Landmarks Preservation Commission
October 3, 1989; Designation List 221
LP-1665

SEAGRAM BUILDING, FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR consisting of the lobby and passenger elevator cabs and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces including but not limited to, interior piers, wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, doors, railings, elevator doors, elevator indicators, and signs; 375 Park Avenue, Manhattan. Designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe with Philip Johnson; Kahn & Jacobs, associate architects. Built 1956-58.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1307, Lot 1.

On May 17, 1988, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Seagram Building, first floor interior, consisting of the lobby and passenger elevator cabs and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces including but not limited to, interior piers, wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, doors, railings, elevator doors, elevator indicators, and signs; and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Twenty witnesses, including a representative of the building's owner, spoke in favor of designation. No witnesses spoke in opposition to designation. The Commission has received many letters in favor of designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

The Seagram Building, erected in 1956-58, is the only building in New York City designed by architectural master Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Constructed on Park Avenue at a time when it was changing from an exclusive residential thoroughfare to a prestigious business address, the Seagram Building embodies the quest of a successful corporation to establish further its public image through architectural patronage. The president of Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, Samuel Bronfman, with the aid of his daughter Phyllis Lambert, carefully selected Mies, assisted by Philip Johnson, to design an office building later regarded by many, including Mies himself, as his crowning work and the apotheosis of International Style towers. The space of the tranquil granite and marble plaza extends into the first floor lobby, designed by Johnson. This unity is achieved through the use of common materials, continuous horizontal planes, and the transparency of glazed exterior walls. In addition, the design of the lobby is inherently bound to that of the tower: bronze-clad columns along with other carefully crafted rich materials are common to both. Johnson was assisted by a coalition of talented consultants, a successful collaboration rarely realized in twentieth-century architecture. Together they produced a grand but understated lobby, the architectural character of which is accentuated by innovative illumination and other technical features. Still virtually intact due to the foresighted maintenance plan of the Seagram Company, the building and plaza, along with the lobby, have inspired the work of many

subsequent designers and provided a favorable environment for work and repose.

History of the Site[1]

The history of Fourth (now Park) Avenue begins with the advent of the railroads. In 1834 the New York and Harlem Railroad first carried passengers along grade-level tracks down the center of Fourth Avenue from 42nd to 96th streets. By 1848 the New Haven Railroad entered Manhattan along Fourth Avenue. As railroad traffic increased, the avenue was widened to permit additional tracks and the city mandated depressed tracks to minimize problems of noise, smoke, and the danger of fire and injury. By the 1880s, Fourth Avenue officially became known as Park Avenue and was lined with one- and two-story commercial buildings and carriage houses serving the brownstone residences on nearby side streets; the trains ran in an open cut below grade to the Grand Central Depot. The east side of Park Avenue between East 52nd and 53rd streets contained the finishing manufactory of the renowned Steinway & Sons piano company; erected in the 1860s, it was a large brick building of five stories. The remainder of the site which would eventually be occupied by the Seagram Building was divided up into brick-faced tenements on East 53rd Street and brick- and brownstone-fronted rowhouses on East 52nd Street.

In conjunction with the reconstruction of Grand Central Terminal (1903-13) and the electrification of the railroad (1903-07), Park Avenue was rebuilt solidly with a planted mall and the open wells were covered over. The avenue gradually became a thoroughfare lined with large apartment houses for the wealthy. One of these, the Montana Apartments, an eight-story neo-Romanesque building designed by Rouse & Goldstone and faced in brick and stone, was begun in 1919, replacing the Steinway piano factory.

The 1916 zoning resolution designated the portion of Park Avenue north of East 50th Street as residential, but by 1929 major property owners on the avenue, which was overtaking Fifth Avenue as the city's most prestigious address, succeeded in having the area between East 50th and 59th streets rezoned to permit commercial use. Not until the building boom that followed World War II did these efforts come to fruition with the completion in 1947 of the Universal Pictures Building at 445 Park Avenue, designed by Kahn & Jacobs. The transformation of Park Avenue into a commercial avenue was assured by the rash of new office buildings in the 1950s: Lever House (1950-52); Olin Building, 460 Park Avenue (1954); Colgate-Palmolive Building, 300 Park Avenue (1954); 425 Park Avenue Building (Kahn & Jacobs, 1956); and the Seagram Building.[2]

Samuel Bronfman and Joseph E. Seagram & Sons[3]

Beginning his business career in the hotel industry in Winnipeg, Samuel Bronfman (1891-1971) later operated a mail order liquor company throughout Canada, eventually founding the Distillers Company, Ltd. In 1928 this company bought out its major competitor, Joseph E. Seagram & Sons and incorporated the name. With the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, Bronfman began planning an impressive Manhattan headquarters for his Seagram group,

not to be realized until the 1950s. At the time of his death, Bronfman had amassed at least $400,000,000 and his company was the world's largest distiller, with annual sales exceeding $1.3 billion.

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe[4]

Among the most prominent and influential architects of the twentieth century, German-born Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) was initiated into architecture through the fields of masonry, stone carving, stucco decoration, and furniture design before working as an architect in the office of Peter Behrens. By the end of the 1920s, Mies had emerged as one of Germany's leading architects, noted for his visionary skyscraper projects (wherein the apparently weightless and clearly revealed "skin and bone" modern construction permitted the greatest play of light on the building surface), leadership at the Weissenhof housing exhibition (1927) in Stuttgart, and designs for the Barcelona Exhibition (1929) and Tugendhat House (1928-30) in Brno. His work was significant for its attempt to address problems such as standardization of architectural elements and Baukunst (the art of good building, as opposed to manipulation of form for its own sake). Soon after supervising the Bauhaus design school in 1930-33, Mies emigrated to the United States and assumed the directorship of the architecture department at Armour Institute (now Illinois Institute of Technology) for which he designed a master plan (1939-41) and several buildings. Later Mies received commissions for apartment buildings in Chicago: Promontory Apartments (1946-49) and 860-888 Lake Shore Drive Apartments (1948-51), the latter considered the prototypical Miesian (that is, International Style) high-rise structure with features that would recur in his buildings of the next two decades. Refinements of this prototype are found in the Commonwealth Promenade Apartments (1953-56) and Seagram Building in New York (1954-58). Among his last works was the New National Gallery in Berlin, West Germany (1963-69). He received, among other awards, Gold Medals from the Royal Institute of British Architects and the American Institute of Architects.

Philip C. Johnson[5]

Critic, historian, and architect Philip Johnson (b. 1906) was graduated from Harvard University and became associated with the Museum of Modern Art soon after its founding in 1929, directing its innovative department of architecture and later designing its sculpture garden (1953) and two additions (1950, 1964). With critic and historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock, he organized the momentous exhibition, "Modern Architecture" (1932), and coauthored The International Style (1932), a manifesto for the vanguard architecture of Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, and Mies van der Rohe. Johnson was responsible for inviting Le Corbusier and Mies to the United States. Completing his professional degree in architecture at Harvard in 1943, he subsequently designed several influential residences, including his own Glass House (1949). His association with Mies on the Seagram Building, particularly his design for the Four Seasons Restaurant (1958-59), was a highlight in Johnson's career. His later work includes many New York projects: Asia House (now the Russell Sage Foundation/Robert Sterling Foundation Building), 112 East 64th Street (1958-60), located in the Upper

East Side Historic District; New York State Theater at Lincoln Center (1964); New York State Pavilion (1964, with Richard Foster) for the World's Fair in Flushing; Elmer Holmes Bobst Library and Tisch Hall, New York University (1972, both with Richard Foster); and the American Telephone and Telegraph Building, 550 Madison Avenue (1980-84, with John Burgee). In 1978 the American Institute of Architects awarded him its highest honor, the Gold Medal.

Kahn & Jacobs

Born in New York City, Ely Jacques Kahn[6] (1884-1972) was educated at Columbia University and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Soon after joining the firm of Buchman & Fox in 1917, he became a partner and assumed effective control of the office, then known as Buchman & Kahn. His best-known designs are those for many skycrapers of the 1920s and 1930s, which merged the stylistic influences of Art Deco and the Vienna Secession with his interest in oriental art and archaeology.[7] Extensive travel permitted Kahn to develop a specialized knowledge of building materials. As part of his devotion to architectural education, he organized numerous exhibitions which introduced new ideas in interior and industrial design. Kahn wrote widely for professional journals and in 1935 he published Design in Art and Industry. A fellow of the American Institute of Architects, he lectured extensively, was consultant to the United States Housing Authority, and served as president of the Municipal Art Society.

From 1941 to 1972 Kahn's partner was Robert Allan Jacobs[8] (b. 1905). Also a native of New York City, Jacobs was educated at Amherst College and Columbia University. After working in Paris as a designer and draftsman for Le Corbusier in 1934-35, he returned to New York and joined the newly formed firm of Harrison & Fouilhoux. In 1938 Jacobs began working for Kahn and was soon elevated to partner. In addition to the Seagram Building, the firm's commercial, industrial, and institutional commissions include the Municipal Asphalt Plant, erected in 1941-44 (a designated New York City Landmark), admired as an early use of reinforced concrete in the United States, and several buildings in the Upper East Side Historic District.[9]

Design and Construction[10]

The Seagram Company decided to locate its symbol of corporate achievement on Park Avenue, New York's finest residential boulevard which was quickly becoming a center of international business. In 1951 Seagram paid $4,000,000 for 50,950 sq.ft. of property, including the Montana Apartments, on the east side of the avenue between East 52nd and 53rd streets. In 1954 the company announced it would erect an office building to be completed in 1957, intended to coincide with the centennial of the House of Seagram. In planning its headquarters, Seagram joined that group of American companies which, since the mid-19th century, have sought to establish further their corporate image through architectural patronage, particularly for tall office buildings, a conspicuous symbol of American capitalism.[11] The commission first was awarded to the firm of Pereira & Luckman; however, after seeing this proposal, architect-to-be Phyllis Bronfman Lambert convinced her father to hire an architect who would

distinguish the company with an architecturally compelling design. After a two-and-one-half month search, she recommended Ludwig Mies van der Rohe with Philip Johnson as his associate. Bronfman approved the choice and appointed his daughter director of planning.[12] After selecting the final architects, it was decided more land was needed, so an additional 9,000 sq.ft. of adjacent land was bought for $900,000.

Plans for the new design were filed in March of 1955. At that time the site was occupied by the twelve-story Montana Apartment Building on Park Avenue, a nine-story apartment building on East 53rd Street, and a five-story tenement and row of four-story buildings, all on East 52nd Street. These were demolished between June, 1955, and March, 1956.[13] Construction began soon afterward.

The owner's "simple" requirements were that the building "be the crowning glory of everyone's work, his own, the contractor's, and Mies's."[14] The building was designed by Mies and Johnson, with Kahn & Jacobs preparing the working drawings. Other consultants were: Jaros, Baum & Bolles, mechanical engineers; Severud-Elstad Krueger, structural engineers; Clifton E. Smith, electrical engineer; Richard Kelly, lighting consultant; Charles Middeleer & Karl Linn, landscape architects; Bolt-Beranek & Newman, acoustical consultants; and Elaine Lustig, graphic consultant. The general contractor was the George A. Fuller Company.[15] By April, 1955, photographs of a model of the new design were published.[16] It was clearly distinguished from contemporary (and nearby) buildings which, like the General Reinsurance Building at 400 Park Avenue (Emery Roth & Sons, 1956-57), were unmodern "ziggurats" dressed in modern materials, or like the Union Carbide Building, now Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company Headquarters at 270 Park Avenue (Skidmore Owings & Merrill, 1960), conformed to International Style tenets but lacked the impressive amenity of public space. In short, the Seagram Building was the "ultimate logical development of the revolutionary ideas which [Mies] evolved thrity-five years earlier."[17]

One of Mies's innovative decisions which aggrandized the design was the use of a broad elevated plaza (with a radiant heating system to keep it ice-free,) symmetrically arranged with fountains and weeping beech trees. This was in accordance with the viewpoints of several New York architectural firms such as Kahn & Jacobs, which had been urging Parks Commissioner Robert Moses to propose a revision to the zoning regulations, in order to replace full-site ziggurat towers with large buildings surrounded by open spaces. At that time there were no direct precedents in midtown Manhattan for such a planning scheme. The Rockefeller Center mall, which serves a very different urban design role, unifies a complex of buildings (Associated Architects, 1932-40, and 1947-73, a designated New York City Landmark). Lever House, a glass-skinned slab balanced on a low-rise pedestal which permits entry into an atrium open to the sky, is an earlier solution by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill to the urban siting of skyscrapers. Elevating the Seagram tower above a first-story glazed exterior wall, Mies united the plaza to the lobby. This unity is enhanced through continuous travertine paving and a slab marquee which is, in effect, an exterior extension of the lobby ceiling. The "outside and inside are simply the same."[18] The result was a departure from Mies's previous designs: historian Franz Schulze has noted

that the Seagram Building "is almost unique in [Mies's] American oeuvre for the excellence with which it is wedded to its urban situation."[19]

The lobby layout leads visitors to banks of elevators as well as to the monumental spaces for a bar and restaurant located in the opposing wings behind the lobby. Together these elements satisfied the program's demand for a large public space on the ground story.[20]

Johnson arranged and detailed the lobby to coordinate with the overall character of the building. Great care was taken in selecting cladding materials, even ensuring that appearances would improve as the building aged. In terms of the lobby, this meant, among other items, travertine floors and walls, bronze mullions, and specially designed elevator cab interiors. All details, including square serif lettering and special door hardware, were painstakingly designed to harmonize.

The plans of the tower were arranged to permit the Seagram Company to occupy the first seven stories or about one-third of the total office space of approximately 854,000 sq.ft. Although the $50/sq.ft. construction cost[21] (including the price of the land) was twice the usual cost for contemporary office buildings, over 115 tenants would pay high rents to share the remainder of the building, and partake of its luxurious materials, prestigious address, and spacious plaza, not to mention the cachet of having an office in a building designed by an internationally renowned architect. Therefore, the owner expected a thirteen percent return in the first year on its initial investment.

The Seagram Company moved into its new offices in December, 1957, and January, 1958. By July, the popularity of the plaza among New Yorkers was acknowledged in a newspaper account.[22] Although temporary Certificates of Occupancy were issued by the Department of Buildings in 1958, the final certificate was not issued until 1959.[23]

Description[24]

The serene lobby efficiently conducts people from the plaza to either the elevators or first-floor restaurant without leading the users to a monumental central space, as do lobbies of traditional Beaux-Arts style buildings. In that way, Mies characteristically relied on the inherent quality of space and detailing rather than the application of ornament to achieve elegance. Although unified by rich materials and understated detailing, the lobby can be divided into three sections: the rectangular (front) portion to the west, the central portion of three corridors and adjacent elevator interiors, and the T-shaped (rear) portion to the east. Uniform throughout these spaces are the travertine floors and walls; a twenty-four foot high ceiling covered in gray glass mosaic set in black cement; and exterior walls of clear glass set within bronze mullions and protected by one bronze bar at chair rail height, added in the 1970s to conform to state law. All lettering for signs is in the square serif style specially chosen for the building. Details and materials are original (or replicas of original components) unless otherwise noted.

The western portion, entered through three revolving doors in the western glass wall, is illuminated by a row of recessed incandescent fixtures along the western edge and multi-bulb incandescent recessed troffer lighting fixtures along the other walls. Two bronze-clad columns divide the space into thirds. Two bronze-framed directory panels (which do not use the square serif alphabet) are located at the eastern side of the space.

The central portion contains three corridors, illuminated by recessed troffers along the long sides, each side of which contains two or three unadorned bronze elevator doors. Each elevator cab is lined with removable panels of stainless steel and bronze mesh in a cartridge-belt pattern and illuminated by a raised plastic grid of square white translucent panels. Each elevator door is surmounted by a recessed fluorescent fixture in the doorway soffit and a translucent signal bar in the wall above. Service doors, four-panel mail boxes, and a standpipe alarm box are all bronze.

The eastern portion contains a rectangular space, entered at the northern and southern sides by paired revolving doors. Two sets of paired service doors pierce the east wall; one bronze-framed elevator control panel, two directories, and one recent bronze-framed fire station panel are located in the west wall. A bronze slab-top desk with leather surface is fixed in the southern half of this space. Attached to this space is a rectangular appendage; it contains a stair- case, of seven risers with bronze railings, which concludes at a clear glass wall with bronze mullions and chair rail (proportioned to reflect the glass wall in the rest of the lobby) and paired central doors. This section is illuminated by a row of recessed fixtures.

Impact

Architectural critics have overwhemingly praised the Seagram Building. Lewis Mumford called it a "Rolls-Royce" of buildings with "the aesthetic impact that only a unified work of art" enjoys.[25] Another contemporary review opined, "Seagram challenges accepted skyscraper practice all the way down the line."[26] A generation later, historians would refer to the building as "seminal" and, in describing the ensemble of tower, interior, and Four Seasons Restaurant, "In toto incomparable."[27] Always included in surveys such as "The Ten Best Lobbies in New York," the Seagram lobby has been praised as "one of the best urban spaces built in Manhattan this century."[28]

Conclusion

The Seagram Building's high standards of design and construction have been augmented by a rigorous maintenance program. Soon after construction was completed, the fixed desk was added to its present location. Except for a fire station panel and similar modest additions, the lobby has not been altered from its original condition. In 1980 Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, Inc. sold the building to Teachers Investment & Annuity Association; the sale agreement required the new owner to seek Landmark status for the structure when it became eligible under the thirty-year age requirement.[29] The building continues to be one of New York's most prestigious business addresses.

Report prepared by David M. Breiner,
Research Department

Report edited by Marjorie Pearson,
Director of Research, and
Elisa Urbanelli, Research Department

NOTES

1. This account is based on Landmarks Preservation Commission, Lever House Designation Report, report prepared by Alex Herrera (New York, 1982), 3 and Christopher Gray, "Is It Time to Redevelop Park Avenue Again?" New York Times, Real Estate Report "Commercial Property," sec. 13 (May, 14, 1989), pp. 44-47. See also: Robert A.M. Stern, et. al., New York 1900 (New York, 1983), 353-58; Stern, et. al., New York 1930 (New York, 1987), passim; Atlas of the City of New York and Part of the Bronx (New York, 1885), pl. 18; Moses King, King's Handbook of New York, 2nd ed. (New York, 1893), 942-43; New York Public Library, Photographic Views of New York City, 1870's - 1970's (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1981), fiche 0946-C3, D5, E2, E3, F2; Manhattan Land Book, City of New York (New York, 1934), pl. 78; New York City, Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets, Block 1307, Lot 1. NB 257-1919.

2. See "High Rise Office Buildings," Progressive Architecture 38 (June, 1957), 162 and Insurance Maps of the City of New York, Borough of Manhattan, vols. 4, 6E (New York, 1920-present).

3. Who's Who in America, vol. 31 (Chicago, 1960-61), 362. Samuel Bronfman obituary, NYT, July 11, 1971, p. 46. Bronfman was a noted philanthropist. In recogition, his children established the Samuel Bronfman Biblical and Archaeological Museum at the Israeli Museum in Jerusalem.

4. Mies's biography is based on "Mies van der Rohe, Ludwig," Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects, ed. Adolf K. Placzek, vol. 3 (New York, 1982), 183-95 and Encyclopedia of 20th Century Architecture, gen. ed. Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, rev. & enl. ed. (New York, 1986), 221-28.

5. "Johnson, Philip," Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects, vol. 2, 499-501; Encyclopedia of 20th Century Architecture, 181-82; American Architects Directory, 2nd ed., ed. George S. Koyl (New York, 1962), 354; LPC, Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report, vol. 1 (New York, 1981), 188.

6. See: "Kahn, Ely Jacques," Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects, vol. 2, 537; American Architects Directory, 2nd ed., 363; Ely Jacques Kahn obituary, NYT, Sept. 6, 1972, p. 48.

7. These include the Squibb Building at 745 Fifth Avenue; 120 Wall Street Building; 2 Park Avenue Building; and buildings at 1400, 1410, and 1450 Broadway. Kahn was also the architect for: Bergdorf Goodman Store; the Jay-Thorpe Building, West 57th Street; the Film Center; Montefiore Hospital; and Hospital for Joint Diseases. For the World's Fair of 1939-40 he designed the Maritime Transportation Building, the General Cigar Building, and the Ballantine Inn. Kahn's residential projects included: part of the Fort Greene Houses; Gowanus Houses; Carver Houses; and Hudson Manor Apartments.

8. See American Architects Directory, 343; "Inventory of a Collection of Architectural Drawings from the Office of Kahn & Jacobs, Including the Works of their Predecessor Firms, Compiled by Janet Parks" (typescript at the Avery Architectural Library of Columbia University, 1978).

9. See LPC, Municipal Asphalt Plant Designation Report (New York, 1976); LPC, Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report (New York, 1981). Other works by Kahn & Jacobs include: 100 Park Avenue; 1407 Broadway; parts of Mount Sinai Hospital; and the American Airlines Terminal at J.F. Kennedy International Airport.

10. See Paul Noll, "Discriminatory Taxation: The Seagram Building," Comment 3, no. 2 (Apr., 1965), 17; "New Thinking on Office Buildings," Architectural Forum 99 (Sept., 1953), 123; G.E. Kidder Smith, The Architecture of the United States: New England and the Mid-Atlantic States (New York, 1981), 551-52; "Bronze Monument in the Sky," Empire State Architect 16 (Oct., 1956), 72; "Seagram's Bronze Tower," Architectural Forum 109 (July, 1958), 68-77; Arthur Drexler, "The Seagram Building; Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson, Architects," Architectural Record 123 (June, 1958), 140.

11. See Kenneth Turney Gibbs, Business Architectural Imagery in America, 1870-1930 (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1984), esp. 1, 4, 169.

12. Franz Schulze, Mies van der Rohe: A Critical Biography (Chicago & London, 1985), 270-71; "Park Ave. To Get New Skyscraper," NYT, July 13, 1954, p. 25; "Seagram's Bronze Tower," 77. "Seagram's Plans Plaza Tower in New York," Architectural Forum 102 (Apr., 1955), 9.

13. The plans filed on March 29, 1955, must have been submitted as an amendment to the original application (NB 97-1954) because the docket book shows no new applications for that site on that date. The block and lot folder is incomplete. See "Seagram Offices Get Final Plan," NYT, Mar. 30, 1955, p. 50. Regarding the demolitions, see NYC, Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets, Block 1307, Lot 1. DEMO's 367-1955, 387-1955, 524-1955, 31-1956.

14. Phyllis Lambert, Testimony given before the LPC at a public hearing, May 17, 1988. Item No. 1 (LP-1664).

15. "The Seagram Building," Arts and Architecture 77 (Jan., 1960), 15.

16. "Seagram's Plans Plaza Tower in New York," Architectural Forum 102 (Apr., 1955), 11.

17. Jurgen Joedicke, A History of Modern Architecture, trans. James C. Palmes (London, 1959), 77 [caption to fig. 132].

18. Lewis Mumford, "The Lesson of the Master," Journal of the A.I.A. 31 (Jan., 1959), 21.

19. Franz Schulze, Letter to LPC dated May 10, 1988, n.p. (LP file).

20. To accommodate other program requirements, the pristine slab rests on three subterranean levels and is backed by a ten-story "bustle," full-height spine, and five-story wings.

21. In 1958 the estimated cost was published as $35,000,000. According to Seagram Vice President Arthur S. Margolin in a conversation on June 26, 1989, the cost of construction was approximately $40,000,000.

22. "Footsore Here Finds Oasis at Seagram Building Plaza," NYT, July 26, 1958, p. 12.

23. See "Monument in Bronze," Time, Mar. 3, 1958, p. 54; NYC, Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets, Block 1307, Lot 1. C of O 48433-58 (temp) and C of O 51303-59.

24. "The Seagram Building," 14; "Seagram's Bronze Tower," 73.

25. Mumford, 19-20.

26. "Seagram's Bronze Tower," 67.

27. William J.R. Curtis, Modern Architecture Since 1900 (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1983), 266; Smith, 550-51.

28. See, for example, Peter Blake, "The Ten Best Lobbies in New York," New York Times Magazine, Dec. 28, 1975, p. 13.

29. "Extract of Closing Memorandum Sale of Seagram Building, entered into between Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, Inc. and Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association of America in virtue of Agreement of Purchase and Sale dated February 15, 1980," Articles 26 (pp. 56-73) and 28 (p. 75) (photocopies submitted to LPC by Canadian Centre for Architecture.)

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this structure, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Seagram Building, first floor interior, consisting of the lobby and passenger elevator cabs and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces including but not limited to, interior piers, wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, doors, railings, elevator doors, elevator indicators, and signs, has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City, and the Interior is one which is customarily open and accessible to the public, and to which the public is customarily invited.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Seagram Building, first floor interior, is an integral part of the tower, a seminal example of International Style architecture; that the bronze-clad columns and other carefully crafted rich components are common to both lobby and tower; that the lobby is inherently bound to the plaza through the use of common paving materials, transparent glass walls, and strong horizontal features; that the first floor interior was designed in 1954-55 by architectural master Ludwig Mies van der Rohe with Philip Johnson and erected in 1956-58; that it is Mies's only building in New York City and is the climax of his ideas on tall office structures, which began in the 1920s; that the realization of the building's interior was made possible by a rare coalition of talented consultants and by pioneering efforts of research and fabrication; that the mosaic-clad ceiling, bronze lobby appointments, specially designed elevator cabs and other features produce a rich but understated lobby; that this interior is accentuated by an innovative illumination scheme and other technical features; and that this first-floor interior was commissioned by the notable firm of Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, and has been kept virtually intact through a foresighted maintenance program.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as an Interior Landmark the Seagram Building, first floor interior, consisting of the lobby and passenger elevator cabs and the fixtures and interior components of these spaces including but not limited to, interior piers, wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, doors, railings, elevator doors, elevator indicators, and signs, 375 Park Avenue, Borough of Manhattan and designates Manhattan Tax Map Block 1307, Lot 1 as its Landmark Site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

American Architects Directory. 2nd ed. Ed. George S. Koyl. New York: A.I.A. & R.R. Bowker Co., 1962.

Atlas of the City of New York and Part of the Bronx. New York: E. Robinson, 1885.

Blake, Peter. The Master Builders. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960.

_____. "The Ten Best Lobbies in New York." New York Times Magazine, Dec. 28, 1975.

[Bronfman, Samuel. Obituary]. New York Times, July 11, 1971, p. 46.

"Bronze Monument in the Sky." Empire State Architect 16 (Oct., 1956), 55, 72.

Curtis, William J.R. Modern Architecture Since 1900. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1983.

Drexler, Arthur. "The Seagram Building; Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson, Architects." Architectural Record 123 (June, 1958), 139-47.

Encyclopedia of 20th Century Architecture. Gen. Ed. Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani. Rev. & enl. ed. New York: N.N. Abrams, 1986.

"Extract of the Closing Memorandum Sale of Seagram Building, entered into between Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, Inc. and Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association of America in virtue of Agreement of Purchase and Sale dated February 15, 1980." Articles 26 and 28. LPC files.

"Footsore Here Finds Oasis at Seagram Building Plaza." New York Times, July 26, 1958, p. 12.

Gibbs, Kenneth Turney. Business Architectural Imagery in America, 1870-1930. Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1984.

Gray, Christopher. "Is It Time to Redevelop Park Avenue Again?" New York Times, Real Estate Report: Commercial Property, May 14, 1989,sec. 13, pp. 44-46.

"High-rise Office Buildings." Progressive Architecture 38 (June, 1957), 159-91.

Insurance Maps of the City of New York, Borough of Manhattan. vols. 4, 6E. New York: Sanborn, 1920-present.

"Inventory of a Collection of Architectural Drawings from the Office of Kahn & Jacobs, Including the Works of their Predecessor Firms, Compiled by Janet Parks." Typescript at the Avery Architectural Library of Columbia University, 1978.

Joedicke, Jurgen. A History of Modern Architecture. Trans. James C. Palmes. London: The Architectural Press, 1959.

Jordy. William H. "Seagram Assessed." Architectural Review 124 (Dec., 1958), 374-82.

[Kahn, Ely Jacques. Obituary]. New York Times, Sept. 6, 1972, p. 48.

King, Moses. King's Handbook of New York City. 2nd ed. Boston: Moses King, 1892/93.

Lambert, Phyllis. Testimony given befored the Landmarks Preservation Commission at a public hearing, May 17, 1988, Item No. 1. (LP-1664).

Landmarks Preservation Commission. Lever House Designation Report (LP-1277, 1982, Report prepared by Alex Herrera); Municipal Asphalt Plant Desgination Report (LP-0905, 1976); Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report (LP-1051, 1981).

Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects. Ed. Adolf K. Placzek. 4 vols. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., Free Press, 1982.

Manhattan Land Book. New York: G.W. Bromley, 1934.

"Monument in Bronze." Time, March 3, 1958, pp. 52-54.

Mumford, Lewis. "The Lesson of the Master." Journal of the A.I.A. 31 (Jan., 1959), 19-23.

"New Thinking on Office Buildings." Architectural Forum 99 (Sept., 1953), 107-23.

New York City. Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets. [Block 1307, Lot 1].

New York Public Library. Photographic Views of New York City, 1870's-1970's. Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1981.

Noll, Paul. "Discriminatory Taxation: The Seagram Building." Comment 3, no. 2 (Apr., 1965), 16-44.

"L'oeuvre de Mies van der Rohe." L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui 29, no. 79 (Sept., 1958). [entire issue].

"Original Cost of Expensive Commercial Building of Striking Design Used to Justify Tax Assessment in Excess of Capitalized Rental Income (Joseph E. Seagram & Sons v. Tax Comm'n, N.Y. App. Div. 1963)." Columbia Law Review 63 (1963), 1528-32.

"Park Ave. To Get New Skyscraper." New York Times, July 13, 1954, p. 25.

Politeś, Nicholas. "The Seagram Building: Living With a Landmark." Building Economics (May, 1986).

Schulze, Franz. Letter to LPC dated May 10, 1988. LPC files.

_____. Mies van der Rohe: A Critical Biography. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

"The Seagram Building." Arts and Architecture 77 (Jan., 1960), 14-15.

"Seagram Offices Get Final Plan." New York Times, Mar. 30, 1955, p. 50.

"Seagram's Bronze Tower." Architectural Forum 109 (July, 1958), 66-77.

"Seagram's Plans Plaza Tower in New York." Architectural Forum 102 (Apr., 1955), 9.

"A Skyscraper Crammed with Innovations." Engineering News Record 15? (195?), 8-9.

Smith, G.E. Kidder. The Architecture of the United States: New England and the Mid-Atlantic States. Vol. 1. New York: Doubleday, Anchor Press, 1981.

Stern, Robert A.M., Gregory Gilmartin, and John Massengale. New York 1900: Metropolitan Architecture and Urbanism, 1890-1915. New York: Rizzoli, 1983.

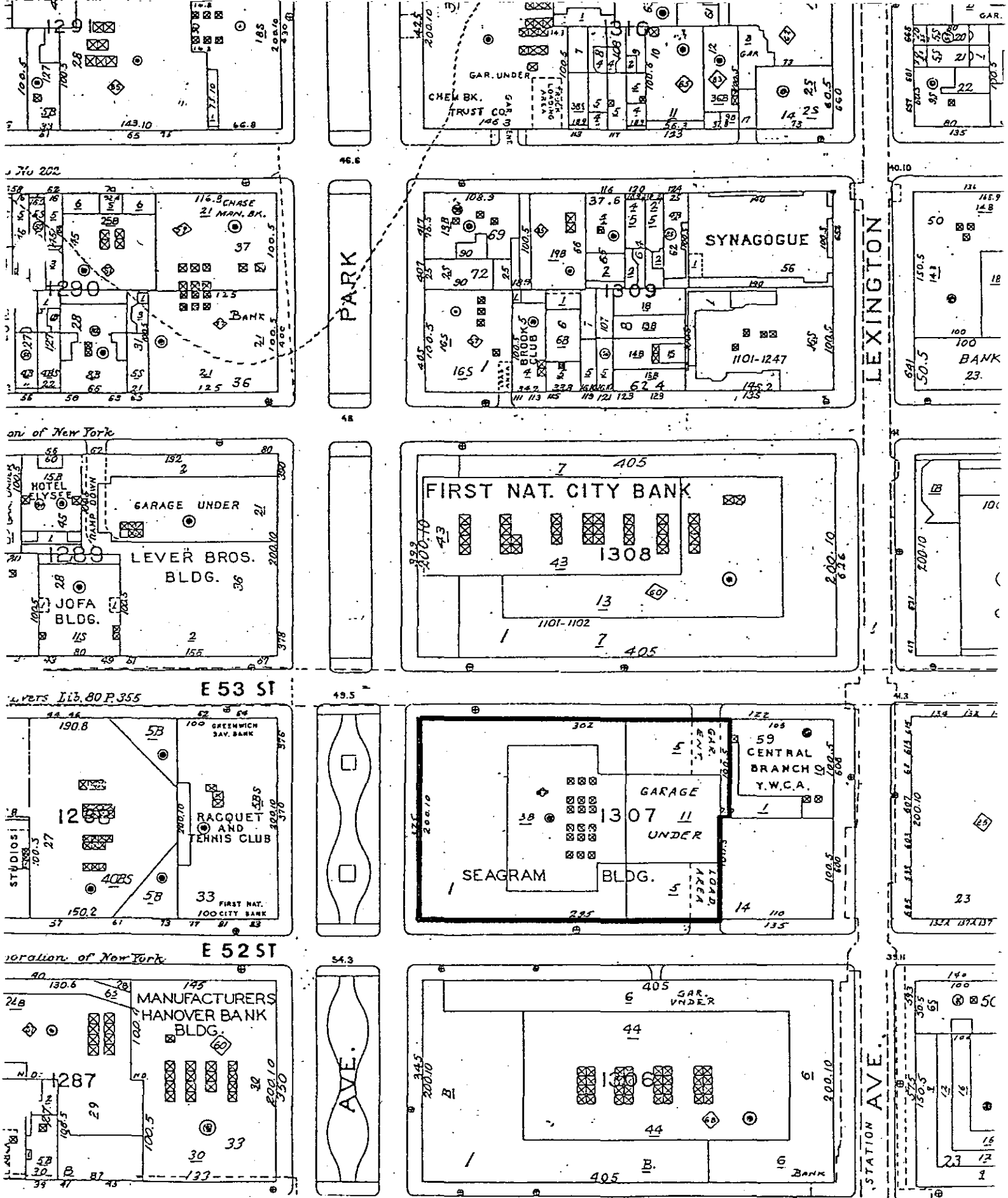
Stern, Robert A.M., Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins. New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars. New York: Rizzoli, 1987.

Who's Who in America. Vol. 31. New York: A.N. Marquis Co., 1960-61.

Whyte, William H. The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces. Washington, D.C.: The Conservation Foundation, 1980.

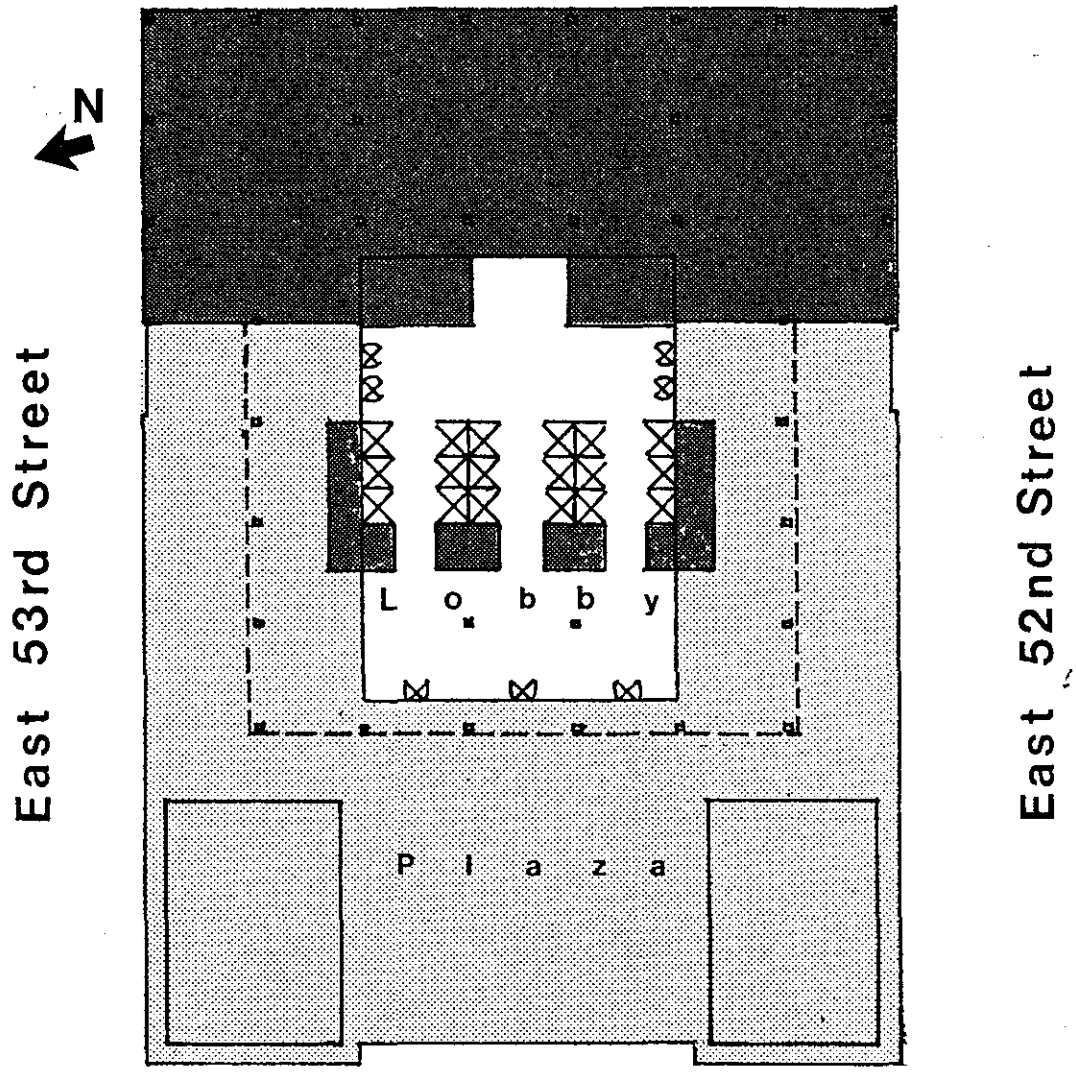
Wright, Carol P. Blue Guide to New York. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1983.

Zoning New York City: A Proposal for a Zoning Resolution for the City of New York submitted to the City Planning Commission by Voorhees Walker Smith & Smith, August, 1958. New York, 1958.



SEAGRAM BUILDING,
FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR 375 Park Avenue

Source: Sanborn, Manhattan Land Book, 1988-89, pls. 78, 84



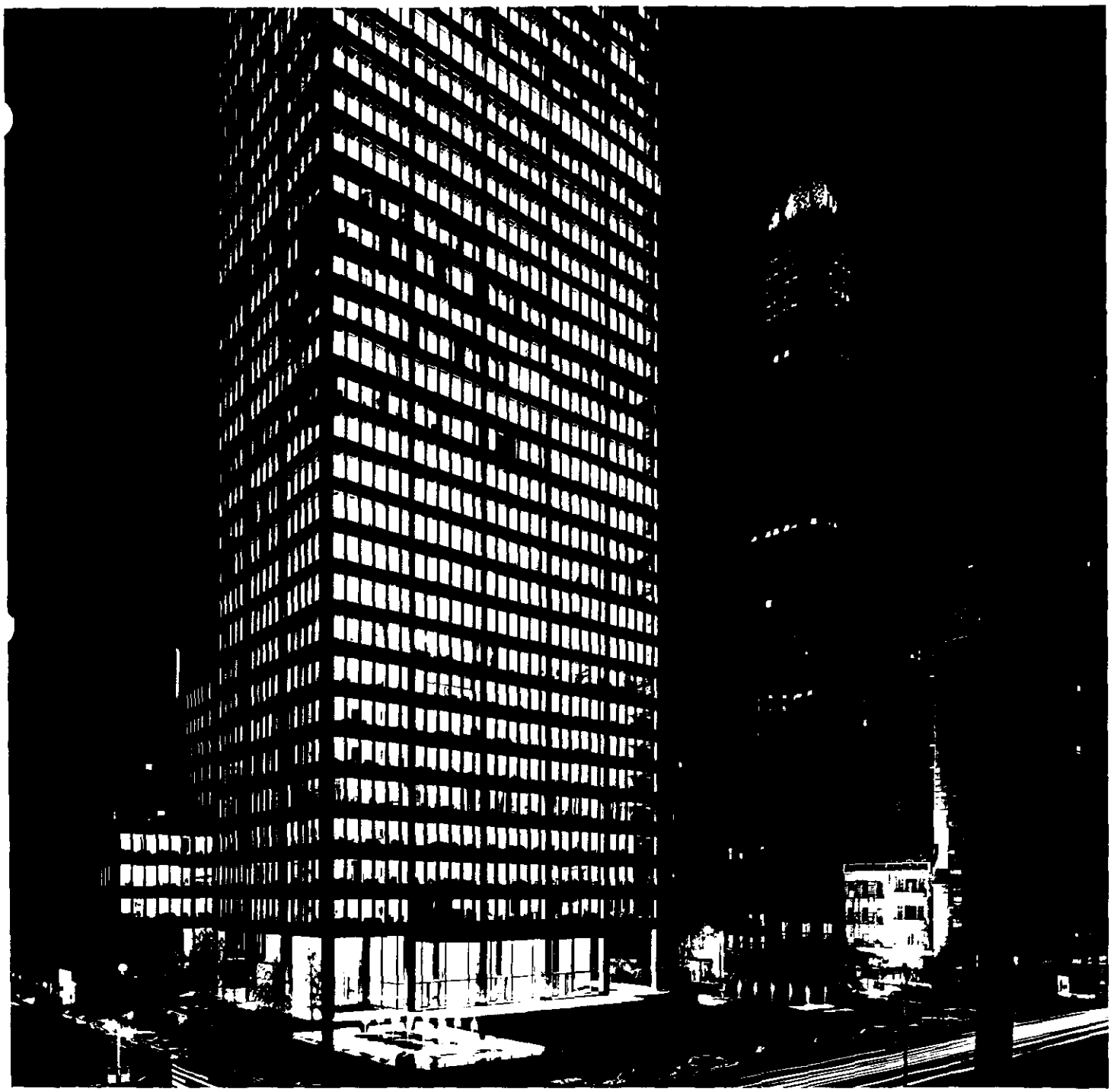
SEAGRAM BUILDING
375 Park Avenue

Exterior Designation

Interior Designation

Landmarks Preservation Commission

October 3, 1989



SEAGRAM BUILDING, FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR Original plaza & nighttime lighting
Photograph by Ezra Stoller, 1958 Courtesy of Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, Inc.

SEAGRAM BUILDING, FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR Photo credit: David M. Breiner
West portion of Lobby, view to East 53rd Street

SEAGRAM BUILDING, FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR
East portion of Lobby, showing entrance to Four Seasons Restaurant

CREDIT PHOTO

SEAGRAM BUILDING, FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR Photo credit: David M. Breiner
East portion of Lobby, view to East 53rd Street

SEAGRAM BUILDING, FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR Photo credit: David M. Breiner
East portion of Lobby, with stationary desk

SEAGRAM BUILDING, FIRST FLOOR INTERIOR East portion of Lobby
Photograph by Ezra Stoller, 1958 Courtesy of Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, Inc.