

March 15, 2011

NYC Landmarks Preservation Commission  
1 Centre Street, 9th Floor  
New York, NY 10007

**Testimony regarding Certificate of Appropriateness for alterations to  
Manufacturers Trust Company Building, 510 Fifth Avenue**

DOCOMOMO-US New York/Tri-State is the local chapter of an international organization working to identify, document and protect buildings, sites and neighborhoods of the Modern Movement.

Our chapter would like to commend Vornado Realty Trust and its architect Skidmore, Owings & Merrill for certain aspects of their proposal, especially the restoration of the luminous ceiling of the landmark first and second floor banking space, as well as the removal of some of the unfortunate interventions, particularly at the ground floor, which have obscured the clarity of the original design with its floating mezzanine and free-standing escalators.

The proposed all-glass rails at the edge of the mezzanine are also admirable, although the addition of planters as in the original design would be a welcome enhancement.

The inclusion of a new architectural screen reminiscent of and in the same location as the original Bertoia artwork is also commendable, not least because it allows for the possibility of reinstalling the original screen in the future—an outcome to be hoped for.

On the other hand, we are distressed by the significant alteration of the landmark exterior posed by the introduction of new entrances with opaque transoms and signage on the Fifth Avenue façade, which is distinguished by its unbroken regularity and consistent transparency. The entrance on 43rd Street is a key feature of the original design and should be retained. Also, the proposed introduction of interior louvers at portions of both facades would compromise the building's signature lantern-like transparency.

We are dismayed, too, by the proposal to dismantle several of the key components of the landmark interior, such as the 43rd Street entrance vestibule and the paired escalators ascending to the second floor just beyond this entrance—features which are specifically identified in

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the interior landmark Designation Report. The elimination of these elements would fundamentally alter the composition and experience of the landmark space.

We also find the removal of the entire black granite-clad north wall of the ground floor vault, also part of the designated interior landmark, unfortunate. At least some portion of that wall should be retained, in order to preserve a volumetric reading of the vault enclosure rather than isolating the east wall with its iconic Dreyfus-designed vault door as a vestigial "stage flat."

All of these objections could be avoided if the owner were to proceed from the premise that the designated landmark interior is to be preserved, and establish a tenancy arrangement that accommodates and complements that interior.

DOCOMOMO-US New York/Tri-State recommends that the Commission deny this application and direct the owner to develop a re-use proposal that is more sympathetic to this Modern interior and exterior landmark.

Sincerely,  
Advocacy Committee  
DOCOMOMO US New York/Tri-State

*Drafted by K. Johnson*