

PEPSI COLA BUILDING – 500 Park Avenue, New York, NY. (2001)

1. IDENTITY OF BUILDING OR GROUP OF BUILDINGS

current name of building: Pepsi-Cola Building

variant or former names: Olivetti Building, ABN-Amro Bank Building

number and name of street: 500 Park Avenue, a.k.a. 62 E. 59th Street

town: New York zip code: 10022

country: United States

CURRENT OWNER

name: Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States, but all business is conducted through the managing agent, Jones, Lang, La Salle America's, Inc. (address below)

number and name of street: 500 Park Avenue

town: New York, NY zip code: 10022

telephone: 212.223.0449 fax: 212.838.8287

CONSERVATION PROTECTION

type: City of New York Landmarks Preservation Commission,
Landmark Designation List 265 LP 1920

date: 1995

AGENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR CONSERVATION

name: City of New York Landmarks Preservation Commission

number and name of street: 100 Old Slip

town: New York zip code: 10005

telephone: 212.487.6800 fax:

2. HISTORY OF BUILDING

original owner: The Pepsi-Cola Company

Commission Brief:

The building replaced a nine-story city-owned structure that had been sold at public auction in June of 1956 to the Pepsi-Cola Company for a record \$2 million. The former building on the site dated from 1898 and had been occupied by the administrative offices of the Board of Education for forty-two years and later accommodated a variety of municipal agencies.

The architecture of the new Pepsi-Cola world headquarters reflected the spectacular advances that the company had made during the decade of the Fifties when Pepsi-Cola's sales had quadrupled, and its officers wanted a new office building as an asset in its continuing competition with Coca-Cola. Robert Cutler of SOM knew Alfred N. Steele, Chairman of the Board of Pepsi-Cola; Cutler obtained the job for SOM. The state of the art, modern design was to be a 'direct reflection of the advances of Pepsi-Cola on the World Scene' and was to set the pace for the company's vision of the future. It was built at a cost of \$7.8 million.

Design brief:

Pepsi-Cola's officers needed a relatively small headquarters, providing design partner Gordon Bunshaft and Natalie de Blois, senior designer for the project, the opportunity to design another compact and precise building that did not crowd the skyline. Here the well-scaled precision of the design team harmonizes with the modest dimensions. The ground-floor lobby includes a reception area with room for exhibits. Below are a basement and a sub-basement; above are nine office floors and penthouses with offices and mechanical equipment.

The site slopes down to the west along 59th Street, where the building is cantilevered 13 feet. The difference in levels is marked by a raised plaza built along the 59th Street sidewalk. The office building recedes 20 feet from the building line on the north (so as to comply with city zoning regulations) and 34 feet from the hotel that formerly adjoined it at the west, giving the building a rectangular shape and identical office floors instead of setbacks. In order to preserve the symmetry of the building's east façade and to prevent its south elevation from butting with its Park Avenue neighbor, the designers set back the building 15 feet on the south and set its narrow service core back from the street line. Covered by black granite on its eleven stories, the south wall gives the impression of a pocket of dark space isolating the light-colored curtain-walled office block from its massive neighbor.

Building brief:

The Pepsi-Cola building features reinforced construction with structural steel column reinforcing. The 390 tons of steel columns were bolted together by a high-tensile strength bolting method, which has been used successfully in bridge and industrial plant construction. The method was first used in Manhattan after the New York City code was changed on July 30, 1956.

Ten concrete columns reinforced with structural steel provide the main support for the entire structure. The building is cantilevered on its East 59th Street side with the result that there are no columns in offices on that side of the building.

Two-men bolting teams assembled and tightened approximately 400 bolts in one working day, an easier, quicker, cleaner and safer, and much quieter method than the commonly used four-man riveting team. Dreier Structural Steel Company supplied the steel and accomplished the bolting method of erecting the columns.

Other interesting facts about the new structure include:

-The foundation of the building, which partially rests on 73 pipe piles (remaining portion resting on piers to rock), contains 1,220 cu. yds. of concrete and 128 tons of reinforced steel.

-To obtain minimum and uniform dimensions on the building's 10 reinforced concrete columns, a unique approach involving the use of structural steel members for reinforcing was evolved, with 390 tons of structural H members used in the columns.

-The remaining portion of the superstructure is of reinforced concrete. Approximately 4,450 cu. yds. of concrete and 500 tons of reinforcing steel were utilized.

-In addition to structural concrete required for the building, approximately 1260 cu. yds. of light weight concrete fill and finish on the various floors was installed.

names of architectural designers: Gordon Bunshaft, design partner and Natalie de Blois, senior designer

names of other designers: SOM New York, interior design

names of consulting engineers: Severud-Elstad-Krueger Associates, structural
Slocum & Fuller, mechanical & electrical
Bolt Beranek & Newman, acoustical

names of contractors: George A. Fuller Co.

CHRONOLOGY

Notify in the dates are exactly known (e) or approximately estimate (a) or (+/-)

conception date: 1956 (e) commission or competition date:
design period: 1956-1958 (e) preliminary design:
official building permission: 1958 (e)
duration of site work: start: 1958 (e) completion: 1960 (e)
inauguration: February 1, 1960

PRESENT STATE OF THE BUILDING (2001)

current use:

The Walt Disney Company currently occupies five floors at this location. ABN-Amro Bank occupies the rest of the office space, but has immediate plans (as of this writing) to move out. The Bloomberg Group will occupy the space once the bank moves out. The ground floor features three commercial spaces.

current condition:

Very good.

summary of restoration or other works carried out, with dates:

The Pepsi-Cola Building was greatly expanded in 1981-1984 for its then new owner, The Equitable Life Assurance Society, which had diversified into real estate development and securities brokerage. The former Nassau Hotel on 59th Street was torn down and replaced with an addition to the 1960 office tower designed by the firm of James Stewart Polshek & Partners. The forty-one story tower, clad in thermal finish gray-green granite, supports sections of cantilevered aluminum and glass, in homage to the original design. The lower twelve stories of the new tower increased the space of the older building and the upper levels accommodate condominium units.

Among the changes made not part of the original design are:

- The sidewalk plaza of the corner site was repaved in granite to match the sidewalk in front of the new tower and to recall the material used for vertical surfaces in the original SOM design.
- A brushed stainless steel signage cube identifying the building tenants and the building number was placed on the corner plaza at 59th Street and Park Avenue.
- Also added were wall-mounted letters in the recessed bay facing Park Avenue identifying the tenant, as well as the wall-mounted letters reading "500 Park Tower" on the polished granite wall at the west end of the plaza and adjacent to the tower.
- The ground level floor of the original building was subdivided, and some bays slightly altered, to accommodate changing tenants. The ground floor now includes retail uses.
- The ground floor building façade and the ground floor retail tenants spaces bear the tenants' signage both above the entrances and on the glass of the façade.
- Each of current retail spaces is served by its own entrance
- The revolving doors and glazed double doors at bays 4 and 13 are not original
- Above the ground story, the original luminous ceiling of acrylic plastic was replaced by a white plaster ceiling with one new lighting fixture per bay, reinforcing the original rhythm of the building as seen from the exterior.

3. DOCUMENTATION/ARCHIVES

written records, correspondence, etc.:

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP - New York Office
14 Wall Street
New York, NY 10005

212.298.9300
212.298.9500 FAX
E- info@som.com

drawings, photographs, etc.: see above

other sources, film, video, etc.: see above

principal publications (chronological order):

“500 Park—A Skillful Solution” Ada Louise Huxtable, The New York Times, Sunday, May 3, 1981. pp. 27 & 31.

Goldberger, Paul. Photography by David W. Dunlap. The City Observed: New York, A Guide to the Architecture of Manhattan. New York: Vintage Books, 1979, ill.

Jacobus, John. Twentieth-Century Architecture: The Middle Years 1940-65. New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966, ill.

Krinsky, Carol Herselle. Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. New York: Architectural History Foundation, 1988, ill.

Le Blanc, Sydney, with a foreword by Ralph Lerner. Whitney Guide to 20th Century Architecture: 200 Key Buildings. New York: Whitney Library of Design, 1992, ill.

Museum of Modern Art, the Municipal Art Society of New York, prepared by Ada Louise Huxtable. Four Walking Tours of Modern Architecture in New York City. Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1961, ill.

New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. (Former) Pepsi-Cola Building (now ABN-Amro Bank Building), 500 Park Avenue, a/k/a 62 East 59th Street, Manhattan. Built 1958-1960. Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, architects; Gordon Bunshaft, design partner; Natalie de Blois, senior designer for the project. Report prepared by David. M. Breiner, with contributions by Gale Harris, Research Department. New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1995, ill.

New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission. “Motion to Designate The (Former) Pepsi-Cola Building.” Photo-copied. New York: n.d.

Pepsi-Cola Company. “For Release: After 6:00PM, Sunday, January 31. Pepsi-Cola to Dedicate New Building Monday, February 1.” New York: 1960.

Pepsi-Cola Company. “For Release: 12:00 Noon, February 1, 1960 and Thereafter. New Pepsi-Cola World Headquarters Features Reinforced Construction, Bolted Steel Columns.” New York: 1960.

Pepsi-Cola Company. “New Pepsi-Cola Building Reflects Advances of Company on World Commerce Scene.” Photo-copied. New York: 1960.

Smith, Donald C. 500 Park Avenue, New York, New York. Nomination letter for AIA’s 25 Year Award. Photo-copied. New York: August 16, 1990.

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. “500 Park Avenue, New York, New York.” Photo-copied. New York: n.d.

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. “Project Fact Sheet.” Photo-copied. New York: n.d.

Stern, Robert A. M., Thomas Mellins, David Fishman. New York 1960: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Second World War and the Bicentennial. New York: Monacelli Press, 1995, ill.

“The New Professional: Coming of Age.” Progressive Architecture 58 (3/1977): 47-48.

4. **DESCRIPTION OF BUILDING**

One page only, except for groups of buildings, continuous text.

The eleven-story building is situated on a 100-foot by 125-foot corner fronting Park Avenue and East 59th Street, and contains 120,000 square feet of floor space with its service core along the south and west sides. By its extreme simplicity, austerity and careful detailing, the Pepsi-Cola Building asserts its presence with quiet dignity and pride.

The building exterior consists of a ground story, in which the interior lobby and plaza are unified; a nine-story office block, cantilevered from ten columns; an eleventh-story executive penthouse set back the same distances from the office block as the ground floor; and an even further recessed penthouse for mechanical systems and water tower. The lobby was originally set back from the upper face of the building to provide an open gallery, besides the landscaped plaza, to be used for receptions and exhibitions.

The granite paving of the plaza, now altered, extends out to the curb of both streets. Due to the slope of the site, the plaza is level with the sidewalk along Park Avenue, but is four risers above the sidewalk at the western end of the East 59th Street side. At that location stands a granite projection supporting two brushed stainless steel flagpoles and a metal canopy, which was installed in the 1980s. The granite paving turns up to become a low bulkhead for the glazed walls of the ground story. Glass is framed in stainless steel, which is then set within black metal frames; the rhythm of the original bays is consonant with the modular character of the overall design throughout the building. One original revolving door survives, at bay 11, its cylindrical aluminum housing features a curved light above a glazed door. On the Park Avenue façade, the two columns, which are not enclosed within the ground story, are clad in aluminum and have granite reveals at the top and bottom of their ground-story segments.

The nine-story curtain wall of the office block feature one-quarter-inch-thick encaustic-etched and anodized aluminum spandrels and nine-by-thirteen-foot panes of polished gray-green plate glass of one-half-inch thickness. The five-bay Park Avenue façade and nine-bay East 59th Street façade are further articulated by polished aluminum “I”-section mullions framing each bay. The windows retain fabric-covered vertical blinds according to the original design. At the south end of the Park Avenue façade, a recessed granite-clad wall accommodates paired, unadorned service doors at the ground story and recessed balconies at the upper levels.

The curtain walls terminate in a pipe-rail balustrade, behind which are a landscaped roof terrace and the glazed walls of the executive penthouse. Above its aluminum fascia, that level is crowned by another railing and a further recessed, largely louvered structure for the mechanical systems. The western end of the mechanical penthouse is capped by a traditional water tower.

5. **EVALUATION**

Reasons for selection as a building of outstanding universal or local value

1. technical appraisal

From its inception, the design aesthetic for curtain walls that SOM tried to achieve and perfect was in making the metal as thin as possible. Bunshaft believed an ideal glass wall was one

with no metal. But the metal was needed in order to make the wall strong against wind load, and it had to be sealed properly.

For Pepsi-Cola, SOM made the curtain wall as simple as possible at the time. The building looks exceptionally thin-surfaced, as its large panes of glass--almost in the same plane as the spandrels--seem continuous with them. The polished gray-green plate glass was made in the largest panes then obtainable, nine feet high by thirteen feet long and only a half-inch thick. The glass was cushioned by neoprene glazing strips, sealed and secured with mastic to keep the joints between the glass and aluminum watertight without using heavy surrounding frames. The spandrels are made of encaustic-etched and anodized aluminum sheet a quarter-inch thick and are reinforced to avoid rippling, or "tin-canning," an effect noticeable in the columns of Lever House. Polished aluminum mullions--which are also guide rails for the window-washing apparatus--add a bright vertical accent to the bays. The architectural press touted the exterior detailing for its technological innovation and refinement.

2. social appraisal

The Pepsi-Cola Building is socially significant mainly due to one of its principal players, senior designer Natalie de Blois. Representing a different attitude and approach to the architectural practice of pioneer women architects, were women who joined the field after WWII. One of them was Natalie de Blois. She joined SOM in 1944 and remained with the firm for 30 years almost invisible while greatly contributing to the firm's reputation for tastefully innovative corporate design, one that became the firm's signature. As basic design coordinator with SOM, de Blois worked with partners Gordon Bunshaft, Robert W. Cutler, and William S. Brown and was responsible for programming, design presentation, working drawings, interiors, as well as coordinating with members of the structural and mechanical trades.

De Blois worked on many of the SOM's well-known commissions, including, the Terrace Plaza Hotel in Cincinnati, the United States Consulate in Dusseldorf, the U.S. Consulate Housing in Bremen, the Hilton Hotel in Istanbul, Lever House, Union Carbide Corporation Headquarters, Connecticut General Life Insurance, the Emhart Corporation Headquarters, the offices of Boots Head, and the Equitable Building in Pittsburgh.

De Blois was quoted as saying that a successful woman architect "has to have a very strong personality" given "very chauvinistic" male colleagues. Nevertheless, she asserted to have had a "wonderful working relationship" with Bunshaft, who was so busy with the Union Carbide project that she "was practically alone on the design work" for the Pepsi-Cola Building. In his 1973 autobiography, SOM founder Nathaniel Owings praised de Blois for having a mind and hands that worked marvels in design. He added that only de Blois knew just how many great solutions, with the imprimatur of one of the male colleagues at SOM, owed much more to her than was attributed by either firm or the client.

3. artistic and aesthetic appraisal

In many respects, the design of the Pepsi-Cola Building corresponds to the aims of the International Style as defined by Johnson and Hitchcock: its emphasis of volume over mass, regularity, and the avoidance of ornament. The design represents the culmination of the process used by SOM to refine the idiom which it adopted as its corporate signature, and which its distinguished designers, such as Bunshaft and de Blois, succeeded in perfecting. Pepsi-Cola is the epitome of simplicity: a single raised rectilinear volume, where the only contrasting accents are in the delicate detailing of the window sills and mullions. It has been referred to by critics as an exquisite silvery glass jewel box.

Everything about the building seems delicate and simple: the color, supporting piers, curtain wall, materials, and delicate proportions. This extreme simplicity is the result of very careful calculations. The 59th Street facade is set back twenty feet from the building line, and a recessed L-shaped, black-granite-clad service core separates the curtain wall of the building to the south. When built, these design solutions allowed the office building to appear to stand free of its old-fashioned neighbors. The tower-like effect is reinforced by the sloping of the site along E. 59th Street, where the building is cantilevered 13 feet, and by the raised plaza, which takes the character of a podium furthering this illusion of stand-alone tower set on a base.

After its construction, the thinness of the curtain wall and the simple detailing perfectly conveyed the image of transparency in the Pepsi-Cola Building. The thinness was expressed by the use of cantilevered floors. Wide, sleek aluminum spandrels divide the building horizontally, while slender aluminum mullions against the glass provide vertical definition, and there is hardly any contrast between the glass and the silvery metal. The interior is interrupted by only ten columns set back from the exterior envelope. The ground floor lobby, visible from the outside through walls of glass interrupted only by minimal mullions, provided a preview of the open floors above. This effect has changed in recent years.

The whole interior was laid out on a ten-foot module that controlled the location of interior partitions, which were made of materials similar to those on the exterior. Partitions were capped with glazed strips, permitting exterior light to penetrate the interior sections of each floor. Consistent with smooth concealment of ducts was the integration of barrier rails near the window with heating and cooling units. Air conditioning was zoned according to the sun's position. Vertical fabric window blinds—considered as part of the overall design—took on the appearance of auxiliary mullions. The open, gridded space was accentuated at night by the view from the street of uninterrupted planes of illuminated ceilings. This effect has also changed. SOM also designed all the furniture, in keeping with the elimination of as many separate elements as possible.

4. canonic status (local, national, international)

Once completed, the Pepsi-Cola Building drew praise from every quarter. New York's Municipal Art Society voted it the 'Building of the Year' (1960) for its contribution to the beautification of the city. Contemporary journals referred to it as the 'newest, smallest, and slickest corporate package in New York' and commented that the simple design of the building's eleven storeys allowed it to stand out and hold its own in the vicinity of such giants as Lever, Seagram, and Union Carbide.

In 1961 the building received the AIA's Honor Award, and subsequently in 1964 the design for Pepsi-Cola was awarded the first City Club's Albert S. Bard prize of Excellence in urban architecture. The award citation by this civic organization called it 'an almost perfect example of what a modern building can do to improve the streetscape and set an example of quality and excellence.'

Architectural writers have consistently praised the building for its superb design, innovative technology, sensitive siting, gemlike treatment, and especially its sophisticated curtain wall, a nearly smooth skin of gray-green and aluminum spandrels, accented mullions which serve to create visual interest. Former New York Times critic Ada Louise Huxtable puts Pepsi-Cola at the top of the list of the city few modern landmarks—a kind of Pazzi Chapel of corporate design stemming from the taut delicacy of its sleek façade and its perfectly adjusted proportions. Critic Paul Goldberger describes the building as one of the few examples in modern commercial architecture in New York that succeeds at what it is supposed to do: to create an elegant, refined, and civilized environment that enriches the city at large.

5. reference value

It was Mies vander Rohe's buildings in the U.S. which influenced Bunshaft in his design for the Pepsi-Cola Building. Among the particularly Miesian elements of the younger architect's design were the nearly smooth curtain wall and the thin vertical mullions, projected from the otherwise smooth walls, creating shadows to provide texture and depth to emphasize the skeletal construction. This image became SOM's signature for corporate design, and it seems that in the smaller projects of this nature, i.e. Lever House (1952), Manufacturers Hanover Trust (1954), and Pepsi-Cola, the firm excelled in creating finished structures which were transparent and thin, austere and compact, clean and flawless.

The design for Pepsi-Cola invites comparison with the Inland Steel headquarters in Chicago (1956-58) by SOM Chicago's Walter Netsch. As Inland Steel, Pepsi-Cola is a corner site, has a relatively low elevation on freestanding columns, is isolated from its neighbors and withdraws from the sidewalk to enlarge pedestrian space, and has offices contained in a glass-and-metal structure adjacent to a core at one side. Both strive to give the impression of a freestanding tower. With the use of cantilevers they are both able to express the thinness of the skin wall. But where Inland Steel is large, Pepsi-Cola is small, where the former is structurally expressive, the latter is comparatively reticent, with no more visible structure than needed.

6. VISUAL MATERIAL

List of documents assembled in supplementary dossier

original visual records:

1. Park Avenue Elevation North-South Section
(Not released for publication. Source: SOM Pepsico AIA nomination master book)
2. Park Avenue Elevation, North-South Section
(Not released for publication. Source: SOM Pepsico Photolog)
3. Typical floor plan and ground floor plan
(Not released for publication. Source: SOM Pepsico AIA nomination master book)
4. Floor plan/lobby interior
(Not released for publication. Source: SOM Pepsico Photolog, P-6)
5. Floor plan, 9th floor
(Not released for publication. Source: SOM Pepsico Photolog, P-9)
6. Executive penthouse plan
(Not released for publication. Source: SOM Pepsico Photolog, P-14)
7. Exterior details; spandrel at typical & 11th floors
(Not released for publication. Source: SOM Pepsico Photolog)
8. Exterior details; executive Penthouse, eleventh floor
(Not released for publication. Source: SOM Pepsico AIA nomination master book)
9. Curtain wall details; at typical floors, f.s.
(Not released for publication. Source: SOM Pepsico AIA nomination master book)
10. Park Avenue facade. Photo by Ezra Stoller
(Not released for publication. Source: SOM Pepsico AIA nomination master book)
11. Park Avenue facade. Photo by Ezra Stoller
(Not released for publication. Source: SOM Pepsico AIA nomination master book)
12. View of SW corner of Park Avenue at 59th Street. Photo by Ezra Stoller
(Not released for publication. Source: SOM Pepsico AIA nomination master book)
13. Interior view of lobby. Photo by Ezra Stoller
(Not released for publication. Source: SOM Pepsico Photolog, I-1)
14. View of typical office floor with barrier rial fixed above the heating/cooling units, and careful integration of elements into the design. Photo by Ezra Stoller
(Not released for publication. Source: SOM Pepsico AIA nomination master book)
15. View of office interior. Photo by Ezra Stoller
(Not released for publication. Source: SOM Pepsico AIA nomination master book)
16. View of secretarial area. Photo by Wagner International Photos, Inc.
(Not released for publication. Source: SOM Pepsico Photolog, I-10)

17. View of executive board room. Photo by Ezra Stoller
(Not released for publication. Source: SOM PepsiCo Photolog, I-18)

recent photographs and survey drawings:

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