

HOTEL LEXINGTON

511 Lexington Avenue (AKA 509-515 Lexington Avenue,
134-142 East 49th Street), Manhattan
Tax Map Block 1302, Lot 51

Built: 1928-29

Architect: Schultze & Weaver

Style: Neo-Romanesque

Actions: Calendared September 17, 2013

The Hotel Lexington (1928-29), at the southeast corner of Lexington Avenue and East 48th Street, 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 law, the romantic tiered massing of the building represents the early evolution of skyscraper design.

The Hotel Lexington is designed in a neo-Romanesque style, complexly massed with ornamented setbacks, clad in limestone, brick, and terra cotta, and features a differentiated base with historic arched entrance (now enclosed for retail space) and sculptural details, continuous piers, and a distinguished skyline profile as it rises 27 stories including the pyramidal roofed towers.

Hotel specialists, Leonard Schultze & S. Fullerton Weaver were commissioned for its design. Considered the preeminent American luxury hotel firm of the 1920s to early 1930s, Schultze & Weaver, following their designs in the 1920s boom years in Florida, became known for expertise in modern skyscraper hotels cloaked in traditional historic ornamental styles. The firm designed a number of New York City's most prestigious hotels, including the Sherry-Netherland (1926-27, with Buchman & Kahn), the Pierre (1929-30), and the Waldorf-Astoria (1929-31). The Lexington was one of the five major hotels, and today is one of only seven extant tall buildings, by Schultze & Weaver in Manhattan.

According to the *New York Times*, the Lexington Hotel Corp., a subsidiary of the American Hotels Corp., planned this as the largest in the parent firm's “large chain of first-class hotels,” in the United States and Canada. Constructed at \$6.5 million dollars by the Turner Construction Corp., one of the world's leading building concerns, the hotel originally housed 801 rooms marketed as “modern luxury” at very moderate rates for out-of-town visitors.

The Hotel Lexington has attracted favorable notice from critics and historians since its completion. In 1929-30, the building was published in *Architect*, *American Architect*, *Architecture & Building*, and *Architectural Forum*, and “The Skyline” column in *The New Yorker* called it “a



romantic addition” to Lexington Avenue. W. Parker Chase, in *New York: The Wonder City* (1932) called it a “sumptuous hostelry” and stated that the “location is ideal. Building gorgeous.” More recently, the Lexington was one of the 14 hotels featured in the publication *Grand Hotels of the Jazz Age: The Architecture of Schultze & Weaver* (2005), in conjunction with the exhibition “In Pursuit of Pleasure: Schultze & Weaver and the American Hotel” at the Wolfsonian-Florida International University, which was based on its collection of the firm’s plans, photographs, and documents.

The Hotel Lexington was the location of the famous Hawaiian Room (1937-66), featuring Polynesian cuisine and the best in Hawaiian music and dance. In 1984, the base of the building, previously altered, was re-created according to a modified version of the original design.

