

2 PARK AVENUE BUILDING, 2 Park Avenue (aka 37-53 East 32nd Street, 40-58 East 33rd Street) Manhattan. Built 1926-28; Architect Ely Jacques Kahn of Buchman & Kahn.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 862, Lot 29.

On October 18, 2005, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the 2 Park Avenue Building (Item No. 3). The hearing was duly advertised according to the provisions of Law. There were three speakers in favor of designation and no speakers opposed. In addition, The Commission received one letter in support of designation.

Summary

The colorful and striking 2 Park Avenue Building, built in 1926-28 on lower Park Avenue, was designed by one of New York's foremost architects of the first half of the twentieth century, Ely Jacques Kahn. Constructed when this section of the avenue was just beginning to be developed with modern office towers, 2 Park Avenue represents one of Kahn's finest essays into Art Deco or Modernistic style architecture. The name Art Deco came from the famous show in Paris that introduced the style, the 1925 Exhibition des Arts Decoratifs. In the 2 Park Avenue Building, Kahn was able to successfully integrate a new decorative type produced by the application of colorful terra-cotta panels in geometric designs to a tall, commercially successful office/loft structure. 2 Park Avenue was one of the important late 1920s buildings that helped create the visually lively and iconic city of the early 20th century.

Kahn's career spanned most of the first half of the twentieth century, during which time he became known for his commercial structures. He is responsible for the design of numerous tall office and loft buildings in midtown Manhattan (especially in the Garment District), as well as factories and several houses. He claimed that business owners were open-minded about the design of their buildings and he enjoyed the opportunities for innovation that he believed commercial work afforded. In his designs, Kahn attempted to reflect the newly available and constantly changing types of materials and technology, and was highly influenced by the new industrial design trends coming out of Europe in the 1920s. His traditional training at the Ecole des Beaux Arts served as the framework for his approach, which combined the traditional with the modern to create the dominate architectural vocabulary of the 1920s and 30s. The 2 Park Avenue Building is one of Kahn's most dramatic and successful works and survives today as one of the most beautiful and distinctive office towers of the Art Deco period.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

New York Architecture in the 1920s

America's involvement in World War I, followed by a financial recession early in the 1920s resulted in a construction lull in New York, as in other parts of the country. By the mid 1920s, as the economy improved, demand was high for new and larger commercial buildings. During 1925, fifteen new office skyscrapers were erected, and during 1926, thirty more towers were built. There were similar large numbers of new buildings during the next several years. Despite the crash of the Stock Market in 1929, those that had been previously planned and financed went forward. According to architecture critic Paul Goldberger, the 1920s were "the richest era in skyscraper design since the early years in Chicago" producing "a rich array of towers" that merged "Chicago's instinct toward structural expression and New York's instinct toward theatricality."¹

In 1916, New York had implemented the nation's first zoning regulation, a law that determined the height of buildings in relation to the width of streets they faced. This was an attempt to allow more light and air to reach the street level as buildings attained ever increasing heights. It was not until the mid 1920s however, that the 1916 Building Zone Resolution began to influence the shape of new buildings with mandated setbacks. Many of these new ideas were inspired by an article in the publication *Pencil Points* (1923) and later expanded in *Metropolis of Tomorrow* (1929) by architect and critic Harvey Wiley Corbett (1873-1954) and architectural renderer Hugh Ferriss (1889-1962). These men created a series of dramatic renderings that explored the possibilities created by the new zoning law, illustrating the progressive stages of a building's design based on the law's requirements. The drawings and ideas on which they were based significantly influenced the architects of the period, directing the architects' attention to the building as a whole rather than to a single façade of the structure, thus altering the whole design process. By visualizing buildings "from every possible angle" the architect was transformed from a designer of facades into a "sculptor in building masses."² The zoning law provided architects with a sound, rational basis for the form and appearance of the skyscraper as well as a new source of creativity; historical styles did not seem to express the modern sensibility and consequently, a new "skyscraper style" emerged in the 1920s.

Another important influence on buildings of this period was Eliel Saarinen's second-prize winning entry for the Chicago Tribune Building competition in 1923. Although it was not the winning design, the straight-forward shape and strongly vertical emphasis of this and some of the other entries had a significant and wide-ranging influence on buildings in this country for the next several decades. Rather than following the gothic detailing of Hood and Howell's winning design, many architects chose to design buildings that were taller and simpler, with less historic ornament and more concern for the overall shape and massing.

The question of what was "modern" design occupied many architects during this period and expounded on these ideas in the contemporary press.³ They saw the tremendous change in society brought about by new technology and manufacturing processes. They felt that architecture should reflect the changes going on around them and were searching for the "proper" means of expressing this. While a truly new type of modern architecture was being created in Europe at the time, much of the actual work produced in New York was less revolutionary than its proponents believed. Ada Louise Huxtable wrote of the two parallel strains found in design work of the late 1920s, the modernistic and the modern. "Modern was radical, reductive, and reformist" as exemplified in the work of Mies Van Der Rohe. "Modernistic was richly decorative and attached to conservative and hedonistic values."⁴

Many of the New York buildings dating from the mid-1920s through the 1930s were designed in this Modernistic style, also called Art Deco (after the Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes held in Paris in 1925).⁵ This style has also been called an "avant-garde traditionalist" approach to creating a contemporary idiom for buildings of the period.⁶ Much of the architecture that we know as Art Deco was based on accepted, standard building forms and construction techniques, but the buildings were given a modern cast through the use of specific types of ornament, and a variety of materials, some new and some simply used in a new way.⁷ Many of the architects working in this style had received traditional Beaux-Arts training in which the plan and the design of elevations were the first and most important efforts in creating a building. To these initial influences the architects added other design and ornamental ideas that evolved from: the Paris exhibit, the well-publicized designs of the Vienna Secessionists and the Wiener Werkstatte, the German Expressionists, and American architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright and Louis H. Sullivan, contemporary theatrical set designs, and Mayan and other Native American forms.

In addition to their concern for lush ornament, architects working in this style accepted that the facades of buildings were merely a covering for the structural framework and they began to look at the surfaces of these new buildings differently. They were treated without depth, literally as a skin around the framework. This idea was first advanced in this country by the architects of the Chicago School, and it can be traced back, in turn, to the writings of German architect Gottfried Semper (1803-1879). In one of his essays, he described one of the four basic components of architecture as the “enclosure of textiles, animal skins, wattle or any other filler hung from the frame or placed between the supporting poles.”⁸ This led to the idea of wall surfaces being treated like woven fabric, a technique used on several buildings in New York during this period.⁹ New materials such as metal alloys were used during this time, but brick and terra cotta were favorites because of their wide range of color and textural possibilities. Ornament, usually in low relief, often took the form of angular, geometric shapes such as ziggurats and zigzags, or simplified and stylized floral patterns, parts of circles, or faceted crystalline shapes. According to Huxtable, “Modernistic fused the ornamental and the exotic for what was the last great decorative style.”¹⁰ Reaching its zenith in popularity between 1928 and 1931 in New York City, this new architectural style was used most noticeably for commercial skyscrapers.¹¹ As the interests of the business world were perceived to be paramount in the 1920s, the use of the Art Deco style was seen to reflect the integration of commercialism, industry, science and invention, and machinery.

Ely Jacques Kahn (1884-1972)¹²

Ely Jacques Kahn was born into an educated middle-class family in New York. He was always interested in art, and particularly painting, but realized that architecture was a more practical vocation. He began his architectural studies at Columbia University, interrupted in 1907 by a period at the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris, before finishing his American degree. In Paris he joined the atelier of Gaston Redon (brother of painter Odilon Redon), because this teacher was known to be especially interested in decoration.¹³ Kahn continued to paint while in school, even exhibiting several works at the Paris Salon. While abroad, Kahn traveled widely (often with his good friend Clarence Stein), including a trip to Spain and North Africa where he first became aware of Moorish architecture and the geometric forms of Middle-Eastern designs. Kahn was the first American student to be awarded the “Prix Labarre” at the Ecole des Beaux Arts, and earned his diploma in 1911.

Upon his return to the United States, he worked as a draftsman in several different architectural offices, helping to design traditionally styled houses and hotels, and was finally awarded his degree from Columbia University. In 1915, he was appointed to a teaching position at Cornell University. During this time, Kahn designed a residence for his father-in-law, Joseph Plaut, in Elmsford, NY and through him was introduced to Albert Buchman and Mortimer J. Fox, partners in the long-established firm of Buchman & Fox.¹⁴ In 1917, Kahn was invited to join the firm, owing, he said, to the fact that he was able to bring commissions for several buildings for the pharmaceutical firm owned by his father-in-law.¹⁵ Fox was soon ready to retire and by 1919 Kahn was given a leading roll both in the design and business end of the partnership and the name of the firm was changed to Buchman & Kahn. By 1929 Buchman also retired and Kahn took complete control of the organization, changing its name to Ely Jacques Kahn, Architects. Still later, from 1940 until 1966, Kahn took another partner, Robert Jacobs, and the firm name was again changed to Kahn & Jacobs.

In 1925 Kahn went to the Exposition des Arts Decoratifs in Paris and was deeply impressed by the work he saw there. Upon seeing the new forms being displayed, he “felt that the pompous sterility of 1900 with white lines of columns was over.”¹⁶ Upon his return to New York, Kahn arranged an exhibit at the Lord & Taylor department store to display furniture purchased in Paris. In 1928 and again in 1934 and 1940, the Metropolitan Museum mounted an exhibit entitled “the Architect and the Industrial Arts,” in which he participated, along with others such as Raymond Hood, Ralph Walker, Eliel Saarinen and John Root. Kahn worked with many of these same architects on the Chicago World’s Fair of 1933, for which he designed the pavilion and exhibit of Industrial Arts. His work at this time also included the design of shops and domestic interiors. During this same period Kahn was involved with the planning and mounting of several of the annual exhibits of the Architectural League in New York. Through all of this work, Kahn helped publicize and popularize the new type of design that had been introduced in Paris in 1925. He also worked for such companies as Shelton Looms and Kohler Plumbing Company to help them modernize the designs of their products.

During the 1930s, when there was little new building going on, Kahn traveled around the United States and the Far East conducting a survey of art and architecture education for the Carnegie Corporation. This resulted in the publication of a book describing his impressions, *Design in Art and Industry* (1935). He also helped found and then directed the architecture department of the Beaux Arts Institute of Design in New York. Later in his career, and prompted by his partner Robert Jacobs who was a great admirer of Le Corbusier, the firm designed housing and commercial projects, including the Municipal Asphalt Plant (1944, a designated New York City Landmark), that were generally consistent with ideas of the International Style. Kahn was a Fellow with the American Institute of Architects and served as president of the Municipal Art Society.

Kahn's Ideas and Work

Kahn's career spanned fifty years during which he became one of New York's leading architects. He ran a busy and efficient office organization and produced numerous office and loft buildings that helped change the face of the city during the busy years of the 1920s.

Kahn's early training at the Ecole des Beaux Arts emphasized the importance of planning in architectural design. The use of classical ornament to embellish modern buildings, which was also promoted at the school, struck him as unreasonable, however. It was mere "copying some prototype" rather than "designing buildings in a functional manner."¹⁷ He always considered planning to be the most important aspect of his work, stating that, "Ornament will never compensate for a poorly planned structure."¹⁸ Partly because they functioned so well, his commercial projects were successful investments and led to more such commissions.

When Kahn returned to New York after school, he found that most of the big aristocratic, architecture firms were designing important public and private work, but he was more attracted to the commercial developments of the period. Kahn admired the "quite competitive group of architects" who were working on commercial structures, rather than the established firms that were getting the large public commissions.¹⁹ Kahn felt that business owners could be innovative and were more likely to be open to new design ideas.

Public buildings unfortunately are the results of efforts to produce work that would satisfy the large mass of people...an important commercial building has the stamp of an individual, an architect, an owner with precise ideas and objectives.²⁰

Kahn's early work was typical of the period and of the type for which Buchman & Fox were well known: commercial loft buildings with simplified, but classically derived ornament. In Kahn's work of the late teens and early twenties, it is possible to see a gradual simplification and a movement away from the historicism that dominated American design for so long.²¹

After his visit to Paris for the 1925 Exhibition, Kahn was finally able to make a break with the past and his style evolved into a distinctive language of abstract, geometric designs that emphasized the surface of the building and its massing. He was particularly impressed with the Austrian and German Pavilions that he saw at the exhibit. His buildings reflect the expressive brickwork of the German and Dutch Expressionists of the late teens and early 1920s in the way he manipulates brick and terra cotta to give a strong sense of texture to his facades. For the first time, in his Ed. Pinaud Factory Building (1927, 214 East 21st Street), Kahn was able to successfully integrate the entire composition within a monumental classical framework, keeping the surface tension between the base, cornice and the intervening floors. Many of his most successful buildings in the following years were of this same type: a distinctive base, somewhat solid end piers that frame a more open center area, with some sort of strong articulation at the top, in the form of an unusual cornice or decorative band. This type of framework can be seen at the Film Center Building (1929, Ninth Avenue, a designated New York City Interior Landmark), the Indemnity Building (1928-29, 111 John Street) and the Holland Plaza Building (1930, Canal and Varick Streets). Within the overall frame, the tension between the horizontal and vertical members of the composition keeps the visual emphasis on the surface of the building.

The interlocked massing of the building is held together by the design and detailing of the exterior wall . . . Horizontal brick bands and major and minor verticals . . . keep the surface in tension: it is as if all the strands are always there just below the surface but weave in and out of view to produce the desired emphasis.²²

By the time he designed the small office building at 136 East 57th Street, Kahn had perfected this system to achieve a highly simplified grid that clearly met the requirements of the building, something he defined as the primary goal of the architect. According to Kahn, "The theory of the modern designer consists very simply in

the answering of a problem... the result should be no other than an honest solution.”²³ Between 1924 and 1931 Kahn designed more than thirty buildings and his designs changed the look of both the midtown garment district and the insurance district in downtown Manhattan.²⁴

2 Park Avenue Building

The office tower at 2 Park Avenue was conceived and constructed during this fertile period of design and building in New York.²⁵ The site at Park Avenue between 32nd and 33rd Streets was occupied by the dilapidated Park Avenue Hotel and had not been previously developed because there were unattractive transit car barns located directly across the street. In 1925 however, these were replaced by a large office tower designed by York & Sawyer. The ultimate use of the area was still uncertain, and the developers of 2 Park Avenue did not know whether they intended the building to be used for offices or manufacturing. They asked Kahn to design a building that could be adapted for use either as offices and showrooms, or for light manufacturing. Since it was built as a speculative investment, the owners wanted an appealing building to attract tenants, while giving them as large a return on their investment as possible. This type of speculative building coincided with the dominant forces of business and commercial enterprise in the 1920s, and the stylish Art Deco architecture was seen as giving expression to this power. Kahn was particularly adept at meeting the needs of commercial clients. He provided a fashionable building that would serve as its own advertisement and attract clients, while meeting the zoning requirements and fitting into the area where it was constructed. His buildings were fairly economical to construct, while still having large floor areas that could be adapted to changing business needs.²⁶

In an article in which he wrote about the economic considerations entailed in designing commercially successful skyscrapers, Kahn explained how he determined that at 2 Park Avenue a mostly square block, filling all three streetfronts with a light court in the rear would provide the largest possible and most adaptable floor areas for his client and the variety of needs of the possible tenants in the building. Kahn’s success was partly due to his concern for the bottom line and he noted in his writing that economic considerations were as important to a building as the plan and layout. He explained that no matter the design of the exterior, bankers had to be convinced of the economic feasibility of a new building before it would be constructed.²⁷ Kahn realized that the façade design was more a “question of clothing” because it all fits onto a steel skeleton.²⁸

While Kahn was concerned about the economics of a building project, he was first and foremost an architect, and he was involved in the design issues of his day. Kahn’s response to the question of what was modern architecture was that it should “represent its own time” and solve “each practical modern problem in the most direct and honest way.” “Our aim should be to create, not so much a new form of design, but a decorative quality which can only be linked with the particular material involved.”²⁹

Critic Lewis Mumford, writing in the journal *Architecture* in 1928 about modern design, pointed to 2 Park Avenue as one of the best examples. He stated that a good modern building should be, “The direct, economical expression of material and plan...” Further,

...To realize form-in-function, by its clear, lucid expression, is what constitutes the modern feeling... But we are still human beings ...and there must be something more [ie., a combination of structure and feeling] ...It is by utilizing new methods of construction and embodying a new feeling that our modern architecture lives.

The “something more” Mumford was searching for could be found at 2 Park Avenue, where he claimed, “structure and feeling are at last one.” This building achieved a “unique synthesis of the constructive and the feeling elements.” Kahn “kept the exterior and the interior in unity” with its “bands of sunny terra-cotta, broken and accentuated with red, green, bright sky-blue.” He integrated the mass and the decoration to create “the boldest and clearest note among all our recent achievements in skyscraper architecture.”³⁰

Kahn’s use of colored terra cotta on 2 Park Avenue, was a high point in the development of his ornamental vocabulary. Kahn wanted to replace the historically-inspired ornament of previous eras with broad areas of texture and color on his buildings. He advocated that, “Flat surfaces [should] take the place of the obsolete cornices and finally color in surfaces, in proportion to the distance from the observer, mark the accents that the artist desires.”³¹ Kahn also observed that instead of a profusion of ornament, a modern designer should “introduce in his work precisely that quality of interest that the musician understands by rhythm, accent or colour.”³²

This type of wall treatment was also being employed by Ralph Walker in his large telephone company buildings and reflects the ideas of the German and Dutch Expressionists who looked back to the early Gothic tradition in northern Germany for its expressive use of brick. The buildings from this period had a variety and richness to their surfaces that appealed to Kahn. At 2 Park Avenue, this texture can be seen in the spandrels under the windows of the central section that are set in an overall pattern of flat and projecting brick. The surface tension of the façade is displayed in the integration of horizontal and vertical lines. The rhythm Kahn was seeking is seen in the strong vertical emphasis achieved by the projecting triangular-shaped piers that extend from the third through the 17th story and again after the set-back, on the 18th through the 24th stories, reinforced and strengthened by the narrow piers between the windows. At the same time, balance is provided by the horizontal lines created by the window sills, the spandrels, and the bands of terra cotta that encircle the façade or that mark the corners below each setback. The broad, flat end piers frame the composition and serve to further anchor the building. Above the 17th story, the intersections of verticals and horizontals are indicated by blue terra cotta squares in the spandrels, emphasizing the effect of woven fabric. Kahn later admitted that in these designs, "I was thinking of the texture of fabric."³³ Panels of bright blue, red, green, yellow and black terra cotta, some plain and some molded with intricate patterns are integrated into the design. They are especially obvious near the top floors of each section making these sections stand out rather than recede with distance the way they would on other tall buildings.

Kahn had been trying to introduce color into his buildings for some time. He hoped that color would "supplement and maybe replace the play of light and shadow of traditional ornament...The possibilities of strong contrasts of colors eliminating futile carving and crockets, pinnacles and similar appendages of the early skyscraper are unlimited."³⁴ For the designs of 2 Park Avenue, Kahn consulted with colorist Leon Solon to determine the best choices. The building includes several different shades of brick assigned to separate parts of the façade, as well as actual colored terra-cotta panels. The brick on the flat end bays is a different shade from the brick on the triangular piers, and different again from the brick in the window sills and from the brick in the spandrels. "In place of the ornamental subject, the motifs are composed of silhouetted repeating forms, superimposed, each treated with a color."³⁵ Before the actual panels were attached to the building at 2 Park Avenue, Kahn had mock-ups created, and mounted them at an appropriate height, to see how the colors would appear at a distance, to make sure the effects would be what he wanted.

During his career, Kahn was also instrumental in the promotion of terra cotta as a viable and useful material for architectural ornament. He wrote a brochure for the Federal Seaboard Terra Cotta Corporation in 1930 promoting the material, called "Terra Cotta Futurities." He believed that,

The use of clay products in the entire field of surface texture and color is yet to be scratched. The development of the surface, the opportunity for light refraction, the beauty of low tones in delicate relief, will come with increasing interest to the designer as he appreciates their possibilities.³⁶

Kahn's work on 2 Park Avenue is a testament to the design possibilities of terra cotta and shows what a gifted architect could achieve with this material.

Description

The building at 2 Park Avenue is 28 stories high, with its main façade facing Park Avenue and secondary facades along both 32nd and 33rd Streets. There is a double-height ground story with retail storefronts on all three facades, all of which have been modernized. The building extends straight up from the base through the 17th story, where a set-back occurs. The building then extends from the 18th through the 25th story and is capped by a recessed, three-story penthouse and bulkhead. To the west, on both side facades are wings which bear similar arrangements and ornamentation, but are shorter. On the wings, setbacks occur after the eleventh story and the section ends above the seventeenth story. There is a small light court inset at the center of the western side of the building, not visible from any street elevation.

The Park Avenue facade is nine bays wide and is symmetrically arranged around a central opening at the ground story. Within the opening is a large recess faced with marble walls and a multi-colored decorative mosaic ceiling leading to a bronze-framed entrance. The entrance is composed of two sets of revolving doors flanked by additional, single, glass and bronze doors. Around the doors is an elaborate bronze enframingent and the whole composition is capped by a semi-circular glass transom with a decorative pattern of individual lights. A bronze wall directory is mounted on the south wall of the recess and there is a single bronze door on

each side wall, with a lighted sign above each opening. Non-historic lights are also mounted on each side wall. In addition, there is a non-historic door near the front of the north wall that leads to the adjacent storefront.

The base of the building is faced with light tan stone over a granite water table. All of the retail spaces are double height and have non-historic glass and metal storefronts. The next story above the base is distinguished by large display windows in each bay, some of which have a large central fixed sash flanked by narrow one-over-one sash and maintain the original decorative cast iron surrounds. It is difficult to see this floor because of the scaffolding that is currently in place. The tan stone continues as flat pilasters between the bays of this story except at the central bay that is set off by triangular piers and an entablature in a darker material. A projecting cyma reversa molding separates this story from the one above. At the third story the tan stone rises as flat piers between the four narrow windows of each bay and as slightly wider piers between the bays. This story is capped by a flat band of blue terra-cotta tiles (non-historic) that wraps around the entire building.

Above this blue band is the main body of the building. The outside bays on each side are faced in flat tan brick and are pierced by two plain, rectangular window openings on each story. (All of the windows have been replaced by one-over-one sash painted blue.) There are seven wide bays between these two ends, each with four narrow windows spaced closely together. Narrow flat brick piers separate the windows within each bay. Between the bays is a continuous pilaster that begins at the third story and continues through the 17th story, where the building sets back in both directions. These pilasters rise from a decoratively corbelled beginning between the bays of the third story and project from the façade in a shape that is triangular in plan. The spandrels of the windows in the central section are faced with decorative panels of brickwork in a slightly darker shade of tan. The bricks are laid alternately parallel to the façade and perpendicular to it, giving the impression of woven fabric.

At the top two floors of this section, the ornament proliferates to emphasize the end of the first section and the set-back that follows. The spandrel panels of the 16th and 17th stories are faced with colored terra-cotta tiles in green, blue, yellow and red in layered geometric designs. Above the windows of the 17th story, there are a series of yellow vertical projections within each bay that form a parapet that carries the eye upward toward the next section. The tops of the triangular piers separating each bay are faced in blue terra-cotta panels. The end bays of the top two floors are treated with a series of ochre-colored terra-cotta panels in geometric designs in deep relief, that are placed horizontally around each corner. These are capped by narrow layers of red, blue and black terra-cotta panels, some highlighted by yellow verticals.

After the setback above the 17th story, the building rises for eight more floors. On the lower five stories of this section, the window spandrels have blue terra-cotta panels set on a yellow ground, while the end bays are marked by textured, colored, horizontal terra-cotta bands. The spandrels of the 24th floor have panels of multi-colored terra cotta in a design similar to those on the lower section. Above the windows of this floor are more colored panels with vertical yellow projections. The end bays have horizontal terra-cotta ornamental bands at each level and the top two floors of this section have terra-cotta ornament similar to that on the lower section. After the 25th story, the building sets back again for the final section. The 25th floor is capped by more colored terra cotta on the end bays and stepped and layered panels of terra cotta over the central bays that extend up to form a parapet.

The facades on 32nd and 33rd Streets have very similar motifs to those on Park Avenue. The first seven bays extending from Park Avenue to the west are arranged like the Park Avenue façade: five bays, each with four narrow windows centered between two broad, flat end bays. Then the building extends for three more bays to the west, each bay having three narrow windows with a triangular pier between each and a narrow, flat brick end pier. All of these windows have the same decorative brick panel spandrels and the tall, triangular piers that extend from the third through the seventeenth stories. The arrangement and materials of the base are also the same as on the front facade. On the 33rd Street side, the fifth bay from Park Avenue has a secondary entrance door to the lobby. There are two sets of bronze and glass doors (one for a service entrance) set in a stone surround. There is another small entrance in the middle of the 32nd Street façade but it is no longer in use. In the two western bays of the 32nd Street side are two large vehicular entrances with roll-down gates for service and garage entrance.

The western façade of the building is somewhat visible over neighboring buildings on the 32nd street side. It is faced with plain brick and has plain, rectangular window openings. All of the window sash is non-historic.

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NOTES

¹ Paul Goldberger, *The Skyscraper* (NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 61.

² H.W. Corbett, Architecture, @ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, vol. 2 (Chicago, 1929), 275, quoted in Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Barclay-Vesey Building Designation Report* (LP-1745) (New York: City of New York, 1991), report prepared by David Breiner; 4.

³ Sheldon Cheney, *The New World Architecture* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1930). Both Kahn and Ralph Walker, prolific authors as well as architects, addressed this idea in articles in the architectural press.

⁴ Louise Huxtable, *The Tall building Artistically Reconsidered: The Search for a Skyscraper Style*, (Berkeley, CA, Univ. of California Press, 1992), 39.

⁵ Much of the information about Art Deco is adapted from: LPC, *Barclay-Vesey Building Designation Report* (LP-1745); LPC, *The Long Distance Building of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company Designation Report* (LP-1747) (N Y: City of New York, 1991), report prepared by David Breiner; LPC, *Western Union Building Designation Report* (LP-1749) (N Y: City of New York, 1991), report prepared by Betsy Bradley; LPC, *1 Wall Street Building Designation Report* (LP-2029) (N Y: City of New York, 2001), report prepared by Virginia Kurshan; Cervin Robinson and Rosemarie Haag Bletter, "The Art Deco Style," @ in *Skyscraper Style, Art Deco New York* (NY: Oxford University Press, 1975); David Gebhard, *The National Trust Guide to Art Deco in America* (NY: Preservation Press, 1996); and the Landmarks Preservation Commission research files.

⁶ Robinson and Bletter, 41.

⁷ Goldberger has suggested that because the architects were not experimenting with new technology, they were free to concentrate their efforts on the designs of the buildings.

⁸ Robinson and Bletter, 61.

⁹ Two examples of New York buildings in which this technique was used include: 21 West Street (a designated New York City Landmark) and the Film Center Building (630 Ninth Avenue, a designated New York City Interior Landmark).

¹⁰ Huxtable, 44.

¹¹ In the "Selected List" of Art Deco buildings, in Robinson and Bletter, there are 27 buildings listed for 1929 and 31 buildings listed for 1930.

¹² Information about Ely Jacques Kahn comes from the following sources: Kahn's unpublished autobiography at Columbia University; Françoise Bollack & Tom Killian, *Ely Jacques Kahn, New York Architect* (New York: Acanthus Press, 1995); "Ely Jacques Kahn, Leading Architect, Dies at 88," *New York Times* (Sept. 6, 1972); Henry H. Saylor, "Ely Jacques Kahn," *Architecture* 64 (August, 1931), 65-70; Robert A. M. Stern et al, *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars* (New York: Rizzoli, 1987), "Three Modern Masters," 551-558.

¹³ Autobiography, Chap. II, p.31.

¹⁴ The firm had been established in 1860 and had contributed designs to the Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia among many other projects. The firm had a series of name changes, depending on the current partners, just as its name changed again when Kahn became involved.

¹⁵ Autobiography, Chap. II, p.26.

¹⁶ Autobiography, Chap.II, p.31.

¹⁷ Autobiography, Chap. II, p. 9.

¹⁸ Autobiography, interview with Richard Chafee, n.p.

¹⁹ Autobiography, Chap II, p.18.

²⁰ Autobiography, Chap. I, p.2.

²¹ Kahn's earliest buildings for Buchman & Kahn include the Jay Thorpe Building (1921) and the Hospital for Joint Diseases (1925). By the time he worked on the Arsenal Building (1925, Seventh Avenue and 35th Street) his work was bolder and stronger than anything he had created to this point. Bollack & Killian, Introduction, vii-viii.

²² Bollack & Killian, Introduction. xi.

²³ Bollack & Killian, Introduction, vii-xii.

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- ²⁴ Stern, *New York 1930*, 552.
- ²⁵ New York City, Department of Buildings, New Building permit 625-1929, completed February, 1931.
- ²⁶ “The Office Building Problem in New York,” *Architectural Forum* (Sept., 1924), 94-96.
- ²⁷ Kahn, “The Economics of the Skyscraper,” *Architectural Record*, 298. In the case of 2 Park Avenue, the radical nature of Kahn’s design concerned the developers, who hired Raymond Hood to advise them about its suitability.
- ²⁸ “The Office Building Problem in New York,” 96.
- ²⁹ Kahn, “On the Use of New Materials,” in Bollack & Killian, 22.
- ³⁰ Lewis Mumford, “American Architecture To-day,” *Architecture* 57 (April, 1928), 181-188.
- ³¹ Kahn, “On Decoration and Ornament,” in Bollack & Killian, 21.
- ³² Ely Jacques Kahn, “The Province of Decoration in Modern Design,” *Creative Arts* 5 (Dec., 1929), 885.
- ³³ Bollack & Killian, Introduction, XI
- ³⁴ Autobiography, 23.
- ³⁵ Leon V. Solon, “The Park Avenue Building, New York City,” *The Architectural Record* 63 (April, 1928), 296.
- ³⁶ Susan Tunick, *Terra Cotta Skyline, New York’s Architectural Ornament* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997), 78.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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 2 Park Avenue Building has a special character and a 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 2 Park Avenue Building was designed by Ely Jacques Kahn, one of the foremost architects practicing during New York's highly productive building years of the 1920s and early 1930s; that this building, constructed 1926-28, is one of the most important examples in New York of Art Deco or Modern style architecture, a popular architectural style for commercial structures at this time; that the architect had traditional architectural training and began his career in the late nineteen-teens, when buildings were still being ornamented with historically inspired designs; that Kahn originally continued the traditional building practices of the time for loft and office structures, and those of his new firm Buchman & Fox, that had been established many years earlier; that by the mid-1920s Kahn was beginning to move away from traditional ornament, making his buildings stronger and more rational in their designs; that the displays he saw at the Exposition des Arts Decoratifs in Paris in 1925 changed his way of looking at design and drastically changed the work he produced; that through his work for manufacturing companies and on industrial design exhibits, he was highly influenced by the current technological advances and by products produced by industrial designers; that Kahn was also influenced by the work of the German Expressionists, experimenting with different ways to use brick and terra cotta to bring interest and texture to the façade; that his ornamental vocabulary was representative of the period's concern with movement and technology and included brick and terra cotta in abstract geometric patterns, sometimes inspired by native designs or suggestions of the warp and weft of fabric, and emphasized the surface tension inherent in steel-framed commercial buildings; that throughout his long career, Kahn produced many commercial structures in mid-town Manhattan as well as several noted factory buildings and several house designs; that he created some of the most unique and recognizable buildings of this period using the popular Art Deco style; and that the 2 Park Avenue Building is one of Kahn's most successful Art Deco structures and has a truly dramatic and distinctive presence on lower Park Avenue.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 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 a Landmark the 2 Park Avenue Building, 2 Park Avenue (aka 37-53 East 32nd Street, and 40-58 East 33rd Street), Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block, 862, Lot 29 as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair

Stephen Byrns, Roberta Brandes Gratz, Vicki Match Suna, Christopher Moore,
Richard Olcott, Thomas Pike, Jan Pokorny



2 PARK AVENUE BUILDING , 2 Park Avenue
Manhattan

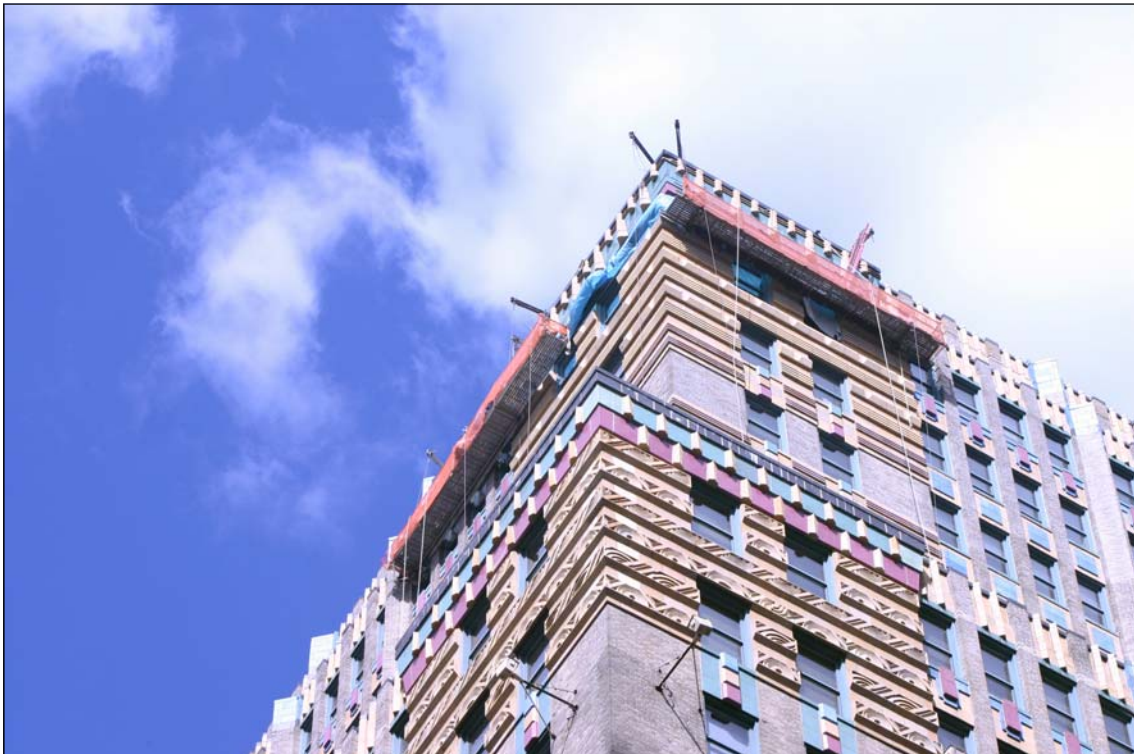
Photo: Carl Forster



2 PARK AVENUE BUILDING
33rd Street Façade
Photo: Carl Forster



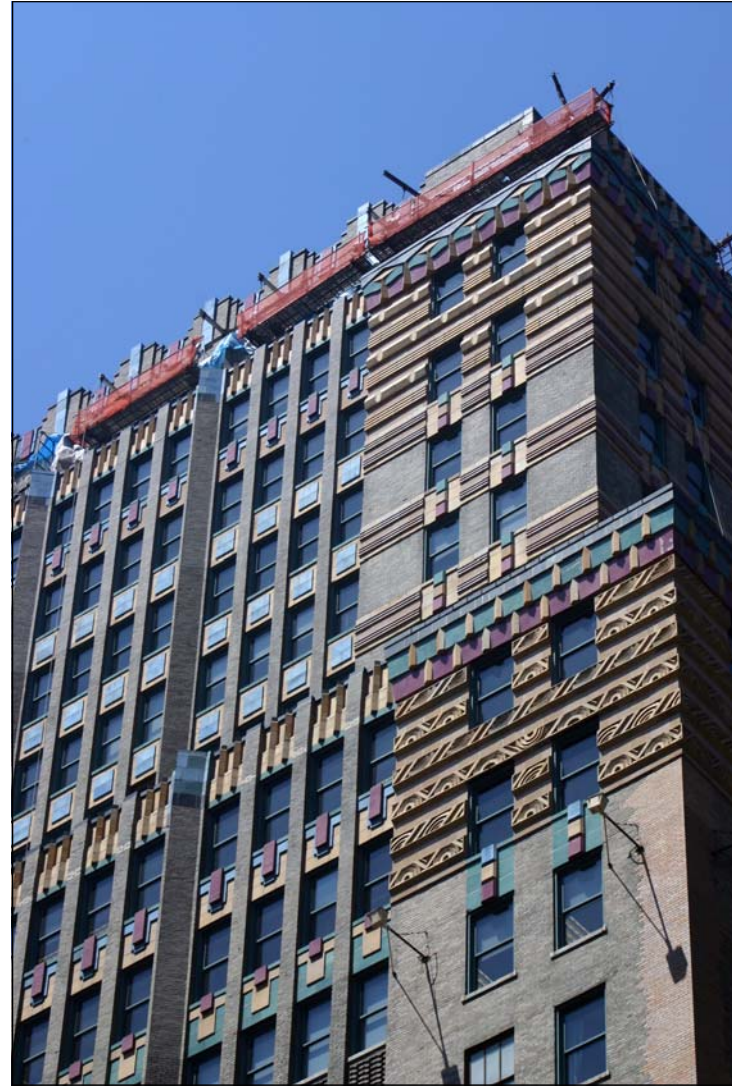
2 PARK AVENUE BUILDING
Terra-cotta details
Photos: Carl Forster



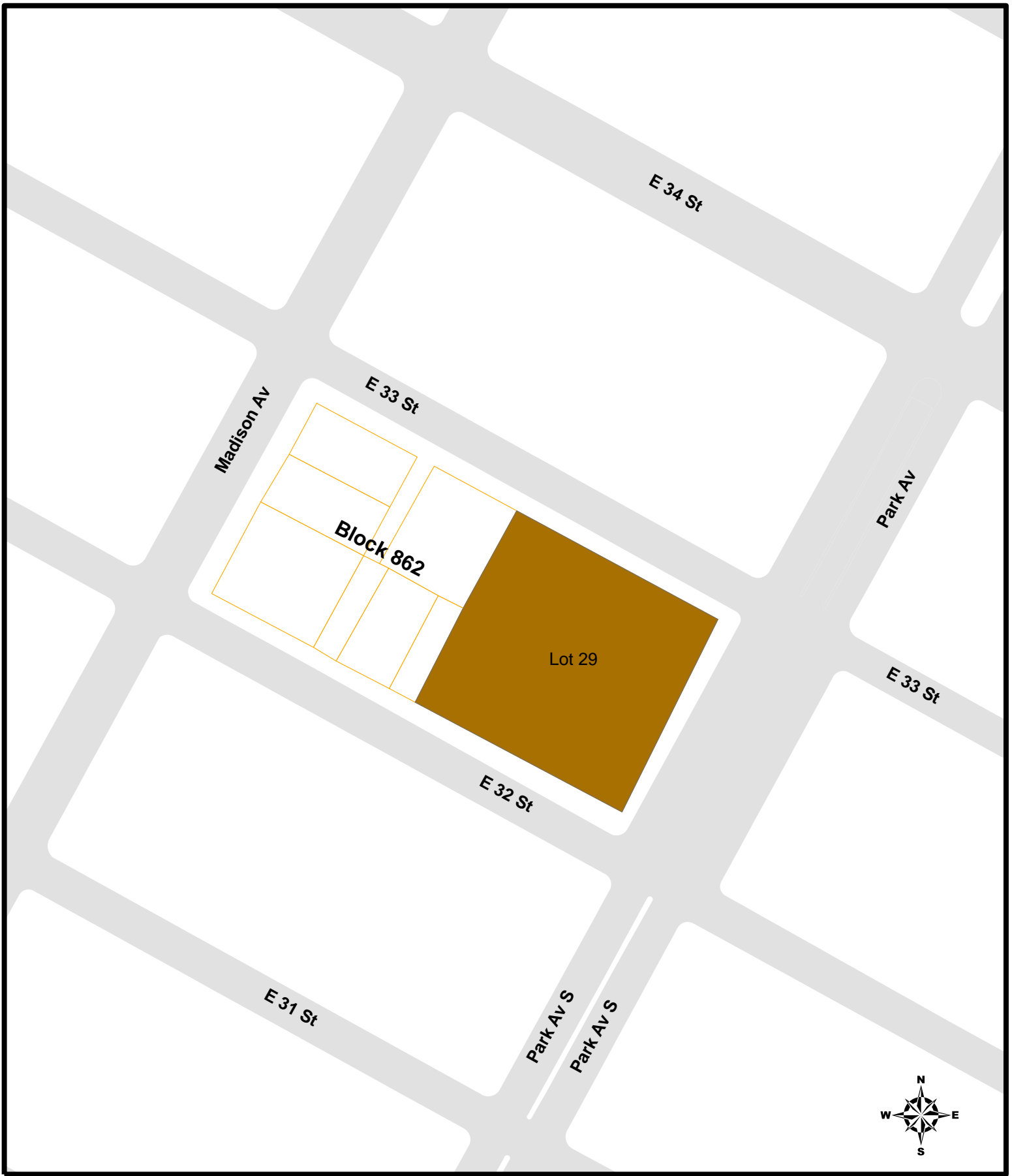


2 PARK AVENUE BUILDING
Details
Photos: Carl Forster





2 Park Avenue Building
Terra-cotta details
Photos: Carl Forster



2 Park Avenue (LP-2186), (AKA: 37-53 East 32nd Street, and 40-58 East 33rd Street), Manhattan.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 862, Lot 29

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 03C, December 2003