## **National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in How to Complete National Register Forms

For HCRS use only received MAY 3 1982 date entered JUN 3 1982

Type all entries—complete applicable se			
1. Name			
historic Park Plaza Apartments			
and/or common	-	- i	-1 - 2 - 1
2. Location			
street & number 1005 Jerome Avenue			not for publication
city, town Bronx	vicinity of	congressional district	22
state New York 10452 code	036 county	Bronx	code 005
3. Classification			
Category district public  building(s) private structure both object	Status  X occupied  unoccupied  work in progress  Accessible  yes: restricted  yes: unrestricted  no	Present Use agriculture commercial educational entertainment government industrial military	museum park private residence apar religious ment house scientific transportation other:
name Alexander Rapaport, Rapapor street & number 175 Main Street	rt Brothers		
city, town White Plains	vicinity of	state N	ew York 10601
5. Location of Lega	l Descriptio	n	
courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Bronx	County Register's	office	NATION AND DESCRIPTION OF CHARLES AND
street & number 1960 Benedict Avenue	v *		
city, town Bronx		state	New York 10462
6. Representation i	n Existing S		
Landmarks Preservation Commis	ssion		gible? yes X no
date April, 1981		federal state	county _X local
depository for survey records Landmarks	Preservation Commis	ssion 20 Vesey St	reet
city, town New York		state	New York 10007

### 7. Description

Condition —— excellent ——X good —— fair	deteriorated ruins unexposed	Check one unaltered X altered	Check one X original site moved date	NA	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	
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#### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

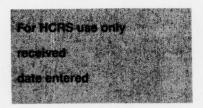
The Park Plaza apartment house is an eight-story building on the east side of Jerome Avenue near West 164th Street in the Bronx, bordering the Highbridge neighborhood. The area is primarily residential, and the buildings in the immediate vicinity are also apartment houses. The Park Plaza is on a hilly site. It is flanked on the south by an apartment house and on the north by a landscaped outdoor stairway which functions as a westward extension of West 165th Street; directly east across Jerome Avenue is John Mullaly Park (see site map).

The Park Plaza is divided into five blocks or sections, each six bays wide; the blocks are separated by recessed courtyards and connected by a continuing section at the rear (see site map). The central block, containing the entrance, is flanked on either side by two wings; this block is connected to the two inner blocks by one-story sections which, with the central entrance, form the building's lobby space. The inner and outer wings are linked by half-story brick walls which mask stairs and walk leading to basement entrances and utility areas. Each block is defined by its window arrangement, brick patterns, small tower-like massings at the roofline, and terra-cotta banding. Both the outer wings have a matching design, as do the inner wings, providing a symmetry which is further defined by the windows which are recessed to create vertical strips in the outer wings and central block, but not in the inner wings. The central block is distinguished from the wings by its elaborate two-story entrance and by a taller tower and more elaborate window treatment. The different elements within the blocks are emphasized through the placement of terra-cotta panels and the arrangements of the windows.

The ornamentation and design of the building take two forms: the arrangement of brick and window bays as vertical shafts and the use of ornamental polychromatic terra-cotta one of the major materials of Art Deco buildings. Besides being used to define continuous window strips, brick is used decoratively in the patterned parapets and tower-like masses at the roofline, and the patterned spandrels between windows in the vertical strips. Polychrome terra-cotta is used in a banding composed of alternating triangles showing alternating decorative scenes: one shows a fountain flanked by flamingos backed by a sunburst and the other shows the rays of the rising sun shining out behind a large Bronx apartment house. Placed at the top of the bands at various points are individually cast figures of birds, squirrels and other animals. Terra-cotta panels under many of the windows show a large scene of an architect presenting a model of his building to the Parthenon and asking, in the architect's words, "What do you think?" 2

In the central block, the entire ground floor and the inner window bays of the second floor are linked by terra-cotta facing defining the building's main entrance, with ornamental terra-cotta bands above both stories; the actual doorway section is outlined in black marble, with surrounding walls of glass block. The windows of the four inner bays above the second floor are arranged as recessed continuous vertical strips. In the corner bays, by contrast, the second and third floor windows are joined by a recessed spandrel and capped by a pointed arch, as are the windows at the top floor. Above the second floor, the brick shafts of the inner bays rise to patterned brick caps, above which rises a centrally placed tower-like mass.

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In each of the inner wings, a tower effect is created by wide corner window bays flanking four narrower window bays. Within the inner bays, the second and third floor windows and seventh and eighth floor windows are linked vertically. The brick shafts between the windows rise to small decorative caps. The central section as a whole is slightly recessed behind the corner bays. The corner bays, articulated with terra-cotta bands, balconies, and arches, rise to tower-like masses.

In the outer wings, the tower effect is again created by wide corner bays flanking narrower windows. As in the central entrance block, the windows in the inner bays are arranged as continuous recessed vertical strips. The corner bays rise to tower-like brick masses which are of different design than those of the inner wings. The inner brick shafts flanking the windows rise to a stepped parapet. The windows of the lower floors are articulated with terra-cotta bands and spandrels. Terra-cotta banding also effectively defines the low sections and walls linking the wings along Jerome Avenue.

The rear of Park Plaza Apartments at 1001 Anderson Avenue is narrow brick-faced six-story wing connected to the major portion of the building (see site map). Its design is a much simplified version of the 1005 Jerome Avenue facade.

The 20-foot-high spacious lobby of the Park Plaza maintains its modernistic detail, including its etched-glass mirrors. There are slightly under 200 apartments in the building, ranging from one to five rooms, and their layouts are standard; details include large windows, parquet floors, and arched entrances between rooms.

#### Footnotes:

- 1. The text of this report was taken almost in its entirety from the New York Landmarks Preservation Commission Designation Report, Park Plaza Apartments (LP-1077), 1981, by Anthony W. Robins.
- 2. Marvin Fine, Interview, November 17, 1980. Notes in the Landmarks Commission files.

### **B. Significance**

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Specific dates	1928-31	Builder/Architect	Horace Ginsberg, Marvin	Fine

#### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

7 10

The Park Plaza is one of the very first Art Deco apartment houses to have been built in the Bronx. Its designer, Marvin Fine in the office of Horace Ginsberg, consciously synthesized the major elements of the new skyscraper style being developed in Manhattan by Raymond Hood and William Van Alen, among others, and adapted them to suit the lowrise apartment house type of the city's residential neighborhoods. The Park Plaza is both one of the handsomest Art Deco buildings in the Bronx and a pioneering work which helped change the face of the borough.

arged and "A leaves to a region weeks The Park Plaza is in a quiet, isolated residential enclave in the West Bronx, across from John Mullaly Park from which it takes its name. Intensive development of the West Bronx dates from the close of World War I when the newly opened Jerome Avenue elevated line, a flood of returning war veterans in need of housing, a 10-year realestate tax-exemption for new buildings (passed in 1921 by the New York State legislature), and the general economic boom of the 1920s, all contributed to an explosion of apartmenthouse development which eventually made the area the most built-up section of the borough and one of the densest districts in all of New York City.

In 1928, Simon and Louis Bregman, speculative apartment house builders active in the Bronx, assembled the various lots comprising the site of Park Plaza and hired the architectural firm of Horace Ginsberg to design an apartment house. The extremely large acquisition included, in addition to a 365' frontage on Jerome Avenue, a very small frontage on Anderson Avenue, purchased to avoid a zoning restriction on the height of semi-fireproof buildings. Under this provision, such buildings could be no more than six stories tall, but through-the-block buildings facing the streets of differing grade could rise extra stories above the lower grade. By rising six stories on Anderson Avenue, Park Plaza could actually rise ten stories on Jerome.

Ginsberg's office put out a press release announcing construction of the Park Plaza, noting that "the building will be developed in character along Modernistic lines accentuating the simplicity of detail in Modernistic architecture - the use of polychrome terra-cotta blends harmoniously with the light brick used and a very pleasing effect will be created." 1 Construction was almost complete when the building was destroyed by fire in June 1929. "The building was to have been one of the most pretentious in the Bronx," wrote the New York Times, which termed the fire "of suspicious origin." 2 Following the fire, as insurance claims were settled, the building was purchased from the Bregmans and Ginsberg was retained to rebuild the structure. The Fire and Buildings departments, however, insisted that the building's height be reduced from 10 to 8 stories; the elevation was somewhat altered, chiefly by the removal of the ornamentation originally planned for the roofline. Completed in 1931, the Park Plaza, in its slightly smaller and altered condition, represented a major departure in scale and design from the surrounding buildings.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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State Historic Preservation Office		unh	elman	4/9/5
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Keeper of the National Register				
Attest:			date	
Chief of Registration				

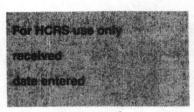
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#### United States Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

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During the housing boom of the 1920s, Bronx apartment house design evolved from the simple brick buildings of the previous decades into larger and more luxurious structures, designed to attract the upwardly mobile immigrants living in the crowded tenement quarters of Manhattan. The higher-class Bronx apartment house became known for its generous windows, elaborately landscaped inner courtyards and general roominess, and later for such "luxury" details as sunken living rooms. These aspects of apartment planning were fairly continuous over the 20-year span between the World Wars; the development of exterior design, however, divides more clearly into two phases, corresponding roughly to the decades of the '20s and the '30s.

The apartment houses of the 20s reflected the current style and fashion of Manhattan, marked by an historicism based on neo-classical and neo-medieval motifs. Some of the more elaborate Bronx buildings included crenellated parapets, corner towers, neo-Tudor half-timbering, classical terra-cotta entrance porticos, Japanese-style gardens, and Moorish-style spiral-columned arcades. In the 1930s, however, again under the influence of Manhattan fashion, the style of new apartment houses in the Bronx changed radically as architects turned away from conservative historical styles to the new "modernistic" notions of Art Deco.

The Art Deco style, introduced to midtown and downtown Manhattan in the mid-1920s, found its way "uptown" to the Bronx before the end of the decade, and the Bronx soon became one of the great repositories of Art Deco buildings nationwide. As developed for apartment house design in the borough, the style was marked by such streamlined, "modernistic" elements as curving walls, recessed spandrels used to create an effect of continuous vertical window strips, polychrome brickwork arranged in vertical or horizontal patterns, corner windows, materials suggestive of the "Machine Age" including glass brick and steel, and abstract decorative detailing.

The Park Plaza apartment house proved to be a pivotal building stylistically in the Bronx. <sup>3</sup> Fine's design for the building synthesized the major traits of Art Deco appearing in Manhattan skyscrapers and created the first of the many dozens of Bronx Art Deco apartment houses.

Horace Ginsberg (1900-1969) was born in New York City and educated at Columbia University, graduating in 1919. By 1921 he had organized his own firm, Horace Ginsberg, Architect. Ginsberg was very active between 1924 and 1940 in apartment house design in the Bronx, where his firm was responsible for several dozen buildings on or near the Grand Concourse, the spine of the West Bronx. Ginsberg's expertise was specifically in the design and layout of apartments, for which he was no doubt asked to be on the design team for New York City's first federally funded public housing project, Harlem River Houses. The design of elevations for his buildings, he left to others. From 1928 on this responsibility was turned over to Marvin Fine.

Marvin Fine (b.1904) was born in Harlem and grew up in Upper Manhattan. While at the University of Pennsylvania, he came under the influence of Paul Cret, a nationally prominent Beaux-Arts architect. Upon graduation, Fine returned to New York and joined the office of Cass Gilbert. After 18 months in Gilbert's office, designing gargoyles for the New York Life Building, Fine joined the firm of Horace Ginsberg and except for a brief leave of absence during the late 1930s he has been with the firm ever since.

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Today he is a senior partner with Fred Ginsberg, Horace Ginsberg's son. Fine's training and his work with Cass Gilbert's office had been in the classical Beaux-Arts tradition. By 1928 Ginsberg's firm had designed a number of historicist brick-faced apartment houses in the West Bronx. Fine's first drawings for the Park Plaza project were classical in inspiration, showing a brick facade decorated with urns and swags and other standard neo-Renaissance ornamental details. At some point Fine threw out that conception and produced the design which Ginsberg's press release described as "developed in character along Modernistic lines." Park Plaza was the firm's first major Art Deco building, and it was also Fine's first large job with the firm.

Fine traces the development of his Art Deco apartment house designs directly to two major sources: Raymond Hood and William Van Alen, perhaps the two most significant and talented architects working in the style in Manhattan, and architects whom Fine knew professionally, admired, and "decided to follow." The influence of their work on his design for the Park Plaza, as well as his later, more developed Art Deco work is quite specific. The vertical shafts and recessed brick spandrels of the Park Plaza are a direct descendant of the vertical shafts of the American Radiator Building and later, the colored brick spandrels of the Daily News Building: "I developed (Hood's) vertical style, and all up the Concourse in all the buildings we designed, the change of brick between the spandrels I got directly from him."6 The influence of Van Alen's Chrysler Building was more apparent in the original design of the Park Plaza than in the rebuilt version. Photographs of the first version under construction show the top of the building lined with large and small pointed terra-cotta triangles, which are similar in shape to the triangular windows and metal projections at the top of the Chrysler Building. The Chrysler Building in fact was rising only a block away from Ginsberg's office at 205 East 42nd Street; it had not yet been completed at the time of Fine's design, but he may have seen detailed drawings.

Because the Park Plaza is still a transitional design, it is not as completely decorated an Art Deco design as later Ginsberg buildings and still shows some traces of the earlier historicist manner. Instead of the polychrome brick patterns and curved wall surfaces found in later apartment houses, the Park Plaza has monochrome brick and a flat facade; there are no corner windows, but still several that are pointed in the Gothic manner. The window arrangement, however, and the motifs of the polychrome terra-cotta—flamingos, fountains, and the sun rising behind a Bronx apartment house—are standard Art Deco traits.

Marvin Fine remembers telling Horace Ginsberg that the firm needed to design something unique to the office, that would be a "mark of reference on all our jobs." The Art Deco apartment houses of the West Bronx became that trademark. The success of the Park Plaza led to dozens of further commissions for apartment houses, and the firm's subsequent West Bronx buildings developed the Art Deco or Moderne elements of the Park Plaza into the major residential version of what had begun in Manhattan as a commercial skyscraper style. The pioneering design of the Park Plaza, a melding of the work of Raymond Hood and William Van Alen, marks the entry of Art Deco into the Bronx.

#### Footnotes:

1 Press release supplied by Marvin Fine. Quoted in part in the <u>New York Times</u>, Sunday Real Estate section, 1/27/1929 XII 11:3. 2 New York Times, 6/26/1929, p.9.

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Based on the list of buildings in Cervin Robinson, Rosemarie Haag Bletter, Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975) and in Donald Sullivan and Brian Danforth, Bronx Art Deco Architecture (New York: West Bronx Restoration Committee, Graduate Program in Urban Planning, Hunter College, City University of New York, 1976).

<sup>4</sup>Sullivan and Danforth, p. 31. <sup>5</sup>Most of the information about Fine and his designs is derived from an interview with him held on November 17, 1980, at the office of Horace Ginsberg & Associates, 205 E. <sup>4</sup>2nd Street, New York City.

Ibid.

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Plaza Park Bronx County

New York

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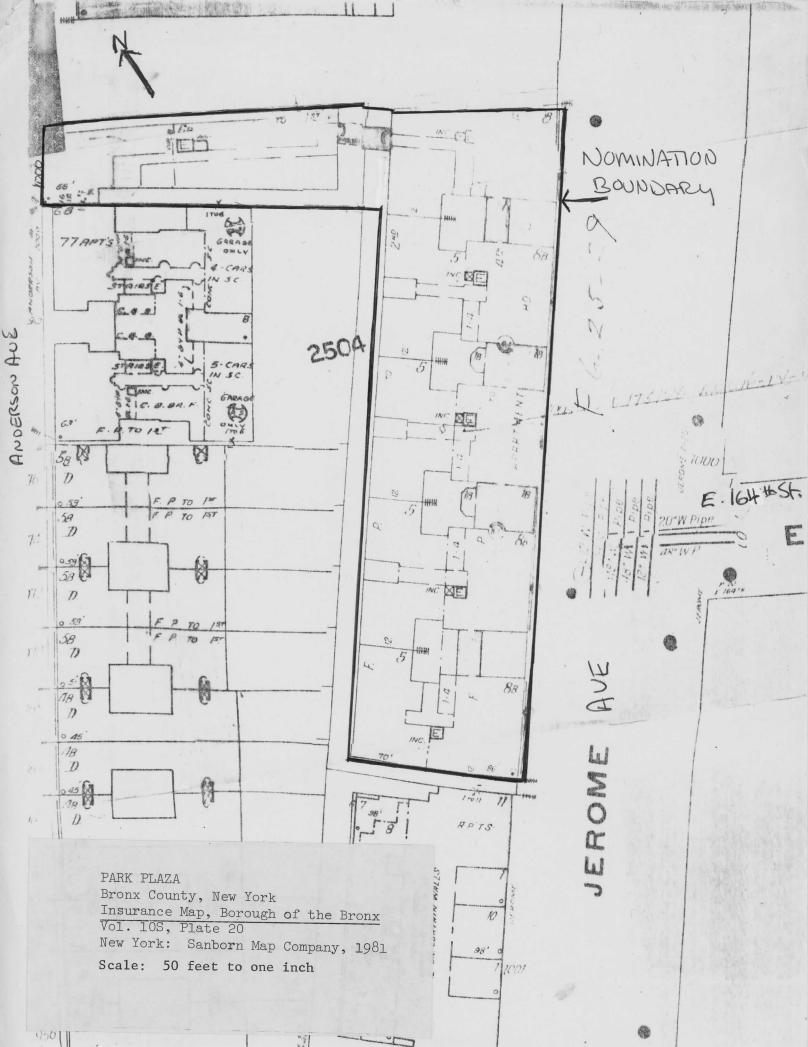
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Fine Marvin. Interview, November 17, 1980.
Ginsbern, Horace, & Associates. Archives. 205 E.42nd Street, NY, NY.

New York Times, June 26, 1929, p. 9.
Robinson, Cervin, and Bletter, Rosemarie Haag. Skyscraper Style: Art Deco New York.

New York: Oxford University Press, 1975.
Sullivan, Donald and Danforth, Brian. Bronx Art Deco Architecture: An Exposition.

Graduate Program in Urban Planning, Hunter College, City University of New York,



United States Department of the Interior NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES **National Park Service** EVALUATION / RETURN SHEET Property: Park Plaza Apartments Working No. 5/3/82 Fed. Reg. Date: FEB 1 State, County: NY, Bronx Date Due: 6/3/82 -Federal Agency: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Action: \_\_ ACCEPT\_ Entered in the \_\_\_ RETURN\_ \_ resubmission nomination by person or local government National Register \_\_\_ REJECT\_ photos\_\_\_ \_\_ owner objection maps \_\_ Appeal \_\_ sample \_\_ request \_\_ appeal \_\_ NR decision Substantive Review: Reviewer's comments: Recom. / Criteria \_\_\_ Reviewer\_ Discipline\_\_ Date\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_ see continuation sheet Nomination returned for: \_\_\_\_technical corrections cited below \_substantive reasons discussed below 1. Name 2. Location 3. Classification 4. Owner of Property 5. Location of Legal Description 6. Representation in Existing Surveys has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_\_\_yes \_\_\_\_ no 7. Description eribe the present and original (If known) physical appearer \_\_ summary paragraph \_\_ completeness \_ clarity \_ alterations/integrity dates \_\_ boundary selection

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Comments for any item may be continued on an attached sheet



1. Park Plaza Apartments Bronx County, New York

Andrew S. Dolkart, 1981 New York Landmarks Photo by:

Neg. at:

Preservation Commission

View from the east



#### Park Plaza Apartments Bronx County, New York

Photo by: Andrew S. Dolkart, 1981

Neg. at: New York Landmarks

Preservation Commission

View from the northeast, detail



Park Plaza Apartments Bronx County, New York

Photo by: Andrew S. Dolkart, 1981 New York Landmarks

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Preservation Commission

Main entrance, view from the southeast



Park Plaza Apartments Bronx County, New York

Andrew S. Dolkart, 1981 New York Landmarks Preservation Commission Photo by:

Neg. at:

Decorative detail, view from the east

Red tint indicates areas in which only landmark buildings are shown

the National or State reservations shown on this map