

December 9, 2021

Landmarks Preservation Commission
Town Of Hempstead
c/o Mr. Michael Hartofilis
1 Washington Street
Hempstead, NY 11550
Via e-mail to: MHartofilis@tohmail.org

Re: Application for Landmark Designation
Geller House
175 Ocean Avenue, Village of Lawrence, Town of Hempstead

Dear Commissioners & Mr. Hartofilis:

I am writing on behalf of Docomomo US/New York Tri-State in support of the Application for Landmark Designation submitted by Docomomo US on December 7th, 2021.

Docomomo US/New York Tri-State is a local chapter of an international organization working in nearly 70 countries around the world. Our mission is to increase public awareness and appreciation of Modern architecture, landscapes and urban design; to identify and document local examples; and to advocate for the protection of those determined most significant. Since 1996, the chapter has been advancing this mission in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut.

Built in 1945, the house at 175 Ocean Avenue, designed by Marcel Breuer for Bertram and Phyllis Geller, is an extremely important and largely well-preserved work of Modern residential architecture designed by an internationally recognized architect. It is undoubtedly worthy of designation as a local landmark.

Marcel Breuer (1902-81) was among the most prominent architects in the world in the post-war era. A native of Pecs, Hungary, he studied and later taught at the famed Bauhaus in Germany and in his twenties developed some of the first tubular steel residential furniture, known today as the Wassily and Cesca chairs, still widely produced and utilized. At the outbreak of World War II, Breuer moved to America where he taught at the Harvard Graduate School of Design along with Walter Gropius, the founder of the Bauhaus, and practiced architecture in partnership with Gropius. Their students included I.M. Pei, Philip Johnson, Paul Rudolph and many others who became celebrated architects.

Breuer's domestic designs of the late 1940s and 1950s were extremely innovative and widely influential. The exhibition house he designed for the Museum of Modern Art, displayed in their garden in 1949, was visited by over 70,000 thousand people. Breuer's larger scale institutional and commercial projects included such prestigious commissions as the UNESCO Headquarters In Paris (1958) and the Whitney Museum of American Art (1966).

The Geller House was Breuer's first house constructed after his partnership with Gropius and the widespread recognition it received in the architectural community was important in establishing his reputation as an independent designer. The house was also the first built by Breuer incorporating his influential concept of the "bi-nuclear" house, in which living and sleeping areas of the house are separated into different formal elements. The commission included the design of the interiors for which Breuer developed custom designed furniture.

Soon after it was completed, the Geller House was widely published in the United States and in Europe. It was featured in an 8-page article in *House & Garden* in January of 1947. *Progressive Architecture*, long among America's most respected architectural journals, published an extensive 17-page article in February of 1947. That article begins,

"The importance of this house, over and above its vigorous challenge to comfortable convention in most phases of its design, is the extraordinary degree of integration that has been achieved-Integration of all elements: plan, structure, finished design, even furnishings and landscaping. It is, indeed, that rare design accomplishment in the residential field-an organic sum of its elements rather than a framework to which modern conveniences are attached."

Progressive Architecture also awarded the design a Citation in the Residential category of the 1946 Progressive Architecture Awards. In Europe, the project was published in the late 1940s in *Architectural Review* in England, *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* in France, and *Werk* in Switzerland.

The Geller House has also been documented in many of the numerous books devoted to Breuer's architecture and furniture designs, which have proliferated in recent years as Breuer's legacy has enjoyed renewed interest. In addition, the Geller House appears in both *Long Island Modernism: 1930-80* by Caroline Rob Zaleski, published by the Society for the Preservation of Long Island Antiquities, and the *AIA Architectural Guide to Nassau & Suffolk Counties*.

Finally, it is worth noting that the Geller House had a profound influence on the career of a young man who grew up in Lawrence. Herbert Beckhard was so inspired upon seeing the newly completed house, much discussed locally at the time, that it confirmed his thoughts about becoming an architect. Not only did he become an architect, he became Breuer's longtime partner and design collaborator.

Please protect the Geller House so that it can continue to inspire others now and in years to come.

Sincerely,



John Shreve Arbuckle
President
DOCOMOMO US/New York Tri-State
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