

When Renovation Meets Redo

By **ROBIN POGREBIN**
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Amid the chorus of accolades that have greeted [Lincoln Center's](#) continuing physical transformation — in particular, the new Alice Tully Hall by Diller Scofidio & Renfro — a few discordant voices are raising an alarm with worries that Lincoln Center may be changing too much.

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Sara Krulwich/The New York Times
Work in progress on the north plaza of Lincoln Center, as seen through the windows of the Vivian Beaumont Theater.

Having lost the battle against transforming the campus's north plaza in front of the Vivian Beaumont Theater, laid out in 1965 by the celebrated landscape architect Dan Kiley, some preservationists say they fear that the rest of the \$1.2 billion redevelopment project could end up compromising the original 1960s composition of Lincoln Center as a whole.

These advocates say they are especially worried about [Lincoln Center Theater's](#) plans to put an experimental theater on the roof of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, whose interior and entry pavilion were designed by Gordon Bunshaft, the architect of Lever House and other Modernist classics. They also wonder about the fate of Avery Fisher Hall, designed by Max Abramovitz, where the [New York Philharmonic](#) was originally going to limit its plans to create a new auditorium but has yet to commit to a course of action. And they say they have yet to be informed about Lincoln Center's plans for Damrosch Park, the green space on the south side, also designed by Kiley.

"It feels like they're just chipping away at pieces of Lincoln Center," said Nina Rappaport, the chairwoman of Docomomo New York/Tri-State, an organization that works to protect distinctive Modernist buildings. The campus, she said, was designed as a whole, with different architects responding to a scheme.

"Now we're seeing these bits and pieces that have been developed, and some of that is being lost," she said. "You never know what chunks they're going to take out next. In the end, where is the holistic plan for Lincoln Center?"

[Reynold Levy](#), Lincoln Center's president, said that Diller Scofidio & Renfro, the lead architectural firm on the redevelopment, has shown "enormous sensitivity to the pre-existing condition of Lincoln Center." The project went through an extensive public approval process over the last several years, he added, with officials making a point of being open to alternative views.

But while preservation advocates acknowledge that they have had extensive discussions with Lincoln Center, they say the talks have had little impact. "They've been very open about presenting the plans, but the plan is the plan," said Andrew S. Dolkart, the director of [Columbia University's](#) historic preservation program. "I don't think preservation is a concern at the moment."

Many preservationists question the lack of involvement of the [Landmarks Preservation Commission](#), which has so far declined to consider a 2005 proposal for landmark status.

"The fact that it's not a New York City designated landmark is incredible," said Kate Wood, executive director of Landmark West!, an advocacy group. In not considering Lincoln Center, she added, the agency "has deprived the public of being able to be part of the process for securing the site for the future."

"Every corner of Lincoln Center could be transformed," she said. "Where is the Landmarks Commission?"

Elisabeth de Bourbon, a spokeswoman for the commission, said the agency had reviewed the proposal, known as a request for evaluation, which was filed by Docomomo. And although the agency has not made Lincoln

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Center a landmark, Ms. de Bourbon said it had provided input on the expansion, "to help ensure that the work is appropriate to the spirit of the complex."

Some advocates suggest that the commission has not held a hearing on landmark status because the redevelopment is the second-largest construction project in the city (after ground zero) and has the strong support of the mayor. "Landmarks has been very careful not to get involved," Mr. Dolkart said.

Ms. de Bourbon said, "Political pressure played no role in the commission's decision not to pursue the designation of Lincoln Center as a landmark."

In 2000 the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation determined that Lincoln Center was eligible for listing on the state and national registers of historic places — nonbinding classifications that might have buttressed the cause of preservation — but Lincoln Center declined that consideration, the state office said. (Betsy Vorce, a spokeswoman for Lincoln Center, said that Mr. Levy could not recall "ever having personally addressed it with the state preservation office.")

In the initial stages of the redevelopment, preservationists made a concerted effort to try to save the north plaza, an example of midcentury Modern landscape design long admired for its elegant proportions. A restaurant that will take up some of the plaza's space is currently under construction, incorporating a sloping green roof that will overlook the reflecting pool, whose dimensions have been altered.

"The restaurant is clearly a huge interruption of that composition that ultimately is going to compromise that setting," said Gregory G. Dietrich, a preservation consultant who was a co-author of the Lincoln Center National Register nomination. "I am not by any means against the concept of redevelopment at Lincoln Center, but when you're talking about a landscape design by a pre-eminent landscape designer, more care should be taken."

Plans for a new black-box auditorium above the library have yet to be announced publicly; [Hugh Hardy](#) is the architect on the project. But preservation advocates who have seen early designs said an external elevator was planned for the building's south side, which would markedly change the glass facade. Mr. Dolkart said the theater on top would be a "big visible box on the roof of the building, which has the sense of floating now."

Ken Smith, a prominent landscape architect, said Lincoln Center's rationale for its changes to the north plaza was "that by completely redesigning it, they were restoring it."

"If they apply the same standard to Damrosch Park," he said, "it would not be very good."

Mr. Levy said plans for Damrosch Park, which haven't been formally announced, are limited to upgrading the band shell and repairing aging tree planters.

But Mr. Smith said that based on what had happened with the north plaza, he is still skeptical.

"We had lots of meetings where they said good words about respect for Kiley," he said, "but at the end of the day it was a complete redesign."

This article has been revised to reflect the following correction:

Correction: June 7, 2009

Because of an editing error, an article on Tuesday about preservationists' concerns about the Lincoln Center redevelopment project misspelled the surname of the main architect of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center, a building whose roof is to be the site of an experimental theater. He is Gordon Bunshaft, not Bunschaft. The article also referred incompletely to the design. While Bunshaft designed the library's interior and its entry pavilion, Eero Saarinen designed the adjacent Vivian Beaumont Theater building, which houses part of the library.

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