

Ambassador Grill & Lounge and Hotel Lobby in One UN New York



Ambassador Grill (photo courtesy Metropolis Magazine)

The Ambassador Grill & Lounge and Hotel Lobby are significant examples of Late Modern and Post-Modern design by the internationally-acclaimed architectural firm Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo and Associates. Lavish and exceptionally well preserved, these sparkling public interiors skillfully blend modern and historical forms. Completed seven years apart, they incorporate distinct stylistic vocabularies that express the shifting character of American architecture in late 1970s and early 1980s.

Part of a hotel-and-office complex built by the United Nations Development Corporation, each interior is independent. The theatrical U-shaped Ambassador Grill & Lounge, located at the rear of the first floor, opened in 1976. It has a patterned black-and-white marble floor, mirrored walls and a dramatic, vaulted, faux skylight, backed by illuminated mylar panels.

The hotel's elegant lobby adjoins the driveway and parallels East 44th Street. Completed in 1983, the atrium-like reception area has a stepped octagonal glass dome and a seating area adjoined by marble columns of unusual design. Such classicizing features suggest the growing influence of Post-Modern aesthetics during this era.

These interiors were celebrated by leading architecture critics. Paul Goldberger called the Grill “New York’s first good hotel dining room since the 1920s.” Carter Wiseman described it as a “glittering piece of public theater” and Ada Louise Huxtable wrote that these spaces “have real style –the style and conviction of their own times.” In her 2011 monograph on Roche, architectural historian Eeva-Liisa Pelkonen called these spaces significant representations of the era: “With its over-the-top interiors the hotel became a destination and an active participant in the disco era of the late 1970s and the 1980s, when New York’s economy finally turned around.”

Major works by Roche Dinkeloo include the Oakland Museum of Art (1961-68) and the Ford Foundation (1963-68, a New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark), as well as numerous additions to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, including interiors (1967-2012). Roche was awarded the Pritzker Prize in 1982, the field of architecture’s top prize, and the Gold Medal from the American Institute of Architects in 1993.



1 UN New York Lobby, (photo by Ronald Livieri, Architect's Design Record Photos circa 1985)