

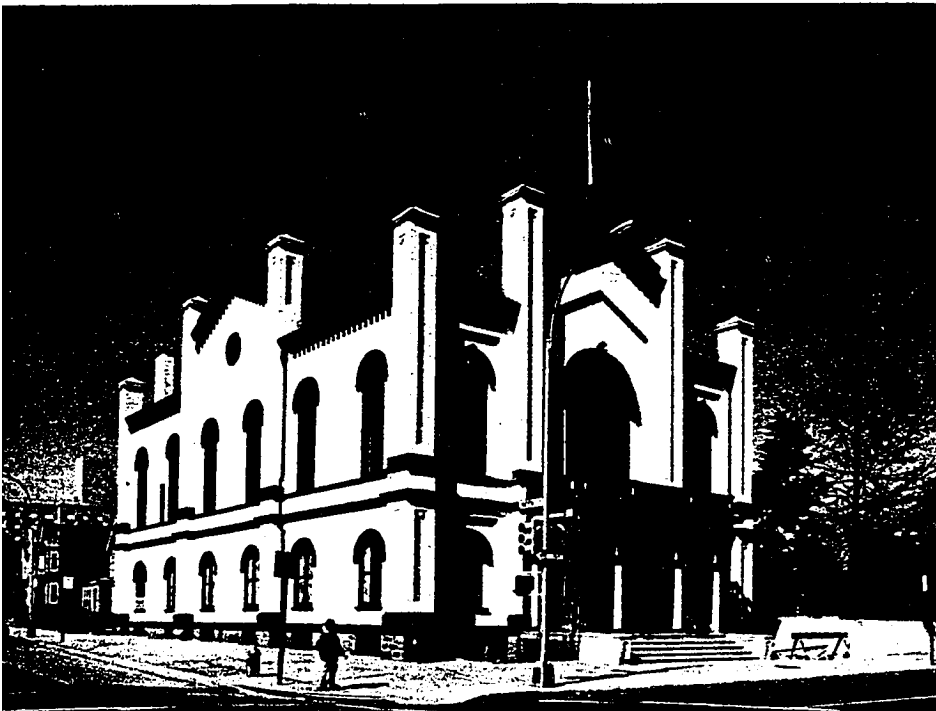
Design: New York rediscovered

By Ada Louise Huxtable

New York Times (1923-Current file); Jul 18, 1976; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times
pg. 160

Design

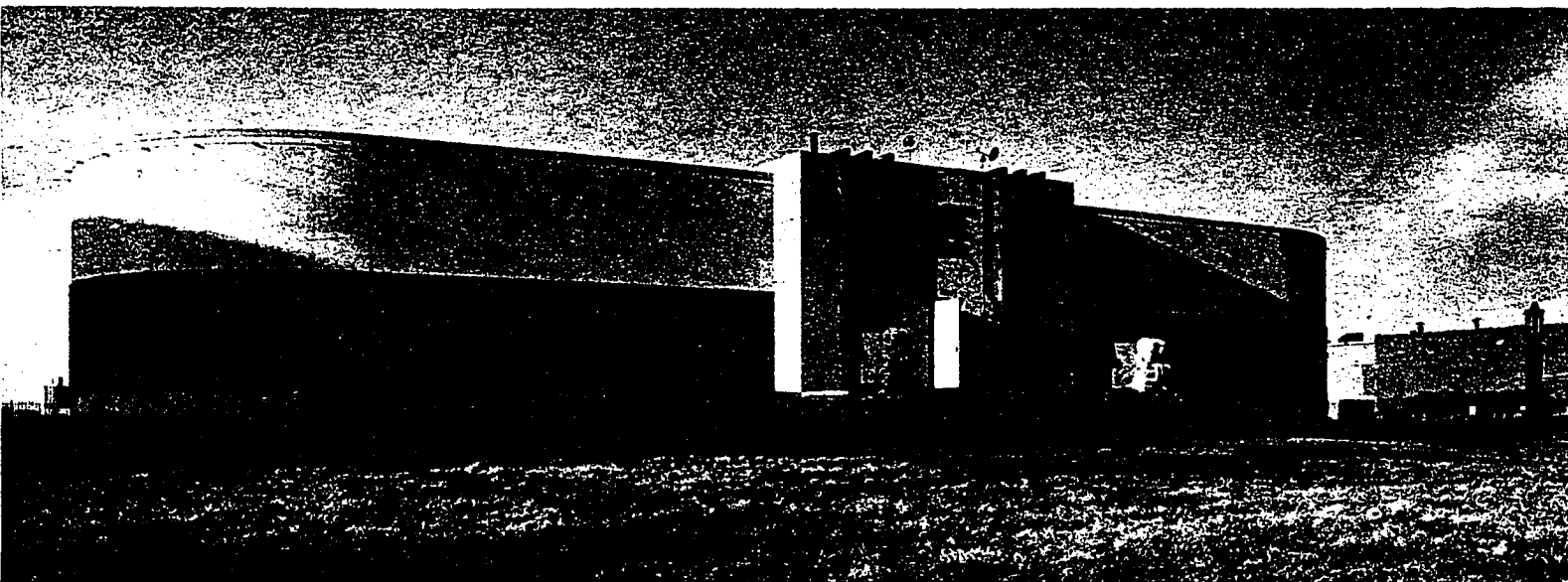
New York rediscovered



A Lombard Romanesque municipal courthouse. Flushing. 1862.



A Flemish Renaissance firehouse. Queens. B. L. Gilbert. 1903.



An Art Deco pumping station. Coney Island. I. S. Chanin. 1930.

By Ada Louise Huxtable

Nobody knows New York. Its streets are a journey of architectural discovery. The city is full of buildings of every style, of which the majority are unrecorded and unsung. In fact, New York City has just been told by the New York Landmarks Conservancy that it is host to over 4,000 public buildings of a surprisingly high level of design, put up by the city, the state and the Federal Government. This revealing inventory destroys the durable belief that except for a few landmark structures New York has little of architectural distinction.

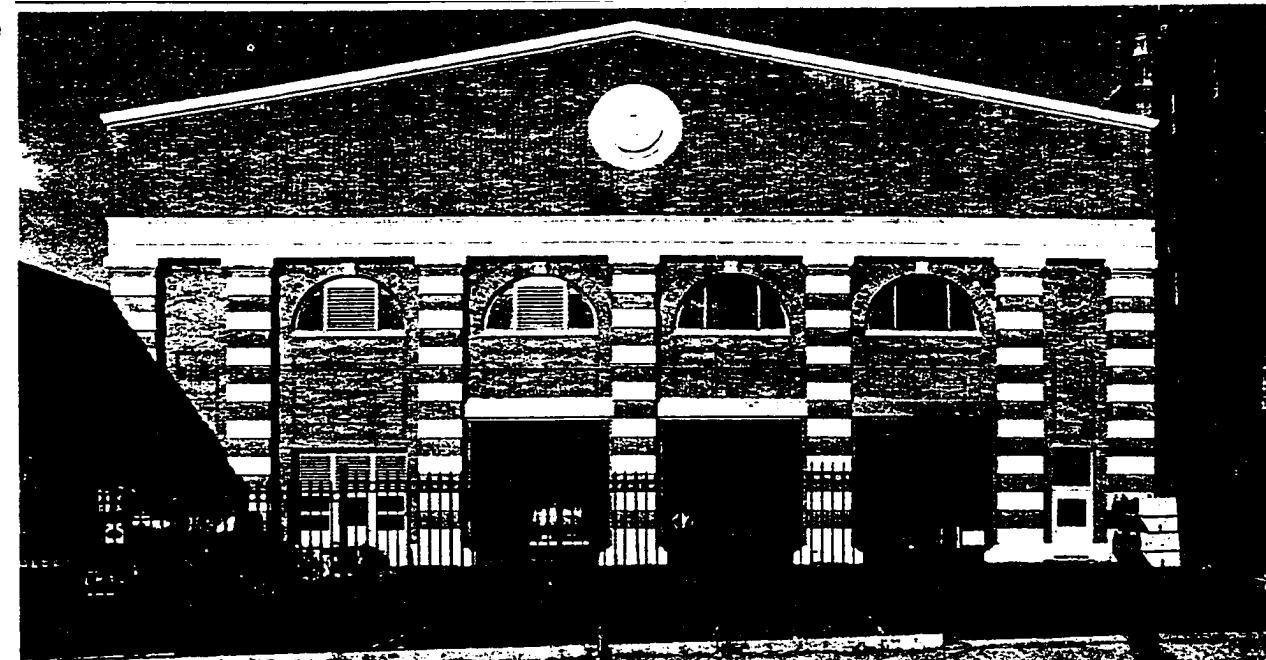
The counting has been done over the last year by the conservancy, a state-chartered, not-for-profit preservation group, with the help of Columbia University's Center for Advanced Research in Urban and Environmental Affairs, and a grant from the New York State Council on the Arts. The results disclose a substantial public resource.

The conservancy found more than 18,000 government structures of all sorts in New York, ranging from the usual schools, libraries, courthouses and police and fire stations to piers, pumping stations, public baths and other esoterica. Of these 18,000 buildings, over 4,000 were worth visiting and recording, and 744 were listed as exceptional. Not only has New York's traditional commitment to services for its people been a physical commitment as well, but the city has also been an extraordinary architectural client. The discovery has its poignancy, because quality is now the exception in public building, where once it was the rule.

The structures listed, from the early 19th century to 1940, represent almost every architectural fashion known in this country within that span of time: Greek and Gothic Revival, vernacular and High Victorian, Beaux Arts, Classical Revival and even Art Moderne. The architects include the city's and country's finest: Richard Morris Hunt, McKim, Mead & White, Carrère & Hastings, Calvert Vaux, Napoleon Le Brun.

There is a Lombard Romanesque courthouse of 1862 in Flushing, and an Art Deco pumping station in Brooklyn.

Ada Louise Huxtable is a member of the editorial board and is architecture critic of *The Times*.



A 1930's classical grit chamber (sewage plant). The Bronx. McKim, Mead & White. 1936.

A 1930's classical grit chamber (sewage plant) on Bruckner Boulevard in the Bronx, by the successor firm to McKim, Mead & White, displays an industrial elegance similar to the solemn architectural fantasies of Ledoux. Beaux Arts baths at Asser Levy Place in Manhattan, built by Arnold W. Brunner and William Martin Aiken in 1906, suggest Caracalla before Manhattan's East Side. Turn-of-the-century firehouses are a suavely sophisticated parade of Florentine and Flemish Renaissance, French Gothic and Beaux Arts.

These buildings had character, quality, art and style, and a genuine community role. They both served and embellished a neighborhood. Today,

some are still functioning for their original or recycled purposes, some are designated landmarks, others are abandoned shells that birds fly through. They form an architectural heritage and a problematic resource, in terms of continuing use, which no one, least of all the city (which sold 12 at surplus-property auctions last year), has yet calculated or faced.

The Landmarks Conservancy expected to document about 25 worthwhile buildings until it saw the results of the study. It then decided to go for all 744. This upward revision of urban buildings of value is actually taking place all over the country; it is an act of rediscovery reflecting a newly developed perception

of the past as art and history.

Of these 744 buildings, 105, superbly photographed by Jerry Spearman, are currently on view downtown at the Old Custom House on Bowling Green. By a calculated coincidence, the Custom House is an endangered public building. One of the city's most distinguished Beaux Arts structures, this 1907 landmark by Cass Gilbert was closed when the Customs Service moved in 1973 from its statue-embellished marble grandeur to the universal sanitary spaces of the World Trade Center.

The exhibition celebrates the temporary reopening of the Custom House to the public for the Bicentennial. This is a joint project of the con-

servancy, the General Services Administration (the Federal agency that owns the building) and the Custom House Institute, a not-for-profit organization set up to find alternate uses and a continued life for the abandoned landmark.

G.S.A. is in the process of cleaning the building's ornate white marble facade for the event. The rich ground floor interiors have been restored, with new lighting for the Reginald Marsh murals in the rotunda, where the surveyed buildings are displayed. Anyone interested in some of the city's architectural gems, from rough to polished, can see them, pictured and live, at the Custom House through Sept. 19. ■



A Beaux Arts pool and bathhouse. Manhattan. Arnold W. Brunner and William Martin Aiken. 1906.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.