

Landmarks Preservation Commission
November 12, 1985; Designation List 183
LP-1568

NORMANDY APARTMENTS, 140 Riverside Drive, Manhattan. Built 1938-39; architect, Emery Roth & Sons.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1248, Lot 1.

On November 12, 1985, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Normandy Apartments and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 23). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Twenty-two witnesses spoke in favor of designation. Nine witnesses spoke in opposition to designation. The Commission has received many letters and other expressions of opinion, many of which supported designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Normandy Apartments is one of the most outstanding apartment buildings on Manhattan's Upper West Side. A large eighteen-story (with nineteenth-story penthouse) twin-towered structure overlooking the Hudson River, it dominates the vista of Riverside Drive. Designed by Emery Roth, and built in 1938-39, it was his last great work, as well as the last of the monumental pre-World War II apartment houses that are such an important element of the Upper West Side.

Emery Roth was one of New York's most highly respected designers of apartment houses and hotels. A Hungarian-born immigrant, he trained in the offices of the major American architects Burnham & Root and Richard Morris Hunt, and maintained an active practice from the turn of the century up through World War II. Like most architects specializing in residential work, he received few commissions during the Depression years of the 1930s, but with the upturn in construction in 1939 he joined three partners in a syndicate to build the Normandy.

The design of the Normandy Apartments reflects two diverse sources: the Italian Renaissance, in keeping with Roth's predilections for historical sources, and the Style Moderne that became popular in the 1930s. The Normandy incorporates Renaissance-inspired detail but combines them with forms and streamlining characteristic of the modernistic trends of the era. Occupying its entire blockfront on Riverside Drive, the Normandy is twin-towered, with curving streamlined corners. Its limestone base is articulated with horizontal striations which suggest the rustication typical of Italian Renaissance palaces, but in a curving, streamlined fashion. Original steel casements survive in most of the windows, and those at the corners are placed to follow the building's curves.

The Normandy today, majestically towering over Riverside Drive, stands

as a dominant visual element in the skyline of the Upper West Side, a monument in the development of New York as a city of apartment houses, and a unique cross between the eclectic -- here of Italian Renaissance inspiration -- and the Moderne, the two major currents of design in the inter-war period.

The Upper West Side and Riverside Drive

Although its history can be traced as far back as the 17th century, the Upper West Side, including the land on which the Normandy is sited, remained largely undeveloped until the 1880s.

The presence of Central Park, on the northern fringe of the city above 59th Street, authorized by the State Legislature in 1853, and designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux, spurred development to its east and west. Several other civic improvements greatly contributed to the eventual development of the Upper West Side: the Eighth Avenue horse car line was extended to 84th Street in 1864; the Commissioners of Central Park were authorized to complete the laying out of streets west of Central Park in 1865; and Bloomingdale Road (renamed "the Boulevard" and later Broadway) was widened in 1868-71 and adorned with central planted malls from 59th to 155th Streets. The biggest boost to development of the area west of Broadway was the creation of Riverside Park and Drive near the Hudson River. Park Commissioner Andrew H. Green sought and received legislative approval in 1866 for the purchase of the steep river bluff for a park, and in 1867 Riverside Drive was mapped as a straight avenue. It soon became apparent, however, that the hilly topography would necessitate extensive landfill. Olmsted, at the request of the Park Commissioners, produced a plan in 1873-75 for a curving scenic parkway adapted to the existing topography, with islands and views of the Hudson and of the steep park itself (which extended to the Hudson River Railroad). Riverside Park and Drive, based on Olmsted's initial proposal, were constructed over the years between 1876 and 1900 (today the Park and Drive are a designated New York City Scenic Landmark).

The financial Panic of 1873 ended a period of post-Civil War speculation, and the real estate and building industry entered a period of stagnation which lasted until the end of the decade. Development in the area did revive, however, spurred by the completion of the Ninth Avenue Elevated Railroad in 1879, and the real estate investments of Edward Clark, president of the Singer Sewing Machine Company. Clark's developments along Central Park included the Dakota at 1 West 72nd Street (Henry J. Hardenbergh, 1880-84; a designated New York City Landmark), New York's first luxury apartment building.

By 1885 the Upper West Side had emerged as the city's area of most intense speculation. Development initially occurred more rapidly on the streets between the Boulevard and Central Park than on the streets to the west of the Boulevard, but promotional brochures and publicity in the press eventually heightened interest in the territory west of the Boulevard. In 1890, the New York Herald ran a series of editorials and articles extolling the advantages of the Upper West Side, particularly the area around Riverside Drive:

The district to the east of Riverside Park as far as Central Park is likely, or rather, sure to become within the next twenty years, perhaps the location of the most beautiful residences in the world. The advantages of pure air and beautiful surroundings, glimpses of New Jersey Hills at the end of each street, with the glitter of the Hudson between; the nearness of parks and the accessibility of the district will be insurmountable factors in popularity.¹

The Panic of 1893 temporarily slowed development, but in the late 1890s architect-developer Clarence F. True, having purchased all available lots along lower Riverside Drive south of 84th Street, constructed several groups of elegant and distinctive houses there, spurring development of the Drive. Twelve town houses were constructed on the current site of the Normandy in the 1890s. By the turn of the century the area along Riverside Park had evolved into one of the most fashionable residential neighborhoods in the city. In 1899, one observer noted that Riverside Drive was "universally acknowledged to be one of the most beautiful and picturesque [streets] in the world."²

The last years of the 19th century witnessed the increasing acceptance by the upper middle classes in Manhattan of the multiple dwelling. The value of available vacant land previously reserved for rowhouse development escalated sharply, and ultimately the cost of the average rowhouse jumped to a point at which it became unprofitable for the developer and unaffordable for the prospective buyer. A number of factors further encouraged the construction of apartment buildings and the termination of rowhouse construction, including legislation in the early 20th century permitting taller apartment buildings, and changing styles of living, with a "universal demand for comfort, with less care and expense than entailed in private house maintenance."³ Apartment house construction on the Upper West Side continued unabated until the Depression. As vacant lots became increasingly scarce, particularly after World War I, developers took to demolishing existing houses and small-scale tenements (many of which were less than twenty years old), in order to assemble sites for more lucrative large apartment houses. Riverside Drive and West End Avenue were particularly vulnerable to this development trend, and most of the rowhouses and mansions which had once lined them succumbed.

With the onset of the Depression, the Upper West Side entered a period of stagnation and decline. Little new construction occurred after 1931, and many rowhouses, which had become financial burdens to maintain as single family residences, were converted to multiple dwellings. Towards the end of the 1930s, however, Riverside Park was expanded to the Hudson River (and over the tracks of the New York Central Railroad) and its design was modified in the 1930s under the administration of Parks Department Commissioner Robert Moses. The improved park helped revive interest in Riverside Drive in the late 1930s. The New York Sun pointed out in 1938 that

there is a good demand for the better type of apartments in the Riverside Drive section of the West Side... due to the fact that Riverside Drive has become one of the most beautiful parkways in the world due to the recent covering of

the New York Central tracks and the extensive landscaping and roadway improvements completed last year.⁴

The large number of Americans returning from Europe in anticipation of the outbreak of war was also credited with spurring a boom in new housing.⁵ Economic conditions in general had also improved, spurring the construction of more apartment buildings than at any time during the 1930s.⁶ The Normandy was one of a number of new buildings erected there just prior to the outbreak of World War II.

In 1938, Emery Roth joined with three partners, Samson Rosenblatt, Herman Wacht, and Henry Kaufman, to form a syndicate to build the Normandy Apartments. The Normandy was among the largest and last project conceived during this false spring of building preceding the outbreak of World War II.

Emery Roth & Sons

Orphaned at the age of 13 in Hungary (in an area that is now part of Czechoslovakia), Emery Roth (1871-1948) immigrated to the United States, going first to Chicago and then to Fairplains, Illinois, where he found employment as an office boy with an architect's firm.⁷ After working as an apprentice draftsman in an architect's office in Kansas City in 1889-90, Roth moved to Chicago where he was appointed to the architectural staff of the World's Columbian Exposition through the firm of Burnham & Root. The Exposition, with John Root as Consulting Engineer and Daniel H. Burnham as Chief of Construction, was held in 1893 and had a profound influence in the revival of classical forms in American architecture. After Root's death in 1891, Roth assisted Root's successor, Charles B. Atwood, in the design of the most celebrated building of the fair, the Fine Arts Palace.⁸

Roth left Chicago in 1893, moving to New York to join the firm of Richard Morris Hunt, "dean of American architecture." Roth had made a favorable impression on Hunt during the Exposition, when he was called on to make a last-minute model for the Administration Building. While Roth was with Hunt, Roth worked on the interiors of a number of suburban residences and on one of the largest and most lavish of Hunt's commissions: "The Breakers" for Cornelius Vanderbilt in Newport.⁹ It was through the latter commission that Roth came to know the prominent interior designer Ogden Codman. Roth was subsequently hired by Codman and rose to the position of chief designer in his firm. In later years Roth attributed his abilities as a planner to his experience in interior decoration.¹⁰

In 1895, Roth opened his own office, which he continued for only three years. He then formed the short-lived firm of Stein, Cohen & Roth, with Theodore G. Stein and E. Yancey Cohen. In his early career Roth was one of the more experimental New York City architects, working with such non-traditional influences as Art Nouveau.¹¹ The Hotel Belleclaire (1901-03) at 2171-2177 Broadway, thought to be Roth's first major work in New York City (designed while he was with Stein, Cohen & Roth), is a unique combination of the French Beaux-Arts and Viennese Secession styles. Soon after the turn of the century, Roth began an independent practice. At the

height of his long and highly successful career in the 1920s and 1930s, Roth specialized in apartment house and hotel design, showing great skill at adapting mainly neo-Renaissance and classically-inspired detailing to modern building forms. He produced numerous notable examples in Manhattan: the Ritz Tower (1925, with Thomas Hastings), Park Avenue and East 57th Street; the Oliver Cromwell Hotel (1928), 12 West 72nd Street; the Beresford Apartments (1928-29), 211 Central Park West; the twin-towered San Remo Apartments (1929-30), 145-146 Central Park West; the Art Deco style Eldorado (1929-31, as a consultant to Margon & Holder), 300 Central Park West, a designated New York City Landmark; Southgate Apartments (1929-31), 400-434 East 52nd Street; the Art Deco style Ardsley Apartments (1930-31), 320 Central Park West; and the St. Moritz Hotel (1931), 50 Central Park South. On many of his 1920s projects Roth was involved both as architect and as developer.

Like most architects during the Depression, Roth saw the number of his commissions dwindle, and his staff shrink. Work began to pick up again in 1935, at which time Roth's sons, first Richard and later Julian, joined him and the firm became Emery Roth & Sons.¹² The Normandy, constructed in 1938-39, was one of Roth's last great apartment house designs. After World War II, the firm's buildings turned to a more standardized commercial vein.

The Normandy Apartments on Riverside Drive

The site of the Normandy had been occupied since 1896 by eight rowhouses constructed by architect-builder Henry Cook¹³ on Riverside Drive, and another four on 86th and 87th Streets. A first attempt to redevelop the site had been made in 1921, when Dr. John A. Harriss, who had bought the house on the corner of 86th Street and Riverside Drive in 1910, purchased the rest of the blockfront under the name of "Rivercrest Realty," with the intention of erecting a "high-grade apartment house."¹⁴ Rivercrest lost the property to Metropolitan Life in 1933 in one of the many mortgage foreclosures of the Depression¹⁵ When Emery Roth and his three partners finally purchased the largely vacant rowhouses in 1938, the deal was described by the brokers involved, Wood, Dolson & Company, as

the largest transaction in the sale of vacant property for improvement with private capital in New York City since the advent of the financial depression.¹⁶

Roth's syndicate included himself and three partners: Samson Rosenblatt, Henry Kaufman, and Herman Wacht. All three partners were builders; Rosenblatt had built the massive Graybar-Varick Building at 180-190 Varick Street in lower Manhattan¹⁷] It was Roth, however, who was most prominently connected with the building of grand apartment houses, and the Normandy was explicitly modeled on his earlier works.

Roth and his partners intended to build

one of the largest multi-family edifices ever erected on Manhattan Island. It will contain 1,080 rooms divided into 250 suites ranging from three to seven rooms... A number of suites will be of the duplex type and many will be provided with open terraces.¹⁸

The model they chose was that of the great Upper West Side apartment houses that had transformed Central Park West a decade earlier: the twin-towered Century, Majestic, San Remo and Eldorado, and a fifth, the Beresford, that supported three squat towers on the prominent corner of Central Park West and 81st Street. It was the construction of these buildings that had prompted the New York Times to write in 1930 that the west side "skyline bids fair to be ere long as beautifully fantastic as it is where the river mingles in the bay."¹⁹

Emery Roth himself had designed two of the five Central Park West towers -- the San Remo and the Beresford -- and been a consultant on a third, the Eldorado. Frederick A. Wyckoff, president of Wood, Dolson & Company, the brokers for the Normandy site, had also been the broker for the San Remo and the Beresford.²⁰ Roth and his partners must have considered these to be eminently successful models for the Normandy, for they announced in 1938 that its

architectural design will be in the Italian Renaissance style of the same character as the San Remo Towers and Beresford Apartments on Central Park West. Each corner of the new building will be surmounted by a tower.²¹

The tower forms of these buildings came about as a result of the multiple dwelling law passed by the New York State Legislature in 1929. This law mandated an increase in yard and court area, but allowed residential buildings to rise higher than before, legalizing setbacks and towers in this building type for the first time. The bill limited the height of street walls to one-and-one-half times the width of the street, but, on plots of over 25,000 square feet, allowed towers that could rise up to three times the width of the street. The towered apartment houses on Central Park West acted as a group to define that boulevard's character; the Normandy, being the only such tower in its area, stands alone as a major skyline monument on Riverside Drive.

Unlike the five Central Park West towers, whose major and minor facades were set flush with the lot line, the pavilions, or wings, of the Normandy flank a prominent recessed garden court on Riverside Drive. This court, with a similar one at the rear of the building within the block, totaling 9000 square feet in area that would remain unbuilt on, guaranteed maximum light and air for all apartments. The garden courts were described in contemporary accounts as unusual innovations. In an interview, Roth was described as being very

interested in the unique gardens that will be a feature of the building both front and back, the rear garden taking up a plot of ground 80 by 100 feet. Because of these gardens, replacing old-style courts, every apartment will have two exposures, with round corner windows, or be floor-throughs from garden to garden.

In the interview Roth was quoted:

People nowadays are comfort-conscious and because a city apartment is to be their home for a great part of their life

time they want to incorporate suburban features. For example, they want a pleasant outlook, not bleak walls and windows.²²

Nor did the Normandy skimp on luxury interior amenities. Plans included a sunken lobby for the building, and for the individual apartments a bathroom for every bedroom, numerous closets, circular foyers, multiple terraces at the setbacks, and carved wood and marble fireplaces in the penthouse apartments. In the two, seven-room penthouse apartments at the tower bases, the lower and upper floors were connected by a semi-circular staircase set in a semi-circular wall of glass brick.²³

The Normandy: Italian Renaissance and the Moderne

The design of the Normandy Apartments displays an unusual combination of the Italian Renaissance sources popular in the eclectic designs of the 1920s, for which Roth is perhaps best known, and the streamlined Moderne.

The Moderne is one variety of the modernistic styles generally grouped under the heading of "Art Deco."²⁴ Where the Art Deco of the 1920s relied on vertical emphasis and multi-colored materials, patterned brickwork and terra-cotta ornament based on abstract forms, the Moderne of the 1930s was inspired more by the so-called "machine aesthetic." Instead of the emphasis on soaring verticality, the Moderne looked to sweeping horizontal lines, defined by large, horizontally-arranged rows of windows, set close to the facade surfaces. This, in turn, emphasized the wall surface of a building and its volume rather than its mass. The sharp angularity of the Deco of the '20s gave way to streamlined curves in the '30s. Polychromatic treatments and applied terra-cotta ornament, which required specialized work, were replaced by simple flat monochromatic surfaces, easily adaptable to mass production.

The Moderne, and modernistic styles in general, were developed during the 1930s. The emphasis on horizontally-arranged bands of windows, one of Moderne's chief characteristics, could be found in New York as early as Raymond Hood's McGraw-Hill Building of 1930-31. Horizontal emphasis combined with sweeping curves characterize the design of the Starrett-Lehigh Building, designed by Cory & Cory and built 1930-31. Curving bows with rows of windows are the major design element of Rockefeller Apartments (Harrison & Fouilhoux, 1935-37). Many of the Rockefeller Center buildings designed in the later 1930s, such as the Eastern Airlines Building of 1939, made use of these characteristics. Modernistic styles in general reached their apogee of popularity and influence in 1939, with the opening of the 1939 New York World's Fair. The Fair, in the planning stages from the mid-1930s, overshadowed almost all other building activity in New York, and represented a culmination of the modernistic trends of the 1920s and '30s. Designs for many of its streamlined curving buildings had been published by 1938, and its influence on the Normandy cannot be discounted.²⁵ At the same time, although evidence is inconclusive, it appears highly probable that Roth's Normandy was inspired by, and was the Americanized namesake of, the French ocean liner Normandie (see Appendix.) With only slightly less celebrity than her triumphant arrival in 1935, and still "the fastest ship

on the Western Ocean," the Normandie departed on her hundredth trans-Atlantic voyage on July 13, 1938, just six weeks before plans for the Normandy Apartments were filed at the Buildings Department.²⁶

Roth himself had designed the twin-towered San Remo Apartments on Central Park West in 1929-30, the only one of the four such buildings on that avenue not clad in modernistic Art Deco forms. (He was also credited as a consultant on the Art Deco style Eldorado Apartments, but the nature and extent of his involvement is not clear.) Roth's predilection for classical sources was quite strong, but he also designed modernistic apartment houses, including the Art Deco style Ardsley at 320 Central Park West (1931). Roth had few residential commissions in the 1930s, but he did design an extraordinary Moderne style apartment house at 888 Grand Concourse in 1937.²⁷ No. 888, a six-story building with horizontally placed windows, streamlined curving corners, and concave mosaic-lined entrance, anticipated many of the details of Roth's Normandy design of the following year. Immediately following the completion of the Normandy, in an apartment house at 875 Fifth Avenue built in 1939-40, Roth created a thoroughly Moderne design.²⁸ This was followed in 1940 by a very similar apartment house at 295 Central Park West, corner of 90th Street.²⁹

Although the Normandy falls within this sequence of modernistic buildings, its style does hark back in certain details to the Renaissance-inspired design that Roth had always preferred. Moreover, its H-shaped plan with pavilions and its symmetrically-organized, major facade on Riverside Drive -- with a balance of verticals and horizontals -- are indicative of Roth's classical sensibility. The original choice of "Italian Renaissance" style, modeled on the success of the San Remo and Beresford of a decade earlier, apparently seemed odd to his contemporaries, for Roth had to defend it. Writing about the Normandy's design, he explained:

It will be definitely 1939. That doesn't mean "modernistic." Every building is ultra modern when erected, whether it is inspired by any one of the historic periods of architecture or whether it was planned with a conscious search for originality. Architecture at all periods and at all times was modern for its particular era. I am fond of so-called old Italian architecture. If today I designed a building of old Italian architecture it would emerge nevertheless as a modern structure, always to be recognized as of 1939.³⁰

The resulting style of the Normandy Apartments is an unusual cross between the two dominant trends in the period between the two world wars. The "Italian Renaissance" details include the flat pilasters with decorative capitals articulating the wall surfaces, the balustraded parapets shielding the setbacks, and the towers themselves. The obviously modernistic features are the streamlined curving corners, the horizontal arrangement of the windows, which are set close to the wall surface, thus emphasizing its volume, the semi-circular recessed mosaic-lined entrances -- containing, nonetheless, stylized classical motifs -- and the flat brick with minimal applied ornament. The treatment of the building's base is most unusual: Renaissance-inspired rustication treated as streamlined horizontal striations.³¹ The Normandy's handsome steel casement windows could have been found in buildings designed in either style during the

period; the installation of the casements to follow the curves in the corner bays, however, is strictly Moderne in inspiration. Roth took great care over the casement windows, having each one assembled to his specifications from individual portions sent by the manufacturer.³²

The Normandy as built differs somewhat from Roth's original intentions because of difficulties with New York City Buildings Department regulations. Original plans filed August 16, 1938, were rejected in late September; Roth appealed the ruling in November 22 to the Board of Standards and Appeals, but lost, and had to submit new drawings.³³ The result was that a series of balconies enclosing terraces and cornices at the roofline, which were originally intended to project substantially from the wall, had to be redesigned with smaller projections.³⁴ One effect of these modifications — particularly the loss of a major overhanging cornice — was to diminish some of the Italian Renaissance character of the design and hence to emphasize its Moderne qualities.

Description

The Normandy Apartments occupies the entire blockfront of Riverside Drive between 86th and 87th Streets and extends back along the side streets 125 and 160 feet respectively. Eighteen stories high with a nineteenth-story penthouse level and two towers, the building is organized in a rough H plan with two pavilions or wings flanking a recessed mid-section facing onto Riverside Drive. While the Riverside Drive elevation is symmetrically arranged, the two side street elevations differ from each other in accordance with the interior layouts of the apartments and depth of the pavilions along the side streets. The rear facade, facing east, is only partially visible, but it extends in two asymmetric wings to flank an interior garden court. Several elements are used to unify these elevations with their varying articulations and forms. These include a uniform facade material — gray-beige limestone and cast stone at the base, parapets, and towers, and matching beige brick for the remainder of the facades; a uniform design treatment for the base which links the elevations; a uniform window type, although set in varied patterns;* and the use of curves -- punctuated by window openings allowing ample light and air into the apartments -- to emphasize the corners of the buildings and make the transition from one elevation to the next. The elevations themselves display a subtle balance of horizontal and vertical elements, the horizontality articulated by the sweeping curves and striations of the base and the treatment of the window openings, the verticality emphasized by shallow brick pilasters setting off the window bays in the pavilions and by the towers themselves.

The Riverside Drive elevation is symmetrically organized with two pavilions flanking the recessed mid-section. The powerful treatment of the base creates a clear sense of horizontality in contrast to the more vertical emphasis given the stories above. The two-story base is faced in gray-beige limestone which is laid up to suggest rustication, but only the horizontal joints are expressed, by means of triple striations in the form

*The windows are described as originally designed and installed. Some windows were changed prior to this designation.

of narrow moldings; the stone blocks themselves are very finely tooled with horizontal markings to further enhance the effect. The base rises from a cast-stone water table marked by an ovolo molding and is surmounted by a wide torus molding above the second story. The base is punctuated by regularly spaced window openings with casement window sash set in very shallow reveals. No effort is made to set these openings within surrounds, although the horizontal striations carefully articulate their upper and lower edges. Centered in the mid-section of the base behind the garden court and recessed behind the building line is a glassed-in area opening onto the lobby which is framed in a cast-stone surround. This is a 1983 modification to the original opening. The garden court itself is shielded from the sidewalk by a balustered cast-stone railing with urn-topped end posts and a wrought-iron railing. Rising from the base, the two pavilions are identically articulated. The Riverside Drive elevation of each has a broad stone bandcourse at the base of the third story and is divided into three bays by subtle changes in the brick facing to create the effect of shallow pilasters. The outermost pilasters rise from shallow bases set in the bandcourse and terminate in stylized Ionic capitals at the seventeenth story. Window openings within the bays are set with casement window sash which is barely recessed behind the facade. As designed, each opening contained paired casements flanking a central pane of fixed glass, creating a triple group. Horizontal muntins separate the casements and central pane from smaller panes of fixed glass above and below. This articulation of the window bay creates a horizontal element which balances the verticality of the pilasters. Windows immediately below these bays in the two-story base are handled similarly. Flanking the three bays of the pavilion are curving corners which further add to the horizontality of the facade. The curve is made more prominent by the insertion of window openings. Five-part sash — three fixed panes flanking two moveable casements — are only very slightly recessed behind the brick facing. While the sash are not actually curved, the use of horizontal muntins and the placement of the sash give an effect of curvature. The curved corners terminate in terraces at the sixteenth and seventeenth floors. A balustraded parapet sets off the recessed eighteenth story on each pavilion. The return of each pavilion as it sets back to the mid-section is articulated by three window openings on each floor, except at the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth floors where there are only two window openings. All of these window openings were also originally designed with casement sash with horizontal muntins. The elevation of the recessed mid-section is articulated by a uniform treatment up through the eighteenth floor. As originally designed, at each story a double casement window pair at the north and a single casement window pair at the south flank triple casement groups (like those of the pavilions) which in turn flank four single casement window pairs. As elsewhere on the building, the casements have horizontal muntins and are barely recessed behind the facade. The nineteenth story penthouse rises behind a parapet with stylized corbels.

On the 86th Street elevation, the limestone base is continuous with that of the Riverside Drive elevation and is detailed identically, although the pattern of openings is much more irregular, reflecting the internal plan of the building. At the easternmost end at the first story level, the base continues in the form of a wall with a wrought-iron service gate to meet the adjacent property. Also at the first story, nearly centered, is one of the major entrances to the building. This entrance is takes the

form of a semi-circular recess behind the building line and, above a cast-stone dado, is adorned with mosaics of beige, gold, and blue set in vertical and horizontal patterns, which echo in stylized form the details of classical columns and a cornice. Bronze revolving doors lead into the lobby. The entrance is marked by a fixed projecting canopy of curving streamlined form. Two bronze doors set in the base lead to professional apartments. Rising from the base and the third story stone bandcourse which continues from the Riverside Drive elevation, the 86th Street elevation is divided into two asymmetrical sections by stylized brick pilasters, two of which terminate in stylized Ionic capitals. The western section is punctuated by five window openings at each floor -- as originally designed, four casement pairs with horizontal muntins, and a shorter window with three sections and only the upper horizontal muntin. This pattern is also seen at the second story in the base. This articulation continues to the fifteenth floor; there is a variation in the window placement at the sixteenth and seventeenth floors, reflecting the differing apartment plans. Parapets set off the setback eighteenth and nineteenth floors. The eastern section of the 86th Street elevation has a different window pattern. As originally designed, at floors two through nine, are two triple casement groups (like those on the Riverside Drive elevation) with horizontal muntins, a single casement window pair with horizontal muntins, and two shorter windows with only one horizontal muntin each. At floors ten through fifteen, two more single casement window pairs are substituted for one of the triple casement groups. The sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth stories are set back behind parapets, adorned with stylized corbeling. The curved corner which sweeps around to the eastern elevation of the building is articulated with windows like those in the Riverside Drive corner. In all cases, the windows on the 86th Street elevation are only barely recessed behind the facade, thus accentuating its horizontal qualities and sense of volume.

The 87th Street elevation differs from the 86th Street one, in part because of its greater width. It is given a tripartite, but asymmetrical, treatment which reflects the apartment plans within. The base treatment continues from the Riverside Drive elevation with the same kind of detailing, but is two stories high only in the westernmost section of the facade, then it continues eastward as a one-story base which becomes a wall with a wrought-iron service gate to meet the adjacent property. The recessed entrance is detailed like that on 86th Street with mosaics, revolving door, and streamlined canopy. Two bronze doors set in the base lead to professional apartments. Above the base and broad stone bandcourse, the westernmost section of the facade is articulated by shallow brick pilasters. Floors two through seventeen each have five window openings -- as originally designed, four single casement pairs with horizontal muntins and a shorter window with only one horizontal muntin. The eighteenth and nineteenth stories are set back behind parapets. The eastern section is set off by its curved corners with casement sash with horizontal muntins which follow the curve of the corner. As the curve of the western corner is more pronounced than that on the Riverside Drive corner, there are only three casement sections following the curve and they are somewhat more recessed behind the facade. The curving eastern corner has five-section casement window groups. As designed, floors two through nine have window openings with a triple casement group, a double casement pair, a single casement pair, a shorter window with a casement pair, and a slit window. Floors ten through fifteen have five openings with single

casement pairs as designed. Floors sixteen and seventeen each have a single casement pair and a double casement pair and a portion of their facade set back behind a parapet with stylized corbels. The eighteenth floor is even further set back behind a parapet. The mid-section of the 87th Street elevation is further divided into two sections. The western section continues straight up above the entrance and is articulated by the brick pilaster it shares with the section to its west and by a curved corner, set with window openings and casements like those in the eastern section. Other window openings on floors two through fifteen contain single casements pairs, as designed. Floors sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen step back behind parapets. The eastern portion of the mid-section is set back from the wall line created by the base and continues straight up through the eighteenth floor. At each story the window openings, as designed, contain a double casement pair and two single casement pairs. As on the 86th Street elevation, all windows are only slightly recessed behind the facade, thus accentuating its horizontal qualities and its sense of volume.

The eastern facade of the Normandy is not completely visible from the public way, nonetheless, it is a designed facade. Like the Riverside Drive elevation, it is composed of two pavilions, or wings, flanking a recessed mid-section. These pavilions are of unequal depths, corresponding to the length of the side street elevations. Each pavilion is dominated by its curved corners with five-section casement groups (as described on the side street elevations). Each pavilion is designed with a setback, rising fifteen stories in the section closest to the street walls, but only nine stories in the section adjacent to the garden court. Both the eastern walls and the flank walls of the pavilions are articulated with casement window pairs. Interestingly, on the eastern wall of the northern pavilion major window groups do not begin until the tenth floor, which is higher than the adjacent rowhouses to the east.

The towers of the Normandy are set above the pavilions and rise from the nineteenth story penthouses. Such towers, a characteristic feature of many of Roth's apartment buildings, were designed to conceal water tanks and other building service mechanisms on the roof. The parapeted setbacks which begin above the seventeenth floor give vertical emphasis to the towers, and are adorned with broken pediments; the corners of the parapets support small obelisks. The towers are faced with beige brick with cast-stone detail and are flanked by clustered piers at the corners. The three major faces contain blind openings with elaborate cartouche-adorned surrounds. The eastern faces are obscured by chimneys. These portions of each tower are surmounted by balustraded parapets behind which rise additional setback sections of the towers. The faces of the setback sections also have blind openings. Each tower is terminated by a tiled pyramidal roof supporting a lantern-like finial. The total effect is somewhat like an Italian campanile. The classically-inspired detail of the towers contrasts with the streamlined Moderne treatment of the building below.

Conclusion

The Normandy today stands as one of the great monuments of Riverside Drive, Manhattan's grandest and most picturesque residential boulevard.

Its twin-towered presence rises majestically above the Hudson. Conceived and built by Emery Roth, among New York's finest designers of apartment buildings, the Normandy dominates the skyline of Riverside Drive just as his work of a decade earlier dominates the skyline of Central Park West.

Last of the great Upper West Side apartment houses from the era of its most intense development, the Normandy reflects, in its unusual cross of Italian Renaissance and Moderne, the two main design currents of that inter-war period. Its streamlined curves, its elegant towers, its modernistic recessed, semi-circular, mosaic-lined entrances, its fenestration pattern with casement windows, its Italian Renaissance-inspired detailing, all combine to form an unusually handsome design. Highly visible, beautifully designed, and still largely intact, the Normandy symbolizes the grand era of 20th century urbanism, and is a true landmark of the Upper West Side.

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Research Department.

Notes

1. New York Herald, August [?], 1890, cited in Landmarks Preservation Commission, Riverside-West 105th Street Historic District Designation Report (IP-0323)(New York: City of New York, 1973), p. 3.
2. Idell Zeisloft, The New Metropolis (New York: D. Appleton, 1899), p. 618.
3. "The Huge Apartment House," New York Times, September 6, 1908, sec. 2, p. 8, quoted in Elsa Gilbertson, The Apthorp and Belnord: Grand Dames of the Upper West Side, New York Neighborhood Studies, Working Paper Number 2 (New York: Columbia University, Graduate School of Architecture and Planning, 1983), p. 9.
4. "Blockfront Sold on Riverside Drive," New York Sun, August 7, 1938. We are grateful to Steven Ruttenbaum, who is currently preparing a monograph on the life and work of Emery Roth, for bringing the material in the New York Sun to our attention.
5. "Sees War Creating Apartment Demand," New York Times, June 23, 1940, sec. 11, p. 10.
6. "Apartment House Construction in New York," Buildings and Building Management, 39 (August 1939), 47.
7. Sources for this biographical sketch of Emery Roth include Emery Roth, Autobiographical Notes, 1940-1947 (photocopy of a typescript in the Drawings and Archives Collection, Avery Library, Columbia University, New York; Roth's obituaries in the New York Times, Aug. 21, 1948 and Architectural Record 104 (Oct. 1948), 164; Paul Goldberger, "Emery

Roth Dominated the Age of Apartment Buildings," New York Times, Feb. 16, 1978; and Christopher Gray, "Emery Roth," Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects, ed. Adolf K. Placzek (New York: The Free Press, 1982). See also the entries for Roth in Dennis S. Francis, Architects in Practice: New York City 1840-1900 (New York: Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1979); American Architects Directory (New York: American Institute of Architects; R.R. Bowker Co., 1956, 1962, 1970).

8. Roth, Autobiographical Notes, pp. 237-238.
9. Ibid., p. 251; Emery Roth obituary, New York Times.
10. Roth, Autobiographical Notes, p. 252.
11. Gray, "Emery Roth," pp. 61-62.
12. Roth, Autobiographical Notes, p. 313.
13. "Blockfront Sold."
14. Ibid.; New York County Register's Office, Liber Deeds, Liber 3243, Page 21.
15. Deeds, Liber 3842, Page 478. A second attempt to develop the large site with a nineteen-story structure failed in 1937; see "Blockfront Sold."
16. Ibid.
17. "Buy Block Front on Drive," New York Sun, August 6, 1938.
18. "Blockfront Sold."
19. "Uptown Skylines Being Transformed," New York Times Oct. 26, 1930, sec. 10, p. 12.
20. "F.A. Wyckoff Celebrates," Real Estate Record, February 26, 1938, p. 3.
21. "Blockfront Sold."
22. "He Views a New Design," New York Sun, September 10, 1938.
23. For a fuller description, see Stephen Ruttenbaum, "The Normandy Apartments: History, Description and Architectural Analysis," statement in support of the Landmark designation of the Normandy Apartments, November 1985, pp. 7-9.
24. On the Moderne see Marcus Whiffen and Frederick Koeper, American Architecture 1607-1976 (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1981), pp. 331-2; Martin Greif, Depression Modern: The Thirties Style in America (New York: Universe Books, 1975); David Gebhard, "The Moderne in the U.S. 1920-1941," American Architectural Quarterly 2 (July 1970), 4-20.

25. See the New York World's Fair Bulletin, the official publication of the New York World's Fair, vol. 2 (April 1938). We are indebted to Larry Zim for this citation.
26. "Events of Interest in Shipping World," New York Times, 7/10/1938, sec. 3, p. 9.
27. Published in "Apartment House Renting Features in Modern Design," Real Estate Record, January 29, 1938, p. 8.
28. See Emery Roth, "No. 875 Fifth Avenue," Empire State Architect 11(Mar-Apr 1942), 5-7.
29. "295 Central Park West: Corner of 90th Street New York, N.Y." Empire State Architect.
30. "He Views a New Design."
31. Pointed out by Steve Ruttenbaum, "Normandy Apartments," p. 4.
32. Interview with Milton Glass, AIA, conducted by Steven Ruttenbaum on October 29, 1985; Glass worked in Roth's office at the time of the Normandy commission and prepared working drawings for it. Cited in Ruttenbaum, "Normandy Apartments," p. 5.
33. New York City, Department of Buildings, Manhattan, New Building Permit 144-1938.
34. Roth's working drawings for the Normandy, including a detailed post-appeal facade elevation dated Jan. 27, 1939, are in the drawings collection at Avery Library. See Emery Roth, "18 Story & Penthouse Apartment House on Riverside Drive from 86th to 87th St. N.Y.C." Archives and Drawing Collection, Avery Library, Columbia University, New York. Our thanks to Janet Parks and the staff of the Drawings Collection for their invaluable assistance.

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 Normandy Apartments 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 Normandy Apartments is one of the handsomest apartment buildings on Manhattan's Upper West Side; that it is a prominent twin-towered structure overlooking the Hudson River and dominates the vista of Riverside Drive; that, designed by eminent architect Emery Roth and built in 1938-39, it was one of the last great monumental pre-World War II apartment houses that are such an important element of the Upper West Side; that its style reflects an unusual combination of the eclectic use of Italian Renaissance detailing common in the 1920s and early 1930s, with the streamlined Moderne styling characteristic of the modernistic trends of the later '30s; that its outstanding design elements include its streamlined curves, its elegant towers, its modernistic, semi-circular, recessed, mosaic-lined entrances, its fenestration pattern with casement windows, its garden courts, and its Italian Renaissance-inspired detailing; and that, as a reminder of the grand era of apartment house design, it is a landmark on the Upper West Side.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, 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 Normandy Apartments, 140 Riverside Drive, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1248, Lot 1, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

Appendix: The Normandie

The Normandie embarked on her maiden voyage from Le Havre, France on May 31, 1935. In a record-breaking 4 days, 11 hours and 42 minutes she arrived to tremendous fanfare in New York, the undisputed Queen of the Sea.¹ Measuring 1029' long with 79, 280 gross tonnage and an average speed of 29.64 knots, she was legendary from inception as the largest and fastest ship in the world. In order to receive her, the Hudson River had to be dredged by the United States Army, the pier at West 48th Street enlarged and its slip deepened.² New Yorkers were captivated by a ship which, in local terms, compared with the Empire State Building laid on its side, racing through the city at 34 miles an hour --- the rate of a speeding taxi.³

The Normandie's intrigue was based on more, however, than just speed and velocity. In the post-Depression era she was the essence of luxury. In unprecedented fashion, the ship was designed by the finest marine architects in France together with the best land architects, decorators and artists. The collaboration resulted not only in the most advanced navigational vessel, but one whose splendid appointments vied with the finest hotels in the world.⁴ Sumptuously embellished and contoured with curves of the Moderne streamlined aesthetic, the ship was, according to the New York Times, "racier [and] more chic [than any other vessel] -- a Parisienne, graceful, youthful, confident that no one in the world is clad more smartly than she."⁵

The Normandie was by far the greatest attraction on New York's busy waterfront in the late 1930s. In her first three years of service alone, she carried 100,000 passengers and hosted nearly a half million visitors from land. Commemorative postage stamps were issued in her honor and tugboats dispatched from as far away as Boston to guide her proud entry into New York. With only slightly less celebrity than her triumphant arrival in 1935, and still "the fastest ship on the Western Ocean," the Normandie departed on her hundredth trans-Atlantic voyage on July 13, 1938.⁶ A floating palace, with sufficient lights to illuminate a large city, she left her West 48th Street berth in full view of Riverside Drive. Six weeks later, plans were filed at the Buildings Department in Manhattan for the similarly streamlined and luxurious Normandy apartment building.

In 1939, after four years on the high seas, the Normandie was protectively interned in New York for the duration of what was then a European war. When France was invaded by Germany, the ship was confiscated by the American government as enemy property. She was modified for troop transport and in 1942, rechristened the U.S.S. Lafayette. Barely a month later, on February 9, 1942, the ship caught fire in port. Damaged by the conflagration, but suffering more heavily from shifting tides and especially from the enormous amount of water used to extinguish the flames, the stricken giant listed and lay helpless on her side. In August, her furnishings and artworks were sold at auction, and in October the once proud ship herself was sold for scrap metal.



NORMANDY APARTMENTS
140 Riverside Drive
Manhattan

Architect: Emery Roth & Sons
Built: 1938-39

Photo Credit:
Gale Harris
LPC



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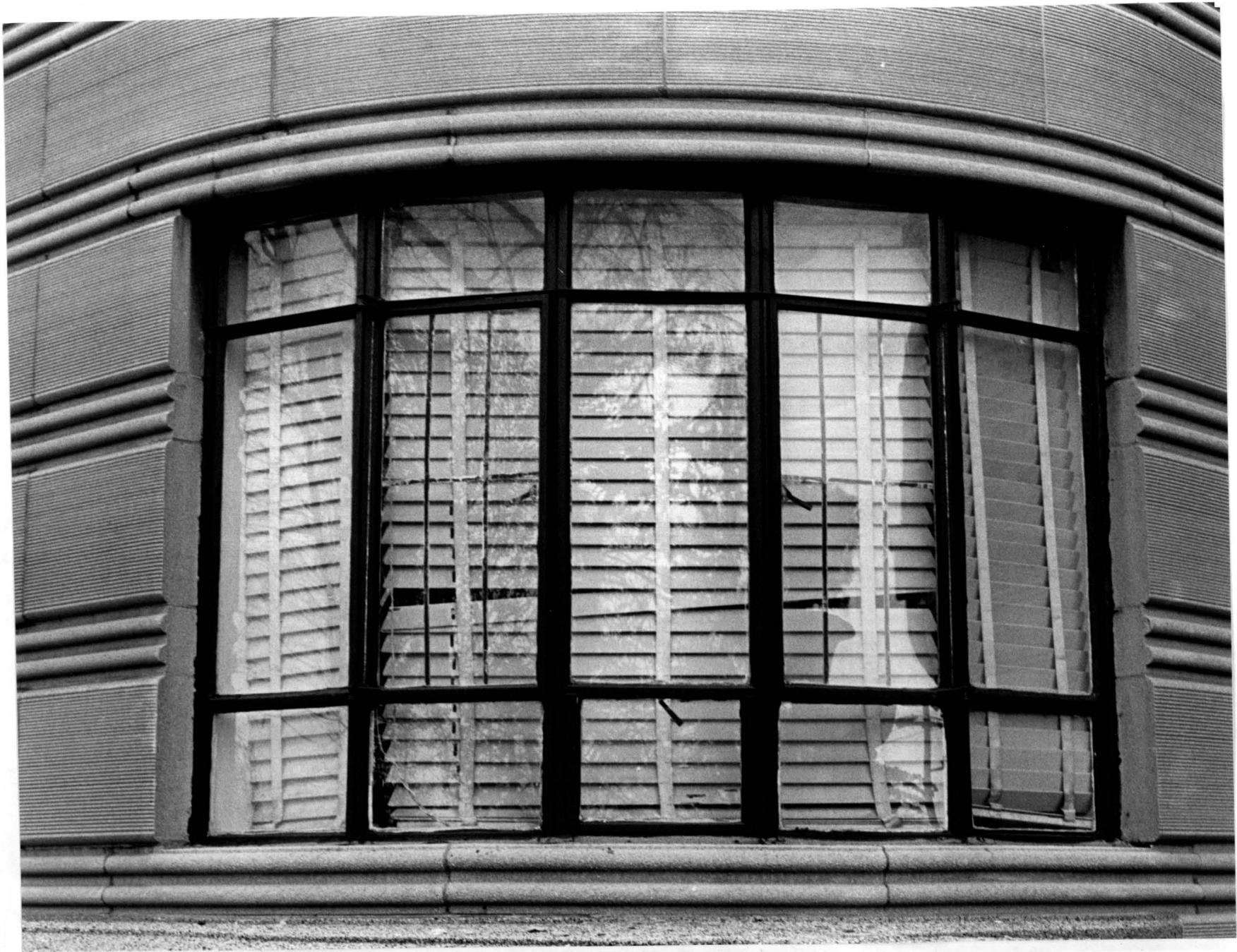
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