

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

JAN 08 2016

Nat. Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service

### National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

#### 1. Name of Property

historic name Master Building

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

#### 2. Location

street & number 310 Riverside Drive [ ] not for publication

city or town New York [ ] vicinity

state New York code NY county New York code 061 zip code 10025

#### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements as set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [ ] nationally [ ] statewide  locally. ([ ] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Ruth A. Puyopant DBHPO  
Signature of certifying official/Title

12/30/15  
Date

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [ ] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register criteria. ([ ] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register  
[ ] see continuation sheet
- [ ] determined eligible for the National Register  
[ ] see continuation sheet
- [ ] determined not eligible for the National Register
- [ ] removed from the National Register
- [ ] other (explain) \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
date of action

Edson W. Beall

2-23-16



**Master Building**

**New York, New York**

Name of Property

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.)

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location
- C** a birthplace or grave
- D** a cemetery
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F** a commemorative property
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by historic American Building Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**Areas of Significance:**

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Architecture \_\_\_\_\_
- Art \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance:**

1929 - 1938 \_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates:**

1929 \_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person:**

N/A \_\_\_\_\_

**Cultural Affiliation:**

N/A \_\_\_\_\_

**Architect/Builder:**

Harvey Corbett – Helmle, Corbett & Harrison \_\_\_\_\_

Sugarman & Berger \_\_\_\_\_



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Master Building - Description of Property

Overview

Located on the northeast corner of Riverside Drive and West 103<sup>rd</sup> Street, the Master Building is a twenty-nine-story Art Deco apartment tower. Constructed from 1928 to 1929, the building is significant for being an important example of the work of the architect Harvey Wiley Corbett, for its innovative program, which attempted to combine everyday living with art and culture, and for its association with the artist Nicholas Roerich. The building maintains a high degree of exterior integrity and was designated as a New York City Landmark in 1989.

The building is situated in an area of Manhattan known as the Upper West Side. The building is within the boundaries of the locally designated Riverside-West End Historic District Extension II and is across the street from Riverside Park. The majority of the buildings in the immediate area are late nineteenth century row houses and early twentieth century apartment buildings, built primarily of limestone and brick.

The building is unusual for the color of its brick, which changes from dark purple at the base to light grey at the top, and for its height. At twenty-eight stories, the Master Building is the tallest building on Riverside Drive. The upper stories of the building have views of the Hudson River and the New Jersey Palisades to the west and Midtown Manhattan to the southeast.

**Master Building**

Base

There are two main entrances to the building. The first is located on Riverside Drive and historically provided public access to Roerich Museum. The second is on 103<sup>rd</sup> Street and provides access to the lobby of the apartment building. Each of these entrances is two stories in height and is emphasized by a projecting stepped brick surround. Cantilevered metal canopies draw additional attention to these entrances. Above these canopies are tripartite transom windows with blue leaded glass sidelights. The sidelights are divided into small rectangles and feature an ornamental metal design. The abstract design is reminiscent of a corn stalk. This pattern is also featured on the glass and metal doors of the 103<sup>rd</sup> street entrance.

To the right of the apartment lobby entrance on 103<sup>rd</sup> street are three doors that provide access to the auditorium. The outer two doors are metal service doors, while the center door has paneled glass. Similar to the other two main entrances, the middle of these three doors is emphasized by a two-story brick surround; however, the brick does not project from the façade but steps back into façade of the building. While this entrance possesses a similar tripartite transom to the other two main entrances, the sidelights lack the blue leaded glass and the entrance does not have a metal canopy. In place of the metal

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canopy, between the transom and the door is a dog-tooth brick panel that incorporates projecting headers and is present above each of the entrances to the theatre.

One final entrance is located on Riverside Drive. This entrance historically provided access to the building's restaurant, which no longer exists. A single metal door surrounded by metal paneling still provides access to the interior space.

On the first and second floors, there are three double-hung windows located on either side of the Riverside Drive museum entrance. The first window on either side of the entrance is located between the brick entrance surround and one of the building's brick piers. The next two windows are grouped together between two piers. On 103<sup>rd</sup> Street, four windows flank the each side of the apartment lobby entrance on the first and second floors. The first three windows are grouped together and a brick pier separates the fourth. The ground floor windows retain their original metal grillwork.

At the base of the southwest corner of the building is a black granite corner stone with an engraved monogram. The monogram consists of a circle with the letters R and M surrounded by three dots. The R and M stand for the Roerich Museum, but there are conflicting accounts as to the symbolism of the three dots within a circle. Roerich himself described the circle as representing the totality of culture with the three dots signifying art, science, and religion, but he also described the circle as representing the eternity of time, encompassing the past, present, and future.<sup>1</sup>

### Upper Stories

From the third through the fourteenth story of the building, the fenestration and detail of each floor is repeated. Corner windows and vertical brick piers provide emphasis to these stories. With the exception of the corner windows, the windows are narrow metal one-over-one sash windows. The first windows in from the corner of the building stand alone, while the rest of the windows are grouped in pairs. A thin brick pier separates the windows in each individual pair and a wide brick pier separates each pair. The spandrels are emphasized through brick pattern work, achieved through contrasting light and dark bricks. The effect is four narrow light colored lines running vertically under each spandrel. The spandrels, piers, and window groupings have the effect of creating a strong vertical rhythm, which accentuates the building's height.

Above the fourteenth story are a series of irregular setbacks culminating in a short octagonal tower. The setbacks create private terraces for various apartments and are accentuated with terra cotta cresting. Like the brick, the cresting varies in color depending on its vertical location. In some areas the terra cotta has rich orange and gold tones while in others it appears grey.

### Interior

<sup>1</sup> "Roerich Pact and Banner of Peace," Nicholas Roerich Museum, accessed June 6 2015, <http://www.roerich.org/roerich-pact.php>.

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There are three primary semi-public spaces on the first floor of the Master Building. One of these is the auditorium, which is currently being used by a church. The auditorium has an orchestra and mezzanine level and seats approximately three hundred people. The stage wraps around to the front and right side of the room. The seats and the curtains are of deep purple and red hues.

The second is the main lobby, which provides access to the building's apartments, is located on 103th street. It consists of a concierge desk on the right side of the room and a lounge on the left side of the room. The lounge is treated as a small gallery. Four columns separate these spaces from the three elevators that line the north wall. The elevators exhibit a geometric design, which recall the grills on the first floor windows and is achieved through the contrast between the brushed and polished aluminum finish. The bronze colored lights, which are suspended from the ceiling between the columns, are octagonal in shape. The terrazzo floor is a colorful combination of geometric patterns. The geometric nature of the room's details is emphasized in the crown molding, which varies in height, reaches several feet below the ceiling in places, and is laid entirely at right angles.

The lobby of the Riverside Museum on Riverside Drive consists primarily of a grand staircase constitutes the third semi-public space. The staircase, which is made of limestone, begins as one central flight of steps. Upon reaching a small landing, the staircase splits into two flights of stairs, which run in the reverse direction on either side of the first flight. The sides of the staircase are enclosed by heavy limestone blocks, which increase in height with the staircase. On each side of the entrance are two double doors, which offer access to rooms that are currently leased out to commercial tenants. Like the stairs, the floor and baseboards of the lobby are made of limestone. The second story, which was original used by the museum, has been partitioned off with glass walls. This space is currently being used as an office.

Alterations

Incomplete alteration records and the lack of original floor plans make it difficult to document all of the changes that have been made to the building's interior. In 1947, the Department of Buildings approved alterations of the existing pantries in the apartments. These alterations entailed the removal of existing doors to facilitate cooking. In 1996, a round of alterations were made including the replacement of the building's elevator doors, the addition of a custom-designed front desk that incorporated the building's corn stalk pattern, the refurbishment of original light fixtures, and an in-fill terrazzo floor where there had been a concierge desk.

Other alterations to the interior of building include changes to the first and second floor gallery space. Some of these spaces have been subdivided, and today most of the space is either leased to commercial tenants or used as storage. The third floor has also been altered, and some of the space has been converted to apartments. The auditorium's stage was at some point enlarged, and the mezzanine level of the auditorium has been altered throughout the years.

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Over time, several of the apartments in the building have been combined. While the alterations vary, many of the apartments have had their kitchens enlarged. The majority of apartments, however, remain studios.

The exterior of the building has undergone few changes and maintains a high degree of integrity. As of 1989, when the building was designated an individual New York City Landmark, changes to the exterior of the building have been regulated by the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission.

In 1990, the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission approved the replacement of all of the building's existing windows and terrace doors. Many of the building's original steel windows had been replaced in the early 1970s and those that remained were in poor condition. The Landmarks Preservation Commission stipulated that all of the building's windows be replaced with aluminum casement and double-hung windows with a baked-on enamel finish. These new windows closely match the original windows in configuration, details, and finish.

In 1996, under the direction of the architectural firm of Antonucci and Lawless, work was done to the exterior of the building. The Landmarks Preservation Commission approved the replacement of the doors at the 103<sup>rd</sup> Street apartment lobby entrance. The work included the removal of the central pane between the two doors so as to widen the doors and make them ADA compliant. The corn stalk detail to the window above the door, which had been removed, was restored. In addition, missing and damaged portions of the decorative iron grilles were restored.

In 2004, the exterior masonry of the building was restored. This included selective repointing and in-kind brick replacement. Repairs were also made to the terra cotta, which was both cracking and spalling. Additionally, the brick and terra cotta parapet wall was rebuilt to match the historic condition. In 2009, the three exterior doors to the building's auditorium were replaced and in 2012, the building underwent additional repointing.

One major change to the exterior of the building that cannot be dated is the removal of the stained glass from at least three of the entrances, after they were vandalized.<sup>2</sup> They were located above the museum and lobby entrance and around the exterior doorway of the restaurant. The entrance to the restaurant now features a metal door and surround and the stained glass above the museum and apartment lobby entrance has been replaced with large panels of plate glass.

<sup>2</sup> Oriole Feshbach, phone interview by Kathryn Ralph, June 7, 2015.

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**Master Building - Significance:**

The Master Building is a twenty-nine-story Art Deco skyscraper that was built in 1929 with the goal of combining art with everyday living. The building is significant under Criteria A in the area of Art for its associations Roerich Museum, which featured hundreds of the artist's paintings, as well as two not-for-profits associated with the museum —the Master Institute of the United Arts and The Corona Mundi International Center. The Master Building is also significant under Criteria C for its Art Deco design. Primarily attributed to Harvey Wiley Corbett of the firm of Helmle, Corbett & Harrison, the building is one of Corbett's most significant pieces of work and is one of the best examples of New York City's Art Deco-style skyscrapers. The building is a designated New York City landmark.

Nicholas Roerich

Nicholas Konstantinovich Roerich was born in St. Petersburg, Russia in 1874. Roerich received his education in art and law and studied at the Academy of Art and St. Petersburg University.<sup>3</sup> Considered a scholar, mystic, painter, and designer, Roerich wrote extensively on subjects such as philosophy and religion.<sup>4</sup> He was particularly attracted to ancient and Eastern philosophies, and "believed that art should be incorporated into everyday life."<sup>5</sup> In 1920, Roerich came to the United States on an invitation from the Chicago Art Institute and toured the country with his paintings.<sup>6</sup> The natural and historical scenes he painted incorporated rich colors and were exhibited in some of the world's most renowned art museums such as the Louvre in Paris, the National Museum of Stockholm, and the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.<sup>7</sup> A cultural activist, Roerich founded the Master Institute of United Arts in New York in 1921 and the International Art Center the following year. For four years, from 1924 until 1928, Roerich led an American artistic-scientific expedition around Central Asia. Thereafter, he settled in a town called Naggar in the Himalayas.<sup>8</sup>

For most of his career, Roerich was concerned about the problems of cultural preservation, believing the culture of each nation to be a world treasure. In 1935, Roerich established The Roerich Pact. Predating the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, the pact sought to protect heritage from neglect and war. A flag was devised to fly above all sites of cultural and historic value. Known as the Banner of Peace, it featured a circle with three dots. The pact

<sup>3</sup> "Biography," Nicholas Roerich Museum, Early Years, accessed April 20, 2015, <http://www.roerich.org/roerich-biography.php>.

<sup>4</sup> Debra Craine and Judith Mackrell, *The Oxford Dictionary of Dance*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), s.v. "Roerich, Nicholas," accessed April 20, 2015.

<sup>5</sup> New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, "Master Building," Designation Report, (Dec 5, 1989), 2.

<sup>6</sup> "Biography," Nicholas Roerich Museum, America, accessed April 20, 2015, <http://www.roerich.org/roerich-biography.php>.

<sup>7</sup> "Riverside Drive's Tallest Building Under Way," *Real Estate Record and Guide*, 122, (July 28, 1928), 7-8.

<sup>8</sup> "Biography," Nicholas Roerich Museum, America, accessed April 20, 2015, <http://www.roerich.org/roerich-biography.php>.

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was initially signed by twenty-one nations including the United States.<sup>9</sup> Roerich was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize for his work.<sup>10</sup>

Louis & Nettie Horch

Throughout his career, Roerich's reputation as a painter, his beliefs, and his charisma garnered him the attention and financial backing of figures such as Louis Horch.<sup>11</sup> Louis Horch made his fortune on Wall Street and was a senior partner in the foreign-exchange firm of Horch Rosenthal.<sup>12</sup> In 1942, he became the manager of the New York office of the Board of Economic Warfare and was subsequently appointed regional director of the Department of Commerce by Henry Wallace.<sup>13</sup> Louis's wife, Nettie, was an art lover and interested in Buddhism and theosophy. From 1937 to 1954, she was the fine arts chairman of the National Council of Women of the United States.<sup>14</sup> She met Nicholas Roerich and his wife Elena in 1921 and subsequently introduced the Roerichs to her husband. The Horches were charmed by Nicholas Roerich's charisma and discovered that they shared Roerich's interests in art and belief in art education as a form of public service. They were invited to participate in the newly founded Master Institute. Louis Horch would go on to help Roerich pay off all his debt and invested huge sums of his own money in the Master Institute of United Arts and the Roerich Museum.<sup>15</sup>

Master Institute of the United Arts

The Master Institute of the United Arts was a school that stemmed from a united effort between the Roerichs and Sina and Maurice Lichtmann. The Lichtmanns were Russian pianists, who became acquainted with Nicholas Roerich shortly after his arrival in New York City. They were taken with his work, and together, they sought to create a school that would disseminate art and knowledge among the American youth.<sup>16</sup> The school was formally established in November 1921 and began operating in a large studio above a Greek Orthodox Church on 310 West 54<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>17</sup> The institute offered classes in areas such as music, theatre design, sculpture, foreign languages, and ballet. Roerich's participation helped attract an accomplished group of instructors including, Deems Taylor, Robert Edmund Jones, and Lee Simonson.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>9</sup> "Roerich Pact and Banner of Peace," Nicholas Roerich Museum, accessed June 6 2015, <http://www.roerich.org/roerich-pact.php>.

<sup>10</sup> "Nicholas Roerich: Messenger of Peace and Beauty," Center for Peace through Culture, The Banner of Peace, accessed June 6, 2015, <http://www.centerforpeacethroughculture.org/roerich.asp>.

<sup>11</sup> "Nicholas Roerich," Nicholas Roerich Society, accessed June, 9, 2015, [http://www.nicholasroerichsociety.com/Site\\_3/Roerich.html](http://www.nicholasroerichsociety.com/Site_3/Roerich.html).

<sup>12</sup> "Louis L. Horch, 90, Founder of Museum," *New York Times*, (Apr 16, 1979), D13.

<sup>13</sup> "ibid

<sup>14</sup> "Nettie S. Horch, An Arts Patron, Is Dead at 94," *New York Times*, (May 1, 1991), D.25.

<sup>15</sup> Alexandre Andreyev, *The Myth of the Masters Revived: The Occult Lives of Nikolai and Elena Roerich*, (Leiden, Koninklijke, 2014), 83.

<sup>16</sup> Ruth A. Drayer, *Nicholas and Helena Roerich: The Spiritual Journey of Two Great Artists and Peacemakers*, (Wheaton, Quest Books, 2005), 26; Alexandre Andreyev, 80.

<sup>17</sup> Alexandre Andreyev, 80.

<sup>18</sup> "Biography," Nicholas Roerich Museum, America, accessed April 20, 2015, <http://www.roerich.org/roerich-biography.php>.

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Corona Mundi International Center

The Corona Mundi art center was established in New York in 1922. Part of its mission was to create an international community of experts that would organize artistic and archeological expeditions and that would create touring art exhibitions that would be shown in places such as schools, hospitals, and villages without easy access to art.<sup>19</sup>

Relocation to Riverside Drive and the Construction of the Master Building

In 1923, Maurice Lichtmann purchased a three-story mansion a 310 Riverside Drive.<sup>20</sup> The mansion became the temporary home of the Master Institute of the United Arts.<sup>21</sup> Intending to create a "great community which should bridge art and life," Louis and Nettie Horch began purchasing the property upon which the Master Building would be built in 1925. This included lot 40 or 310 Riverside Drive, which was purchased from Sina and Maurice Lichtmann and the buildings on lots 42, 43, 44, and 76, which were purchased from other owners over a period of approximately three years. These lots were deeded to the Master Institute of United Arts Inc. and the Roerich Museum Inc.<sup>22</sup>

Hoping to construct a building with enough rental units to financially support both a museum and art school, in 1928 final plans were filed for a 24-story brick museum and apartment hotel.<sup>23</sup> Apartment hotels were common in New York City between the 1880s and 1930. They allowed owners to evade the regular height restrictions imposed on residential buildings. They offered hotel amenities such as maid service and restaurants, but were designed for long-term residents. In order to meet code, apartments typically had service pantries as opposed to regular kitchens.<sup>24</sup>

Completed in late 1929, the Master Building was constructed towards the end of a period of rapid development on Riverside Drive.<sup>25</sup> Riverside Drive was for many years "one of the city's most prominent residential boulevards" and was distinguished by a general uniformity in design and building height.<sup>26</sup> The inter-war period ushered in a new phase of development that saw the replacement of mansions, row houses, and flats with large apartment buildings that typically ranged from twelve to sixteen stories. Completed in 1929, just prior to the stock market crash, the Master Building, at 28-stories in height, was one of the last and most ambitious of these projects.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Alexandre Andreyev, 100.

<sup>20</sup> Deed, Louis L. and Nettie S. Horch Papers, circa 1920s-1960s, Columbia University, Avery Manuscripts and Archives.

<sup>21</sup> Alexandre Andreyev, 101.

<sup>22</sup> Deeds, Louis L. and Nettie S. Horch Papers, circa 1920s-1960s, Columbia University, Avery Manuscripts and Archives; Property Records, Department of Finance, New York City.

<sup>23</sup> "The Roerich Museum and Master Apartment Building," *Architectural Record* 66, (1929), 109; New York City Department of Building, New Building Permit.

<sup>24</sup> New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 4.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 4.

<sup>26</sup> "Riverside Drive's Tallest Building Under Way," 7-8.

<sup>27</sup> New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 4.

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The Architects

The design of the Master Building was a partnership between the firms of Helmle, Corbett & Harrison and Sugarman & Berger. Harvey Corbett of Helmle Corbett & Harrison is credited in contemporary accounts with designing the Master Building. The firm of Sugarman & Berger played an advisory role in the design and supervised the interior construction work.<sup>28</sup>

Harvey Wiley Corbett (1873-1954) was born in San Francisco and received his degree in engineering from the University of California, Berkeley.<sup>29</sup> He subsequently studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris and came to New York in 1900.<sup>30</sup> In the early years of his career, Corbett was associated with Cass Gilbert, but he established the firm of Pell & Corbett with F. Livingston Pell in 1903. In 1912 he entered into a partnership with Frank J. Helmle.<sup>31</sup> They were active in Brooklyn and Manhattan in the early 1910s-1920s.<sup>32</sup> While he would change his mind later in his career, Corbett was an advocate of skyscraper design. He saw the skyscraper as "the most important American contribution to the field of architecture." He believed that skyscrapers were "New York's chief assets," and that they would enable the city to avoid congestion by diverting traffic vertically.<sup>33</sup> The firm would become prominent for designing skyscrapers in the 1920s. Their designs were influenced by the streamlined forms of stripped European modernism.<sup>34</sup> During his career, Corbett designed many prominent buildings including the Maryland Institute in Baltimore, the Brooklyn Masonic Temple, and part of Rockefeller Center. In 1954, he was awarded the Gold Medal of the New York Chapter of Architects for the accomplishments of his career. He received honorary degrees from University of California, Liverpool University, and Columbia University.<sup>35</sup>

Henry Sugarman (1889-1946) was educated at the National Academy of Design and the Columbia University School of Architecture. He spent eight years of his career at the firm of J. E. R. Carpenter, Architects.<sup>36</sup> Albert Berger (1879-1940) was born in Hungary and attended the University of Budapest. He immigrated to New York in 1904. He began his career in the United States with the firm of Schwartz & Gross.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>28</sup> *ibid*, 4.

<sup>29</sup> Sandra L. Tatman, "Corbett, Harvey Wiley (1873 - 1954) -- Philadelphia Architects and Buildings," Philadelphia Architects and Buildings, accessed April 21, 2015, [http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar\\_display.cfm/106546](http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/106546).

<sup>30</sup> New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Sandra L. Tatman, "Corbett, Harvey Wiley (1873 - 1954) -- Philadelphia Architects and Buildings.

<sup>32</sup> New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 3.

<sup>33</sup> "Harvey W. Corbett, Architect of Rockefeller Center, Dies," *New York Herald Tribune*, (Apr 22, 1954), 26.

<sup>34</sup> New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 5.

<sup>35</sup> "Harvey W. Corbett, Architect of Rockefeller Center, Dies."

<sup>36</sup> "M.H. Sugarman, 58, Architect, is Dead," *New York Times*, (Oct 13, 1946), 60.

<sup>37</sup> "Albert G. Berger Had Designed Buildings Worth \$150,000,000," *New York Herald Tribune*, (Nov 17, 1940), C2.

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The two formed the firm of Sugarman & Berger in 1926. They were the architects of the New Yorker Hotel, One Fifth Avenue, and the Navarre-Garment Center Building. Henry Sugarman received the Gold Medal from the American Institute of Architects in 1925.<sup>38</sup>

Design and Layout

Challenged with incorporating rental units, a museum, and an art school all within one building, Corbett decided to functionally separate the building into two sections. The first three floors of the building were semi-public with space devoted to the Roerich Museum, the Master Institute of United Arts, a theatre, and the hotel's restaurant and lobby. The upper floors of the building were reserved for apartments.

Entry to the museum lobby was off of Riverside Drive. To the left of the museum lobby was a large gallery space and to the right a smaller conference room. A grand staircase provided access to the second floor of the building. While no original plans for the building have been found, it is known that the second floor provided additionally gallery space and that the third floor was used as an art school.<sup>39</sup>

The primary entrance to the apartment lobby was from West 103<sup>rd</sup> Street. The apartment lobby provided direct access to the building's elevators, which are located in the center of the building. A low wall separated the areas to the right and left of the vestibule from the rest of the lobby. The area to the left was used as a lounge and the area to the right was where the mailboxes were located.

To the rear of the building was a restaurant, which could be accessed from a separate entrance on Riverside Drive as well as through a long hallway connecting it to the apartment lobby. The theater was on the eastern side of the building and could be accessed from a separate lobby on West 103<sup>rd</sup> Street as well as via the main lobby.

The most typical residential floor plan, which encompassed the 5<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> floors of the building, had twenty-one apartments arranged around all four sides of the building with the bedrooms and living rooms facing the exterior. Eighteen of the twenty- one apartments were studios. The other three units were one-bedroom apartments with a living room and bedroom. These units were positioned in three of the four corners of the building, allowing these residents to enjoy the building's innovative corner windows. Each apartment included a private bathroom, a serving pantry, and two closets.

From the exterior, Corbett's design divided the building into three sections. The first two stories were distinct for their double height entrances and lack of corner windows. The fenestration and ornamentation was repeated on the exterior for the third through fourteenth floors. Above the fourteenth were a series of set backs, as required by zoning, that culminated in an octagonal tower.

<sup>38</sup> "M.H. Sugarman, 58, Architect, is Dead."

<sup>39</sup> "Riverside Drive's Tallest Building Under Way," 7-8.

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The building included aspects common to Art Deco design within New York City, including a strong vertical emphasis, patterned brick, and terra-cotta ornament. Harvey Wiley Corbett was not only influenced by the European modernists of his time but also Eliel Saarinen's 1923 design for the Chicago Tribune Building. He eschewed ornament, preferring the "natural beauty of silhouette and color," and believed in the need for vertical emphasis in skyscraper design.<sup>40</sup>

The color of the building's brick, which changes from purple at the base to light grey at the top, was chosen, according to Corbett, "to create the effect of a growing thing;" and gave the building not only form, mass and silhouette, but also color.<sup>41</sup> Inspired by the use of corner windows in Europe, Corbett chose to incorporate them into the project. The corner windows had the added benefit of providing wide unobstructed views of the Hudson River and they were, according to contemporary accounts, the first corner windows to be used in New York City.<sup>42</sup> When describing the Master Building, Corbett wrote that he saw the building as an "outstanding example of this new and ever-growing trend toward more perfect expression in building of the spirit and life of this very modern age."<sup>43</sup>

### Reception

The sheer height of the Master Building and its unusual combination of functions garnered the building considerable attention from the press. The building was published in such journals as the *Architectural Record*, *The Builder's Record and Guide*, *Architectural Forum*, *American Architect and Architecture*, and the *New Yorker*.<sup>44</sup> *The Builder's Record and Guide* claimed that the building's dual function as a residential skyscraper and museum was the first of its kind within the United States, and described it as having no parallel, while *American Architect and Architecture* contended that it was probably the first of its kind in the world.<sup>45</sup> The building's design was complimented for its lack of unnecessary decorative detail, and Nicholas Roerich was described as "undoubtedly the greatest living figure on art and culture."<sup>46</sup>

### Marketing

Early brochures for the building advertised it as a "home of art and culture."<sup>47</sup> Residents were provided with free membership to the Society of Friends of the Roerich Museum. This provided them

<sup>40</sup> New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 5.

<sup>41</sup> Harvey Wiley Corbett, "Architecture of the Master Building," *Message of 1929*. (New York: The Roerich Museum, New Era Library, 1930).

<sup>42</sup> New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 6.

<sup>43</sup> Harvey Wiley Corbett, "Architecture of the Master Building."

<sup>44</sup> "A Museum overnight," *The New Yorker*, (November 9, 1929), 44, 46; "The Skyline," *The New Yorker*, (October 26, 1929), 11; *American Architect and Architecture*, (January 20, 1929), 70.

<sup>45</sup> "Riverside Drive's Tallest Building Under Way."

<sup>46</sup> *ibid*

<sup>47</sup> Multiple Brochures, undated, Louis L. and Nettie S. Horch Papers, circa 1920s-1960s, Columbia University, Avery Manuscripts and Archives.

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access to the Roerich Museum, described as “one of America’s artistic monuments,” and to guest lectures free of charge. Residents also had the opportunity to take out on loan works of art through the Corona Mundi International Art Center, which was located within the building. Additionally, tenants had the opportunity to take courses at the Master Institute of Arts and enjoyed access to the building’s cinema.<sup>48</sup>

The building was promoted for its proximity to Riverside Park, the express subway, its many outdoor terraces, and the hotel services it offered. These included maid, valet, laundry, and cleaning service as well as a restaurant within the building.<sup>49</sup>

The apartments were marketed as being extremely affordable with the added benefit of providing free cultural activities that could save residents money. Residents had the opportunity to choose between studio, one, and two bedroom apartments that could be rented either furnished or unfurnished.<sup>50</sup>

### Tenants

When the Master Building opened in 1929, the entire building was fully rented. The 1930 census shows that the early residents at the Master Building consisted largely of working professionals. These included salesmen, managers, and teachers. The majority of residents either lived alone or were couples. Few families lived in the building, undoubtedly because of the small number of larger apartments that were available.<sup>51</sup>

Over the years, the building has been home to several notable residents including pianists Paul Wittgenstein and Artur Schnabel, photographer Lisette Model, jazz composer Billy Strayhorn, psychologist Rollo May, writer and political activist Elie Wiesel, and actor Tommy Tune. Many notable figures also took classes and used the studio space at the Master Institute of the United Arts. These include singer and actress Lena Horne, singer Marian Anderson, violinist Yehudi Menuhin, and violinist and conductor Isaac Stern.<sup>52</sup>

### Subsequent History

The building opened in October 1929 just prior to the stock market crash. By 1931, two years after its opening, the Roerich Museum was in financial trouble. After lengthy court proceedings, control of the building was granted to Louis Horch, and Horch began to distance himself from Nicholas Roerich. In 1938, Louis Horch closed the Roerich Museum. That same year the Riverside Museum was opened in its place, with Nettie Horch as the director. The museum was dedicated to contemporary American painting and sculpture. In its early years it devoted numerous shows to female artists, which was a particular

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> New York, New York County. 1930 U.S. Census, digital images, Ancestry.com. accessed June 13, 2015, <http://ancestry.com>.

<sup>52</sup> “Building History & Photos,” Master Apartments; Oriole Feshbach, phone interview by Kathryn Ralph, June 7, 2015.

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passion of Nettie's. In 1939, the museum staged one of the earliest exhibits of the work of the American Abstract Artists, a group that was formed in New York City in 1936 and is credited with contributing to the acceptance of abstract art within the United States.<sup>53</sup> Beginning in the 1950s, the Horch's daughter, Oriole Feshbach began curating many of the museum's exhibits including the first exhibit of psychedelic art and one of the first exhibits of contemporary Puerto Rican art.<sup>54</sup> The Riverside Museum and the Master Institute for the United Arts closed in 1971, at which point the museum's collection was donated to Brandeis University Museum in Waltham, Massachusetts.<sup>55</sup>

In 1961 the Equity Library Theatre began using the building's auditorium. Founded in 1943 by Same Jaffe and George Freedley, the Equity Library Theatre was dedicated to showcasing unemployed actors and providing free theatre to New Yorkers. The Equity Library Theater featured actors such as James Earl Jones, Jean Stapleton, Treat Williams, Hector Elizondo, and Eartha Kitt.<sup>56</sup> The theater's final season was in 1989.<sup>57</sup>

Louis Horch owned the Master Building until the 1970s. In the late 1980s the building was converted to a cooperative.<sup>58</sup> The building was designated as a New York City landmark in 1989. Today much of Roerich's work is located in the Roerich Museum on West 107<sup>th</sup> Street, only a few blocks from the Master Building. His philosophy and work still live on in the hundreds of Roerich societies that exist around the globe and the continued symbolic value of the Banner of Peace. True to its original mission, the Master Building continues to offer regular lectures spanning topics such as art, architecture, archaeology, historic preservation and urban planning, history, contemporary health issues, and international travel. The building also uses its lobby as a small rotating gallery space.

<sup>53</sup> Nettie S. Horch, An Arts Patron, Is Dead at 94;" Sandra Kraskin, *Pioneers of Abstract Art: American Abstract Artists, 1936-1996*, exhibition catalog, 5.

<sup>54</sup> Oriole Feshbach, "Exhibitions Curated," Oriole-art.com, accessed June 24, 2015, <http://oriole-art.com/exhibitions.html>; Oriole Feshbach, phone interview by Kathryn Ralph, June 7, 2015.

<sup>55</sup> New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 7.

<sup>56</sup> "Building History & Photos," Master Apartments.

<sup>57</sup> MasterAdmin, "Playbill Recalls Equity Library Theater in Its Final Year at the Master," February 13, 2015, accessed April 13, 2015, <http://masterapts.com/2015/02/13/playbill->.

<sup>58</sup> New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, 11.

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Verbal Boundary Description

The Master Building is located at 310 Riverside Drive on the corner of 103<sup>rd</sup> street on the upper-Westside of Manhattan. The boundary is indicated by the heavy black line on the enclosed map.

Boundary Justification

The nominated resource is located on the lands associated with its 1929 to 1938 period of significance.

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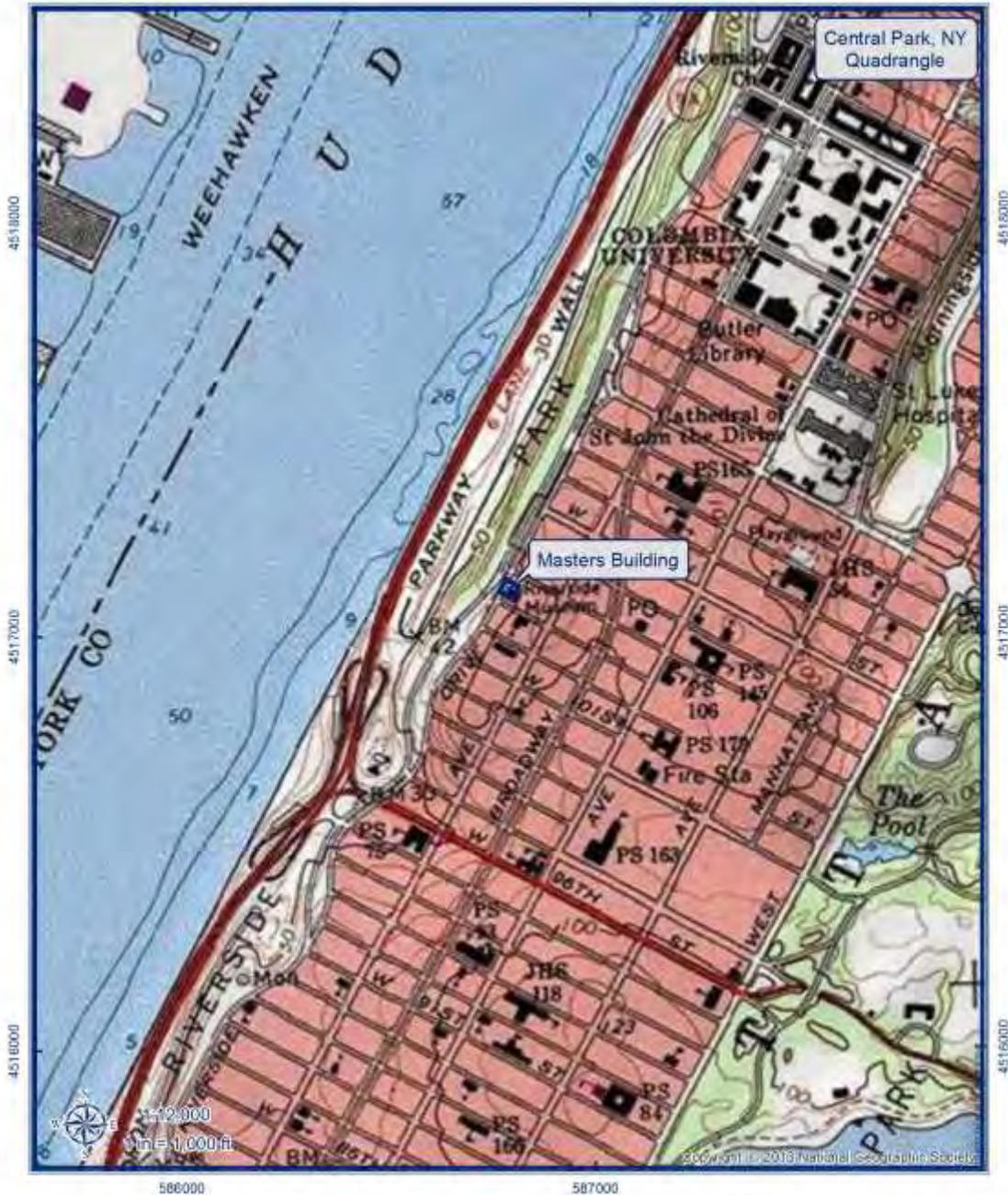
New York, New York

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Masters Building  
Manhattan, New York Co., NY

310 Riverside Drive  
New York, NY 10025



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18Y  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter



Masters Building



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Masters Building  
Manhattan, New York Co., NY

310 Riverside Drive  
New York, NY 10025



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N  
Projection: Transverse Mercator  
Datum: North American 1983  
Units: Meter



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Additional Information

Photos:

Photographed by Corinne Engelbert – 4/21/15

1. View of south and west façade from Riverside Park
2. View of upper stories of the western side of the building from Riverside Park.
3. Photograph of cornerstone located on the southwest corner of the building.
4. View of 103<sup>rd</sup> Street apartment lobby entrance post alterations.
5. View of the Theater entry 103<sup>rd</sup> Street
6. View of the Museum entry on Riverside Drive.
7. View of original window grille.
8. View of museum lobby on Riverside Drive.
10. View of the apartment lobby & elevators
11. View of auditorium.
12. Typical apartment interior
13. Typical apartment interior
14. Balcony
15. Terraces looking down

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Photograph of the north and west façade of the Master Building. Source: "The Roerich Museum and Master Apartment Building, New York," *Architectural Record*, December, 1929.

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Photograph of corner windows on southwest corner of the Master Building. Source: "The Roerich Museum and Master Apartment Building, New York," *Architectural Record*, December, 1929.

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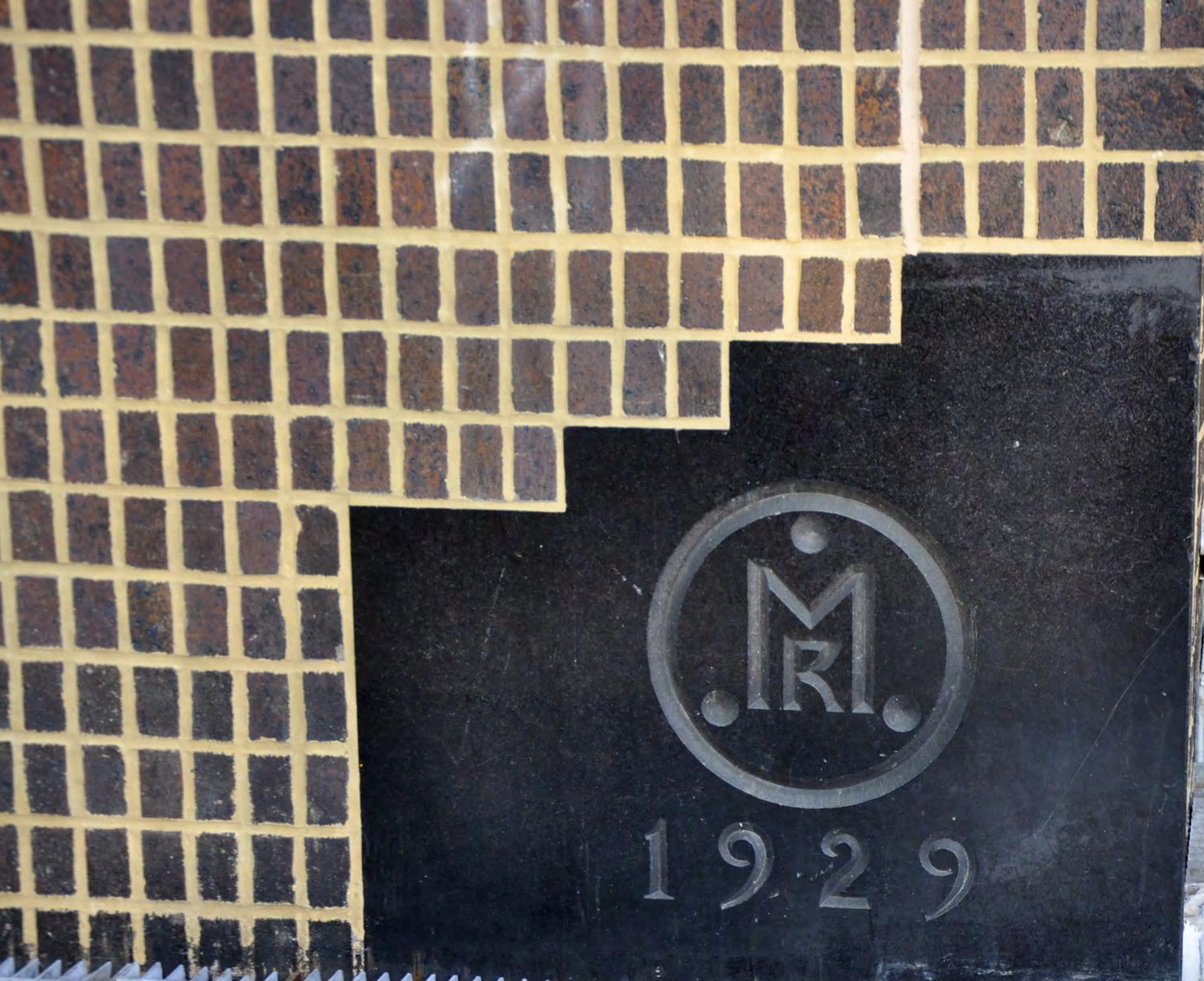
Photograph of Riverside Drive entrance. Source: F. S. Savastano, "Roerich Museum" *Architecture and Building*, 1930.







1929







RIVERSIDE MUSEUM

310

NO  
SMOKING  
HERE

























NEW YORK

# ROERICH MUSEUM



ROERICH MUSEUM



NICKY RUSTO DRIVE

