
HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD

Historic Landmark Case No. 15-03

Sedgwick Gardens

3726 Connecticut Avenue NW
Square 2060, Lot 31

Meeting Date: May 28, 2015
Applicant: Art Deco Society of Washington
Cleveland Park Historical Society

Affected ANC: 3F
Staff Reviewer: Frances McMillen

The Historic Preservation Office recommends that the Board designate Sedgwick Gardens, 3726 Connecticut Avenue NW, including its entrance lobby, a landmark to be entered in the District of Columbia Inventory of Historic Sites. The HPO further recommends that the Board request that the State Historic Preservation Officer forward the nomination to the National Register of Historic Places with a recommendation for listing as of local significance, with a period of significance of 1931-1932.

Background

Constructed in 1931-1932, Sedgwick Gardens is a five-story apartment building located at the intersection of Connecticut Avenue and Sedgwick Street NW. The Art Deco building was designed by prominent Washington architect Mihran Mesrobian for local developer Max Gorin.

Born in Turkey to Armenian parents, Mihran Mesrobian immigrated to the United States in 1921. Soon after his arrival in Washington he began his career with Harry Wardman (1868-1938), then the city's leading real estate developer. He quickly became Wardman's chief architect, staying with him until Wardman's death in 1938, while also operating his own private practice, from which he retired in the 1950s. His designs included hotels, office buildings, shopping centers, apartment complexes, and modest to grand single family homes throughout the Washington area. His hotels for Wardman included the Carlton Hotel, (currently the St. Regis, 1926), the Hay-Adams (1927) and the Wardman Tower (1928). The AIA awarded Mesrobian a national award for excellence in 1926 for his design of the Carlton Hotel. Mesrobian's residential projects for Wardman included Fort Stevens Ridge in Brightwood and English Village in Woodley Park. Sedgwick Gardens is one of a number of apartment buildings he designed; other notable projects include Cathedral Mansions (1922-1924), the Macklin (1939), the Dupont Circle Building (1931), and Capitol Plaza (1949). The Wardman Tower and Cathedral Mansions are listed on the National Register and the DC Inventory of Historic Sites.

Mesrobian worked with local developer Max Gorin to create Sedgwick Gardens. Russian-born Gorin arrived in the United States in the early 1900s and began working in Washington's

building industry in the 1920s. His company, Max Gorin Builders, later known as Southern Construction Company, developed single-family houses and small apartment buildings in northwest and southeast Washington. His most ambitious projects included Capitol Towers and Sedgwick Gardens.

Sedgwick Gardens was one of several apartment buildings constructed along Connecticut Avenue north of Rock Creek Park in the 1920s and early 1930s. By 1910, a small number of luxury apartment buildings were erected just south of Rock Creek Park; with the construction of the Taft Bridge over the park in 1909, development continued northward expanding the apartment building corridor along the avenue. Construction halted during World War I, as materials and supplies were dedicated to the war effort, creating a housing shortage as new residents flooded the city to fill war-related jobs. In the decade following the war, an apartment building boom swept Washington to meet the demand for housing. New buildings sprang up around the city; the largest and most lavish of these buildings were erected on Connecticut Avenue, including the Wardman Park (1918), the Broadmoor (1928), Tilden Gardens (1930), and the Kennedy-Warren (1931).

In designing Sedgwick Gardens, Mesrobian employed a mix of Byzantine, Romanesque, Moorish, and Art Deco decorative motifs to create one of the most striking buildings along Connecticut Avenue. The red brick building's exterior ornamentation includes string courses of white glazed brick, stylized figures and mythological creatures, floral and animal motifs. The limestone porte cochere, with its four octagonal piers, Art Deco lamps, sculptural panels and figures, creates a dramatic entrance and sets Sedgwick Gardens apart from other buildings on the avenue.

As with the exterior, for the lobby Mesrobian made use of numerous design motifs and materials to create a grand and dramatic space that offered an elegant entry to pass through, as well as areas where residents and guests could socialize or take advantage of the services offered to the building's occupants. The space features terrazzo floors, artificial travertine walls, and ten Scagliola piers. A center fountain, with a six-sided Art Deco skylight, serves as the lobby's focal point; the space suggests an exterior courtyard enclosed by a Romanesque colonnade. The perimeter of the lobby includes gathering spaces separated from the center of the lobby by Serlian triple arches lining the room.

Sedgwick Gardens is prominently featured with its own chapter in James Goode's "Best Addresses: A Century of Washington's Distinctive Apartment Houses" (1988), which concludes that it has "one of the most important Art Deco lobbies in Washington."

Evaluation

Sedgwick Gardens meets D.C. Designation Criterion B (History) and National Register Criterion A (Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history) for its association with the development of the Connecticut Avenue as an apartment building corridor.

Sedgwick Gardens also meets D.C. Designation Criterion (D) Architecture and Urbanism and National Register Criterion C (Architecture) for its Art Deco design and as the work of prominent local architect Mihran Mesrobian. The building is an excellent example of a purpose-built luxury apartment building. The lobby is particularly notable feature and is in keeping with

other interior landmark apartment buildings. Along with the lobby, the nomination includes the building's hallways. Although the corridors contain pilasters accented with low-relief sculpture, original wood entry doors and marble flooring, they are relatively standard for the era. The hallways do not exhibit the craftsmanship and distinction found in other landmarks, such as Alban Towers and the Northumberland, with interior designations that include the hallways. Accordingly, the HPO recommends that the hallways be excluded from the designation.