Landmarks Preservation Commission
March 22, 2011, Designation List 440
LP-2420

JAPAN SOCIETY HEADQUARTERS, 333 East 47th Street (aka 327-333 East 47th Street), Manhattan. Built 1969-71, Junzō Yoshimura and George G. Shimamoto, of Kelly & Gruzen, architects; expanded 1992, 1995-98, Richard L. Blinder, of Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1340, Lot 16.

On June 22, 2010, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Japan Society headquarters and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. A letter from the Vice-President of Japan Society was read in support of designation, and two people spoke in favor of designation, including representatives of Docomomo US New York/Tri-State, and the Historic Districts Council.

Summary

The headquarters of Japan Society, earlier called Japan House, is located in the Turtle Bay section of Manhattan on the north side of East 47th Street, close to First Avenue and the United Nations. Founded in 1907, Japan Society functions as a cultural and educational institution, as well as a forum for dialogue between Japanese and American business leaders. Junzo Yoshimura, a leading Japanese architect during the second half of the 20th century, was responsible for the building's handsome horizontal design, in partnership with George G. Shimamoto, of the firm Kelly & Gruzen. In addition to being Yoshimura's only work in New York City, this building is likely to have been the city's earliest permanent structure designed by a Japanese citizen. A life-long resident of Tokyo, Yoshimura was closely associated with the Rockefeller family throughout his career; he built an exhibition house in the garden of the Museum of Modern Art in 1954, as well as two structures at the Rockefeller estate in Pocantico Hills. John D. Rockefeller 3rd was president of Japan Society from 1952 to 1978. He and his wife Blanchette Rockefeller donated the site and likely played an important role in Yoshimura's selection as architect. Yoshimura started to prepare his design in 1967 and construction was completed in 1971. While some of Yoshimura's earlier American projects followed Japanese tradition, for this building he pursued a more contemporary approach, re-interpreting familiar Japanese elements in such industrial materials as bronze and painted concrete. His elegant yet restrained charcoal-colored design was praised and received a "Certificate of Merit" from the New York Society of Architects in 1972. In the 1990s, Beyer Blinder Belle supervised a sensitive renovation and expansion of the building that added a fifth story on 47th Street but left much of Yoshimura's original plan intact. Japan Society is a conspicuously serene work of late modernism. In a city where buildings often compete for attention, Yoshimura's muted design is remarkably timeless, reflecting Japan's unique architectural heritage and the Society's mission to serve as a venue for international exchange.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Japan Society

Japan Society was established in May 1907 during a visit by Japanese General Baron Tamesada Kuroki to promote "friendly relations between the United States and Japan" and to provide a "more accurate knowledge of the people of Japan, their aims, ideals, arts, sciences, industries, and economic conditions."[1] The Society was part of a broader trend reflecting increased American interest in, and contact with, Japan. New York City's Japanese population increased gradually during the second half of the 19th century, reaching more than 1,000 in 1900. To serve this community, several organizations were formed, including the Japanese Christian Institute, the Nippon Club, and the Japanese Mutual Aid Society. Initially, Japan Society's activities were of a social nature; it published books on Japan and organized events, such as luncheons and lectures at the Hotel Astor (demolished) in Times Square, where a roof-top Japanese garden and teahouse were installed in 1912.[2] Many notable New Yorkers served on the original executive committee, including Stewart L. Woodford, Jacob H. Schiff, August Belmont, and Seth Low.

Membership in the society reached 1,300 in the 1920s. To help support "educational work," an endowment was created with substantial contributions from Japanese donors. Interest, however, declined during the Depression years and activities ceased in response to Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. A formal peace treaty between the United States and Japan was signed in San Francisco in September 1951. John D. Rockefeller 3rd (1906-78), eldest son of John D. Rockefeller Jr. and Abby Aldrich Rockefeller, was in attendance and was elected president of a revived Japan Society in March 1952. Four years later, he founded Asia Society and the two organizations would occupy an elegant International Style building – known as Asia House – that Rockefeller financed at 112 East 64th Street (now the Russell Sage Foundation, part of the Upper East Side Historic District). Located between Park and Lexington Avenues, the $1.168 million building was designed by Philip Johnson. Faced with dark glass, the 1959 structure featured offices, an auditorium, and garden.

Planning a new headquarters

Japan Society quickly outgrew Asia House. With a staff of ten and approximately 1,500 members, outside facilities were frequently needed for weekly meetings, educational programs, and storage. Executive director Douglas W. Overton wrote in May 1965:

> In short, the Japan Society barely has adequate space to maintain its current program and any further development in our activities would appear to be impossible until this problem is solved.[3]

In an assessment of present and future needs, Overton made a strong case for erecting an independent headquarters with room for additional offices and cultural activities. Though a more ambitious scheme, housing a small group of related organizations, was contemplated, in the end the directors favored a solution that would create a singular focus on the Society. Overton promoted the project as a unique architectural opportunity:

> The Japan Society – and Japan – deserves a really significant building, and I feel that we should be prepared to employ a great architect to do the job. Japan has several world-famous architects (for instance, [Kenzo] Tange and [Junzo] Yoshimura), none of whom yet has a building in New York.[4]

Next, the Space Committee commissioned a study by consultant Philip Van Slyck. He advised acquiring a 60 by 100 lot where a large structure could "strengthen" their current program and perhaps "entertain" new challenges. In aesthetic terms, he thought it should be:

> . . . designed in the Japanese style, with the participation of a leading Japanese architect. It would be the first building in New York designed by a Japanese architect in the Japanese manner. Japan deserves such a monument in New York, and the Japan Society can be the means of providing it.[5]

Funding, Van Slyck believed, could be more easily raised because this approach "will be far more appealing to Japanese business and other leaders who may be expected to contribute to its construction and, perhaps, to some areas of program development."[6] The committee supported this view and in January 1966 the board of directors approved his recommendation that the Society "design a permanent headquarters . . . to provide for necessary growth in quality and quantity of program."[7]

At least four Manhattan sites received consideration, including a parcel on East 64th Street that would have allowed Asia House to expand.[8] A 100 by 100 foot site on the north side of 47th Street, near the corner of First Avenue, offered significant advantages. Not only was this lot nearly twice as wide as the rest, but it was praised for having a "nice prospect" across Dag Hammarskojld Plaza, and towards the United Nations.[9] Cross & Brown, a realty company, praised the location: "When the subject plot is improved with the proposed structure, this street, with its width, will be one of the most attractive in the entire United Nations area."[10]

At the time, the site contained three five-story apartment buildings, as well as a small commercial structure. John D. Rockefeller 3rd, who lived two blocks away at 1 Beekman Place, agreed to purchase and donate the site in 1966. The land transfer was finalized in 1968 but more than a year passed before all of the tenants were persuaded to relocate.[11]

East 47th Street

Japan Society is located in Turtle Bay, an area that remained mostly undeveloped until after the Civil War. With the opening of the Second and Third Avenue Elevated Railways around 1880, the long blocks east of Lexington Avenue began to fill with single-family residences, modest apartment buildings, and commercial structures.[12] Following the Second World War, the United Nations Headquarters (1946-53) was built in Turtle Bay. Located along the East River, between 42nd and 48th Streets, this large waterfront site had been assembled by developer William Zeckendorf with the intention to create what he called a "Dream City" but John D. Rockefeller Jr. persuaded him to sell, thus guaranteeing New York City's position as world capital. In subsequent decades, many private organizations with an international purpose gathered in the vicinity, including missions erected by foreign governments, as well as the Institute of International Education (1964), the Carnegie Endowment International Center (1953, demolished), and the Ford Foundation (1965, a designated New York City Landmark and Interior).

To create a ceremonial approach to the United Nations complex, various streets were modified. A tunnel was submerged beneath First Avenue and city construction coordinator Robert Moses took steps to create a 160-foot-wide boulevard along 47th Street, stretching two blocks, from First to Third Avenues. Though a broad concourse was proposed in 1947, leading to the headquarters' north end, only a single block was realized, extending from First to Second Avenue. The buildings on the south side of the street were condemned and demolished. Construction began in 1951, with two directions of traffic and a central divider, as well as a park or esplanade, measuring more than 70 feet. This block-long open space would attract frequent

public demonstrations and was renamed Dag Hammarskjold Plaza in 1961,[13] honoring the Swedish diplomat who served as the second Secretary General of the United Nations.[14]

These municipal projects, however, had limited impact on the street's north side, which was gradually redeveloped in the 1960s. The first structure built was the United Engineering Center (Shreve, Lamb & Harmon, demolished) at 345 East 47th Street, completed in 1961 on an L-shaped parcel at the corner of First Avenue. Unlike the current apartment building at 845 United Nations Plaza, which faces First Avenue, the Center's entrance was located on 47th Street. Directly west of Japan Society, at 315 East 47th Street, stands the Roman Catholic Church of the Holy Family (George J. Sole, 1962-65), sometimes called the United Nations Parish.[15]

The Architects

Junzo Yoshimura (1908-1997), chief designer of Japan Society, was a major figure in 20th-century Japanese architecture. A year before construction began, the Australian architect-critic Robin Boyd wrote, that Yoshimura was:

> . . . like his buildings: gentle, gray and impeccably civilized. He and they represent a subtle blend of tradition and modern that erases international cultural boundaries not so much by drawing the modern West into Japan as by disseminating the Japanese essence into the modern West.[16]

Identified by Overton as one of two leading candidates in mid-1965, Yoshimura did not become officially involved until late 1966. Born in Tokyo, he trained in the Architecture Department of the Tokyo Arts College (now Tokyo Geijutsu Daigaku) and as a student was associated with the Czech architect Antonin Raymond (1888-1976). Following graduation in 1931, he joined Raymond's Tokyo practice. For a brief period in 1940, Yoshimura lived in New Hope, Pennsylvania, where Raymond operated a school, and helped design, fabricate, and supervise installation of a teahouse at the short-lived Japan Institute, on the 36th floor of the International Building at Rockefeller Center.[17] A year later, an American oil embargo was launched against Japan and Yoshimura returned home. He designed approximately 237 houses, as well as many structures for Japanese cultural institutions, such as the Aichi Prefectural University of Fine Arts (1966-71), the Nara Prefectural Museum (1972) and the Hall of Chamber Music, Yatsugatake (1988) in Nagano.[18] For much of his career, Yoshimura taught architecture at his alma mater and in 1995 was recognized by Japan's prime minister as a "Person of Cultural Merit."

The Rockefellers traveled to Japan in 1951. Though their primary purpose was to accompany John Foster Dulles and negotiate a final peace treaty, John D. Rockefeller 3rd and his wife, Blanchette Rockefeller (1909-92), met with Yoshimura and invited him to design a Japanese-style house for the Museum of Modern Art, which his mother helped establish two decades earlier. Among members of the Rockefeller clan, they held the longest and closest ties to Japan, returning frequently throughout their lives. Arthur Drexler, the museum's curator of Architecture and Design, would spend two months in Japan during 1953 "making arrangements to have the house designed and shipped here."[19] Like Yoshimura's earlier tea house at the Japan Institute, the so-called "Shofuso" was constructed with traditional techniques, then disassembled, and reassembled in the museum's garden where it was displayed in 1954-55. Following the closing of the exhibition, the house was moved to Philadelphia's Fairmount Park, where it can be visited today.

Yoshimura projects in the New York metropolitan area included an "Oriental style" ticket office for Japan Airlines (1956, in association with Rado & Raymond) in Rockefeller Center, a branch of the Takashimaya department store (1958, in association with Rado & Raymond), and the Motel on the Mountain complex (c. 1957, in association with Steinhardt & Thompson) in

Suffern, New York.[20] Yoshimura designed two structures at the 1,500 acre Rockefeller estate in Pocantico Hills, north of Tarrytown, including a small teahouse "along the order of the Katsura garden pavilions." Blanchette Rockefeller oversaw the project, in consultation with Arthur Drexler. Fabricated by the Nakamura Komuten firm in Kyoto, work was completed by 1964.[21] A subsequent commission at the Rockefeller estate, built 1972-73, was a two-story Japanese-style residence for Governor Nelson Rockefeller and Happy Rockefeller. Begun shortly after completion of Japan Society, Yoshimura worked in partnership with George G. Shimamoto, of Gruzen & Partners. Rolland D. Thompson (b. 1921), formerly of Steinhardt & Thompson, knew both architects. He joined Gruzen as an associate partner in 1964 and may have suggested that Shimamoto collaborate with Yoshimura on Japan Society.

Born in Japan, Shimamoto (1902-94) immigrated to California in 1918. Trained as an engineer at Polytechnic College in Oakland, after a brief stint working with architect Oliver W. Thorton, he designed Buddhist churches in San Jose, San Francisco, and Oakland. Like thousands of Japanese and Japanese Americans, Shimamoto was interned during the Second World War. Following his release in 1944, he moved east and became a draftsman with the architects Kelly & Gruzen. Established by B. Sumner Gruzen and Hugh A. Kelly in Jersey City in 1936, this firm was responsible for many notable structures, especially in and around Manhattan's Civic Center. Shimamoto remained with the firm (later called the Gruzen Partnership, now Gruzen Samton) for the duration of his career, serving as general manager, and rising to partner. Fluent in Japanese, he also advised the team that restored Yoshimura's house in Fairmount Park in 1975 and 1987.

Design and Construction

In May 1966, Japan Society's building committee met for the first time. Issues included how to raise funds "over and above what we hope to receive from Mr. Rockefeller and the Japanese side" and "how to proceed in selecting an architect."[22] In subsequent months, Yoshimura was invited to prepare a "feasibility study" for the site. When he travelled to New York in December 1966, he met with Shimamoto, who had been hired "to ensure compliance with New York licensing requirements."[23] Yoshimura would return at least four times – in July 1967, May-June 1968, September 1969, and July 1970.

As principal designer, Yoshimura developed the overall concept during 1967 and early 1968. Initial plans divided the building into two sections, with a low horizontal structure paralleling the sidewalk and a five or six-story structure at the rear. Though the character of the design was quite similar to what was ultimately built, in this scheme the layout was reversed, with the entrance to the east and a third-story garden offering views towards the United Nations. This arrangement reflected Van Slyck's recommendation that public and private activities be separated, but this awkward early design lacked balance and visual coherence. James L. Stewart, who replaced Overton, became executive director of Japan Society in July 1967. He played an important role in the process, as did MoMA curator Arthur Drexler, who acted as an informal advisor. Though Drexler urged the building committee to "go forward" with Yoshimura's plan in January 1968, John D. Rockefeller 3rd and Blanchette Rockefeller expressed reservations about the "smallness of the building" and the interiors, as late as April 1968. The design was subsequently modified and Blanchette Rockefeller phoned Stewart in June 1968 to say she was "thrilled" by the changes, calling the "new design . . . lovely."[24]

Drawings for Japan House were submitted to the Department of Buildings in March 1969, with subsequent revisions in early 1970. The estimated cost, including land, was $4 million. Continuous bands of concrete divide the main elevation into four horizontal sections. These unornamented black bands serve distinct purposes: to shade the first story, to provide a

balustrade for each terrace, and above the fourth floor, to suggest a cornice. At the rear of the second floor, to the east, was originally a Japanese-style garden, and to the west, private conference rooms.[25] The smaller third and fourth floors were planned as office space and a row of private offices along 47th Street adjoin a shallow terrace, enclosed by bronze-colored sun screens.[26] To brighten these spaces, the terrace ceilings were painted white. A windowless fifth floor, which was originally set back from the main elevation, was used for machinery. The lower level contained a reception area and auditorium, seating 262 people.

It appears that, at the very least, Yoshimura was directly responsible for such first floor elements as the metal "komoyose" or fencing, the door pulls, and wood ceiling grilles. The balance of blueprints was prepared by Gruzen & Partners (formerly Kelly & Gruzen), with Irving L. Levett as project manager. Demolition began in July 1969 and ground was broken in September 1969.[27] In attendance were Japan's foreign minister Kiichi Aichi and John D. Rockefeller 3rd, who spoke about the Society's role as a "bridge" between the two nations. The Turner Construction Company served as builder, with Severud-Perrone-Sturm-Conlin-Bandel, and Cosentini Associates, as engineers. Construction spanned approximately 16 months and was mostly complete by June 1971.[28]

Staff began to occupy Japan House in April 1971 and the official opening ceremony took place on September 13, 1971.[29] In attendance were Prince and Princess Hitachi, the Japanese emperor's younger son; the Japanese ambassador to the United States, Nobuhiko Ushiba; John D. Rockefeller 3rd; and Yoshimura, among others. Yoshimura wrote: "I hope that the House will play its full role in promoting understanding between the United States and Japan."[30] On the cover of the event's program, a black-and-white photograph highlighted the distinctive metalwork at the base of the facade. A subsequent brochure described the building as "the new headquarters, conference center, and facility for exhibits and performing arts."[31]

Yoshimura's design received a positive response from media. Leah Gordon, an arts columnist for the *New York Times*, wrote shortly before the opening on September 5, 1971:

> In an area replete with UN Missions and consulates, this building has no seals, no mottos and is distinguished only by a slanted, 3-foot iron fence . . . It is soon apparent that this is no customary New York architectural atrocity but a sedate, jewel-like structure that, in its quiet way, commands attention.[32]

Japan Architect observed in August 1972:

> It is not only the facade screens, the lattices, and the bamboo inside the building that makes this a rare example of Japanese-style architecture in New York City. The scale of the building and the simple, but abundant, use and variation of space too are typical of the Japanese approach to architectural design.[33]

Later that year, in December 1972, the New York Society of Architects awarded Yoshimura's design a "Certificate of Merit."[34] The *Architectural Record* commented that the headquarters:

> Adds quiet a dollop of civility to Dag Hammarskjold Plaza. Its exterior is quiet, nicely scaled and guardedly transparent: fleeting glimpses of the interior are afforded through bronze anodized aluminum screens, and the glass entrance doors.[35]

In 1978, the authors of the *AIA Guide to New York* described the building as "Japan's public architectural emissary to the City of New York. Delicately detailed, inside and out."[36]

Architectural Significance

From the start, Japan Society was characterized as "the first building of contemporary Japanese design to be built in New York City."[37] This label was frequently adopted, by the Society in its various publications, as well as in tourist guides. American interest in Japanese architecture and aesthetics originated in the mid-19th century. Pavilions, sponsored by the Japanese government to display cultural objects and promote commercial goods, were erected at various international expositions, such as in Philadelphia (1876), Chicago (1893), San Francisco (1894), and St. Louis (1904). Constructed by visiting Japanese craftsman, these structures were conceived to "pander to the Western desire for a smorgasbord of exotic "oriental" effects."[38] In New York City, several notable structures and interiors were executed in the Japanese style at the start of the 20th century. Two were by Brooklyn architect John J. Petit (1870-1923): a house at 131 Buckingham Road (1902) in the Prospect Park Historic District, and the Air Ship Tower (c. 1903, demolished), a popular ride at Steeplechase Park in Coney Island. In 1915, the celebrated "Hill and Pond Garden" was created at the recently-established Brooklyn Botanic Garden. An early example of a Japanese style garden in the United States, it was designed by landscape architect Takeo Shiota, who immigrated here in 1907.

Japanese architecture has often been presented as a precursor to 20th-century European modernism. Featuring simple abstract forms, standardized components and flexible floor plans, the German refugee architect Bruno Taut (1880-1938) traveled in Japan during 1933 and would publish several influential studies on the nation's built environment. When MoMA erected Yoshimura's "House in the Garden" in 1954, architecture critic Lewis Mumford wrote in *The New Yorker* that it demonstrated "how much beauty can be achieved merely by quiet repose, by selection and elimination, by stripping every human requirement down to its essentials."[39] Despite considerable praise, few Japanese architects received commissions in the United States and what structures were built made greater reference to Japan's past, than current trends.

Yoshimura was most likely the first Japanese citizen to design a permanent structure in New York City. Prior to the introduction of air travel, the only Japanese active in the city's architectural community were immigrants, for instance Iwahiko Tsumanuma, who worked with Takeo Shiota and practiced in the United States under the name Thomas S. Rockrise,[40] and Yasuo Matsui, who collaborated on the design of the Manhattan Company Building (1928-29) and the Starrett-Lehigh Building (1930-31),[41] and consulted on the Japanese pavilion at the 1939 World's Fair. Since World War II, the number of Japanese architects active in New York has increased slightly, including Fumihiko Maki, who worked as a draftsman at Skidmore Owings & Merrill in the mid-1950s, and is architect of 4 World Trade Center, now under construction at 150 Greenwich Street. Other works by Japanese architects in Manhattan include the 2004 addition to the Museum of Modern Art (Yoshio Taniguchi) and the New Museum of Contemporary Art (SANAA, 2003-7).

Simultaneous trends shaped Yoshimura's serene design. During the 1950s, Japan began to rebuild its devastated cities. Though architects were influenced by modern functional aesthetics, developed at the Bauhaus in 1920s Germany, others sought solutions that would express Japan's unique cultural identity and heritage. In the first chapter of *New Directions in Japanese Architecture*, Robin Boyd wrote in 1968:

> . . . almost every step the modern Japanese [architect] takes shows his awareness of tradition and his deliberate attempt to rid himself of shallow imitation of it . . . Even if the modern architects can escape the historical trimmings and associations, the introversion and the withdrawal, their historical background is still alive with unforgettable evocative forms and images.[42]

When plans for Japan Society were announced in 1969, considerable attention was paid to which architectural elements were derived from Japan tradition, such as the angled railings ("a modern derivative of the komayose), metal sun screens ("contemporary versions of the traditional sudare") and use of black and gold ("reminiscent of the colors in certain Shinto monuments").[43] Yoshimura explained:

> People the world over used to build their houses with local and traditional materials. Today, however, contemporary buildings all over the world use the same basic materials – concrete, steel and glass – yet different characters and nationalities can still be perceived amongst them. In designing Japan House I have tried to express in contemporary architecture the spirit of Japan.[44]

Yoshimura's design has a strong horizontal orientation, defined by unbroken lines that extend the full width of the main facade. Such characteristics are present throughout the history of Japanese architecture, in wood frame residences, temples, and palaces. The use of continuous glazing and wide terraces, enclosed by unornamented panels, displays similarities to the architect's 1955 design (with Kunio Maekawa and Junzo Sakakura) for the International House of Japan in Tokyo, as well as Kenzo Tange's own house (1953) and his Kagawa Prefectural Government Hall (1958).[45]

At Japan Society, the exterior is mainly built with reinforced concrete, painted a flat black. This color may have been chosen to help the building to stand out from its neighbors, which were mostly faced with granite and limestone. Furthermore, several acclaimed buildings in Manhattan featured a similarly restricted palette: the granite-clad CBS Building (1961-64, a designated New York City Landmark), the granite-clad Whitney Museum of American Art (1963-66, part of the Upper East Side Historic District), and the anodized aluminum Marine Midland Bank Building (1967), at 140 Broadway. Eero Saarinen, who designed CBS, believed "dark" buildings were "more quiet and dignified" and this stark tower – frequently called "Black Rock" – was widely praised. At the base of Japan Society's street elevation, however, Yoshimura inserted different materials. Here, the details display a warmer tone, with brass railings and an exposed concrete ceiling. These gray rectangles incorporate recessed lighting fixtures with unstained wood baffles. Such choices prepare visitors for the handsome lobby, which displays similar ceiling fixtures and baffles.

Expansion

Japan Society completed a $10 million capital fund drive in 1988. That year, the management consultant McKinsey & Company prepared a study "Positioning the Japan Society to Meet Challenges in the Future." Beyer Blinder Belle Architects & Planners was then hired to develop a master plan, which in 1990 envisioned an expansion program executed in two phases "without changing the basic character of the institution."[46] The partner in charge of the project was Richard L. Blinder (1935-2006). The first phase, completed in 1992, focused on the lower level where the library was expanded and a Japanese language center was created. A latter phase was approved by the Department of Buildings in July 1996. This phase called for the elimination of the second-story garden and the enlargement of the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th floors. In total, almost 10,000 square feet of floor space was added. From 47th Street, the most visible aspect is the fifth floor, with a wall of glazed offices, shaded by a cantilevered steel pergola. To accommodate this level, the concrete side walls were extended upward and the new front terrace was enclosed by a simple metal balustrade. Alterations to the interiors included an enlarged atrium and skylight, as well as much larger mechanical room.[47] In October 1998, Japan Society agreed to transfer

60,000 square feet of zoning rights to the developer of Trump World Tower (1999-2001), known as 845 U.N. Limited Partnership.[48]

Description

Japan Society stands on the north side of 47th Street, between First Avenue and Second Avenue. Five stories tall, it occupies an approximately 100 by 100 foot site, with the Church of the Holy Family to the west, and Trump World Tower, facing First Avenue, to the east. The side (east and west) facades are concrete panels, incised with vertical lines. The rear (north) facade faces north and is partially visible from 48th Street.

Historic

Main facade: concrete spandrels, painted flat black; *1st floor*: recessed from sidewalk, black granite pavers, vertical brass latticework, low metal fence set on granite base, glass entrance doors with C-shaped handles and brass trim, exposed concrete ceiling contains lighting fixtures and wood baffles, service/emergency exits, free-standing metal signboard; *2nd floor*: recessed windows, white ceiling panels, metal screens; 3rd *floor*: recessed windows, white ceiling panels, metal screens; 4th floor: recessed windows, white ceiling panels, metal screens; *East facade*: incised concrete panels, painted black; *West facade*: concrete, painted black; *Rear facade, facing 48th Street*:

Alterations

2nd and 4th floors: two horizontal metal tubes for stringing banners. *Fifth floor:* expanded in 1990s, south windows with brass frames, gridded metal balustrade, cantilevered steel pergola. *East facade*: expanded to 5th floor in 1990s. *North (rear) facade*: expanded in 1990s, first and second floors, concrete, painted beige.

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NOTES

[1] Michael R. Auslin, *Japan Society: Celebrating a Century* 1907-2007 (New York: Japan Society, 2007); "Japan Society Born at Kuroki's Party," *New York Times*, May 20, 1907, 1. Auslin is based on Edwin O. Reischauer, *Japan Society 1907-1982: Seventy-Five Years of Partnership Across the Pacific* (New York: Japan Society Gallery, 1982).

[2] Yamanaka & Company supervised the project. See Auslin, 19.

[3] Douglas Overton, "Japan Society Space Needs," memorandum to Directors of Japan Society, May 10, 1965, 2, Japan Society Archives.

[4] Ibid., 4.

[5] Philip Van Slyck, "Japan House Study," January 20, 1966, 20, Japan Society Archives.

[6] Ibid.

[7] *Annual Report*, Japan Society, 1967-68, 6.

[8] Similar mid-block sites were rejected for lacking prominence or narrow width, or a potential "problem" with vertical circulation.

[9] Various letters, 1964-66, Japan Society Archives.

[10] Cross & Brown report, August 21, 1968, Japan Society Archives.

[11] "Rockefeller Gift Will Provide a Site for Japan Society," *New York Times*, May 11, 1967, 54.

[12] On 47th Street, for instance, east of Second Avenue stood St. Boniface (c. 1868), a German Roman Catholic Church, the Phoenix Steam Brewery and two slaughterhouses. Adjoining blocks contained breweries, a granite works and hat factory.

[13] "Councilmen Shelves Ethics Code Action," *New York Times*, October 25, 1961, 28.

[14] In subsequent decades, cross-town public buses regularly used this section of 47th Street as parking. This practice came to an end in the mid-1990s, when the park was reconstructed and expanded, eliminating the south lane. This $2.9 million project (1995-99) added fountains and seating. George Vellonakis was the designer. See "With Buses rerouted, a Plaza Can Now Grown Green," *New York Times*, September 27, 1998, CY6; "Diplomacy Rare on UN Park, *New York Times*, October 3, 1993, 625.

[15] Founded in a former stable at this location in 1925, this small religious complex contains the church, a rectory, and a small garden with fountain. See http://www.nycago.org/Organs/NYC/html/HolyFamily.html. At what is now called John F. Kennedy International Airport, Sole designed two Roman Catholic chapels, in 1955 and 1965-66. Both have been demolished. Also see "First a Brewery, Then a Stable, Building is Now Artistic Church," *New York Times*, May 39, 1965, R1.

[16] Robin Boyd, *New Directions in Japanese Architecture* (New York: George Braziller Inc., 1968), 90.

[17] Kurt Gerard Frederick and William Whitaker, *Crafting a Modern World: Antonin & Noumi Raymond* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2007), 62, fn 28.

[18] Yoshihoro Masuko, "Toward Enriching Human Experience from the Viewpoint of Everyday," *JA59: Junzo Yoshimura* (Autumn 2005), 4.

[19] "Museum of Modern Art Speeds Building of House From Japan, *New York Times*, June 12, 1954, 17.

[20] "Office Here Has Oriental Style," *New York Times*, September 9, 1956, R1.

[21] The garden was designed by landscape architect David Engel. See Cynthia Bronson Altman, "The Japanese Garden at Pocantico," viewed online as pdf, 2010, at www.Rockefellerbrothersfund.org.

[22] Building Committee, May 26, 1966, Japan Society Archives.

[23] Building Committee, December 16, 1966, Japan Society Archives.

[24] "Memorandum for the Record," June 5, 1968, Japan Society Archives.

[25] The square-shaped garden featured planters of varied height and dimensions, as well as sculptures by Isamu Noguchi and others. Prescott Gould of M. Paul Friedberg Associates attended the July 1970 meetings and is likely to have designed the original garden.

[26] The original metal screens were fabricated in Japan. Minutes of Meetings, July 13-16, 1970, Japan Society Archives.

[27] "Work on New Home for Japan Society Begun Near U.N.," *New York Times*, September 17, 1969, 4.

[28] Certificate of Occupancy No. 70699, June 22, 1971, viewed online at New York City Department of Buildings.

[29] Auslin, 65.

[30] Auslin, 7.

[31] Brochure, 1972, Japan Society Archives.

[32] Leah Gordon, "Guess Who's Going to China," New York Times, September 5, 1971, D20.

[33] "Japan House," *Japan Architect* (August 1972), 80.

[34] "Projects in City Granted Awards," *New York Times*, December 3, 1972, R12.

[35] "New Delights for Dag Hammarskjold Plaza," *Architectural Record* (April 1973), 108.

[36] *AIA Guide to New York City* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1978), 160.

[37] *Annual Report*, 1967-68, Japan Society, 6.

[38] *The Oxford Companion to Architecture*, Vol. 1, 509, viewed online, January 2011, at www.books.google.com.

[39] Lewis Mumford, cited in Robert A.M. Stern, Thomas Mellins, David Fishman, *New York 1960* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1997), 480.

[40] "Iwahiko Tsumanuma,' *New York Times*, February 8, 1936, 15. For images of the studio he designed for Burton Holmes in c. 1920, see: http://www.burtonholmes.org/life/travelersrest.html.

[41] Both buildings are designated New York City Landmarks.

[42] Boyd, 7-8.

[43] "Japanese Center Here to Blend Styles," *New York Times*, September 28, 1969, R12.

[44] Auslin, 66.

[45] John D. Rockefeller 3rd was a major sponsor of the International House of Japan, as well as New Delhi.

[46] Beyer Blinder Belle website, viewed online, January 2011.

[47] "For the Japan Society, An Expansion," *New York Times*, September 22, 1996, viewed online 2011.

[48] This residential project required the demolition of the Engineering Societies Building. Japan Society's windowless east facade now faces a through-block drive, connecting 47th and 48th Streets, and three ventilation structures. *New York Times*, September 12, 1997.

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 Japan Society Headquarters at 333 East 47th Street 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 the headquarters of Japan Society, earlier called Japan House, is located close to the United Nations in the Turtle Bay section of Manhattan; that it was designed by Junzo Yoshimura, in partnership with George G. Shimamoto of Kelly & Gruzen; that it was likely the first permanent structure in New York City designed by a Japanese citizen; that Yoshimura was a leading 20th-century Japanese architect and a life-long resident of Tokyo who was closely associated with the Rockefeller family, in particular John D. Rockefeller 3rd who served as the society's president from 1952 to 1978; that Rockefeller sponsored the exhibition house that Yoshimura designed for the Museum of Modern Art in 1954; that Rockefeller purchased the 47th Street site and donated it to Japan Society in 1968; that Yoshimura developed his design during 1967-68 and construction commenced in 1969; that while some of his earlier American projects followed Japanese tradition, for this project he pursued a more contemporary approach that reinterpreted familiar Japanese elements using industrial materials; that this restrained and elegant charcoal-colored building was praised and received a "Certificate of Merit" from the New York Society of Architects in 1972; that the architects Beyer Blinder Belle supervised a sensitive restoration and expansion of the structure in the 1990s adding a pergola and a full floor of windows to the fifth floor; and that Japan Society is a conspicuously serene work of late modernism that exhibits a timeless quality reflecting both Japan's architectural heritage and the Society's mission to serve as a venue for international exchange.

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 Japan Society Headquarters at 333 East 47th Street and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1340, Lot 16, consisting of the land beneath 333 East 47th Street, as its Landmark site.

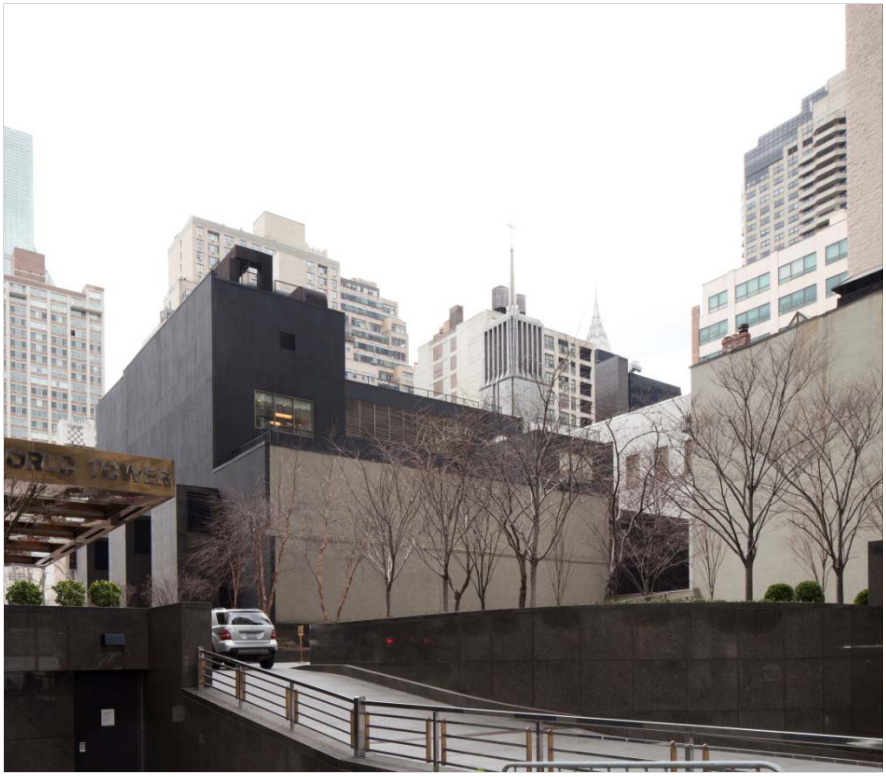
Commissioners:
Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Pablo Vengoechera, Vice Chair
Frederick Bland, Diana Chapin, Michael Devonshire,
Michael Goldman, Christopher Moore, Roberta Washington

Japan Society Headquarters
333 East 47th Street (aka 327-333 East 47th Street), Manhattan
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2010

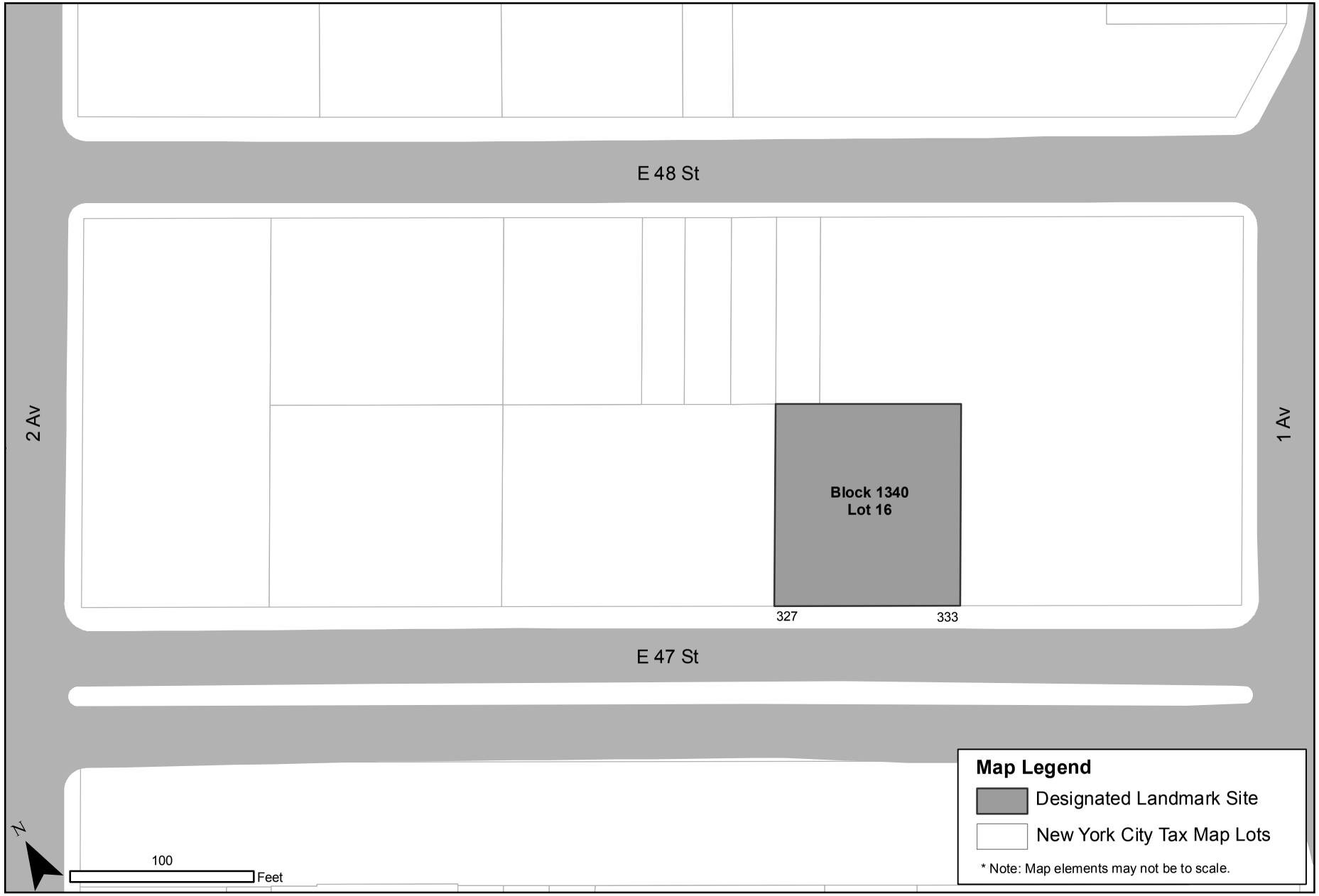
Japan Society Headquarters
First story from west (top), from east (bottom)
Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011

Japan Society Headquarters
First story, view west
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011

Japan Society Headquarters
Details: Fifth story; First story
Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2010



Japan Society Headquarters
Rear facade, from 48th Street
Front and east facade, from 47th Street
Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011



JAPAN SOCIETY HEADQUARTERS (LP-2420), 333 East 47th Street (aka 327-333 East 47th Street)
Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1340, Lot 16

Designated: March 22, 2011

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 09v1, 2009. Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, JM. Date: March 22, 2011