

RICHARD ROTH JR., FAIA

4041 N 38th Ave.
Hollywood, FL 33021-1934

October 9, 2014

Vikki Barbero
Chair
Community Board Five
450 Seventh Avenue
Suite 2109
New York, NY 10123

Re: Park Lane Hotel Landmark Designation

Dear Ms. Barbero:

It is a pleasure to write in support of saving the Park Lane Hotel. I write not only in support of designating the Hotel as a landmark, but also in support of our greatest park, Central Park. The most important factor in big city living is not only the design of the structures, but also how they affect the light and air of the dwellers. Central Park is being brutalized by new GIANT structures being built along what use to be a wonderful walking boulevard called 57th street. The pleasure of walking to Carnegie Hall has all but been destroyed by the giant out of place new millionaire row housing. These new buildings are only affordable to the ultra-wealthy from mostly foreign lands.

The Park Lane Hotel was a real challenge to me as a young designer. Harry Helmsley was a very good client to the firm but a demanding perfectionist. I was asked to design a tall, for those days, hotel on the most perfect street in the city. This was the first hotel the firm (Emery Roth & Sons) had designed in New York City in several decades. This was a unique design at the time and very different from the other buildings that we were designing at the time. It is a very special building that I designed based on all of my experience with architecture from around the world. One of the demands was to optimize the park view from as many luxury rooms as possible. The height of the building was determined by the existing building and zoning codes. Being a commercial building, the height could be increased by providing a plaza which would increase the gross area. The Board of Standards and Appeals approved the building to be built along the lot line to be consistent with the neighboring buildings.

As I mentioned, I was a young designer still in my thirties. It was a real challenge to put my building along an avenue that had some of the most memorable buildings in the city, including The St. Moritz, Essex House and buildings designed by my Father and Grandfather, many to be landmarked later. Once the shape had been determined, my intention was to design the most elegant building possible. I used limestone as the major element facing the park so that the Hotel would be in cooperation with the buildings on its sides. I believed, and still believe, that buildings should be nice to their neighbors. I also broke the façade up in the classical way – it has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The beginning is the elegant first and second floors, including the tall archways for the first and second floors. The middle is the limestone pillars

rising to the top in curved archways mimicking the first two floors and ending the building the way it had started. The arches at the top of the building end it in an elegant classical tradition. I am very proud of this unique design. I believe the building stands out as our most important project of this era and needs to be preserved. It is also unique to other buildings designed at that time.

The first floor plan was important, as not only did it have to be an elegant lobby space, but it was also a passageway to 58th street. The 58th street entrance included a circular drive to allow hotel guests to enter undercover, and also allowed the vehicles to not block the through traffic on the street.

I am exceedingly proud of my design. There is nothing I would change some 45 years later. The building needs to remain as it is, which is one of the most elegant and profitable hotels in the city. There seems to be no need to build taller, except for the greed of the developer world. The developer has already destroyed one of the most beautiful hotels in the city, the Drake on Park Avenue, and replaced it with a building so tall that it casts shadows over Central Park and has made walking on 56th street a very unhappy experience.

I believe that the Park Lane Hotel, as well as Central Park South, should be landmarked and kept as is for future generations of New Yorkers and visitors. We cannot allow more damage to our environment. Light and air are needed in order to sustain a great city.

Sincerely,

/s/ Richard Roth Jr.

Richard Roth Jr., FAIA