

Modulightor Building



DESIGNATION REPORT

Modulightor Building

LOCATION

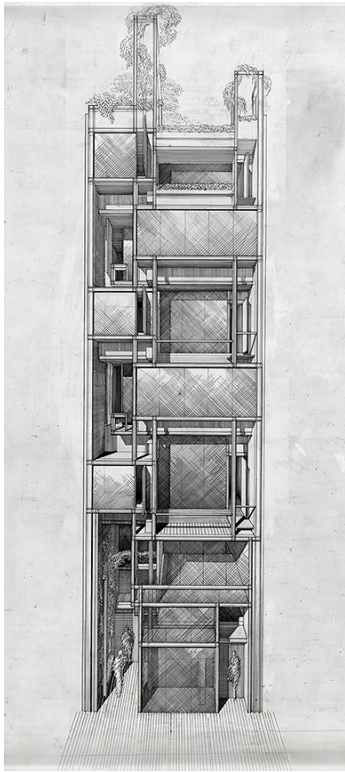
Borough of Manhattan
246 East 58th Street

LANDMARK TYPE

Individual

SIGNIFICANCE

Designed by the prominent architect Paul Rudolph in 1988-93 and built in phases, the Modulightor Building is an innovative and distinguished example of late 20th century modern design.



Perspective rendering, 246 East 58th Street, c. 1989
Library of Congress

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Modulightor Building

246 East 58th Street, Manhattan

Designation List 536

LP-2676

Built: 1989-93, 2010-16

Architect: Paul Rudolph

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan

Tax Map Block 1331, Lot 128

Building Identification Number (BIN):

1038621

Calendared: October 3, 2023

Public Hearing: November 28, 2023

On November 28, 2023, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Modulightor Building as a New York City Landmark and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 2). The hearing was duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of the law. Six people spoke in support of designation, including representatives of the owner/Paul Rudolph Institute for Modern Architecture, Docomomo US, Docomomo US/New York Tri-State, Historic Districts Council, New York Landmarks Conservancy, and NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project. One individual provided testimony in neither support nor opposition. The Commission also received 30 written submissions in favor of the proposed designation, including submissions from the Friends of the Upper East Side and the Neutra Institute for Survival Through Design.

Summary

Modulightor Building

A significant late work by the American architect Paul Rudolph (1918-1997), the Modulightor Building was constructed in two stages. Designed in 1988-93, it was built on a standard 20-foot-wide lot as an alteration and addition to an 1860s row house that had been substantially remodeled in the 1960s.

Paul Rudolph and Ernst Wagner purchased the property in early 1989. During the initial years of construction, Rudolph moved his office to the building, acting as his own contractor, while Wagner opened the Modulightor showroom on the first floor, selling custom lighting fixtures and systems inspired by Rudolph's interest in modularity. The first four floors—including two duplex apartments—were mostly complete by 1993, four years before the architect's death.

In 2010-16, the building was enlarged vertically, adding a fifth and sixth floor, as well as a roof deck. Designed by architect Mark Squeo, who worked in Rudolph's office in 1990-91, this second phase was inspired by drawings of the building that Rudolph donated to the Library of Congress in 1997, as well as materials now held by the Paul Rudolph Institute for Modern Architecture.

The strikingly complex street elevation consists of intersecting and overlapping horizontal and vertical rectangles of varying projection and size. Painted white, the steel I-beams form a lively three-dimensional composition that recalls the spatial investigations of De Stijl-founder Theo van Doesburg and the engineered elegance of Mies van der Rohe, as well as some of Rudolph's early Florida residences and later works in Asia.

Rudolph was a leading figure in American architecture during the latter half of the 20th century. Born in Kentucky, he attended Auburn University and the Harvard Graduate School of Design (1947), where he developed a modern sculptural aesthetic that often relied on such industrial materials as concrete and steel. Rudolph moved his thriving architectural practice to Manhattan at the height of his career, in the mid-1960s, when he was Dean of the Yale School of Architecture in 1958-65. Though many of the architect's projects in the metropolitan area were unrealized, the Paul Rudolph Penthouse & Apartments at 23 Beekman Place is a New York City Landmark, and the so-called "Halston House" at 101 East 63rd Street, is part of the Upper East Side Historic District.

Named for the architectural lighting company Rudolph founded with Wagner in 1976, the Modulightor Building contains commercial space, an expanded duplex apartment, and two floors that are used for exhibitions and events. A fitting conclusion to this architect's remarkable career, the Modulightor Building is a unique and distinguished example of late 20th century modern design.

Building Description

Modulightor Building

The Modulightor Building is a six-story building in midtown Manhattan, on the south side of East 58th Street, slightly west of Second Avenue. The street (north) facade and rear (south) facade are mostly glass and metal, painted white, with steel I-beams that form jigsaw-like screens composed of intersecting and overlapping rectangles of varying projection and size. As described in this designation report, it was constructed in two phases. The first four stories were designed and built by Rudolph and define the character of the building, which was expanded by Mark Squeo in 2010-16, who took inspiration from the many drawings that Rudolph produced for the building in 1988-93. This designation recognizes the entire building as significant and provides detail to help distinguish Rudolph's design from the later vertical expansion.

Primary street facade

Intersecting horizontal and vertical steel elements form overlapping grids of varying size; points where the elements intersect are welded and form small rectangles. The horizontal I-beams are 6 ¼ inches, the vertical I-beams are 4 ¼ inches, and the vertical I-beams that run up the east and west edges are 8 ¼ inches wide. While most of the rectangles contain glass, some vertical openings contain operable wood doors mounted on piano hinges, and some slender recessed horizontal openings are concrete block. Open, unglazed rectangles form shadow boxes, with ledges as great as 2 ½ feet deep. The left side of the street facade is slightly more complex than the right, with a tighter grid that extends up to the roof.

There are two entrances. The left entrance is deeply recessed and two stories tall. It steps up from right to left and has a metal gate with white metal bars that opens outward. In front of the gate, at left, is a doorbell panel. Within the recess is a carpeted floor that leads to a glass-paneled door. Left of the door, on the east wall, is a vertical diagonal plant lattice. Above the door is a cantilevered plant box. The entrance on the right side serves the Modulightor showroom. It has a glass door that is slightly recessed, with square white marble floor pavers that match the interior floor. Between the entrances is a three-panel display window. Center and right sections open outwards, with silver locking mechanisms across the bottom.

The sidewalk on East 58th Street is paved with mostly gray slate squares. In front of the left (east) entrance, the squares are interrupted by a square metal grate that may have originally served a coal chute. To the right of the showroom entrance is a freestanding fire department connection. Adjacent to the curb is a square planting bed.

East and west facades

The east and west facades are stuccoed brick and concrete block. Part of the east facade is visible above the neighboring building at 248 East 56th Street. Painted white, it has single fixed vertical slot windows on the third, fourth and fifth floors, and three vertical slot windows on the sixth floor. The west facade is partly visible above 242 East 58th Street. It is also painted white and has a single vertical slot window on the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth floors.

Rear facade and deck

The rear facade is fully articulated and visible from some neighboring buildings. The first and second floors nearly fill the entire lot. The second floor incorporates metal-and-glass skylights, as well as a

south-facing window with mostly vertical metal mullions. The third and fourth floors were designed by Rudolph.

A raised white metal deck with a rectangular grid has been installed above the second-floor skylights. The first two stories and the third-floor deck extend almost the full width of the lot, from the edge of a hot tub (now used as a planter) to an area where ventilation equipment is disguised by plants. On the east side of the third-floor deck is a metal staircase with railings, open risers, and treads with gridded rectangular openings. It rises to a solid door with a slender full height window on the right side. Above the door, a glazed transom tilts inward at the top. Left (west) of the stairs is the greenhouse with an angled top panel that is now enclosed by an outer glass panel.

Above the fourth floor, and designed by Mark Squeo, are four metal balconies of varied width, placement, and projection. The widest balcony, at the fifth floor, rests atop the greenhouse. Other balconies project from the sixth floor, roof deck, and mechanical structure. A multi-story section of the red brick party wall is visible along the west edge of the rear facade. The rear part of the west facade is visible from some neighboring buildings. Painted white, it has pairs of vertical slot windows on the fifth and sixth floors. The rear part of the east facade has vertical slot windows on the fourth and fifth floors, as well as at the level of the roof deck.

Roof deck

The roof deck has gray-colored pavers. There are, from front to rear, an elevator foyer with a glass door and walls, an outdoor staircase, and a cantilevered rear balcony with a pierced metal floor and screens. Opposite the rear balcony, to the east, is a glass door that opens to an interior staircase that descends to the sixth floor. The north and south parapet is glass with metal handrails, while the concrete block side

parapet, facing west, incorporates a raised box skylight.

The outdoor staircase, near the center of the roof deck, has a metal railing and gridded screen, open risers, and solid treads. The same gridded screen encloses the top of the mechanical structure, which is made of concrete block and has a cantilevered south-facing balcony.

History and Significance

Modulightor Building

Manhattan's Design District

The Modulightor Building is named for the lighting company that Paul Rudolph founded with Ernst Wagner in 1976. Located on East 58th Street, slightly west of Second Avenue, he and Wagner¹ chose this location because a large group of design showrooms were concentrated in the area.

Except for a small group of scattered dwellings and farm buildings, Manhattan's east 50s remained mostly rural until the middle of the 19th century. A block east of the Modulightor Building are two of the neighborhood's oldest structures, a pair of two-story Italianate-style houses (1856-57, both are New York City Landmarks).² Starting in the 1860s, speculative row houses were constructed on many east-west streets, including the block where the Modulightor Building now stands, as well as groups of town houses in the Treadwell Farm Historic District on East 61st and East 62nd Streets, between Second and Third Avenues. All Saint's Episcopal Church, on East 60th Street, was established during this period. Consecrated in 1872, it served "the rich and the poor, the high and the low."³

Bloomingdale's Great East Side Bazaar opened on Third Avenue, between East 56th and 57th Streets in 1872. Founded on the Lower East Side as a "ladies' notion shop" in 1861, the new location flourished, in part due to the convenience of the Third Avenue Elevated Railway, which began serving 59th Street in 1878, and the Second Avenue Elevated Railway, which began serving 57th Street in 1880. This well-known department store moved to its current location, between East 59th and 60th

Streets, in 1886.

The Queensboro Bridge (a New York City Landmark) was constructed in 1901-08. With its main entrance at Second Avenue and 59th Street, it originally incorporated roadways, streetcar track, and an underground terminal. A decade later, in 1919, the Interborough Rapid Transit Company subway was extended north along Lexington Avenue to 59th Street, creating a transit hub with stores, theaters, and banks.

In 1940, the Second Avenue elevated railway closed, followed by the Third Avenue elevated railway in 1955. The Lexington Avenue-59th Street subway station was soon expanded, adding an express stop on the lower level in 1962, and a Third Avenue entrance, serving the Broadway Line to Queens, in 1973. In the 1970s, Roosevelt Island was redeveloped with middle-income housing. To serve this nearby East River community, an aerial tramway opened in 1976, with its Manhattan terminal on the east side of Second Avenue, a block from the future site of the Modulightor Building, between 59th and 60th Streets.

Third Avenue experienced phenomenal growth in the 1950s and 1960s. While the blocks south of 57th Street attracted mainly high-rise office buildings, the northeast 50s retained some of the neighborhood's low scale, mixed-use character. During this period, Alexander's Department Store (demolished) opened, and Bloomingdales expanded. Architecture critic Paul Goldberger wrote: "the corner of 59th and Third has become the focus for the powerful attraction this neighborhood exerts on moviegoers, shoppers, and voyeurs alike."⁴

In the 1960s, local stakeholders tried to give the neighborhood a distinctive name. Dry Dock Savings Bank, for instance, launched a campaign in 1968 that celebrated "Dry Dock Country ... Isn't it great to bank where everything's at?"⁵ From a branch at the corner of Lexington Avenue and 59th

Street (demolished), it distributed colorful maps promoting area boutiques, galleries, and restaurants. The name caught on and in 1984 *The New York Times* observed: “It was gridlock in Dry Dock Country, that crossroads of residences and commerce that also serves as a loading and receiving zone for the Queensboro Bridge.”⁶

Of particular importance to the neighborhood was the increasing presence of design showrooms. A 1967 article in *The New York Times* called it the “Design District.” There were reportedly more than 200 “firms that supply furnishings and materials used by interior decorators and architects ... concentrated in 10 structures between 56th and 63d Streets on or near Second and Third Avenues,”⁷ as well as the New York School of Interior Design, which leased floors at 155 East 56th Street, from 1962 to 1994. Many buildings still contain to-the-trade showrooms that cater to architects and interior designers. Modulightor’s website currently describes the East 58th Street location as “in the middle of New York’s decorative arts district.”⁸

History of the Site

246 East 58th Street was originally part of a group of Italianate-style row houses, probably faced with brownstone, dating to the 1850s or early 1860s. As originally built, each three-story building had a stoop and three bays. In 1941, 246 East 58th Street was converted into a multiple dwelling with 15 furnished rooms on four floors.⁹ Vacant in the 1950s, by 1966 it had been entirely rebuilt as a commercial structure, with two-story extensions in the front and back, as well as half apartments on the second and third floors. The new owner was Ellsworth & Goldie, an Asian art and antiques gallery. *Gardner’s Guide to Antiques* described the mostly glass structure as a “strikingly new and modern building.”¹⁰ James R. Goldie sold the property two years later, in 1971. Subsequent occupants included retail stores

specializing in printed fabrics. Paul Rudolph purchased the building from MIRA-X International Furnishings Inc. in February 1989.

Paul Rudolph and New York City¹¹

Paul Rudolph was an important mid-to-late 20th century American architect, with a close association to New York City. Celebrated as both an influential educator and designer, the architect and historian Robert A. M. Stern wrote that he “possessed the greatest talent of his generation of American architects.” Rudolph moved his practice to Manhattan at the height of his career in the mid-1960s, when his seven-year tenure of chairman of the Department of Architecture at Yale University was ending. During this period, Rudolph was involved in many significant projects, including a large number in the metropolitan area.

Born in Kentucky in 1918, Rudolph received a bachelor’s degree in architecture from the Alabama Polytechnic Institute, now Auburn University, in 1940. During World War II, he spent nearly four years as an officer in the United States Navy. He was based at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, where he oversaw ship construction and was later a reserve officer. For a brief period prior to his service (1941-42) and after, he was a student at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, where he studied with Walter Gropius and Marcel Breuer, both formerly of the Bauhaus design school in Germany. Rudolph graduated in 1947 and, following travels in Europe, was active in coastal Florida. The crisp, often Miesian, beach houses he designed were widely praised for their imaginative geometric forms and sensitivity to the natural environment.

Rudolph maintained three architectural offices in the early 1960s: in New Haven, Connecticut, where he designed the Art and Architecture Building (now Rudolph Hall) at Yale University; in Cambridge, Massachusetts; and in

Manhattan. His approach to design became increasingly sculptural and projects were often executed with textured concrete. Though many of his schemes in the New York City remained unrealized—such as a wildly audacious plan for the Lower Manhattan Expressway (1967-72)—he did complete a number of significant projects, including 101 East 63rd Street (1966, part of the Upper East Side Historic District), a multi-level penthouse at 23 Beekman Place (1977-82, a New York City Landmark), as well as three apartment complexes in the Bronx, two of which were built for the New York Housing Authority.

His first Manhattan office was on the top floor of 26 West 58th Street (demolished 1969), a small office structure between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. This dramatic workspace suggested a terraced garden with distinct and overlapping levels that anticipated the interiors he designed for 23 Beekman Place and 246 East 58th Street.

Modulightor

Paul Rudolph began designing architectural lighting in the mid-1960s. Several of his earliest fixtures were included in a survey of experimental lighting, published by *Progressive Architecture* in October 1968.¹² Rudolph sought to produce modular, flexible, project-specific fixtures that could be assembled using standard parts to “perfectly satisfy [a] designer’s vision and client’s needs.”¹³

Modulightor was incorporated in 1976, with Ernst Wagner as president, treasurer, and secretary of the company. Born in Switzerland, Wagner studied business administration and economics at the University of Basel and Teachers College, before settling in the United States in 1974. Wagner filed to become a permanent resident in 1975, and when he applied for labor certification in 1976, Rudolph wrote that his firm “desires Mr. Wagner to develop and promote a new line of furniture, lighting fixtures,

rugs, and other interior accessories.”¹⁴

Initially, the lighting fixtures were produced in Rudolph’s model shop at 54 West 57th Street. The workshop relocated to SoHo in 1981.¹⁵ Modulightor produced fixtures for many of the architect’s interiors, including his own townhouse at 23 Beekman Place. A 1979 advertisement in *Residential Interiors* offered: “Sculptural lightgrids. Infinity lighting in tables, wall panels, ceilings, baseboards and modular strip lighting for commercial and residential specifications.”¹⁶

With both leases up for renewal in 1988, Wagner noticed a “for sale” sign at 246 East 56th Street. He suggested he and Rudolph purchase the building and reconfigure it as Rudolph’s architecture office, the Modulightor showroom and workshop, and revenue-producing apartments. Rudolph’s preliminary design, dated July 1988, proposed erecting a 7-story mixed-use structure, consisting of commercial space and five apartments.

First Phase of Construction

A month after acquiring the East 58th Street property, Rudolph proposed a mixed-use structure,¹⁷ submitting an alteration permit to the Department of Buildings in March 1989 (ALT 340-89). This proposal expanded the 1988 scheme, with substantial revisions occurring in September and October 1989, as well as later. It was described in the permit as an addition and alteration, with five apartments. A permit was issued in September 1989. During construction, Rudolph moved his architectural office to the second floor (sometimes referred to as the mezzanine), while Wagner opened the Modulightor showroom, selling custom lighting fixtures designed and inspired by Rudolph, on the first floor.

Construction began in late 1989 or 1990. Rudolph received a mortgage in 1990, though he soon faced financial difficulties and decided to proceed in phases, starting with the lower floors.

Wagner secured loans from a Swiss friend, Robert Enhrenberg, who became a partial owner. Rudolph moved his architecture office out of the building in 1992 or 1993, allowing the second floor to generate revenue.

Rudolph continued to fine-tune his design in the early 1990s, modifying the appearance of the street facade, the entrance sequence, and floor plan. Donald Luckenbill, who studied architecture at the Pratt Institute and worked in Rudolph's office from about 1969 to 1982, was the associate architect and job captain in 1989-90, followed by Mark Squeo in 1990-91. Luckenbill later told *The New York Times* that "Rudolph did hundreds of designs" for the building.¹⁸

Photographs show the front and rear facades being constructed in August 1992. According to Kelvin Dickinson, president of the Paul Rudolph Institute for Modern Architecture, it was a "very personal effort" – using "skilled tradespeople," as well as "day laborers which Rudolph would hire off the street."¹⁹ In subsequent months, the glass panels were installed and by February 1993 the steel I-beams had been painted white.²⁰

The cellar, first floor, and mezzanine received a temporary Certificate of Occupancy in May 1993.²¹ The latter two spaces were identified as a retail store and office space. A second certificate, which was renewed many times, was issued in June 1994. This certificate referenced the first, second, third, and fourth floors, as well as the cellar and subcellar. In terms of use, the third and fourth floors were identified as "Duplex Class A Apartments." Rudolph began leasing the two apartments in July 1996.²²

Second Phase of Construction

Rudolph became ill in 1996 and died in September 1997. Prior to his death, he transferred ownership of the property (and stock in Modulightor) to Wagner,

who moved his residence to the building in 2002. Challenges to Rudolph's estate were resolved and the will was probated in 2001.²³ Under architect Luckenbill, the north and south duplex apartments were merged into a single unit.

Wagner and colleagues founded the Paul Rudolph Foundation in 2002.²⁴ About two years later, in 2004, the Modulightor website began referring to the 246 East 58th Street building as the "Modulightor Building."²⁵ Wagner served on the foundation's board until 2014, when he formed the Paul Rudolph Institute for Modern Architecture, which was known as the Paul Rudolph Heritage Foundation until 2022.

In the late 2000s, Wagner began planning the second phase of construction. Mark Squeo, of Squeo Architecture, was hired to oversee the project.²⁶ Using Rudolph's earlier plans as a guide, he began working on what was described as a "penthouse residence addition" in October 2007. According to Squeo, Wagner did not want the new construction to be a "xerox copy."²⁷

The Modulightor was enlarged vertically, adding a fifth and sixth floor, as well as a roof deck with mechanical equipment. Though Squeo's addition resembles an undated ink-on-mylar rendering and project model that Rudolph donated to the Library of Congress, as well as drawings now held by the Paul Rudolph Institute, he took some liberties with Rudolph's original scheme. In addition to modifying the placement of some I-beams on East 58th Street, several cantilevered balconies were added to the rear facade and the penthouse triplex was eliminated.²⁸

An alteration permit was issued by the Department of Buildings in November 2010, with revisions in June 2011. Construction began in 2010 or 2011. Work on the interiors and balconies continued until 2016, when construction was considered mostly complete. In October 2017,

Modulightor was part of the Archtober festival, welcoming members of the public to tour the expanded interiors for the first time.

Design

The Modulightor Building was one of Paul Rudolph's last projects. During the 1980s, when Postmodernism dominated international architecture, he remained a steadfast modernist, continuing the use of exposed industrial materials and abstract forms. Built on a conventional twenty-foot-wide lot, with a limited budget, he enclosed the building with a remarkably lively and intricate street facade.

The most significant elements are the steel I-beams, which have three different widths. The horizontal I-beams are 6 ¼ inches, the vertical I-beams are 4 ¼ inches, and the vertical I-beams that run along the left and right edges are 8 ¼ inches. At points where the I-beams intersect are small squares and occasional rectangles. Like the welded connections at 101 East 63rd Street (1966, part of the Upper East Side Historic District), they function as modest decorative features.

Rudolph painted the steel white, a color long associated with the development of 20th century modern art and architecture, as well as his own buildings. The East 58th Street facade brings to mind the spatial investigations of De Stijl-founder Theo van Doesburg in the 1910s and 1920s, as well as the engineered elegance of Mies van de Rohe's Farnsworth House (1945-51). Grids appear in many of Rudolph's most important commissions, such as the Walker Guest House (1952), the Milam Residence (1959-62), and the Bass Residence (1970).

The spatial complexity of the interiors is strongly expressed on the East 58th Street facade. The interlocking I-beams form a three-dimensional composition, with a depth as great as 2 ½ feet. Fixed square and rectangular windows, operable wood

doors, and shallow planting balconies disguise the individual floors and blur boundaries between interior and exterior space.

Timothy M. Rohan, in his 2014 study of Rudolph, described the Modulightor Building as "a miniature version of one of his Asian skyscrapers."²⁹ Various horizontal and vertical elements intersect and overlap, similar to the mirror-glass elements (sometimes compared to koala bears climbing a tree) that project from the elevations of his recently completed Lippo Centre (1984-88) in Hong Kong.

Combining commercial and residential use, the Modulightor Building has two entrances. The residential entrance, at left, is taller and more conspicuous, incorporating a deep stepped opening enclosed by a steel gate that was most likely designed by Rudolph. On the right side is a three-part display window with panels that swing open like doors, as well as a recessed entrance with a glass door and white marble pavers that resemble the showroom floor. To further differentiate the building from its neighbors, Rudolph paved the sidewalk with gray slate squares that are similar to the ones in front of 101 East 63rd Street.

The rear (south) facade was less ambitious than the East 58th Street facade, with larger glazed openings and fewer I-beams. While the first and second floors are mostly unchanged and date from the mid-1960s, the third and fourth floors, including the green house, steel stairs, and steel grating platform were designed (or chosen) by Rudolph. The fifth and sixth floors, as well as the balconies, were added by Squeo.

Reception

Construction of the Modulightor Building was mostly overlooked in the 1990s, with little attention paid to its construction and design until almost a decade after the first four floors were completed.

In 2004, critic Joseph Giovanni published an

enthusiastic article about 248 East 56th Street in *The New York Times*. He wrote that it was “finally finished” and evidence of “a master at the height of his powers.” Giovanni saw the building as a potent critique of Postmodern architecture’s use of ornament and color. He wrote that Rudolph’s philosophy was:

... clear from the facade, where he conceived an intricate series of steel frames pinwheeling around squares, subdividing the glass wall into large and small windows that advance and recede with a depth of several feet. Like Italian architects carving Renaissance and Baroque facades to be revealed in Mediterranean light, Rudolph succeeded in suggesting depth within shallow dimensions.³⁰

William Menking praised the building in the *Architect’s Journal* in 2004, saying it was built “under a severe budget constraint” and was “fantastically creative.”³¹ In subsequent years, the building was included in *New York 2000: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Bicentennial and the Millennium* (2006), as well as on the website *Daytonian in Manhattan* (2013), where blogger Tom Miller called it an “architectural gem ... little known by most New Yorkers.”³²

Recent editions of the *AIA Guide to New York City* include the Modulightor Building. Identified by address only in the fourth edition (2000), the authors did not credit its design to Rudolph. The authors, nonetheless, called it “A happy tour-de force. Steel makes a structural facade into a powerful composition.”³³ In the fifth edition (2010), they described Rudolph’s facade as “almost musically composed.”³⁴

With the second phase of construction

complete by 2016, the Modulightor gained greater attention in the local press and from the public, appearing on websites and in social media. To mark the centenary of architect’s birth, an exhibition, “Paul Rudolph: The Personal Laboratory,” was held on the recently completed upper floors from October to December 2018. Critic Jason Farago wrote in *The New York Times* that the Modulightor provides a “corrective” to the architect’s reputation for being part of the Brutalist movement, calling it “an artful composition of elevations, setbacks, and planes of glass framed with white I-beams.”³⁵

Conclusion

The Modulightor Building is an impressive and significant late work by Paul Rudolph. Not only was this important American architect’s office briefly located here, but it continues to house the lighting company he founded with Ernst Wagner, as well as the Paul Rudolph Institute for Modern Architecture, a non-profit organization dedicated to Rudolph’s remarkable creative legacy.

Endnotes

¹ Wagner's full name is Ernst Peter Wagner Jr.

² "311 East 58th Street House Designation Report" (LP-583), 1967; "313 East 58th Street House Designation Report" (LP-584), 1970.

³ For more information on All Saints Church, see: <https://daytoninmanhattan.blogspot.com/2014/06/all-saints-episcopal-church-no-230-e>, accessed 2023

⁴ Quoted in Robert A. M. Stern, Thomas Mellins, David Fishman, *New York 1960* (Monacelli Press, 1995) 431.

⁵ "Antoinette in Dry Dock Country," advertisement, viewed at <https://thefinancialbrand.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/08/dry-dock-antoinette.jpg>

⁶ "Residents of Clogged East Side Area," *The New York Times*, February 21, 1984.

⁷ "Showrooms Grow In Design District," *The New York Times*, August 27, 1967.

⁸ See "About" on Modulightor website: <https://www.modulightor.com/about>

⁹ Certificate of Occupancy, Department of Buildings, #27584, April 17, 1941; also see "Paul Rudolph's Masterful 246 East 58th Street," *Daytonian in Manhattan*, September 17, 2013, accessed online 2023.

¹⁰ Arron Gardner, *Gardner's Guide to Antiques and Art Buying in New York* (1969), 66.

¹¹ This section is based on "Paul Rudolph in New York City," part of *Paul Rudolph Penthouse & Apartments Designation Report* (LP-2390), written by Matthew A. Postal, November 16, 2010, 3-4. The most complete study of Rudolph's career is Timothy M. Rohan, *The Architecture of Paul Rudolph* (Yale University Press, 2014).

¹² "Floating Platform," *Progressive Architecture*, May 1967, 150-51; "Kinetic Electric Environment," *Progressive Architecture*, October 1968, 201-02.

¹³ "House of Light", *Elements of Living*, March 2006, 2.

¹⁴ Kelvin Dickinson, email to author, October 25, 2023.

¹⁵ Dickinson, materials for "The Modulightor Building – Exterior Designation," submitted to LPC, July 1, 2019, 3.

¹⁶ *Residential Interiors*, March 1979, 143.

¹⁷ Other New York City landmarks that combine commercial and residential uses include the William Lescaze House and Office, 211 East 48th Street, and the

Morris B. Sanders Studio and Apartment, 219 East 49th Street.

¹⁸ Joseph Giovanni, *The New York Times*, "An Architect's Last Word," July 8, 2004.

¹⁹ Dickinson, materials submitted to LPC, 2019, 5, 1.

²⁰ These photographs were viewed at <https://www.paulrudolph.institute/198801-modulightor>

²¹ Rudolph described the apartments as "currently under construction" in February 1993. Letter to Tony Amato, Douglas-Eliman, Paul Rudolph Institute for Modern Architecture.

²² According to Timothy Rohan, rents "from the townhouses on Beekman Place and 58th Street paid the buildings' mortgages." Rohan, 223.

²³ Paul Rudolph Foundation v. Paul Rudolph Heritage Foundation, United States District Court, September 30, 2021, 2-3.

²⁴ For information about the Paul Rudolph Foundation, see <https://paulrudolph.org/about/>

²⁵ Dickinson email, 2023.

²⁶ Squeo studied architecture at Syracuse University and the University of Texas. During his time with Rudolph, he was involved with a number of unbuilt projects in southeast Asia.

²⁷ Squeo email to author, November 2023, LPC files.

²⁸ The ink drawing can be viewed at <https://www.loc.gov/item/2004675223/>

²⁹ Rohan, 223.

³⁰ Giovanni.

³¹ William Menking, "Manhattan Masterpiece," *The Architect's Journal*, October 2004.

³² "Paul Rudolph's Masterful 246 East 58th Street," (2013) accessed at <https://daytoninmanhattan.blogspot.com/2013/09/paul-rudolphs-masterful-no-246-east.html>

³³ *American Institute of Architecture Guide to New York City* (2000), 309.

³⁴ American Institute of Architecture Guide to New York City (2010), 346

³⁵ Jason Farago, "Paul Rudolph at 100: New Love for a Brutalist," *The New York Times*, December 20, 2018.

Findings and Designation

Modulightor Building

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and the other features of this building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Modulightor Building has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City, state, and the nation.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 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 Modulightor Building and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1331, Lot 128 as its Landmark Site, as shown in the attached map.



Modulightor Building, 246 East 58th Street
LPC, December 2023



Modulightor Building, 246 East 58th Street
LPC, December 2023



Modulator Building, 246 East 58th Street
LPC, December 2023



Modulator Building, rear facade
LPC, December 2023



Rear deck, view from above
LPC, October 2023



Rear deck, view south
LPC, December 2023



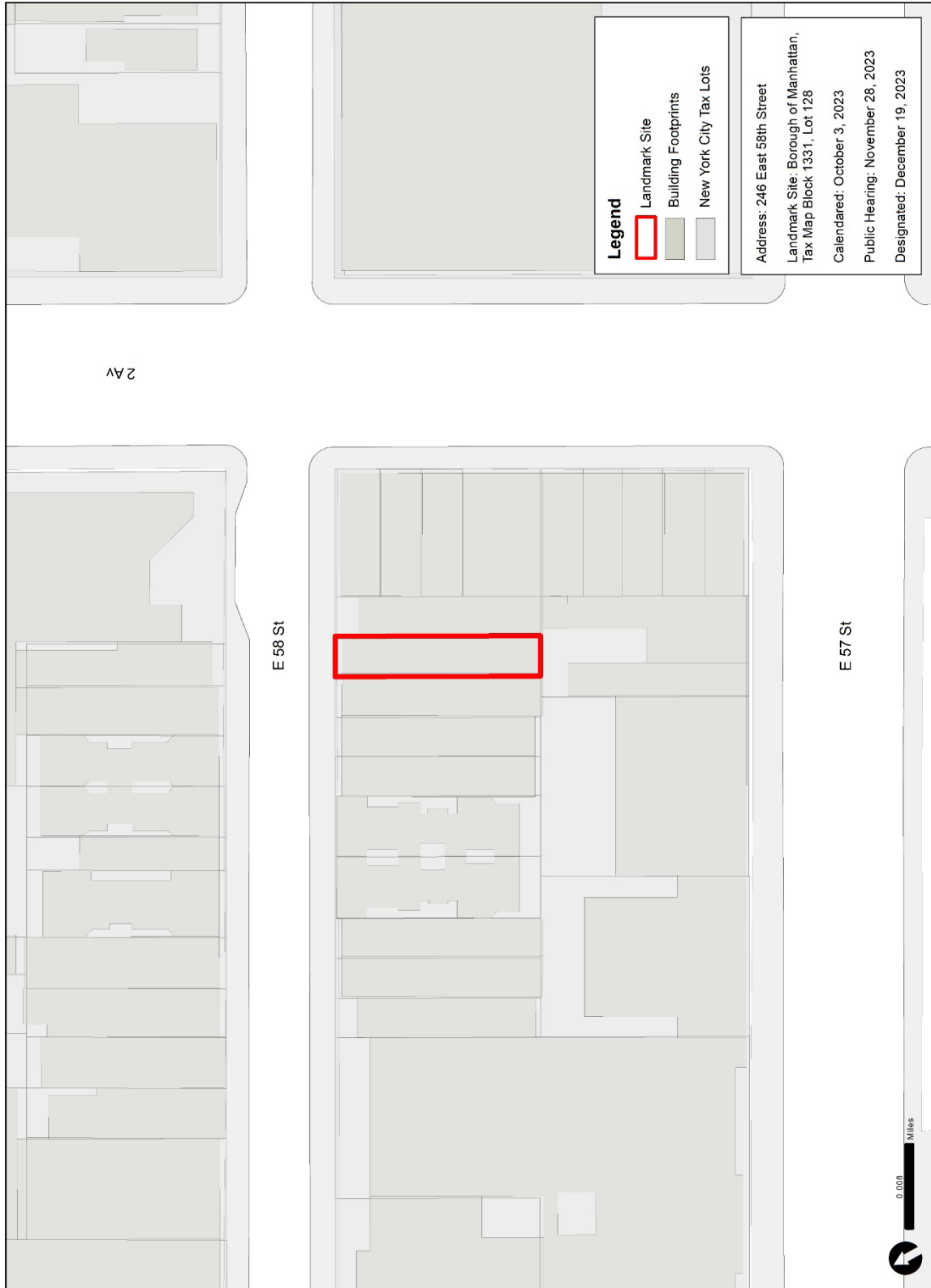
Roof deck, view north to street
LPC, December 2023






Roof deck stairs
LPC, December 2023



Roof deck (left, view south; right, view north)
LPC, December 2023



Legend

-  Landmark Site
-  Building Footprints
-  New York City Tax Lots

Address: 246 East 58th Street
Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan,
Tax Map Block 1331, Lot 128
Calendared: October 3, 2023
Public Hearing: November 28, 2023
Designated: December 19, 2023



Graphic Source: MapFLUTO, Edition 22v2, Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, DHW, Date: 12.19.2023