interested in volunteering as a docent. Would you like to join us on this tour but want more information? Give us a call!

In celebration of the **100th anniversary of the Fourth Universalist Society**, a lecture on its architect, William A. Potter, designer of Trinity School's Parish House (W. 91 St., Columbus & Amsterdam), Main Hall and Macy Hall of Columbia's Teachers College, Advent Lutheran Church (B'way at W. 93 St.) and other NYC buildings. Sarah Bradford Landau, architectural historian, professor of fine arts at NYU and former vice chair of the Landmarks Preservation Commission will present the lecture at the Fourth Universalist Society (76 and CPW) on Sunday, April 26, 1998. Save the date!

In the News

"New York's immediate architectural glory may be skyscrapers. But behind the facades is a lesser-known treasure: tile ceilings by Rafael Guastavino, self-supporting canopies that look like parachutes billowing in a breeze." Our fall 1996 newsletter profiled the works of the Guastavino Company that can be found throughout the city. A map tracking the "embarrassment of riches" of Guastavino sites—from the Oyster Bar to jewels closer to home, such as the porte-cochere at the Ansonia on W. 73 St.—is available free through LW! Give us a call.

LANDMARK WEST!

Support LANDMARK WEST! – we need your help. Please make your tax-deductible contribution below, and return this form.

*** A special offer:** Contribute \$150 or more, and receive a gift of either *Terra Cotta Skyline* by Susan Tunick; *New York 1930*, by Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin and Tom Mellins; *AIA Guide to New York*, by Elliot Willensky and Norval White, or another book from our collection.

\$30 \$50 \$100 \$150* \$250 \$500 \$1000

Terra Cotta Skyline *New York 1930* *AIA Guide to New York*

Whatever you give will help \$ _____

Thanks, you can keep the book...but here's my gift of \$150

I would like to make a gift in honor of _____

I would like to be a LANDMARK WEST! Block Monitor **

I will do volunteer work for LANDMARK WEST! – send me a form

My employer offers a Matching Grants Program – the form is enclosed

Send me a copy of the LANDMARK WEST! map newsletter

I would like to be notified of walking tours

To save costs, I do not need acknowledgement of my gift

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*** * *** Illegal alterations threaten individual landmarks and historic districts. If you spot questionable activities, call us. We'll investigate, and if necessary, involve the Landmarks Preservation Commission.

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About LANDMARK WEST!

LANDMARK WEST! is a non-profit award-winning community group working to preserve the best of the Upper West Side's architectural heritage from 59 to 110 St. between Central Park West and Riverside Drive. Since 1985 it has worked to achieve landmark status for individual buildings and historic districts. Today, **LANDMARK WEST! is the proud curator of the area's 2,604 designated landmarks (up from only 337 in 1985)**, and continues to promote awareness of these architectural treasures and the urgent need to protect them against insensitive change and demolition.

LANDMARK WEST!

THE COMMITTEE TO PRESERVE THE UPPER WEST SIDE
45 WEST 67 STREET NEW YORK NY 10023 (212) 496-8110

Preservation Profile: Jan Hird Pokorny

by Jennifer Morris



Jan Hird Pokorny, architect and founder of Jan Hird Pokorny Associates, Inc., is one of the newest members of the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Although he is a modern architect, Pokorny has long been identified with preservation, an association that began in 1963 with his restoration of Lewisohn Hall for Columbia University's School of General Studies. The restoration involved the installation of a contemporary interior, while leaving the historic exterior intact. James Marston Fitch, then in the process of establishing the historic preservation program at Columbia's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation, told Pokorny that he would switch from the architecture to the preservation faculty "if he knew what was good for him." Pokorny did, and so began a 30-plus year association with Columbia's historic preservation program. Another result of the Lewisohn Hall success was the opportunity to lead the Schermerhorn Row (South Street Seaport) restoration project in the 1970s. On the Upper West Side, Jan Hird Pokorny Associates, Inc. was responsible for the restoration of the Firemen's Memorial on Riverside Drive at W. 100 Street.

Pokorny is proud of his long-standing association with the Czech community of New York. Since emigrating from Czechoslovakia in 1940 via Ellis Island, he has been active in causes and organizations including the American Fund for Czechoslovak Relief and the Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association. He directed the exterior restoration of Bohemian National Hall on East 73 Street. Perhaps best known is his participation in the battle to save Dvorák's residence in Manhattan (where the New World Symphony was composed). Dvorák House was demolished in 1991 following a rare reversal of landmark designation by the City Council. Pokorny has since designed a pedestal for a statue of Dvorák by Ivan Mestrovic, a gift from the Czechoslovak National Council of America. The statue was installed in its home in Stuyvesant Square Park in September amid a celebration of Dvorák's music.

In a recent conversation, Pokorny recounted that one of the most interesting segments of his work at the Commission is the review of new construction in historic districts. His basic conception is that historic districts are more successful than individual landmarks in preserving and conveying the atmosphere of the past. However, he also believes that historic districts are "more meaningful if they continue to be a lively part of the city," integrating new uses and buildings with the historic. Pokorny sees this as one of the most challenging tasks facing architects-to create something new and original while acknowledging and respecting historic surroundings; that is, to create a "good neighbor." In addition, Pokorny believes in the importance of the streetscape in one's perception of the city, a topic of great interest to LW! and its Retail Assistance Program (RAP). He says that "you cannot underestimate the importance of awnings and signage," noting that we're most aware of what's closest to the eye, and often disregard these significant details. Pokorny values LW! and other community groups for their ability to bring these issues to the eyes of the Commission and the public.

Jennifer Morris is a student in Columbia University's Historic Preservation Program.



Coming soon!
My Preservation Journal, grades 4-6

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Terra Cotta: New York as “Clay Jungle”

by Susan Tunick

Architectural terra cotta became an integral element of New York City buildings well over 100 years ago. During much of the past century, however, this exceptional material received little attention, escaping notice of most city dwellers. Even recently, those who do notice and admire terra cotta ornament often do not really know what it is - baked and modeled clay. There are hundreds of significant terra-cotta ornamented buildings in New York; enough that the familiar image of a “concrete jungle” could easily be changed to “clay jungle.”

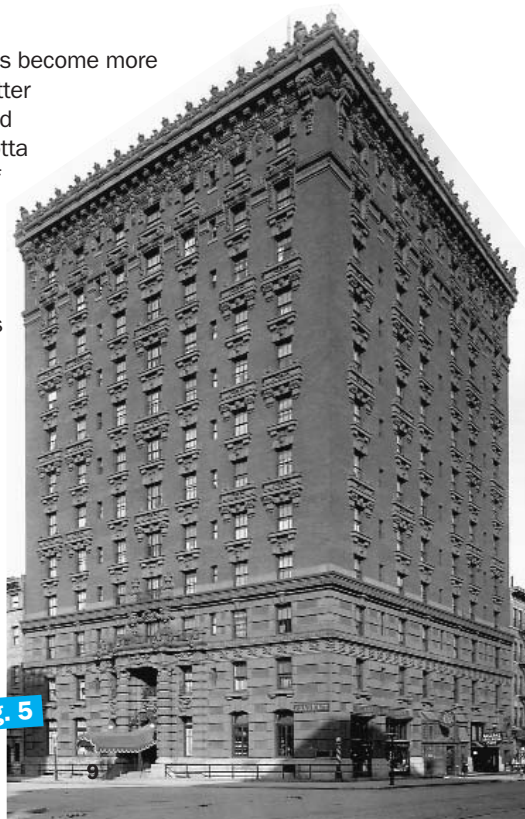
The Upper West Side has an abundant supply of fine terra cotta to celebrate. The lavishly-adorned Hotel Lucerne at Amsterdam and West 79 Street is just one example. This 12-story building, constructed in 1903-04 by Harry Mulliken, was originally a combination of apartments and a hotel. The deeply modeled, banded entry columns are adopted from the Baroque style, and were manufactured in Long Island City by the New York Architecture Terra Cotta Company.

Revisiting Paul Goldberger’s 1979 description of the Hotel Lucerne in *The City Observed: New York* reveals that even professionals in the field mistook terra cotta for other materials. Of the Lucerne Goldberger wrote: “...this one stands out, in part because of the wonderful richness of its brownstone. It could almost be wet mud, so alive and sharp is the color, or child’s clay, molded carefully and then baked. The detailing is heavy and thick, making the building seem all the more like clay, but it is skillful enough so that it never feels overbearing.” Today, Goldberger and other architectural critics would know that this superb ornament was in fact terra cotta.

In recent years terra cotta has become more recognized and its history better understood. Documenting and protecting significant terra cotta buildings has become part of preservationists’ agenda. The organization Friends of Terra Cotta was formed in 1981 and its advocacy, workshops, tours, exhibitions and publications have reached a wide audience. Often in collaboration with other organizations such as LW!, these efforts have helped to create a new respect for the craft of ceramics and an increased awareness of the impact of terra cotta on the city’s skyline.

Susan Tunick is president of Friends of Terra Cotta and a ceramic mosaic artist.

See Books in Brief pg. 5



Rice Mansion: Endangered, Protected, Entitled

by Christopher Gray

It was one of the bitterest preservation battles ever, pitting a struggling Orthodox Jewish school in a magnificent 1903 mansion against a well-organized group of West Siders who fought for landmark designation and successfully blocked the building’s demolition. Now, 17 years later, the operators of a successor school in the Isaac L. Rice mansion at 89th Street and Riverside Drive are reaching out to their neighbors for help in restoration rather than destruction.



The Rice mansion was designed in 1900 by the architectural firm of Herts & Tallant, which produced a large free-standing house with a reflecting pool and colonnaded garden along the south side of the lot. The individualistic design mixed Beaux-Arts, Georgian and Renaissance elements. The house was completed in 1903. Isaac Rice called it Villa Julia, after his wife.

In 1907, the Rices moved to the Ansonia apartment building at 73 and Broadway and sold their house to Solomon Schinasi, a tobacco merchant. Schinasi’s brother, Morris, began his own mansion at 107 and RSD in the same year (profiled in our spring 1997 newsletter). The Schinasi family remained in the house through the 1920s and later leased it to different institutions.

In 1954 the Yeshiva Chofetz Chaim bought the building for its school. In 1979, as West Side property values increased dramatically, the school began negotiating to sell. The Landmarks Preservation Commission designated the building in February 1980, over bitter protests by the Yeshiva. In 1988, Yeshiva Ketana took over the Rice mansion. School officials say they are fighting a difficult battle to maintain the building and are struggling just to make long-overdue roof repairs, with a grant of \$100,000 from a private foundation, the Caroline and Joseph S. Gruss Life Monument Funds, that covers part of the \$250,000 cost.

Most rooms are generally intact but architecturally disheveled, with much plaster deterioration that has not been improved by repeated painting. Esthetic concerns are a long way off. Perhaps \$1 million - the equivalent of \$5,000 per family - would bring the house up to the range of typical private-school standards, money even a long-established school would have trouble raising. That amount might even allow the school to landscape its huge front yard, now not much more than raw land. Because of falling masonry and roof-repair scaffolding, the students are not allowed in the yard, according to Leah Teller, the Yeshiva’s director.

Mrs. Teller decided to contact the preservationists and wrote Joan Rome, an organizer of the original landmark effort who became a founding director of Landmark West! This fall the school, LW!, the Landmarks Conservancy and other groups will try to develop a strategy for saving the building a second time. “This is an excellent opportunity for us to join hands,” Mrs. Rome said.

Adapted from material in Christopher Gray’s New York Times August 24, 1997 article.

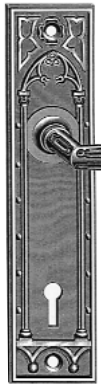
Heavenly Hardware: God is in the Details

by Preuit Hirsch



To perform their function—announcing the entrance to a building—porticos, marquees and canopies must make themselves noticed, often doing so very elegantly. On the other hand, the hardware that lets you through the door is frequently overlooked. But be alert: though its function may be homely, its form can be heavenly. As with Cyrano de Bergerac's plume, the issue is *panache*!

Hardware was first manufactured in the United States in the early 19th century. Prior to the establishment of American hardware companies, colonists selected and ordered items from European merchants' catalogues. The trade was so specialized, guarded and controlled that the catalogues omitted the manufacturers' names and locations to prevent colonists from ordering directly from the foundries, and England discouraged skilled craftsmen from emigrating with their knowledge of smithing and production. Eventually, Stephen Bucknall, an English blacksmith, made it to America and helped establish one of the first hardware companies in Connecticut, where many early hardware companies were to operate.



Because the hardware industry has always been highly competitive, manufacturers continually improved the mechanics of their hardware and kept pace with the evolution of styles in architecture and decor. The invention, during the 1870s, of a process for casting metals under pressure made newly rich ornamentation possible. Hardware companies created art departments and hired well-known designers and architects. Chicago School master Louis Sullivan designed door knobs for theaters, hotels and office buildings. Yale & Towne Manufacturing Co. in the 1960s sold aluminum lever handles by Philip Johnson and colorful, ceramic escutcheons by Fernand Leger.

Changing the hardware on doors or furniture does more than simply transform their appearance; it can subtly create *panache*. The search for interesting examples leads enthusiasts to the stalls of flea markets and the offices of hardware manufacturers and reproduction specialists. Edward R. Butler Co., Inc., one such manufacturer in New York City, has delighted in the study of early hardware trade catalogues. The ability to identify the date, manufacturer, mechanics and decorative styles of hardware pieces contributes immeasurably to preservationists working on restoration projects, archaeologists at sites and to others who might be interested in the subject—like the average door owner.

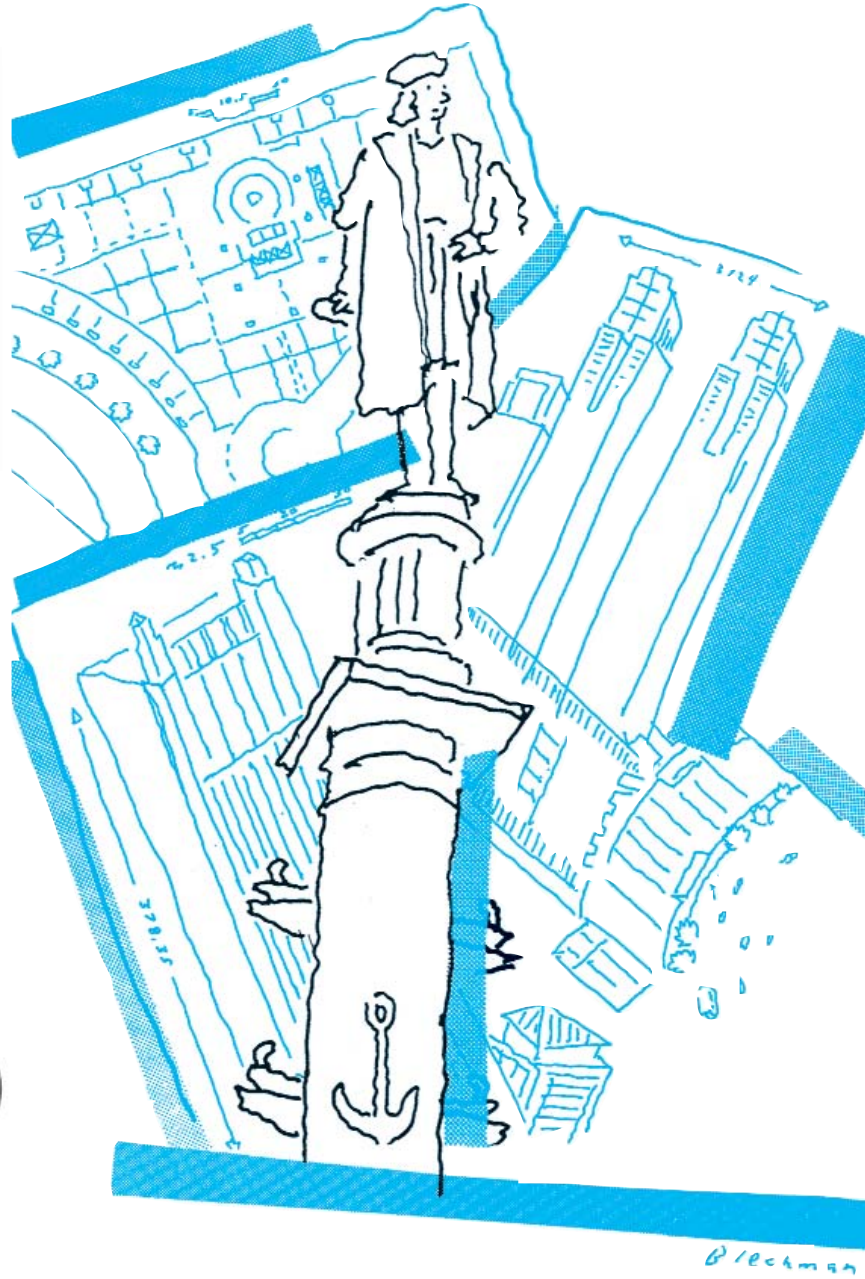


The next time you pass through your door, examine its hardware. It's a piece of industrial art and it's worth a second look.

Preuit Hirsch is a student in Columbia University's Historic Preservation Program.

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NEWSLETTER FALL 1997