

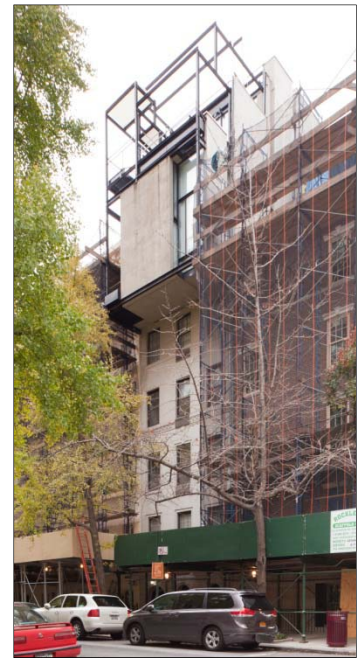
PAUL RUDOLPH PENTHOUSE & APARTMENTS, 23 Beekman Place, Manhattan.
Built late 1860s; facade altered 1929-30, Franklin Abbott, architect; penthouse and rear facade 1977-82, Paul Rudolph, architect.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1361, Lot 118.

On November 17, 2009, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a hearing on the proposed designation of the Paul Rudolph Penthouse & Apartments and the proposed designation of the related Landmarks Site (Item No. 5). Three people spoke in favor of designation, including representatives of Docomomo New York/Tri-State, the Historic Districts Council, and the Paul Rudolph Foundation. Community Board No. 6 took no position at this time and a representative of the owner of the property requested that the public record remain open for a period of thirty days.

Summary

Paul Rudolph, one of the most celebrated and innovative American architects of the 20th century, was associated with 23 Beekman Place for more than 35 years, from 1961 until his death in 1997. Trained at the Harvard Graduate School of Design in the 1940s, Rudolph was a second-generation modernist who grew dissatisfied with functional aesthetics but remained committed to exploiting industrial materials to create structures of great formal complexity. From 1958 to 1965, he served as chairman of the Department of Architecture at Yale University, where he designed the well-known Art and Architecture Building, now called Paul Rudolph Hall. Rudolph began leasing an apartment on the fourth floor of 23 Beekman Place in 1961, which became his full-time residence in 1965. He purchased the building in 1976 and converted it into five apartments in 1977-82, adding a remarkable multi-story penthouse that suggests a work of architectonic sculpture. *New York Times* architecture critic Paul Goldberger praised the steel-and-concrete design, calling it “a handsome composition, a neat arrangement of geometric forms that is visually pleasing in itself and a welcome addition to Beekman Place’s already long list of architectural styles.”¹ 23 Beekman Place was also home to actress Katharine Cornell. Dubbed by drama critic Alexander Woolcott the “First Lady of the Theater,” she purchased the building with her husband, director-producer Guthrie McClintic, in 1922 and lived here until the early 1950s. Although the elaborate multi-level interiors have been modified by subsequent owners, the exterior is virtually unchanged. Rudolph completed only six buildings in New York City. 23 Beekman Place stands out as one of his most personal and experimental designs, drawing on themes that he explored throughout his prolific career, as well as anticipating aspects of his later work in Southeast Asia.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Beekman Place

The Paul Rudolph Penthouse & Apartments is located on Beekman Place, a small residential enclave in the Turtle Bay section of Manhattan. Close to the East River, this street extends just two blocks, from Mitchell Place (aka East 49th Street), past 50th Street (aka Dunscombe Place), to 51st Street. Topography has always played a significant role in this neighborhood's appeal. Because the numbered cross-town streets end slightly to the east, for more than a century Beekman Place developed in quasi-isolation, standing above and apart from early industrial activities in the area, and construction of the United Nations, which began in the mid-1940s. Furthermore, due to the street's unique and secluded character, it attracted a continuously changing roster of prominent residents, from the late 19th century to the present day.

Beekman Place was first opened in the mid-1860s. Most of the property in the area was owned by Samuel W. Dunscombe, a former minister. Four-story houses, faced with brownstone and classical detail, were soon erected on both sides of the new street, as well as a stone retaining wall to separate the rear yards from a narrow piece of river front property that James W. Beekman and family continued to own. These single-family houses were similar to those along 48th and 49th Streets, in what is now the Turtle Bay Gardens Historic District; each building was 20 feet wide, with a continuous metal or wood roof cornice, as well as a stoop rising to the first or parlor floor. Early residents included author Henry Harland, who produced popular novels under the pseudonym Sydney Luska. In *Mrs. Peixada* (1886) he described the street's character:

Beekman Place, as the reader may not know, is a short, chocolate-colored, unpretentious thoroughfare, perched on the eastern brink of Manhattan Island, and commanding a fine view of the river, of the penitentiary, and of the oil factories of Hunter's Point.²

When Beekman sold the property, he promised that any future development would rise no higher than Dunscombe's retaining wall – about 40 feet.³ He also promised that “nothing could be built there considered dangerous, noxious or offensive.”⁴ In 1914, the estate's lawyers asked that these restrictions be nullified to allow improvements to the property. They claimed that commercial use was part of the “natural progress of the city,” but the New York State Supreme Court upheld the 1865 agreement, maintaining restrictions.⁵ Such litigation had a significant impact on Beekman Place; in addition to protecting views from the houses that faced east, these events brought the area increased attention and a large number of buildings were sold, substantially altered, or demolished.

Residential Beekman Place

Actress Katharine Cornell (1893-1974) and producer-director Guthrie McClintic (1893-61) acquired 23 Beekman Place in 1922.⁶ They purchased the former town house from Charles Schmid, who acquired it from Maria L. Higgins in 1906. It seems likely that one of these owners removed the stoop and divided the structure into at least two apartments, which were occupied in the 1910s by Schmid and four children, and Roger Howson, who later became chief librarian at Columbia University, as well as his wife, three children, and a governess.

Cornell and McClintic met in 1921 and married, forming a professional partnership that lasted four decades. Though relatively little is known about their private lives, they collaborated

on 28 theatrical productions, with Cornell in the lead roles. Critic Alexander Woollcott described her as the “First Lady of Theater” and she was often compared to such luminaries as Helen Hayes and Lynn Fontaine.⁷ McClintic rivaled Cornell in terms of his contribution to the New York stage, directing 94 theatrical productions, including both classic and contemporary works.

Architect Franklin Abbott was hired to “remodel” the front elevation in 1929, as well as the interiors.⁸ Simple neo-classical details were added to the facade, as well as round-arched windows at the base and rusticated stonework. It was probably at this time that a service entrance was added to the right side of the ground story, as well as a metal canopy to keep water from collecting in the areaway. The basement was also extended at the rear of the property and walls were built around the garden. According to the United States Census of 1930, McClintic and Cornell occupied the building with two servants, a butler and cook, and possibly, a single tenant. A visitor in the 1940s described their home as “veritable theatrical museum,” with Cornell occupying the third floor, and McClintic, the fourth.⁹ They moved to Palisades, New York, in 1951 and the house was sold two years later, in 1953.

In the 1920s, Beekman Place developed considerable cachet, attracting prosperous families and cultural figures, such as: John D. and Blanchette Rockefeller III at 1 Beekman Place (Sloan & Robertson, 1929); Noel Coward at 2 (1932); composer Irving Berlin at 17 (1929); landscape architect Ellen Shipman at 19-21 (Butler & Corse, 1920s); CBS executive William S. Paley at 29 (Eldridge Snyder, 1934); art critic and historian Walter Pach at 33 (redesigned by Harrie T. Lindeberg, 1925); and painter Max Ernst and Peggy Guggenheim at 39 (redesigned by John B. Thomas, 1925). Physical changes to the immediate neighborhood also contributed to an aura of exclusivity, starting with construction of the East River (now Franklin Delano Roosevelt) Drive in the 1940s. Built on landfill and pilings, this highway project eliminated commercial wharves and reduced local access to the waterfront. The city also acquired riparian rights to a section of the shoreline between 52nd and 53rd Streets and a pedestrian bridge was constructed above the highway, near 51st Street.¹⁰ This trend continued in the 1950s, with the completion of the United Nations Headquarters, which occupies a 17-acre site, south of 48th Street. Acquired from developer William Zeckendorf, a resident of 30 Beekman Place (Emery Roth, 1932), this large parcel had been occupied by tanneries, breweries, and slaughterhouses. The buildings at 860 and 870 United Nations Plaza, a mixed-use development with the apartment entrances facing 49th Street and Mitchell Place, were erected by the architects Harrison & Abramowitz in the mid-1960s. Like “Beekman House,” a neo-Gothic style apartment building at 439 East 51st Street (Treanor & Fatio, 1925) that stands at the street’s north end, this pair of sleek, bronze-colored International Style towers blocks views south and provides a sense of enclosure.

Paul Rudolph in New York City

Paul Rudolph was an important late 20th century American architect, with a close association with New York City. He moved his practice here at the height of his career, during the mid 1960s, when his tenure as chairman of the Department of Architecture at Yale University was coming to a close and his firm was embarking on many ambitious projects, including a large number in the metropolitan area.

Born in Kentucky in 1918, Rudolph received a Bachelor’s Degree in Architecture from the Alabama Polytechnic Institute, now Auburn University, in 1940. During the Second World War, he spent nearly four years as an officer in the U.S. Naval Reserve working at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, where he oversaw ship construction. For a brief period prior to the war (1941-42), and after, he attended the Harvard Graduate School of Design, where he studied with Walter

Gropius and Marcel Breuer, formerly of the Bauhaus. Rudolph graduated in 1947 and following travels in Europe, was active in Florida where he worked with the Sarasota architect Ralph Twitchell (1890-1978). The sleek, box-like houses that he produced were widely praised for their imaginative forms and sensitivity to the natural environment. Rudolph also worked for the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, collaborating with design curator Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., on the “Good Design” exhibition of 1952. Several years later, in 1955, he designed “The Family of Man,” organized by photography curator Edward Steichen. With more than five hundred images on display, this immensely popular exhibition included one of the museum’s most daring and memorable installations.

Rudolph maintained three architectural offices in the early 1960s: in New Haven, where he designed the controversial and now-celebrated Art and Architecture Building at Yale University; in Cambridge, Massachusetts; and Manhattan. His approach to design became increasingly sculptural and many projects were executed using textured concrete. Though most schemes in the metropolitan area remained unrealized, such as an audacious plan for the Lower Manhattan Expressway (1967-72) and a Graphic Art Center over the West Side Highway (1967-68), he did execute at least five other projects here: a townhouse at 101 East 63rd Street (1966), Manhattan; Tracy Towers (1967-72), 20/40 West Mosholu Parkway, the Bronx; Davidson Houses for NYC Housing Authority (1967-73), 810 Home Street in the Morrisania section of the Bronx; Middletown Plaza for the NYC Housing Authority (1967-73), 3033 Middletown Road in the Pelham Bay section of the Bronx; and 246 East 58th Street (1989-94), Manhattan.

His first office in Manhattan was located on the top floor of 26 West 58th Street, between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. Designed 1964-65, the interiors suggested a terraced garden with distinct and overlapping levels of interconnected workspace that anticipate the general layout of the penthouse. When the 58th Street building was demolished in 1969, Rudolph settled into a smaller space at 54 West 57th Street, near Sixth Avenue, where the alterations to 23 Beekman Place were planned.¹¹ In the early 1990s, he moved the office to 246 East 58th Street, which he designed and built as an investment. In his final years, he worked at 23 Beekman Place, where he converted his bedroom into a small atelier. During this period, most of his clients were located in Southeast Asia and local firms were responsible for preparing the final production drawings and overseeing construction. Rudolph died in 1997; in his *New York Times* obituary, architecture critic Herbert Muschamp discussed his evolving reputation and continued significance:

Mr. Rudolph leaves behind a perplexing legacy that will take many years to untangle. With the exception of Louis I. Kahn, no American architect of his generation enjoyed higher esteem in the 1960s . . . [he] wielded enormous influence over the direction of American architecture at mid-century. His buildings . . . were widely studied and imitated. In recent years, American architecture students too young to remember the 1960s have rediscovered Mr. Rudolph as a model of rare integrity. In 1993, at a lecture at the Cooper-Hewitt Museum in New York, he drew a standing room only crowd composed mostly of the young and held the audience spellbound, as if he were a visitor from a long-vanished golden age.¹²

In the introduction to a 2008 collection of architect’s writings, Robert A. M. Stern declared that Rudolph “possessed the greatest talent of his generation of American architects.”¹³

Re-designing 23 Beekman Place¹⁴

Rudolph began his three-decade association with 23 Beekman Place in 1961, leasing the fourth-story from Philomena Marsciano, of the Mariscano Foundation, which had purchased the building as an investment five years earlier.¹⁵ He was currently living in New Haven and probably used the 700-800 square foot apartment on weekends, or occasionally, as a workspace. It became his primary residence in 1965. Two years later, in 1967, *New York Times* reporter Barbara Plumb wrote: “This one-bedroom apartment may be small, but its influence is likely to be huge because the architect, Paul Rudolph, former chairman of the School of Architecture at Yale University, lives here.”¹⁶

In the mid-1970s, Manhattan’s real estate market was weak and Rudolph purchased 23 Beekman Place for \$300,000. Having already completed several significant alterations as a tenant, he wrote in *GA Houses*:

For approximately 15 years I have occupied an 800 square foot apartment overlooking the East River. During this period its constrictions were modified in various ways. Three small windows facing the river, Roosevelt Island, and industrial Queens (complete with its 40’ x 90’ neon signs) were replaced by a glass wall with doors opening onto a small terrace.

Though the text devoted considerable attention to the interiors, he concluded with this cryptic sentence: “The apartment no longer exists, but it was never more than a series of sketches, or studies, for other projects.”¹⁷ In saying this, Rudolph hinted at forthcoming changes, not only to his apartment but to the entire structure at 23 Beekman Place.

Initial plans for a \$120,000 alteration were filed with the Department of Buildings (DOB) in July 1976. Plan examiners expressed objections to the proposed height and the enlargement of the second, third and fourth floors by as much as 25 per cent. Alfonso Duarte, a Queens engineer, presented Rudolph’s case to the Board of Standards and Appeals (BSA), arguing that it was “not feasible or practical nor even economical to erect a new comparable structure on the site” and that by taking specific precautions it would actually improve safety. The BSA granted a variance in February 1977 and a DOB permit was issued in June 1977.

Donald Luckenbill, who was employed in Rudolph’s office from 1969 to 1982, served as project architect. Trained at Brooklyn’s Pratt Institute, he remembered 23 Beekman Place as an extremely challenging project that needed to be broken down into “manageable parts.” The rear was demolished and a new steel-and-glass facade was erected that extended out by as much as 17½ feet. Furthermore, the roof-top addition was carefully engineered to support multiple mezzanines, terraces, and cantilevers. At the front of the building, the cantilever projects approximately five feet, matching the depth of the areaway below. Some proposals, however, were rejected by DOB, such as a roof-top swimming pool and rooms without windows. Luckenbill met frequently with plan examiners during 1976 and 1977. He worked closely with contractor Marco Martelli, of the Omar Building Corp., of New Rochelle, as well as structural engineer Vincent J. DeSimone. Though the upper floors are the most conspicuous element, the first stage of work involved rebuilding sections of the brick sidewalls, which were determined unsafe. The penthouse was then erected during late 1977 and 1978 using “exceptionally light” steel supplied by East Bay Iron Works, located in the Hunt’s Point Section of the Bronx, and concrete block panels manufactured by Imperia Brothers, of Pelham Manor, New York.¹⁸

By the end of 1978, most of the interior work on the rental apartments was done and the materials needed for the penthouse were being raised to the fifth floor.¹⁹ The building received temporary certificates of occupancy throughout 1979 and 1980. So that the apartments could be

rented at market rates only five units were built. Two were duplexes at the rear of the building, spanning the ground and first floors, as well as the fifth and sixth floors. The penthouse, sometimes described as a quadriplex, was arranged on four interconnected levels. Entered from the main stairs near the west end of the sixth and seventh story, it contained a two-level guest suite on Beekman Place, as well as a private elevator. At the core was a large volume of space ringed by cantilevered floors, narrow bridges, open stairs, windows of varying dimensions, and terraces. In total, there were estimated to be seventeen distinct levels. A final certificate of occupancy was awarded in January 1982.

Rudolph would continue to rework the interiors (not part of designation) in subsequent years, often serving as his own contractor. Various completion dates have been proposed, including as late as 1988, when architect-critic Michael Sorkin called the penthouse “one of the most amazing pieces of modern urban domestic architecture produced in this county, a structure packing more finesse and design wallop in its compact volume than many architects manage to produce over entire careers.”²⁰

Architectural and Aesthetic Significance

Rudolph was a “second-generation” modernist. Trained at Harvard University in the 1940s, he studied with Bauhaus founder Walter Gropius but eventually grew dissatisfied with the so-called “International Style,” which he described as “monotonous” and “timid” as early as 1952.²¹ To Rudolph, functional aesthetics became a cliché after the Second World War and he said that “driving down Park Avenue [was] rather like flipping through the pages of a window manufacturer’s catalogue.”²² Though he never completely rejected this training, like his classmates Edward Larrabee Barnes, Victor Lundy and I. M. Pei, he saw modernism as “a base on which one could build, not merely a formula.”²³ Rudolph later remarked:

I think things grow, one thing from another, and develop, and retard and take side trips and whatnot. [International-style modernists] figured out a lot of things that give you a base to proceed.”²⁴

Rudolph’s once-distinguished reputation entered a slow period of decline in the 1970s – Post-Modernism (and the rediscovery of traditional ornament) was becoming fashionable. Despite trends, he remained strongly opposed to using historical forms, claiming as early as 1962: “neo-classicism is a dead duck. We have been through almost a decade of neo-classicism, which has nearly ruined American architecture.”²⁵

23 Beekman Place is a late work in Rudolph’s career that draws on themes that he explored throughout his life, as well as anticipating projects that he would design for Southeast Asian clients during the 1980s. At a time when many of his peers were drawn to stone surfaces with classical detail, he remained committed to experimenting with industrial materials to produce complex abstract forms. Consequently, this project ignored current fashion – not only would it provide him with a spacious residence and rental income, but it would demonstrate his continued vitality as a designer and the enduring relevance of architectural modernism.

In New York City, relatively few buildings have been designed and built by architects for their own use. Two significant 20th-century survivors can be viewed in nearby Turtle Bay, close to Beekman Place: the William Lescaze House & Office (1933-34, a designated New York City Landmark), and the Morris Sanders House & Studio (1934-35, a designated New York City Landmark). Like 23 Beekman Place, these pioneering modern works incorporate industrial materials that contrast sharply with their earlier row house neighbors. Architect Edward Durrell Stone, however, adopted a somewhat different strategy at 130 East 64th Street (1878/1958, part

of the Upper East Side Historic District), where he replaced the original masonry facade with a glass curtain wall disguised by a decorative concrete screen. This solution transformed the exterior without sacrificing some of the Victorian-era interiors, including a paneled Eastlake-style parlor.

While many mid-20th-century architects have been criticized for ignoring history and context, these issues did interest Rudolph. He wrote in 1962:

Le Corbusier's solution was to tear down Paris; Gropius tried to reduce planning to a few simple rules and principles; even Wright – not that he was an International Stylist – had nothing to suggest, except that we all move to the country. We have still to learn how to add to the evolving city without tearing down everything in sight . . . Most buildings should be background buildings, so to speak; only a few should stand out to stop a certain sequence ...²⁶

As an urban planner, Rudolph believed scale, rather than ornament, should be used to tie old and new construction together. He also felt that how a building is perceived from the street and sidewalk is as important as how it looks against the sky.²⁷

What sets 23 Beekman Place apart from earlier Rudolph designs was his decision to place a highly-conspicuous, multi-story addition on top of an existing structure. As a long-term tenant, he was familiar with Beekman Place and the neighborhood's historic fabric. In effect, he took an aging town house and turned it into a podium, fusing disparate aesthetics and building campaigns into a memorable late 20th-century modern design. Juxtaposing new construction with old, as well as steel, glass, concrete and masonry, it differs significantly from how most New York architects approached roof-top additions. When floors were added to row houses in the late 19th century, the original roof was sometimes replaced by a mansard, inspired by Second Empire French residences and palaces. Steep canted roofs, usually with large windows, were also popular, especially among artists and their patrons. In contrast, additions to most 19th- and early 20th-century office buildings were remarkably seamless, displaying almost identical materials and ornament.²⁸ One memorable exception to this pattern was the penthouse headquarters that I. M. Pei (in association with William Lescaze) designed for William Zeckendorf in 1952. Erected on the roof of the Webb & Knapp Building at 383 Madison Avenue (1920s), there was a floor of glazed office suites and terraces, as well as remarkable cantilevered circular pavilion. This eye-catching addition contained the developer's office and private dining room.

Penthouses appeal to New Yorkers because they offer increased privacy, superb vistas, cool breezes, and in many cases, substantial prestige. According to the *American Heritage Dictionary* (2000), the word is derived from the Latin *appendre*, meaning "to cause to be suspended."²⁹ It first appeared in the *New York Times* in 1924 under the headline "Homes on The Roofs: Penthouses Under the Sky Are Prized by City Dwellers, but Few Can Be Had."³⁰ More of these apartments became available in subsequent years, especially in buildings located near public parks and along the riverfront. Many incorporated terraces that were positioned on setbacks required by the 1916 zoning ordinance. After the Second World War, however, slab-like towers came into vogue and cantilevered balconies were much more common. These stacked outdoor spaces were initially large and well-proportioned, as at Manhattan House (1947-51, a designated New York City Landmark), but later examples provided considerably less square footage, with limited benefit to residents.

Rudolph's penthouse fits squarely into this tradition and was conceived as a private refuge, a place where he could escape from and observe the city. Designed to take full advantage of its elevated position, there are five distinct outdoor spaces on four staggered levels. The

largest terrace, located at the apex of the building, is L-shaped and opens to the sky. It faces east, providing exceptional views of the East River, Roosevelt Island, and Queens. Like an outdoor room, each space is enclosed by an exposed steel framework that functioned as a pergola. Hung with plants and vines, these natural elements were intended to provide a leafy camouflage, softening the structure's rectilinear character, while providing shade and visual privacy. Though Rudolph encountered some difficulty finding the right mix of greenery, towards the end of his life the vegetation, sometimes hung by gridded wires, was remembered as full and abundant.³¹

Architecture, Rudolph claimed, was a "serious game of space"³² and the spaces he created at 23 Beekman Place were intended to be as varied and challenging as possible.³³ It served as his private laboratory in which the layered interior organization is expressed on the exterior through the play of open and closed forms that project out, rise up, and recede from the street. Constructed with thin steel elements, these box-like silhouettes display similar proportions to the rooms they adjoin. This treatment recalls the Walker Guest House (1954) on Sanibel Island, Florida, which Rudolph considered one of his most successful early projects. To give this modest beach house increased visual coherence the gridded framework was painted white, but in the case of 23 Beekman Place the steel is brown, to contrast with the color of the concrete panels.

Concrete was an essential material in Rudolph's work. Though some of his best-known projects of the 1960s, such as the Art & Architecture Building at Yale, feature textured surfaces, here the rectangular panels were assembled from concrete blocks and coated with stucco to create a smooth, unbroken appearance. Arranged vertically, they appear to float weightlessly in front of the windows, allowing light to leak through the slender gaps that divide them. Most are lined up along the side elevations, but a large, nearly square panel fronts the terrace that extends over Beekman Place. Similar in texture and color to the lower facade, the panels toward the front of the building screen the windows, while creating a visual link between the penthouse and the floors below.

Rudolph frequently employed cantilevers in his institutional designs, but in a residential neighborhood it comes as a complete surprise. While it somewhat recalls the deep extended eaves that crown many of Frank Lloyd Wright's houses, in other instances it suggests the late, more sculptural work of the French-Swiss architect Le Corbusier, whom he especially admired. Rudolph wrote in 1954:

Why do buildings always have to flank the street? Why can they not sometimes be placed over the street, thereby forming an enclosure and a focal point? . . . the tyranny of the endless streets must end.³⁴

The penthouse hangs over the front areaway and interrupts the street wall, occupying vertical space that is commonly left open. He did this to provide a place for an external stair, to enlarge the guest suite, and perhaps, to make the penthouse even more visible from the street. As an added benefit, this feature increased privacy. In a 1986 interview, he said: "The fact of the matter is that because of the cantilevers you don't see into the building much. You see underneath the building."³⁵ The base of the cantilever is steel, except for two rectangular openings, one filled with clear glass and the other left empty. Like the transparent and reflective materials used throughout the apartment, the juxtaposition of solids and voids was intended to create a sense of dislocation and unease.

At the height of his career in 1967, Rudolph's varied production was justly praised in the *New York Times* for being "unpredictable" as he urged students and contemporaries to create structures that "give visual delight."³⁶ Though some neighbors on Beekman Place objected to the

penthouse and the views that were lost, his was certainly a unique solution that reflected a bold and distinctive architectural philosophy.³⁷ Abstract and minimal, open and closed, classical and industrial, 23 Beekman Place has a strong sculptural quality – a quality rarely found in Manhattan’s residential streetscape.³⁸

Subsequent Owners

Following Rudolph’s death in 1997, 23 Beekman Place was sold to Gabrielle and Michael Boyd in 2000.³⁹ They converted the four apartments and penthouse into a single-family residence in 2001. Though some writers praised their alterations, others strongly criticized changes to the interiors. The current owner, Rupert LLC, purchased the building in 2003. The architects Jared Della Valle and Andrew Bernheimer began renovating the building in 2004, undertaking structural work and exterior renovations.⁴⁰

Description

The Paul Rudolph Penthouse & Apartments is located at 23 Beekman Place, on the east side of the street, between 50th Street and 51st Street. Approximately 20 feet wide, the structure has two distinct sections: a five-story masonry structure and four-story roof-top addition that cantilevers over the sidewalk, as well as the rear yard. The front (west) facade is visible from Beekman Place and 50th Street, and the rear (east) facade is visible from Peter Detmold Park, as well as the FDR Drive.

The rusticated **ground story** is set below grade and incorporates three round-arched openings. Reached by steps, the left (north) opening is slightly wider than the two windows and serves as the entrance. Above the door, attached to the keystone, is a non-historic glass-and-metal lighting fixture, flanked by simple decorative reliefs. There is an Adamesque wood-paneled door, probably dating to 1929-30, with an arched transom that incorporates scalloped details similar to those that crown each window. The mullions and wood details are painted black. To the right of the door is an oval plaque, sponsored by the New York Landmarks Preservation Foundation. To the right of the south window, a small metal camera is attached near the top of the wall. Between the ground story and first floor is a continuous flat metal awning supported by four metal columns, probably dating to 1929-30. The metal is painted black, though the underside is painted white. Above the center window, the awning is interrupted and part of the air conditioning unit is visible. Attached to the north column is a metal tube to drain water. Metal railings parallel the sidewalk, as well as along the north and south edges of the areaway.

The **second story** has three nine-over-nine windows, set in recessed frames, with shallow decorative metal screens at the bottom. The **third, fourth, and fifth stories** have non-historic double-hung windows. The third-story windows have sills and prominent keystones that meet the raised scalloped cornice that extends between the third and fourth stories. On the third story, the sill below the center window has been removed and replaced by a recessed air conditioning unit. The center windows on the fourth and fifth stories are treated in a similar manner.

The penthouse begins at the sixth story and cantilevers above the sidewalk. It is constructed with exposed steel I-beams and metal panels, painted brown. It has floor-to-ceiling windows, screened by rectangular concrete block panels, with non-historic metal coping. There are multiple panels along the north and south elevations, and a large, single panel facing Beekman Place. The base of the cantilever has small openings on the left and right side. The left side has a metal grate and the right has been left completely open. Above the concrete panel, at the sixth story, is a wide terrace with stairs on the left side ascending to the uppermost terrace

and mezzanine. To shade the stairs, the framework above it is filled with what appears to be tinted plexiglas.

The **rear facade** faces east, overlooking the East River. It is framed with painted steel and is entirely glazed. Each floor has a shallow terrace that extends the full width of the building. The **south facade** is partly visible from 50th Street and Beekman Place, and points to the southeast. The west section consists of vertical concrete panels of various widths, separated by small gaps, the rest of the facade is mostly faced with stucco. Single rectangular windows are visible near the east end, on the fourth, fifth, and sixth floors. The widest window, consisting of slender vertical mullions and glass panes, extends across the east side of the seventh floor. A slender vertical strip of windows, near the center of the south facade, extends from the seventh to eighth floors. The **north facade** is partly visible from Beekman Place, and points to the northeast. Near the west end, the penthouse levels are enclosed with concrete panels, steel, and glass. The east end is less visible and features cage-like steel framing.

Researched and written by
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NOTES

¹ Paul Goldberger, "Architecture: Show of Rudolph's Work," *New York Times*, July 5, 1979, C14.

² Sidney Luska, *Mrs. Peixada* (1886), 22, viewed online at books.google.com.

³ "Old Restriction on Part of Famous Beekman Farm Prevents Improvement of Two River Front Blocks," *New York Times*, December 6, 1914, RE1; "Realty Trials of Beekman Estate," *New York Times*, February 29, 1920, W21; "Latest Dealings in Realty Field," *New York Times*, July 29, 1922, 18.

⁴ "Realty Trials of the Beekman Estate," *New York Times*, February 29, 1920, W21.

⁵ As a result, the parcel was sold in 1922 and a one-story, 460-foot-long garage (John J. Dunnigan, architect) was erected by the American Yellow Taxi Cab Company. "1 Beekman Place; A Rockefeller Co-op and Its 460-Foot-Long Garage," *New York Times*, October 1, 2000, viewed online at nytimes.com.

⁶ "Guthrie McClintic Dead at 68; Broadway Producer-Director," *New York Times*, October 30, 1961, 29.

⁷ "Katharine Cornell is Dead at 81," June 10, 1974, viewed at <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/general/onthisday/bday/0216.html>.

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- ⁸ Department of Buildings, Block 1362, Lot 18, ALT 1059-29.
- ⁹ Isabella Taves, *Successful Women and How They Attained Success* (1943), 50, viewed at books.google.com.
- ¹⁰ “City to Get Rights On The East River,” *New York Times*, January 18, 1940; “Closed East Side Park,” letter to *New York Times*, June 19, 1952. The park is now called Peter Detmold Park, honoring a co-founder of the Turtle Bay Association. According to the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation, land for the park was acquired in three stages, between 1942 and 1951. For more on this park, see: http://www.nycgovparks.org/sub_your_park/historical_signs/hs_historical_sign.php?id=12365
- ¹¹ Robert A. M. Stern, Thomas Mellins, David Fishman, *New York 1960* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1997), 569-71.
- ¹² Herbert Muschamp, “Paul Rudolph is Dead at 78, Modernist Architect of the 60s,” *New York Times*, August 9, 1997, 50.
- ¹³ Robert A. M. Stern, forward to *Writings on Architecture: Paul Rudolph* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 6.
- ¹⁴ This section is mainly based on conversations with Ernst Wagner and George Balley (June 2010), Donald Luckenbill (June 11, 2010), and Marco Martelli June 14, 2010). Also see: “An Architect’s Home Was His Modernist Castle,” *New York Times*, June 21, 1988, A1; *New York 1960*, 564; and Robert A. M. Stern, David Fishman, Jacob Tilove, *New York 2000* (Monacelli Press, 2006), 937-38.
- ¹⁵ In 1960, the *New York Times* reported that the new owner would convert the building into apartments. “Dwelling Changes Hands,” *New York Times*, January 13, 1960, 36. Also see *GA Houses*, December 1978, 106.
- ¹⁶ “Paul’s Pacesetter,” *New York Times*, July 23, 1967, 188.
- ¹⁷ “Paul Rudolph,” *GA Houses*, (December 1978), 106.
- ¹⁸ “Manufacturer’s Statement” submitted to Department of Buildings, November 27, 1978. Files, Paul Rudolph Foundation.
- ¹⁹ Donald Luckenbill, letter to Marco Martelli, September 29, 1978. Files, Paul Rudolph Foundation.
- ²⁰ Michael Sorkin, “The Light House,” *House & Garden* (January 1988), 89.
- ²¹ “Regionalism in Architecture” (1957) reprinted in *Writings on Architecture*, 38.
- ²² Rupert Spade, *Paul Rudolph* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1971), 14.
- ²³ “Three New Directions” (Summer 1952), reprinted in *Writings on Architecture*, 8.
- ²⁴ Interview with Robert Bruegmann, 1986, 53, viewed at <http://www.artic.edu/aic/libraries/research/specialcollections/oralhistories/rudolph.html>.
- ²⁵ “Paul Rudolph cites old principles as bases for analysis of today’s work,” 1962 interview with Jonathan Barnett, reprinted in *Writings on Architecture*, 83.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ Robert Bruegmann, “Architect as Urbanist, part 1,” viewed at <http://places.designobserver.com>.
- ²⁸ Noteworthy commercial buildings with major additions that are designated landmarks include: the Bennett Building (Arthur D. Gilman; 1872-73, addition by James M. Farnsworth, 1890-94), the Morse Building (Silliman & Farnsworth, 1878-80, addition by Bannister & Schell 1901-2), the *New York Times* Building (George B. Post, 1888-89, addition by Robert Maynicke, 1903-5), and the Pierce/Powell Building (Carrere & Hastings, 1890-92, addition by Henri Fouchaux, 1905).
- ²⁹ *The American Heritage Dictionary* (2000) viewed online at <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/penthouse>.
- ³⁰ “Homes on The Roofs,” *New York Times*, February 24, 1924, XX2.
- ³¹ Interview with George Balley, 2010.

³² Willem Dudok quoted in “Changing Philosophy of Architecture,” reprinted in *Writings on Architecture*, 14.

³³ During the period that Rudolph worked at Yale University in the early 1960s, he owned an 1855 house on High Street, which he altered and enlarged, anticipating some of the changes to 23 Beekman Place.

³⁴ “Changing Philosophy of Architecture,” reprinted in *Writings on Architecture*, 16.

³⁵ Interview with Robert Brueggemann, 1986, 32.

³⁶ David Jacobs, “The Rudolph Style: Unpredictable,” *New York Times*, March 26, 1967, 226; “Changing Philosophy,” 19.

³⁷ Critic Paul Goldberger gave Rudolph’s design a mixed review but observed that it “has been strongly criticized by its neighbors, who seem to have forgotten that their street is a mix of styles put together over time.” See Paul Goldberger, *The City Observed* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 149.

³⁸ In 2006, Colin Davies included 23 Beekman Place in *Key Houses of the Twentieth Century* (Laurence King Publishing, 2006), viewed online at Googlebooks.com. Also see Alice T. Friedman, “Your Place or Mine? The Client’s Contribution to Domestic Architecture” in *Women’s Places: Architecture and Design 1860-1960* (2003), 83, viewed online at books.google.com.

³⁹ Patricia Leigh Brown, “Toil and Trouble in Plexi-Land,” *New York Times*, December 3, 1998; Bonnie Schwartz, “A Modern Masterpiece Becomes Child’s Play,” *New York Times*, May 4, 2000, F1; Mildred F. Schmertz, “A Constructivist Masterpiece Rescued,” *Architectural Digest* (December 2001), 162; and David Hay, “The Beautiful Headache,” *New York Magazine* (October 1, 2006), viewed online at nymag.com.

⁴⁰ At this time, a feud began with the owner of the adjoining property at 19-21 Beekman Place, who erected a wide brick wall along the north edge of the roof, blocking views of, and from, the Rudolph-designed penthouse. Following litigation in New York State Supreme Court, the owner was fined by the Department of Buildings and removal of the wall began in 2009. Also see “Brick Walls, And Bad Blood,” *New York Times*, January 16, 2005, K1; “Tear Down This Wall! Beekman Place Townhouse Hits Market for \$25M,” *New York Observer: Real Estate*, March 11, 2009, viewed online.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Paul Rudolph Penthouse & Apartments at 23 Beekman Place has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that Paul Rudolph, one of the most celebrated American architects of the 20th century, was associated with 23 Beekman Place for more than 35 years, from 1961 until his death in 1997; that he trained at the Harvard Graduate School of Design and was a second-generation modernist who grew dissatisfied with functional aesthetics but remained committed to exploiting industrial materials to create structures of great formal complexity; that he served as chairman of the Department of Architecture at Yale University from 1958 to 1965, where he designed the well-known Art and Architecture Building, now called Paul Rudolph Hall; that he began leasing an apartment at 23 Beekman Place in 1961 and it became his full-time residence in 1965; that he purchased the building in 1976 and converted it into five apartments in 1977-82, adding a remarkable multi-story penthouse that suggests a work of architectonic sculpture; that architecture critic Paul Goldberger praised the steel and concrete design, calling it a “handsome composition” that is a “welcome addition to Beekman Place”; that this building had been also home to actress Katharine Cornell, who *New York Times* drama critic Alexander Wolcott dubbed the “First Lady of the Theater;” that she lived here with her husband, the noted theater director-producer Guthrie McClintic, for almost thirty years; that although the Rudolph’s elaborate interiors have been modified by subsequent owners, the exterior is virtually unchanged; and that 23 Beekman Place stands out as one of the architect’s most personal and experimental works, drawing on a wide range of themes that he explored throughout his career, as well anticipating aspects of his subsequent work in Southeast Asia.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 (formerly Section 534 of Chapter 21) of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Paul Rudolph Penthouse & Apartments, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1361, Lot 118, consisting of the land beneath 23 Beekman Place, as its Landmark site.

Commissioners:

Robert B. Tierney, Chair

Pablo Vengoechera, Vice Chair

Frederick Bland, Diana Chapin, Joan Gerner, Michael Goldman

Margery Perlmutter, Elizabeth Ryan, Commissioners



Paul Rudolph Penthouse & Apartments
23 Beekman Place, Manhattan
Photo: Christopher D. Braze, 2010



Paul Rudolph Penthouse & Apartments
Beekman Place, entrance
Photo: Christopher D. Braze, 2010



Paul Rudolph Penthouse & Apartments
Beekman Place, main facade
Photo: Carl Forster, 2007



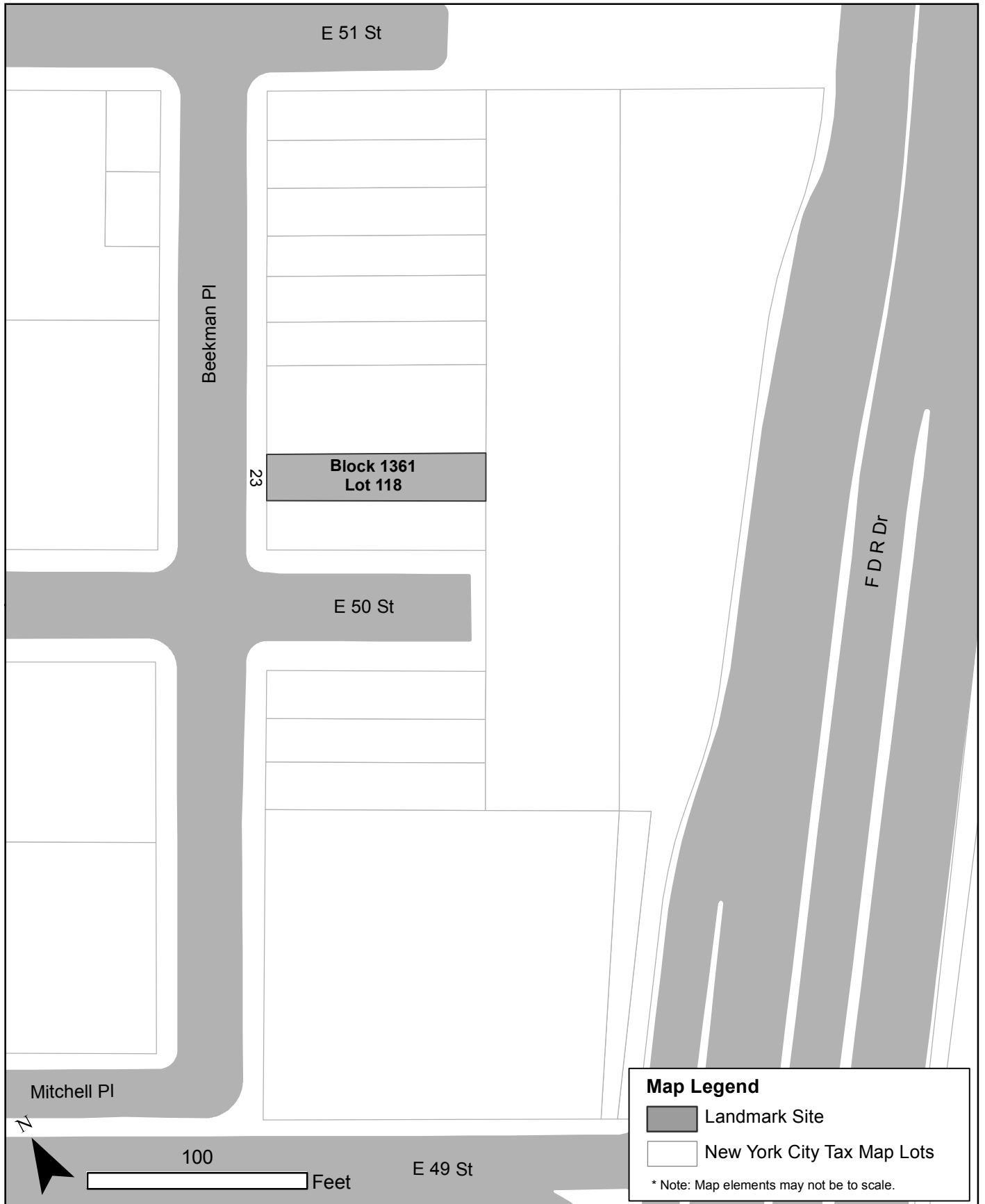
Paul Rudolph Penthouse & Apartments
Beekman Place facade, from the north
Photo: Carl Forster, 2007



Paul Rudolph Penthouse & Apartments
East facade, facing Queens
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2010



Paul Rudolph Penthouse & Apartments
South facade, facing 50th Street
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2010



PAUL RUDOLPH PENTHOUSE & APARTMENTS (LP-2390), 23 Beekman Place
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1361, Lot 118

Designated: November 16, 2010