



The New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

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LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION DESIGNATES THE RALPH BUNCHE HOUSE IN QUEENS AND THE SUMMIT HOTEL IN MANHATTAN

“Dr. Bunche’s legacy is unsurpassed,” said Robert B. Tierney, Chairman of the Landmarks Preservation Commission. *“By designating his house the Commission is honoring Dr. Bunche’s trailblazing leadership in the United Nations and his remarkable lifetime accomplishments.”*

Ralph Bunche House (115-24 Grosvenor Road, Queens)

Constructed in 1927 and designed by the prominent Brooklyn architects Koch & Wagner, Dr. Ralph Bunche and his family lived for more than thirty years in a neo-Tudor style residence in Kew Gardens, Queens. Bunche had an illustrious career in academia, international service and diplomacy, which included the award of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1950 for his role in negotiating armistice settlements between Israel and its Arab neighbors. He helped found, and then worked for the United Nations, first as head of its Trusteeship Council, later as advisor to three different Secretaries-General. From 1954 until his death in 1971, Bunche served the organization as Under Secretary-General, the highest post ever held by an American. Dr. Bunche was instrumental in developing and administering the various UN peacekeeping and truce observation activities of those years, as well as helping to establish two important programs of the United Nations: the International Atomic Energy Agency and the UN Development Program.



As an African-American, Dr. Bunche fought all his life to overcome the racial prejudice and barriers to advancement that existed in this country. Upon the establishment of the United Nations, Bunche and his family moved from Washington, D.C. to New York in 1947. They first lived in Jamaica, Queens, before buying this house in Kew Gardens in 1952. Kew Gardens was a racially-integrated, garden city development begun in the early years of the twentieth century. The area has a mix of types and styles of homes, mostly historical revival styles, set in a lush, suburban atmosphere. The home and the neighborhood proved to be an ideal environment for this extraordinary man and his family.

“The Summit is one of the most important examples of modern architecture in New York City,” said Robert B. Tierney. *“The shape, color and details of this building represented a breakthrough in design.”*

Summit Hotel (569-573 Lexington Avenue, Manhattan)

Admired for its unusual S-curve shape, aquamarine color and dramatic sign, the Summit Hotel is one of finest buildings designed by architect Morris Lapidus. Located at the southeast corner of Lexington Avenue and 51st Street, the June 1960 ground breaking marked the resumption of hotel construction in New York City after a three decade hiatus. Lapidus, who spent the first half of his career as a retail designer in New York City, began designing hotels around 1950. Many are located in Miami Beach, including the celebrated Fontainebleau and Eden Roc. The success of these resorts led to his association with the Tisch family, who commissioned the Americana Hotel in Bal Harbor, Florida, in 1956. After acquiring a controlling interest in Loew’s Theaters, they commissioned the Summit Hotel, which adapts many of the elements Lapidus perfected in his Florida hotels to a challenging, constricted, urban site.



Built in reinforced concrete, a material favored for its sculptural potential, the curving north and south elevations are clad in light green glazed brick and dark green tile. To further distinguish the building from its neighbors, Lapidus created a striking illuminated sign on Lexington Avenue. Consisting of seven disks hung between stainless steel pins, this unique element enhanced the hotel’s street presence, making it visible from various directions. Aside from alterations to the base along Lexington Avenue, this flamboyant midtown structure retains much of its original character.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission is the New York City agency responsible for designating and regulating New York City’s landmarks. To date, the Commission has designated 1,123 individual landmarks, 104 interior landmarks, 9 scenic landmarks, and 83 historic districts.