

ALWYN COURT APARTMENTS, 182 West 58th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Begun 1907, completed 1909; architects Harde & Short.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1010, Lot 61.

On May 10, 1966, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Alwyn Court Apartments and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. (Item No. 7). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were three witnesses in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. The owner of the building has informed the Commission that he favors its designation as a Landmark.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Alwyn Court is a unique example of an apartment house of the type utilizing Terra-cotta. This is the finest building of its type in New York City. Most high apartment structures at the turn of the century followed a general pattern having limestone base for the lower stories, a relatively plain shaft of regularly spaced windows for the central portion, and a top story or two treated in some special manner crowned by a projecting cornice. Decoration as such was limited to main entrances, occasional balconies, belt courses and cornices. Here at Alwyn Court, instead of limiting the decoration, the architects went to the other extreme, leaving hardly any surface undecorated. Such detail would have been out of the question in stone, but by taking advantage of a material in vogue at that time, 1907-08, the architects were able to produce the entire commission for less than a million dollars. This material was terra-cotta, a cast clay product glazed and fired. Since each mold could be used repeatedly the amount of decoration desired was only limited to the number of motifs the budget allowed.

The architects for Alwyn Court in designing this French Renaissance apartment house, decided to depart from the prevailing design formula of that day by constituting the first four floors the base, the next five as the shaft and the final three as the crown. These three parts are separated horizontally by strong projecting decorative bands between which pilasters with Corinthian caps divide the Seventh Avenue elevation into four bays and the 58th Street elevation into five. The corner is a rounded bay in the best Parisian tradition. The shafts of the pilasters, treated as Renaissance panels, have a profusion of details. The tripartite windows at each floor are separated by richly decorated mullions and spindles; the spandrels between floors are divided into three panels each heavily decorated. The decoration consists of French Renaissance detail, including the crowned salamander, symbol of Francis the First, King of France.

This richly ornamented building is unique and a joy to the City, contrasting with the stark simplicity of contemporary buildings. Few buildings like this have ever been built; there will never be another.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

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 Alwyn Court Apartments 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, among its important qualities, the Alwyn Court Apartments is an unusual example of exterior treatment in terra-cotta of an early Twentieth Century apartment house, that its decorative detail in the French Renaissance period of Francis the First is beautifully executed, and that its use as a richly decorated overall surface treatment is of significant interest in the history of New York architecture.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 8-A 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 the Alwyn Court Apartments, 182 West 58th Street, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1010, Lot 61, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.