

Furcraft Building

242-246 West 30th Street, Manhattan
Tax Map Block 779 Lot 66

Built: 1925-26

Architect: Henry I. Oser

Style: Neoclassical

Proposed Action: Proposed for Calendaring April 22, 2025



Furcraft Building, LPC, 2025

The Furcraft Building is uniquely evocative of the Manhattan neighborhood once known as the Fur District, and of New York's leading role in the international fur business during the 20th century. Opened in 1926 along a section of West 30th Street then known as "Furriers' Street," this 14-story building stands out for its dramatic, symmetrical massing and distinctive ornament, especially its grand entrance guarded by two handsome fox sculptures perched on tall plinths.

It was constructed as the city's fur center consolidated in the area south of Penn Station starting in the 1910s. By the mid-1920s, according to one contemporary account, New York's Fur District extended "over a score of streets on either side of Seventh Avenue.... Whichever way the eye turns in this section just above 23rd Street, it falls upon signs of industry—pelts large and small, pelts in bales and bundles ... ready for the skilled designer to fashion for the market." At this time, New York was "the greatest fur trade mart in the entire world," with about 50,000 people employed in the industry. More than 85% of the country's furs were made in New York, which was said to be capable, "at a week's notice," of providing "every man, woman, and child in the country with a garment of fur."

Plans for the Furcraft Building were announced in 1925, when a rendering of the structure was published in the *New York Times*. As it neared completion later that year, the trade publication *Fur Trade Review* called it "the very best" of the area's "modern fur buildings," offering "the 'last word' in beauty, comfort, and design." The journal noted that its developers were "practical furriers who know the furriers' needs, and this building is to be, in their minds, a monument to the progress of the fur trade." Its designer, Henry I. Oser, was an immigrant from Kiev who studied civil engineering at Columbia University. He designed several tall loft buildings in the Fur and Garment Districts as well as the neo-Gothic-style building at 191 Joralemon Street (1925), within the Borough Hall Skyscraper Historic District.

In the Furcraft Building, Oser skillfully blended the zoning code's setback requirements with the Neoclassical style. Most of its ornament is at the ground story, where a classical bronze enframingent, clock, and grand stone entrance surround with pilasters, garlands, a cartouche—and most memorably, two alert foxes—convey the building's function and importance. The original terra-cotta storefronts crowned by bracketed cornices with Vitruvian scrolls remain intact. Above the eighth story, the facade sets back, and a prominent Greek temple projects forward. The facade sets back twice more before ending at the 14th story, where a two-story tower framed by plinths projects above. Overall, the building is well-preserved, although most of its windows have been replaced.

By the 1990s, New York's fur industry had drastically shrunk as a result of warmer winters, changing fashions, the shift to overseas manufacturing, and the success of anti-fur publicity campaigns. Most Fur District buildings were adapted for other commercial tenants, or, by the 2010s, converted into residential buildings. Today, the Furcraft Building houses a variety of commercial tenants while continuing to serve as the monument its builders intended, to an industry in which New York once led the world.

