



AMERICAN SOCIETY OF
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTS
NEW YORK
148 West 37th Street, 13th Floor
New York, NY 10018-6909
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www.aslany.org

10 November 2014

The Frick Collection Board of Trustees
Att.: Ian Wardropper, Director
1 East 70th Street
New York, NY 10021

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Dear Mr. Wardropper:

The American Society of Landscape Architects, New York Chapter, opposes the Frick Collection's expansion proposal that would destroy the superbly designed Viewing Garden by British Landscape Architect, Russell Page. Our members are urging the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission deny the Frick's request.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission defines a landmark as a building, property or object that has a special character or special historical or aesthetic interest or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the city, state, or nation. The Frick's viewing garden, which the Commission approved in 1974, is an inextricable element of the Frick's architectural character that helps it meet this definition of a landmark. The Frick's 1974 Landmarks designation was done before Page's death in 1986. As the work of a master landscape architect and a rare American commission, the Russell Page-designed garden is today eligible under Criterion C of the National Register of Historic Places criteria when evaluating significance of a property.

Located in New York City amid the world's most prestigious art museums, the Frick Collection offers art lovers a refreshing contrast to the enormous white boxes that contain many of the city's important collections. The Frick provides an increasingly rare intimate art experience. Still, we understand the need for cultural institutions to stay relevant and to grow in order to attract visitors. The work performed by Landscape Architects is almost always part of a development project - we are by no means advocating for zero growth. However, in this case, we believe the importance of this garden should give the Board Members of the Frick sufficient reason to devise alternative expansion plans that would retain the garden. The Frick's plans should seek to balance the benefits of economic development with the need to retain sufficient green space in our urban environment. This aspect of our city is easily lost in the shadows of tall buildings, making healthy landscapes difficult to grow. New York City's parks and green spaces make our city a more gracious place to work and live. They are worth preserving, and in the same civic spirit of the original gift of the Frick Collection, this garden should be spared demolition.

The garden is an important work of art in its own right. It is a significant piece in the Frick's collection. The museum's own horticulturist said that viewing the precious outdoor space from the street or from the light-filled Reception Hall Pavilion is "like viewing an Impressionist painting." It contributes to the museum's unique character by setting the building in an appropriately quiet, contemplative green space which prepares visitors for the culturally enriching experience within the museum.

Architecturally, the original house was conceived as a "country house in the city," a low lying structure with a large sunny garden that faces central park. The notable landscape architecture firm of the Olmsted Brothers designed the sunny garden on Fifth Avenue. The side garden designed by Russell Page, the subject of this petition, also contributes to that original concept. His original design intent was to create an enclosed terrace on East 70th



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Street that would evoke the charm of catching a glimpse into a private Parisian garden compatible with the Neo-classical architecture of the mansion. The Frick’s horticulturist also noted that this garden is meant to be a surprise discovery for passersby. Page’s garden is designed to slow, or stop, a busy New Yorker, to pause for a moment – a respite from the city. It’s an oasis everyone can enjoy. Green spaces, such as the Frick’s garden, contribute to our mental and physical well-being.

We agree with the Cultural Landscape Foundation’s assessment: One of the wonders of the Frick is that it doesn’t fill up its site, that it has a bit of room to breathe. One of the problems with green space is that it is often just seen as inherently ephemeral and too often viewed as places to “put stuff.” Unless it is deeded as a park, it’s just real estate with some plants stored on it.

This garden space is too special to erase from the cityscape. It has demonstrated its value to the citizens of New York City, and in turn its value to the Frick Collection. Should the Frick change direction and decide to save the garden, the members of the ASLA-NY stand ready to assist the Frick to retain this important work of landscape architecture while still achieving their expansion goals.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeanette Compton', with a large, stylized initial 'J'.

Jeanette Compton, President
American Society of Landscape Architects, New York Chapter

Cc: Mayor Bill de Blasio, City of New York
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