



*Testimony in Support of the Proposed Designation of
the Modulightor Building, 246 East 58th Street, Manhattan,
as a New York City Landmark*

Tuesday, November 28, 2023

My name is Amanda Davis, and I am the project manager of the NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project, a cultural heritage initiative founded by historic preservationists in 2015 to document historic places connected to the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community in the city's five boroughs.

The Project strongly supports the designation of the Modulightor Building as a New York City Landmark. The building was designed by eminent architect and iconic modernist Paul Rudolph, who was openly gay. While this would not be the first LPC-designated landmark designed by an LGBTQ architect, the designation of the Modulightor Building has the opportunity to be the first in the LPC's history to officially acknowledge an architect's gay identity. This provides a small but important step in making LGBTQ history visible. The Modulightor Building is one of over 450 historic places our project has documented that illustrate the contributions that LGBTQ people have made to New York and American history and culture. It is also included in our website's "Art & Architecture" thematic collection of sites, in order to celebrate the impact of LGBTQ people on the city's built environment.

Paul Rudolph and Ernst Wagner, who lived and worked together until Rudolph's death, founded Modulightor in 1975. They developed a system of lighting fixtures that could be combined in countless variations, as well as furniture and other interior accessories. In 1990, Modulightor moved into a four-story building at 246 East 58th Street, which Rudolph and Wagner jointly purchased the year before. Rudolph modified the existing structure, moving his architectural office to the second story. Modulightor's showroom and production facility occupied the ground story, mezzanine, and three sub-basements.

The interior was the last in New York City completed by Rudolph during his lifetime, with work based largely on his plans continuing after his death. The building was left to Wagner in Rudolph's will, and Wagner worked with others to create the Paul Rudolph Foundation in 2001. The subsequent Paul Rudolph Heritage Foundation now occupies the second story. The Foundation notes that "The Modulightor building is the only intact and publicly accessible building designed by Paul Rudolph in New York City." In addition, it is one of three residential townhouse buildings in Manhattan that display Rudolph's contributions to American architecture in the 20th century. And it would join a select handful of significant Modernist townhouses in Manhattan to be designated.

The NYC LGBT Historic Sites Project proudly supports this proposed designation.

Thank you.