

FORD FOUNDATION BUILDING, 321 East 42nd Street and 320 East 43rd Street, aka 309-325 East 42nd Street and 306-326 East 43rd Street, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1963-67; architects Eero Saarinen Associates (later Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo Associates).

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1335, Lot 5.

On September 16, 1997, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Ford Foundation Building, and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 5). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Six witnesses spoke in favor of designation, including representatives of the Ford Foundation. There were no speakers in opposition to designation. A resolution has been received from Manhattan Community Board No. 6 supporting designation.

Summary

The Ford Foundation Building, built in 1963-67 and designed by Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo Associates, is recognized as one of the most successful and admired modern buildings to emerge in New York City following World War II. The Ford Foundation, the nation's largest private foundation, commissioned an independent headquarters building through the inspiration of its then president, Henry Heald, who in his former position at the Illinois Institute of Technology had overseen the construction of the Mies van der Rohe-designed campus, a major monument of the modern movement. The Foundation's architects created an elegant, transparent glass cube, just twelve stories tall, framed in exposed Cor-Ten weathering steel (also known as controlled-rusting steel) and mahogany-colored South Dakota granite that clads poured concrete piers, encompassing a lush landscaped full-height atrium that occupies most of the building and is visible from the outside. The architects, in an approach unusual for modern movement buildings in the 1960s, carefully considered the context of the surrounding neighborhood in planning the building's design. The building's twelve-story height matches the set-back line of the office buildings directly to the west. By placing the main entrance with its driveway on East 43rd Street, the designers deliberately created a grand scenic approach road for the building due to local one-way street patterns. Among the many critics who have extolled its design, Ada Louise Huxtable called the Ford Foundation Building a "civic gesture of beauty and excellence."¹



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Ford Foundation²

Created in 1936 by automobile pioneer Henry Ford and his son Edsel Ford as a small family foundation, the Ford Foundation in its early years devoted its resources largely to aiding local Michigan philanthropies favored by the Ford family, particularly the Henry Ford Hospital and the Edison Institute. In 1950, following the settlement of the estates of the founders who had died several years earlier, the Ford Foundation emerged as the largest foundation in the nation, with assets worth approximately \$474 million. The Foundation separated from the Ford family, established itself as a grant-making institution of international scope, and, following a study undertaken by a panel of independent consultants, identified five general areas of interest targeted for its very significant financial support: peace, democracy, the economy, education, and human relations.

Though the reorganized Foundation established headquarters initially in Pasadena, California, with auxiliary offices in both New York City and Detroit, it closed the Pasadena office in 1953 and consolidated its headquarters in New York. In 1962, the Foundation refocused its energies on new areas: educational affairs, public and economic affairs, international affairs, and the arts and sciences. In 1963, the Ford Foundation bought property on East 42nd and 43rd Streets for a new headquarters building.³ That same year, the Foundation's major initiatives included a grant towards the construction of the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.; the establishment of a population program; support for experiments in classroom television; support for the National Educational Television and Radio Center (NET); support for the National Defender Project of the National Legal Aid and Defender Association; and a grant to start a program developing ballet training in the United States. In 1968, a year after the completion of the new building, Ford's assets totaled \$3.7 billion dollars, making it by far the largest foundation in the country.⁴

Private foundations did not often build highly publicized headquarters. Prior to occupying the new building on East 42nd Street, the Ford Foundation had rented space in a Madison Avenue office building. But Henry Heald, who left his position as head of New York University to become president of the foundation in 1956, had formerly been president of the Illinois Institute of Technology whose new campus, built to designs by Mies van der

Rohe, had become one of the country's most famous modern monuments. Heald apparently decided that Ford should do something similar.⁵ (Heald himself left the Foundation in 1965; McGeorge Bundy, his successor, became the first president with an office in the new building.)

The Ford Foundation's approach to its new headquarters was immediately recognized as differing from the approach of major corporations, "even," in one writer's words, "a Seagram or Lever or CBS. The unyielding laws of economic return in the metropolis dictate against such a desirable circumstance."⁶ The site, according to Kevin Roche, the architect, could have accommodated a building two and a half times larger.⁷ It was the rare corporate client that would sacrifice so much rentable area, and turn so much over to a landscaped atrium. When asked why Ford did it, Roche replied "for no reason other than to make a public gesture. . . . A developer could never be persuaded to do it unless there was some significant benefit." But in this case, he said, it was important "for the relationship of this community with the public."⁸ *New York Times* architecture critic Paul Goldberger later described the building as "one Ford Foundation philanthropy that, by its very presence on the streetscape, benefits the entire city."⁹ Urban planner Jonathan Barnett called it "a tremendously generous gift to the city."¹⁰

Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo Associates

Ford turned to the firm of Eero Saarinen Associates, headed by the surviving partners of Eero Saarinen (1910-1961), one of the leaders of modern architecture.¹¹ In 1966, the year before the Ford Foundation building's completion, the firm was renamed Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo Associates. Kevin Roche was the chief designer of the building; John Dinkeloo was responsible for its construction.

The Dublin-born Kevin Roche (b. 1922) received his architectural degree at the School of Architecture at University College, Dublin, in 1945, and after a few years working in Dublin and London came to the United States where he studied with the legendary modern architect Mies van der Rohe at the Illinois Institute of Technology. In 1951 Roche joined the firm of Saarinen, Saarinen & Associates, which later became Eero Saarinen & Associates. Roche became Saarinen's principal design associate. John Dinkeloo (1918-1981), architect and engineer, earned a B. Arch. in architectural engineering from the University of Michigan in 1941, and after

service in World War II served as head of production for the Chicago office of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. He joined Eero Saarinen & Associates in 1950, becoming a partner in 1956. Dinkeloo's construction innovations included the use of structural neoprene gaskets to seal exterior walls and the introduction of weathering steel of the kind used in the Ford Foundation Building.

Following Saarinen's death in 1961, Roche, Dinkeloo, and Joseph Lacy continued the firm's practice. Roche became the firm's chief designer, while Dinkeloo handled construction. In the early 1960s, Roche completed the design of a dozen unfinished Saarinen projects, including the TWA Flight Center (1956-62) at Kennedy Airport, Dulles International Airport Terminal (1958-62) near Washington, D.C., the Vivian Beaumont Repertory Theater (1961-65) at Lincoln Center, and CBS Headquarters (1961-64) in Midtown Manhattan.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Roche continued working in Saarinen's romantic modernist vein, rather than in the austere, rigorous modernism championed by Roche's teacher Mies van der Rohe. The firm's many buildings in which Saarinen's influence has been traced include the Oakland Museum (1961-68), the Richard C. Lee High School in New Haven (1961-68), and the Cummins factory in Darlington, England (1963-67).¹² The firm's work over the decades includes 38 corporate headquarters and eight museums, as well as performing arts centers and other institutional buildings.¹³

John Dinkeloo died in 1981, but the firm continues in practice under the name Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo Associates.

The Ford Foundation Building

The sponsorship of the Ford Foundation created an unusual, perhaps unprecedented, opportunity to design a new kind of Midtown office building. The architects created an elegant, transparent glass cube, just twelve stories tall, framed in exposed Cor-Ten weathering steel and mahogany-colored South Dakota granite that clads poured concrete piers.¹⁴ Instead of placing their building in an outdoor plaza, they brought the plaza inside, creating a lush landscaped atrium occupying most of the building, a botanical garden in the heart of Midtown.

The International Style concept of a tall, pristine tower set apart from its neighbors in a large plaza had become enshrined in New York's 1961 zoning resolution, modeled on such prominent modern towers as Lever House (Skidmore, Owings &

Merrill, 1950-52) and the Seagram Building (Mies van der Rohe, 1956-58) in Midtown (both are designated New York City Landmarks). Such buildings have a monumental presence but in effect turn away from their urban context. By inverting the concept, and enclosing the plaza, the architects were able to let the Ford Foundation Building -- unusual and monumental though it might be, with a powerfully individual presence -- relate to its immediate surroundings.

The Ford Foundation Building's design refers directly to Tudor City on the east and north and to the office buildings on East 42nd Street. Although Roche deliberately avoided designing a high-rise, he chose the height of twelve stories to bring the building's East 42nd Street facade to the height of the second set-back level of the adjacent office building. The Ford Foundation building is set back approximately ten feet from its lot line. On the east side, the landscaped atrium relates to the adjoining small park of Tudor City. On the East 43rd Street facade, the mahogany color of the granite harmonizes with the red brick of the Tudor City buildings across the street.

But Roche also saw Tudor City as providing a major opportunity for his new building. Even though, to his 1960s sensibilities, Tudor City looked like what he called "a phony piece of stage-set architecture," he nevertheless saw it as having "a fairly nice character" and "a fairly nice environment, with trees, birds singing, and even some sunlight. There are even places to sit out and enjoy the sun, even in the wintertime. So we wanted to relate to this, instead of the typical 42d Street kind of space."¹⁵ In addition, Roche took advantage of the location, and the necessities of the one-way street system, to create "a limousine entrance for state heads or ambassadors . . . We had a unique opportunity, unique for New York, anyway, of approaching a building and driving around it before you get to the entrance. It's rather like having a building in the countryside where one has an approach road."¹⁶ By placing the main entrance with its driveway on East 43rd Street (the East 42nd Street entrance is primarily for the public entering the atrium), he created a grand scenic approach road for the building, something normally possible only in a suburban or rural setting. The local one-way street patterns require approaching automobiles to drive east on East 41st Street across Second Avenue into Tudor City, then left on Tudor City Place continuing two blocks within Tudor City's quiet, picturesque environs and park-like setting, and only then left onto East 43rd Street, to

the *porte cochere* entrance. Since that entrance is placed at the northwest corner of the atrium, and most of the offices within line the north and west interior walls, visitors entering are immediately aware of the transparent, twelve-story high atrium and its landscaping, as light pours in through the eastern and southern glass walls.

A similar, if less elaborate, drama attaches to the East 42nd Street entrance. At the western edge of the facade, the corner granite-sheathed concrete pier acts as a “shield wall.” Roche said of the “big 45 degree angle” that “the sun comes around the wall, lights up, and gives a strong wall of light” and “one penetrates into the building before going through the door. You’re partially in the building before you enter.”¹⁷

The building was formally dedicated on December 8, 1967.¹⁸ Following its completion (and even before), the Ford Foundation Building has been praised as a major breakthrough in post-World War II Modern architecture. Among the many critics who have extolled its design, Ada Louise Huxtable called the Ford Foundation Building a “civic gesture of beauty and excellence.”¹⁹ Some critics have found the building overly awe-inspiring. Jonathan Barnett suggested that the cube shape was “an ancient symbol of power, used in religious buildings and palaces” and therefore not conducive to intimacy.²⁰ Vincent Scully criticized the building’s “military scale” and “sultanic inner garden.”²¹ But most reaction has been favorable. Paul Goldberger described the atrium as “one of the city’s most spectacular interior spaces.”²² The building was a winner in 1968 of one of the Sixth Annual Bard Awards for excellence in architecture and urban design.²³

Description

The Ford Foundation Building occupies a site approximately 202 feet by 200 feet; the building footprint is approximately 180 x 174 feet. The exterior of the building (twelve stories on East 42nd Street; eleven stories on East 43rd Street) is constructed of Cor-Ten weathering steel, poured concrete clad in mahogany-colored South Dakota granite, and sheets of glass. Pavers of glazed reddish-brown brick (used in the building’s atrium) are used outside on East 42nd and East 43rd Streets extending from the lot line to the wall of the building and in the driveway to the building’s west. The colors of the Cor-Ten steel, granite, and brick all harmonize with each other.

East 42nd Street facade:

The main focus of the East 42nd Street facade is the recessed wall of glass, with panes of glass framed in weathering steel, through which the interior atrium and garden are visible. At the top, a catwalk and two floors of offices above it project progressively outward from the glass wall, all topped by a steel I-beam. A narrow, granite-faced concrete pier rises uninterrupted at the eastern corner; from the pier’s western edge, a matching, diagonal granite-faced wall angles back to meet the recessed glass wall. A similar granite-faced pier rises on the west, with a receding diagonal wall connecting to the recessed wall of glass; the two piers frame the main portion of the glass wall. The second granite-faced pier forms a protective space for the entrance to the atrium. There is an additional, narrow, recessed glass area to the west of that second pier, which hides a fire stair exit door; it is flanked in turn on the west by a much wider expanse of granite-faced wall, which bears the carved date of 1967. The third and fourth bays (from the east) of the main glass wall contain the entrance consisting of a revolving door of polished bronze and glass in a polished bronze housing, flanked by single-leaf doors of polished bronze and glass with vertical pulls, set on the diagonal.

Eastern facade facing Tudor City:

The eastern facade repeats the arrangement of the East 42nd Street facade, but with a slightly different order: a diagonal pier at the southern corner, a recessed glass wall, a wide granite-faced pier, a narrow recessed glass wall, and a granite-faced wall abutting and rising above an adjoining building in Tudor City. Here too the upper floors of catwalk and offices project progressively outward from the glass wall, and are topped by an I-beam. The steel framework enclosing glass panes for the atrium project out at the base of the large glass wall. A metal service door adjacent to this framework provides access from East 42nd Street.

East 43rd Street facade:

The East 43rd Street facade is arranged as three narrow eleven-story glass walls framed by narrow granite-faced piers, with one additional wide expanse of granite-faced wall at the facade’s eastern edge. The glass walls, unlike those on the south and east facades, are composed of smaller, paired glass panes in groups of three pairs, set between thin vertical steel mullions; each story is separated from the next by a steel I-beam. The top two stories are slightly recessed behind the granite-faced piers. The fourth and third stories are progressively recessed behind the granite-faced piers, and the first and second

stories are deeply recessed, beneath the third story, to form a driveway and *porte-cochere*. The brick paving forms a step, edged in brass, which follows the line of the *porte-cochere*, extending out to the piers. Steel beams tie the recessed window walls to the piers at the third and fourth stories.

At street level, the granite-faced piers meet the ground as freestanding supports. The two-story high building wall behind them is divided into three sections by granite-faced piers which reflect those of the outer wall: to the east and west, a two-story wall of glass panes, the first and second stories separated by a steel I-beam, and in the center an entrance bay. The entrance bay consists of two large single glass panes, each flanking a paired double door of bronze and glass with vertical pulls. Gold letters have been applied on the glass to the right of the right-hand door, reading THE FORD FOUNDATION/AMERICAN HEALTH FOUNDATION. The brick-paved walkways approaching the entrance were originally constructed with steps which have been replaced by shallow ramps.

Western facade:

The western facade is visible from both East 42nd and East 43rd streets, behind steel gates, each with a granite-faced pier placed off-center. This

facade consists of, from north to south: a wide granite-faced pier; a narrow bay of paired glass panes; a very broad granite-faced wall with a small framed opening at the fire stairwell at each story; a broad section of window bays similar to those on the East 43rd Street facade; a narrow granite-faced pier; another broad section of window bays; and a narrow granite-faced pier at the corner of the East 42nd Street facade.

The driveway to the west of the building, behind the gates, is paved in the same pavers as the sidewalks in front of the street facades. A service entrance, fire stair exit doors, a garage entrance, a ramp to East 43rd Street, and the building loading dock are located in the driveway. A low raised parapet at the western edge of the driveway is lined with freestanding light boxes (not original). Three planters (not original) have been placed near the west wall on the East 42nd Street end of the driveway.

Report prepared by
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Director of Special Projects

NOTES

1. Ada Louise Huxtable, "The Ford Foundation Flies High," *New York Times*, October 26, 1967, Section II: 23, 25, reprinted in Huxtable, *Will They Ever Finish Bruckner Boulevard?* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 90-91.
2. For general information on the Ford Foundation, see Richard Magat, *The Ford Foundation at Work* (New York: Plenum Press, 1979); also Waldemar A. Nielsen, *The Big Foundations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), Chapter 5: "Coming of Age in the Ford Foundation." See also the Ford Foundation's Website at <http://www.fordfound.org>.
3. The site had been occupied by the Hospital for Ruptured and Crippled Children, later Beth David Hospital.
4. Figures cited in Nielsen, 78.
5. Robert A.M. Stern, Thomas Mellins, David Fishman, *New York 1960: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Second World War and the Bicentennial* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1995), 458.
6. James Burns Jr., "A Great Space Taking Shape in New York," *Progressive Architecture* 45 (November 1964), 196.
7. John W. Cook and Heinrich Klotz, *Conversations with Architects* (New York: Praeger, 1973), 70.
8. Francesco Dal Co, *Kevin Roche* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1985), 44.
9. Paul Goldberger, *The City Observed: New York, A Guide to the Architecture of Manhattan* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 134.

10. Jonathan Barnett, "Innovation and Symbolism on 42nd Street," *Architectural Record* 143 (February 1968), 108.
11. The Saarinen firm had its offices in Bloomfield Hills, a suburb of Detroit. Among the commissions which undoubtedly attracted Heald's notice was the General Motors Technical Center (1945-56) in Warren, Michigan. David G. DeLong in "Eliel Saarinen and the Cranbrook Tradition in Architecture and Urban Design," *Design in America: The Cranbrook Vision 1925-1950* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1983), 72, calls it "Eero [Saarinen]'s most complete essay in modernism and obviously derive[d] from the Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago (1939-41 ff.) by Mies van der Rohe."
12. See Dal Co, 7ff: "As Roche himself maintains, the choice that he made was clear from the beginning and only confirms what is here being postulated. Between the two cultural poles of the field in which his formation took place, Roche had no doubts: the intellectual inventiveness and eclecticism of Saarinen, and not the asceticism of Mies, would end up as his model."
13. The firm's museums include additions to the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Jewish Museum, both designated New York City Landmarks.
14. The use of weathering steel, such a prominent part of the design of the Ford Foundation Building, was pioneered by John Dinkeloo, who first used it at the Deere & Co. Administrative Center in Moline, Ill. (designed 1957, completed 1964). The steel is an alloy, with particular proportions of manganese, copper and nickel, which corrodes for a certain amount of time, and then stops. It develops a red-orange color, turning a dark brown color at the completion of the oxidation process. See Suzanne Stephens, "Savvy about Steel, Game with Glass," *Progressive Architecture* 55 (September 1974), 78-83.
15. Kevin Roche, quoted in Cook and Klotz, 69.
16. *Ibid.*, 69, 70.
17. *Ibid.*, 72.
18. "Ford Foundation building is completed and dedicated," *Architectural Record* 143 (Jan. 1968), 35.
19. Huxtable, 91.
20. Barnett.
21. Stern, *New York 1960*, cites Vincent Scully, *American Architecture and Urbanism*, (New York: Praeger, 1969), 200.
22. Goldberger, 134.
23. "Awards," *Architectural Forum* 128 (May 1968), 97.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Ford Foundation Building has a special character and a special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Ford Foundation Building is one of the most distinguished post-World War II buildings of the modern movement in architecture in New York City; that it was built in 1963-67 for the Ford Foundation, the nation's largest private foundation, and designed by Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo Associates, the successor firm to Eero Saarinen Associates, one of the nation's premier firms working in the modern style; that the Ford Foundation and its architects, through this new building, offered New York an alternative model for a modern office building in the form of an elegant, transparent glass cube, just twelve stories tall, framed in exposed Cor-Ten weathering steel and mahogany-colored South Dakota granite that clads poured concrete piers, encompassing a lush indoor landscaped atrium visible from outside; that the architects, in an approach unusual for modern movement buildings in the 1960s, carefully considered the context in planning the building's design, and matched the building's twelve-story height to the set-back line of the office buildings directly to the west; that by placing the main entrance, with its driveway, on East 43rd Street, the designers deliberately created a grand scenic approach road for the building via Tudor City Place; and that the Ford Foundation Building has been recognized as a civic gesture to the streetscape of New York City.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Ford Foundation Building, 321 East 42nd Street and 320 East 43rd Street, aka 309-325 East 42nd Street and 306-326 East 43rd Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Manhattan Tax Map Block 1335, Lot 5, as its Landmark Site.



Ford Foundation Building, 321 East 42nd Street and 320 East 43rd Street, aka 309-325 East 42nd Street and 306-326 East 43rd Street, Borough of Manhattan.

Photo: Carl Forster



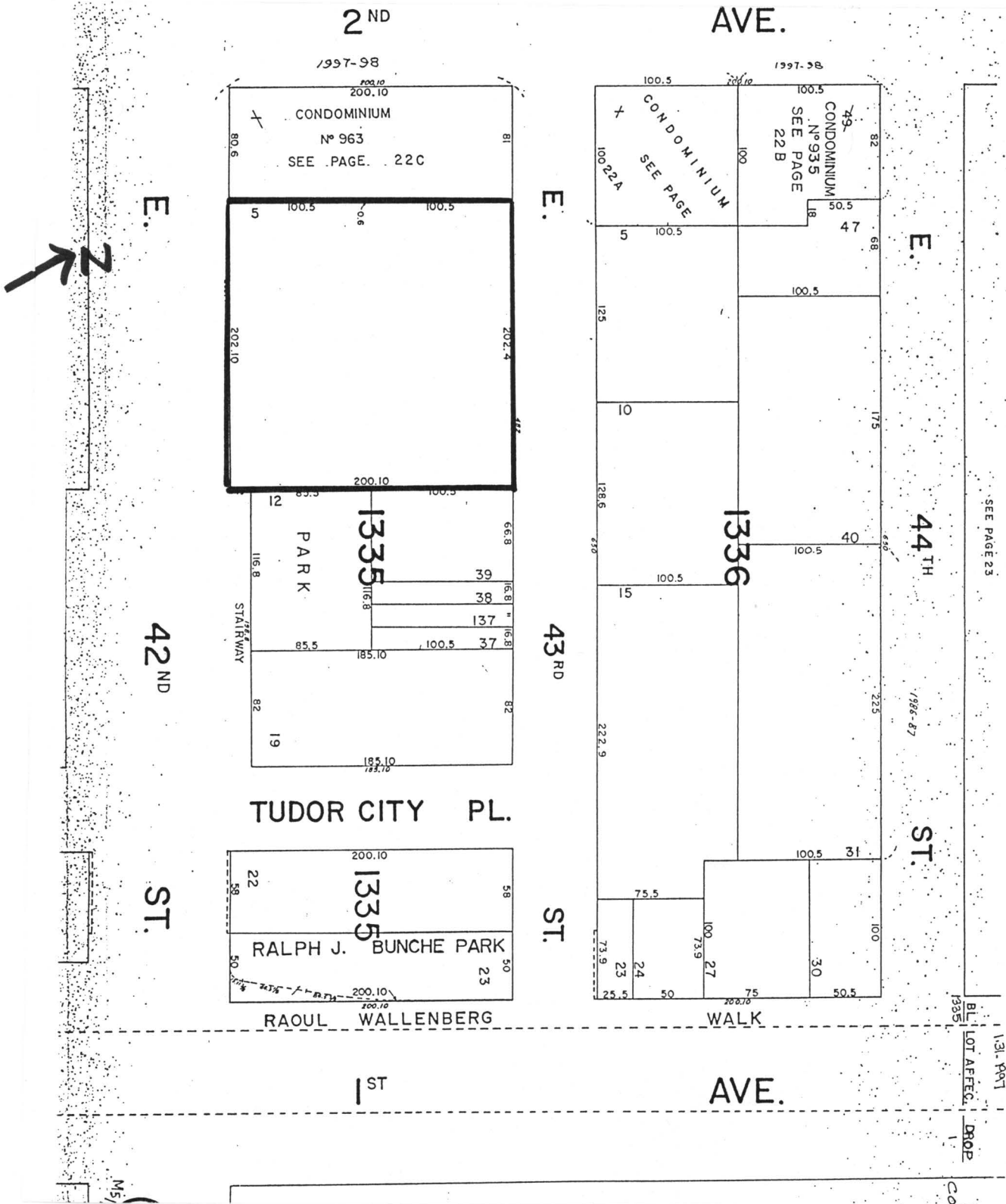
Ford Foundation Building, 321 East 42nd Street, Borough of Manhattan.
View of East 43rd Street front. *Photo: Carl Forster*



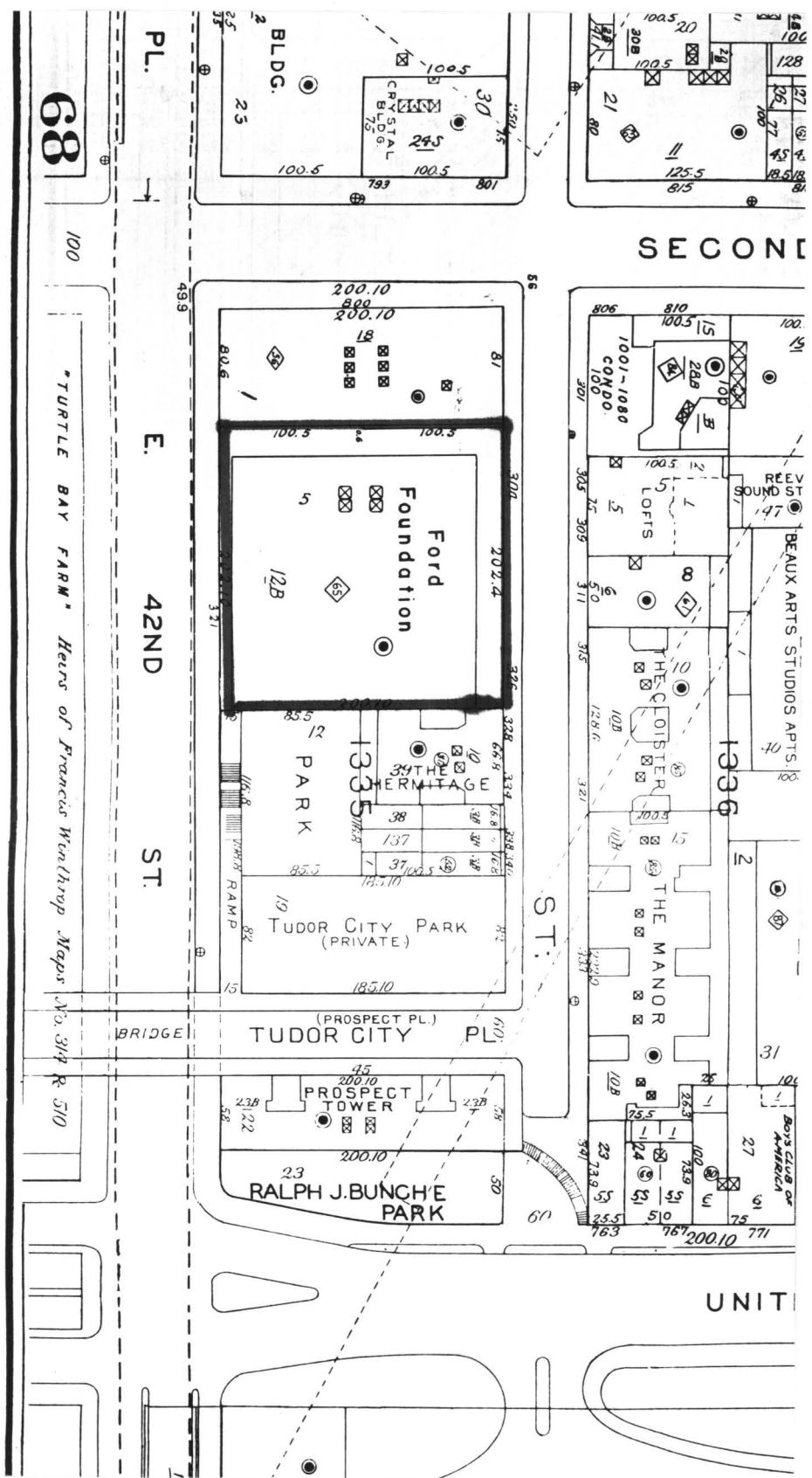
Ford Foundation Building, 321 East 42nd Street, Borough of Manhattan.
View of East 43rd Street *porte cochere* Photo: Carl Forster



Ford Foundation Building, 321 East 42nd Street, Borough of Manhattan.
Detail of upper floors. Photo: Carl Forster



Ford Foundation Building, 321 East 42nd Street, Borough of Manhattan.
 Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1335, Lot 5
 Source: New York City Department of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map



Ford Foundation Building
Source: Sanborn, *Manhattan Land Book* (1996-97), pl. 74