

15 EAST 70TH STREET HOUSE, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1909-10;
architect Charles I. Berg.
Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1385, Lot 13.

On November 27, 1973, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 15 East 70th Street House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 21). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Three witnesses, including the representative of the owner, spoke in favor of designation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The handsome house at 15 East 70th Street was built in 1909-10 and was designed in the French Classical manner, although it displays elements of Italian Renaissance design at the first and fifth floors. The architect of the house, Charles I. Berg, was well-known in New York City for his commercial and public structures.

The properties on this block were held by the Estate of James Lenox until 1907 when they were transferred to the New York Public Library--Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations. The Lenox Library building which stood on this block was completed in 1875; in 1911 the collections were removed from the location on Fifth Avenue and 70th Street to the new New York Public Library building on Fifth Avenue at 42nd Street, and the Lenox Library building was subsequently replaced by the Henry Clay Frick mansion.

The Library began selling the properties on the north side of East 70th Street in 1909, and this new residence was among the first to be built on the block. Fifth Avenue and its side streets, above 59th Street, had already been well developed in the 1880s and 1890s, so for this land to remain open until 1909 was quite unusual. The wealthy New Yorkers who bought these lots commissioned houses for themselves, thus continuing a well-established residential trend in the development of this area. Mrs. J. C. (Corinne deB.) Moore purchased the property for No. 15 in June 1909, and construction was begun on her house in July.

This five-story limestone-faced residence, although basically inspired by French Classicism, has a rusticated Italian Renaissance ground floor with an entranceway enframed by a foliate molding and crowned by a cartouche. The three second story windows are accentuated by bead-and-reel moldings in the enframements and balustered window guards. These windows are sheltered by a handsome stone balcony carried on foliate brackets which supports a wrought-iron railing serving the third floor windows. The "eared" enframements of the third and fourth floor windows contrast well with the smooth wall surface surrounding them. The fifth floor, also Italian Renaissance in spirit, is treated with paneled sections between the windows set above a horizontal molding which extends the width of the house, serving as window sills and separating this upper element of the design from the smooth wall plane below. Above the windows a boldly projecting roof cornice is carried on elongated modillions with a row of dentils beneath them. Rising above the cornice is a stone roof balustrade which is the terminating feature of this fine facade.

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 15 East 70th Street House 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 15 East 70th Street House is a handsome residence designed in the French Classical manner with Italian Renaissance elements, that the boldly projecting third floor balcony and roof cornice cast shadows which lend interest to the flush upper wall, that the facade is further enlivened by many fine architectural details, and that the house contributes to the dignity and character of the fine row of town houses on this side of the street.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of 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 the 15 East 70th Street House, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1385, Lot 13, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.