

For Immediate Release

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Demolition of Kennedy-Warren Interiors Has Started

Within days after the Art Deco Society of Washington (ADSW) filed a landmark application seeking to protect the interior spaces of the famed Kennedy-Warren Apartment Building, ADSW has learned that demolition has begun on the historic interiors of several apartments. These apartment interiors are largely unchanged from when the building opened in 1931. ADSW calls on owner B.F. Saul to halt further demolition until the landmark application can be considered. ADSW believes that many alternatives to demolition exist for one of the city's most renowned historic properties.



Debris from the demolition of apartment interiors

Located adjacent to the National Zoo, the Kennedy-Warren opened with 317 apartments in 1931. Designed in the Aztec Deco style by architect Joseph Younger, the original owners and builders, Edgar S. Kennedy and Monroe Warren, Sr., filed for bankruptcy soon after the building was completed and B.F. Saul obtained the rights to the building. A rear wing was added in 1935.



The exterior of the Kennedy-Warren Apartments is listed on the National Register of Historic Places

Entering the individual apartments in the original building is like opening a time capsule. The units have the original hardwood floors, bathroom fixtures and ceramic tile, and Hoosier-style kitchen cabinets. The high ceilings, curved archways, thick plaster walls, and wide wood moldings instantly return the visitor to the ambiance of the Art Deco era.



Original interiors featured Hoosier cabinets



A kitchen after removal of the Hoosier cabinets

Although a second wing was included in Younger's original plans, it was not until 1996 that B.F. Saul pursued plans to complete the Kennedy-Warren as originally envisioned by Joseph Younger.

The new South Wing was completed and opened in 2002. B.F. Saul did a careful replication of the exterior of the original building in the new construction and a meticulous restoration of the main lobby. However, the interior elements of the Art Deco style seen in the corridors and apartments of the original building were not carried forward in the design of the interior corridors and apartments in the new south wing.

ADSW has learned that in addition to gutting the interior of the apartments, Saul plans to lower the ceilings in as well as shorten the length of corridors and remove distinctive architectural elements from both the apartments and corridors. These include the novel milk shafts and forced-air vents.



One of the novel features of the Kennedy-Warren apartments that B.F. Saul plans to remove are the milk shafts. Each unit in the historic wings has a small compartment between the hallway and the kitchen with doors on both the interior and exterior. The milkman would open the door in the hallway to leave milk and other dairy products. The tenant could retrieve the goods by opening the door in the kitchen.

On Friday, October 17, 2008, the Art Deco Society of Washington took the first step toward what it hoped would be the inclusion of the interior spaces of the city's most prominent Art Deco apartment building on the National Register of Historic Places. The Society, a nonprofit preservation organization known for its successful campaigns to save some of Washington's Art Deco treasures—including the Greyhound terminal, the Silver Theatre, and the Greenbelt Community Center--filed a landmark application with Washington, D.C.'s Historic Preservation Office (HPO) intended to stave off planned demolition of much of building's original interiors.

ASDW is troubled to learn that in the first week after the landmark application was filed, at least seven apartment interiors were demolished. While the demolition to date has been limited to apartment interiors, ADSW is concerned that this demolition work could be expanded to include the corridors, ballroom, and other public areas.

ASDW is particularly concerned about the possible effects of any planned renovations on the Ballroom. The Ballroom has not been used for many years and is in disrepair, suffering from years of neglect. At least two areas of serious decay are clearly visible in the ceiling.



Unused for many years, the ballroom is in serious disrepair.

Although B F Saul spokesperson James Goode told ADSW in July 2008 that the Ballroom will eventually be restored, a representative of the project's architectural firm provided no such assurance when contacted by ADSW earlier this week. ADSW has learned that at present, B F Saul has not decided what to do with the ballroom and there is nothing in current renovation scope of work concerning the Ballroom.

ASDW believes that several options exist to "modernize" the Kennedy-Warren while preserving its historic fiber. These include air conditioning the building without lowering the ceilings; reusing the original hardwood flooring wherever possible and using "green" materials such as cork and linoleum, popular in the 1930s and once again readily available, and preserving as many of the historic apartments as possible.

Although real estate agents and home improvement television programs frequently urge sellers to “update” their kitchens and baths to facilitate a sale, many Decophiles and others interested in historic interiors prefer to live in homes and apartments that have not been altered over time. For these individuals, finding a house or apartment with its original kitchen cabinets, tile bathrooms, and plumbing fixtures is more of a selling point than central air-conditioning, dishwashers, or granite countertops. The historic wing of the Kennedy-Warren offers such individuals a rare opportunity to live in an unspoiled building, and ADSW believes that authentic apartments in the Kennedy-Warren would find a strong market among them.

ADSW believes that the demolition of the historic interiors of the Kennedy-Warren will essentially turn what has been for almost 80 years Washington’s most famous apartment building, into yet another façade project, stripped of almost all interior architectural elements beyond the lobby.

ADSW urges interested parties to express your concerns to B.F. Saul, the Historic Preservation Office, the Advisory Neighborhood Commission, and Councilmember Cheh. Contact information is provided below. To receive updates on the state of the Kennedy-Warren directly from ADSW, email info@adsw.org

End

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