



Testimony before the Landmarks Preservation Commission
by Lisa Kersavage, Kress/RFR Fellow for Historic Preservation
(Former) Domino Sugar Refinery Building, Including the Filter
House, Pan House and Finishing House, 292-314 Kent Street, Brooklyn
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The Municipal Art Society of New York is a private, non-profit membership organization whose mission is to promote a more livable city. Since 1893, the Society has worked to advocate excellence in urban design and planning, contemporary architecture, historic preservation and public art.

I am Lisa Kersavage, speaking on behalf of the Municipal Art Society's preservation committee, in strong support of the designation of the Domino Sugar Refinery processing house buildings. We commend the owners of the site for their support of the designation and for their stated commitment (in the *New York Times*) to integrating historic sites into development plans while moving forward to create a new residential development. It is critical that as the site is developed, key buildings are designated and the commission guides their adaptive reuse. While we fully support the designation of the Filter, Pan and Finishing Houses, we ask that enough of the newer buildings, including the Bin Structure, be designated so that the development of the industrial complex over time can be understood to future generations.

For nearly 150 years, ships delivered sugar cane from as far away as India to the Domino Sugar plant (originally American Sugar Refining Company) on the East River. In the massive factory buildings workers processed the cane into granulated sugar and packaged it for distribution. The Brooklyn plant was one of the largest refineries in the world, and by 1870 more than half of the sugar consumed in the entire country was refined here. Thousands of Brooklynites worked there and many settled in nearby Williamsburg and Greenpoint, shaping the character of those neighborhoods. It was a terrible blow to Brooklyn in 2004 when sugar processing ceased. While the Domino company is gone, the architectural and historic legacy remains in these waterfront buildings.

We applaud the Commission for bringing these buildings forward for designation prior to the site being rezoned from manufacturing to residential. We encourage such practice not only on the Brooklyn waterfront, but across the city. That being said, one important fact will be brought forward in the environmental review -- the entire Domino site was found to be eligible for listing on the National Register because of its architectural and historic significance, and also for its

association with an important American figure, Henry O. Havemeyer.” The eligibility determination emphasizes that three different periods of industrial design are represented at the complex, and we urge the commissioners to weigh that fact and consider expanding the designation. Furthermore, as the environmental review proceeds, we urge the commission staff to work closely the State Historic Preservation Office on appropriate mitigation for any demolition of these very historic buildings.

In order to preserve the sense of an industrial complex built over time, we urge the commission to designate additional structures on the site. The Bin Structure, completed in 1962, is made of reinforced concrete with a four-story glass crown and contains the iconic 40’-tall “Domino Sugar” neon sign. The top of the structure housed the screening facilities used to separate the finished product into various grades of sugar which sifted into a series of large steel storage bins at its bottom. The Bin is connected to the Finishing House by a pair of sloped bridges which contained conveyor belts for moving refined sugar to the Bin Structure for sorting and storage. To the south of the Boiler House is a group of steel canisters known as the Syrup Station. During the refinery process syrup was collected from various parts of the refinery and stored at the Syrup Station. The different syrups were stored, weighted and loaded onto trucks for shipment to industrial customers who blended it with corn syrup, dextrose, and acids for soft drinks and other products. Considered as a whole this group of connected structures communicates a story about the refinery process and, by including structures built after 1884, represents how the largest plant on the waterfront evolved over time.

As many of you know, the industrial heritage of the Brooklyn waterfront was named one of the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s *11 Most Endangered Historic Places* just two weeks ago. In fact, the Trust put Brooklyn first on their list. While there many endangered sites on the 11 miles of Brooklyn’s waterfront, the Domino Sugar buildings are some of the most important. Their designation moves us one small step closer to removing Brooklyn’s waterfront from the Trust’s endangered list.

The Municipal Art Society looks forward to seeing the proposed development at the Domino site, and has high expectations that it will balance the preservation of the character of this historic complex, while providing waterfront access and mixed income housing at a moderate density.