

A DECORATIVE ART CENTER FOR NEW YORK CITY

Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
of Bachelor in Architecture

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

May 13, 1957

Peter Michael Bernholz

Lawrence Bernhart Anderson
Chairman, Department of Architecture

✓

14 Blossom Court
Boston, Massachusetts


May 13, 1957

Dean Pietro Belluschi
School of Architecture and City Planning
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Cambridge, Massachusetts.

Dear Dean Belluschi:

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor
in Architecture, I herewith submit my thesis, entitled: "A Decorative
Art Center for New York City."

Respectfully yours,


Peter Michael Bernholz

To K. M. D.

Whose devotion and encouragement

I hope to be worthy of.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS:

I wish to acknowledge the invaluable assistance of the architectural faculty during my studies in architecture.

For assistance and criticism on this project, I am indebted to:

Dean Pietro Belluschi

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Mr. William Bagnall

Mr. Bruno Leon

Mr. Marvin E. Goody

Department of City Planning, City of New York

American Institute of Decorators

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Mr. Louis Appleton

Mr. William Pahlmann

I wish to acknowledge the help and assistance given me by all the students of the fifth year class.

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Title Page

Letter of Submittal

Dedication

Acknowledgments

Table of Contents

Abstract 1

Background and Need 3

Site Selection 7

Programme 10

Design Criteria 11

Bibliography 17

Appendix

ABSTRACT:

The subject of this study is a Decorative Art Center for the City of New York. This building's primary and essential purpose is to provide exhibition space for furniture manufacturers whose factories and plants are outside of the New York area and who wish to establish a New York address. The by-product of this is the concentration of the resources used in the decorating profession, which is to the ultimate advantage of all concerned - the manufacturer, the decorator, and the client. The outgrowth of such a development would be the creation of a center for the decorating profession in New York where exhibitions and displays may be held and where meetings of a more social nature may take place to allow for the exchange of ideas.

It must be stressed that the exhibition spaces contained in this building are entirely different in concept from those of either a retail or a wholesale furniture outlet. This difference is caused basically by the nature of the clientele served. This building does not contain a collection of individual "furniture stores" dealing directly with the public. The showrooms deal exclusively with the representative of the client, i.e., his architect or decorator, who, however, is generally accompanied by the client. Thus, the difference from a wholesale outlet, where only buyers are present.

Again, it is the nature of the clientele served which would establish the standard of the concerns tenanted in this building, restricting it to the manufacturers of the better grade, custom furniture, and discouraging the manufacturers of the more commercial lines.

BACKGROUND AND NEED:

New York City* presently contains 250 furniture showrooms. The City itself has more manufacturers of high quality, custom-made furniture than any other city in the country. This, coupled with the wealth so necessary for the potential customer of this quality furniture, which is also concentrated in the New York area, has made the City the center of the industry. The furniture manufactured here is shipped all over the country to people who come to New York to see and purchase.

Up until twenty-five years ago, this better furniture was produced and sold at one location by the individual manufacturer, who built and exhibited at one address. However, the advent of the war, and the decrease in skilled labor, such as upholsterers and cabinetmakers, due to the increase in European immigration, coupled with higher rents and taxation has greatly increased the cost of production in New York. Furthermore, zoning in the City has decreased the area in which manufacturing can take place. These factors forced a great many firms to move their centers of production to outlying areas. This removal of the factories from New York, however, still leaves them with the necessity of maintaining showrooms in the city.

*Reference to New York denotes Manhattan, not the five boroughs.

While some showrooms in New York are maintained by manufacturers from other furniture centers in the country, such as Michigan and North Carolina, most of the showrooms are primarily of New York manufacturers.

While these furniture showrooms in New York are spread over an area of ten or twelve blocks, an attempt has been made to keep them fairly close together, which follows the general trend in New York of districts. All the large industries have their own centers, such as the garment district, the fur district, or the millinery district. While much of this is due to the fact that manufacturers find it advantageous to be near their competitors, to establish lines of personal communication, and to be in on the "grape vine," a great deal of this is because it is the nature of the client to shop - to go from one place to another. With New York traffic as congested as it is, it is essential that people be able to walk to their various destinations. Concentrating all the resources of the decorating profession in one center would be ideal from the standpoint of both shopping and research on new items.

The idea of centralizing these furniture exhibition spaces is not a new one. It was originally conceived back in the Thirties, but at that time mortgage money was not available for purposes other than housing developments. The site which was under consideration at that time is presently the location of Manhattan House.

At the present time two rather haphazard attempts have been made to coordinate these showrooms. One is in a building at 305 East Sixty-third Street, and the other is the Decorators' Mart at 410 East Fifty-fourth Street. Here there are 210,000 square feet of showroom space, but it is spread over four old buildings.

In the meantime, the need for a center of this kind has been recognized in other cities throughout the country.

Chicago has its Merchandise Mart, which while not the same quality of project, being of a highly commercial nature and widely diversified, has undoubtedly been extremely successful.

The Dallas Center, when fully completed, is to comprise 150,000 square feet of showroom space located in five buildings. This project has more the nature of a suburban shopping center, being all on one level. This is also considered very successful and has a great many New York manufacturers maintaining exhibition space there.

San Francisco has a project which, while uncoordinated, consisting of several old buildings housing showrooms grouped around a square, has also proven successful.

Los Angeles has a new center still under construction, but it is too early to judge its success as yet.

These cities, by their support of such centers, have proven the feasibility of the projects. If these centers are justified in other cities, then New York, with its far greater market, surely has a dire need for one. The fact that attempts, however unsuccessful, have been made to coordinate these exhibition spaces in New York tends to prove conclusively that the industry does recognize the necessity and desirability of such a center, but merely lacks a master plan.

SITE SELECTION:

The site selected is presently occupied by a gas station, a parking lot, and two small three-story buildings devoted to light manufacturing. It is strategically located in the Upper East Sixties; precisely on the corner of, and bounded by, Second Avenue, Sixty-third Street and Sixty-second Street. This piece of land was created when a new street was put through from Sixtieth Street to Sixty-third Street to accommodate a ramp which leads to the upper deck of the Queensboro Bridge. So the site is really bounded by this new street, Sixty-third Street, Sixty-second Street, and Second Avenue. This site is approximately 240 feet in the north-south direction and 260 feet in the east-west direction, comprising an area of 62,400 square feet, with an eight foot difference in elevation between the east and west ends of the site.

The location was chosen because the furniture industry in New York has historically been located on the east side of the City and during the last fifty years the center of its activities has steadily moved northward from its first location, which was in the area of Twenty-third Street. This northward movement is not uncommon, since in New York, which was originally settled on its southerly tip, all activities have had to progress in this northward direction. From Twenty-third Street the industry progressed to an area bounded by Thirty-eighth Street and

Fifty-seventh Street. Today it is located between Fifty-seventh Street and Sixty-ninth Street. A prime factor in this last movement was the conversion of the building at 305 East Sixty-third Street to showroom facilities.* This building, which contains twenty-seven showrooms, is located directly across the street from my site.

The general area of the site previous to 1949 was a light manufacturing district. Some of the buildings in this area are still these light manufacturing, loft buildings, with some tenements. This is the area of Second Avenue and Sixty-third Street. Now the area has been rezoned, restricting it to residential and limited business purposes, to which this Center would be ideally suited. This rezoning has resulted in a revitalization of the whole district, creating of the side streets in the Upper East Sixties and Seventies, running west from Second Avenue to Fifth Avenue, the most exclusive residential neighborhood in New York. In 1948 Manhattan House, a large luxury apartment house, was built on Sixty-fifth Street and Second Avenue. This area is two blocks west from York Avenue and Sutton Place, which is an extremely luxurious residential neighborhood. The building types west from Second Avenue to Fifth Avenue are mostly brownstones, which have been converted into luxury apartments.

*I have selected the most prominent showrooms in the different periods and plotted them on the accompanying charts to graphically illustrate the movement of these districts.

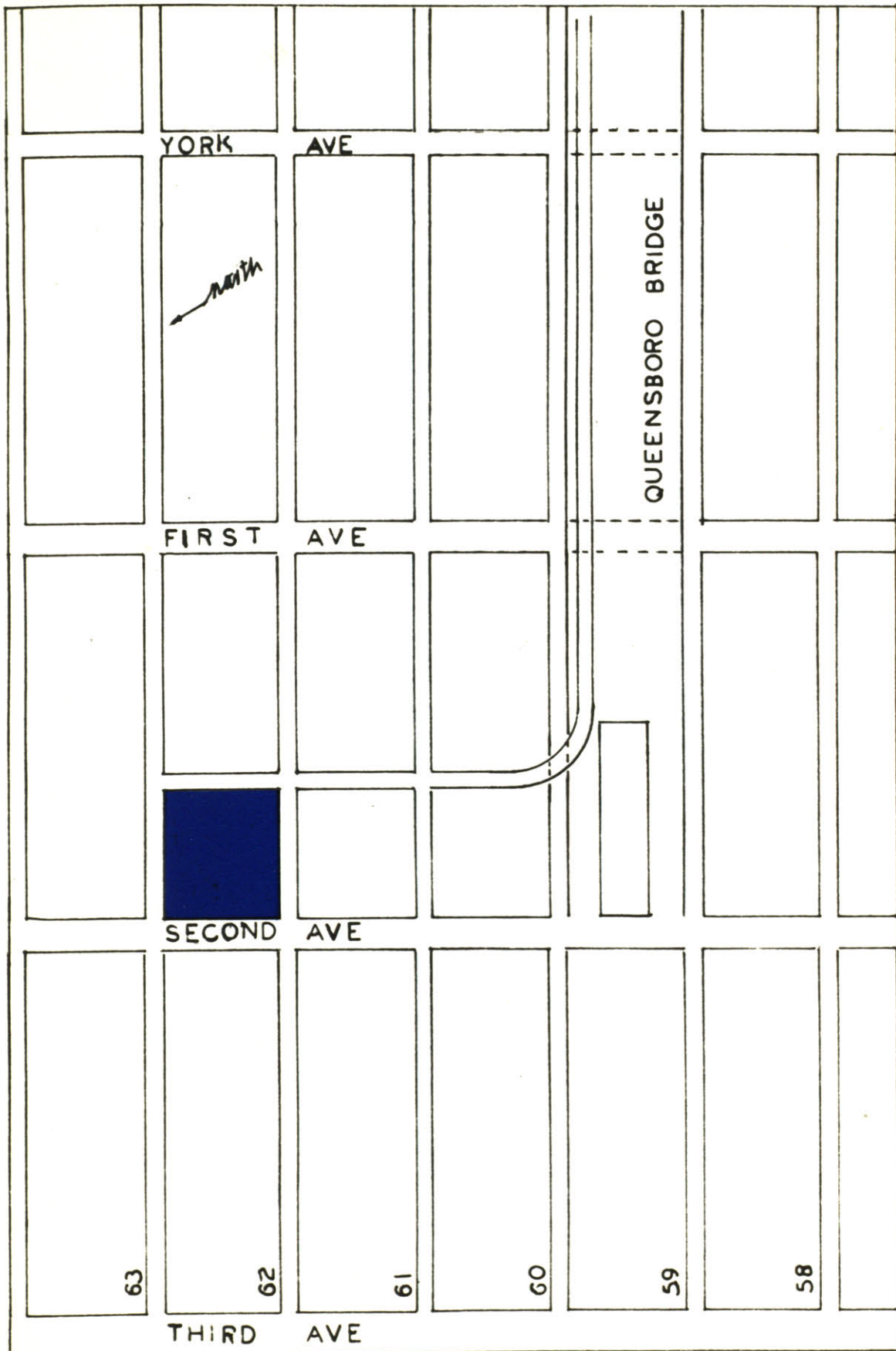
As the east-west streets in this area have developed into a fine residential district, the north-south streets have become more desirable for the limited commercial uses which are permitted by the zoning laws. This has resulted in a great deal of new construction. The appearance of the whole area is changing rapidly, although some segments of it still retain the characteristics of a light manufacturing district. Because of the premium placed on land in this area now, it will cost approximately \$30.00 a square foot to purchase the site I have selected.

The zoning laws for this area were changed at the time of the destruction of the Third Avenue Elevated. While this limits the availability of the area by public transportation, it has undoubtedly contributed greatly in creating the desirability of the neighborhood. The nearest subway transportation to my site would be a north-south line on Lexington Avenue. Bus lines on both First and Second Avenues would serve the site also, but it is probable that the majority of people visiting this center would come by taxicab.

The accompanying photographs of my site will provide some insight into the visual aspects of this area.



● LOCATION OF PROMINENT SHOWROOMS PRIOR TO 1925
● " " " " 1925 — 1947
● " " " " 1947 — 1957
■ LOCATION OF MY SITE





THE SITE AS SEEN FROM WEST SIDE OF SECOND AVENUE



LOOKING NORTH ALONG SECOND AVENUE FROM SIXTY-SECOND STREET



THE SITE AS SEEN FROM SOUTH SIDE OF SIXTY-SECOND STREET



LOOKING SOUTH ALONG NEW APPROACH TO QUEENSBORO BRIDGE



THE APPROACH TO PRESENT DECORATIVE ART CENTER



THE PRESENT DECORATIVE ART CENTER (305 EAST SIXTY-THIRD STREET)

PROGRAMME:

I	Showrooms (24)	
		<u>sq. ft.</u>
	A. Display Area	4,000
	B. Offices	1,200
	C. Reception	100
	D. Service and Storage	<u>500</u>
	Total	5,800 x 24 = 139,200
II	Exhibition Area (Public)	300
III	Restaurant	
	A. Executive	70 - 100 people
	B. Public (Customers and Employees)	50 people
IV	Parking (Executive and Client)	70 - 100 cars
V	Shipping and Receiving	

DESIGN CRITERIA:

The design consists primarily of two main building types: a high-rise tower building which is twenty-four stories high, containing twelve showroom floors (two showrooms per floor), each complete with mezzanine, and a low structure, containing exhibition and restaurant facilities, set in a public plaza.

Because of the cost of land and the number of showrooms required to make the project economically feasible, a high-rise building was necessary. Fortunately, the site conditions are favorable to such construction.

The zoning laws of New York City, which require set-backs and maximum heights, decree that a building may be only one and one-half times as wide as the widest street it faces. For each one foot the building is set back, three feet can be added to the height; but the maximum height cannot exceed one and three-fourths times the widest street, plus three feet, which in this case would make the maximum height 115 feet and would not accommodate the necessary square footage for the showrooms. Fortunately, there is another law which states that if a building occupies thirty per cent or less of its site, it can have unlimited height. Therefore, by providing the public plaza, I am able to go to a height of 250 feet.

The arrangement of exhibition spaces in the tower building was decided upon in order to create the most flexible spaces possible for the individual tenants. The prospective tenants of this center, being so closely associated with the architectural and decorating professions, demand great flexibility in the arrangement of their exhibition spaces in order to better express their individuality. This I feel has been achieved by the creation of the two-story display areas with the office and reception areas in the mezzanines. This provides for greater flexibility in the third dimension because of the additional height and also separate entrances for service, on the showroom level, and for clients on the mezzanine level.

The minimum area for rental gives the tenant 4,800 square feet of floor area for showroom space plus 1,600 square feet of office space on the mezzanine level. This is one-half a floor and is all usable space. Should the tenant so desire, he may rent a whole floor, which gives him 3,200 square feet of office space, and 11,200 square feet of floor space, including the service facilities which come up through a central core in the building.

Should it ever be found desirable to expand this tower building, it could be very easily be accomplished. The central core arrangement of the service facilities would create no problems, and the completion of the mezzanine floors would double the square footage of exhibition space. To accommodate such a

decision, the structural members of the building have been designed to withstand this increase in load.

The low exhibition building is placed across the entire width of the site facing on Second Avenue and is set upon columns. This, while providing a means of entrance, effectively screens the area from the street, which tends to discourage people who would normally have no business in the center itself and greatly enhances the atmosphere created by the plaza.

The main flow of traffic to the center is twofold, basically at right angles to each other, coming from Second Avenue and the building at 305 East Sixty-third Street. This being the case, I have planned the change of direction to occur at the base of the tower building. This arrangement also has the advantage of reducing the number of people who would be tempted to cut across the site.

For similar reasons the restaurant is not located on the street level of the tower building where it would attract the attention of the casual passer-by who might be tempted to drop in. It is intended to be for the use of the people who work and shop at the center, to make the whole project a more self-contained unit.

The area I have provided for public exhibitions is intended to be operated as a joint enterprise of the tenants of the tower building, and could also conceivably be used by an organization such as the American Institute of Decorators. The value of such an exhibition area would be to further public interest in the decorative arts. The profession annually holds a Good Design Show in New York; but due to the fact that they have had no permanent home, it usually is at a different address each year. The exhibition space that I propose in this center would provide such a permanent home.

For the convenience of the executives, provisions have been made in the basement of the tower building for the handling of approximately seventy-five to one hundred cars. Also in the basement area are the shipping and receiving facilities, which are not required to be too extensive due to the fact that these showrooms do not sell anything directly from the floor, thereby requiring service only when changing their individual exhibits.

It being the consensus of opinion of the people in the profession that it would be extremely advantageous to have a central location where they might meet daily, I have provided, above the last showroom floor, a dining facility containing a main dining area, five private dining rooms, a lounge and a bar.

While this area is principally for the executives and their clients, it could perhaps be made available to non-tenants who are related to the trade on a club-membership basis. This would provide the physical plant needed for the formation of lines of personal communication so important to the members of any profession or industry.

One of the most difficult problems to solve was that of the natural lighting conditions in the tower building. I was unable to find any printed information on this subject, but after considering the problem at length and speaking to people in the profession, it became obvious that a great deal of natural light would be to no great advantage in these exhibition spaces. However, purely from a psychological viewpoint, it would be unendurable to have a building completely without windows. Therefore, I have provided strip windows two feet on either side of the exterior columns, which gives a glass area of four feet every twenty feet. This allows sufficient daylight and also satisfies the human desire to be able to look out. This is also advantageous because of the fact that the building is not favorably orientated in regard to solar heat gains. This is unavoidable as New York streets do not run directly north and south, but rather in a northeast-southwest direction. The wide dimension of the building being orientated toward the west-north-west, the limited glass area reduces the solar heat gained and provides for a more balanced air conditioning load.

In order to cater to the tenants' demand for the utmost flexibility in arranging the lighting for their displays, no attempt has been made to provide a standardized lighting system throughout the showroom area, but rather an extremely flexible system of electrical raceways is provided, which will give the individual exhibitor the opportunity to design his lighting to his own needs.

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APPENDIX:

WILLIAM

Pahlmann

ASSOCIATES, INC.

INTERIOR AND INDUSTRIAL DESIGNERS

231 EAST FIFTY-FIRST • NEW YORK 22, N. Y. • PLAZA 9-7306

January 9, 1957

Mr. Peter M. Bernholz
Department of Architecture
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
77 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Bernholz:

Forgive me for being so late in answering your letter of December 12th in regard to the creation of a center for the furniture industry in New York City.

I think the idea of concentrating the resources we use in our decorating work would be an ideal thing for us because it makes shopping and research on new items much simpler than scouring the entire community for them.

Of course this is nothing new. It has been done in a great many cities and there is such a building at 305 East 63rd Street right now, with two or three other smaller buildings within hailing distance of it.

I personally wouldn't be interested in having my office in such a building however. People in my profession have identities of their own, and I would feel somewhat restricted if I were brushing up constantly against all sorts of decorators, whether they were ten percenters or legitimate ones working on a retail basis as we do. I think we maintain our identity by being in a place apart even though it's an old loft building.

I don't happen to believe in a standardization of living outside of the necessary plumbing and convenience facilities of a house. Perhaps that's the reason I have an aversion to being classified as an occupant of Cell 2, 3, 4 or 5. It would give me a feeling of being restricted and hemmed in.

But these are my personal feelings and in no way reflect on the soundness of your idea, and I'm sure you will find many other people who differ with my thinking.

Ellen Lehman McCluskey INTERIORS, INC.
667 MADISON AVENUE, NEW YORK 21, N. Y. TEMPLETON 8-61

December 17, 1956

Massachusetts Institute of Technology,
Department of Architecture,
77 Massachusetts Avenue,
Cambridge, Mass.

Att: Peter M. Bernholz

Dear Mr. Bernholz:

In reply to your letter of December 12th, I would be very much in favor of a center for the furniture industry in New York City.

I have attended two furniture markets in Chicago and welcomed everything being in two buildings, in contrast to roaming all over New York.

A much more important reason for this unification would be an information desk demanding decorator identification as it is now acknowledged that many of the wholesale suppliers sell retail to clients, or to decorators whose only qualification is a card from the Allied Board of Trade.

We do not think it is a necessary corollary that the decorators have offices in the same building as this might allow clients to make their own entry to the suppliers.

Yours very truly,

ELLEN L. MCCLUSKEY INTERIORS, INC.

ELMCC:RF

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11 EAST 36TH STREET
NEW YORK 16, N.Y.

MURRAY HILL 5-9810

December 19th, 1956

Mr. Peter M. Bernholz
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Department of Architecture
77 Massachusetts Avenue
Cambridge 39, Massachusetts

Dear Mr. Bernholz:

I am answering your letter of the 16th inst. which is most interesting for several reasons which I will attempt to enumerate.

1. There is justification for the creation of a furniture center.
2. The most sought after and best location is in the East 60's.
3. There have been several contemplated, large centers which for various reasons petered out. One was the square block 65th to 66th Streets, 2nd to 3rd Ave., abandoned by N. Y. Life for their big "Manhattan House." Another the square block from 67th to 68th Streets, 2nd to 3rd Ave. bought by my friends the Chanins and since resold for school and religious purposes. A third was the blockfront on 2nd Ave. from 67th to 68th Sts. subsequently improved with a large apartment house. A business friend of mine considered for a while building a mart on his square block 11th to 12th Avenues 43rd to 44th Streets. His thought, probably correct, was that a big center would be successful anywhere in Manhattan.
4. If Chicago can support a tremendous Furniture Mart, why not New York City?
5. I recently sold a \$1,000,000. worth of land in the block you mention -- to a very wealthy corporation user, ^{other} than furniture. The only portion for resale is 125 x 100 @ \$30.00 per sq. ft. with perpetual light and air guaranteed on three sides.

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MEMBER REAL ESTATE BOARD OF NEW YORK



11 EAST 36TH STREET
NEW YORK 16, N.Y.

MURRAY HILL 5-9810

Mr. Peter M. Bernholz
Massachusetts Institute of Technology -- Pg. 2 -- December 19th, 19

6. No large plot at this point can be purchased nor leased.
7. We, as you may know, have been very active with the furniture field. We recently had a building on East 53rd Street rebuilt into air-conditioned show-room floors and leased there several of the larger Madison Avenue concerns. We have sold buildings to others.
8. Good property in the East 50's, 60's and 70's will run over \$30.00 per sq. ft. for land. Demolition costs must be figured per individual job. Construction cost, air-conditioned, fireproof will run \$13.00 per sq. ft. of space for a building up to say 8 stories.
9. A centralized large furniture center should have years of success. Buyers would welcome the elimination of travelling all over the City from concern to concern.

I have tried, and hope I have been helpful to you and trust that your activities will result in something more tangible than a mere study of this most interesting situation.

Very truly yours,

BERLEY & CO., INC.

IRA A. LURIE

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