



A GUIDE TO HISTORIC NEW YORK CITY NEIGHBORHOODS

CHELSEA  
MANHATTAN





The Historic Districts Council is New York's citywide advocate for historic buildings and neighborhoods. The Six to Celebrate program annually identifies six historic New York City neighborhoods that merit preservation as priorities for HDC's advocacy and consultation over a yearlong period.

The six, chosen from applications submitted by community organizations, are selected on the basis of the architectural and historic merit of the area, the level of threat to the neighborhood, the strength and willingness of the local advocates, and the potential for HDC's preservation support to be meaningful. HDC works with these neighborhood partners to set and reach preservation goals through strategic planning, advocacy, outreach, programs and publicity.

The core belief of the Historic Districts Council is that preservation and enhancement of New York City's historic resources—its neighborhoods, buildings, parks and public spaces—are central to the continued success of the city. The Historic Districts Council works to ensure the preservation of these resources and uphold the New York City Landmarks Law and to further the preservation ethic. This mission is accomplished through ongoing programs of assistance to more than 500 community and neighborhood groups and through public-policy initiatives, publications, educational outreach and sponsorship of community events.



**Council on  
the Arts**



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## CHELSEA

In 1750, British naval officer Thomas Clarke bought a Dutch farm to create his retirement estate, named "Chelsea" after the Royal Hospital Chelsea in London. His property extended from approximately Eighth Avenue to the Hudson—its shore ran roughly along today's Tenth Avenue—between 20th and 28th Streets. The estate was subdivided in 1813 between two grandsons; Clement Clarke Moore received the southern half below 24th Street while his cousin, Thomas B. Clarke, inherited the northern section.

In the 1830's, as the street grid ordained by the city in 1811 extended up the island and through his property, Moore began dividing his land into building lots for sale under restrictive covenants which limited construction to single-family residences and institutional buildings such as churches. By the 1860's, the area was mostly built out with a notable concentration of Greek Revival and Anglo-Italianate style row houses, many now preserved within the Chelsea Historic District.

Thomas B. Clarke's property north of 24th Street was developed around the same time, but with a more varied mixture of row houses, tenements, and industry. By the late 19th century, the area had an unsavory reputation. During the urban renewal era of the mid-20th century, much of it was officially declared a slum and rebuilt with tower-in-the-park housing, although clusters of row houses and several significant institutional buildings remain.

By the 1850's, infill of the Hudson pushed the waterfront to Eleventh Avenue and within decades to its current location west of Twelfth Avenue. Industry was bolstered by the mid-19th century with the opening of the Hudson River Railroad, and soon the neighborhood supported a range of smaller manufacturers interspersed with sizable operations including iron works and lumberyards. Storage and warehousing became important uses around the turn of the century with the creation of the Gansevoort and Chelsea Piers. By 1920, most of the area's factories had been replaced by modern facilities. The heart of this industrial district is preserved within the West Chelsea Historic District. Clement Clarke Moore's rowhouse blocks to the east were largely converted to apartments for a working class employed by these businesses. As they became inactive, an influx of gay residents opened a new chapter of Chelsea history. The neighborhood remains proudly gay friendly today.

The current character of the western part of Chelsea is built on adaptive reuse of industrial relics. Art dealers drawn to the lofty spaces of former warehouses and factories began arriving in the 1990's and built the blocks west of Tenth Avenue into the world's largest gallery district. After decades of abandonment, the elevated Hudson River Railroad was transformed into the High Line, a public park and tourist attraction. Its innovative design and impact on real estate values spurred a boom in new buildings by celebrated architects along its length.

Although Thomas Clarke's 1750 Chelsea estate extended only east to Eighth Avenue and south to 20th Street, the present-day neighborhood encompasses a larger area. Its eastern edge along Sixth Avenue lies within the Ladies' Mile Historic District, named for the elite shopping district, which saw its first department store open in the 1860's. Today, Chelsea contains a variety of historic architecture, including some of the city's most intact nineteenth-century residential blocks, significant commercial buildings, and industrial complexes near the Hudson River.



I

126, 128, 130-132, 136, AND 140  
WEST 18TH STREET  
All NYC ILs

These five late-19th-century brick stables are all that remain of an original grouping of 13 commercial livery stables, built in 1864-66 for wealthy owners whose residences were some blocks away. This block of 18th Street was then almost exclusively stables, a pre-zoning development pattern that separated service uses and light industry from upscale

residential enclaves. There are very few surviving groups of cohesively designed carriage stables in Manhattan, and this group of five is a remarkably intact and architecturally distinguished example. Inspired by the German Rundbogenstil (round arch) mode, each façade follows a lively pattern of arched openings, accented by faceted keystones and unified by stone stringcourses. The wide opening in the center bay would have been fitted out with large doors for horse carriages to pass through.

### LEGEND OF DESIGNATIONS

National Historic Landmark:	NHL
National Register of Historic Places	NR
New York City Historic District:	NYC HD
New York City Individual Landmark:	NYC IL
New York City Interior Landmark:	NYC INL



2a

O'NEILL BUILDING  
655 Sixth Avenue  
(1875, Mortimer C. Merritt;  
expanded 1895)



2b

THIRD CEMETERY OF THE SPANISH-  
PORTUGUESE SYNAGOGUE  
104 West 21st Street  
(1829-51)  
Both NYC HD Ladies Mile

As early as the 1860's, the West 20s above Union Square had a reputation as a shopping district for a new class of retail consumer, primarily women with disposable income and leisure time to spend on shopping for ready-made clothing and goods. The Hugh O'Neill Dry Goods Store is perhaps the most visible department store on this stretch of Sixth Avenue. With its domed corner towers and central pediment it is among the finest examples of cast-iron architecture in the city. The original four-story, French-inspired Renaissance Revival design was expanded in 1895 with a fifth floor. The domes and pediment were temporarily removed and then reinstalled on top of the addition. Adding stories or whole new bays on cast-iron fronted buildings was a fairly frequent occurrence, and pointed up the advantages of cast iron as a modular construction technology in which standardized, mass-produced facade components and ornament could be replicated and installed with relative ease. The L-shaped building was erected around a small burial ground on 21st Street, established in 1829 as the third cemetery of Congregation Shearith Israel of Lower Manhattan. (The congregation itself moved to Chelsea in 1860, before relocating to the Upper West Side in the 1890s).



**3**  
**THE CORNER**  
 729 Sixth Avenue  
 (1886-87,  
*Schwarzmann &  
 Buchman*)

The late 19th-century commercial takeover of Sixth Avenue wasn't limited to just high-end department stores. The area surrounding 23rd

Street was once a nexus of theatrical productions, of both vaudeville and legitimate persuasions alike. In 1879, Koster & Bial took over Bryant's Opera House (established 1870, infamously one of the last minstrel theaters in the city). The partners soon expanded to a 1,200-seat theater on 23rd Street and eventually took up the entire Sixth Avenue frontage as well with a beer garden and a corner annex, which served as a saloon and beer store. The latter's pediment and corner plaque still proudly advertise "The Corner" and "Koster & Bial." In 1893, the partners were forced to close their Chelsea operations on charges of "encouraging prostitution." A few days later they had opened a new venue on 34th Street (later famous for hosting the city's first motion picture exhibition in 1896).

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**4**  
**20TH WARD, SCHOOL 48**  
 120 WEST 28TH STREET  
 (c. 1854, AMNON MACVEY,  
 SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOL BUILDINGS)



The New York City Board of Education was established in 1842, and in 1853 it merged with the older Public School Society to create Manhattan's first true municipal public school system. Under it, schools were overseen by the local ward trustees who had considerable oversight over the construction and operation of school buildings. This building was completed during the long tenure of Macvey, who served from the 1830's (under the Public School Society) through the 1870's. One of the three oldest public school buildings in Manhattan, its Italianate design is characteristic of the period, with a symmetrical facade featuring a slightly projecting central section with shallow pediment.



**5**  
**SEAMEN'S HOUSE YMCA**  
 550 West 20th Street  
 (1930-32, *Shreve, Lamb & Harmon*)

An embodiment of Chelsea's working waterfront, the Seaman's House YMCA was built to serve merchant sailors whose ships were docked along the Hudson. Along with clean rooms, its gymnasium, pool, cafeteria, and chapel were aimed at diverting seamen from the less savory establishments available in the area. Shreve, Lamb & Harmon is most famous for designing the Empire State Building, completed just a year earlier. Their Art Deco

YMCA makes a design motif of the organization's triangular logo and features stylized, nautical-themed, polychrome terra cotta ornament. The building maintains a strong presence at the intersection of 11th Avenue and 20th Street, with its chamfered corner and monumental entrance. It operated as a YMCA until 1966. The property was sold to New York State and operated as a correctional facility from 1974-2012.

**6**  
**TRAFFIC BUILDING**  
 163 WEST 23RD STREET  
 (1927, ABRAHAM FISHER)



This six-story commercial building is notable for its striking façade and unusual name, a reference to the "Traffic Cafeteria" that occupied the lower two stories in the late 1920's. "Traffic" referred to the trucking industry in its nascent years. Cafeteria-style restaurants catering to budget-conscious urbanites became popular in the 1920s. Designed by little-known architect Fisher, the building is a wonder of patterned brickwork and rich, Celtic-inspired terra cotta ornament. Rather than bearing weight, this façade is a "curtain wall" held up floor-by-floor by the building's concealed steel frame. Fisher's treatment of the Traffic Building's façade as a tapestry and use of diagonally-laid brick acknowledge this up-to-date reality. At the same time, traditional elements make it seem anachronistic. It is one of those buildings which, when noticed, rivet and reward.

7

**HOTEL CHELSEA**  
222 West 23rd Street  
(1883-85; Hubert, Pirsson &  
Co.)  
NYC IL; S/NR

The famed Hotel Chelsea was one of the city's first cooperative apartment buildings, originally named the Chelsea Apartments. Architect and developer Philip Hubert was influenced in bringing the co-op to America by the philosophy of early socialist French thinker Charles Fourier, who imagined a utopian society based on communal associations. Hubert designed the Chelsea with apartments for both co-op members and renters at a variety of income levels, with shared spaces to facilitate community interaction. The massive and imposing 12-story, red-brick building is 25 bays wide, fronted by tiers of delicate iron balconies, and capped by dramatic pyramidal slate roofs, gables, dormers, and chimneys. It has elements of Aesthetic Movement, Queen Anne, and High Victorian Gothic styles, and is notable for its early use of fireproof construction methods such as load-bearing masonry walls and wrought iron beams. When Hubert's experiment bankrupted in 1905, the building was converted into a luxury hotel visited by prominent guests including Mark Twain, William Dean Howells, Sarah Bernhardt, and painter John Sloan. After World War II, as the hotel declined and room prices fell, it attracted Jackson Pollock, Virgil Thomson, Larry Rivers, James Schuyler, Dylan Thomas, Tennessee Williams, and Jack Kerouac. Arthur Miller moved into Room 614 after his divorce from Marilyn Monroe. Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick wrote the screenplay for 2001: A Space Odyssey at the Chelsea. From 1957 to 2007, the hotel was an informal artists' colony benevolently and tolerantly "curated" by manager Stanley Bard. Artwork he accepted in lieu of back rent from struggling artists filled the lobby and main staircase. Bard fashioned and maintained the unique creative dynamic for which the hotel is perhaps most famous, presiding during the 1960's when Bob Dylan and Leonard Cohen wrote some of their greatest songs. Andy Warhol filmed Chelsea Girls here. Bard's departure was mourned by many residents of the hotel and the Chelsea community. The building continues to house a significant number of permanent tenants.



8

**NATIONAL BISCUIT COMPANY/  
CHELSEA MARKET**  
75 Ninth Avenue  
(Multiple architects, 1883 to  
1934; Tenth Avenue frontage,  
1932-34, Louis Wirsching, Jr.)  
S/NR

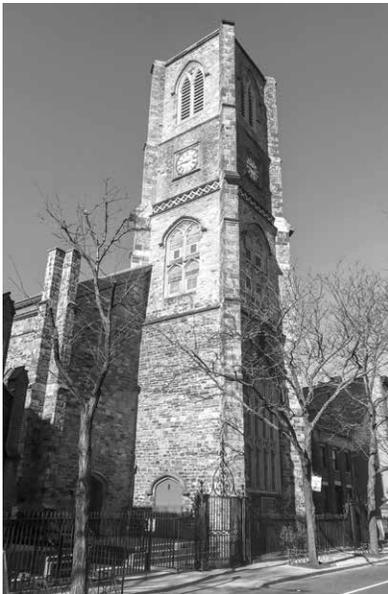


This full-block complex, birthplace of the Oreo, was built in several phases over a number of decades. The oldest section was erected in the 1880's for brewer Thomas McMullen. The rest of the block was developed in the following decades by the newly formed New York Biscuit Company. The baking industry experienced massive consolidation in the 1890's, culminating in the merger of the New York firm with the American Biscuit and Manufacturing Company and the Chicago-based United State Baking Company in 1898. The resulting conglomerate, named the National Biscuit Company, officially established headquarters in its New York City complex in 1906. By 1920, the firm occupied all or parts of five city blocks on Manhattan's west side. This location was perfectly suited for manufacturing purposes. A railroad spur was routed through the complex in 1904. When the High Line arrived in the 1930's, the entire Tenth Avenue facade was redesigned to accommodate the elevated tracks. The company changed its name to Nabisco in 1941, and in 1956 divested its Chelsea factories during the deindustrialization of Manhattan.

9

**ST. PETER'S CHURCH**

336-346 West 20th Street  
*(Rectory, 1831, attributed to  
 Clement Clarke Moore; Church,  
 1836-38, James W. Smith, builder)*  
 NYC HD Chelsea; S/NR



Worship services at the newly opened General Theological Seminary quickly became so popular that this independent congregation was established to serve the neighborhood's booming population. The church complex is on land leased and later donated by Clement Clarke Moore, an active congregant who also supplied architectural sketches suggesting the design of the buildings. First completed was the chapel, now the Rectory, whose Greek Revival facade closely resembles Moore's original vision. The Gothic Revival design of the church—called “the very first of the English parish Gothic churches built in this country” by the Landmarks Preservation Commission—was a marked departure from Moore's design. It resembles Magdalen Tower, Oxford's tallest structure, completed in 1509, supposedly as suggested by a vestryman who had visited there. The similarity would have been more pronounced before the deterioration and removal of St. Peter's original wooden corner turrets, gone the way of its wooden porches. The Parish Hall is now a playhouse for the Atlantic Theater Company. Originally serving as the rectory, it was completed in 1871 and features a Victorian Gothic design. The oldest component of the complex is the iron fence, which dates to the 1790's. It originally enclosed St. Peter's Church downtown and was donated to the new congregation by Trinity Church.

10

**OLDEST HOUSE IN CHELSEA  
 AND CUSHMAN ROW**  
 404, and 406-418,  
 West 20th Street  
 NYC HD Chelsea HD;  
 S/NR



No. 404 West 20th Street has the distinction of being the oldest house in the Chelsea Historic District. It was built in

1829-30 for Hugh Walker on land leased from Clement Clarke Moore for forty dollars per year. The lease stated that if, during the first seven years, a good and substantial house of two stories or more was built of brick or stone, or having a brick or stone front, the lessor would pay the full value of the house at the end of the lease. Walker opted for the least expensive option, a two story house (to which a third story was later added) with a brick façade. The original wood of no. 404's clapboard side wall can still be seen, facing the narrow side alley between it and no. 402 to the east. By 1835, Moore banned side alleys and wooden exteriors like no. 404's altogether. They were a particular characteristic of early Chelsea. No. 404 is the last wooden house with a side passage left in Chelsea, a critical reminder of its humble, rustic origins. Standing where the oldest house's wood clapboard side meets its brick front, one sees Chelsea turn the corner from semi-rural village to the sophisticated urban neighborhood so richly embodied in Cushman Row to its right.

The brick front of no. 404 served Moore's purpose of raising his budding development's profile and property value, the fruition of which is amply seen in the seven row houses that soon followed immediately west of it, at nos. 406-418. Known as Cushman Row, these were built in 1839-40 for developer Don Alonzo Cushman in the popular English mode of a single unified “terrace” of fashionable townhomes. Cushman Row presents a remarkably intact example of high-style Greek Revival architecture, rivaled in New York only by the famous row on the north side of Washington Square. Hallmarks of the Greek Revival style found here are smooth red brick facades with thin mortar joints, monumental brownstone door surrounds, front doors bordered by sidelights and transoms, ornate stoop and areaway ironwork featuring motifs such as palmettos and Greek keys, attic stories expressed as a monumental cornice entablature, and small decorative attic windows.

The Seminary stands on land donated by Clement Clarke Moore, and originally included just the 1827 East Building, since demolished, and the matching 1836 West Building, which remains. Moore hoped the open campus would double as a value-enhancing town square, like Washington Square and Gramercy Park; it was in fact long called “Chelsea Square.” A seminary graduate, Eugene Augustus Hoffman, was installed as the first dean in 1879. Backed by his personal wealth, he began an ambitious building program known as the “Grand Design.” His architect Haight took inspiration from the Collegiate Gothic campuses of England and their quadrangles as well as the image of a medieval cloister. He built along three sides of the Seminary block’s perimeter, shielding its grounds from Ninth and Tenth Avenues and 21st Street, and preserving much of Moore’s original public-square intent. Left open on the south, Haight’s plan admitted sunlight and allowed the front gardens of the rowhouses across 20th Street—planned via a ten-foot setback laid out by Clement Clark Moore—to contribute their greenery to the leafy oasis of the Seminary. Haight’s design and the rowhouses opposite create a modern, urban version of an encircling cloister. The Seminary’s central, south-facing chapel occupies the traditional place of a medieval cloister church. Its bell tower, like St. Peter’s Church, is modeled on Magdalen Tower at Oxford. Despite unfortunate encroachments on the Seminary’s open space by luxury apartment construction, the block remains uniquely gracious and the heart of Chelsea.

II

**GENERAL THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY**  
 440 West 21st Street  
 (1827 and 1836; 1883-1902,  
*Charles Coolidge Haight*)  
 NYC HD Chelsea; S/NR



I2

**EMPIRE DINER**  
 210 Tenth Avenue  
 (1929 or 1943; altered  
 1976, *Carl Laanes*)

The Empire Diner is a classic example of the streamlined, stainless-steel, railroad dining car-cum-restaurant that modernized the urban tradition

of horse-drawn lunch wagons catering mostly to working men. A diner, or “lunch wagon” (as it was labeled on a 1955 map of the neighborhood), was erected on this site in 1929, but may have been replaced with the present structure in 1943. In 1976, the diner received a makeover designed by Carl Laanes, the former head of MoMA’s graphics department. The Empire quickly became an important social gathering place for Chelsea’s gay community, and was instrumental in the “Chelsea Renaissance” of the late 1970’s and 80’s. Today one can still appreciate the vintage aesthetic of the diner’s shiny metal panels and contrasting black and white enameling.

I3

**LONDON TERRACE**  
 West 23rd to West 24th Streets,  
 Ninth to Tenth Avenues  
 (1930-34; *Farrar & Watmough*)



London Terrace Apartments comprises 14 connected 16- and 20-story buildings occupying the perimeter of an entire city block around two generous courtyards. Developed by Russian-born real estate magnate

Henry Mandel, they were built in just two years at a cost of \$6 million, included 1,670 units, and boasted an indoor pool, gymnasium, dining room, children’s play area, and roof terrace simulating the deck of an ocean liner, from which residents could see actual passenger ships docking at the Hudson River piers just blocks away. Of main appeal were the courtyards, a garden oasis in the middle of the city. Farrar & Watmough designed the buildings as a unified whole, enlivening the monolithic brick and terra-cotta facades with fanciful gargoyles and motifs from North Italian Romanesque, Gothic, and Renaissance architecture. “London Terrace” was borrowed from the row of 36 Greek Revival-style brownstone rowhouses demolished to make way for the new development. According to Mandel’s 1942 obituary, London Terrace “was hailed as the largest multi-family building unit in New York” at the time of its completion.

I4

**437 TO 459, AND 461 WEST  
 24TH STREET,**  
 (1849-50, *Philo V. Beebe*,  
*builder of nos. 437-459*)  
 NYC ILs; S/NR

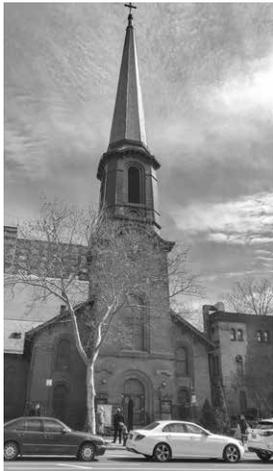


The 12 houses from no. 437-459 were developed by Beverley Robinson (an associate of the Clarke/Moore family) and George F. Talman. Architecturally, these residences mark a transition between the upright, rectilinear Greek Revival and the more curvilinear Italianate styles. Though several of the houses have received updates in later architectural styles—seen especially in the cornices—the row remains unified by its deep front yards, paired stoops, and twin entrances. Immediately to the west stands the smaller, likely somewhat earlier residence at no. 461, which lacks the Landmark status of nos. 437-459. It is a purer example of Greek Revival architecture, with the style’s characteristic flush window lintels and a simple molded cornice from which tiny attic windows peek. The little house would originally have stood on the Hudson River bank.



I5a

**MANOR COMMUNITY CHURCH**  
350 West 26th Street  
(1873; expanded and current facade  
1907, Samuel Edson Gage)



I5b

**CHURCH OF THE HOLY APOSTLES**  
300 Ninth Avenue  
(1845-46, Minard Lafever;  
additions 1853-54, Lafever, and  
1858, Charles Babcock of Richard  
Upjohn & Son)  
NYC IL; S/NR

Lacking the restrictive covenants imposed by Clement Clarke Moore to the south, the blocks of Chelsea north of 24th Street, called Chelsea Manor, were developed with a mixture of residences, shops, and industry in close

proximity. By the mid-19th century, it was a notorious center of vice and threat to vulnerable youth. In 1855, Sunday school advocate R.G. Pardee with help from the South Reformed Dutch Church, set up a mission above a disreputable saloon at Ninth Avenue and 25th Street. In 1866, the mission became an arm of the church, which built Manor Chapel and Mission, now Manor Community Church. Incorporating classrooms and a library, it was completed 1873. Enlarged and given a new façade in 1907, the building's picturesque Dutch Revival style acknowledges its roots.

Two blocks north, the Church of the Holy Apostles is another of Chelsea's historic Episcopal congregations, founded as a mission of Trinity Church. It has long had a socially active congregation and been called "one of the most important meeting places in New York City for organizations of the early post-Stonewall gay rights movement." Architecturally, it is a remarkably original work that defies precise stylistic categorization. Italianate and Romanesque influences can be seen, but it forges a new statement from them. During the urban renewal era of the mid-twentieth century, much of the area around it was officially labeled a slum and targeted for redevelopment. In the 1950's, six entire blocks between Eighth and Ninth Avenues were condemned for the private, middle-income Penn South housing project. The developer agreed to save Holy Apostles, along with Manor Community Church and two other churches.

I6

**HOPPER-GIBBONS HOUSE**  
339 West 29th Street  
(1846-47)  
NYC HD Lamartine Place



Inspired by the terraced houses of England, the north side of this block was developed as a continuous row of Greek Revival residences by William Torrey and Cyrus Mason, who gave it the vanity address Lamartine Place. It soon attracted a respectable group of homeowners including Abby Hopper Gibbons and James Sloan Gibbons, who purchased no. 339 in 1852. Well-regarded philanthropists and abolitionists, their house became a nexus for anti-slavery activity in pre-Civil War New York, and is the only documented stop on the Underground Railroad in Manhattan. During the Draft Riots of 1863, the Gibbons residence was targeted by a mob that set it afire. Family members fled across the roofs of the adjacent houses. The family later returned to their houses and made repairs. Though somewhat altered since, it is one of the few surviving sites directly associated with the Draft Riots.

I7

**STARRETT-LEHIGH BUILDING**  
601-625 West 26th Street  
(1930-31; Cory & Cory;  
Yasuo Matsui, associate; Purdy &  
Henderson, consulting engineers)  
NYC IL, NYC HD  
West Chelsea



The Starrett-Lehigh building was constructed in 1930-31 on the site of the Lehigh Valley Railroad rail yards. The massive concrete-framed structure occupied an entire city block and served as a freight terminal with rental warehouse

and manufacturing space. Its influential design combines industrial and modernist sensibilities, incorporating functional elements like railroad tracks to receive trains directly into the building, freight elevators that conveyed entire trucks to upper-floor loading docks, and the curtain-wall technology that made possible the signature feature of unbroken ribbons of steel windows wrapping around the building. A pioneering work of architecture, it was one of only six American buildings featured in the Museum of Modern Art's influential "International Style" exhibition in 1932. The curved forms and factory windows of many new buildings along the High Line reference this Chelsea icon.

