

Landmarks Preservation Commission
January 29, 1985, Designation List 175
LP-1533

RIZZOLI BUILDING, 712 Fifth Avenue, Borough of Manhattan.
Built 1907-08; Architect Albert S. Gottlieb.

Landmark Site: Tax Map Block 1271, Lot 38 in part, consisting of that portion of the lot, formerly known as lot 38, on which 712 Fifth Avenue is situated, and excluding that portion of the lot, formerly known as lot 43, on which 2 West 56th Street is situated.

On January 8, 1985, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a Public Hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Rizzoli Building and proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 8). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Thirty-four witnesses spoke in favor of designation; there were 17 speakers in opposition to designation, including three owners of the property and six representatives. Numerous letters and statements have been received both supporting and opposing designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Rizzoli Building, built in 1907-08, is not only a significant reminder of Fifth Avenue at the turn of the century, when the avenue, south of 59th Street, was shifting from residential to commercial use, , but the building, as designed by Albert S. Gottlieb, is also a distinguished example of the elegant neo-French Classic style which recalls 18th-century Parisian town houses. Commissioned by the adjacent Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church as a commercial venture, the building has always housed prestigious commercial tenants. Despite its commercial purposes, it is, nonetheless, residential in height, scale, and design details in deference to its then residential neighbors. Its style, form, and materials, create a building of the type which now characterizes Fifth Avenue as an elegant boulevard of shops, department stores, hotels, and clubs. Today the urbane quality of its design continues to enhance Fifth Avenue as the city's and the nation's premier shopping street.

Fifth Avenue and the Site

For much of the 19th century, successive portions of Fifth Avenue enjoyed the reputation of being New York's most prestigious residential street. As the street was developed northward from Washington Square in Greenwich Village, its character reflected the growth and change of Manhattan. Residential enclaves moved northward, followed closely by the inroads of commerce. The area of Fifth Avenue between 42nd Street and 59th Street was built up for residential use in the years following the Civil War, yet by 1900, the commercial changes which had occurred on the avenue beyond Union

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Square were inevitably wending their way northward. Writing in Scribner's in 1900, Jesse Lynch Williams describes "The Walk Up-Town" from 42nd Street:

When a "For Sale" sign comes to one of these (old comfortable places) you feel sorry, and when one day in your walk up-town you see it finally irrevocably going the way of all brick, with a contractor's sign out in front blatantly boasting of his wickedness, you resent it as a personal loss. It seems all wrong to be pulling down those thick walls. . . . Soon there will be a deep pit there with puffing derricks, the sidewalk closed, and show-bills boldly screaming. And by the time we have returned from the next sojourn out of town there will be an office building of ever-so-many stories or another great hotel.¹

Continuing change led to A.C. David to describe "The New Fifth Avenue" in 1907:

Among the many radical changes which have been brought about during the past six years in New York City, the most radical and the most significant are those which have taken place on Fifth Avenue. That thoroughfare has been completely transformed. It has been transformed economically by an increase in the value of real estate, amounting to 250 per cent and over. It has been transformed architecturally by the erection of a score of new and imposing buildings and twice as many small ones. It has been transformed in use by the intrusion of a large number of more popular stores. And finally it has been transformed in the human spectacle it presents by a great increase in the number of pedestrians. From being a comparatively quiet avenue, occupied in part by old brownstone residences and in part by a carefully selected group of special stores, it has become a bustling thoroughfare, jammed with carriages and motors, crowded with shoppers and passersby and redolent with the names of wealth and business.²

In the 1870s, when the west blockfront of Fifth Avenue between 55th and 56th Streets was developed, it exemplified that "comparatively quiet avenue." The earliest construction on the block was a group of three brownstone-fronted houses, Nos. 714, 716 and 718 Fifth Avenue, with two additional houses at 2 and 4 West 56th Street, built in 1871 by architect-builder Charles Duggin.³ The blockfront immediately to the south was occupied by St. Luke's Hospital. In 1873, the Presbyterian Church in Fifth Avenue, then located at 19th Street, motivated by a need for a larger church and the desire to escape the commerce then encroaching on that part of Fifth Avenue, purchased a large corner parcel at 55th Street.⁴ When it was completed to the designs of Carl Pfeiffer in 1875, it also changed its name to the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church. A photograph in the collection of the New York Public Library shows the residential character of that section of the street at that time.⁵ No. 712, the remaining vacant parcel on the blockfront was purchased by the church in 1886, and a parsonage was constructed.⁶

Yet despite the major changes taking place on Fifth Avenue in the early years of the century, not all believed that a shift from residential to commercial use was inevitable. The editor of Real Estate Record, writing in 1907, stated:

Of course no one can tell what will happen in New York real estate at the end of thirty years, but certainly for a long time to come the development of Fifth Avenue for business purposes is not likely to extend north of Fiftieth Street. It will be stopped by the influence of the Vanderbilts and of several rich men who have of late years bought and built in that neighborhood. At the present time the property is really more valuable for residential than for business purposes, and this fact will have a decisive influence upon the immediate future of the avenue. On no other avenue in Manhattan are there any important shops situated north of Forty-second Street, and it is not to be expected that the transformation of Fifth Avenue in this respect will push far ahead of the other important avenues to the east and west. . . . In the long run doubtless there will be fewer private residences in New York south of Fifty-ninth Street, but, this result will take a great many years to accomplish.⁷

Yet even as this was being written, Fifth Avenue, north of 50th Street, was beginning to experience an influx of commerce, in the form of such buildings as No. 712, that presaged the transformation of Fifth Avenue into an elegant boulevard of shops, department stores, hotels, and clubs. Indeed, the Fifth Avenue Association was founded in 1907 to provide for orderly growth and expansion of trade on the avenue, as well as to promote civic improvements. The church, seeing this trend, commissioned an elegant new commercial building to replace the parsonage at No. 712 from architect Albert S. Gottlieb.

The Architect

Albert S. Gottlieb (1870-1942) received his architectural education at the Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris. Returning to New York he joined the firm of McKim, Mead & White, working on designs for the Metropolitan Club and the first buildings of the Columbia University campus. He opened his own office in 1901, maintaining a New York practice until his retirement to Harrington, Delaware, in 1934. Examination of his known works reveals a familiarity with the classical vocabulary taught at the Ecole and which McKim, Mead & White did so much to popularize in the United States. These include the Knickerbocker Building, 16th Street and Fifth Avenue, the Stuyvesant Building, 15th Street and Fifth Avenue, both 1903-05; the large Colonial Revival house of William Levy at Elberon, N.J., 1905; "Raymare," the country house of Jacob Rothschild at Deal, N.J., 1908, described as "an adaptation of the Louis XVI period"⁸; Temple B'nai Jeshurun, Newark, N.J., 1915; Ouachita National Bank Building, Monroe, Louisiana, 1922; and Greenville Branch, Free Public Library, Jersey City, N. J., 1925, as well as the building at 712 Fifth Avenue, described in his

obituary as the New York office building of L. Alavoine & Co., so closely associated had the building become with its chief tenant.⁹ Available records do not indicate how Gottlieb received the commission for the building.

The Building and its Tenants

The Rizzoli Building can be compared and contrasted with that class of buildings which A.C. David described in 1907:

The buildings erected by rich retail firms for their own occupancy constitute the last and individually the most interesting examples of commercial architecture on the avenue. Indeed they constitute the new Fifth Avenue. It is these buildings which linger in the minds of visitors to New York, and constitute a sort of select and glorified vision of the thoroughfare, as the most remarkable and interesting business street in the country.¹⁰

Prime examples cited by David are the Tiffany Building, Fifth Avenue and 35th Street, 1906, and the Gorham Building, Fifth Avenue and 36th Street, 1906, both some twenty blocks further south on the avenue and both designed by Gottlieb's old employer, McKim, Mead & White. These two buildings both use the forms of Italian Renaissance architecture, expanded in scale, to meet the needs of commerce. Unlike these two buildings, No. 712 retains a residential scale in its design; Gottlieb replaced an actual residence with a commercial building that deferred to its residential neighbors. At that time, No. 714 was about to be rebuilt for commercial use, No. 716 was still in residential use,¹¹ and No. 718 had shopfronts inserted into the original 1871 house but was residential on the upper floors.¹² The eastern blockfront between 55th and 56th Streets was also residential.¹³ The west side of the avenue remained residential northward to 58th Street, beyond which was the Plaza Hotel. Southward on the west side to 50th Street, the demarcation line cited in the Real Estate Record and Guide,¹⁴ the buildings were residential with the exception of the Gotham Hotel at 55th Street, the University Club at 54th Street, and St. Thomas Church at 53rd Street. The east side was residential north to 58th Street, and residential southward to St. Patrick's Cathedral at 51st Street with the exceptions of the St. Regis Hotel at 55th Street, the Criterion Club at No. 683, near 54th Street, and the Union Club at 51st Street. Thus in its volume, scale and details, No. 712 resembled existing town houses on the avenue as well as town houses being built along nearby streets and along streets of the Upper East Side at about the same time.¹⁵ However, the forms and materials used at No. 712 came to characterize Fifth Avenue in succeeding years as seen in hotels, clubs, shops, and department stores.

Thus, the architectural design and the history of No. 712 exemplifies the character of Fifth Avenue as an exclusive shopping street. Only seven years after the building was completed, Fifth Avenue was described as:

. . . one of the world's famous streets.

What Regent and Bond Streets are to London, the Rue de la Paix to Paris, the Unter den Linden to Berlin, the

Ringstrasse to Vienna, Fifth Avenue is to New York. It is the most aesthetic expression of the material side of the metropolis . . . from 34th to 59th Streets, department stores and exclusive shops now predominate, having either swept away or flowed around churches, clubs, hotels and residences. . . establishments wherein may be found products of the greatest ancient and modern artisans make this part of Fifth Avenue one of the most magnificent streets in the world.¹⁶

No. 712 remains as an excellent example of the type of building which led to of Fifth Avenue originally made in 1915, and causes Fifth Avenue still to be perceived "as one of the most magnificent streets in the world."

The first and major tenant of the building was the interior decorating firm of L. Alavoine & Co., which leased the site prior to construction and retained offices there through the 1950s.¹⁷ The jeweler Cartier occupied the third floor between 1908 and 1917, prior to locating at 651 Fifth Avenue. A succession of art galleries occupied the first floor, among them that of Edward Brandus and A. Schmidt and Son. In 1959 the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church sold the building to Harry Winston, the jeweler who was located at No. 718. Winston in turn sold the building in 1963 to the Gotham Development Corp., which acted on behalf of Rizzoli Editore.¹⁸ The deed also contained a restrictive covenant mandating that "the premises herein conveyed shall at all times be maintained and used only in a first-class manner and in accordance with the highest standards of appearance and decorum of the Fifth Avenue Association." Since 1964 the building has housed the bookstore and publishing firm of Rizzoli, which specializes in books on the fine arts.

Description

The Rizzoli building is a five-story limestone-fronted structure which occupies the site of the Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church parsonage and extends back into the lot some 120 feet. The design employs details which are characteristic of neo-French Classic architecture. The rusticated ground floor is accented by two openings, an arched entranceway with keystone at the right, which leads to the upper floors, and a shopfront, covering two-thirds of the front, at the left. The square-headed doorway with outer wood and glass double doors and inner panelled wood double doors is surmounted by a lunette with oculus adorned with swags set within the arch. The building retains its original detail except for changes to the storefront on the ground floor. The present shopfront was installed in the original storefront opening in 1964 for Rizzoli; it contains a center entrance and side showcases, set back from the front wall of the building. The wood and glass door has a limestone enframing with lintel on console brackets. The original shopfront was flush with the facade and contained an entrance at the right. A modillioned cornice above a frieze with guttae extends the width of the facade above the ground floor. The second story is treated as a piano nobile with three full-length arched window openings set between piers. Balustrades accent the bases of the windows while the arches set on impost blocks are outlined with foliate ornament, emphasized

by foliate bracket keystones. Each window is composed of two wood casements set below vertically-divided transoms. A frieze containing the Rizzoli inscription extends above the second floor setting off a dentilled cornice. The third and fourth stories are designed as a unit with double-height pilasters with Corinthian capitals flanking the window openings. Those at the third floor are accented by panels with swags. Wrought-iron grilles accent the window bases. The windows are wood casements with horizontal divisions at the level of the grilles and are set below vertically divided transoms. The fourth floor windows are set within segmental arches with bracket keystones. Shallow projecting corbeled sills supporting decorative wrought-iron grilles which protect the windows. These wood windows are double-hung with a heavy vertical mullion in each, set below vertically divided transoms. The major cornice with modillions supports an urn-adorned balustrade at the fifth mansard story. The slate-covered roof is pierced by three segmental-arched dormers with wood windows set below vertically divided transoms. A metal coping sets off the roof.

Conclusion

Today the Rizzoli Building survives as a reminder of that period when this section of Fifth Avenue was shifting from a prestigious residential precinct to an elegant shopping street. While the form of the building with its refined neo-French Classic details recalls that residential past, the building has gracefully accommodated itself to the needs of commerce for over 75 years. Its style, form, and materials create a building of the type which has come to characterize Fifth Avenue as an elegant boulevard of shops, department stores, hotels, and clubs. Today, its distinguished design adds to and enhances the continuum of Fifth Avenue as New York's and the nation's premier shopping street.

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FOOTNOTES

1. Jesse Lynch Williams, "The Walk Up-Town," Scribner's Monthly, 27 (January 1900), 59.
2. A.C. David, "The New Fifth Avenue," Architectural Record, 22 (July 1907), 1.
3. New York City, Department of Buildings, New Building Docket 206-1871.
4. A Noble Landmark of New York: The Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church: 1808-1958 (New York: Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, 1906), p.47.
5. New York Public Library, Photographic Views of New York City, 0362-D4, 1876, Ewing Galloway.
6. See Photographic Views of New York City, 0362-C6, c.1886, New-York Historical Society, and 0363-C5, 1894, Brown Brothers, for representative photographs.
7. Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 79 (April 6, 1907), 669.
8. " 'Raymere' Residence of Mr. Jacob Rothschild, Albert S. Gottlieb, Architect," Architects' and Builders' Magazine, 11 (November 1901), 1.
9. "Albert S. Gottlieb - Retired Architect in Practice Here for 40 Years, Dies at 71," New York Times, January 15, 1942, p.19.
10. David, p.11.
11. See Photographic Views, 0363-A4, c.1910; and directory listing in Collins' "Both Sides of Fifth Avenue" (New York: J. F. L. Collins, 1910), p.61.
12. Photographic Views, 0363-A4.
13. Collins, p.61.
14. See Note 7.
15. The resemblance to the work of Ogden Codman, especially such designs as the Lucy D. Dahlgren House (1915), 15 East 96th Street, and Codman's own house, (1912), 7 East 96th Street, is particularly striking.
16. Fifth Avenue (New York: Fifth Avenue Bank, 1915), pp. 5,6.
17. Real Estate Record and Builders Guide, 79 (March 23, 1907), 582.
18. New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds, Liber 5248, p.207

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Rizzoli Building has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Rizzoli Building is a significant reminder of Fifth Avenue at the turn of the century when the avenue, south of 59th Street, was shifting from residential to commercial use; that as designed by architect Albert S. Gottlieb the building is a distinguished example of the neo-French Classic style which recalls 18th-century Parisian town houses; that although the building was commissioned for commercial use, and it has always housed commercial tenants, it is residential in height, scale and design details in deference to its then residential neighbors; that among the notable architectural characteristics of the building are the rusticated base and limestone facing, arched openings, double-height pilasters, wrought-iron grilles, and mansard roof with dormers; that the building has gracefully accommodated itself to the needs of prestigious commercial tenants for over 75 years; and that today the urbane quality of the building's design continues to enhance Fifth Avenue as the city's and the nation's premier shopping street.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21 (formerly Chapter 63) of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Rizzoli Building, 712 Fifth Avenue, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1271, Lot 38 in part, consisting of that portion of the lot, formerly known as lot 38, on which 712 Fifth Avenue is situated, and excluding that portion of the lot, formerly known as lot 43, on which 2 West 56th Street is situated, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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William, Jesse Lynch. "The Walk Up-Town." Scribner's Monthly, 27 (January 1900), 44-59.



TERMIN CHURCH

CARTIER
Jewellers
I. ALAVOINE & CO.
Interior Decorators
No. 712

EDWARD BRANDUS
Art
No. 712

No. 714

SCHUMANN & CO.
Jewellers
No. 716

LEIKENS
Florist
No. 718

ULAMAN & CO.
Brokers
No. 720

WEST
56th St.

West side of Fifth Avenue between 55th and 56th Streets
1911 photograph

Photo Credit: from Fifth Avenue: New York from Start to Finish. New York Public Library.



Byron Co.
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West Side of Fifth Avenue from 55th to 56th Sts

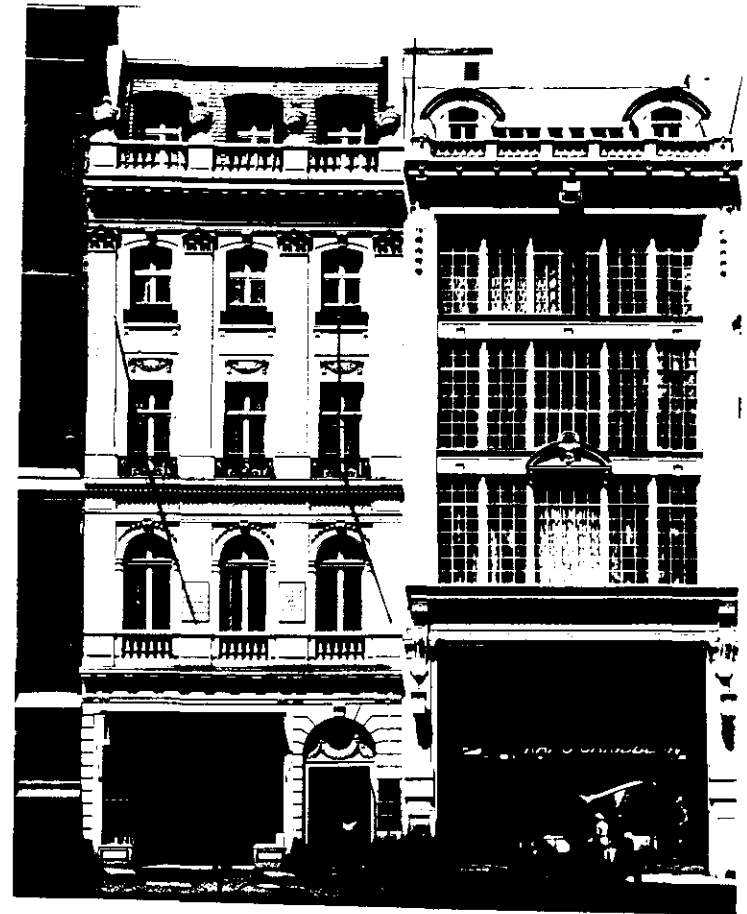
West side of Fifth Avenue between 55th and 56th Streets
1924 photograph

Photo Credit: Byron
Company of New York, for
Cushman & Wakefield Inc.



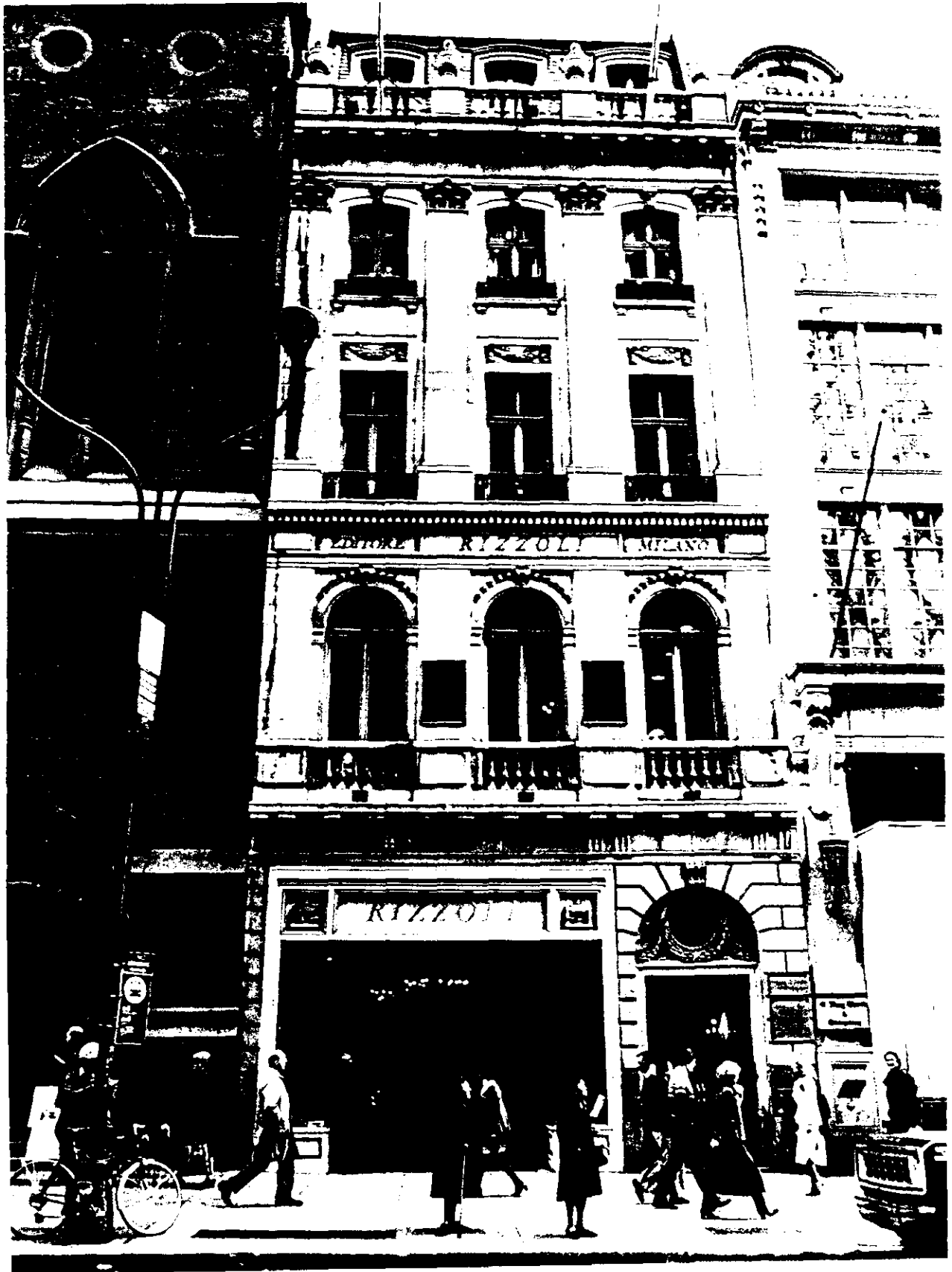
Rizzoli and former Coty Building
712 and 714 Fifth Avenue

Photo Credit: John Barrington Bayley
1963



Rizzoli and former Coty Building
712 and 714 Fifth Avenue

Photo Credit: John Barrington Bayley
1965



Rizzoli Building
712 Fifth Avenue
Manhattan

Built: 1907-08
Architect: Albert S. Gottlieb

Photo Credit: Landmarks
Preservation Commission