

THE NEXT CHAPTER FOR AN ART DECO ICON

RALPH WALKER'S ONE WALL STREET BECOMES A LUXURY RESIDENCE

Kathleen Murphy Skolnik

The magnificent Art Deco tower at the head of New York's Wall Street, once home to the Irving Trust Company and later the Bank of New York Mellon, will soon become one of the most prestigious residential addresses in the city. A sensitive redevelopment by Macklowe Properties is transforming the former financial institution headquarters into a luxury condominium, with the first closings projected for this summer.

In the late 1920s, the noted New York architectural firm of Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker received the commission to design a new 50-story office building for Irving Trust at the corner of Wall Street and Broadway. *The New*

York Times called the piecemeal-assembled site "the world's costliest real estate plot."

By this time, principal designer Ralph Walker had risen to become one of the most preeminent architects in the country. His career began as an apprentice to a Providence, Rhode Island architect. Two years later he enrolled in the School of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, but frustration with the school's traditional Beaux-Arts approach to architectural education led him to leave before obtaining his degree. Jobs with firms in Montreal and Boston followed, and during World War I Walker served in the Camouflage Section of the Army Corps of Engineers. In 1919 he joined McKenzie, Voorhees &



Left to right: Expressive brickwork topping the windows at the Western Union Building at 30 Hudson Street Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, 1930. Photos: Glenn Rogers. • The former client reception room of the Irving Trust Company at One Wall Street, commonly known as the Red Room. Photo: Hildreth Meière Dunn. • One Wall Street, Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, 1931; addition, Voorhees, Walker, Smith, Smith & Haines, 1965. Photo courtesy of Macklowe Properties.

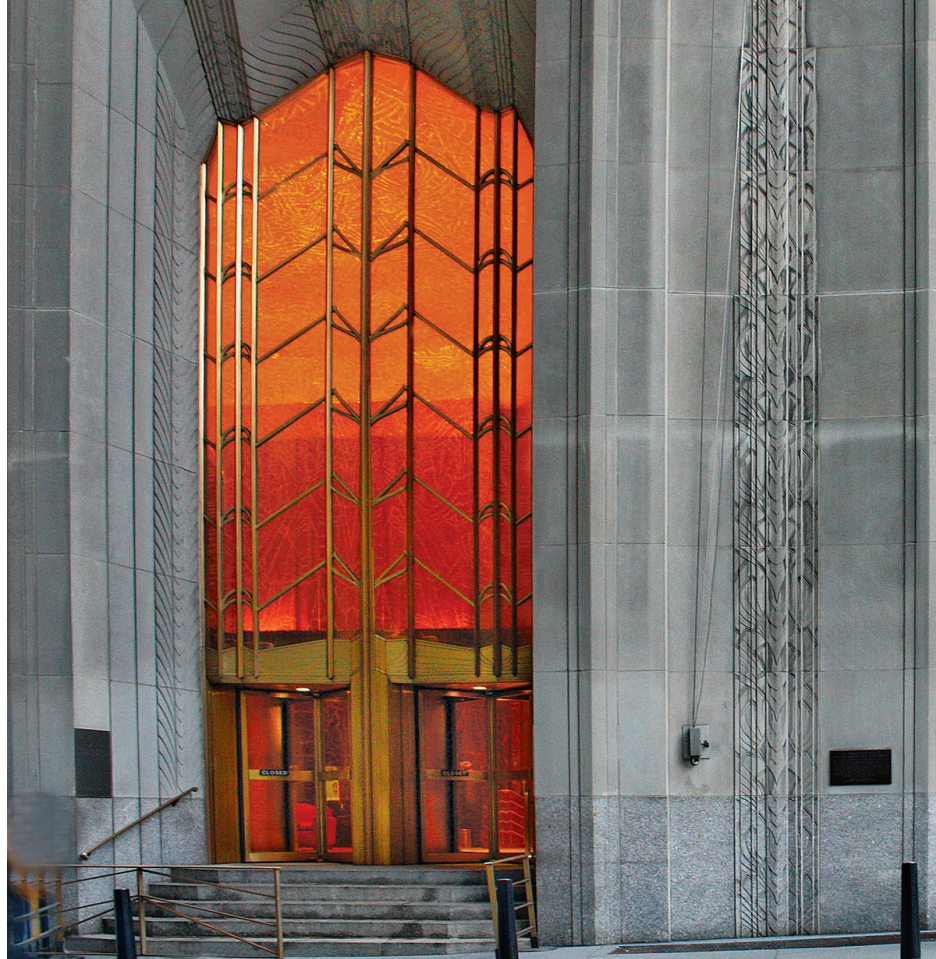


Gmelin, better known for engineering expertise than for distinctive designs, but Walker's creativity and innovation would transform the firm's reputation. His first major project there, the Barclay-Vesey Building for the New York Telephone Company, earned a gold medal from the Architectural League of New York as well as a partnership for Walker in what became Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker after Andrew McKenzie's death.

Walker's stepped-back Art Deco towers can be found throughout Manhattan—the Salvation Army American Headquarters Building on West 14th Street, the Western Union Building on Hudson Street in Tribeca, projects for New York Telephone on West 18th Street and West 50th Street, and the AT&T Long

Distance Building at 32 Sixth Avenue. The beauty and elegance of his work stem not from walls lavished with ornamentation but rather from the refined sculptural treatment of the materials. The cast-stone trim framing the Salvation Army Building's entrances simulates the graceful folds of a curtain surrounding the proscenium opening of a stage. This curtain imagery resurfaces in the expressive brickwork above the ground-floor openings of the Western Union Building.

Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker gained a reputation as specialists in the design of buildings for the telecommunications industry. The economical brick cladding typically used to cover the walls of these projects was not only cost effective but also enlivened



the façade with color and texture. However, the budget for the Irving Trust Building project was far more generous, allowing Walker to substitute limestone for the usual brick.

The limestone-clad walls of One Wall Street give a new and literal meaning to the term curtain wall, one generally reserved for the flat glass and steel facades of the International Style buildings so popular for corporate headquarters in the 1950s and 1960s. Irving Trust's undulating walls appear to ripple like the folds of a curtain suspended from the parapets of the building's progressive setbacks.

Walker was committed to modernity and rarely incorporated historic references in his designs. At One Wall Street, however, he included such Gothic-inspired elements as the pointed arches of the tall, narrow, cathedral-like, ground-level windows filled with bronze mullions reminiscent of Gothic tracery. Walker's departure from his usual ahistorical motifs paid intentional homage to the neo-Gothic Trinity Church located across from One Wall Street.

Glittering glass mosaic tiles sheath the walls and ceiling of the breathtaking Red Room, one of the building's interior highlights, the former client reception area accessed from the Wall Street entrance. More mosaics cover the window reveals and the capitals of the room's marble-clad piers. Their intricate, abstract, flame-like pattern

formed by gold leaf tesserae is attributed to Perry Coke Smith, a designer and later partner with Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker. American muralist Hildreth Meière was the consultant on scale and color, which ranges from deep ox-blood red on the lower walls to brilliant golden orange on the ceiling. One architectural critic of the time compared it to "a rich, free-hanging fabric."

Another spectacular interior space is the building's top floor former observation room featuring stone fireplaces and 35-foot high ceilings. A red and buff fabric with a Native American war bonnet motif originally covered the walls and white kappa shells imported from the Philippines once sheathed the faceted ceiling. This space will now become a triplex penthouse with exceptional views.

In 1965, successor firm Voorhees, Walker, Smith, Smith & Haines returned to design a 30-story annex south of the original tower, filling the entire block between Wall Street, Broadway, New Street, and Exchange Place. The design of the adjacent structure shunned the International Style so favored at the time but also resisted the urge to replicate the earlier building. Its limestone-clad walls harmonize with the 1931 tower and the matching floor levels integrate it into the site.

The Bank of New York, which became BNY Mellon in 2008, acquired the Irving Trust Company in 1988 and occupied One Wall Street until 2014. The building is now



Left to right: The Gothic elements in One Wall Street pay homage to the neo-Gothic Trinity Church across the street. Photo courtesy of Macklowe Properties. • Gothic-inspired elements introduced by Ralph Walker at One Wall Street include the pointed arches of the tall narrow windows at the ground level with bronze mullions reminiscent of Gothic tracery. Photo: Hildreth Meière Dunn. • Rendering of the rippling canopy over the entrance to the condominiums at One Wall Street. Photo courtesy of Macklowe Properties.

owned by Macklowe Properties, which is working with SLCE architects on what has been called the largest office to condo conversion in New York real estate history. The renovated interior will contain 566 condominium units ranging in size from studios to four bedrooms and 174,000 feet of retail space on the lower levels.

Because the 1931 tower was designated a New York City Landmark in 2001, any proposed alterations to the exterior require the approval of the New York Landmarks Preservation Commission. Overall, Macklowe is respecting the building's historic character, although some modifications are being made, all with the blessing of the Commission. The Broadway entrance has been moved from the annex to its original location in the older building and will serve as the main entry to the condominiums. Newly topped with a dramatic canopy to protect residents during inclement weather, the rippling profile of the canopied entrance references the building's fluted limestone cladding.

Another change to the historic portion of the building is the addition of windows to bring more light into

the residences and enhance views. The creation of forty-seven private terraces at the building's setbacks required the replacement of several windows with access doors and the installation of guardrails.

A six-story glass addition projecting from the lower floors of the 1965 building, which is not a New York City Landmark and therefore may be altered, has an angled façade that, like the canopy at the residential entrance, harmonizes with the undulating limestone walls of the historic tower. A 50,000-square-foot Whole Foods grocery store and a Life Time fitness center will occupy the lower portion, with apartments on the upper levels. Another glass-clad addition at the top of the annex will contain apartments, an enclosed 75-foot lap pool, and a landscaped terrace overlooking New York Harbor.

One of the most challenging aspects of the conversion was the removal of the original elevators and escalators. All the elevator shafts were demolished and rebuilt and the elevators, which had blocked views of the harbor, were relocated to the center of the building.



The Red Room has undergone a \$1 million restoration that included repairing, grouting, and polishing the glimmering red and gold mosaic tiles. The space, which currently serves as the development's sales office, will later be converted to high-end retail, although the tenant has yet to be named.

One Wall Street is the fourth Walker-designed building in Manhattan to undergo a residential conversion (preceded by the Barclay-Vesey Building at 140 West Street, now One Hundred Barclay; 210 West 18th Street, now Walker Tower; and 425 West 50th Street, now Stella Tower). This latest project is an impressive example of how commercial properties from the Art Deco era can be adapted for residential use while still preserving and acknowledging their historic legacy.



Top left, clockwise: The sales room for One Wall Street currently occupies the Red Room. Photo courtesy of Macklowe Properties. • Rendering showing the glass-clad addition with pool at the top of the annex at One Wall Street. Photo courtesy of Macklowe Properties. • Rendering of the six-story glass addition with retail spaces on the lower floors of the 1965 addition at One Wall Street. Photo courtesy of Macklowe Properties.

More information about the units at One Wall Street is available at www.onewallstreet.com. More about Hildreth Meière and her designs can be found at www.hildrethmeiere.org.

AUTHOR'S BIO

Kathleen Murphy Skolnik teaches art and architectural history at Roosevelt University in Chicago where she also leads seminars on Art Deco design at the Newberry Library, a private research institution. She is the co-author of *The Art Deco Murals of Hildreth Meière* and a contributor to the recently published *Art Deco Chicago: Designing Modern America*. From 2008 to 2016 she was the editor of the *Chicago Art Deco Society Magazine* and currently serves on the Advisory Board of the Art Deco Society of New York.