



Central Park South, view southwest. Photograph Paul Whalen, 2020.

RAMSA Walking Tour

Residential Buildings of Central Park South



- Reference locations:
- A. 520 Park Avenue
 - B. Hotel Pierre
 - C. Sherry-Netherland Hotel
 - D. Plaza Hotel
 - E. Hampshire House
 - F. Essex House
 - G. 220 Central Park South
 - H. Gainsborough Studios
 - I. Time Warner Center
 - J. 15 Central Park West



A. 520 Park Avenue



Photographs Francis Dzikowski, 2019.

Architect: Robert A.M. Stern Architects

Location: 520 Park Avenue (northwest corner of Park Avenue and East 60th Street)

Completed: 2019

520 Park Avenue provides 35 apartments—30 floor-through simplexes and five duplexes—in a 54-story tower. The massing and detailing of the three-story base complement and respect its neighbors, the Grolier Club (Bertram Goodhue, 1917) and Christ Church (Cram & Ferguson, 1931), while the campanile-like tower, set 15 feet back from the entrance, joins the other slender towers—such as the Sherry-Netherland and the Pierre—at the southeast corner of Central Park. The apartment building is crowned by four corner chimneys framing pilasters and aedicules with a copper-roofed limestone pavilion at the 48th-floor terrace.

Like 15 Central Park West, our previous collaboration with Zeckendorf Development, 520 Park Avenue is entirely clad in limestone. The oriel windows on the south, east, and north facades emphasize the verticality of the tower, while changes in the fenestration patterns subtly break down the building's height and express the different apartment plans. Each facade of the

building is further articulated with stone detailing evocative of the great New York apartment buildings of the 1920s and 1930s. Seven residences above the 39th floor feature generous balconies overlooking preserved views over the Upper East Side Historic District.

The building's entrance, a double-height arched doorway with a suspended bronze canopy, leads into a vestibule and coffered lobby with an imposing marble fireplace. Beyond the lobby is a groin-vaulted salon with fireplaces at each end. This sequence of rooms creates a view through the building to the garden, which features double-tiered plantings surmounted by a trellis and three limestone fountains on the rear wall.



B. Hotel Pierre



Architect: Schultze & Weaver

Location: 2 East 61st Street (southeast corner of Fifth Avenue and East 61st Street)

Completed: 1930

After the First World War, with the decline in luxury townhouse construction and the demise of notable entertainment palaces such as Delmonico's, the great hotels of New York took on increased significance. In the minds of the general public, hotels carried the main burden of social and aesthetic trendsetting. Although the nearby Sherry-Netherland is elegant, it in no way compared in grandeur to the Hotel Pierre of 1930, easily the most lavishly appointed of the Plaza group of hotels. At the time of its construction, the Pierre abutted

McKim, Mead & White's Metropolitan Club. Because the Pierre was not in Fifth Avenue's business district but in its residential zone, street-facing shops were not permitted, a factor that, as Henry H. Saylor noted helped the design "tremendously . . . by permitting it to rest on a solid base, rather than on glass." The building's composition was relatively graceful, with a 21-story tower rising from a complexly massed base to a steeply sloped, copper-clad roof.

C. Sherry-Netherland Hotel



Architect: Schultze & Weaver with Buchman & Kahn

Location: 781 Fifth Avenue (northeast corner of Fifth Avenue and East 59th Street)

Completed: 1926-27

Imposing as the Sherry-Netherland's silhouette was when seen from Central Park, the hotel itself was modestly scaled if opulently detailed. The arriving visitor entered the hotel from Fifth Avenue, passing through a small vaulted lobby on their way to the hotel's skylit restaurant, which was placed a half level below the lobby to increase the height of its ceiling. Like the Savoy-Plaza Hotel (McKim, Mead & White, 1927; demolished 1965), the Sherry-Netherland had relatively little public dining space, since Prohibition had driven

most guests away from restaurants to their rooms where they could order food from the hotel's kitchen and consume it with wine or liquor ordered from a bootlegger.

D. Plaza Hotel



Architect: Henry J. Hardenbergh
Location: 768 Fifth Avenue (between West 58th Street and Central Park South)
Completed: 1905–7

The Plaza began in 1883 as a family apartment hotel, but the builders ran into financial problems and after five years of litigation the New York Life Insurance Co. foreclosed on the mortgage, hiring McKim, Mead & White to transform the half-built structure into a luxury hotel. Despite initial praise, by 1905, the building was outdated. The recovery of the economy at the turn of the century produced a boom in the construction of grand hotels—and the still-standing Plaza Hotel was one of the products of that boom.

The hotel's location was partially responsible for its distinction, but its architecture made it the leading hotel of New York at the time. Henry J. Hardenbergh did not abandon the chateausque domesticity of his earlier work, with details that hinted at the style of Francois I, but deliberately restrained and concentrated at the mansard roof, where the filigree softened the skyline silhouette. The simple mass below presented Hardenbergh's clearest statement of the tripartite skyscraper formula, with a rusticated limestone base.



Plaza Hotel (Henry J. Hardenbergh, 1905–7). Photograph c. 1910.



Plaza Hotel (McKim, Mead & White, 1889). Photograph c. 1890.

E. Hampshire House



Architect: Caughey & Evans
Location: 150 Central Park South (between Sixth and Seventh Avenues)
Completed: 1926-31

While the opening of the Pierre and the Waldorf-Astoria effectively marked the end of the hotel construction in the Metropolitan Era, the strange circumstances that surrounded the completion of Hampshire House, once labeled “Manhattan’s Monument to Frenzied Finance,” revived the old spirit at the end of the Depression. Magnificently situated next to Essex House, the Hampshire House was abandoned in June 1931, unfinished, when the developer, having already received more than \$2 million of the \$3 million called for by

the terms of the mortgage, defaulted. It stood derelict until 1938. Executed in white brick, Hampshire House was a strange hybrid, a cascade of setbacks attached to a rectangular tower that rose from the back of the lot. The tower was crowned by a steep copper roof and twin chimneys that referred to the Savoy-Plaza Hotel, but the dormers below were Spanish Baroque, and the base of the building—with its rusticated white marble walls and polished black granite trim—was a stylish example of Modern Classicism.

F. Essex House



Architect: Frank Grad
Location: 160 Central Park South (between Sixth and Seventh Avenues)
Completed: 1929-31

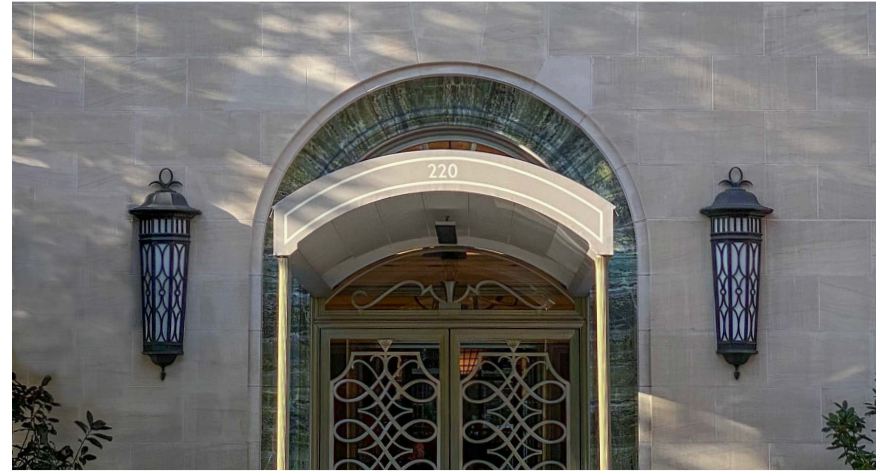
Essex House was initially conceived of as the Park Tower Hotel and for a while designated the Seville Towers. A massive tower rising from a symmetrically disposed base, the design of the Essex House was drastically simplified by the time it opened in 1930.

As realized, it is a narrow, setback slab running through the block, with windows on the eastern facade overlooking a low wing.

There is little architectural rhetoric in the design; so little, in fact, that the hotel erected a huge illuminated sign on the roof to identify itself!



G. 220 Central Park South



Photographs Paul Whalen, 2020.

Architect: Robert A.M. Stern Architects

Location: 220 Central Park South (between Seventh Avenue and Columbus Circle)

Completed: 2020

220 Central Park South combines an 18-story building called “the villa” and a 950-foot tower rising behind it. The villa sits comfortably among its comparably-sized neighbors facing Central Park. Its entrance and lobby connect by an arcaded passage to the tower, wrapping the motor court, entered from West 58th Street.

The two buildings share a common palette of silvery Alabama limestone and a pattern of dramatically varied fenestration and window groupings accentuated with Juliet balconies, set-back terraces, and ornamental metalwork. Both the villa and the tower have a strong presence on the skyline and at the same time join the family of buildings that have framed Central Park for generations.



H. Gainsborough Studios



Architect: Charles Buckman
Location: 222 Central Park South (between Seventh Avenue and Columbus Circle)
Completed: 1908

Many fin-de-siècle and early-20th-century duplex apartment buildings were built for artists to live and work in: their attraction was a double-height “studio” space with oversized windows facing north. The studios were designed to function as both workplace and living room for artists, but a much wider audience quickly found them appealing. The Gainsborough’s facade was one of the most distinguished of all the studio buildings. Bas-reliefs and a bust of Sir Thomas Gainsborough above the Ionic portal, as well as the

oversized windows, marked it as an artist’s building, skillfully crowned by mosaics and a flurry of ornament at the top.

I. Time Warner Center



Architect: SOM
Location: 10 Columbus Circle (west side of Columbus Circle)
Completed: 1999–2004

A long history predates the Time Warner Center at Columbus Circle, where the New York Coliseum stood from 1956 until its demolition in 1999. This mixed-use building features retail shops, restaurants, a theater, a hotel, and 191 residential units, which are located on the upper floors of the south and north towers. Despite the fact that the light gray, nearly colorless glass originally specified to clad the Time Warner Center was replaced by a much darker shade of gray, fostering a sense of brooding bulkiness, the

complex was greeted with general approval by many critics, including former *New York Times* architecture critic Ada Louise Huxtable, who found it to be “exactly what a New York Skyscraper should be—a soaring, shining, glamorous affirmation of the city’s reach and power, and its best real architecture in a long time.”



J. 15 Central Park West



Photographs Peter Aaron / OTTO, 2008.

Architect: Robert A.M. Stern Architects

Location: 15 Central Park West (between 61st and 62nd Streets on Central Park West)

Completed: 2004–8

Central Park West is one of the city's most glamorous streets, both architecturally and in terms of the mix of people who have been drawn to live here over many years. With its almost continuous palisade of romantically silhouetted apartment towers bounding Central Park, Manhattan's front lawn, Central Park West is an internationally acknowledged archetype of Manhattan and of modernity.

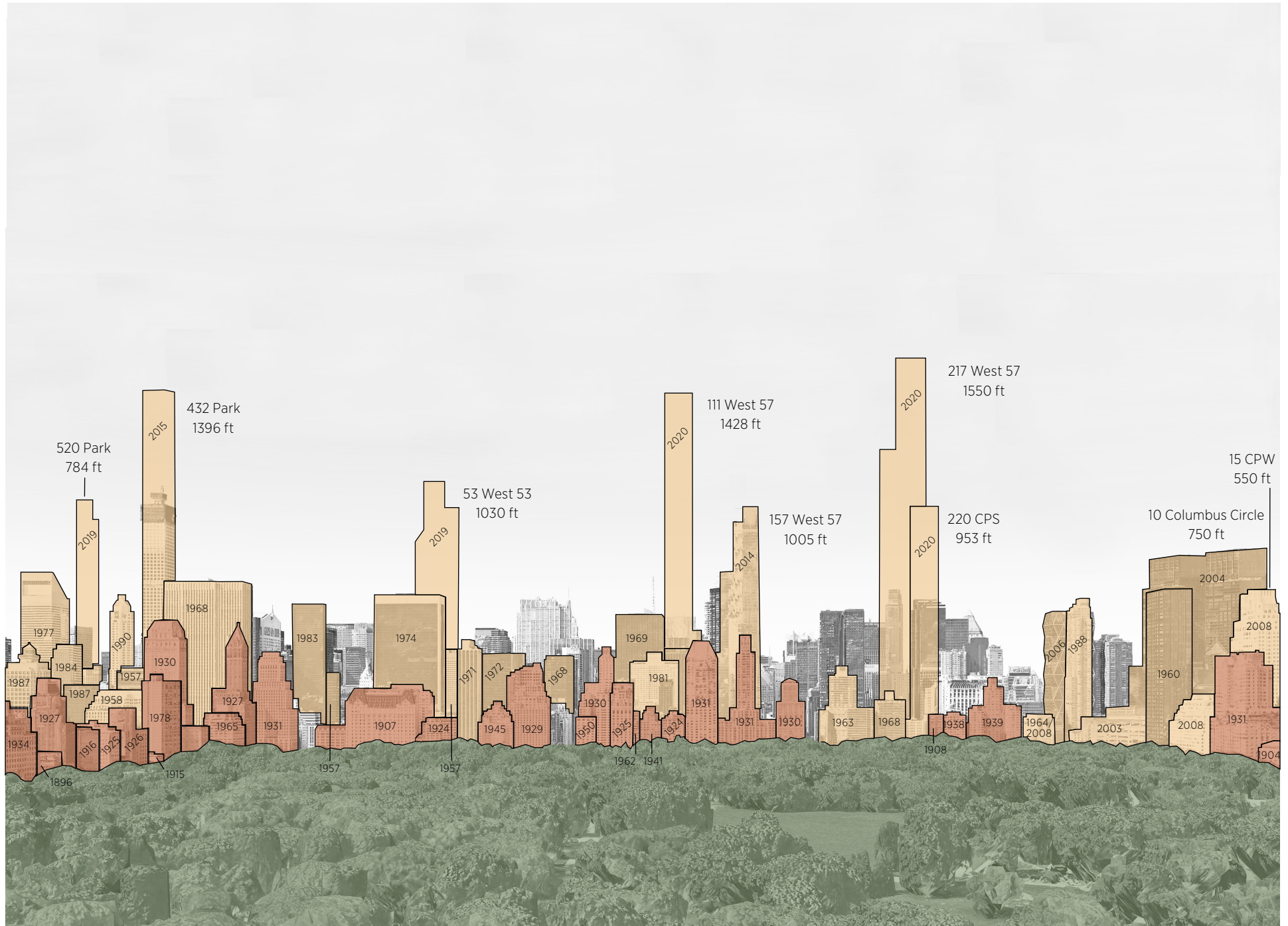
15 Central Park West is designed to complement its neighbors. The 19-story house joins the palisade of park-facing apartment houses that stretches for more than two miles along Central Park West. The 35-story tower takes its place among the 1920s towers punctuating that palisade—the Century, the Majestic, the San Remo, and the Eldorado—as well as among the post-war towers that line Broadway to form a back range to the skyline. On the west, shopfronts participate in the active pedestrian life of this stretch of Broadway.

15 Central Park West is completely clad in limestone, complementing the light-toned brick and stone of the older towers and contrasting with the dark reflections of the newer buildings around Columbus Circle. The warmth and natural variation of limestone has made it the material of choice for many of New York's most important buildings from the Metropolitan Museum of Art to the Frick Museum to the Empire State Building to some of the great apartment houses like 998 Fifth Avenue and 740 Park Avenue.

The building's Central Park West entrance, a canopied bronze door with a double-height expression, leads into a vestibule and a grand lobby with two fireplaces. 202 apartments range from one-bedroom to five-bedroom homes. The traditional masonry expression of the exterior accommodates large windows that, together with projecting bays, French balconies, and deep terraces at the setbacks, fill the residences with natural light.



Drawing David Abecassis, 2017.



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