

45 EAST 66th STREET BUILDING, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1906-08;
architects Harde & Short.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1381, Lot 22.

On May 10, 1977, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 45 East 66th Street Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 7). At the request of the owner the hearing was continued to July 12, 1977 (Item No. 1). Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. A total of ten witnesses spoke in favor of designation at the two hearings. Two witnesses, one of whom was the attorney for the owner, spoke against designation. The Commission has received a great many communications in favor of designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The striking apartment house at 45 East 66th Street stands at the corner of 66th Street and Madison Avenue and is richly detailed with a profusion of Gothic ornament. The building creates a picturesque and imposing effect reminiscent of the neo-French Renaissance style which often employed Gothic detail. Executed in brick with terra-cotta trim, from the designs of the architectural firm of Harde & Short, this handsome apartment building with its distinctive corner tower was, when it was erected in 1906-08, among the earliest of its type to be constructed in the city.

During the first decade of the 20th century, luxurious apartment houses gradually began to replace the opulent private residences of affluent New Yorkers who, for both economic and practical reasons, came to prefer apartment-style urban living. The convenience of apartment life was noted in many periodicals of the time and was praised by the architect, Lafayette A. Goldstone, writing in Architecture (1918):

He [the apartment dweller] can be entirely isolated and experience the joy of living 100 to 200 feet in the air, above the noise and dust of the street, and if he desires to travel need only dismiss his help and latch the front door, with none of the dreaded discomfort of closing up a huge house.

As early as 1884, The Dakota, one of the most impressive of the early luxury apartment buildings, had been constructed on 72nd Street and Central Park West. A number of elegant apartment houses were subsequently erected along Central Park West; however, construction of large deluxe apartment buildings along the fashionable streets of the Upper East Side did not occur until slightly later.

At the time that 45 East 66th Street was built, the surrounding neighborhood was characterized by low scale rowhouses. Only a few apartment buildings, such as Charles Platt's neo-Italian Renaissance design at 131-35 East 66th Street (1905-07), stood nearby. After the construction of 45 East 66th Street, a number of elegant apartment houses were erected in this part of the Upper East Side. In 1909, the Verona was erected at 64th Street and Madison Avenue and in 1912, a large apartment house was built at 66th Street and Park Avenue. The apartment buildings of the early 20th-century were designed by many of the most prestigious architects of the day and elegantly detailed in a wide variety of styles, including the neo-Gothic, neo-Renaissance and French Beaux-Arts. The use of elaborate architectural ornament on the exterior of the building symbolized the grandeur and luxury of the style of living within.

THE ARCHITECTS

The architectural firm of Harde & Short was responsible for many deluxe apartment houses throughout the city. Several of these buildings still stand

today and are among the most distinguished examples of this early type of apartment design. Herbert Spencer Harde (1873-1958) studied architecture in London.* Returning to New York, Harde designed a number of tenement houses at the turn of the century. Between 1898 and 1900 he worked with both James E. Ware Associates and Ralph Townsend on tenements located on the Upper West Side. Harde was listed as the owner of two of these properties. One of the earliest references to the architect, Richard Thomas Short, appears in I.N. Phelps Stokes' The Iconography of Manhattan Island; it concerns a 1900 housing exhibition in which Short won first prize for his model tenement design. The first building known to have been designed by the firm of Harde & Short was "Red House," an apartment house erected in 1903-04 at 350 West 85th Street. Lavishly ornamented with features which recur in the later work of the firm, "Red House" still stands. The Gothic window detail of this building is quite similar to that used a few years later at 45 East 66th Street.

In 1906, Charles F. Rogers, president of Parkview Real Estate Company, commissioned Harde & Short to design the apartment house at 45 East 66th Street. Completed two years later, the building originally had two apartments per floor. The extensive use of large windows, combined with the exuberant terra-cotta Gothic detail, give 45 East 66th Street an unusually handsome appearance. One of the most distinctive features of this apartment house, its corner tower, recalls Parisian apartment buildings of the time and was repeated in another of the firm's impressive works, Alwyn Court.

Erected in 1908-09, Alwyn Court, like 45 East 66th Street, is magnificently ornamented with terra-cotta detail. A designated New York City Landmark, Alwyn Court was designed by Harde & Short in the neo-French Renaissance style and displays such characteristic features as the crowned salamander, the official symbol of François I. Alwyn Court was named for Alwyn Ball, Jr., a member of the syndicate responsible for the building as well as for another apartment house by Harde & Short, known as The Studio. Strongly Gothic in character, The Studio, at 44 West 77th Street within the Central Park West-76th Street Historic District, was completed the same year as Alwyn Court. The original features of The Studio-- such as the series of traceried arches elaborately crowned by crockets-- closely resembled those at 45 East 66th Street. Much of this fine detail was removed from The Studio in 1944, so that now 45 East 66th Street is the only Harde & Short apartment house which displays such a profusion of intricate Gothic ornament.

Short also worked independently of Harde and designed a variety of building types, including a police station (1907-08), which still stands on West 30th Street, and the Moorish style Kismet Temple Mystic Shrine (1909) in Brooklyn. Despite the high quality of the designs executed by Harde & Short during the first decade of the 20th century, little is known about the architects after this period.

THE BUILDING

The striking ten-story high apartment building at 45 East 66th Street rises above the surrounding town houses and, with its distinctive corner tower and ornate red brick and light-colored terra-cotta facade, is reminiscent of the French Renaissance style. The contrast between the red brick of the facade and the intricate light-colored terra-cotta features animates this building and creates a rich effect. The wealth of Gothic detail gives it an almost medieval quality and is characteristic of the early phase of the French Renaissance, which often used Gothic ornament.

The apartment house is composed of two facades -- one facing Madison Avenue and the other 66th Street -- which are connected by the full-height corner tower. Each of these facades is divided vertically into three large bays of varying widths. At the far end of each facade, the widest of the bays -- five windows wide-- projects slightly and is flanked by engaged spiral columns. Along Madison Avenue, the other two bays are four windows wide, similar to the "hinge" corner tower, while the two at the 66th Street facade are only three windows wide. The building is now entered on 66th Street and the original entrance, set in the corner tower, has been remodeled. The first floor of the apartment house has been converted to commercial use and is separated from the upper stories by a wide paneled band course which recurs above the second story windows. The twelve-over-twelve sash windows of the second story, with the exception of the eight-over-eight of the third story, are similar to those above and, in the extensive use

*According to Christopher Gray, an architectural historian who has done extensive research on the firm.

of mullions, recall the windows of Tudor architecture. The second and third-story windows share common round-shouldered enframements and drip moldings which have corbeled ends.

At the fourth story, a richly detailed stone balcony of scrollwork flanking vertical panels elegantly crowns the three lower stories and extends around both facades, following the graceful curve of the corner tower. The upper stories are more elaborately embellished with Gothic ornament. Each of the tall window bays is flanked by narrow, pointed ribs. At either side of these bays, the walls are enlivened by light-colored terra cotta keyed to the brickwork, creating the effect of quins. The spandrel panels between the twelve-over-twelve windows of the fourth through the sixth stories are ornamented with a series of arched motifs. Handsomely crowning the sixth story of each of the bays is a decorative canopy, characteristic of the Gothic style. Executed in terra cotta, the canopy is composed of delicate ogee arches with crockets, finials and tracery and creates a rich, sculptural effect above these windows. At each facade between the canopies, a larger trefoil arch in terra cotta is set against the brick wall between the two smaller bays and is capped by an elaborate finial.

At the four upper stories, the narrow pointed ribs continue at either side of the bays and terminate, above the tenth floor windows, in finials. Triple arches on corbels are set in the spandrel panels between the windows. Impressively crowning each of the tenth story windows is a large traceried ogee arch with ornate finials. The delicate rhythm created by these terra-cotta features lends a distinctively picturesque quality to this building. Comparatively simple in design, the roof cornice is carried on a series of diminutive corbeled arches, surmounted by a band of vertical grooves. Originally a high parapet was set above the cornice.

In its striking scale and prolific use of elaborate architectural detail, the 45 East 66th Street Building is an impressive reminder of the grand era of the early luxury apartment house. As one of the first elegant apartment buildings of the 20th century, it stands out today as among the most distinctive extant designs of that period and as a vital architectural element in this part of the city.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

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 45 East 66th Street 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 45 East 66th Street Building is an impressive reminder of the grand era of the early luxury apartment house; that it is one of the finest works of the distinguished architectural firm of Harde & Short which was responsible for several handsome apartment houses in the city; that it was designed with a profusion of elegant and ornate Gothic detail; that with its distinctive corner tower and ornate brick and light-colored terra-cotta facade it is reminiscent of the early phase of the French Renaissance style; that the building stands out today as among the finest extant apartment houses of the early 20th century when the apartment style of urban life became popular; and that the 45 East 66th Street Building is a vital architectural element in this part of the city.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of 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 45 East 66th Street Building, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1381, Lot 22, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.