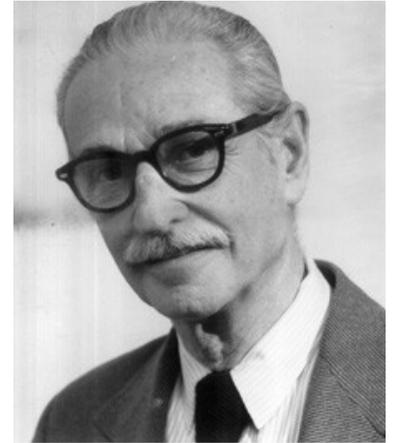


ALLA CORRENTE

Giorgio Cavaglieri

Giorgio Cavaglieri (1911-2007) was born in Venice on August 11, 1911. In his early 20s he became head of his household when his father, an insurance executive, died. He studied at the Superior School of Engineering in Milan, from which he graduated *magna cum laude* in 1933 at the age of twenty-two. He then worked as an in-house architect for the Italian government's insurance company, which had employed his father. During the Second Italo-Ethiopian War (October 1935–May 1936) he was drafted into the Italian Air Force and completed his first architectural projects designing airfields for Mussolini's army in Tobruk, Libya. In 1939, after his military discharge and because Fascist law prohibited Jews from working and living freely in Italy, Cavaglieri immigrated to New York. He reportedly was especially distressed about having to leave Rome because he relished its architectural work and thought European design led the world.



During World War II, he was drafted into the U. S. Army and won the Bronze Star for meritorious achievement for his adaptations of captured German barracks for Allied use. After the war, a colleague referred him to New York architect Rosario Candela, the renowned designer of luxury Manhattan apartment buildings, and Cavaglieri moved to Manhattan from Baltimore with his wife (Norma Sanford, whom he had married in 1942) and began work under him.

In 1946 with the aid of the G.I. Bill, Cavaglieri opened his own private practice. By 1955, he was exploring the redesign of historic buildings to use for new purposes, by adapting an old warehouse into offices for a local union.



Jefferson Market Public Library

By the mid-1960s, he had accomplished his best-known work, the renovation of the Jefferson Market Courthouse into the Jefferson Market Public Library in Greenwich Village. This building was saved after preservationists had been unable to stop the demolition of Penn Station, and the project is generally regarded as the first real instance of successful historic preservation in New York City. The battle to convert what had been a courthouse, considered the city's premier High Victorian Gothic building, was led by Margot Gayle and other preservationists. But it was Cavaglieri's work to restore—he used the word “refresh”—the building that made the dream become a reality.

He began with four years of preliminary study, and then integrated modern library facilities, like air-conditioning, elevators and furniture, into the turreted Victorian fantasy. He carefully differentiated old details and new ones. He took countless photos to ensure accuracy in replacing a stained-glass window and carved black walnut doors. However, he also designed new features—rather than just copying the old ones—and these were contemporary in both material and style. The new entrance to the old circular stair tower, for instance, was through a sleek glass door set into the old carved limestone. The most striking addition was a stark catwalk above the main reading room.

Continued next page...

ALLA CORRENTE, *Continued* **Giorgio Cavaglieri**

This renovation attracted the attention of the renowned architectural critic, Ada Louise Huxtable. She recommended him to Joseph Papp for the renovation of the Astor Library into the New York Shakespeare Public Theater, one of the earliest alterations made to a historic building under the recently passed New York City landmarks law.

Among his most notable projects, in addition to the Jefferson Market Library and the New York Shakespeare Festival Public Theater, were the restoration of the incoming train room at Grand Central Terminal, the preservation of the historic structures on Roosevelt Island, and the restoration of the Delacorte Theater in Central Park. He also worked on the U.S. Pension Building, the Chapel of the Good Shepherd on Roosevelt Island, the American Academy of Dramatic Arts building, the New York Public Library projects including the main library's periodical room and Gottesman Exhibition Hall, the New York University Grey Art Gallery and Study Center and the Fine Arts Department.



Public Theatre Astor Library Building

Though his projects were heavily concentrated in New York City, Cavaglieri also took commissions from Washington, D.C. to San Francisco. His projects won numerous awards and were extensively published in major architectural periodicals. He collaborated on some of the most important and large-scale preservation projects in New York City, yet he also continued to design small-scale new work throughout his career. These included his showroom for the Olivetti Corporation in San Francisco, the Kips Bay Branch Library, and the Mid-Manhattan Branch Library.

His preservation projects demonstrated his firm belief that historic architecture was not only important and merited preservation, but that it could be re-purposed or restored to achieve the same ends as new construction. As one of the first preservation architects, Cavaglieri proved in his work that the destruction of historic buildings was unnecessary, and he helped develop the nation's growing historic preservation movement.

Cavaglieri was influential in New York City's architectural community not only on account of his designs but also because of his involvement with organizations, panels, juries and preservation advocacy. He gave many speeches and lectures on the topics of historic buildings, landmarks, architectural restoration, and the relationship of preservation and modern architecture. He often argued for the saving of historic buildings by sending letters to the editor of the New York Times, the Mayor of New York City, the New York State Senate and providing statements on behalf on various organizations. He served as president of the Municipal Art Society from 1963 to 1965, president of the Fine Arts Federation from 1972 to 1974, and chairman of the Board of Trustees for the National Institute of Architectural Education from 1956 through 1958. He was a member of the American Institute of Architects and was elected to the AIA College of Fellows in 1965; and served as president of the New York AIA chapter from 1970 to 1971. One of the last awards he won was the Lucy G. Moses Preservation Leadership Award, presented by the New York Landmarks Conservancy in 2002.

Cavaglieri continued his architectural practice and community involvement, working every day until he was 93, when he badly injured his right arm in a fall. He then learned to paint watercolors with his left hand, fulfilling his first ambition, which was to be a painter. He died, at the age of 95, on May 15, 2007. His wife had died in 1971, and they had no children.

—Adapted by James J. Boitano

Sources: Columbia University Library (<http://library.columbia.edu/indiv/avery/da/collections/cavaglieri.html.html>) and The New York Times (http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/18/arts/design/18cavaglieri.html?_r=0)