

Preserved Treasure

Good news is rare in New York City these days, but those who believe that this metropolis has a future as a city and not just as an exercise in crisis accounting are gladdened by word that a way has been found to save the Gold Room of the landmark Villard Houses on Madison Avenue.

Working closely with public and private groups and the Roman Catholic Archdiocese to find a solution, the developer, Harry Helmsley, and the architect, Richard Roth, will now incorporate the Gold Room, which was scheduled for demolition, into the plans for the new Palace Hotel. The library of the south wing will also be utilized in the adjoining new construction, keeping alive at least two of the superbly crafted and decorated McKim, Mead & White spaces of the eighteen-nineties. Even in extremis, New Yorkers cared about these fine period interiors and how the exterior of the new hotel-office-apartment tower would affect the landmark facade. The builder has responded to complaints over the initial designs with far better plans, inside and out.

Now it will be up to the City Planning Commission, rather than the Board of Standards and Appeals, to decide whether a requested variance for the tower is appropriate or acceptable. A solution is in the interest of all, since the much-improved project would eliminate the continuing, basic problem that threatens the Villard Houses' existence—how to make the valuable, money-losing site and landmark buildings economically supportable for their owner.

Even though the plan to build the new Palace still throws a good part of the real palace away—odd that those rich, rare and irreplaceable interiors are not seen as the natural signature and cachet of a genuine luxury hotel—there are possibilities of other tenants for the remaining great rooms. It seems reasonable enough in New York to settle for a compromise somewhat short of perfection which gains the main objective: **Keeping the wreckers away.**