

To: Barbaralee Diamonstein - EXTRA COPY -  
From: Carla Caccamise @sh  
572 7379  
FILE  
Landmarks Preservation Commission  
October 3, 1989; Designation List 221  
LP-1664

SEAGRAM BUILDING, INCLUDING THE PLAZA, 375 Park Avenue, Manhattan. Designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe with Philip Johnson; Kahn & Jacobs, associate architects. Built 1956-58.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1307, Lot 1.

On May 17, 1988, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Seagram Building including the plaza, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Twenty-one witnesses, including a representative of the building's owner, spoke in favor of designation. No witnesses spoke in opposition to designation. The Commission has received many letters in favor of designation.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

##### Summary

The Seagram Building, erected in 1956-58, is the only building in New York City designed by architectural master Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. Carefully related to the tranquil granite and marble plaza on its Park Avenue site, the elegant curtain wall of bronze and tinted glass enfolds the first fully modular modern office tower. Constructed at a time when Park Avenue was changing from an exclusive residential thoroughfare to a prestigious business address, the Seagram Building embodies the quest of a successful corporation to establish further its public image through architectural patronage. The president of Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, Samuel Bronfman, with the aid of his daughter Phyllis Lambert, carefully selected Mies, assisted by Philip Johnson, to design an office building later regarded by many, including Mies himself, as his crowning work and the apotheosis of International Style towers. The innovative, modular design of the building was a feat furthered by a coalition of talented consultants, a successful collaboration rarely realized in twentieth-century architecture, and by pioneering efforts of research and fabrication. The juxtaposition of the structural members, articulated by extruded bronze, with the transparent glass surfaces of the elegant curtain wall creates the balance between solid and void which typifies International Style design. Still virtually intact due to the foresighted maintenance plan of the Seagram Company, the building and plaza have inspired the work of many subsequent designers, affected New York's zoning regulations and real estate tax assessment, and provided a favorable environment for work and repose.

##### History of the Site<sup>1</sup>

The history of Fourth (now Park) Avenue begins with the advent of the railroads. In 1834 the New York and Harlem Railroad first carried passengers

along grade-level tracks down the center of Fourth Avenue from 42nd to 96th streets. By 1848 the New Haven Railroad entered Manhattan along Fourth Avenue. As railroad traffic increased, the avenue was widened to permit additional tracks, and the city mandated depressed tracks to minimize problems of noise, smoke, and the danger of fire and injury. By the 1880s, Fourth Avenue officially became known as Park Avenue and was lined with one- and two-story commercial buildings and carriage houses serving the brownstone residences on nearby side streets; the trains ran in an open cut below grade to the Grand Central Depot. The east side of Park Avenue between East 52nd and 53rd streets contained the finishing manufactory of the renowned Steinway & Sons piano company; erected in the 1860s, it was a large brick building of five stories. The remainder of the site which would eventually be occupied by the Seagram Building was divided up into brick-faced tenements on East 53rd Street and brick- and brownstone-fronted rowhouses on East 52nd Street.

In conjunction with the reconstruction of Grand Central Terminal (1903-13) and the electrification of the railroad (1903-07), Park Avenue was rebuilt solidly with a planted mall and the open wells were covered over. The avenue gradually became a thoroughfare lined with large apartment houses for the wealthy. One of these, the Montana Apartments, an eight-story neo-Romanesque building designed by Rouse & Goldstone and faced in brick and stone, was begun in 1919, replacing the Steinway piano factory.

The 1916 zoning resolution designated the portion of Park Avenue north of East 50th Street as residential, but by 1929 major property owners on the avenue, which was overtaking Fifth Avenue as the city's most prestigious address, succeeded in having the area between East 50th and 59th streets rezoned to permit commercial use. Not until the building boom that followed World War II did these efforts come to fruition with the completion in 1947 of the Universal Pictures Building at 445 Park Avenue, designed by Kahn & Jacobs. The transformation of Park Avenue into a commercial avenue was assured by the rash of new office buildings in the 1950s: Lever House (1950-52, a designated New York City Landmark); Olin Building, 460 Park Avenue (1954); Colgate-Palmolive Building, 300 Park Avenue (1954); 425 Park Avenue Building (Kahn & Jacobs, 1956); and the Seagram Building.<sup>2</sup>

#### Samuel Bronfman and Joseph E. Seagram & Sons<sup>3</sup>

Beginning his business career in the hotel industry in Winnipeg, Samuel Bronfman (1891-1971) later operated a mail order liquor company throughout Canada, eventually founding the Distillers Company, Ltd. In 1928 this company bought out its major competitor, Joseph E. Seagram & Sons and incorporated the name. With the repeal of Prohibition in 1933, Bronfman began planning an impressive Manhattan headquarters for his Seagram group, not to be realized until the 1950s. At the time of his death, Bronfman had amassed at least \$400,000,000 and his company was the world's largest distiller, with annual sales exceeding \$1.3 billion.

#### Ludwig Mies van der Rohe<sup>4</sup>

Among the most prominent and influential architects of the twentieth

century, German-born Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969) was initiated into architecture through the fields of masonry, stone carving, stucco decoration, and furniture design, before working as an architect in the office of Peter Behrens. By the end of the 1920s, Mies had emerged as one of Germany's leading architects, noted for his visionary skyscraper projects (wherein the apparently weightless and clearly revealed "skin and bone" modern construction permitted the greatest play of light on the building surface), leadership at the Weissenhof housing exhibition (1927) in Stuttgart, and designs for the Barcelona Exhibition (1929) and Tugendhat House (1928-30) in Brno. His work was significant for its attempt to address problems such as standardization of architectural features and Baukunst (the art of good building, as opposed to manipulation of form for its own sake). Soon after supervising the Bauhaus design school in 1930-33, Mies emigrated to the United States and assumed the directorship of the architecture department at Armour Institute (now Illinois Institute of Technology) for which he designed a master plan (1939-41) and several buildings. Later Mies received commissions for apartment buildings in Chicago: Promontory Apartments (1946-49) and 860-888 Lake Shore Drive Apartments (1948-51), the latter considered the prototypical Miesian (that is, International Style) high-rise structure with features that would recur in his buildings of the next two decades. Refinements of this prototype are found in the Commonwealth Promenade Apartments (1953-56) and especially the Seagram Building in New York (1954-58). Among his last works was the New National Gallery in Berlin, West Germany (1963-69). He received, among other awards, Gold Medals from the Royal Institute of British Architects and the American Institute of Architects.

#### Philip C. Johnson<sup>5</sup>

Critic, historian, and architect Philip Johnson (b. 1906) was graduated from Harvard University and became associated with the Museum of Modern Art soon after its founding in 1929, directing its innovative department of architecture and later designing its sculpture garden (1953) and two additions (1950, 1964). With the critic and historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock, he organized the momentous exhibition, "Modern Architecture" (1932), and coauthored The International Style (1932), a manifesto for the vanguard architecture of Walter Gropius, Le Corbusier, and Mies van der Rohe. Johnson was responsible for inviting Le Corbusier and Mies to the United States. Completing his professional degree in architecture at Harvard in 1943, he subsequently designed several influential residences, including his own Glass House (1949). His association with Mies on the Seagram Building, particularly his design for the Four Seasons Restaurant (1958-59), was a highlight in Johnson's career. His later work includes many New York projects: Asia House (now the Russell Sage Foundation/Robert Sterling Foundation Building), 112 East 64th Street (1958-60), located in the Upper East Side Historic District; New York State Theater at Lincoln Center (1964); New York State Pavilion (1964, with Richard Foster) for the World's Fair in Flushing; Elmer Holmes Bobst Library and Tisch Hall, New York University (1972, both with Richard Foster); and the American Telephone and Telegraph Building, 550 Madison Avenue (1980-84). In 1978 the American Institute of Architects awarded him its highest honor, the Gold Medal.

## Kahn & Jacobs

Born in New York City, Ely Jacques Kahn<sup>6</sup> (1884-1972) was educated at Columbia University and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Soon after joining the firm of Buchman & Fox in 1917, he became a partner and assumed effective control of the office, then known as Buchman & Kahn. His best-known designs are those for many skyscrapers of the 1920s and 1930s, which merged the stylistic influences of Art Deco and the Vienna Secession with his interest in oriental art and archaeology.<sup>7</sup> Extensive travel permitted Kahn to develop a specialized knowledge of building materials. As part of his devotion to architectural education, he organized numerous exhibitions which introduced new ideas in interior and industrial design. Kahn wrote widely for professional journals and in 1935 he published Design in Art and Industry. A fellow of the American Institute of Architects, he lectured extensively, was consultant to the United States Housing Authority, and served as president of the Municipal Art Society.

From 1941 to 1972 Kahn's partner was Robert Allan Jacobs<sup>8</sup> (b. 1905). Also a native of New York City, Jacobs was educated at Amherst College and Columbia University. After working in Paris as a designer and draftsman for Le Corbusier in 1934-35, he returned to New York and joined the newly formed firm of Harrison & Fouilhoux. In 1938 Jacobs began working for Kahn and was soon elevated to partner. In addition to its involvement in the Seagram Building, the firm's commercial, industrial, and institutional commissions include the Municipal Asphalt Plant, erected in 1941-44 (a designated New York City Landmark), admired as an early use of reinforced concrete in the United States, and several buildings in the Upper East Side Historic District.<sup>9</sup>

## Design and Construction<sup>10</sup>

The Seagram Company decided to locate its symbol of corporate achievement on Park Avenue, New York's finest residential boulevard which was quickly becoming a center of international business. In 1951, Seagram paid \$4,000,000 for 50,950 sq.ft. of property, including the Montana Apartments, on the east side of the avenue between East 52nd and 53rd streets. In 1954 the company announced it would erect an office building to be completed in 1957, intended to coincide with the centennial of the House of Seagram. In planning its headquarters, Seagram joined that group of American companies which, since the mid-19th century, have sought to establish further their corporate image through architectural patronage, particularly for tall office buildings, a conspicuous symbol of American capitalism.<sup>11</sup> The commission was first awarded to the firm of Pereira & Luckman; however, after seeing this proposal, architect-to-be Phyllis Bronfman Lambert convinced her father to hire an architect who would distinguish the company with an architecturally compelling design. After a two-and-one-half month search, she recommended Ludwig Mies van der Rohe with Philip Johnson as his associate. Bronfman approved the choice and appointed his daughter director of planning.<sup>12</sup> After selecting the final architects, it was decided more land was needed, so an additional 9,000 sq.ft. of adjacent land was bought for \$900,000.



Plans for the new design were filed in March of 1955.<sup>13</sup> At that time the site was occupied by the twelve-story Montana Apartment Building on Park Avenue, a nine-story apartment building on East 53rd Street, and a five-story tenement and row of four-story buildings, all on East 52nd Street. These were demolished between June, 1955, and March, 1956. Construction began soon afterward.

The owner's "simple" requirements were that the building "be the crowning glory of everyone's work, his own, the contractor's, and Mies's."<sup>14</sup> The building was designed by Mies and Johnson, with Kahn & Jacobs preparing the working drawings. Other consultants were: Jaros, Baum & Bolles, mechanical engineers; Severud-Elstad Krueger, structural engineers; Clifton E. Smith, electrical engineer; Richard Kelly, lighting consultant; Charles Middeldeer & Karl Linn, landscape architects; Bolt-Beranek & Newman, acoustical consultants; and Elaine Lustig, graphic consultant. The general contractor was the George A. Fuller Company.<sup>15</sup> By April, 1955, photographs of a model of the new design were published.<sup>16</sup> It was clearly distinguished from contemporary (and nearby) buildings which, like the General Reinsurance Building at 400 Park Avenue (Emery Roth & Sons, 1956-57), were unmodern "ziggurats" dressed in modern materials, or like the Union Carbide Building, now Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company Headquarters, at 270 Park Avenue (Skidmore Owings & Merrill, 1960), conformed to International Style tenets but lacked the impressive amenity of public space. In short, the Seagram Building was the "ultimate logical development of the revolutionary ideas which [Mies] evolved thirty-five years earlier."<sup>17</sup>

One of Mies's innovative decisions which aggrandized the design was the use of a broad elevated plaza (with a radiant heating system to keep it ice-free), symmetrically arranged with fountains and weeping beech trees. This was in accordance with the viewpoints of several New York architectural firms such as Kahn & Jacobs, which had been urging Parks Commissioner Robert Moses to propose a revision to the zoning regulations, in order to replace full-site ziggurat towers with large buildings surrounded by open spaces. At that time there were no direct precedents in midtown Manhattan for this planning scheme. The Rockefeller Center mall, which serves a very different urban design role, unites a complex of buildings (Associated Architects, 1932-40, and 1947-73, a designated New York City Landmark). Lever House, a glass-skinned slab balanced on a low-rise pedestal which permits entry into an atrium open to the sky, is an earlier solution by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill to the urban siting of modern skyscrapers. Nor were there many precedents in Mies's previous designs: historian Franz Schulze has noted that the Seagram Building "is almost unique in [Mies's] American oeuvre for the excellence with which it is wedded to its urban situation."<sup>18</sup>

Mies located the thirty-eight story tower, which occupies only fifty-two percent of the entire site, 100 feet back from Park Avenue. Using the glass-enclosed lobby and raised tower (elements refined from his designs for the 860-880 Lake Shore Drive buildings), and a slab marquee and continuous pavement, Mies provided the Seagram Building with a unity between indoor and outdoor spaces. This, in addition to the monumental spaces for a bar and restaurant located in the opposing wings behind the lobby, satisfied the program's demand for a large public space on the ground story. To

accommodate program requirements, the pristine slab rests on three subterranean levels<sup>19</sup> and is backed by a ten-story "bustle," full-height spine, and five-story wings.

Structural and mechanical innovations abounded in the design. The 520-foot steel frame was the tallest office building so far ever erected with high-strength bolts and was unusual for its vertical truss wind bracing.<sup>20</sup> Exterior columns and all beams are encased in concrete; interior columns are fireproofed with gypsum block. Four-inch thick concrete floors contain utility ducts (including closed circuit television cables).

Great care was taken in selecting cladding materials, even ensuring that appearances would improve as the building aged. The thirty-eight story tower has a curtain wall composed of 153,000 sq.ft. of bronze cladding and 122,000 sq.ft. of pinkish gray tinted glass, features which enhance the luxuriousness of the building. The sides of the "bustle" are covered in serpentine marble. Traditional granite, travertine, and verde antique marble in the plaza were arranged in opposition to the modern bronze alloys and extrusions and the warm tone of heat absorbing glass, all products of pioneering efforts of research and fabrication.

The Seagram Building is considered to be the first fully modular modern office tower due to the modular planning grid which integrates the partition system (designed by Hauserman, the company's first) the lighting (the first fully modular low-brightness system, designed by Richard Kelly), and the modular high- and low-tension electrical services. Supported by a steel skeleton of columns on 27'-9" centers, the building accommodates a 4'-7.5" module used to furnish the interior with standardized parts such as floor-to-ceiling doors and partitions and low profile perimeter diffusers which permit mostly unobstructed views through the floor-to-ceiling windows. The juxtaposition of the structural members, articulated on the exterior by extruded bronze, with the transparent glass surfaces of the elegant curtain wall creates the balance between solid and void which typifies International Style design. To maintain a uniform window appearance, Mies incorporated special Venetian blinds with only three positions and slats angled to maximize the full impact of the building's illumination when viewed from the sidewalk. Mylar ceiling panels in a grid pattern, visible from the sidewalk, illuminate the window-wall spaces. An automatic time clock control permits nighttime display lighting and guarantees a uniform low-intensity glow around the whole tower.<sup>21</sup>

All details, including square serif lettering and special door hardware, were painstakingly designed to harmonize. Seagram's own offices received furniture Mies himself had designed and works of art were both bought and specially commissioned.<sup>22</sup>

The plans were arranged to permit the Seagram Company to occupy the first seven stories or about one-third of the total office space of approximately 854,000 sq.ft. The \$50/sq.ft. construction cost<sup>23</sup> (including the price of the land) was twice the usual cost for contemporary office buildings. However, over 115 tenants would pay high rents to share the remainder of the building, and partake of its luxurious materials,

prestigious address, and spacious plaza, not to mention the cachet of having an office in a building designed by an internationally renowned architect. Therefore, the owner expected a thirteen percent return in the first year on the initial investment.

The Seagram Company moved into its new offices in December of 1957. By the next July, the popularity of the plaza among New Yorkers was acknowledged in a newspaper account.<sup>24</sup> Although temporary Certificates of Occupancy were issued by the Department of Buildings in 1958, the final certificate was not issued until 1959.<sup>25</sup>

### Description

The symmetrically arranged thirty-eight story tower is surmounted by a tall mechanical story. The tower's first story, recessed to reveal the outermost row of bronze-clad columns, is faced in clear glass with bronze mullions. A Muntz metal<sup>26</sup> marquee with two rows of incandescent recessed light fixtures extends on the west facade. The tower is articulated by four-and-one-half by six inch bronze I-beam extrusions, continuous vertical elements applied to represent structural intent and provide shadow to the surface. Horizontal bands, created by Muntz metal spandrels and pinkish-gray glass, balance the exterior's strong verticality. The five-story wings, ten-story "bustle," and full-height spine resemble the tower in their exterior articulation except that in portions of the ten-story section the glass is replaced by serpentine marble panels. Restaurant entrances on East 52nd and 53rd streets have sidewalk canopies, double glass doors, and metal signs. Recessed from the face of the building within a bronze-clad entry, which is illuminated by three recessed light fixtures, the doors on East 52nd Street are flanked by two square bronze planters at the sidewalk. Service entrances on these streets are large rectangular openings with roll-down garage doors.

Other details ensure uniformity throughout the elevations. Each window contains a Venetian blind which may be adjusted to only three levels (open, half-closed, and fully-closed) and the angle of its slats is set at forty-five degrees so that during the day the exterior has a harmonious composition. Around the perimeter of each ceiling there is a twenty-foot band composed of luminous panels in a grid pattern; therefore, at night the building is characterized by its consistent lighting level.

Elevated three risers above the Park Avenue sidewalk, the pink granite podium of the plaza is bound on its north and south sides by long parapets of verde antique marble and contains identical rectangular pools, each with water jets gathered in a tight group near the center.<sup>27</sup> Near the southern pool stands a bronze-clad flag pole, the only asymmetrical feature of the plaza. Flanking the base of the building are ivy-covered planting areas with gingko trees and, on each side, one staircase with two metal railings which leads to the sidewalk. The grandeur of the plaza is extended to the adjacent sidewalks, likewise paved in pink granite.

## Impact

Architectural critics have overwhelmingly praised the Seagram Building. Lewis Mumford called it a "Rolls-Royce" of buildings with "the aesthetic impact that only a unified work of art" enjoys.<sup>28</sup> Another contemporary review opined, "Seagram challenges accepted skyscraper practice all the way down the line."<sup>29</sup> A generation later, historians would refer to the building as "seminal" and, in describing the ensemble of tower, interior, and Four Seasons Restaurant, "In toto incomparable."<sup>30</sup> William Jordy credited the Seagram design as an influence on other prominent office buildings, among them the Inland Steel Building, Chicago (SOM, 1956-58) and the Union Carbide Building, 270 Park Avenue (SOM, 1960).<sup>31</sup>

The design was influential in other ways. Soon after the erection of the Seagram Building, the tax assessment of the building became the subject of an important controversy when the high cost of construction was used as the basis for a tax assessment in excess of capitalized rental income. In 1963 the New York Appellate Division, in supporting the city Tax Commission's challenged assessment of the building, stated "The building was of a type ... not only serving the owner's obvious commercial purposes but also advertising its business and contributing to its prestige."<sup>32</sup> The Appellate Division's decision was affirmed by the Court of Appeals in 1964. Also, the Seagram Building's plaza was considered so successful that the 1961 revision of the zoning code included a provision which permitted a building to be larger if a public plaza was provided.<sup>33</sup>

## Conclusion

The Seagram Building's high standards of design and construction have been augmented by a rigorous maintenance program which includes annual oiling of the bronze curtain wall and periodic resetting of the pavement in the plaza (under way during the summer of 1989). In 1980 Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, Inc. sold the building to Teachers Investment & Annuity Association; the sale agreement required the new owner to seek New York City Landmark status for the structure when it became eligible under the thirty-year age requirement.<sup>34</sup> The building continues to be one of New York's most prestigious business addresses.

Report prepared by David M. Breiner  
Research Department

Report edited by Marjorie Pearson  
Director of Research, and  
Elisa Urbanelli, Research Department



## NOTES

1. This account is based on Landmarks Preservation Commission, Lever House Designation Report, report prepared by Alex Herrera (New York, 1982), 3 and Christopher Gray, "Is It Time to Redevelop Park Avenue Again?" New York Times, Real Estate Report "Commercial Property," sec. 13 (May, 14, 1989), pp. 44-47. See also: Robert A.M. Stern, et. al., New York 1900 (New York, 1983), 353-58; Stern, et. al., New York 1930 (New York, 1987), passim; Atlas of the City of New York and Part of the Bronx (New York, 1885), pl. 18; Moses King, King's Handbook of New York, 2nd ed. (New York, 1893), 942-43; New York Public Library, Photographic Views of New York City, 1870's - 1970's (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1981), fiche 0946-C3, D5, E2, E3, F2; Manhattan Land Book, City of New York (New York, 1934), pl. 78; New York City, Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets, Block 1307, Lot 1. NB 257-1919.
2. See "High Rise Office Buildings," Progressive Architecture 38 (June, 1957), 162 and Insurance Maps of the City of New York, Borough of Manhattan, vols. 4, 6E (New York, 1920-present).
3. Who's Who in America, vol. 31 (Chicago, 1960-61), 362. Samuel Bronfman obituary, NYT, July 11, 1971, p. 46. Bronfman was a noted philanthropist. In recognition, his children established the Samuel Bronfman Biblical and Archaeological Museum at the Israeli Museum in Jerusalem.
4. Mies's biography is based on "Mies van der Rohe, Ludwig," Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects, ed. Adolf K. Placzek, vol. 3 (New York, 1982), 183-95 and Encyclopedia of 20th Century Architecture, gen. ed. Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani, rev. & enl. ed. (New York, 1986), 221-28.
5. "Johnson, Philip," Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects, vol. 2, 499-501; Encyclopedia of 20th Century Architecture, 181-82; American Architects Directory, 2nd ed., ed. George S. Koyl (New York, 1962), 354; LPC, Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report, vol. 1 (New York, 1981), 188.
6. See: "Kahn, Ely Jacques," Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects, vol. 2, 537; American Architects Directory, 2nd ed., 363; Ely Jacques Kahn obituary, NYT, Sept. 6, 1972, p. 48.
7. These include, all in New York, the Squibb Building at 745 Fifth Avenue; 120 Wall Street Building; 2 Park Avenue Building; and buildings at 1400, 1410, and 1450 Broadway. Kahn was also the architect for: Bergdorf Goodman Store; the Jay-Thorpe Building, West 57th Street; the Film Center; Montefiore Hospital; and Hospital for Joint Diseases. For the World's Fair of 1939-40 he designed the Maritime Transportation Building, the General Cigar Building, and the Ballantine Inn. Kahn's residential projects included: part of the Fort Greene Houses; Gowanus

Houses; Carver Houses; and Hudson Manor Apartments.

8. See American Architects Directory, 343; "Inventory of a Collection of Architectural Drawings from the Office of Kahn & Jacobs, Including the Works of their Predecessor Firms, Compiled by Janet Parks" (typescript at the Avery Architectural Library of Columbia University, 1978).
9. See LPC, Municipal Asphalt Plant Designation Report (New York, 1976); LPC, Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report (New York, 1981). Other works by Kahn & Jacobs include: 100 Park Avenue Building; 1407 Broadway Building; parts of Mount Sinai Hospital; and the American Airlines Terminal at J.F. Kennedy International Airport.
10. See Paul Noll, "Discriminatory Taxation: The Seagram Building," Comment 3, no. 2 (Apr., 1965), 17; "New Thinking on Office Buildings," Architectural Forum 99 (Sept., 1953), 123; G.E. Kidder Smith, The Architecture of the United States: New England and the Mid-Atlantic States (New York, 1981), 551-52; "Bronze Monument in the Sky," Empire State Architect 16 (Oct., 1956), 72; "Seagram's Bronze Tower," Architectural Forum 109 (July, 1958), 68-77; Arthur Drexler, "The Seagram Building; Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson, Architects," Architectural Record 123 (June, 1958), 140.
11. See Kenneth Turney Gibbs, Business Architectural Imagery in America, 1870-1930 (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1984), esp. 1, 4, 169.
12. Franz Schulze, Mies van der Rohe: A Critical Biography (Chicago & London, 1985), 270-71; "Park Ave. To Get New Skyscraper," NYT, July 13, 1954, p. 25; "Seagram's Bronze Tower," 77. "Seagram's Plans Plaza Tower in New York," Architectural Forum 102 (Apr., 1955), 9.
13. The plans filed on March 29, 1955 must have been submitted as an amendment to the original application (NB 97-1954) because the docket book shows no new applications for that site on that date. The block and lot folder is incomplete. See "Seagram Offices Get Final Plan," NYT, Mar. 30, 1955, p. 50. Regarding the demolitions, see NYC, Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets, Block 1307, Lot 1. DEMO's 367-1955, 387-1955, 524-1955, 31-1956.
14. Phyllis Lambert, Testimony given before the LPC at a public hearing, May 17, 1988. Item No. 1 (LP-1664).
15. "The Seagram Building," Arts and Architecture 77 (Jan., 1960), 15.
16. "Seagram's Plans Plaza Tower in New York," 11.
17. Jurgen Joedicke, A History of Modern Architecture, trans. James C. Palmes (London, 1959), 77 [caption to fig. 132].
18. Franz Schulze, Letter to LPC dated May 10, 1988, n.p. (LP file.)

19. The underground levels accommodate parking, storage, off-street loading platforms, and service space for the first-story tenants.
20. "A Skyscraper Crammed with Innovations," Engineering News Record 15? (195?), 8-9.
21. "A Skyscraper Crammed with Innovations," 9; Nicholas Polites, "The Seagram Building: Living with a Landmark," Building Economics (May, 1986). According to Carla Caccamise Ash, Curator of Collections for the Seagram Company, in a conversation in July, 1989, the nighttime illumination system has not been used since the 1970s, but is still in place. LPC is also indebted to Ms. Ash for supplying other pieces of important information and copies of Ezra Stoller's photographs of the building.
22. See Peter Blake, The Master Builders (New York, 1960), 253.
23. In 1958 the estimated cost of the building was published as \$35,000,000. According to Seagram Vice President Arthur S. Margolin, in a conversation on June 26, 1989, the cost of construction was approximately \$40,000,000.
24. "Footsore Here Finds Oasis at Seagram Building Plaza," NYT, July 26, 1958, p. 12.
25. See "Monument in Bronze," Time, Mar. 3, 1958, p. 54; NYC, Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets, Block 1307, Lot 1. C of O 48433-58 (temp) and C of O 51303-59.
26. Muntz metal is an alloy resembling bronze in color, but containing a higher proportion of copper. See "L'oeuvre de Mies van der Rohe," L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui 29, no. 79 (Sept., 1958), 103.
27. Mies originally expected the pools to contain abstract sculptures, but instead rows of evenly spaced jets were installed. The current condition of grouped jets, therefore, is not original.
28. Lewis Mumford, "The Lesson of the Master," Journal of the A.I.A. 31 (Jan., 1959), 19-20.
29. "Seagram's Bronze Tower," 67.
30. William J.R. Curtis, Modern Architecture Since 1900 (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1983), 266; Smith, 550-51.
31. William H. Jordy, The Impact of European Modernism in the Mid-Twentieth Century. American Buildings and their Architects, vol. 5 (New York & Oxford, 1972), 159, 276.
32. "Original Cost of Expensive Commercial Building of Striking Design Used to Justify Tax Assessment in Excess of Capitalized Rental Income (Joseph E. Seagram & Sons v. Tax Comm'n, N.Y. App. Div. 1963),"

Columbia Law Review 63 (1963), 1528-32. The decision immediately provoked comment from architects, art critics, corporate sponsors, and the general press. See Noll, 17; "New York Court Upholds Tax on Seagram Tower," Architectural Forum 121 (July, 1964), 5.

33. Zoning in New York City: A Proposal for a Zoning Resolution for the City of New York submitted to the City Planning Commission by Voorhees Walker Smith & Smith, August, 1958 (New York, 1958), 128; William H. Whyte, The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces (Washington, D.C., 1980), 14; Carol P. Wright, Blue Guide to New York (New York, 1983), 313.
34. "Extract of Closing Memorandum Sale of Seagram Building, entered into between Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, Inc. and Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association of America in virtue of Agreement of Purchase and Sale dated February 15, 1980," Articles 26 (pp. 56-73) and 28 (p. 75) (photocopies submitted to LPC by Canadian Centre for Architecture.)



## FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this structure, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Seagram Building, including the plaza, 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 Seagram Building, including the plaza, is a seminal example of International Style architecture, which has inspired the work of many twentieth-century architects; that it was designed in 1954-55 by architectural master Ludwig Mies van der Rohe with Philip Johnson and erected in 1956-58; that it is Mies's only building in New York City and is the climax of his ideas on tall office structures, which began in the 1920s; that the granite and marble plaza, an oasis of amenable public space, is inherently bound to the design of the tower; that the realization of building and plaza were made possible by a rare coalition of talented consultants and by pioneering efforts of research and fabrication; that the elegant curtain wall of extruded bronze, Muntz metal spandrels, and tinted glass--shaded by specially designed interior blinds--presents itself as a serene slab of pervasive uniformity; that the juxtaposition of the structural members with the transparent wall surfaces creates the balance between solid and void which typifies International Style design; that a special lighting design for the perimeter offices was included to allow uniform illumination at night; and that this first fully modular office tower was commissioned by the notable firm of Joseph E. Seagram & Sons and has been kept virtually intact through a foresighted maintenance program.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, 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 Seagram Building, including the plaza, 375 Park Avenue, Borough of Manhattan and designates as its Landmark Site Manhattan Tax Map Block 1307, Lot 1.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- American Architects Directory. 2nd ed. Ed. George S. Koyl. New York: A.I.A. & R.R. Bowker Co., 1962.
- Atlas of the City of New York and Part of the Bronx. New York: E. Robinson, 1885.
- Blake, Peter. The Master Builders. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960.
- [Bronfman, Samuel. Obituary]. New York Times, July 11, 1971, p. 46.
- "Bronze Monument in the Sky." Empire State Architect 16 (Oct., 1956), 55, 72.
- Curtis, William J.R. Modern Architecture Since 1900. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1983.
- Drexler, Arthur. "The Seagram Building; Mies van der Rohe and Philip Johnson, Architects." Architectural Record 123 (June, 1958), 139-47.
- Encyclopedia of Modern Architecture. Ed. Gerd Hatje. New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1964.
- Encyclopedia of 20th Century Architecture. Gen. Ed. Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani. Rev. & enl. ed. New York: N.N. Abrams, 1986.
- "Extract of the Closing Memorandum Sale of Seagram Building, entered into between Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, Inc. and Teachers Insurance and Annuity Association of America in virtue of Agreement of Purchase and Sale dated February 15, 1980." Articles 26 and 28. LPC files.
- "Footsore Here Finds Oasis at Seagram Building Plaza." New York Times, July 26, 1958, p. 12.
- Gibbs, Kenneth Turney. Business Architectural Imagery in America, 1870-1930. Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1984.
- Gray, Christopher. "Is It Time to Redevelop Park Avenue Again?" New York Times, Real Estate Report: Commercial Property, May 14, 1989, sec. 13, pp. 44-46.
- "High-rise Office Buildings." Progressive Architecture 38 (June, 1957), 159-91.
- Insurance Maps of the City of New York, Borough of Manhattan. vols. 4, 6E. New York: Sanborn, 1920-present.
- "Inventory of a Collection of Architectural Drawings from the Office of Kahn

- & Jacobs, Including the Works of their Predecessor Firms, Compiled by Janet Parks." Typescript at the Avery Architectural Library of Columbia University, 1978.
- Joedicke, Jurgén. A History of Modern Architecture. Trans. James C. Palmes. London: The Architectural Press, 1959.
- Jordy, William H. The Impact of European Modernism in the Mid-Twentieth Century. American Buildings and their Architects. vol. 5. New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- ". "Seagram Assessed." Architectural Review 124 (Dec., 1958), 374-82.
- [Kahn, Ely Jacques. Obituary]. New York Times, Sept. 6, 1972, p. 48.
- King, Moses. King's Handbook of New York City. 2nd ed. Boston: Moses King, 1892/93.
- Lambert, Phyllis. Testimony given before the Landmarks Preservation Commission at a public hearing, May 17, 1988, Item No. 1. (LP-1664).
- Landmarks Preservation Commission. Lever House Designation Report (LP-1277, 1982, Report prepared by Alex Herrera); Municipal Asphalt Plant Designation Report (LP-0905, 1976); Upper East Side Historic District Designation Report (LP-1051, 1981).
- Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects. Ed. Adolf K. Placzek. 4 vols. New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., Free Press, 1982.
- Manhattan Land Book. New York: G.W. Bromley, 1934.
- "Monument in Bronze." Time, March 3, 1958, pp. 52-54.
- Mumford, Lewis. "The Lesson of the Master." Journal of the A.I.A. 31 (Jan., 1959), 19-23.
- "New Thinking on Office Buildings." Architectural Forum 99 (Sept., 1953), 107-23.
- New York City. Department of Buildings, Manhattan. Plans, Permits and Dockets. [Block 1307, Lot 1].
- "N.Y. Court Upholds Tax on Seagram Tower," Architectural Forum 121 (July, 1964), 5.
- New York Public Library. Photographic Views of New York City, 1870's-1970's. Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms, 1981.
- Noll, Paul. "Discriminatory Taxation: The Seagram Building." Comment 3, no. 2 (Apr., 1965), 16-44.
- "L'oeuvre de Mies van der Rohe." L'Architecture d'aujourd'hui 29, no. 79

(Sept., 1958). [entire issue].

"Original Cost of Expensive Commercial Building of Striking Design Used to Justify Tax Assessment in Excess of Capitalized Rental Income (Joseph E. Seagram & Sons v. Tax Comm'n, N.Y. App. Div. 1963)." Columbia Law Review 63 (1963), 1528-32.

"Park Ave. To Get New Skyscraper." New York Times, July 13, 1954, p. 25.

Polites, Nicholas. "The Seagram Building: Living With a Landmark." Building Economics (May, 1986).

Schulze, Franz. Letter to LPC dated May 10, 1988. LPC files.

-----, Mies van der Rohe: A Critical Biography. Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press, 1985.

"The Seagram Building." Arts and Architecture 77 (Jan., 1960), 14-15.

"Seagram Offices Get Final Plan." New York Times, Mar. 30, 1955, p. 50.

"Seagram's Bronze Tower." Architectural Forum 109 (July, 1958), 66-77.

"Seagram's Plans Plaza Tower in New York." Architectural Forum 102 (Apr., 1955), 9.

"A Skyscraper Crammed with Innovations." Engineering News Record 15? (195?), 8-9.

Smith, G.E. Kidder. The Architecture of the United States: New England and the Mid-Atlantic States. Vol. 1. New York: Doubleday, Anchor Press, 1981.

Stern, Robert A.M., Gregory Gilmartin, and John Massengale. New York 1900: Metropolitan Architecture and Urbanism, 1890-1915. New York: Rizzoli, 1983.

Stern, Robert A.M., Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins. New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Two World Wars. New York: Rizzoli, 1987.

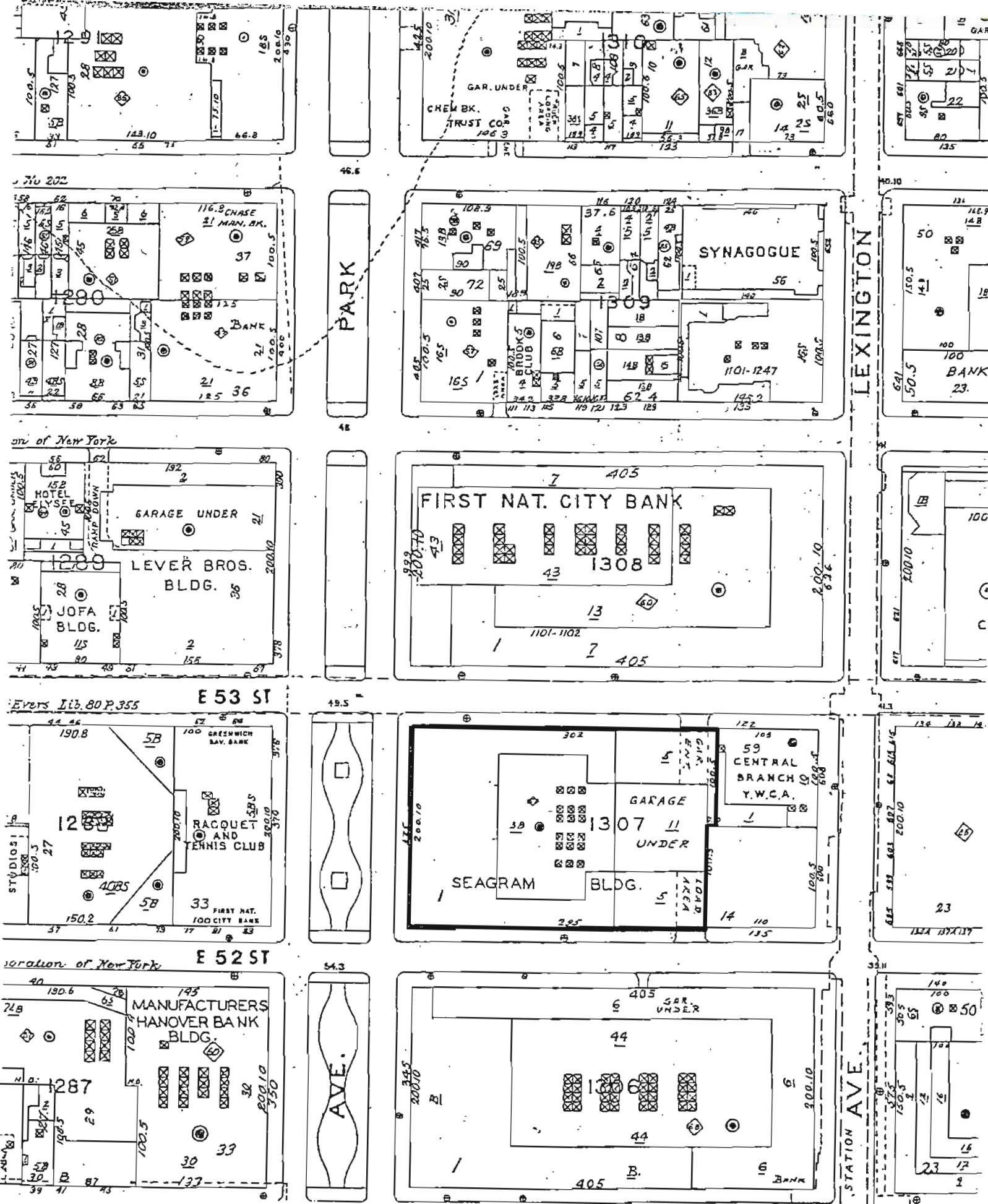
Who's Who in America. Vol. 31. New York: A.N. Marquis Co., 1960- 61.

Whyte, William H. The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces. Washington, D.C.: The Conservation Foundation, 1980.

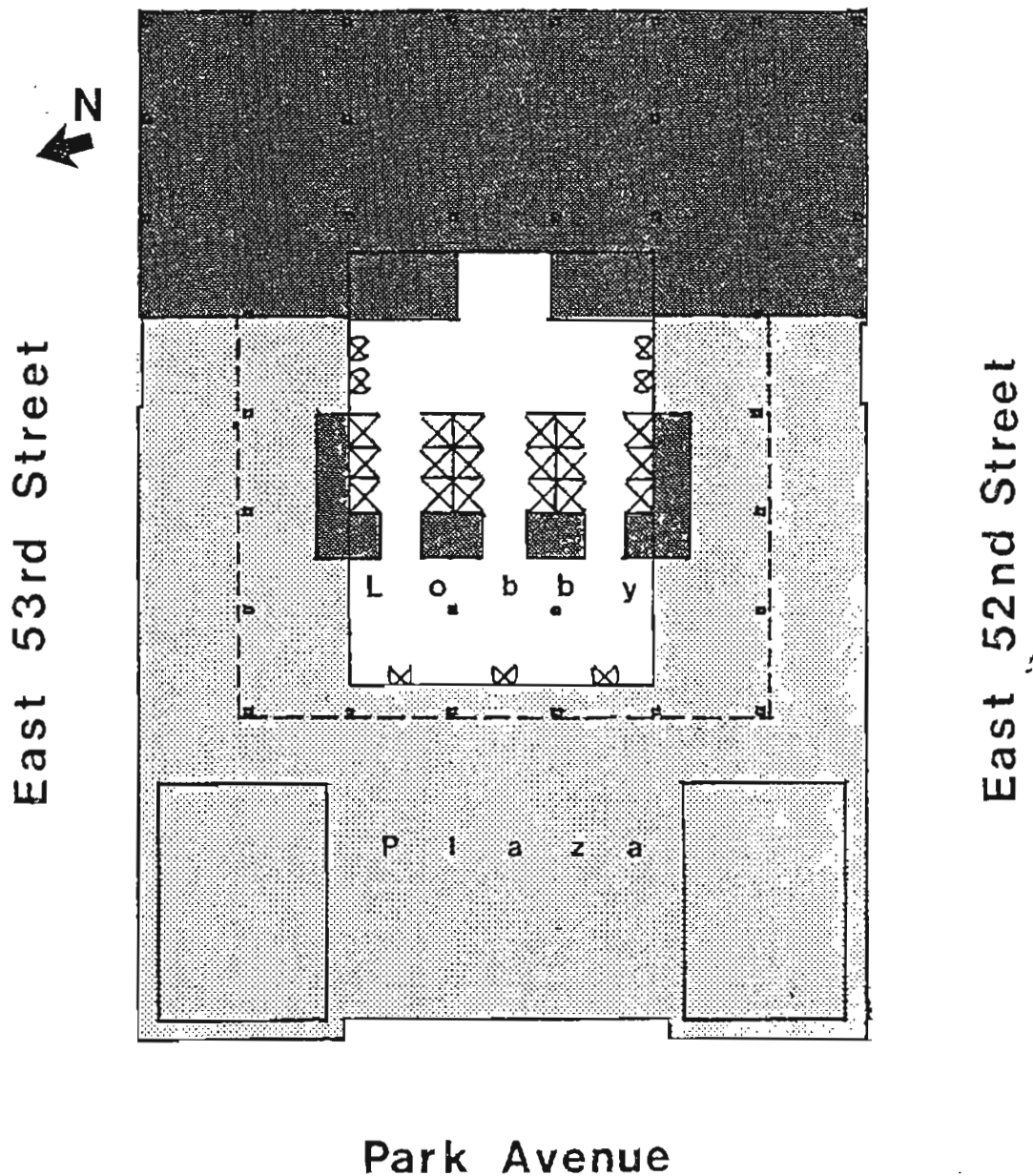
Wright, Carol P. Blue Guide to New York. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1983.

Zoning New York City: A Proposal for a Zoning Resolution for the City of New York submitted to the City Planning Commission by Voorhees Walker Smith & Smith, August, 1958. New York, 1958.





SEAGRAM BUILDING  
375 Park Avenue

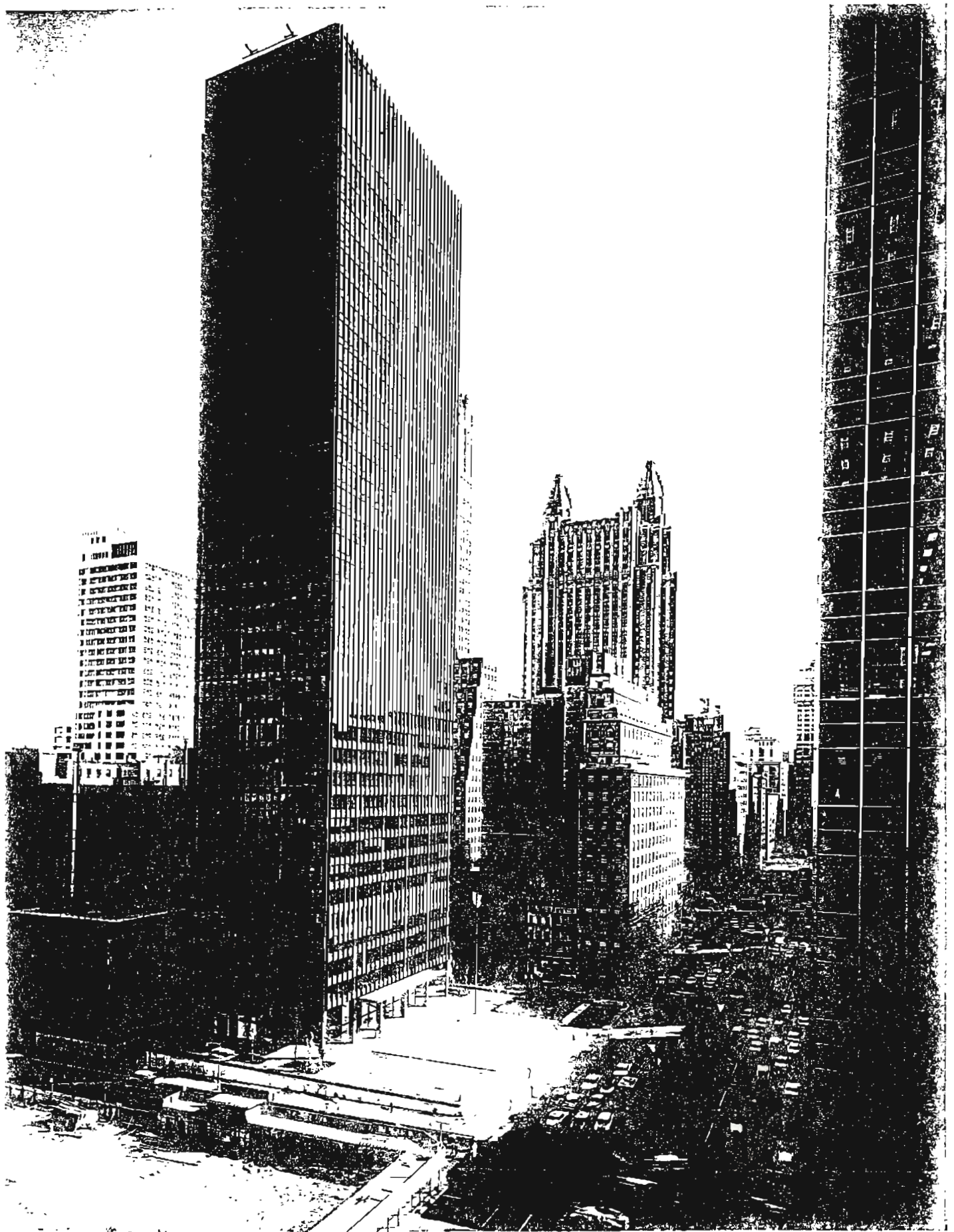


# SEAGRAM BUILDING

## 375 Park Avenue

Exterior Designation 

Interior Designation 



SEAGRAM BUILDING, photograph by Ezra Stoller, 1958  
Courtesy of Joseph E. Seagram & Sons, Inc.

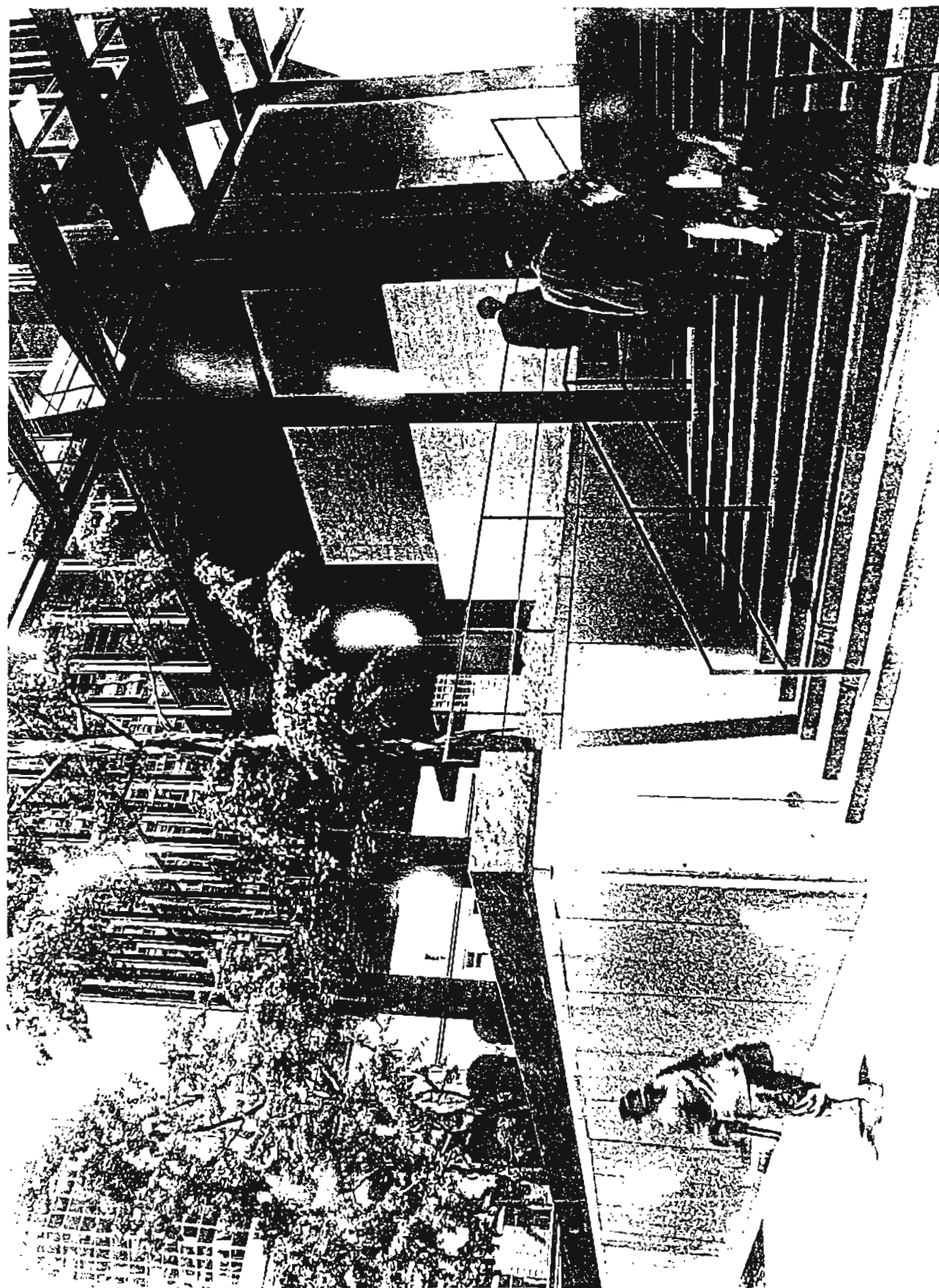




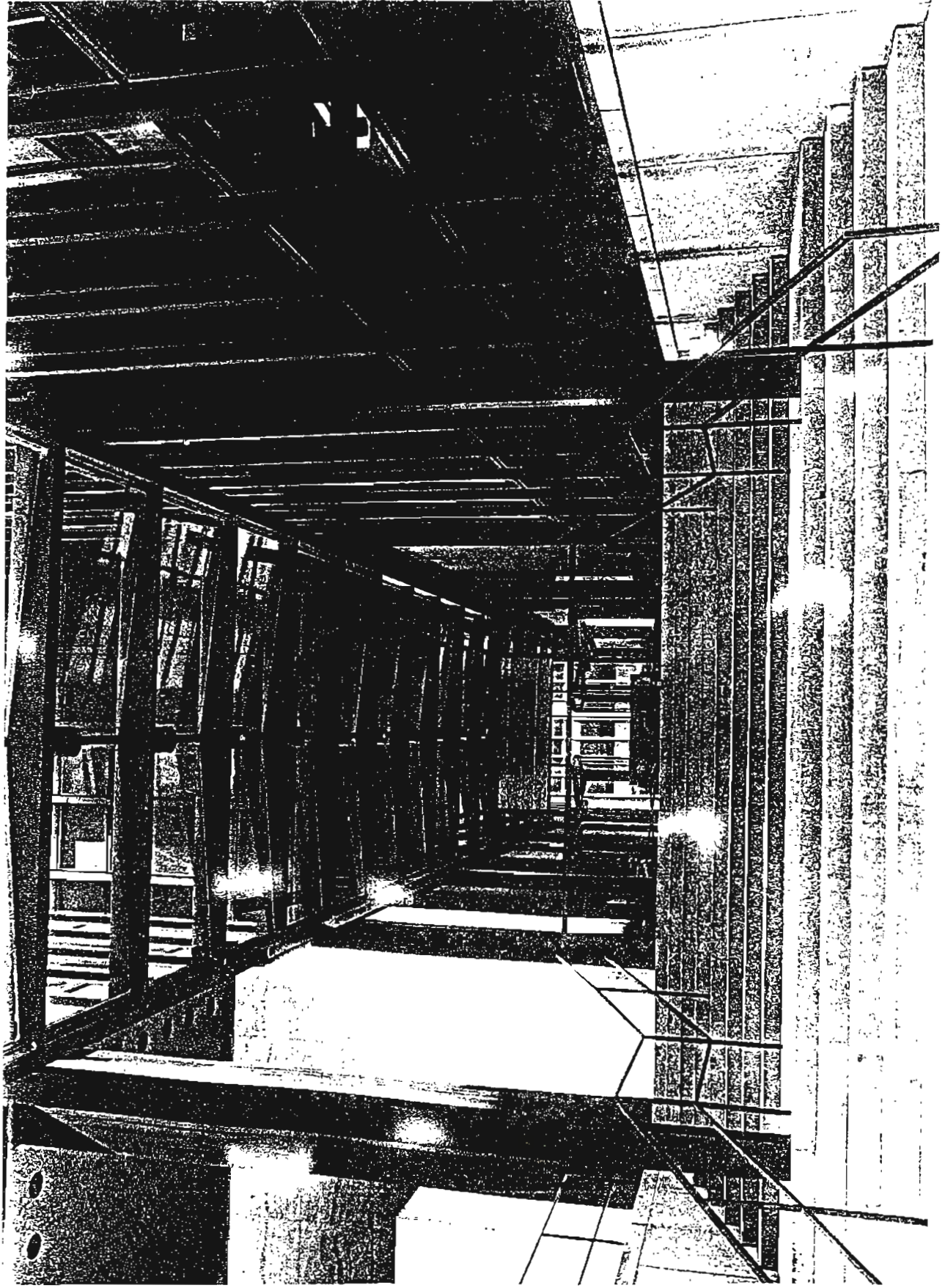
SEAGRAM BUILDING (1989)

Photo credit: David M. Breiner





SENGPAN ELLIUNG, Entrance at 52nd Street      Photo credit: David M. Breiner



SEAGRAM BUILDING, Entrance at 52nd Street Photo credit: David M. Breiner





STERN BUILDING, Commercial entrance

Photo credit: David M. Dreiner