

998 FIFTH AVENUE APARTMENT HOUSE, Manhattan. Built 1910-12; architects McKim, Mead & White.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1493, Lot 1.

On July 24, 1973, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 998 Fifth Avenue Apartment House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 51). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Thirty witnesses spoke in favor of designating the buildings under consideration in this part of Manhattan, including 998 Fifth Avenue. The representative of the cooperative owning 998 Fifth Avenue spoke against designation. Previous hearings had been held in 1966 and 1970 on the proposal to designate 998 Fifth Avenue.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

No. 998 Fifth Avenue is a remarkably handsome building - the finest Italian Renaissance style apartment house in New York City. The architects were the prestigious firm of McKim, Mead & White, which at that time was designing the north wing of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, across the avenue.

Although a few luxury apartment houses, such as The Dakota and The Apthrop, had been built earlier, it was not until about 1910 that many prominent families who had previously resided in private town houses, decided that for convenience and often for economic reasons, it was advantageous to live in apartment houses. Thus, the realtors did not question the ready availability of clientele to occupy such apartments, first on a rental basis and later as cooperatives. Included among the first tenants at 998 Fifth Avenue were Mr. and Mrs. Murray Guggenheim, Senator and Mrs. Elihu Root, and the Hon. and Mrs. Levi P. Morton.

998 Fifth Avenue is visually divided into three superimposed four-story sections which are separated by bandcourses with balustrades, creating a strong horizontal emphasis which is repeated in the striking roof cornice. The first section consists of an unusually high base of boldly rusticated limestone, a feature which is typical of the Italian Renaissance palazzo tradition. In contrast, the upper sections are smooth-faced and accented by quoins.

The first of two horizontal accents occurs at the fifth floor, where a wide bandcourse with balusters beneath the windows creates the division. The window openings behind the balustrades have French doors with transoms and the window enframements are crowned by triangular and arched pediments. Just below this, the fourth story is adorned by panels with handsome shields in relief set between the windows.

A second horizontal accent at the ninth floor consists of a wide bandcourse with balustrades similar to that at the fifth story, but more restrained. The window openings on this floor are square-headed and crowned by full entablatures. Panels between the eighth story windows are of fine yellow Siena marble. A striking stone roof cornice with modillions and bold dentils crowns the building in traditional Italian Renaissance palazzo fashion.

Taken as a whole, these architectural features form an impressive and harmonious composition in keeping with the Italian Renaissance design tradition. Skillful workmanship is evident in the many fine details on the building.

The entire structure has great dignity, manifested in its scale and details, making it a worthy companion for its neighbor across the street, The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

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 998 Fifth Avenue Apartment House has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, 998 Fifth Avenue is the finest Italian Renaissance style apartment house in New York City, that it has good proportions and a magnificent scale in keeping with its conspicuous site on Fifth Avenue, that it shows skillfull workmanship, and that its fine details enrich the building and give evidence of superb design by the famous architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White.

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 998 Fifth Avenue Apartment House, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1493, Lot 1, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.