

FRIENDS



OF THE UPPER EAST SIDE HISTORIC DISTRICTS

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Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts formally submits this Request for Evaluation of the Barbizon Hotel for Women, located at 140 East 63rd Street for consideration as an individual New York City Landmark.

Situated just outside the recently designated Upper East Side Historic District Expansion, this building displays an eclectic blend of Italian Renaissance, Gothic and Islamic architecture. Constructed in 1927 by architects Murgatroyd & Ogden, it represents one of the earliest residential alternatives for women looking to take advantage of the new professional opportunities in New York City during the 1920s. The Barbizon provided a "safe retreat" resembling a family home.

The twenty-three story skyscraper is clad in intricate rose-hued brick, honey-toned sandstone and beige-colored terra cotta ornament. Similar to many buildings constructed in the 1920s, it combined the latest in steel-cage construction and made use of a number of setbacks required by the 1916 Zoning Resolution. The second floor features tall arched windows connected by decorative columns. Each window has a handsome railing of twisted iron, accented with large, cursive "B" in its center. At the corners of the eighteenth floor, open arched windows are supported by classical columns, while the building's numerous setbacks display a distinct corbelled brick pattern. Three gigantic arched windows are located below one massive arched window at the hotel's penultimate setback. Finally, the building is crowned by a broad red pyramidal roof. The Barbizon owns air rights to adjacent properties, ensuring plenty of light and unimpeded views for the upper floors. The interior contains an elegant lobby, library, art gallery, music studios and recital hall, as well as a solarium, swimming pool and gym.

Its residents were largely made up of aspiring models and actresses, who paid as little as \$12 a week for nine-foot by twelve-foot cubicles. As referenced in April 2010's *Vanity Fair*, this "elite dollhouse" harbored the greatest concentration of beauty east of Hollywood including Grace Kelly, Joan Crawford, Lauren Bacall, Liza Minnelli, Candice Bergen and Cloris Leachman. In addition, Eileen Ford stabled her young models at the Barbizon. The hotel also accommodated future writers such as Joan Didion, Ann Beattie and Sylvia Plath, who described a fictionalized version of the Barbizon in her book "The Bell Jar." Despite its meager lodging, the hotel served as a sheltered entry point into New York City society, business and arts for these, and many other, proper young women.

For most of its existence, men were not allowed above the ground floor of the hotel and strict dress and conduct rules were enforced. The establishment loosened these restrictions when it began admitting men as guests in 1981. Twenty years later, a \$40 million renovation was completed and the name was changed to the Melrose Hotel. Finally, in 2006, the Barbizon was converted to use as a condominium, although, eleven women still reside under the old arrangements of the hotel.

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Significant for its socioeconomic and cultural contributions, as well as its distinctive architectural presence, Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts believes this remarkable building not only meets, but exceeds, the Landmark Preservation Commission's requirements for a New York City landmark. Friends respectfully requests evaluation of this noteworthy structure and we look forward to supporting its induction as one of the City's most significant and well-protected structures.