

# CARTER'S VIEW

BY CARTER B. HORSLEY



## *The Great Pre-war Apartment Buildings of Rosario Candela and James Carpenter*

There are three great “names” in pre-World War II apartment buildings: James Edwin Ruthvin Carpenter, Rosario Candela and Emery Roth.

These “names” epitomize a level of elegance and luxury not matched in “post-war” buildings: their buildings usually have limestone façades, high ceilings, spacious apartment layouts, excellent detailing and superior locations.

These buildings are not perfect, of course, as most were erected in the pre-air-conditioning era, and not being skyscrapers their views were not as “boundless” as some more recent projects,

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although many have protected views overlooking Central Park. Their buildings also “suffer” from a lack of “amenities” that proliferate in some new projects such as dog runs, putting greens and automated garages.

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In terms of architectural quality, their work was impressive but not as spectacular as the great

multi-towered skyscraper palazzi designed by Emery Roth and Irwin Chanin on Central Park West, nor as grand as McKim, Mead & White’s earlier Italian Renaissance palazzo-style apartment house at **998 Fifth Avenue** of 1910. And they are certainly not as exotic as Henry Janeway Hardenbergh’s great, even earlier **Dakota** at 1 West 72nd Street overlooking Central Park, nor as overflowing with amenities as **River House** at 435 East 52nd Street, which was designed by Bottomley, Wagner & White and erected in 1931.

Yet when one discusses “pre-war” apartment buildings in Manhattan, invariably one thinks of the Carpenter and Candela buildings because there are so many—more than 125—and because they form the essential character of Fifth and Park Avenues as they exist today. Fifth Avenue, of course, was initially lined with sumptuous limestone mansions and was known as “Millionaire’s Row,” and only a few have survived the onslaught and popularity of the apartment buildings.

Many of the Carpenter and Candela buildings contained relatively few apartments, often only one per floor, although over the years many such units were subdivided. While statistics are not readily available on the number of “grand” apartments, a reasonable guess is that Fifth Avenue perhaps has as many as 4,000 apartments between 59th and 98th Streets and that Park Avenue perhaps has as many as 8,000 apartments between 59th and



834 Fifth Avenue (on the left)

96th Streets and perhaps only a third of these are in "pre-war" buildings and perhaps only half of the "pre-war" buildings were designed by Carpenter and Candela, a total perhaps of about 2,000 units.

While 2,000 or so apartments is only a drop in the bucket in a city of more than 8 million people, they make up a "grand tour" if one had the contacts and time but a tour that probably no one has ever completed. Indeed, few people have probably set foot inside even half of these buildings.

The stroller up or down Fifth and Park Avenues on the Upper East Side of Manhattan passes palatial phalanxes of apartment buildings as well as a healthy mix of museums, clubs and religious institutions. The dominant building type is the mid-size apartment building that generally rises about a dozen stories. Along these avenues, most of these structures were erected in the 1920s and 1930s and most of the fancier ones were designed by either James Carpenter or Rosario Candela, the two leading architects of "luxury" multi-family buildings of their day.

Candela's career began a few years after Carpenter's and his buildings tend to be a bit more flamboyant but both architects are noted for their conservative elegance and the formal and spacious planning of the interiors of their buildings.

Many of the buildings contained special apartments that were even grander than the typical layouts and many of the earlier ones had their top floors

devoted to servants' quarters, almost all of which would subsequently be rebuilt as penthouse apartments. While many of the larger apartments were eventually subdivided into smaller, but still large units, many of the best buildings have not been subdivided. Remarkably in this city of change all but three of the buildings designed by Carpenter and Candela still survive.

While the continuity of the Carpenter/Candela cityscapes along Fifth and Park Avenues has been disrupted in the period after World War II and while some of the city's more recent high-rise "luxury" towers have begun to offer large quarters and plentiful amenities, the Carpenter/Candela imprimatur/address has not been diminished. They just don't build them like that anymore even if the newer towers have fabulous views.

Rob Taub, a Douglas Elliman broker, recently sold an apartment at **12 East 97<sup>th</sup> Street** to a buyer who felt that the fact that "it was designed by Candela added prestige and value."

In 2001, an excellent book, "The New York Apartment Houses of Rosario Candela and James Carpenter," by Andrew Alpern with essays by David Netto and Christopher Gray, was published by Acanthus Press.

"The greatest glory of these buildings," wrote David Netto, an independent architectural designer specializing in interior apartment renovations, in the book's foreword, "is not the face they present to the street. Although they possess beautiful façades in a variety of historical styles and are much-appreciated embellishments to the streetscape, their real accomplishment and contribution to architectural history lies in the ingenuity of their floor plans."

"After decades of uncertainty," Mr. Netto continued, "the societal changes following World War I had finally made apartment living a truly acceptable alternative to private town houses. Carpenter understood the reality that, if this promise was to be fulfilled, the planning of new apartments had to be so skillful that the compromise of 'multiple dwelling' status would be obscured. What Carpenter developed to accomplish that was to become the blueprint for nearly all successful

apartment planning. Essentially, he did two things and did them exceedingly well. He developed and perfected the ‘off the foyer’ layout, in which an entrance hall or gallery is the pivot point of the apartment. In a large unit it is conceived as the fourth room in a suite of reception spaces that includes living room, dining room, and library, providing immediate visual orientation to those rooms. In a small one, it is the circulation hub for the entire apartment. Carpenter also introduced a strict, functional separation of areas for reception, private life and service. With his 1912 design for **635 Park Avenue**, these principles were first made vividly clear, and every apartment thereafter follows this formula, whether designed by Carpenter or by his younger contemporary Rosario Candela.”

“When it came to designing façades,” Mr. Netto maintained, “Carpenter exhibited a restraint which at times approached austerity. The form of many of his buildings is that of an amplified Renaissance palazzo, complete with rusticated base and enlarged stone cornice, as evidenced at **907 Fifth Avenue**, completed in 1916. By the time **4 East 66th Street** was built in 1920, the architect had abstracted the details of the palazzo to a minimalist articulation that is also two-dimensional; the rustication and the belt courses are there, but they have been so reduced in scale that the form can be read as a skyscraper’s monolithic shaft as much as an extruded historicist mansion façade. The muted dignity of Carpenter’s exteriors makes his buildings serve especially well as units in a larger urban scheme. He seems to have been aware of the role

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his buildings would need to fulfill in that scheme for taken together they help to form the continuous building wall along Fifth and Park Avenues far more harmonious than the eclectic body of private houses they replaced.”

“The clarity of Carpenter’s plans and the principles they evidenced,” according to Mr. Netto, “provided



1 Sutton Place South

the foundation which was built upon by a Sicilian immigrant who graduated from Columbia University’s School of Architecture in 1915. At the beginning, his projects generally were relatively modest ventures on the West Side of Manhattan, but by 1925, with real estate and stock markets booming, Candela attracted patronage that permitted him to express, in buildings like **1 Sutton Place South** and **775 Park Avenue**, a new level of apartment-house design. Candela expanded on Carpenter’s planning precepts and added more luxury to the rival architect’s rigorous design

formula. Most buildings before Candela had relatively thin exterior walls that were merely sufficient to keep out the weather with columns and mechanical equipment inelegantly intruding upon the interior spaces.

Candela thickened those walls to conceal the structural framing

and to carry plumbing risers unseen. Deep window reveals that completely enclose the radiator cabinets are the happy result of this revision to conventional construction methods. Instead of pairing windows as was the custom to admit more light Candela made windows larger and spaced them in majestic single succession endowing his rooms with a feeling of greater scale and balance.

This refinement, along with higher ceilings and carefully considered vistas from one room to the next, made Candela's a richer architecture than New York apartments had ever known or would see again."

"If Carpenter's greatest innovation was his formula for planning apartments," Mr. Netto wrote, "Candela's is his development of the terraced setback, which first appears in 1927 at the eastern portion of **960 Fifth Avenue** and can be seen in its apotheosis on such buildings as **770 and 778 Park Avenue**, each designed in 1929. It is ironic that the most significant architectural imagery of these apartment buildings came in response to zoning restrictions. To construct higher than one-and-a-half times the width of the street, the architect was required by the regulations to set back from the lot line above what was usually the 11th or 12th floor. Most Carpenter buildings were built at a time when penthouse living had not yet caught on and roof space was conventionally used for servants' quarters. By the time Candela had reached the height of his powers in the late 1920s, however, the marketability of penthouses could no longer be ignored, and he developed the prototype of the New York setback penthouse



*1035 Fifth Avenue*

crowned with a rooftop. Candela's roofscapes are both romantic and pragmatic. Seemingly designed to exploit maximum silhouette value, upon closer examination the exuberance of the skyline tempietto is rationalized as a water tower enclosure."

In his preface to the book, architectural historian Christopher Gray noted that "to own a ten- to 20-room apartment in a Candela-designed building is to accede to architectural as well as social cynosure."



*960 Fifth Avenue*

Born in Palermo in 1890, Candela came to the United States in 1909 to work with his father, a plasterer and attended Columbia University's School of Architecture. He first went to work for Gaetano Ajello, whose practice included designing some Upper West Side buildings, and Candela then joined the firm of Frederick Sterner, "who redid town houses for the rich and influential," according to Mr. Gray.

By 1920, he was on his own," Mr. Gray continued, "working out of a row house at 120 East 101st Street. His first known commission appeared in 1922, the tall apartment house at the northeast corner of 92nd Street and Broadway. [This building was the Clayton at **215 West 92nd Street** that was developed by Anthony Campagna and Joseph Paterno on land Campagna had purchased from the estate of William Waldorf Astor, according to Mr. Alpern, who noted that Anthony Campagna and his brother Arminio were married to the sisters of the four Paterno brothers.] Later in the same year, he designed his first East Side building, a

cooperative at **1105 Park Avenue**. Today, a visit to the lobbies of these two buildings reveals the differences between their respective audiences. The Park Avenue lobby is spare and elegant, with understated marble work and plain plaster trim—the old money look. But over on Broadway, the lobby is all gaudy-gilt with a showy coffered ceiling and other accouterments the East Side crowd would have found about as amusing as a trip to Hester Street. During the next five years Candela designed a number of nicely planned rental buildings on West End Avenue, Riverside Drive, and elsewhere for developers who generally were Italian. The mass-produced high-rise housing they sold had about as much in common with capital ‘A’ architecture as LeRoy Nieman has with Rembrandt.”

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By the late 1920s, however, the apartment market was getting more sophisticated and Candela would design a dozen or so “exquisite buildings from 1926 until the crash of 1929, a group of buildings on which his reputation was built and continues to expand,” Mr. Gray wrote.

“The earliest of these were **775 Park Avenue** and **1 Sutton Place South**, both red brick neo-Georgian, located on full-block fronts. Though their exteriors were more elegant than usual, it was their interior features that made the difference. 1 Sutton Place South had apartments of 12 to 20 rooms with an elegant drive-through entry and a lobby opening onto a giant lawn overlooking the East River. Each apartment had its own laundry room in the basement and at the time of opening, the building promised a deep-water landing for yachts. 775 Park Avenue consists of a complicated arrangement of simplex, duplex, and triplex units of eight to 16 rooms, with a lobby designed by Dorothy Draper to look like an ‘old London house.’ Proper distance between the living rooms and libraries is provided ‘to allow two members of the family to entertain at once,’” Mr. Gray wrote.

And, as a further inducement, there was “a fireplace in every room that should have one.”

Candela’s first Fifth Avenue building was **2 East 67th Street**, which he designed in 1927, and then he designed **960 Fifth Avenue**, followed by **720 Park Avenue**. “There followed another half-dozen superior buildings, including **834** and **1040 Fifth Avenue**, and **740, 770, and 778 Park Avenue**. Most were built under the new multiple-dwelling law, which encouraged buildings to have terraced set-backs at the upper floors. The dramatic profiles of **1040 Fifth Avenue** and the three Park Avenue buildings certainly contribute to Candela’s reputation, but it was the interiors that sold them: at **834 Fifth**, the linen room in each apartment was bigger than two servants’ rooms combined; at **778 Park**, steam was provided to clean out garbage buckets,” according to Mr. Gray.

While Candela was exclusively a residential architect, Carpenter did both residential and commercial buildings.

After graduating from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1884, he attended the L’Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. Based at first in Nashville, Tennessee, Carpenter designed the Hermitage Hotel in Nashville and the Hurt Building in Atlanta. With Walter D. Blair, the Empire Building in Birmingham, the Stahlman Building in Nashville and the American National Bank Building in Pensacola, Florida and a library building at Vanderbilt University in Nashville.

In 1909, Carpenter joined forces with Spencer Fullerton Weaver (1879-1939), who had designed with Leonard Schultze (1877-1951) the **Sherry Netherland** and **Pierre** Hotels as well as the Atlanta Biltmore, the Los Angeles Biltmore, the Palm Beach Breakers and the San Francisco Clift, Mr. Alpern wrote. Carpenter’s first project with Weaver was a 9-story apartment building at 116 East 58th Street that was completed in 1910 and named the Fullerton and was notable for its layouts that included foyers. Unfortunately this very handsome building was demolished about 1970. His second project with Weaver was the 13-story apartment building at **960 Park Avenue** at 82nd Street and on this he worked



740 Park Avenue

with D. Everett Waid (1864-1939), who later did several major commissions for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. Carpenter's next two buildings, **246 West End Avenue and 3 East 85th Street**, continued to demonstrate his skill in arranging interiors and would be followed by **635 and 640 Park Avenues**. "Even before 640 Park Avenue had been completed and its apartments rented, Carpenter felt sufficiently experienced with luxury residential development and construction in New York to venture off on his own without the contributions of S. Fullerton Weaver. **907 Fifth Avenue** was a large apartment house project for which the architect Cass Gilbert had provided preliminary design schemes. The project's development group, headed by Robert D. Knowles and John H. Harris, was evidently dissatisfied with what Gilbert had produced. Carpenter, who had already shown he could provide a suitable product, obliged the developers by producing a completely new design and construction plans for number 907 that were filed on August 27, 1915," Alpern wrote, and its design won a Gold Medal from the New York chapter of the American Institute of Architects. "While still involved in the 907 Fifth Avenue project as architect, Carpenter expanded his operation to encompass development as well. Starting off grandly, he simultaneously formed one company with his wife for a project at **630 Park Avenue** and another with his brother John H. Carpenter

for a second project four blocks south at **550 Park Avenue**. At 630 Park Avenue, he created plans early in 1916 for a 12-story stack of 17-room, full-floor residences that would replace five small 19th Century buildings. Each residence included four working fireplaces, a 46-foot entrance gallery, and an 85-foot enfilade of library, drawing room, and dining room. The arrangement of rooms was very similar to the one he had devised for 640 Park Avenue three years earlier, but the proportions of the new site permitted a layout of considerably greater grandeur. Although the apartments at **640 Park Avenue** still exist as originally built (subject to occupant alterations, of course), the ones at 630 Park Avenue were subdivided in 1953 to accommodate a vastly changed residential rental market. For the project at **550 Park Avenue**, Carpenter and his brother John purchased the antiquated seven-story Yosemite apartment house at the 62nd Street corner, which had been designed 25 years earlier by the eminent architectural firm of McKim, Mead & White. Demolishing the elegant but economically no-longer-viable building, Carpenter replaced it with a 17-story structure whose height would have been barred by the 1916 Zoning Resolution had the City enacted it more quickly. The typical floor plan for the building was essentially the mirror image of the layout he had developed for 960 Park Avenue. The plan delineated two apartments of ten and 12 rooms each, with the extra twist that on floors nine, 16 and 17 he combined the space to create a single, huge unit occupying the entire floor (his selection of these particular floors being



655 Park Avenue

a mystery). The roof space at 550 Park Avenue was originally used only for extra maids' rooms and storage. When the building was completed in December 1917, Carpenter and his wife were among the original complement of residents."

"In Spring, 1919," Mr. Alpern continued, "Carpenter designed and began construction for his own account of a modest nine-story, mid-block apartment house at **115 East 82nd Street**. This building demonstrates Carpenter's skill at both planning and decorative embellishment. The façade of the structure is well articulated and includes a top-floor arcade of arches and colonnettes unique in Carpenter's work. The plan is H-shaped and includes the four units per floor (each with five or six rooms) that was typical of the genre. Concurrent with the 82nd Street project, Carpenter served as architect in association with the firm of Cross and Cross for a dramatically different undertaking for a development enterprise headed by Adrian Foley and James Regan. At 845 Fifth Avenue, also known as **4 East 66th Street**, Carpenter created a grand 11-story structure



988 Fifth Avenue (on the left)

with a single expansive apartment on each floor. Behind an ultra-restrained limestone façade, each unit boasts a dining room 22 feet by 30 feet and a dual drawing room and library overlooking Central Park whose combined dimensions are 36 feet by 46 feet. There are six master bedrooms, seven servants' rooms, five working fireplaces and ceiling heights ranging from 11 to 13 feet."

Carpenter continued to do some work outside of the city. In 1910 in association with Walter D. Blair he designed a replica in Greenwich, Connecticut of the Petit Trianon for Laura Robinson, an heiress of the Diamond Match and Goodyear Tire fortunes, and in 1928 he teamed with Kenneth Franzheim to design the National Democratic Convention auditorium in Houston and was a consultant to Franzheim for an office tower for the Gulf Oil Company in Houston. Mr. Alpern also noted that about the same time as the latter project Carpenter also designed the Barclay on Rittenhouse Square in Philadelphia.

In 1928 he also designed the 24-story office building at 485 Madison Avenue for the Columbia Broadcasting System and two years later designed and developed, with his brother, the 42-story office building at 515 Madison Avenue "whose distinctively designed side-street entrance and lobby have been well maintained," Mr. Alpern observed.

The most important of Carpenter's New York office buildings is the 52-story Lincoln Building at 60 East 42nd Street, which was completed in 1930. It was developed by a syndicate led by John H. Carpenter and Louis Bean and Carpenter himself invested in it and his resulting debts associated with it contributed to his estate's insolvency. He died of a heart attack June 11, 1932.

"Candela's six grandest apartment houses were designed and their plans filed with the city in one continuous stretch of creativity between March and October of 1929. **740, 770, 778 and 1220 Park Avenue** and **834 and 1040 Fifth Avenue** contain among them the most magnificent assemblage of extraordinary apartments ever produced by any architect. They represented the final display of fireworks before the Depression descended, and they were completed only after its effects

had begun to be felt. The fat years had ended with a bang. The plunge in the market for stocks was mirrored in the precipitous fall in Candela’s workload. From approximately 26 commissions in 1929, he dropped to two in 1930, and a single one in 1931. By 1936 hints of a recovery were enough to prompt the production by developer John Thomas Smith of a stripped-down, Art Deco limestone apartment project at **19 East 72nd Street** that Candela designed in collaboration with Mott Schmidt. Nearby at **955 Fifth Avenue**, Candela designed a similarly minimalist apartment house for Anthony Campagna in 1937. In association with Paul Resnick in 1948, Candela was involved with the design of his two final multiple dwellings: **1 East 66th Street** and **135 East 54th Street**.

“There is a certain class of buyers who know Carpenter and Candela and they will only want their buildings,” observed Mark Chin, a broker with Citi-Habitats.



*19 East 72nd Street*

**Major Apartment Buildings by Rosario Candela**

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|--------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 834 Fifth Avenue   | 778 Park Avenue       | 446 East 57th Street | 820 West End Avenue    |
| 1 East 66th Street | 1021 Park Avenue      | 19 East 72nd Street  | 865 West End Avenue    |
| 2 East 67th Street | 1025 Park Avenue      | 133 East 80th Street | 875 West End Avenue    |
| 2 East 70th Street | 1172 Park Avenue      | 12 East 88th Street  | 878 West End Avenue    |
| 950 Fifth Avenue   | 1192 Park Avenue      | 8 East 96th Street   | 915 West End Avenue    |
| 955 Fifth Avenue   | 1220 Park Avenue      | 70 East 96th Street  | 280 Riverside Drive    |
| 960 Fifth Avenue   | 4 Sutton Place        | 12 East 97th Street  | 285 Riverside Drive    |
| 990 Fifth Avenue   | 25 Sutton Place       | 230 West End Avenue  | 425 Riverside Drive    |
| 995 Fifth Avenue   | 30 Sutton Place       | 240 West End Avenue  | 325 West 86th Street   |
| 1040 Fifth Avenue  | 1 Sutton Place South  | 320 West End Avenue  | 334 West 86th Street   |
| 720 Park Avenue    | 14 Sutton Place South | 522 West End Avenue  | 215 West 92nd Street   |
| 740 Park Avenue    | 1 Gracie Square       | 607 West End Avenue  | 110 Central Park South |
| 770 Park Avenue    | 2 Beekman Place       | 755 West End Avenue  |                        |
| 775 Park Avenue    | 135 East 54th Street  | 800 West End Avenue  |                        |

**Major Apartment Buildings by James E. R. Carpenter**

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|--------------------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------------|
| 810 Fifth Avenue   | 1060 Fifth Avenue | 550 Park Avenue | 950 Park Avenue        |
| 4 East 66th Street | 1070 Fifth Avenue | 580 Park Avenue | 960 Park Avenue        |
| 907 Fifth Avenue   | 1115 Fifth Avenue | 610 Park Avenue | 3 East 85th Street     |
| 920 Fifth Avenue   | 1120 Fifth Avenue | 625 Park Avenue | 170 East 79th Street   |
| 950 Fifth Avenue   | 1148 Fifth Avenue | 630 Park Avenue | 246 West End Avenue    |
| 988 Fifth Avenue   | 1150 Fifth Avenue | 635 Park Avenue | 112 Central Park South |
| 1030 Fifth Avenue  | 1165 Fifth Avenue | 640 Park Avenue |                        |
| 1035 Fifth Avenue  | 1170 Fifth Avenue | 655 Park Avenue |                        |