



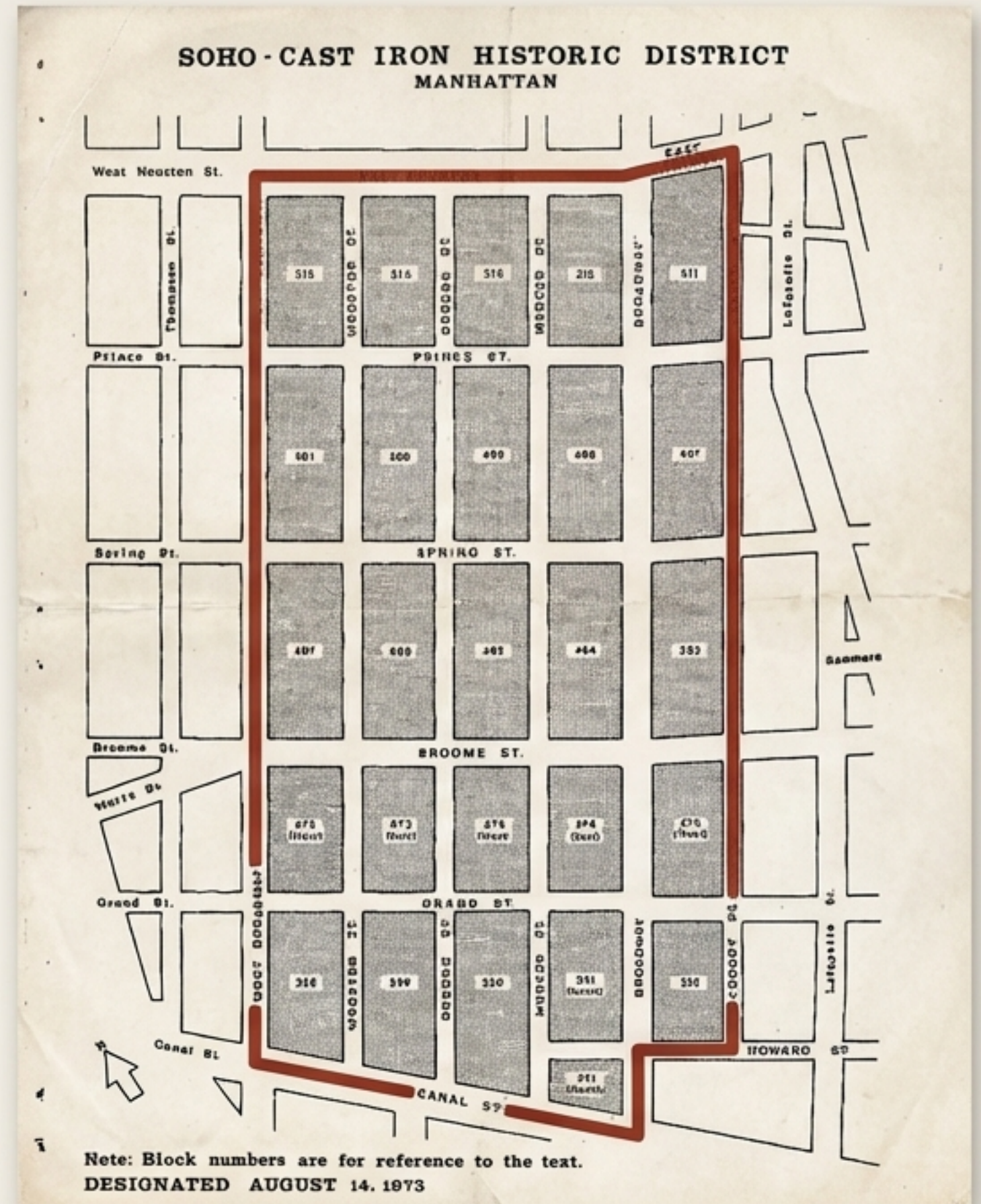
SoHo: Forged in Iron, Saved by Art

Proxima Nova

A Field Guide to the Living History of
New York's Cast-Iron District

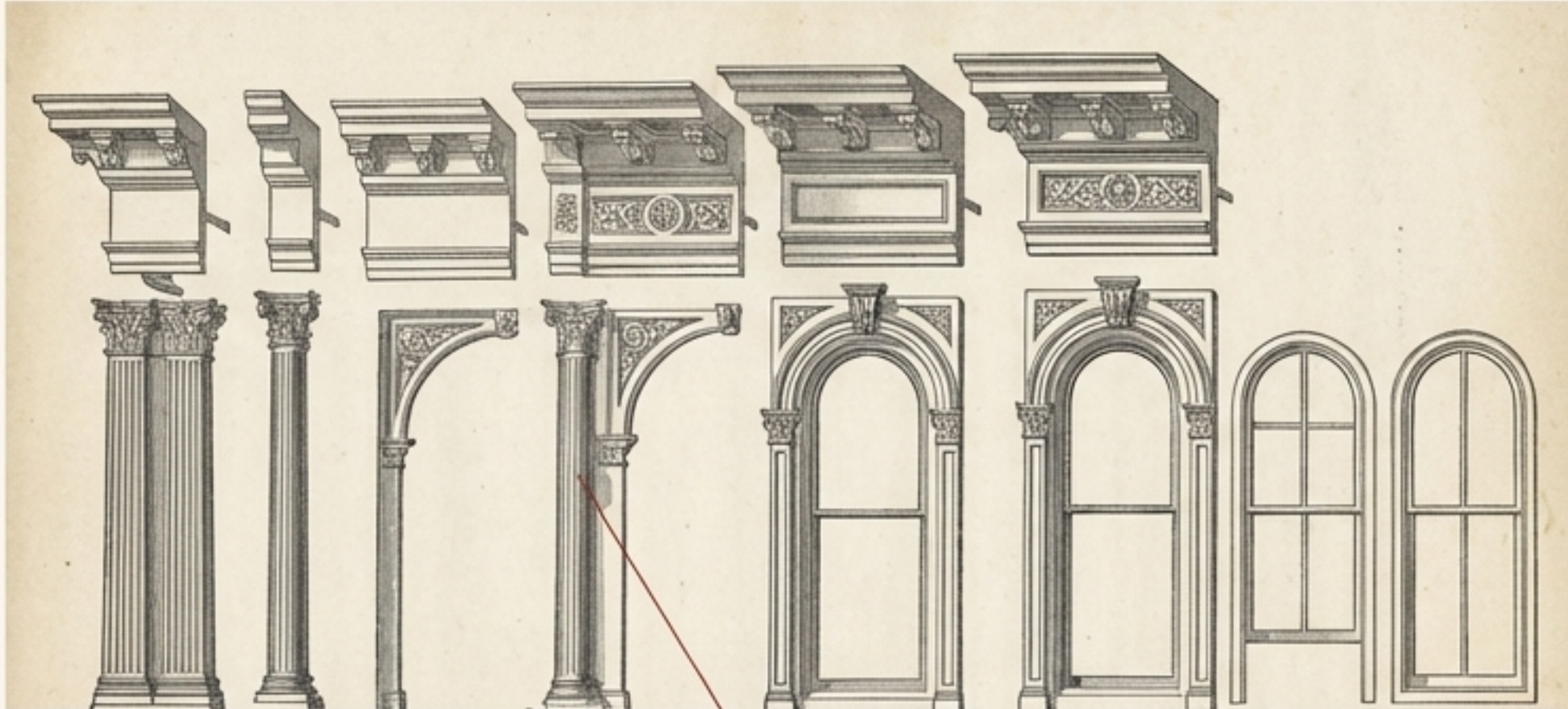
A Neighborhood Defined by History

In 1973, New York City designated a special part of lower Manhattan as the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District, preserving the world's largest collection of this revolutionary 19th-century architecture. This act of preservation is the reason SoHo retains its unique character today. The district stretches from Canal Street to Houston Street between West Broadway and Crosby Street.



The Original Prefab: Palaces of Commerce

In the mid-1800s, SoHo became the heart of New York's mercantile and dry-goods trade. Its growth was powered by cast-iron architecture, a revolutionary building method.



- **Prefabricated:** Entire facades were ordered from catalogs by architects like Daniel D. Badger and James Bogardus, cast in foundries, and assembled on-site.
- **Fast & Affordable:** This process was dramatically **faster and cheaper** than traditional stone carving.
- **Light & Open:** The strength of iron allowed for larger windows, flooding the lofts and showrooms with natural light—a crucial feature for displaying merchandise.



A Forgotten Landscape of Iron and Dust

By the early 20th century, the city's commercial center had moved north, leaving SoHo behind. The report notes, "For the next sixty years, the District lay unchanged and forgotten by the City in a limbo of small industrial and commercial enterprises." The once-grand "palaces of commerce" became home to marginal industries, their ornate facades slowly decaying. The area was at risk of being lost to demolition and redevelopment.



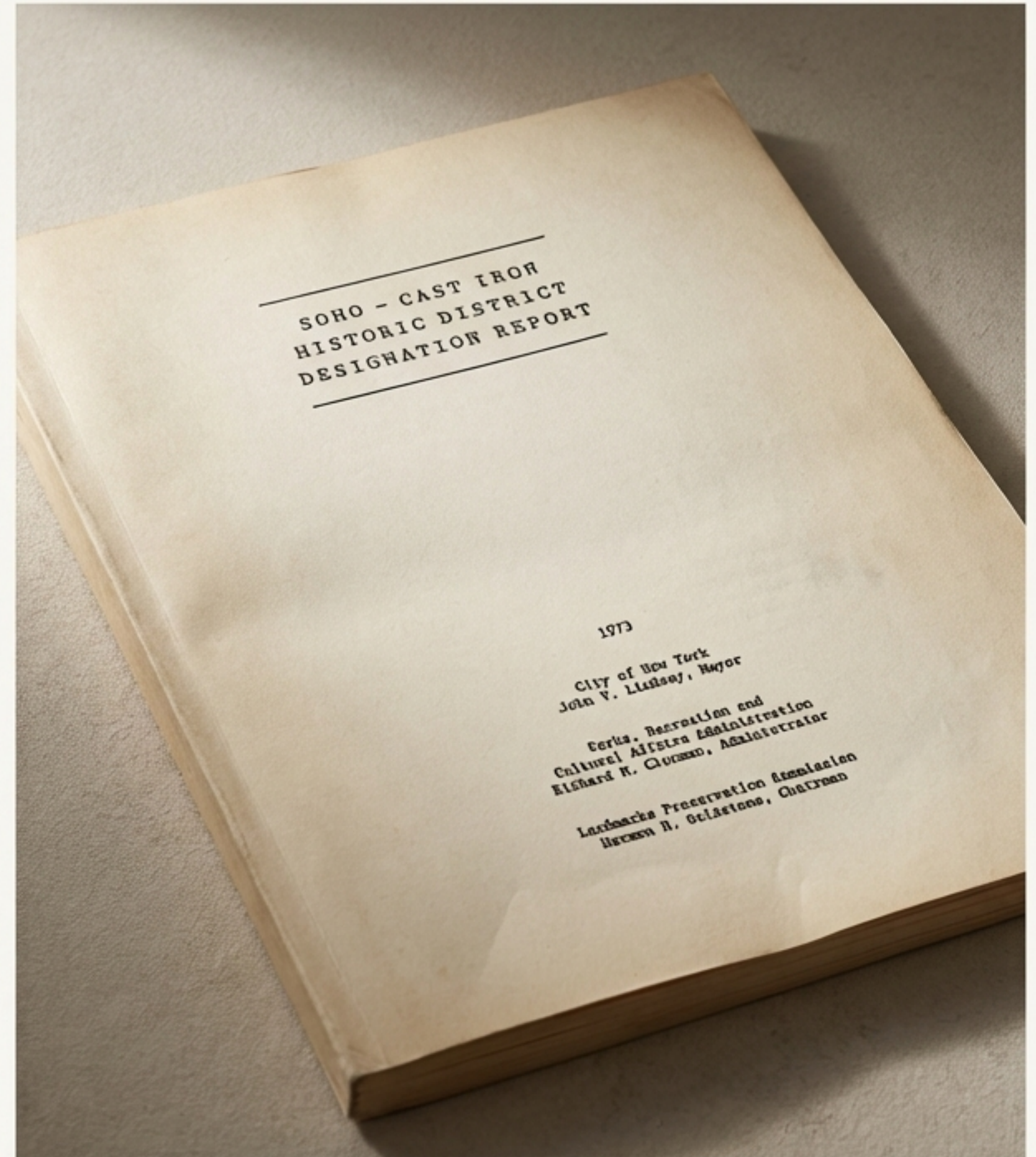
The Unlikely Saviors

A new movement began to stir in the 1960s. The report states this was “surprisingly enough, caused by the trend among artists to paint on larger and larger canvasses.

They were drawn to SoHo for a simple reason: “The high-ceilinged, empty lofts of SoHo provided the large spaces that they needed for their work and the rents were very low.” By colonizing these forgotten spaces, the artists became the catalysts for SoHo’s revival, proving that there were “exciting alternatives to demolition” that could preserve the city’s cultural and historic heritage.

A Living Landmark is Born

The grassroots movement to save the neighborhood culminated on August 14, 1973, when the Landmarks Preservation Commission officially designated the SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District. This pivotal act legally protected the “unique concentration of structures of great historic significance” and ensured its survival for future generations. The landmark status preserved the architectural canvas that makes today’s SoHo possible.



Where History Meets the High Street

Today, SoHo is a world-famous destination where history is alive. The 19th-century cast-iron buildings that were once factories and warehouses are now home to a vibrant mix of trendy upscale boutiques and international retailers. In keeping with the historic building stock, these businesses occupy the ground floors of the classic loft buildings, creating one of the most unique shopping environments in the world. Bars and restaurants are prevalent throughout the neighborhood, making it a hub of activity day and night.



Shopping & Dining Hotspots

Notable concentrations of bars and restaurants can be found along:

- Lafayette Street
- Great Jones Street
- Bond Street
- West Broadway

The neighborhood's world-class shopping is centered on Broadway, Prince, and Spring Streets.

Excellent Transit Access



Key subway stations serving the area include:

- B** Broadway–Lafayette St/Bleecker St (B/D/F/M, 6)
- A** Canal St (A/C/E, N/Q/R/W, J/Z, 6)
- 1** Houston St (1)
- W** Prince St (N/R/W)
- 6** Spring St (C/E, 6)

The Story is Written in Iron

"By the 1890s and early 1900s, skyscrapers ten or more stories high were being built with shored within the SoHo-Cast Iron District, and though they literally can look down on the five- and six-story cast-iron structures around them, they are actually the direct descendants of their modest neighbors."

— SoHo-Cast Iron Historic District
Designation Report, 1973