



## NEW YORK CITY LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION

Robert B. Tierney  
Chairman

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### COMMISSION LANDMARKS A MIDTOWN OFFICE TOWER AND ITS LOBBY

*Warren & Wetmore's Madison Belmont Building Is One of the Earliest Structures in the United States to Incorporate Art Deco Design*



The Landmarks Preservation Commission today approved the designations of the Madison Belmont Building as an individual landmark and first-floor lobby as an interior landmark, both considered unusual works by Warren & Wetmore, the architecture firm that designed Grand Central Terminal.

Located at 181 Madison Avenue, at the southeast corner of 34<sup>th</sup> Street, the 18-story, L-shaped building incorporates Renaissance and Art Deco architectural styles, and was constructed between 1924 and 1925 by the Merchants & Manufacturers Exchange of New York as office and showroom space for silk companies. Its major tenant until 1932 was the Cheney Silk Company, a successful silk manufacturing firm founded in 1838 in Manchester, Connecticut.

"The building is important because it straddles the line between classical and early modern design, and anticipates the coming wave of Art Deco skyscrapers and office buildings in New York City during the late 1920s and 1930s," said Commission Chairman Robert B. Tierney.

Edgar Brandt, a French iron smith who was a pioneer in the Art Deco style in Paris in the 1920s, designed the ornate iron and bronze frames, grilles, figures, doors that appear inside and outside the building, helping to distinguish it from much of (Whitney) Warren & (Charles Delevan) Wetmore's other work. In addition to Grand Central, the firm is known for such other noteworthy Beaux-Arts style buildings such as the flamboyant New York Yacht Club at 37 West 44<sup>th</sup> Street and the Aeolian Building at 689-691 Fifth Avenue. All three are New York City landmarks.



Unlike those buildings, which are clad in traditional stone, the Madison Belmont Building is faced with pink brick, with red metal window frames and contrasting, multi-toned brick work laid in a basket-weave pattern typical of the Art Deco style. At the same time the building includes a classical structure consisting of a three-story base \_ filled mostly by display windows\_ and a strongly projecting cornice and elaborate roofline featuring terra-cotta ornament such as putti heads, garlands and fleurs-de-lys.



The interior lobby is more traditional than the exterior, using a variety of motifs inspired by ancient Greece, Rome and Egypt. An example of the Eclectic Revival style, the room is finished with a mixture of

marbles and bronze and has a multi-colored, barrel-vaulted ceiling. The walls are adorned with vases, lotus flowers, sphinxes, bronze figures of gods and mythological creatures, including the goddess Leda, known as a skilled weaver, riding a swan and holding silk spinning implements. The ceiling is also decorated with motifs of ancient sailing ships, suggesting early efforts to attain silk.



“The sumptuous design and materials of the lobby made a grand statement to visitors originally shopping for fine silk goods back then, and it remains a remarkably intact, elegant entrance today,” said Chairman Tierney

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The Landmarks Preservation Commission is the mayoral agency responsible for protecting and preserving New York City’s architecturally, historically and culturally significant buildings and sites. Since its creation in 1965, LPC has granted landmark status to more than 28,000 buildings, including 1,292 individual landmarks, 113 interior landmarks, 10 scenic landmarks, 105 historic districts and 16 historic district extensions in all five boroughs. Under the City’s landmarks law, considered among the most powerful in the nation, the Commission must be comprised of at least three architects, a historian, a realtor, a planner or landscape architect, as well as a representative of each borough.

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