

RED HOUSE, 350 West 85th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1903-1904;
Architects Harde & Short.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1246, Lot 53.

On November 10, 1981, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of Red House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 7). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. One witness spoke in favor of designation. There were two speakers in opposition to designation. Statements have been received supporting designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Red House, an exceptionally handsome apartment building, located at 350 West 85th Street near the southeast corner of West 85th Street and Riverside Drive, was built in 1903-04. An early building designed by the firm of Harde & Short, Red House takes its name from the color of the brick facing, which is set off by an abundant use of light-colored terracotta ornament. The architects, Herbert S. Harde and Richard Thomas Short, were well known for their deluxe early twentieth-century New York apartment buildings, which included the Studio, Alwyn Court, and the 45 East 66th Street apartment building--all New York City Landmarks. The detailing introduced on Red House, including the use of the salamander and crown motif, baldacchino canopies, and windows with multi-paned sashes organized in bays, were again used by Harde & Short in other apartment houses. This ornamentation recalls the sixteenth-century style of Francois I in its combination of Gothic and Renaissance elements.

Development of the Upper West Side

Until its urbanization at the end of the nineteenth century, the Upper West Side of Manhattan was referred to as "Bloomingdale." The name derives from the Dutch settlers who called the area Bloemendael in fond recollection of a flower-growing area in Holland. By the eighteenth century, Bloomingdale Road provided the main link between the city in lower Manhattan with the farmland of the Upper West Side. The Bloomingdale area itself retained much of its rural character until late in the nineteenth century. However, eventual development as an integral part of the city was assured by the Commissioners' Plan of 1811, which imposed the uniform gridiron plan of lower Manhattan upon the gently rolling hills of upper Manhattan. In the first half of the nineteenth century, several large institutions established themselves on the Upper West Side, attracted by the ready availability of land. By the 1850s, a number of hotels appeared, catering to Manhattanites during the summer months; in the 1860s, the increase in the permanent population was reflected in the construction of a public school built at 82nd Street and Eleventh Avenue (later West End Avenue) which was followed by Ward School No. 54 at 104th Street and Amsterdam Avenue.

By the end of the Civil War, it was apparent that the Bloomingdale area would soon be engulfed by the rapidly expanding city. Thus, it was proposed to modify the gridiron plan of 1811 for the protection and preservation of the Hudson River shore. Subsequently, a plan was submitted to convert the undeveloped riverside belt of precipice into a landscaped ornamental park for the West Side from 55th Street to 155th Street. Also included was the replacement in 1868-71 of

Bloomingdale Road by a wide avenue, with central grassy malls from 59th Street at Columbus Circle to 155th Street. The avenue was renamed the "Boulevard" and the "Public Drive." In 1899, the Boulevard and Public Drive were then changed to "Broadway" as a continuation of the older street south of Columbus Circle.

The residential development of the West Side was influenced by several factors: the Hudson River Railroad, which extended from New York City to Albany, opened several local stations in the Bloomingdale section, which led to further improvements in transportation for the West Side; and the speculative builders of the East Side, the city's fashionable residential district, began to look to the West Side as prices increased on the East Side and in Harlem. By the 1890s, the press was portraying the Upper West Side as a desirable residential area. As a result, the upper middle class began for the first time to take the area seriously.

The district to the east of Riverside Park as far as Central Park is likely, or rather, sure to become within the next twenty years, perhaps the location of the most beautiful residences in the world...the nearness of the parks and the accessibility of the district will be insurmountable in popularity.¹

Although lacking the old family traditions of Fifth Avenue, the Upper West Side attracted a number of the city's wealthy and affluent residents who appreciated the beauty of Riverside Park and Drive, and the atmosphere of the adjacent side streets.

The Apartment House

Throughout the nineteenth century, street after street in Manhattan became lined with rows of attached, single family dwellings, and the Upper West Side was no exception. To the well-to-do New Yorker, the private rowhouse represented an entrenched urban ideal, deriving from A.J. Downing's philosophy of one family per house.² This attitude is clearly expressed in James Fenimore Cooper's observation: "You know that no American who is at all comfortable in life will share his dwelling with another."³ By the turn of the century, however, the cost of purchasing and maintaining a rowhouse in Manhattan had become so prohibitive that New Yorkers were finally prepared to accept apartment living as a normal and healthy way of life.

As early as 1884, the Dakota, one of the most impressive of the early luxury apartment buildings had been constructed on 72nd Street and Central Park West. Unlike tenements and "French flats," the Dakota, along with other luxury apartment buildings erected on Central Park West, incorporated more stories and occupied a lot larger than 25 feet by 100 feet, thus allowing for brighter and more elaborately arranged interior apartments. Moreover, these luxury apartment houses were not intended for the working class (as with tenements and "French flats"), but rather for the wealthy New Yorker. These large apartment buildings, of which Red House is a fine example, offered wealthy families all the luxuries of a private residence, but at less cost. The apartment houses of the early twentieth century were designed by many of the most prestigious architects of the day and were elegantly detailed in a wide variety of styles, including neo-Gothic, neo-Renaissance, and French Beaux-Arts. The use of elaborate architectural ornament on the exterior of the building symbolized the grandeur and luxury of the style of living within.

The Architects

The architectural firm of Harde & Short was responsible for many deluxe apartment houses throughout the city. Several of these buildings still stand and are among the most distinguished examples of this type of design in the city. Herbert Spencer Harde (1873-1958) studied architecture in London. Returning to New York, Harde designed a number of tenement houses at the turn of the century. Between 1898 and 1900, he worked with both James E. Ware & Son and Ralph Townsend on tenements located on the Upper West Side. Harde was listed as the owner of these two properties. One of the earliest references to the architect Richard Thomas Short appears in I.N. Phelps Stokes' The Iconography of Manhattan Island; it concerns a 1900 housing exhibition in which Short won first prize for his model tenement design. Short also worked with James E. Ware & Son, serving as head draftsman. It was in Ware's office that Harde and Short met, which subsequently led to the establishment of their firm. One of the early buildings designed by the firm of Harde & Short was Red House in 1903-04. It is lavishly ornamented with features which occur in the later work of the firm. The Gothic window detail of Red House is quite similar to that used a few years later at 45 East 66th Street.

In 1903, the Eronel Realty Company commissioned Harde & Short to design Red House, located at 350 West 85th Street. The building was completed a year later. It is interesting to note that Eronel Realty Company is a subsidiary of architect Herbert Harde, and the "Eronel" is the reverse spelling of Mrs. Harde's name, Lenore. In addition, Mr. and Mrs. Harde lived in Red House well into the 1910s.

The next major work of the firm was No. 45 East 66th Street, erected in 1906-08. A landmark building, it is magnificently ornamented with terra-cotta detail similar to Red House. The most distinctive feature of No. 45 East 66th Street is its corner tower, which recalls Parisian apartment buildings of the time. Built in 1908-09, Alwyn Court at 182 West 58th Street was designed by Harde & Short in the neo-French Renaissance style and displays such characteristic features as the crowned salamander, the official symbol of Francois I. Alwyn Court was named for Alwyn Ball, Jr., a member of the syndicate responsible for this building as well as for another apartment house by Harde & Short, known as the Studio. Strongly Gothic in character, the Studio at 44 West 77th Street within the Central Park West-76th Street Historic District, was completed in the same year as Alwyn Court. The use of exterior terra cotta is one of the most characteristic features of this firm's work. These four apartment buildings all display notable terra-cotta effects, both to articulate the surface and to create striking architectural detail. Their mastery of this versatile material place Harde & Short in the forefront of their contemporaries in the use of terra cotta.

Short also worked independently of Harde and designed a variety of building types, including a police station (1907-08), which still stands on West 30th Street, and the Moorish style Kismet Mystic Shrine (1909) in Brooklyn. Despite the high quality of the designs executed by Harde & Short during the first decade of the twentieth century, little is known about the architects after this period.

The Design of Red House

An early example of Harde & Short's elaborate and luxurious apartment buildings, Red House established many of the recognizable elements which were to become the firm's calling card. The building indicates the acceptance of

the apartment building as a desirable housing form, and reflects the impact of this change in the physical development of the Upper West Side.

Inspiration for the design of Red House can be found in several historical sources. In sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Europe the construction of great estate houses with what were then considered to be "walls of glass," created styles which used massive bay windows and bay window units. In England, the Prodigy Houses, such as Longleat, Wallaton Hall, and Hardwick Hall, followed this pattern. In France, the sixteenth-century Francois I style was developed at Chambord, Fountainbleau, and in the chateaux of the Loire Valley, which also used large outward-looking window units and created a vocabulary of decorative elements which combined late Renaissance details with indigenous Gothic forms. The personal hallmark of Francois I was the salamander and crown.

Beginning in the mid-nineteenth century, there was a move away from Victorian Gothic design in England, which was reflected in the work of Richard Norman Shaw, Phillip Webb, William Nesfield, and E.W. Godwin. The designs of these architects displayed an interest in historicism which, though far from archaeological in its application, suggested a new freedom in the use of the vocabulary of the past applied to new building types of the present. This English movement had a strong influence on many American architects.

Harde & Short, in exploring the possibilities for design involving a new building type, the apartment building, used a bold combination of materials in a manner not unlike Shaw's own brick New Scotland Yard (1880-1890) in London. More importantly, they took for their own the decorative vocabulary of the Francois I style for use in a dense urban context. The resulting "luxury" of ornament became a standard for their work as well as for the building type.

The facade of the six-story Red House is organized into two pavilions, each with angled sides, flanking a slightly recessed central window bay. The lively detailing of the facade, based on a marked concern for historicism typical of much of the firm's work, is enhanced by a strong contrast of red brick and light cream-colored terra-cotta ornament.

The one-story entrance porch linking the two pavilions is formed by an arcade in the Francois I style, using both Gothic and Renaissance elements, as does most of the facade ornamentation. The bays of the entrance porch are formed by five-centered arches supported on compound piers with foliated capitals which carry a Doric entablature. A plaque above the center bay displays the inscription "Red House."

From sidewalk level, a solid stone base rises to the base of the facade windows. The first floor, second floor, and center bay of each pavilion are set off by terra-cotta and brick courses. Visually strengthening the pavilion corners are compound, full-height corner piers of pilasters framing rope-twist colonnettes. Tying together all the bays at each level and extending across the corner piers are projecting string courses. The unusual sixteenth-century style wood sash, which are heavy paired casements of eight panes each, are a major visual element of the facade. They are surrounded by heavy terra-cotta enframements variously detailed as pilasters, columns, and compound piers, as well as elaborate baldachino window canopies in a decorated Gothic mode at the third and fifth floors. Drip-molded window lintels enhance the windows in the angled sides of the pavilions, and terra-cotta spandrel panels link the windows at the first, second, fourth and fifth floors. The projecting square window bay is consistently framed on each floor by

pilasters, while the uppermost window is recessed, becoming a balcony in antis with Doric columns. Single panels centered between the top floor windows display the salamander and crown motif.

The facade is surmounted by an entablature composed of a corbeled frieze supporting a projecting cornice and an architrave broken by diamond-shaped panels which repeat the pattern of the window spandrels. Elongated brackets terminate in terra-cotta pendants which display the crown of Francois I and foliate motifs. The cornice originally carried a heavy terra-cotta balustrade, now removed. Also removed were angled piers at the corners of the roof, about eight feet high, which displayed terra-cotta panels of the salamander and crown of Francois I. Other alterations are the insertion of double-hung window sash in the eastern most angled side, a modification of some of the central window bay sash to accomodate interior remodelling, and the replacement of the front entrance doors.

Despite these exterior changes, Red House remains an exceptionally handsome architectural design, characterized by contrasting colors and materials and rich ornamental detail inspired by sixteenth-century French sources. An early design of Harde & Short, it is a major example of their work in the apartment building field. Its presence also recalls the development of the Upper West Side with apartment houses in the early years of the twentieth-century, and it is one of the finest surviving from this period.

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FOOTNOTES

1. New York Herald, August (?), 1908, quoted in: Landmarks Preservation Commission, Riverside Drive-West 105th Street Historic District Designation Report (LP-0323) (New York: City of New York, 1973), p. 3.
2. See A.J. Downing, The Architecture of Country Houses (New York: D.Appleton & Co., 1850), pp. xix-xx; also Sarah Bradford Landau, "The Row Houses of New York's West Side," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, 34 (March 1975), 19-20 for a discussion of the urban rowhouse.
3. James Fenimore Cooper, Notions of American Life, cited in Christopher Tunnard and Henry Hope Reed, American Skyline: The Growth and Form of Our Cities and Towns. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1955), p. 157.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

After careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Red House has a special character and aesthetic value and interest as part of the development and cultural character of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, Red House is an early design by Harde & Short and a major example of their work in the apartment building field; that it is an exceptionally handsome architectural design, characterized by contrasting colors and materials and rich ornamental detail inspired by sixteenth-century French sources; that the building is distinguished by its use of exterior terra cotta, one of the most characteristic features of Harde & Short's work; that Red House is one of the early luxury apartment buildings on the Upper West Side and as such stands as a monument to the evolution of this major housing type; and that Red House is one of the finest surviving apartment houses from the early years of the twentieth century.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21 (formerly Chapter 63) of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark Red House, 350 West 85th Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates the Tax Map Block 1246, Lot 53, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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- "Personal and Trade Notes: R. Thomas Short." Record and Guide, 96 (December 18, 1915), 1053.
- "The Red House Apartments." Architecture, 10 (November 1904), plate 94.
- Wurts Collection. /Red House Photograph/. New York Historical Society.



Red House
350 W. 85 Street

Built: 1903-04
Architects: Harde & Short



Built: 1903-04
Architects: Harza & Shurt

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