

Landmarks Preservation Commission
July 9, 1985, Designation List 181
LP-1521

ELDORADO APARTMENTS, 300 Central Park West, Borough of Manhattan.

Built 1929-31; architects Margon & Holder with Emery Roth as consultant.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1204, Lot 29.

On September 11, 1984, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Eldorado Apartments and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 15). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Twenty-one witnesses spoke in favor of designation. There were two speakers in opposition to designation. Many communications have been received both supporting and opposing designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Eldorado, extending along the entire blockfront of Central Park West between 90th and 91st Streets, is the northernmost of the four twin-towered apartment houses that give Central Park West its distinctive skyline silhouette. The Eldorado was designed in 1929 by the architectural firm of Margon & Holder with the renowned early 20th-century New York City architect Emery Roth as consultant. These architects created one of the finest and most dramatically massed Art Deco style residential buildings in New York City.

The Eldorado is one of the most distinguished buildings erected as part of the early 20th-century redevelopment of Central Park West. Central Park West, a continuation of Eighth Avenue, runs along the western edge of Central Park. Development along this prime avenue occurred very slowly, lagging substantially behind the general development of the Upper West Side. When Frederick Law Olmsted laid out Central Park he saw that the presence of the park would raise the value of land immediately adjacent to it. Olmsted expected these areas to develop as prime residential streets. Land speculation did indeed occur on Central Park West. However, the west side of the park never attracted the extremely wealthy people who could afford the inflated prices of land bordering on the park. Thus, while the side streets of the Upper West Side were built up with rows of speculative houses, Central Park West remained largely undeveloped. A survey of Central Park West published in February 1893 shows that of the three blocks between 60th and 96th Streets (the American Museum of Natural History, located between 77th and 81st Streets is counted as one block) nineteen were either totally vacant or contained old shanties and frame houses. Other blocks were partially vacant.¹

The earliest residential improvement on Central Park West, and one of its great architectural monuments, was the Dakota, a designated New York City Landmark, at 72nd Street. Built in 1880-84, this eight-story building established Central Park West's character as a street of multiple dwellings. In 1890, by which time the Dakota had been joined by two apartment hotels, the

St. Remo on 75th Street and the Beresford on 81st Street, as well as several flat houses,² real estate broker F.R. Houghton noted that:

Central Park West seems to have only one future-- it is destined to become an avenue of grand apartment houses and hotels. Everything tends that way. It is too public a thoroughfare to become a private residential avenue.³

However, it wasn't until several years later that Central Park West experienced the construction boom that Houghton had predicted.

The first concentrated building boom on Central Park West occurred at the turn of the century when a significant number of elegant residential and institutional buildings were erected south of 96th Street. These include some of the finest apartment houses in New York, such as the Prasada (1904) at 65th Street, the Langham (1905) at 73rd Street, the Kenilworth (1908) at 75th Street, and the St. Urban (1904) at 89th Street, as well as such institutional structures as the Ethical Culture Society School and Meeting House (1902, 1909) at 63rd and 64th Streets, Holy Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church (1903) at 65th Street, the Second Church of Christ, Scientist (1898) at 68th Street, the Congregation Shearith Israel Synagogue (1895) at 70th Street, the Universalist Church of the Divine Paternity (1898) at 76th Street, and the Progress Club (now the Walden School, 1902) at 88th Street. The presence of these fine apartment buildings and institutions on Central Park West reflects the coming of age of the Upper West Side. The Upper West Side had developed in the final decades of the 19th century as an enclave of upper middle-class life. Affluent middle-class families were attracted to the area by the quality of its housing, the presence of Riverside Park and Central Park, and by the accessibility of the neighborhood. As the Upper West Side became more and more desirable, developers began to build on the more expensive sites bordering the parks, and Central Park West began to be transformed into an elegant avenue of tall buildings that contrasted dramatically in scale to low rise residential Fifth Avenue.⁴

During World War I construction on Central Park West slowed, but between 1920 and 1931 the area was transformed as the vacant sites were filled and many of the early apartment hotels and flats were replaced by new apartment houses. This final phase of Central Park West's development culminated in 1929-31 with the construction of the four twin-towered buildings that give Central Park West its characteristic skyline. The distinctive form of the Century (1930-31) at 62nd-63rd Streets, the Majestic (1930) at 71st-72nd Streets, the San Remo (1929) at 74th-75th Streets and the Eldorado (1929) at 90th-91st Streets has come to symbolize the high quality of residential design on New York's Upper West Side.⁵

The Eldorado Apartments is not the first building of that name at this location. The present building replaces the Eldorado flats which consisted of two eight-story structures designed in 1901 by Neville & Bagge, "which for more than a generation have been among the best of the fine houses on Central Park West." ⁶ In addition to the old Eldorado, the new apartment building replaced five row houses on West 90th Street and three tenements and a row house on West 91st Street. This site was assembled in 1929 and sold to realtor Frederick Brown who retained ownership for several weeks before transferring the

property to the Elkay Building Corporation, Louis Kloak, president. The architects commissioned to design the new Eldorado were the firm of Margon & Holder. Irving Margon (c.1888-1958) and Adolph M. Holder are architects about whom little is known. One of the few buildings known to have been designed by Margon is an Art Deco apartment house at 2805 Grand Concourse in the Bronx. Although Margon & Holder were the chief architects for the new building, they do not appear to have had the experience to design such a large structure. Emery Roth, one of the most talented residential architects in New York during the early decades of this century was hired as a consultant. Among Roth's finest apartment buildings are three important Upper West Side structures designed just prior to the Eldorado--the Oliver Cromwell (1927) at 12 West 72nd Street, the San Remo (1929) at 145 Central Park West, and the Beresford (1929) at 211 Central Park West. It was undoubtedly Roth's experience with designing these large-scale residential buildings that prompted the builders of the Eldorado to hire him as a consultant. It is believed that Roth was responsible for the massing and plan of the building and that Margon & Holder designed the facade.⁷ The form of the Eldorado, with its massive base and twin towers set at the Central Park West corners, closely resembles the massing of the San Remo on which Roth was working at the time he received the Eldorado commission. In addition, the apartment layouts of the two buildings are similar. The twin towered form of the San Remo and Eldorado resulted from 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 1½ 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 San Remo and Eldorado were the first two buildings on Central Park West to be affected by this new law.

The few drawings that Roth produced for the Eldorado have classical details, creating a design that resembles the style of the San Remo. They do not exhibit the Art Deco forms of the building as constructed. Art Deco style ornament appeared on apartment buildings as early as 1928 on Raymond Hood's 3 East 84th Street and on Horace Ginsberg and Marvin Fine's Park Plaza in the Bronx. Margon & Holder were probably aware of the Art Deco forms in use on those apartment houses and they adapted these forms for their Central Park West building. Among the finest Art Deco motifs on the Eldorado is the tripartite Central Park West entrance. The three entrance portals take on the faceted crystalline form that Rosemarie Bletter has traced to German Expressionist architecture.⁸ Above these bronze entrance surrounds are bronze panels with the clashing angular geometric forms and soft curving foliate forms that give the finest Art Deco ornamentation its special tension. The best known Art Deco features of the Eldorado are the futuristic rocket-like pinnacles which crown each tower. Other notable Art Deco motifs include an angular frieze that runs above the third floor, stylized brick spandrel panels below many of the windows, and angular balconies with zigzag panels.

Unfortunately, construction of the Eldorado coincided with the stock market crash of 1929. The crash led to the collapse of the real estate market; cooperatives failed, rental apartments remained vacant, and foreclosure actions were brought against many buildings. Financial and labor troubles delayed the

completion of the Eldorado, but on November 26, 1930, it was announced that the building was to be completed. Although the Eldorado was finished, it experienced rental problems and the owners finally defaulted on loan payments. On November 5, 1931, the building was auctioned. In more recent years, the Eldorado has attracted many people of note, particularly people associated with the arts. Among the Eldorado's residents have been Milton Avery, Martin Balsam, Richard Dreyfuss, Faye Dunaway, Carrie Fisher, Tuesday Weld, Pinchas Zuckerman, Richard Estes, Sybil Burton, Phil Donahue, Marlo Thomas, Edie Adams, Ernie Kovaks, Groucho Marx, Roddy McDowell, and Marilyn Monroe.

Description

The Eldorado is a symmetrical building set on a three-story yellow cast stone base and faced with tan brick trimmed with light brown brick and yellow terra-cotta above. The building extends along the entire Central Park West frontage between West 90th Street and West 91st Street, 200 feet along West 90th Street, and 194 feet along West 91st Street. In the center of the ground floor of the Central Park West frontage is the main entrance consisting of three faceted portals with bronze frames. Above each entrance are a pair of highly ornamental plaques embossed with Art Deco style geometric and floral forms. In the spandrels between the faceted entry arches and the plaques are panels with birds. Separating each pair of panels, as well as the windows above, are stepped piers with geometric incising. Above these piers are projecting skeletal cast stone motifs. A frieze of Art Deco chevrons and arches crowns the cast stone base of the building. On the ground floor, to each side of the entrance are windows and metal doors with Art Deco grilles and handrails, all of which belong to professional apartments.

On Central Park West, the windows of the main bulk of the building (floors two through fourteen) are massed in a symmetrical pattern of 2-3-2-3-2-6-2-3-2-3-2. All of the windows were originally metal-paned casements with thin metal mullions. Each original window is divided into two movable casements of eight panes, each with a single transom of six panes. The small window panes add a sense of texture to the facade and prevent the window openings from becoming voids in the design. The first and third window groups from either end project slightly, while the other groups are separated by projecting piers. The second and fifth groups from either end are framed with light brown brick that gives a vertical thrust to the facade. This vertical thrust is strengthened by the use of raised brick bands below the windows and by the addition of tan brick piers between the windows of the second group from each corner. The patterned brickwork also appears in the central two bays at the thirteenth and fourteenth floors (the exterior floor numbers may not always correspond with the interior numbering system). Projecting from the two central thirteenth floor windows are three-sided stone balconies each supported by a single corbeled bracket and ornamented with a vertical chevron panel. The five central window groups step back above the fourteenth and sixteenth floors to form balconies, while the three end groups on either side rise up two additional floors before setting back at the sixteenth floor and again at the seventeenth floor. All of the balconies have Art Deco railings. Patterned brickwork and pairs of terra-cotta balconies also appear on the fifteenth and sixteenth floors of the end sections and on the sixteenth floor of the central section. The brown brick bays are ornamented at their summits by terra-cotta panels adorned with

chevron, diaper, and other geometric patterns.

The towers rise free of the base for twelve stories. Each tower is six bays wide on Central Park West and is faced with tan brick highlighted by brown brick panels at the four central windows. Terra-cotta balconies appear at the twenty-sixth floor and terra-cotta panels at the twenty-seventh and twenty-eighth floors. The side elevations have similar detailing. There are corner penthouses at the twenty-ninth floor, as each tower steps back to the crowning pinnacle with its fin-like projections. It is these stepped pinnacles that give the Eldorado its distinctive silhouette and make the building immediately identifiable from as far away as Fifth Avenue.

On the side streets the Eldorado is seventeen stories tall with the three-story cast stone base continuing for the first seven bays before it drops down to a one-story base. Only near the Central Park West corners are there window bays articulated with the vertical brown brick bays used on the front elevation. The side facades have penthouses with railings, the balconies and terra-cotta ornament described on the front, as well as professional office doors and secondary residential entrances with Art Deco carving. To the rear of the building are cast stone arches with Art Deco metal gates (the outer face of each gate is covered with a metal sheet).

Alterations to the original design are limited to the replacement of some of the original multi-paned windows with plate glass windows. The most serious alteration has occurred on the eighteenth floor of the south tower where brickwork has been removed for the enlargement of several windows.

The Eldorado's futuristic crowning pinnacles, visible from up and down Central Park West and from as far east as Fifth Avenue, are true architectural landmarks. The Eldorado is the northernmost of the four twin-towered buildings that identify Central Park West as one of New York City's great residential boulevards and the building stands as one of the most important Art Deco apartment buildings in the city.

Report prepared by
Andrew S. Dolkart

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 Eldorado 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 Eldorado Apartments, built in 1929-30, is one of the finest and most dramatically massed Art Deco apartment buildings in New York City; that designed by the architectural firm of Margon & Holder with the renowned early 20th-century New York City architect, Emery Roth, as consultant, it is one of the most distinguished buildings erected as part of the early 20th-century redevelopment of Central Park West; that with its twin-towered form, made possible by the 1929 multiple dwelling law, it is one of a small group of related structures that help give Central Park West its distinctive silhouette; that the Eldorado is a fine essay in Art Deco design as expressed in the brickwork, ornament, entrance, balconies, and windows; that the towers with their futuristic crowning pinnacles are one of New York City's major architectural adornments; and that the Eldorado Apartments continue to symbolize the high quality of residential design on New York's Upper West Side.

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 Eldorado Apartments, 300 Central Park West, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1204, Lot 29, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

FOOTNOTES

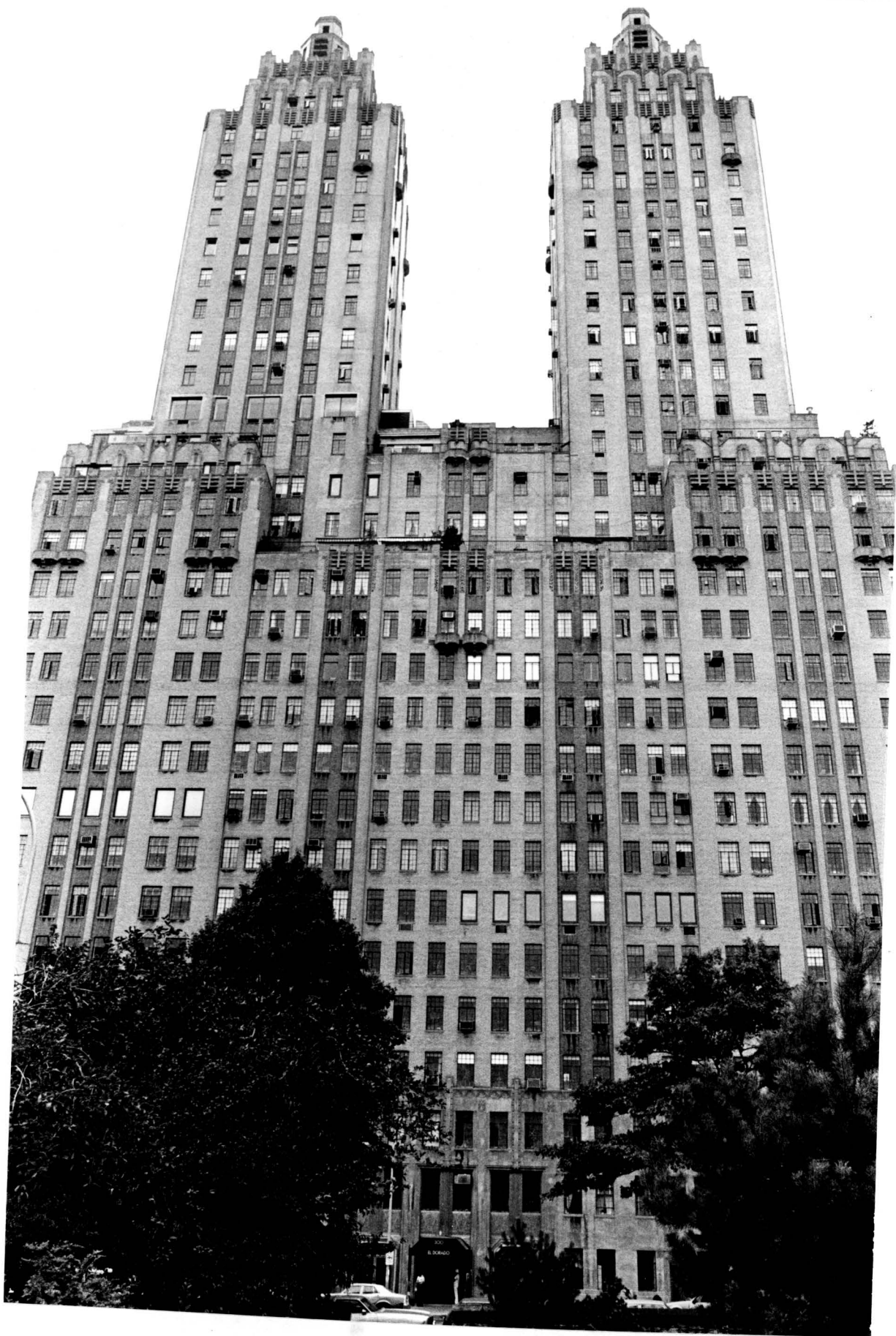
1. Real Estate Record and Builders Guide,51(February 11, 1893),Supplement, p.20.
2. The St. Remo and Beresford were both replaced in the late 1920s by the present buildings of the same name. These two residential hotels were joined by 1893 by the Majestic between 71st and 72nd Streets. Of the flats erected by 1890 only one, at 227 Central Park West (1888), survives.
3. Real Estate Record and Builders Guide,46(December 20, 1890),Supplement, p.29.
4. The first apartment building on Fifth Avenue north of 59th Street was 997 Fifth Avenue at 81st Street of 1910-12.
5. Also of note on the Central Park West skyline is the Beresford (1929) at 81st-82nd Streets with its three square towers.
6. New York Times, November 17, 1929, XII, p.1.
7. The Commission would like to extend its thanks to Steve Ruttenbaum who has provided information on Emery Roth and his work on the Eldorado.
8. Bletter, Rosemarie Haag, "The Art Deco Style," in Cervin Robinson and Rosemarie Haag Bletter, Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York (NY: Oxford University Press, 1975), p.39.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

New York Times. March 15, 1929, p.46; April 14, 1929, p.48; November 17, 1929, Section 12, p.1; November 26, 1930, p.39; June 23, 1931, p.46.

Real Estate Record and Builders Guide. 46(December 20, 1890, Supplement); 51(February 11, 1893, Supplement).

Robinson, Cervin and Rosemarie Haag Bletter. Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York. NY: Oxford University Press, 1975.



Eldorado Apartments
300 Central Park West
Manhattan

Built: 1929-31
Architects: Margon & Holder with Emery Roth

Photo: Philip Yam
Landmarks Preservation



Eldorado Apartments
Entrance

Photo: Philip Yam
Landmarks Preservation Commission



Eldorado Apartments
entrance detail

Photo: Philip Yam
Landmarks Preservation
Commission