

Barkin, Levin & Company Office Pavilion

12-12 33rd Avenue, Long Island City, Queens
Tax Map Block 522, Lot 29 (in part)

Built: 1957-58

Architect: Ulrich Franzen

Style: Mid-20th Century Modern

Proposed Action: Propose for Calendar October 3, 2023



Entrance (east) facade, LPC, 2023




The Barkin, Levin & Company Office Pavilion is a distinguished example of mid-20th century commercial architecture. Located in the northernmost part of Long Island City, close to the Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park, it is a graceful minimalist pavilion set on a small, landscaped parcel enclosed by low brick walls, concrete walkways, and grass lawns. Of particular interest is the unusual structural system – nine steel pillars that support umbrella-like ceiling vaults that extend up and outside the glass walls, shading the pavilion. Praised by architectural historians, it has been called “by far the most elegant” post-World War II building in Long Island City, as well as a “tour-de-force of mid-century design hiding in plain sight.”

Ulrich Franzen designed the Barkin Levin factory complex in 1957-58. Born in Germany, he immigrated to the United States in the 1930s, where he attended Williams College, and after World War II, the Harvard Graduate School of Design. Following graduation, he worked with I. M. Pei for five years, opening his own office in 1955. The Barkin Levin Office Pavilion was one of the architect’s first independent works. In subsequent decades, Franzen worked in a vaguely Brutalist style, building prominent corporate and educational structures. Also of interest is his association with the Landmarks Preservation Commission. In addition to designing the first new building approved for an historic district, the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society Dormitory in Brooklyn Heights, he later served as a commissioner from 1992 to 1994.

Constructed for a manufacturer of women’s coats, *The New York Times* reported the facility was “the first major plant in the garment industry” to incorporate all stages of production. The pavilion was illustrated in a proposal to modify the New York City zoning code, as well as in newspapers and architectural journals. In November 1958, the Queens Chamber of Commerce awarded “first prize in the industrial class” to this “ultra-modern glass-wall clothing factory” building. Despite considerable praise, Barkin Levin closed the facility and began leasing the building to the Structural Display Company in 1961. In recent years, it has been occupied by the shipping firm DHL. Restored with some modifications in 2009, the pavilion retains its striking original form and many of its original features.



Legend

-  Proposed Landmark Site
-  Building Footprints
-  New York City Tax Lots

Address: 12-12 33rd Avenue
Landmark Site: Borough of Queens,
Tax Map Block 522, Lot 29 (in part)
Proposed for Calendaring: October 3, 2023

