

BEVERLY HOTEL (LATER BENJAMIN HOTEL)

557 Lexington Avenue (AKA 557-565 Lexington Avenue, 125-129 East 50th Street), Manhattan
Tax Map Block 1305, Lot 20

Built: 1926-27

Architect: Emery Roth, with Sylvan Bien, Associate Architect

Style: Neo-Romanesque

Actions: Calendared September 17, 2013

Located at the northeast corner of Lexington Avenue and East 50th Street and built in 1926-27, this 30-story setback residential hotel is one of the premiere hotels constructed along the noted “hotel alley” stretch of the Avenue north of Grand Central Terminal. It was built as part of the redevelopment of this section of East Midtown that followed the opening of Grand Central Terminal and the Lexington Avenue subway line. Built after the passage of the 1916 zoning, the romantic tiered massing of the building represents the early evolution of skyscraper design.

The building was erected by the Lexington-Concord Corp. headed by Moses Ginsberg, a leading builder-developer of the period, best known for his Carlyle Hotel (1929-30). The Beverly was marketed to “sophisticated New Yorkers” at moderate rates and featured a number of amenities, notably its “many sunny outdoor terraces.”

It has a handsome two-story arcaded limestone base, which retains its original, though somewhat modified, marquee on East 50th Street. The upper stories, clad in grayish-brown brick, terminate in a skillfully modeled series of setbacks, a lofty octagonal tower lit by rose windows, and a pagoda-like cap. The Beverly is richly ornamented with stylized Romanesque motifs and incorporates details such as pelican and owl sculptures and warrior-head corbels.

The hotel’s distinctive profile made it a favorite subject for American artists of the 1920s, including Georgia O’Keeffe, Alfred Stieglitz, and Charles Sheeler. Later historians have also recognized the building’s design. In *Mansions in the Clouds*, his monograph on Emery Roth, New York City’s preeminent apartment house designer of the interwar years, Steven Rutenbaum described the Beverly Hotel as “one of Roth’s most successful creations.”

In 1997, it was acquired by a company associated with the Denihan family and renamed “The Benjamin” in honor of its founder, Benjamin Denihan, Sr. The building underwent extensive facade repairs and sensitive renovations in 1998-99. The present vertical illuminated sign, which replaced an earlier post-1940 sign, dates to that time.



Today the hotel continues to be, as Ruttenbaum noted, “one of New York’s most romantically styled towers, a rich ornament in the cityscape.”

