

Lefcourt Clothing Center

275 Seventh Avenue, Manhattan
Tax Map Block 801 Lot 1

Built: 1927-28

Architect: Buchman & Kahn

Style: Art Deco

Proposed Action: Proposed for Calendaring April 22, 2025



275 Seventh Avenue, LPC

Located at 275 Seventh Avenue between West 25th and West 26th streets in the Chelsea neighborhood of Manhattan, the Lefcourt Clothing Center is an impressive 27-story brick store, office, and manufacturing building designed in 1927 by Ely Jacques Kahn of the firm Buchman & Kahn for the Courtlef Realty Corporation. The building, which has setbacks starting at the 18th floor, features decorative metal window enframements at the second through fourth stories, which were originally showrooms, and ornamental brickwork throughout.

Born in New York City to a Jewish family of Austrian and French descent, Ely Jacques Kahn was one of New York's preeminent designers of Art Deco office towers. Kahn was known for his textured brickwork, abstracted decorative motifs, and monumental setbacks that artfully maximized a building's volume according to the 1916 zoning regulations. Many of Kahn's buildings, are designated individual landmarks, including Bergdorf Goodman, the Holland Plaza Building, and the 2 Park Avenue Building; his Film Center building is a designated interior landmark. Like these buildings, the Lefcourt Clothing Center stands out for its prominent location, on an avenue taking up the entire blockfront, and for its distinctive patterned brickwork.

Much of Kahn's work in the 1920s was for developers transforming Chelsea and Midtown West into the Garment District, with new tall buildings constructed to house offices, showrooms, and factories for the clothing and textile industries. The Lefcourt Clothing Center was built for prolific real estate developer Abraham E. Lefcourt. The building's early tenants were primarily manufacturing companies making men's and boy's clothing which had moved uptown from Lower Manhattan.

Notably, this site also became an important place for union activity when the International Ladies Garment Workers Union leased a floor for their health center in 1935 and then bought the whole building in 1945, converting multiple floors for use as health care facilities for union workers and renting other floors to commercial tenants. The ILGWU was a nationally significant union that played a key role in improving workers' wages and mounting ambitious social programs. It fought for improved working conditions and offered its members expansive educational, recreational, and health benefits, and became a leading example of what became known as "social unionism." After a number of mergers over the years, the union is now known as Unite Here, representing workers in the garment and hospitality industries. The union still owns the property today and operates its headquarters and a health center in the building to serve its members.

The Lefcourt Clothing Center has undergone minor alterations to the commercial storefronts, the addition of an aluminum cornice at the first floor, two minimally visible rooftop additions, and windows replaced by louvers throughout. These changes are typical of large buildings in the Garment District and do not detract from the striking brickwork and massing of this important skyscraper designed by one of New York's foremost Art Deco architects.

