



Landmarks Preservation
Commission

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL
SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND MARITIME USES
REGARDING DESIGNATION of the UNITED NATIONS HOTEL INTERIORS
March 28, 2017**

Good morning Chairs Koo, Greenfield and Committee Members. My name is Lauren George, Director of Intergovernmental and Community Affairs at the Landmarks Preservation Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Commission's designation of the United Nations Hotel, First Floor Interiors, located at 1 and 2 United Nations Plaza (at First Avenue and East 44th Street); Manhattan, Block 1337, Lots 7502 and 14. After holding a public hearing on November 22, 2016, the Landmarks Preservation Commission voted unanimously to designate the interiors on January 17, 2017. At the public hearing on November 22, 2016, fifteen people spoke in support of designation, including representatives of DOCOMOMO US and DOCOMOMO New York Tristate, Historic Districts Council, Municipal Art Society of New York, New York Landmarks Conservancy, Save the Grill, and the Society for Architecture of the City. This is NYC's youngest interior landmark designation and the only designation of the Postmodern period.

The first floor interiors of the United Nations Hotel (now One UN New York) are important examples of Late 20th-century Modern and Post-Modern design by the architectural firm Kevin Roche, John Dinkeloo and Associates. Lavish and exceptionally well preserved, the Ambassador Grill and lobby skillfully blend modern and historical forms. Part of a hotel-office complex built by the United Nations Development Corporation, these remarkable public spaces display distinct stylistic vocabularies that express the shifting character of American architecture during the mid-1970s and early 1980s.

Theatrical and nearly U-shaped, the Ambassador Grill opened in 1976. Located in a windowless space at the rear of 1 United Nations Plaza, the dining and bar area are divided by angled walls, freestanding walls, serving counters, and several piers. Most of these elements are clad with mirrors, a material that expands and complicates what diners see. Of particular interest is the glazed ceiling vault that snakes through both areas. Set into a slatted ceiling, the white metal frame holds transparent glass panels, behind which mylar and small light bulbs generate

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair

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seemingly endless reflections. The hotel lobby, facing East 44th Street, is especially elegant. Completed in 1983, it features a sky-lit entrance foyer and reception area crowned by stepped multi-level lighting fixtures, as well as a ramped hallway flanked by highly-polished green marble columns that incorporate abstracted capitals and mirrored sides. These distinctive features suggest the growing influence of Post-Modern aesthetics during the 1980s.

Both interiors were celebrated by contemporary critics. Carter Wiseman called the Ambassador Grill a “glittering piece of public theater” and Ada Louise Huxtable wrote that the hotel interiors “have real style –the style and conviction of their own times.” In her 2011 monograph on Kevin Roche, architectural historian EevaLiisa Pelkonen called these spaces significant representations of the era: “With its over-the-top interiors the hotel became a destination and an active participant in the disco era of the late 1970s and the 1980s, when New York’s economy finally turned around.” Major works by Roche Dinkeloo include the Oakland Museum of Art (1961-68) and the Ford Foundation (1963-68, a New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark), as well as various additions to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, including interiors (1967-2012). Roche was awarded the Pritzker Architecture Prize in 1982 and the Gold Medal from the American Institute of Architects in 1993.

Completed seven years apart, these marvelously inventive and well maintained interiors represent some of the best public spaces of 1970s and 80s. Accordingly the Landmarks Preservation Commission urges you to affirm the designation. Thank you.

Meenakshi Srinivasan, Chair

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