



Upper East Side Historic District Awards

Knickerbocker

By Gary Shapiro
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Friends of the Upper East Side Historic District president Anne Millard welcomed guests on Wednesday to the 23rd annual meeting and awards ceremony at the New York School of Interior Design. Architect Hermes Mallea introduced each award, filling in for architectural historian Franny Eberhart.

At the podium, the Reverend John Kamas presented the Exterior Restoration Award to Jan Hird Pokorny Associates, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, and others for their work on Bohemian National Hall which was originally built by the Bohemian Benevolent and Literary Association between 1895 and 1897 in a Renaissance Revival style.

Mr. Mallea singled out their replacement of windows and replication of iron balconies, and said the facade was brought "back to its visual integrity." The building originally featured a bar, bowling alley, shooting gallery, and clubrooms and had served as a meeting place for the many Czech and Slovak residents who once lived in the neighborhood.

Rev. Kamas, who has Slovak ancestry, said his parents had their wedding reception at Bohemian Hall in 1946. He described the flavor of the neighborhood area around the tenement he grew up in on 74th Street. You could see everyone's laundry hanging and "you could hear the music that everybody was playing," he said. On the second floor of the tenement lived a Czech couple, Mr. and Mrs. Hajek, who every Saturday morning would play the "Czech Radio Hour." Rev. Kamas recalled hearing each week a polka that was a big hit in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s that had the phrase "Haj, [hello] Husicky." When he asked his grandmother what the latter word meant, she told him "young women" (literally, "small geese"). "If we translated this today," Rev. Kamas added, to audience laughter, the phrase "would be something like 'Yo, foxy ladies.'"

Next, Columbia University professor of historic preservation Andrew Scott Dolkart presented the Wasserman family with an award for restoration of City and Suburban's York Avenue Estate, an entire city block consisting of 1,350 apartments between 79th and 80th Street between York Avenue and the East River Drive. He said the complex was built between 1901-13 as experimental model housing for working people. Mr. Dolkart said that 22 years ago he received a call from the president of the East 79th Street Neighborhood Association, Betty Cooper Wallerstein, asking him to research the buildings' historic importance because they were the object of proposed demolition.

"That's only half the battle," Mr. Dolkart said. "You have to have a good owner." He praised the Wasserman family, who subsequently bought the building. Mark Wasserman, who accepted the award on behalf of his family and the Stanley Wasserman Company, in turn presented an award to Ms. Wallerstein.

Art historian Bannon McHenry bestowed the Restoration Award on the Church of St. Vincent Ferrer, a Gothic Revival landmark on Lexington Avenue completed in 1918 by Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue. Among the features cited was the restoration of a crucifixion made by Lee Lawrie whose Atlas sculpture is a prominent feature of Rockefeller Center.

Politicians present that evening included Council member Jessica Lappin, who was recently elected to chair the council's land use subcommittee on landmarks and public siting, and who offered brief remarks. Also seen was a special assistant to Rep. Carolyn Maloney, Brice Peyre, whose father, Henri Peyre, was a scholar of French literature.

Council Member Daniel Garodnick presented the Hats Off Award to the board at 850 Park Avenue for restoration that included replacing the cornice that had been removed around 1970. Mr. Mallea said the missing cornice - "where the building meets the skyline" - interrupted the rhythm of the Park Avenue streetscape. Working with Walter B. Melvin Architects, the board installed one made of lightweight fiberglass with a structural steel frame. There were functional reasons to restore it as well as aesthetic, for the cornice makes the upper stories of the building less vulnerable to water damage and masonry deterioration. A board member of 850 Park Avenue, James Cohen, accepted the award, praising board president Larry Sosnow. He told the New York Sun that board member John Forelle was instrumental in launching the project.

A former New York State deputy commissioner for historic preservation, Wint Aldrich, presented the technology award to the New York State Historic Preservation Office. Mr. Mallea said its Web site www.nysparks.state.ny.us/shpo was an essential resource, providing online access to their database.

The evening closed with a special presentation called "Remember the Alamo!" Award for the recent restoration of the Alamo sculpture in Astor Place. Mr. Mallea called the black cube an "iconic piece of public art" and praised its sculptor, Bernard "Tony" Rosenthal, who is honorary chairman of **Friends of the Upper East Side** Historic District chair emeritus. Parks Commissioner Adrian Benepe spoke, and Landmarks Preservation Commission Chairman Robert Tierney read a letter from Mayor Bloomberg, who was honored along with the NYC Department of Parks and Recreation and the NYC Department of Transportation.

Other news mentioned that evening? Friends executive director Seri Worden is engaged to be married; the wedding is set to be in Argentina.

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