

DRAFT

PRELIMINARY SUMMARY OF INFORMATION

SUBMITTED TO THE COMMISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS IN AUGUST 2019



THE PROMONTORY APARTMENTS

5530-5532 South Shore Drive



CITY OF CHICAGO
Lori E. Lightfoot, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development
Eleanor Esser Gorski, AIA, Acting Commissioner

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor and City Council, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. The Commission is responsible for recommending to the City Council which individual buildings, sites, objects, or districts should be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law.

The landmark designation process begins with a staff study and a preliminary summary of information related to the potential designation criteria. The next step is a preliminary vote by the landmarks commission as to whether the proposed landmark is worthy of consideration. This vote not only initiates the formal designation process, but it places the review of city permits for the property under the jurisdiction of the Commission until a final landmark recommendation is acted on by the City Council.

This Landmark Designation Report is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation process. Only language contained within the designation ordinance adopted by the City Council should be regarded as final.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Building Location Maps	2
Mies van der Rohe: Early Life and Work	3
The Promontory Apartments: An Architectural History	5
<i>Residential High-Rise Development on Chicago's Lakefront</i>	5
<i>Development of the Promontory Apartments</i>	6
<i>Architecture of the Promontory Apartments</i>	8
<i>Marketing of the Promontory Apartments</i>	12
<i>Financing of the Promontory Apartments</i>	12
Subsequent Developments with Mies and Greenwald	14
Criteria for Designation	15
Significant Historical and Architectural Features	16
Selected Bibliography	19
Acknowledgments	20



THE PROMONTORY APARTMENTS

5530-5532 SOUTH SHORE DRIVE

PERIOD OF SIGNIFICANCE: 1946-1949
ARCHITECT AND ENGINEERS: MIES VAN DER ROHE, DESIGN ARCHITECT
PACE ASSOCIATES, ARCHITECT OF RECORD
FRANK KORNACHER, STRUCTURAL ENGINEER
HOLSMAN, HOLSMAN & KLEKAMP, CONSULTING ENGINEERS
PETER HAMLIN CONSTRUCTION, GENERAL CONTRACTOR

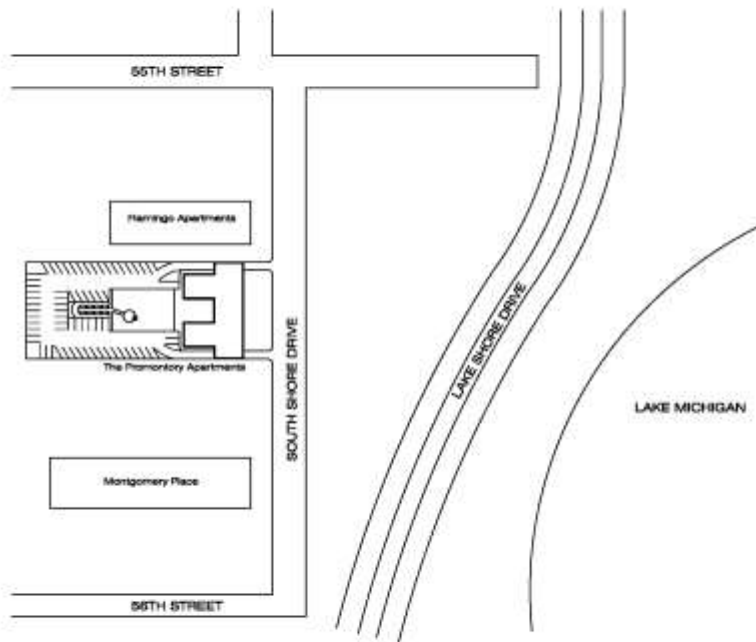
The period of significance for the Promontory Apartments begins with design of the structure in 1946 and completion of the project in 1949. This report was prepared by the co-op board of the Promontory Apartments and compiled largely from the National Register nomination form prepared by Anthony P. Amarose, Pao-Chi Chang, and Alfred Swenson of the Promontory Apartments Trust in 1996.

The Promontory Apartments, designed by architect Mies van der Rohe and constructed between 1946 and 1949, is an icon of Chicago architecture and urban planning. As one of the earliest International Style high-rises in the nation and the first Mies-designed high-rise to be built, the building set the standard for decades of modern architecture. Not since the First Chicago School of Architecture's Monadnock Building (Burnham and Root, 1891) had ornament been abandoned and, in its place, proportion and the expression of structural elements used to generate the aesthetic.

Preliminary design studies for the building included the use of an aluminum and glass curtain wall favored by Mies in later projects, but this was abandoned due to a scarcity of metals so soon after World War II. The final design was an exposed structural concrete skeletal frame with brick and glass infill, more in keeping with Mies' contemporaneous designs at the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT). In fact, soon after completion of the Promontory Apartments, three 12-story apartment buildings of duplicate design were built on that campus. In 1996, the Promontory Apartments were listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



The Promontory Apartments, shaded gray in the above map, are located between 55th and 56th Streets on the west side of South Shore Drive in the Hyde Park neighborhood.



The Promontory Apartments are located on the other side of Lake Shore Drive from Lake Michigan.

MIES VAN DER ROHE: EARLY LIFE AND WORK

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (March 27, 1886 – August 17, 1969) was a German-American architect. Along with Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, and Frank Lloyd Wright, he is widely regarded as one of the pioneers of modernist architecture.

Mies, like many of his contemporaries in the period after World War I, sought to establish a new architectural style that could represent modern times just as Classical and Gothic did for their own eras. He called his buildings "skin and bones" architecture, and his designs created an influential twentieth-century architectural style, stated with extreme clarity and simplicity. He strove toward an architecture with a minimal framework of structural order balanced against the implied openness of unobstructed, free-flowing interiors. He sought an objective approach that would guide the creative process of architectural design, but was always concerned with expressing the spirit of the modern era. His own aphorisms, "less is more" and "God is in the details," distill his guiding architectural principles.

Mies was born the son of a stone mason in Aachen, Germany. Forgoing higher education, he began working in his father's shop by drawing full-size "cartoons" of classical column capitals. His architectural career started with an apprenticeship at the studio of Peter Behrens from 1908 to 1912. There he was exposed to the current design theories and progressive German culture while working alongside Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier.

In the early years of his architectural practice, Mies designed mainly traditional, neoclassical-styled houses for wealthy clients. But, at the urging of his peers, he began to develop visionary projects that, though mostly unbuilt, rocketed him to fame as an architect capable of giving form that was in harmony with the spirit of modern society emerging from the horrors of World War I. Boldly abandoning ornament altogether, Mies made a dramatic modernist debut with his stunning competition proposal for the faceted, all-glass Friedrichstraße skyscraper in 1921, followed by a taller, curved version in 1922 named the Glass Skyscraper.

He continued with a series of pioneering projects, culminating in his two European masterworks: the temporary German Pavilion for the Barcelona International Exposition in 1929 and the elegant Villa Tugendhat in Brno, Czech Republic, completed in 1930. These buildings were noted for their free and open plans defined by walls of luxurious materials, the incorporation of contemporary art, and furniture Mies custom-designed for them.

He joined the German avant-garde, working with the progressive design magazine *G* which started in July 1923. He developed prominence as architectural director of the *Werkbund*, an association of architects, artists, designers, and industrialists responsible for organizing the influential Weissenhof housing exhibition in Stuttgart, Germany. This exhibition consisted of a group of houses designed by many of the most famous architects of the time, including an apartment building designed by Mies himself. The buildings, along with other modern art of the time, were later denounced by the rising Nazi Party as being Semitic. In 1930 he joined the avant-garde Bauhaus design school as their director of architecture, adopting and developing their functionalist application of simple geometric forms in the design of useful objects. He served as its last director when the Bauhaus was closed by the Nazi regime in 1933.

Like many other avant-garde architects of the day, Mies based his architectural mission and principles on his understanding and interpretation of ideas developed by theorists and critics who pondered the declining relevance of traditional design styles. From Russian Constructivism he selectively adopted that movement's ideology of "efficient" sculptural assembly of modern industrial materials. From the Dutch De Stijl artistic movement, Mies found appeal in the use of simple rectilinear and planar forms, clean lines, reduction of color, and the extension of space around and beyond interior walls. In particular, the layering of functional sub-spaces within an overall space and the distinct articulation of parts as expressed by Dutch architect/designer Gerrit Rietveld was incorporated into Mies's designs.

Mies pursued an ambitious lifelong mission to create a new architectural language that could be used to represent the new era of technology and production. He saw a need for an architecture expressive of and in harmony with his epoch, just as Gothic architecture was for an era of spiritualism. He applied a disciplined design process using rational thought to achieve his spiritual goals. He believed that the configuration and arrangement of every architectural



Mies van der Rohe playing baseball on the site of the Promontory Apartments.

Mies enjoys a bite of cake with visionary developer Herbert Greenwald.



element, particularly the character of enclosed space, must contribute to a unified expression. He also experimented with ways to synthesize the exterior and interior spaces of sites. One notable way that Mies connected his buildings with nature was by extending outdoor plaza tiles into the floor of a lobby. This device accentuated the effortless flow between natural conditions and artificial structures.

Fleeing Nazi Germany in 1938, Mies settled in Chicago, Illinois, where he was appointed head of the architecture school at Chicago's Armour Institute of Technology (later renamed the Illinois Institute of Technology). One of the benefits of taking this position was that he would be commissioned to design the new buildings and master plan for the campus. All his buildings still stand there, including Alumni Hall, the Chapel, and his masterpiece the S.R. Crown Hall (a designated Chicago Landmark), built as the home of IIT's School of Architecture.

His early projects at the IIT campus, and for developer Herbert Greenwald, presented to Americans a style that seemed a natural progression of the almost forgotten nineteenth-century Chicago School style. His architecture, with origins in the German Bauhaus and European International Style, became an accepted mode of building for American cultural and educational institutions, developers, public agencies, and large corporations.

THE PROMONTORY APARTMENTS: AN ARCHITECTURAL HISTORY

Residential High-Rise Development on Chicago's Lakefront

Chicago is a broad city of neighborhoods built up with Chicago building types like bungalows and three-flats. These neighborhoods end abruptly when the city meets Lake Michigan. On the North Side, a wall of high-rise apartment buildings defines this edge. On the South Side, scattered towers are situated in park-like settings of the type so admired by the French architect LeCorbusier.

Most of these residential towers were erected in the late 1920's. While the office towers of the Loop mostly adhered to the Chicago School style of "form follows function," the lakefront apartment towers, in their attempt to appeal to the upper middle class, reverted to historic stylistic forms and ornament that were popular in the 1920s. The Promontory Apartments were the first high-rise apartment building to break radically with this tradition, and it set the standard stylistically for decades to follow.

The 1920's construction boom came to a halt after the Great Crash of 1929 and did not appreciably recover through the years of the Great Depression and World War II. After the war, a housing shortage sparked a new round of construction emphasizing a more modern aesthetic. Pioneering this phenomenon was the Promontory Apartments, the first post-war, high-rise apartment building in Chicago.

Development of the Promontory Apartments

In 1946, Herbert Greenwald (1915-1959) returned to Chicago after serving in the military during World War II and decided to embark on a new career. Prior to the war he had been an educator and a Ph.D. candidate in Philosophy at the University of Chicago, but his interests turned to real estate development. No new high-rise residential buildings had been built in Chicago since the onset of the Great Depression, and he reasoned that there was pent-up demand for them. With the aid of financial backers including Samuel Katzin, a large Chicago automobile dealer, he secured options on three sites along the Chicago lakefront in established high-rise residential areas. Two of the sites were in Greenwald's own Hyde Park neighborhood, one at the corner of Hyde Park Boulevard and Cornell Avenue, and the other in the 5500 block of South Shore Drive. The third was in the Streeterville neighborhood in the 800 block of North Lake Shore Drive.

Greenwald soon realized that only the South Shore Drive site was available for immediate development as the two other sites had legal complications yet to be worked out. He chose the name Promontory Apartments for this first project, taking the name from nearby Promontory Point in Burnham Park. Promontory Point had been constructed as a landfill during the 1920's by extending the Lake Michigan shoreline outward some 400 feet. Burnham Park extends along the lakefront from 12th to 56th Streets and was planted in 1934-35 by the landscape architect Alfred Caldwell in the English Romantic landscape tradition of Brown, Repton, Olmsted, and Jensen. During the 1920's and 30's, the Hyde Park lakefront and its beaches had been developed as a summer tourist destination, and a number of large tourist hotels had been built there amongst the apartment towers. But during the war, the tourist industry had declined, and Greenwald had opted for a cooperatively-owned residential building.

In 1946 Greenwald had met his Hyde Park neighbor architect Charles Genther (1907-1987) who had recently founded the architectural firm Pace Associates. Greenwald wanted Genther as the architect of record for the Promontory Apartments, but as Greenwald's son Bennett recalled in 2009, he also wanted a well-known "design architect" who would bring international attention to this first post-war Chicago skyscraper. Greenwald's first choice was Frank Lloyd Wright and he wrote to him. Wright replied, saying if an advance of \$50,000 was deposited to his bank account in Madison, he could start work at once. The sum was more than Greenwald and his backers could afford. Greenwald also sent a cable to the French architect Le Corbusier, who brusquely replied that he did not do buildings in the United States. Greenwald then wrote to the German-American architect Walter Gropius. He responded that his office in Boston was a long distance from Chicago, and went on to say, "Why should you come to me, when 'the master of us all,' Mies van der Rohe, is in Chicago?" Genther had been a graduate student of the German-American architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe at Illinois Institute of Technology from 1939-1940 and 1942-43 and he arranged for the three of them to meet.

Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, or simply Mies, as he was called by Americans, had immigrated to Chicago in 1938. His work had been introduced to an American audience by way of two of his most famous European works, the Barcelona Pavilion and the Tugendhat House. These projects had been featured prominently in the 1932 exhibition "The International Style:



The Promontory Apartments—front and rear elevations



**Ground floor loggia view from lobby (left) and
Typical apartment interior—entry hall view into living room (right)**

Architecture Since 1922” mounted by Philip Johnson and Henry-Russell Hitchcock at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Both in the exhibition catalog and in their subsequent book, *The International Style*, Johnson and Hitchcock had hailed Mies as one of the “four great leaders of modern architecture.” In 1937, when he visited the United States for the first time, Mies had been invited to become the Director of the Department of Architecture at the Armour Institute of Technology in Chicago. Mies replied that he would accept the position only if he could make a new curriculum for the school.

He also wanted to bring with him several colleagues from the German Bauhaus, where he had been director from 1930 until the Nazi government forced it to close in 1933, including the architect and city planner Ludwig Hilbersheimer and the photographer Walter Peterhans. Mies’s terms were accepted and he became Director in 1938. Hilbersheimer and Peterhans became teachers there and helped Mies develop the school’s unique curriculum. In 1940, Mies was also commissioned to design a new, 100-acre campus for the university which had now become the Illinois Institute of Technology. By 1946 he had completed three buildings for the school. Coincidentally, Laszlo Moholy Nagy, artist, photographer, and contemporary of Mies at the Bauhaus, had independently come to Chicago to establish the New Bauhaus which was later incorporated into IIT as the Institute of Design.

Although Mies had never built a high-rise building, he made a favorable impression on Greenwald at their first meeting. Subsequently Greenwald and Genther put together a team of design professionals including Mies as the design architect, Pace Associates as architect of record, the firm of Holsman, Holsman and Klekamp as consulting engineers, and Frank Kornacker as structural engineer.

Architecture of the Promontory Apartments

Greenwald had decided that a 5:1 mix of two- and three-bedroom apartments would be favorable for the Chicago market at that time, and determined that the building would consist of 122 units. The zoning code limited the height of the building to 21 stories. Mies began his plan by locating the building along the full width of the east property line to allow most of the units a view of Lake Michigan.

For the typical floor plan, Mies drew on his design of an earlier apartment building at the Weissenhof Siedlung in Stuttgart completed in 1927. Following the Weissenhof plan, he divided the building into two sections, each with two stairways and two elevators at its center. But unlike the earlier plan, here there were three apartments at each section level, two facing the lake and the third extending outward to the west overlooking the city, forming a T-shape. These units were much larger than those of the Weissenhof, but Mies’s European concerns of the 1920’s for light, views, and natural cross-ventilation were still prominent features.

The building’s structure was developed concurrently with the plan. Mies’s double-T plan was accommodated within a regular array of rectangular bays measuring 16’-6” by 18’-2.” The frame was reinforced concrete with concrete pan-joint floor plates. This concrete structural system had been the marketplace standard for Chicago high-rise apartments since about 1920,



Original construction drawing

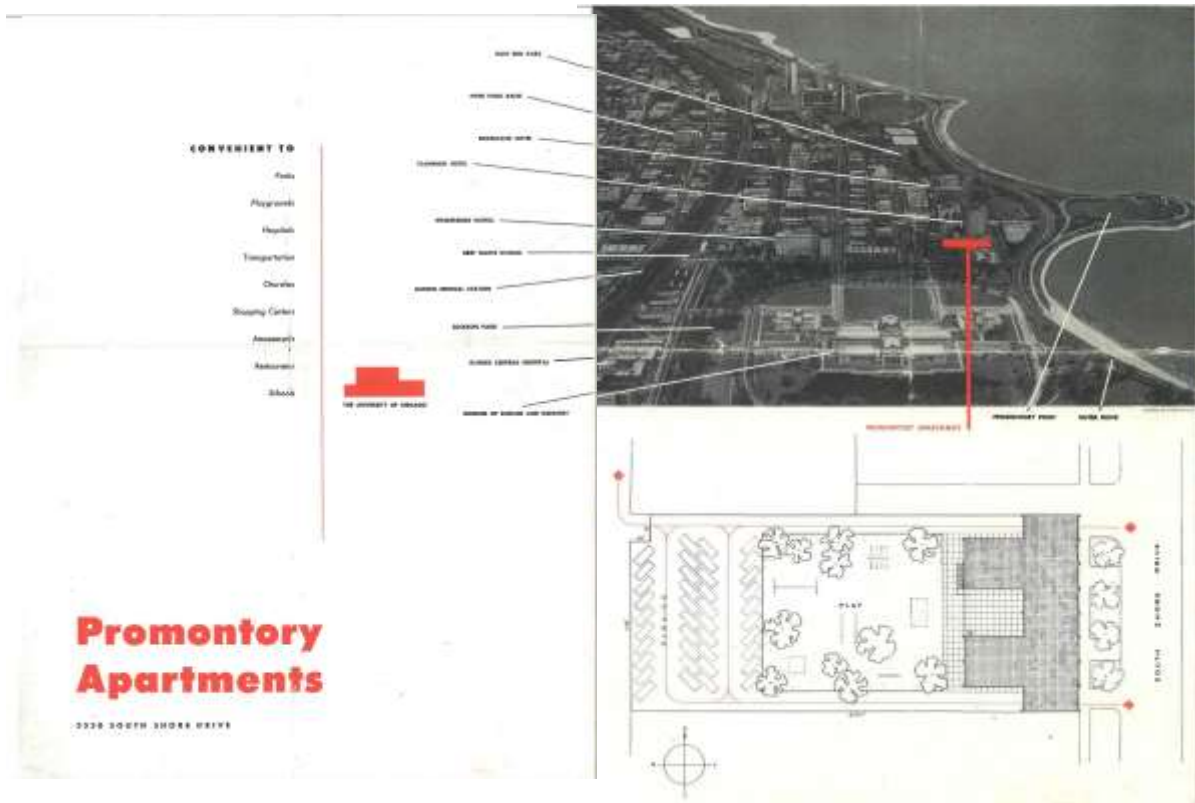
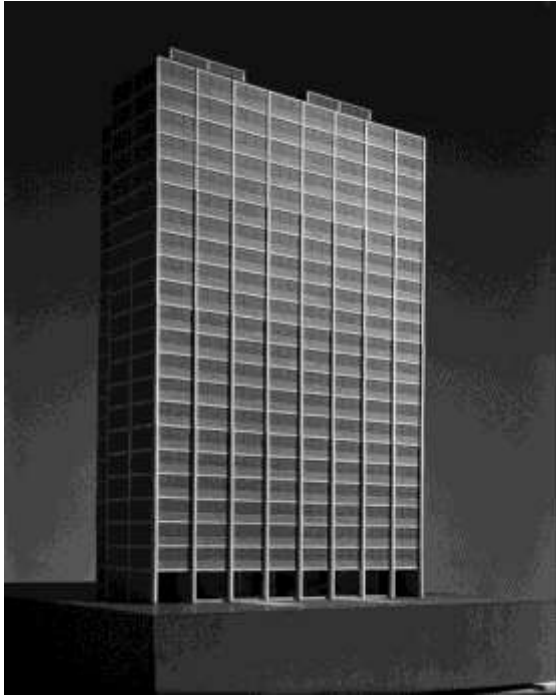
being the most economical structural system for the smaller 20-foot spans typical for residential uses. In the 1920s the concrete frame was largely hidden behind masonry, but Mies chose to make it a major element of the exterior architectural expression of the building, quite unlike any previously executed skyscraper. Every exterior beam and column was exposed so the entire frame could be comprehended by the observer. The spaces between the columns and beams on the east- and west-facing elevations were in-filled with low spandrel walls of buff brick. Above the walls were large windows running from column to column, again reminiscent of the Weissenhof elevations. The north- and south-facing elevations were largely opaque, with buff brick filling in the openings in the concrete frame and only a few windows cut in to light bedrooms, dining areas, and kitchens in the west-projecting wings of the T's.

Despite the structural clarity of the design, the facades needed architectural expression lest they appear dull. On the east- and west-facing elevations, Mies projected the columns forward of the face of the building while stepping the columns back successively at three points as they rose upward to express the decreasing structural loads they carried. The stepped columns bring vitality and lively rhythm to the whole architectural composition.



The Promontory
Apartments today

Clockwise from upper left:
East elevation details;
Entrance;
Porte-cochere and loggia;
North elevation;
West elevation;
South elevation



Mies's model for the Promontory Apartments (upper left). Mason building spandrel wall (upper right). Brochure marketing the Promontory Apartments (bottom).

At the ground floor, Mies introduced a recessed loggia along the east elevation. Bays at the north and south ends have full-height openings over driveways creating porte-cocheres which lead through to the parking area in the rear. From the loggia, two glass-walled vestibules lead to the elevator lobbies of each building section. Between them is the shared lobby lounge with glass walls facing the lake on the east and the garden on the west. Above this base of columns framing open and setback, glass-enclosed spaces rose the 20 floors of apartments forming the middle element of the tripartite horizontal division of the east façade. The composition was completed by a terminal element: a pair of mechanical penthouses, linked together by a glass-walled solarium. All of these elements of Mies's tripartite horizontal division of the building are carefully integrated within the overall discipline of the exposed concrete frame.

Marketing of the Promontory Apartments

To help present his design to prospective buyers of the cooperative apartment units, Mies built a model of the building. The three major exterior materials, brick, concrete, and glass, were represented by different colors of textured drawing papers applied over cardboard forms. Photographs of the model show the front facade facing the lake with the projecting wings at the rear of the building extending into a garden.

Greenwald and Mies included these photos in a marketing brochure they prepared hoping to interest both prospective buyers of the units and mortgage lenders needed to finance the building's construction. The brochure also contained plans and interior perspective collages of the different apartment units. The windows in the interior drawings were filled with photographs of the actual views of the lake and parks that would be seen from them, and Mies himself drew in traditional furniture and accessories to suggest an air of upper middle-class congeniality. Although Mies was a leading modernist architect, he had to compromise to popular tastes in furnishings in order to achieve his objectives.

Financing of the Promontory Apartments

Obtaining a mortgage commitment for the building was necessary because Greenwald's private backers could not finance the entire project. This did not prove to be an easy task, as Genter later wrote:

“Applications for the first mortgage were made by the developer, Mr. Herbert Greenwald, to almost every source known at the time. The adverse criticisms made then are still the classical comments of the uninformed or inexperienced man who has not had the view from within: ‘It looks like a Boston sugar warehouse.’ ‘We don’t understand how people can live with so much glass.’ ‘There is a lack of privacy.’ There was, indeed, a flood of adverse publicity, and it was extremely difficult to convince anyone that they should seriously prepare proposals for the work.” But Mies and his colleagues persisted and the mortgage was finally placed through a man who might be called a representative American cosmopolite, C. A. McCelvain, a man of action and interest in urban affairs, a believer in cooperative housing, and significantly enough, a flying officer in both world wars.



Recessed loggia at ground floor

Entry vestibule



Ground floor lobby looking southeast

Ground floor lobby looking northwest



The final arrangements for the mortgage, placed with McCelvain's Trust Company of Chicago, were completed in the spring of 1947. Greenwald publicly announced on May 3, 1947, that the project would proceed. The estimated cost was given as \$1.8 million, and at that time 30 applications for apartments had been received. The project was advertised for bids on May 15, 1947, and Peter Hamlin Construction was chosen as the general contractor with a bid of \$1.5 million. Work began in the fall of that year.

Construction of the Promontory Apartments proceeded rapidly and was completed in the spring of 1949. Because of the excellent site overlooking Lake Michigan, and the attractive qualities of Mies's design, all the apartment units were rapidly sold, and the building was fully occupied shortly after it was finished. The Promontory Apartments were attractive to professors at the University of Chicago and the Illinois Institute of Technology, and also included creative luminaries such as Gwendolyn Brooks, Pulitzer Prize-winning poet and Poet Laureate of Illinois; Ralph Shapey, Composer; and Pao-Chi Chang, Alfred Swenson, and Natalie de Blois, Architects.

Subsequent Developments with Mies and Greenwald

Soon after its completion, architectural critics began to publish a series of favorable opinions of the Promontory Apartments including this quote from Swiss critic Sigfried Giedion: "These soaring ferroconcrete verticals [on the façade], set back four times in their height, are handled with an extraordinary sensitivity and give a musical articulation to the whole façade." Encouraged by the financial and critical success of the Promontory Apartments, Greenwald and Mies continued to collaborate on more high-rise apartment buildings until Greenwald's untimely death in 1959. Among these developments are 860-880 Lake Shore Drive (1951, a designated Chicago Landmark), the Esplanade Apartments at 900-910 North Lake Shore Drive (1955), the Commonwealth Promenade Apartments (1956), and the Lafayette Park housing development (1963) in Detroit. Indeed, the Promontory Apartments would prove to be a pivotal work in Mies's American career, opening the way to his establishment as a leader in the design of tall buildings.

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Sections 2-120-620 and -630), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to make a preliminary recommendation of landmark designation for an area, district, place, building, structure, work of art, or other object within the City of Chicago if the Commission determines it meets two or more of the stated “criteria for designation” and it possesses sufficient historic design integrity to convey its significance.



Exposed columns step back on the façade of the Promontory Apartments.

The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that the Promontory Apartments be designated as a Chicago Landmark.

Criterion 1: Value as an Example of City, State or National Heritage

Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

Completed in the spring of 1949, the Promontory Apartments was one of the first International Style high-rise apartment building in the nation. It is the work of an acknowledged master of world architecture, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. It possesses high artistic value as evidenced by the opinions of critics and remains to this day a stopping point on tours by architectural buffs from around the world. It is the first realization of two important design themes

in Mies’s subsequent work, the expression of the skeleton structure as an architectural element, and the use of a tripartite horizontal division in high-rise buildings.

Criterion 3: Significant Person

Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

In addition to the significance of the building’s architect, Mies van der Rohe, its developer went on to construct projects that helped shape the skyline of Chicago. Herbert Greenwald was a pioneering developer in Chicago, the first to develop high-rise buildings since the onset of the Great Depression. His further projects with Mies include 860-880 Lake Shore Drive, the Esplanade Apartments at 900-910 North Lake Shore Drive, the 2400 Lakeview Apartments, and the Commonwealth Promenade Apartments, all in Chicago, as well as the Lafayette Park development in Detroit.

Criterion 4: Exemplary Architecture

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.

While peacefully coexisting with its neighboring buildings on the skyline today, the Promontory Apartments was quite striking for its day. Mies pioneered the use of a building's structural elements and their proportions to determine its aesthetics, without relying on ornamental features as architecture traditionally had. The exposed concrete columns and beams, the large areas of glass, and the recessed lobby on the first floor were avant-garde for their time.

Early studies for the façade included a curtain wall scheme of steel and glass, but shortages of metal soon after World War II made this infeasible. Mies would go on to design three more apartment buildings with an exposed concrete structural frame for the Illinois Institute of Technology. He would also go on to design several more apartment buildings in Chicago, Detroit, Baltimore, and Montreal, refining the original steel and glass curtain wall scheme.

There are many subtle design features that distinguish the Promontory Apartments. The exposed concrete columns on the exterior are stepped back three times over the height of the building to express the lessening of the structural loads. Another pioneering feature is the treatment of the ground floor lobby. Full-height glass windows are set back from the perimeter structure, emphasizing the skeletal column and beam construction. Standing in the lobby, one feels in the midst of nature, with unimpeded views of the lakefront to the east and the meadow to the west.

Within individual units, Mies continued to explore the components of a modern minimalist aesthetic. In-floor hot water radiant heat took the place of traditional radiators. Narrow, 2" solid plaster partitions defined spaces while maximizing usable square footage and the flow between spaces. Even details as small as the flushing mechanism for toilets were designed by noted industrial designer Raymond Loewy, eschewing traditional handles and inserting a single, vertical push mechanism to allow for flushing.

Criterion 5: Work of Significant Architect or Designer

Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois, or the United States.

The architect of the Promontory Apartments, Mies van der Rohe, is universally recognized as one of the masters of modern architecture. Mies immigrated to Chicago from Nazi Germany in 1938 to become Director of the Department of Architecture at the Armour Institute of Technology, now the Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT). In addition to developing a new curriculum for the teaching of architecture at IIT, Mies also designed a new campus plan for the University and subsequently designed several academic buildings there including the iconic Crown Hall for the College of Architecture.

Other seminal works by Mies in the Chicago area include the Farnsworth House, 860-880 Lake Shore Drive, the Federal Center complex in the heart of the Loop, and the IBM Plaza on the Chicago River. International projects include the Seagram Building in New York City and the New National Gallery in Berlin. As an educator, Mies influenced generations of future architects whose work dominates the skylines of Chicago and cities around the world.

Frank Kornacker , the structural engineer for the Promontory Apartments, worked closely with Mies on several projects and with other noted architects including Bertrand Goldberg. Mr. Kornacker's notable designs in structural concrete include the Promontory's columns that step back over the height of the building, and the pioneering structural system of architect Goldberg's Marina City, also in Chicago.

Integrity Criterion

The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and ability to express its historic community, architecture or aesthetic value.

The Promontory Apartments has preserved its original architectural design with only minor alterations either designed by Mies or sympathetic to the building's character. In 1964-66, the Promontory Apartments Trust asked Mies to help them solve a problem which had arisen not long after the building was completed. Greenwald and his collaborators had followed the contemporary market standard in environmental control systems for the Promontory Apartments through the use of central space heating and operable windows for ventilation and cooling. But in 1948, the first window air-conditioning units had been marketed and by the early 1950's they had become popular with consumers. The Promontory Apartments soon had many of these units, which projected from the building's face. Mies's solution was to install the units in standardized louvered sleeves let into the brick spandrel walls under the windows. The louvered sleeves were of two sizes and were arranged in a regular pattern on the east- and west-facing facades.

Owners also asked Mies to alter slightly the lay-out of the ground floor. Space was taken from the corner bicycle rooms to create separate mail rooms, one on each side, where existing mailboxes were relocated from the vestibules. The remaining space at the northeast corner was converted to a receiving room.

In 1990-94, the ground floor received a sympathetic remodeling. The existing ground concrete floor had developed cracks so was covered with an epoxy terrazzo veneer of similar appearance. The corroded base of the curtain wall was replaced to match and a new concrete floor surface was installed in the loggia and porte-cocheres. In the mail rooms, openings to the lobby were increased to full ceiling height and the walls were completely finished in buff face brick, matching existing materials and finishes. Granite shelves and larger mailboxes were also installed.

In the fifty years since the building was finished, exterior concrete had weathered, exposing the gravel and limestone aggregates, and iron in the original concrete mix had oxidized, giving it a warm ochre hue. The first major restoration of the exterior concrete frame and brick walls was undertaken from 1995-1998. All the brickwork was repointed and damaged bricks replaced. Damaged areas of concrete were carefully excised and patched with concrete matching the adjacent in color and texture. The result was the restoration of the sharp lines of Mies's original design, mellowed by the patina of its natural materials' exposure of half a century to Chicago's atmosphere including now-vanished steel mills and coal-fired heating systems.

SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

Whenever a building, structure, object, or district is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the "significant historical and architectural features" of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered the most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based upon its preliminary evaluation of the Promontory Apartments, the Commission staff recommends that the significant features be identified as:

- All exterior elevations, including rooflines, of the building; and
- The first floor lobby.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CITY OF CHICAGO

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The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor and City Council, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. The Commission is responsible for recommending to the City Council that individual buildings, sites, objects, or entire districts be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law. The Commission is staffed by the Chicago Department of Planning and Development, Historic Preservation Division, City Hall, 121 North LaSalle Street, Room 1000, Chicago, IL 60602; (312-744-3200) phone; (312-744-9410) fax, website: www.cityofchicago.org/dpd

This Preliminary Summary of Information is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation process. Only language contained within the final landmark designation ordinance as approved by City Council should be regarded as final.