

# A dialogue on conserving architectural landmarks



Brendan Gill



David Teitelbaum

*This discussion is an edited version of the transcript of a December 2, 1979, radio broadcast of the "In the Public Interest" show, which is heard over station WHN in New York City. Participants in the radio broadcast were Brendan Gill, president of the Landmarks Conservancy of New York City, who also is a widely known writer and theater critic; David Teitelbaum, a New York City real estate developer and president of the Teitelbaum Holding Company; and Susan Dempsey, moderator of the WHN show.*

**MS. DEMPSEY:** Years ago—20 or 30 years ago—the trend was to tear down old buildings and build new. We no longer want to do that, do we, Mr. Gill?

**MR. GILL:** New York is famous as a city that just kept knocking itself down every 30 years and building itself over, and there was a great waste of money but always there was more to be made. Because of changed economics, energy, and things like that, we are going to make more use of the stock of buildings that we have. We'll take old buildings, make them over, find new uses for them, and I think this is not only economically better for the city but also psychologically better. Inhabitants of the city will be able to spend generation after generation in familiar surroundings.

**MS. DEMPSEY:** Have there been any buildings torn down that it just breaks your heart to think about?

**MR. GILL:** We still have lots of fights on our hands, but we try to save the best of the old buildings. One of the buildings that David is working on now is the Federal Archives Building on Washington Street, which is a great, red brick, 10-story-high Romanesque structure designed not quite 100 years ago. The federal government had no further use for it, and, with a series of arrangements made with the General Services Administration, the Landmarks Conservancy, and with David as a private developer, this old building will continue to be the anchor of West Greenwich Village, and people will be living there.

**MS. DEMPSEY:** Mr. Teitelbaum, what are you doing with that building?

**MR. TEITELBAUM:** It's a very large building—about 600,000 square feet—and it has an interior courtyard that is the same distance from building to building across Fifth Avenue, so we will be having apartments that will be facing inside into this courtyard and we'll be having apartments that face outside. The ceilings are about 15 feet high, and there'll be about 350 apartments that average about 1,200 square feet. Additionally, there'll be about a 100,000-square-foot commercial complex, and an 80,000-square-foot cultural, nonprofit complex as well, plus a health facility on the roof, which will be accessible to the public. We hope to start construction in June; it's a two-year project. It's been extremely complicated—this has been probably the most complicated transfer of property the city has ever seen.

**MS. DEMPSEY:** Have there been people fighting you all along the way?

**MR. TEITELBAUM:** I don't think it's a question of fighting. This is a new situation. It's a transfer of a monument. It's being given by the federal government to the city and being held in trust by the state. We are leasing the property. The money that is generated from this lease is to be used for historical preservation in New York City. And, in using those few sentences, we've had to deal with about 30 regulatory bodies, each one having a concern that everything is proper.