

HEARST MAGAZINE BUILDING, 951-69 Eighth Avenue/301-13 West 56th Street/302-12 West 57th Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1927-28; architects: Joseph Urban and George B. Post & Sons.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1047, Lot 36.

On May 15, 1987, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Hearst Magazine Building), and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 3). The hearing was continued to September 15, 1987 (Item No. 2). Both hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Five witnesses spoke in favor of designation. One witness spoke in opposition to designation.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

##### Summary

The Hearst Magazine Building was designed in 1926-27 by Joseph Urban (one of the foremost theater designers in America in the early twentieth century as well as a skilled architect) in association with George B. Post & Sons (noted commercial architects). Stretching a full block along the west side of Eighth Avenue between 56th and 57th Streets, the building remains the expectant six-story base of an office tower that was never constructed. It is a stylistic synthesis of Art Deco ornament, Secessionist influence and Baroque theatricality. Further enriched by classical allusions which are both imposing and dramatic, the building survives as a relic of unrealized plans to transform greater Columbus Circle into New York's new cultural and commercial center as well as the corporate headquarters of Hearst's vast publishing empire. The unique product of a uniquely skilled designer, the Hearst Magazine Building is an important monument in the architectural heritage of New York.

##### William Randolph Hearst

Hearst was born in San Francisco on April 29, 1863, the son of a United States Senator who also owned several newspapers. In 1882 young "Willie" Hearst enrolled in Harvard University where, aside from American history, he showed little interest in his studies. Instead, he became involved in the Hasty Pudding Club and especially the Harvard Lampoon which Hearst made profitable for the first time in years. After a rowdy career, Hearst was expelled from Harvard in his senior year. He returned to California and persuaded his father to let him take over the San Francisco Examiner. Within eight years he transformed this unprofitable four-page daily -- "easily the worst in San Francisco" <sup>1</sup> -- into the largest newspaper on the West Coast. And while it remained the political mouthpiece of Senator Hearst, the Examiner also launched independent crusades against civic, corporate and governmental corruption. Thriving on

sensational journalism, it previewed the trend of "gee whiz emotion" that would characterize Hearst's later publications --- and which lay at the core of his multi-million dollar fortune.

Eager to achieve national prominence, Hearst moved to New York with the purchase of the Morning Journal in 1895. He burst upon Printing House Square, quickly violating all the traditions of this previously sedate bastion of newspaper publishing. Hearst's major opponent was Joseph Pulitzer whose World he studied, copied, and ultimately conquered. He reduced the price of the Journal to a penny (forcing Pulitzer to do the same) and through enormous salary increases manned his staff with the best managers, editors and reporters, most of whom were lured away from Pulitzer. In time Hearst also took Pulitzer's publisher and when, in 1927-28, he built the International Magazine Building near Columbus Circle, he employed the successor firm of George B. Post, architect of Pulitzer's World Building in 1889-90 (demolished).

By 1900 Hearst was personally involved in national politics. He was twice elected New York State Congressman (1902-06), but otherwise launched unsuccessful bids for the vice-presidency (1900) and presidency (1904) of the United States, mayoralty (1905) and governorship (1906) of New York. He was defeated in the latter (his last major candidacy) after Secretary of State Elihu Root accused him of responsibility for the assassination of President McKinley.<sup>2</sup>

In the course of his political career, Hearst continued to build his publishing empire. To the Morning Journal (Journal American after 1902) he added the Evening Journal (1896) which, within a year, had the largest circulation in the English speaking world. He also established or purchased the New York Morning Advertiser (1897) and Daily Mirror (1924) as well as other newspapers in virtually every major American city. By 1926 Hearst was receiving an annual income of \$150 million from the 72 companies of which he was sole proprietor; he had no stockholders.

In addition to his 26 newspapers, Hearst owned over a dozen magazines, Cosmopolitan (1905), Good Housekeeping (1911), Harper's Bazaar (1912) and Hearst's International (1920) among them. In 1923 he became a newsreel pioneer with the Hearst-Selig Weekly, subsequently increasing his film involvements with motion pictures, most of which were vehicles for actress Marion Davies. Hearst met Miss Davies (his mistress for the latter third of his life) in 1917 when she appeared as a chorus girl in Florenz Ziegfeld's Follies. The production was especially memorable for its dreamy stage sets by Joseph Urban. In the following years, Hearst, Urban and Ziegfeld had various associations, the most important being the new Ziegfeld Theater on 56th Street and Sixth Avenue (1928; demolished) which Hearst subsidized and Urban designed (in collaboration with Thomas Lamb). In the same year Hearst engaged his by then close friend Joseph Urban to design the International Magazine Building. It was to be located on West 57th Street, a rapidly developing section of New York already distinguished by imposing commercial buildings, Carnegie Hall (1891), the Art Students' League (1892) and numerous art galleries much frequented by Hearst.

## Columbus Circle Development and the Vision of "Hearst Plaza"

When Hearst came to New York in 1895, he leased two floors in the Tribune Building at Printing House Square. The concentration of newspapers in this part of town grew naturally from its proximity to Wall Street, City Hall and the Criminal Courts, all of which furnished the bulk of late nineteenth-century news. With the development of telephones and rapid transit, however, growing newspaper operations were free to seek larger quarters in more fashionable uptown districts. In 1895 the Herald moved to 34th Street and gave its name to the intersection at Sixth Avenue and Broadway. The New York Times likewise relocated in 1904, prompting the rechristening of Longacre Square to Times Square. The Daily News continued the northern migration in 1929 when it commissioned Raymond Hood to design its new building several blocks east on 42nd Street. Hearst himself had moved into the area as early as 1912 with offices located at 119 West 40th Street.<sup>3</sup>

Hearst was intent on making known his presence in New York. He envisioned a midtown headquarters as early as 1895, when he purchased the small block between Columbus Circle and 58th Street, Broadway and Eighth Avenue (site of Edward Durrell Stone's Gallery of Modern Art, 1965; currently used by the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs).<sup>4</sup> Plans for the development of this site with a "lofty structure" were eclipsed, however, in 1903 when Hearst acquired the larger block immediately south (current site of the General Motors Building). Reportedly the latter site was to hold "a mammoth structure to provide a home for [Hearst's] two newspapers."<sup>5</sup> These plans were likewise abandoned when, ten years later, Hearst bought the trapezoidal block immediately north of Columbus Circle between Broadway, 61st Street and Central Park West (current site of the Gulf & Western Building). In this instance he commissioned from commercial architect James C. Green a design for a three-story Gothic structure. It was reinforced from the beginning for the later addition of a tower "30 or more stories in height."<sup>6</sup> The Gothic building was erected in 1912, but never enlarged, allegedly because its irregular plot could "not meet the requirements of a large and satisfactory business structure."<sup>7</sup>

Instead, Hearst acquired in 1920 a large plot between 58th and 59th Streets (currently occupied by the New York Coliseum) where he intended to erect a "25-story building to house the headquarters of his eastern enterprises."<sup>8</sup> Plans for the setback structure, again unexecuted, were drawn up by architect Charles E. Birge who worked on a number of commercial and residential commissions for Hearst.<sup>9</sup> Four months later Hearst bought the Hotel Essex on Madison and 58th Street for "possible future occupancy [by the] International Magazine."<sup>10</sup> In the following year he purchased "the largest available vacant lot in the Columbus Circle District."<sup>11</sup> Located on Eighth Avenue between 56th and 57th Streets and ultimately developed with the International Magazine Building, the site was originally intended to hold a two-story mixed-use structure with stores, offices and a 2,500 seat auditorium. By contrast, Hearst's publications were to be housed in a sprawling seven-story building located on the block he owned between Eleventh and Twelfth Avenues, 44th and 45th Streets.<sup>12</sup> In the end Hearst abandoned the latter scheme (as he had so many others) presumably because its far West Side location was too far removed from the center of town and because of the growing prestige of the Eighth Avenue site. After

several false starts,<sup>13</sup> he hired Joseph Urban and George B. Post & Sons to design for the Eighth Avenue site a low-rise building to be completed with a tower at a later date. In a pattern that was by now typical, the addition never materialized.

Hearst's real estate ventures in western midtown were daringly speculative and characteristically -- and in the end, ruinously -- extravagant. He was encouraged by expectations for Columbus Circle's future as the inevitable extension of New York's growing theater district. The construction of Carnegie Hall on 57th Street and Seventh Avenue had set the stage in 1891. Nearly a dozen theaters followed, most of them concurrent with the International Magazine Building.<sup>14</sup>

Hearst's relationship with Miss Davies predisposed him to theater involvements. For the opening of her motion picture When Knighthood Was in Flower (1922) he hired Joseph Urban to refurbish the Criterion Theater,<sup>15</sup> and in the following year had him do the same for the Cosmopolitan Theater in Columbus Circle which Hearst had purchased for the debut of Miss Davies' film Little Old New York.<sup>16</sup> In 1926 Hearst entered the legitimate stage with construction of the Ziegfeld Theater on the southeast corner of Sixth Avenue and 54th Street. He simultaneously planned the (unexecuted) Billy Burke Theater (named for Ziegfeld's wife), to be located across the street.<sup>17</sup> The feverish development of the new theater district was encouraged by the Metropolitan Opera which had announced plans to build a new house on 57th Street in late 1923.<sup>18</sup> Two months later Hearst purchased the adjacent lots that were ultimately developed with the International Magazine Building. The grand scheme for a cultural center at Columbus Circle faltered, however, when the Opera met strenuous boxholder opposition and consequently abandoned its 57th Street site.<sup>19</sup>

Although disappointed by the Opera's withdrawal, tremendous potential remained for the commercial development of Columbus Circle, the nexus of six major traffic arteries. One of the most important was Eighth Avenue which, in the 1920s, saw unprecedented midtown activity. Its growth was encouraged by new zoning for higher buildings<sup>20</sup> and construction of the Eighth Avenue subway (which, however, was only completed in 1940). Within a decade property values on Eighth Avenue between 42nd Street and Columbus Circle had increased more than 200%.<sup>21</sup> The area was fast becoming New York's new business district, attracting such prominent tenants as the U.S. Rubber Company, the Fisk and Gotham banks, General Motors -- and William Randolph Hearst.

Hearst was advised in real estate by Arthur Brisbane (a reporter who established himself at Pulitzer's World with coverage of Jack the Ripper and who subsequently became Hearst's foremost columnist, editor and executive). Hearst bought huge amounts of property in the area around 57th Street and Eighth Avenue, making purchases every one or two months.<sup>22</sup> In addition to his theaters and the many sites for the International Magazine Building, he owned several large hotels and townhouses. His ultimate objective was the creation of "Hearst Plaza,"<sup>23</sup> an urban focus which by its central location and sheer expanse would eclipse the rival publishing centers at Park Row, Times and Herald Squares. Its location in Columbus Circle, site of the Maine Monument (1913) was particularly appropriate given Hearst's pivotal role in the Spanish-American War.

The Hearst Magazine Building is the sole survivor of this grand scheme, collapsed by the Depression and Hearst's own uncurtailed lavishness. He continued to buy Columbus Circle properties until 1930 but was forced to liquidate within the decade. In 1937 Hearst relinquished financial control of his publishing empire. Drained by too many unprofitable newspapers, financially disastrous films and scores of inflated mortgages, his total debts amounted to a whopping \$126 million.<sup>24</sup>

### Architects of the Hearst Magazine Building

Joseph Urban was born in Vienna on May 26, 1872.<sup>25</sup> His father, a leading Austrian educator, sent him to law school only to discover two years later that his son had spent the entire time studying painting and architecture at the Wiener Akademie as well as construction at the Polytechnicum. His deception discovered, Urban fled from home.

He was given a scholarship to the Akademie by its president Baron Carl Hasenauer who, one year later, sent the 19-year old student to decorate the Abdin Palace at Cairo for the Khedive of Egypt. Urban returned to Vienna in 1892 where he completed his architectural training, but under the influence of Secessionist architect Otto Wagner soon repudiated academic formalism. He became an accomplished book illustrator and in 1896 won the Kaiser Prize, the Austrian Gold Medal for Fine Arts in 1898 and the Grand Prix two years later. In 1898 Urban prevailed over a hundred contestants with his first independent architectural design, a bridge for Vienna. In the same year he became associated with the Secessionists at the Art and Industry Exhibition out of which developed Urban's commission to design Count Carl Esterhazy's castle. In 1900 he was awarded the Grand Prix for his decoration at the Paris Exposition, only to return to a Vienna scandalized over the paintings he had selected for the exhibition. As a result, Urban alienated himself from the Secessionists and formed the alternative Hagenbund.

The Hagenbund's varied membership (artists, architects, actors, musicians) led Urban almost inevitably to theater design. After a trip to St. Louis where he designed the interior of the Austrian Pavilion at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition (1904), he returned to Vienna to design stage sets for the legitimate stage and Royal Opera. He came to America in 1911 as art director for the Boston Opera. Commissions for stage sets followed in Paris, London and ultimately New York where Urban made spectacular designs for "The Garden of Paradise." Unfortunately this artistically acclaimed production went bankrupt almost immediately, leaving Urban temporarily stranded. His fortune changed in 1914 when he met Florenz Ziegfeld and began designing stage sets for his "Follies."

Through Ziegfeld and his chorus girl Marion Davies, Urban was introduced to Hearst, initiating a lengthy professional association and close personal friendship between these two lovers of sensation. In 1916 Urban became art director of Hearst's new film-making studio,<sup>26</sup> and subsequently remodeled the Criterion and Cosmopolitan theaters for him. Ten years later Urban designed the Hearst-financed Ziegfeld Theater while simultaneously continuing his long-term position as set designer for the Metropolitan Opera. In the following year (1927), Urban collaborated with Benjamin Wistar Morris on the design of the Opera's new house on 57th

Street. He had filed plans for Hearst's adjacent International Magazine Building just three months prior. Urban's involvement in both projects assured unified architectural effect. Each of the proposals, however, included high-rise components,<sup>27</sup> an aspect of building with which Urban had little experience.<sup>28</sup> At the International Magazine Building, the expertise was supplied by George B. Post & Sons, noted commercial architects.

The firm of George B. Post & Sons was established in 1904 when George Browne Post (1837-1913) took on as equal partners his sons William Stone Post (1866-1940) and James Otis Post (1874-1951).<sup>29</sup> The father had studied civil engineering at New York University before training in Richard Morris Hunt's 10th Street Studio, after which he formed a brief partnership with Charles Gambrill (1860). Following service in the Civil War, Post resumed practice in New York, first with various associations but independently after 1868. In that year his premiated design for the Equitable Life Assurance Building -- one of the first "elevator buildings" in New York -- launched his long and distinguished career in residential, hotel and commercial design. Among his many notable commissions in New York were the Western Union Building (1873-75), Williamsburgh Savings Bank (1875), Long Island Historical Society Building (1878-79), the Cornelius Vanderbilt House (1879-82), the Produce Exchange (1881-85), New York Stock Exchange (1901-04), north campus of City College and the Mills Building (1881-83) where Post established himself as "a good planner." In light of his firm's involvement in the Hearst Magazine Building it is significant to note that Post was architect of the original New York Times Building (1889) as well as of Pulitzer's World Building (1889-90).

A pioneer in the development of tall buildings, Post's reputation for sound commercial design was continued by his sons whose successor firm retained their father's name long after his death in 1913. William Post joined the office after graduation from Columbia University (1890) and a year of travel abroad. He collaborated with his father on the New York Stock Exchange and City College north campus. In 1901 William was joined in the office by his younger brother James who had likewise graduated from Columbia but who also studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts. After their father's death the two Post brothers made a specialty of commercial and institutional architecture with offices in both New York and Cleveland. Among their most notable commissions are the Statler hotels in Cleveland, Detroit, St. Louis, Boston and Buffalo, the Roosevelt Hotel in New York and the Hotel Olympic in Seattle, as well as the Wisconsin State Capitol and north building of the Prudential Insurance Company in Newark, New Jersey. After William Post's death in 1940, James continued the firm until his own death eleven years later before which time he had designed Mount Sinai Hospital in New York, St. Mary's Hospital for Children in Bayside, Samaritan Hospital in Troy and another in Stamford, Connecticut. James Post also designed the town of Cradock, Virginia for the United States Housing Bureau.

#### The Hearst Magazine Building and its Sculptural Program

Over the course of two decades Hearst had purchased no fewer than a half dozen midtown properties as potential sites for his new building. Meanwhile his publishing empire continued its meteoric growth. By 1926 Hearst was the unchallenged publishing giant in America and perhaps in the world. His decision to consolidate his magazine operations on Eighth

Avenue and 56-57th Street was directly related to the commercial and cultural development of Columbus Circle and to Hearst's intention to establish in the area a grand plaza befitting his publication prowess.

Initial plans for the site were relatively modest, calling for its development by the little known architect Michael Bernstein with three commercial buildings, each three stories high, to contain a motion picture theater.<sup>30</sup> This proposal was replaced one year later by a more ambitious scheme for a six-story theater and office building by the eminent theater architect Thomas Lamb.<sup>31</sup> This short-lived plan was likewise withdrawn in mid-August, 1926 and replaced by Joseph Urban's design for the present structure.<sup>32</sup> Urban's commission came just three months prior to the public announcement of his appointment as architect of the new Metropolitan Opera House to be built on neighboring 57th Street lots.<sup>33</sup> The two designs are sympathetic in their scale and intent.

Like the Opera, Hearst's building was to convey its cultural importance, expressing the influence of his magazines "on the thought and education of the reading public."<sup>34</sup> It was designed with an auditorium for "concerts, lectures and similar educational activities." Its role in the new art, music and theater district is suggested by the six sculptural groups which 28-year old Henry Kreis executed for the building's chamfered corners, main entrance on Eighth Avenue and 57th Street entrance (subsequently altered for commercial use).

Born in Essen, Germany, on July 27, 1899, Kreis received a public school education before apprenticing at age 14 with Meister Goldkuhle, a local tombstone cutter.<sup>35</sup> After four years' training (interrupted by military service in World War I) Kreis spent three additional years in Munich where he studied with Joseph Wackerle. In 1923 he left war-ravaged Germany for America. Nearly destitute, Kreis relied on his early training, setting up tombstones and later, carving stone in Buffalo. He then attended the Beaux Arts School of Design in Manhattan. The building boom brought him numerous jobs for architectural ornament, but its perfunctory execution prompted Kreis to seek more creative outlets for his talent. His opportunity came with a trip to Palm Beach c.1925 where Joseph Urban was executing the Hutton residence, a house "with lots of figures on it."<sup>36</sup> Kreis got the job, became foreman of fifteen carvers, and in the following year was again engaged by Urban, this time on sculpture for the Hearst Magazine Building. Kreis' twelve dramatic figures brought him to public attention and led, after five years additional training with Paulanship and Carl Paul Jennewein, to important commissions for the United States Post Office in the Bronx and especially in Washington where he worked on the War Department Building, Social Security Building, and Department of Justice Building to name only a few. After a long and distinguished career Kreis died in his Essex, Connecticut home at age 63 (1/31/1963).

Kreis' work is characterized by strong composition, simplified and frequently angular forms, qualities particularly appropriate to an architectural setting. His subtle drama is evident at the Hearst Building where allegorical figures merge with their columnar supports in a theatrical play of light and brooding shadow. In each case the figures respond to the cultural development of Columbus Circle, much as their dorsal columns echo the column of the Columbus Monument two blocks to the north (an aspect particularly strong when viewed from the south). The main

entrance on Eighth Avenue is flanked by "Comedy and Tragedy" on the left and "Music and Art" on the right, a pattern repeated at what was originally an entrance on 57th Street. "Sport and Industry" are installed above the chamfered corner at 56th Street. Appropriately, "Printing and the Sciences" appear on the building's major corner at 57th Street.<sup>37</sup>

The figures are placed atop pylons which break theatrically through an otherwise continuous second-story balustrade, emphasized by the almost exclamatory verticality of the columns behind. The building's third story setback also tends to feature the sculpture, rendering the ground floor shops and second-story offices a great pedestal or stage. Spatial drama is especially forceful at the structure's angled corners where building masses project, step up and simultaneously recede in an exciting Baroque display. The angled corners are themselves an urbane gesture to pedestrian traffic and contribute heavily to the scenographic effect of the building as a whole, connecting rather than terminating the three elevations for greater visibility. An unusually generous use of space in a commercial building, they break the standard rectilinear grid and create a space which was uniquely Hearst's.

Theatrical forces are likewise at work on the building's Eighth Avenue entrance. Pierced by a triumphal arch with overscaled keystone, it recalls the self-consciously grand world's fair architecture of which Urban was a veteran designer. The entrance also recalls Otto Wagner's unexecuted scheme for the Kriegsministerium (War Ministry) of 1907/08.<sup>38</sup>

Architectural historians have been irked in their attempts to stylistically classify the building which, while constructed in the early stages of Art Deco, shows only token elements of that style (i.e. the zig-zag pattern around the column-supported urns). Aged 54 in 1926, Joseph Urban was older than most Art Deco architects and less inclined toward its dynamic display. He drew instead from his Secessionist background and from his experience as an exposition, theater and stage set designer. With these he combined an abstracted classicism, the sobriety of which was appropriate to the Hearst Building's position next to the proposed Opera (also designed by Urban).

The six-story Hearst Building was sympathetic to the low-rise Opera house. Its cornices emphasize horizontality and add surface interest, especially below the third-story balustrade whose notched lower edge casts a bold dentillated shadow. The building's genteel scale was recommended by a contemporary who found in it a theatrical contrast against its taller neighbors.<sup>39</sup> But unknown to the critic, the six-story building was merely the base of a tower to be erected at a later date. From the beginning it was structurally reinforced to receive the addition<sup>40</sup> and given six elevator shafts (a ratio of elevator to floors which, as Tauranec has noted, is double or triple the norm).<sup>41</sup> Construction in two stages was a familiar pattern in New York in general and to Hearst in particular.

No attempt to build the tower was made until almost a decade after Urban's death. But in 1945-47 George B. Post & Sons prepared a series of proposals for nine additional stories on the six story base.<sup>42</sup> Although largely unremarkable as architectural designs, the new schemes for completion allow the current building to be seen as the base it was intended to be, removing its truncated aspect. The plans were filed in

1946, but never executed.<sup>43</sup> The proposed addition was the greatest potential alteration to a building which has otherwise remained largely intact. Its most significant change has occurred at ground level where shopfronts were uniformly altered with aluminum and glass replacements in 1970<sup>44</sup> after numerous piecemeal alterations in preceding years.<sup>45</sup>

### Significance of the Hearst Magazine Building

On May 29, 1927 (less than two months before construction began on the Hearst Building), Hearst's newspapers ran an editorial on American architecture which Hearst himself had written. In it he praised New York for developing:

the most magnificent architecture in the world -- an architecture that is not an imitation of some other period, a modification of some other type, but that is new and distinctly American in character. This architecture represents the energy, the imagination and the aspiration of the American spirit. It embodies the ambition of a great race to erect fitting monuments to its period and purposes....Those who are truly artistic, truly progressive and indeed truly patriotic, welcome this new and inspiring development....The old fogies, the back-numbers, the "has-beens," the live-in-the-past-dead-in-the-present contingent of obstructionists must not be allowed to control, or rather to prevent, the natural and national development of American architecture.<sup>46</sup>

The unique character to which Hearst referred could well be applied to his International Magazine Building. Designed outside the Art Deco norm, it combined multiple influences to achieve what might be called an "avant-garde traditionalism." Its low scale, dramatic statuary and bristling columns anticipate the projected tower and impart to the six-story base its special character. But in the words of a leading authority on Urban, this unusual character derives from its execution in "an unusual style, by an unusual [and unusually talented] designer."<sup>47</sup> The building gains in importance as one of only two extant examples of Urban's work in New York.

Aside from its considerable architectural significance, the building is a testament to the urge "to erect fitting monuments." It is a rare survivor of a grand development scheme for greater Columbus Circle which, if executed, would have had profound urban consequence. The product of distinguished artistic talent, strong personalities and vast personal wealth, it was designed in conjunction with the Opera as a major component of a new commercial and cultural center (as the building's sculpture still bears silent witness). Carefully considered were both surface and subway traffic, the building being directly connected with the Eighth Avenue Rapid Transit. The scheme collapsed when the Opera abandoned its 57th Street site in 1927, debilitated further by the onslaught of the Depression. It was simultaneously undermined by the rise five blocks south of Rockefeller Center whose formidable competition for large corporate tenants went so far as to lure the U.S. Rubber Company away from its headquarters in Columbus

Circle. In the end, the same cultural-commercial-thematic art-traffic oriented-personal wealth scenario would be replayed (even to the withdrawal of the Opera) at Rockefeller Center. And it was there that the promise of "Hearst Plaza" was realized in terms so successful that it remains unchallenged to this day.

### Description of the Building

Wrapping around three sides of a western courtyard, the Hearst Magazine Building fronts on Eighth Avenue with its two side exposed elevations on West 56th and West 57th Streets. The six-story cast limestone structure has chamfered north- and southwest corners, each with paired sculptural figures and ornamental columns. The building rises in three stages: a two-story base with commercial ground floor and second story offices, surmounted by three additional stories of offices and terminating attic (the truncated evidence of the tower that was planned as an integral part of the design.)

The major Eighth Avenue facade is symmetrically arranged on either side of its entrance, a large arch with oversized, projecting and beveled keystone (but otherwise flush voussoirs) flanked on either side by smaller square-headed doors (that on the left modified for retail entrance). The arch provides a recessed outer vestibule, its walls and barrel vault relieved by embossed octagonal coffers arranged in a projecting grid of half-round section above an unpolished gray granite base. At the far (western) end of the vestibule a large cusped bronze arch frames the building's four bronze-framed glass doors. Narrow bronze jambs rise to the arch intrados, dividing the glazed lunette into four vertical sections. The lunette is further subdivided by a broad ridged bronze fascia. Above the fascia stationary clear glass panels have frosted borders. Below the fascia are four clear side pivot windows. The vestibule's right/northern wall is pierced by a subway entrance, the head of its open stairwell illuminated by a bronze-framed rectangular light flush with the ceiling. The left/southern wall holds a small shopfront with recessed entrance (bronze-framed glass door and transom). The shop's bronze-framed windows rise above the vestibule's granite base. The vestibule's coffered barrel vault is pierced on the left and right by four recessed bronze-framed, single pane casement windows. From the center of the vault hangs an hexagonal bronze and glass chandelier.

On either side of the triumphal arch-like entrance pylons rise flush from the sidewalk, serving as third story pedestals for paired sculptural figures dorsally engaged to tall fluted columns. "Comedy and Tragedy" are installed on the left; "Music and Art" on the right. The columns are engaged to the building by a vertical series of shallow, stepped and angled setbacks. The columns rise above the sixth story attic where, freestanding, they are crowned by quadrapod-supported urns relieved by a horizontal zigzag band. Between the pylon-columns is a three-window bay, each of its four stories glazed with three-over-three double hung steel sash. At third floor level, the keystone of the arched entrance overlaps a projecting and slightly bowed balcony, along the lower edge of which runs an extended chevron moulding. Below the third, fourth and fifth story windows are fluted stone spandrels which visually tie the central bay to the ornamental columns that flank it. A severe cornice separates the fifth

story from the attic, above which a recessed mechanical housing shed rises.

On either side of the central bay, the Eighth Avenue facade is symmetrical: a two-story base with modern ground floor shopfronts/display windows and seven slightly recessed one-over-one double hung steel sash on the second floor. The base is separated from the upper stories by a balcony whose lower notched edge has recessed overlapping chevrons. In each case the continuous balcony extends from the central bay paylon to the building's chamfered north- and southeast corners. The third through fifth stories, set back behind the balcony, have seven one-over-three double-hung steel sash recessed behind prominent unornamented pilaster strips. A severe frieze and cornice separate the fifth story from the sixth story attic whose unrelieved surface is pierced by seven steel sash. The attic terminates in three simple, slightly stepped horizontal stone bands.

The building's two chamfered corners differ only in their sculpture: "Sport and Industry" are installed on 56th Street; "Printing and the Sciences" on 57th. In each case a modern shop entrance is surmounted by three one-over-one steel sash in a narrow-broad-narrow arrangement). Above, the building rises to form a pedestal for the paired sculptural figures and fluted column behind. On either side of the pedestal are seminal third story balconies which, however, have no balusters. Behind the column the building cuts back with stepped and angled verticals to an acute angle. The fifth story cornice breaks on either side of the column, emphasizing the corner's multiple planes in its own faceting.

The 57th Street facade repeats that on Eighth Avnue, differing only in two respects. Instead of an arched building entrance, the original doorway has been altered for use as a display window, flanked on the left by a service door, and on the right by a retail shop entrance. Above and on either side of the display window are two unrelieved square escutcheons which project slightly from the building plane. "Comedy and Tragedy" and "Music and Art" are installed on the third story pedestals (on the left and right respectively), just as they are on Eighth Avenue. The 57th Street facade also differs in its inclusion of an additional two-window bay which forms the building's western termination. This bay rises sheer from the sidewalk and does not set back at third story level. It does not include a full third story balcony, but only continues its lower notched and chevron lower edge as a decorative molding.

The 56th Street facade differs significantly from the building's two other exposed elevations. Like them, it rises on a two-story base with modern ground floor shopfronts/display windows. The westernmost bay, however, is used as a freight entrance with a roll-down metal gate. The facade is divided into two unequal masses. At the east, it continues the standard building treatment with a third story balcony behind which the structure sets back. Unlike the similar seven-window bays on Eighth Avenue and 57th Street, this bay has eight double-hung steel sash windows in its second through sixth stories. The larger building mass to the west does not set back at third story level, but rises sheer from the sidewalk. It does not have a balcony but, like the far western bay on 57th Street, merely continues the balcony's notched and chevron lower edge as an ornamental molding at third story level. This portion of the building is divided into six bays. On the second through fifth stories each bay contains paired one-over-three double hung steel sash framed by pilaster strips which are

more shallow than those elsewhere on the building. Above the cornice (continuous along 56th Street), the sixth story steel sash are likewise paired.

Report prepared by  
Janet Adams,  
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#### NOTES

1. Winkler, "Profiles: Notes on An American Phenomenon," part II The New Yorker, (April 30, 1927) p. 26.
2. Hearst's newspapers had published a poem by Ambrose Bierce which was considered suggestive of the assassination.
3. New York City Directories. Prior to the construction of the International Magazine Building Hearst published his magazines from 2 Duane Street and later from 119 West 40th. He kept corporate headquarters at 238 William Street. Hearst also had several other New York offices. See also Churchill, Park Row, p. 19.
4. Carlson & Bates, Hearst, Lord of San Simeon, p. 296-297.
5. "W.R. Hearst the Buyer," NYT, 11/28/1903, p. 16 col.4.
6. NB 611-12. The architect of record was listed as Harry O. Reeves, although published accounts attribute the building to Greene. See also "W.R. Hearst's Columbus Circle Building," NYT, 10/14/1914, sec. 7, p.8 col.3 (illus) and "Renewed Activity at Columbus Circle," Real Estate Record and Guide (Aug. 22, 1914), p. 303-04; See NYT, 10/22/1927, p.17 col. 6 for Greene's obituary.
7. "Hearst Big Owner in Columbus Circle," NYT, 7/15/1923, sec. 8, p. 2 col.1.
8. "Free Octagenarian in Vice Accusation," NYT, 2/1922, p.12 col 2. See also "W.R. Hearst the Buyer", NYT, 6/8/1922, p.24 col.5.
9. "Hearst Big Owner in Columbus Circle," op. cit. See NYT, 11/23/1942, p.23 col.2 for Birge's obituary.
10. "Hotel Essex Resold," NYT, 11/8/1923, p.32 col. 5.
11. "Hearst Buys Uptown Plot," NYT, 2/6/1924, p. 11 col.1. See also "Hearst Takes Title," NYT, 4/12/1924, p. 25 col. 4.
12. "Hearst to Erect Four Big Buildings," NYT, 12/4/1925, p. 12 col.3.

13. See p. 8 below.
14. Cosmopolitan Theater in Columbus Circle (1902-03); Al Jolson's on 58th Street between Seventh & Eighth Avenues (1909); The Century on Central Park West between 62 and 63rd Streets (1921); Hammerstein's (currently the Ed Sullivan) on Broadway and 53rd Street (1926-27); Fortune Gallo (currently Studio 54) on 54th Street between Eighth Avenue and Broadway (1926-27); The Zeigfeld on 54th and Sixth Avenue (1926-27); the Golden on 58th Street between Seventh and Eighth Avenues (1926-27); the Craig on 54th Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues (1927-28) as well as Daly's 63rd and the Casino de Paris on 62nd Street off Central Park West.
15. Swanberg, Citizen Hearst, p. 344.
16. Ibid., p. 360.
17. "Publisher and Arthur Brisbane to Build Two Houses...", NYT, 1/6/1925, p. 1 col. 5. See also "Hearst, Brisbane and Ziegfeld Combine to Build Two Theaters," Real Estate Record and Guide (Jan. 17, 1925) p. 10.
18. "Kahn Seen as Buyer of Plot on 57th Street," NYT, 12/8/1923, p. 27 col 7.
19. "Drops 57th Street Site as Home for Opera," NYT, 2/20/1928, p. 1 col. 7.
20. "The Height of Buildings," NYT, 5/23/1926, p. 24 col.5.
21. "Real Estate Values on Eighth Avenue," NYT, 6/ /1927
22. Swanberg, p. 363.
23. Winkler, p. 255.
24. Swanberg, p. 484-85.
25. Teegan, "Joseph Urban," p. 250-271; Krinsky, "Urban," MEA IV p. 245; McGowan, "Profiles: Joseph Urban," p. 21-23.
26. Winkler, p. 254.
27. The high cost of midtown construction required that th Opera be flanked by mid- and highrise buildings. See Urban's Theaters, pl. 23 for 57th Street elevation of the Opera complex.
28. Urban died five years after the 6-story Hearst Building was completed. Before that time, he executed the innovative New School for Social Research (1929-30), his most important commission, prepared designs for the Palace of the Soviets (1932; unexecuted), and acted as color coordinator for the Chicago Century of Progress Exposition (1933-34). He is also remembered for his role in establishing the Wiener Werkstatte in New York (1920).

29. Winston Weisman, "The Commercial Architecture of George B. Post," JSAH, XXXI n3 (Oct. 1972) p. 176-203; Wiseman, "Post George Browne," MEA, III, p. 459-63; Withey, p. 482-3; obituaries: James Otis Post, NYT, 4/22/1951, p. 89 col 1; William S. Post: NYT, 7/9/1940, p.21 col. 4.
30. NB54-26; withdrawn 1/21/1927.
31. NB295-26; filed: 6/8/1926; withdrawn: 8/12/1926.
32. NB584-26; filed 11/24/1926.
33. "Pick Men to Design New Opera," NYT, 2/27/1927, p. 1 col 5.
34. "Six Story International Magazine Company Structure...," Real Estate Record and Guide, 2/11/1928, p. 9.
35. Henry Kreis, "A Sculptor Speaks," Magazine of Art, XXXI (Nov. 1938), p. 630-35, 673. See also "Kreis Gets \$9,000 Job," Art Digest, XV (Oct. 1940), p. 22 and Kreis' obituary, NYT, 4/1/1961, p. 36 col 1.
36. Kreis, "A Sculptor Speaks," p. 632.
37. Illus. Architectural Record, LXIV (Aug. 1928) p. 166-169.
38. Illus. on p. 247, Heinz Geretsegger and Max Peintner, Otto Wagner, 1941-1918: Unbegrenzte Grozstadt Beginn der Modernen Architektur, Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 1964. Wagner's influence is also apparent in Urban's contemporaneous design for the Ziegfeld Theater which repeated the bowed front of Wagner's unexecuted scheme of 1909 for a museum in Karlsplatz.
39. T-Square, The New Yorker (March 24, 1928).
40. Structural plans for the Hearst Magazine Building (preserved in the George B. Post Collection at the New York Historical Society) clearly indicate provisions for future development. See also reference to a seven-story tower in "Hearst Chiefs Move Into New Building," Boston America, May 1, 1928, cited in a letter from Karen Huebner to the Landmarks Preservation Commission, June 11, 1987.
41. Taurenac, p. 156-57.
42. Several of these proposals are preserved at the New York Historical Society.
43. ALT34-46.
44. BN2886-70.
45. BN2012-44; BN1678-44; BN1047-44; BN1587-44; BN2012-44; ALT144-47; BN2243-53; BN591-54; BN838-62.
46. Selections from the Writings and Speeches of William Randolph Hearst,

privately printed, San Francisco, 1948, p. 443-45.

47. Barbara Giella, Letter to LPC, 4/16/1982.

## FINDINGS

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 Hearst Magazine Building 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 Hearst Magazine Building was designed in 1926-27 by the important theater designer Joseph Urban in association with the noted architectural firm George B. Post & Sons; that it was commissioned by William Randolph Hearst, the famous publishing magnate who was also deeply involved in theatrical and real estate ventures; that it is a stylistic synthesis of Art Deco ornament, Secessionist influence and Baroque theatricality; that it is further enriched by classical allusions which are both imposing and dramatic; that the impressive sculptural program with allegorical figures is the work of sculptor Henry Kreis; that it was planned as a six-story base for an office tower that was never constructed; that it survives as a relic of unrealized plans to transform greater Columbus Circle into New York's new cultural and commercial center, as well as the corporate headquarters of Hearst's vast publishing empire; and that it is the unique product of a skilled designer, an important monument in the architectural heritage of New York.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 25, Section 534, 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 Hearst Magazine Building, 951-69 Eighth Avenue/ 301-13 West 56th Street/302-12 West 57th Street , Borough of Manhattan, and designates Tax Map Block 1047, Lot 36, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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Hearst Magazine Building  
951-69 Eighth Avenue

Built 1927-28  
Architects: Joseph Urban and  
George B. Post & Sons

Photo: Janet Adams



Hearst Magazine Building  
Eighth Avenue and 57th Street elevations

Photo: Janet Adams



Hearst Magazine Building  
Eighth Avenue and 56th Street elevations

Photo: Janet Adams



Hearst Magazine Building  
Corner of Eighth Avenue and 57th Street  
Sculptor: Henry Kreis

Photo: Janet Adams



Hearst Magazine Building  
Corner of Eighth Avenue and 56th Street  
Sculptor: Henry Kreis

Photo: Janet Adams



Hearst Magazine Building  
57th Street elevation  
Sculptor: Henry Kreis

Photo: Janet Adams