

A CENTURY OF WASHINGTON'S DISTINGUISHED APARTMENT HOUSES



# BEST ADDRESSES



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## CARLYN, now GATEWAY GEORGETOWN



2500 Que Street, N.W.; southwest end of Dumbarton Bridge

ARCHITECT: Francis L. Koenig, 1941

ORIGINAL APARTMENTS: 275 (59 efficiencies; 197 one-bedrooms; 17 two-bedrooms; 2 three-bedrooms)

STATUS: opened as rental in 1941; converted to condo in 1973

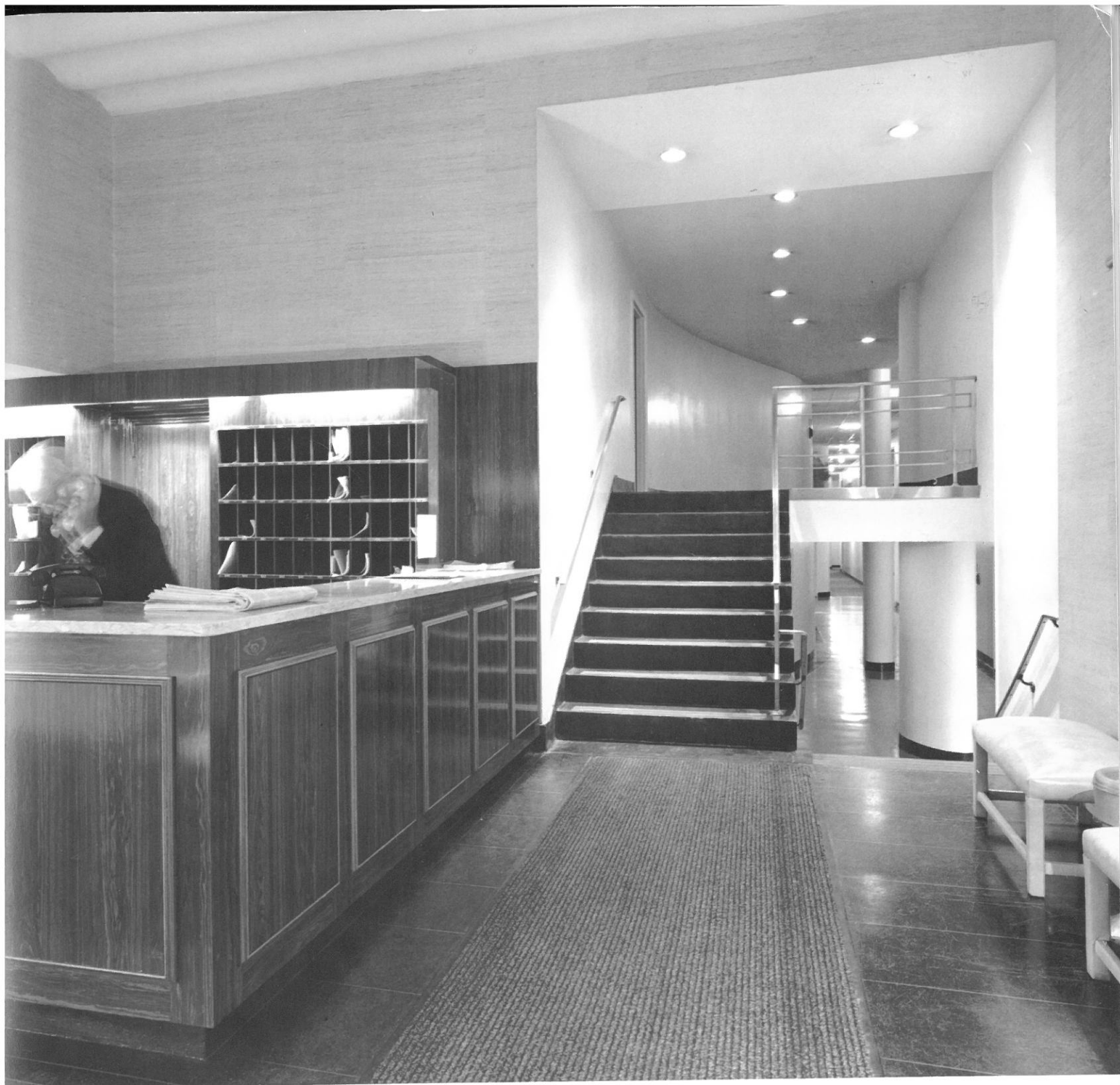


The severely plain facade of the Carlyn is slightly relieved by the horizontal bands of dark red brick that appear on the top floor.

Built in a record five months for \$1 million, the Carlyn opened on a fateful date, 7 December 1941. At the time one of the largest rental luxury apartment houses in Washington, the Carlyn's size is obscured by its irregular U shape. It borders Rock Creek Park and Dumbarton Bridge on the east and extends through the block from Que to P streets. Gustave Ring, the builder and owner, named the seven-story building for his daughter.

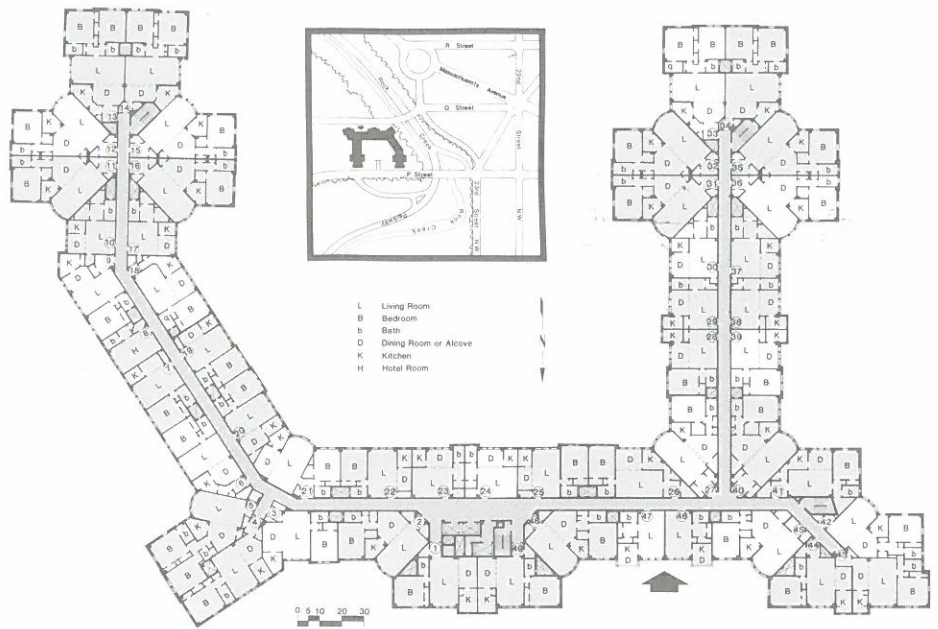
The most striking feature of the Carlyn is its stark simplicity. The great length of the front facade and the building's strong horizontal lines produce a rather heavy effect, although seven projecting pavilions on the front, corners, and ends provide some relief. However, the vast brick facade (1.2 million bricks were used) gains subtle interest from the arrangement of contrasting bands of dark tapestry brick, set against the red brick, along part of the top floor and on some of the pavilions. Since the building is located on a hill (the former site of a large streetcar barn), the front entrance is actually on the third floor with the first and second floors facing to the rear on P Street, N.W.

Close inspection of the interior reveals a number of innovative features. Since the Carlyn is situated on a steep hill, the architect placed the street level lobby midway between the second and third floors. The public



Like the Marlyn, the lobby of the Carlyn is midway between the first and second floors.

hallways, visible from the lobby, offer a good review of late Art Deco streamlined design, with such details as an aluminum balustrade, oval columns, dropped ceilings, curved walls, and hard-rubber black borders on each side of the terrazzo floors. The architect's ingenuity is evident in the fire extinguishers set into niches in the hallways, the simple but elegant wrought-iron rails in the staircases, and sliding cabinet doors in the small kitchens to conserve space and prevent accidents. Within the public corridors,



Unusual in the Carlyn is the diagonal arrangement of the living room in a number of tiers.

apartment doors are staggered so that no two doors face one another and thus enhance privacy.

The Carlyn's current 271 apartments range in size from efficiencies to two-bedrooms with two baths. Austerity and economy prevailed through the end of the Great Depression; instead of formal dining rooms, dining alcoves opened directly into the living rooms. Diagonal living rooms in sixteen tiers are particularly unusual and innovative; at the junction of two wings these directly face the apex of the junction. The outer walls of these living rooms (facing the outside) were designed with a projecting bow or curved bay of glass windows, resulting in increased living room floor space, much greater light, and better ventilation. In addition, the curved bays add interest to the rather plain facade of the building. Because of this design, all of the dining alcoves in these units are wedge-shaped. Other odd angles were used for closet space and are thus not noticeable.

A pleasant amenity originally offered involved five furnished "hotel" rooms, without kitchens, which could be rented for short periods by permanent residents as additional quarters for guests. The Carlyn also contains a basement garage on one level, which opens onto P Street, N. W., with space for 120 cars and a doctor's office with a private entrance from Que Street (to the left of the main entrance). Part of the basement space was originally intended as a public dining room, but World War II labor shortages prevented its ever opening. This space was consequently divided into commercial use during the

war—drugstore, beauty shop, and barbershop—facilities now long since disappeared. Since the public was expected to use the basement hall, its floor and wainscoting were laid in cheerful yellow and tan ceramic tile, an unusually refined feature for an otherwise neglected area in most apartment houses.

The original owner lived in an apartment on the seventh floor from 1941 until 1951, when he purchased a house on Massachusetts Avenue just west of Sheridan Circle. When Gustave Ring moved out, he sold the building to another local investor, Meyer Siegel, whose careful selection of tenants and management set a model for other rental apartment houses. For the following twenty-two years, Siegel constantly improved and renovated the Carlyn. During this time a number of tenants on the top floor were allowed to add private roofdecks, and tenants on the ground level on the rear courtyard added their own private patios and small gardens. The original marquee was removed and replaced by a simple porte-cochère for cars entering the semicircular driveway. Central air conditioning was added, a new lobby desk was installed, the basement commercial space was closed to reduce noise and traffic, new excavation increased garage parking from 120 to ~~149~~ cars, a vestibule was added to the entrance, and the south side of the lobby—which was open to the third-floor corridor—was closed off to provide greater privacy for residents in that area. Siegel's plans for an outdoor swimming pool in the rear courtyard were abandoned, however, when engineers determined that the un-

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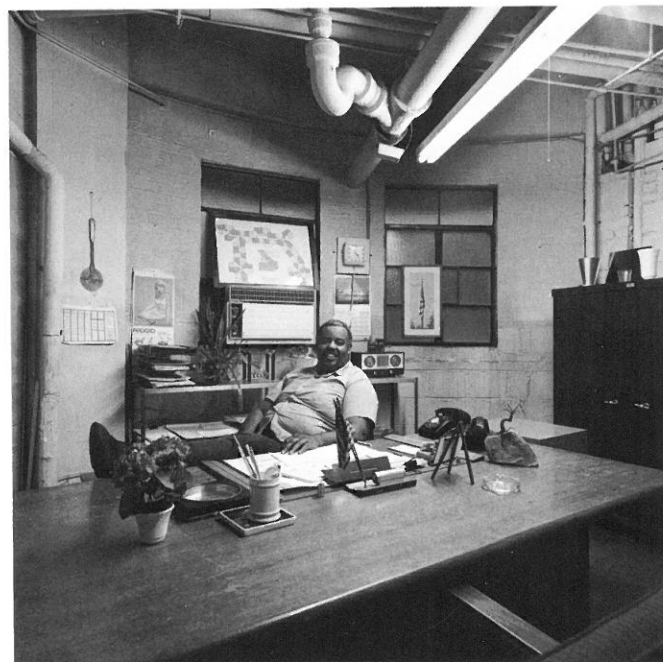




The architect designed the compact kitchens at the Carlyn with sliding cabinet doors to conserve space and to prevent collision with open doors.



This one-bedroom unit at the Carlyn, owned and occupied by Moya King, has a dining alcove completely open to the living room, a feature that became typical of Washington apartment houses beginning in the late 1930s.



Kenneth Gallaway, the head janitor at the Carlyn, relaxes in his basement office.

derground garage ceiling could not support the added weight.

In 1973 Siegel sold the Carlyn to developers who converted it to a condominium. More than 70 percent of the tenants, an unusually high ratio, elected to buy their units. In the conversion process the developer unfortunately redecorated the lobby, painting over the handsome 6-½-foot-wide Art Deco mural on the west wall, eliminated the five guest bedrooms, and renamed the building "Gateway Georgetown."

Over the years the Carlyn has housed many leading political and military notables, including more than two dozen members of Congress. It was featured in several important scenes when Allen Drury's famous novel about political life in Washington, *Advise and Consent*, was made into a movie. A glittering cocktail party was filmed in a beautiful first-floor apartment, and a second scene in the lobby featured Henry Fonda holding court.

In a recent walk through the Carlyn, its architect, Francis L. Koenig, recounted the many trials and tribulations of its construction. During almost all of 1941 Koenig worked simultaneously as construction superintendent for two large Washington apartment houses, the Carlyn and the Dorchester House (which he also designed). Fearful that America's entry into World War II would cause a severe shortage of building materials, he worked on both buildings at a frantic pace, sixteen hours a day, seven days a week, for several months. Although he developed bleeding ulcers and was hospitalized in late summer 1941, he continued to supervise the construction of both buildings by telephone. As a result both were completed ahead of schedule. The completion of the Carlyn in five months set a record for the construction time for a large Washington apartment house that has never been broken.