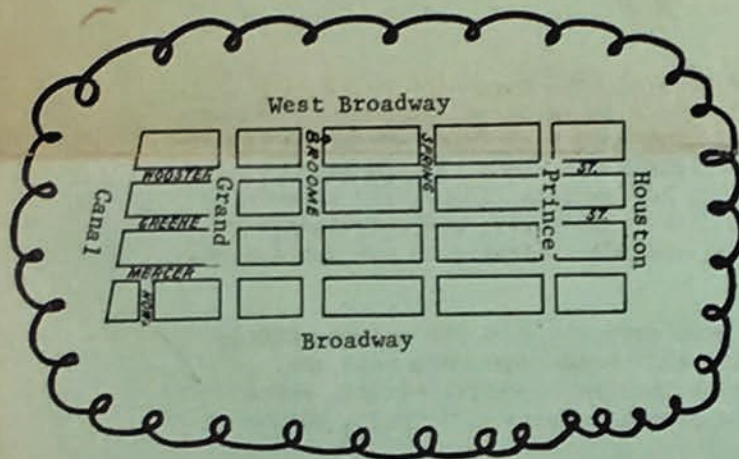


# CAST- IRON BUILDINGS IN SOHO



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In the age of the industrial revolution, cast iron was one of the most important and controversial of building materials. It provided bridges for the railways, ornate furniture for Victorian parlors, and pot-bellied stoves for Western cabins. In New York

City, more than anywhere else in the world, it was used in facades for the city's growing business district.

The SOHO district took its present form after the Civil War when the area, which had till then been the nation's leading red-light district, was rebuilt to serve the city's expanding drygoods trade. Major retail firms settled on Broadway, while wholesale firms filled the sidestreets. A cast-iron front could provide a businessman with ample window space, while at the same time satisfying his desires for economy and florid decoration.

Such a material as cast iron could not have been used so extensively without provoking argument. Critics who shared in the cult of beauty and sought the return of the medieval craftsman were usually glum about cast iron; they are typified by Oscar Wilde who, on his American tour, complained testily about "the Corinthian chimney pots visible on your Broadway." But, with the triumph of functional styles, critics came to recognize that the architects of lower Manhattan had pointed the way toward the great architectural achievements of the twentieth century.

## BROADWAY, starting at Canal Street, north to Houston

427-429 Broadway, SW corner of Broadway and Howard. The A.J. Dittenhofer Building. 1871. Thomas R. Jackson. The great success of this block quite outshines its more ordinary southern neighbors at 424 and 425 Broadway. Jackson took full advantage of his corner site for a display of slightly florid but still effective decoration.

444, 446, 448, 450 and 452 Broadway. There are five buildings here, all erected in 1876. The middle three form a single design unit, while the outer extremities at 444 and 452 are perfect twins, but are wholly unrelated to the three buildings between them. Daniel Badger's catalog for his Architectural Iron Works lists A. Weinman as the architect for Nos. 452 and 454, and describes them as "City Assembly Rooms." Note the old "bishop's crook" street light, also made of cast iron, in front of No. 446.

455-457 Broadway. King's Views, a popular New York City guide published in 1892, describes this five-story building as the home of Belding Bros. & Co. "sewing silk business."

462-468 Broadway, NE corner of Broadway and Grand. 1870. Griffith Thomas. An impressive design that gains its effects partly by the bold multiplication of a single design unit and partly by diminishing the scale of the upper stories so that the building appears taller and less box-like than it really is.

477-479 Broadway.

478-482 Broadway. The Roosevelt Building. 1874. Richard Morris Hunt. Here there is no pretense of great columns supporting a heavy cornice; instead, the stress is all on the natural lightness of the material.

483-485 Broadway.

488-492 Broadway, NE corner of Broadway and Broome. The Haughwout Building. 1857. This is the first iron facade to be officially declared a landmark. James van Derpool has called this the Parthenon of cast-iron buildings, while Ada Louise Huxtable said: "The Haughwout Store's iron elegance contained all the seeds of the future; its metal facade was to lead, in turn, to the metal frame; the elevator, combined with the metal frame, was to produce the skyscraper; and its repetitive Palladian rhythms were to become the basis of today's aesthetic of pre-fabricated, mass produced, structural units."

503-511 Broadway. 1879. The capitals have been stripped from the columns and in spots you can still see the holes left by the bolt heads that once held the acanthus leaves in place. This structure goes through to Mercer Street, where the first floor only is cast iron. Note the street numbers - 74, 76, 78, 80 and 82 - also in cast iron.

517-519 Broadway. A handsome use of cast-iron columns and red brick.

537-541 Broadway. 1868. This commercial palazzo is topped with five cast-iron urns with flame finials.

545 Broadway. The slender width, the sixth floor instead of the usual five, and the diminished scale of the upper stories make this structure seem taller than it really is.

550 Broadway. Look carefully, for the understated charm of this graceful structure is easily lost. A cast-iron trade mark on the building credits the casting to Cornell's Ironworks.

555 Broadway. The Rouse Building. 1889-1900. One of the tallest cast-iron fronts and one of the last to be erected. The aggressive, busy facade reflects the man who sponsored it. Charles Rouse was a southerner who began his career with thousands of dollars of ante-bellum debts hanging over his head. He was so proud of his success that he adopted Broadway as his middle name.

561 Broadway. The Little Singer Building. 1907. Ernest Flagg. Not cast iron, it might be said that this gracious curtain wall of steel, glass and terra cotta represents the kind of structural thinking pioneered by Bogardus, Badger and others.

600 Broadway, SE corner of Broadway and Houston. Ca. 1886. Corinthian columns of descending height on each successive floor.

Mercer Street, from Canal Street north to Houston

- 11 Mercer Street.
- 17 Mercer Street. Note the Corinthian pillars inside.
- 18 Mercer Street. 1876.
- 47 Mercer Street. 1872. Aetna Iron Works marker.
- 50 Mercer Street.
- 55 Mercer Street. 1871.
- 69 Mercer Street. 1876.
- 73-77 Mercer Street.
- 74-82 Mercer Street. First floor of this five-story brick building is splendidly done in cast iron. It's the rear of 503-511 Broadway.
- 83 Mercer Street. 1872.
- 84-88 Mercer Street.
- 85-87 Mercer Street.
- 107 Mercer Street. Excelsior Iron Works marker.

- 110-112 Mercer Street. 1868. This building runs through the block and presents a similar, but somewhat more ornate, facade at 537-41 Broadway. Cast-iron techniques allowed the architect to order the same Corinthian columns from the iron works, but left him free to vary other elements.
- 111 Mercer Street. 1878.
- 116 Mercer Street. 1884-85.
- 121 Mercer Street. 1876-77.
- 142-144 Mercer Street. 1880.
- 150-152 Mercer Street. Marker: C.R. Jackson Co., 201 Centre Street.
- 165 Mercer Street. 1885. Probably the only garage in town with graceful Grecian pillars.

#### Greene Street, from Canal to Houston

- 8 Greene Street. 1884. John B. Snook.
- 10-12 Greene Street. 1869. John B. Snook.
- 16-18 Greene Street. 1880. Samuel A. Warner. He was the architect of the Marble Collegiate Church at Fifth Avenue and 29th Street.
- 15-17 Greene Street. 1895. Samuel A. Warner.
- 19-21 Greene Street. 1872. Henry Fernbach. He was the architect of the Central Synagogue, also built in 1872.
- 20-26 Greene Street. 1880. Samuel A. Warner.
- 23-25 Greene Street. 1873. J. F. Duckworth. Aetna Iron Works marker.
- 27 Greene Street. 1871. W. Jose.
- 28-30 Greene Street. 1876. Da Cunha.
- 31 Greene Street. 1877. C. W. Romeyn. This structure has a twin around the corner at 74 Grand Street.
- 32 Greene Street. 1873. J. F. Duckworth.
- 34 Greene Street. 1873. Charles Wright.
- 37-43 Greene Street. 1884. R. Berger.
- 45 Greene Street. 1882. J. M. Slade.
- 62-64 Greene Street. 1873. Henry Fernbach.
- 66-68 Greene Street. 1873. John B. Snook.
- 65 Greene Street. 1873. John B. Snook.
- 67-71 Greene Street. 1873. Henry Fernbach.
- 72-76 Greene Street. 1873. J.F. Duckworth. The king of this block. Projecting pedimented porch of magnificent Corinthian columns and pilasters.
- 78 Greene Street. 1873. Van Anken. Cast iron with brick and stone.
- 75-7, 81 Greene Street. 1876-78. Henry Fernbach.
- 80-82 Greene Street. 1873. Griffith Thomas.
- 93-99 Greene Street. 1881. Henry Fernbach. Composite capitals support window heads like those at Kips Bay Plaza.
- 96 Greene Street. 1879. Henry Fernbach.
- 98-100 Greene Street. 1880. Henry Fernbach.
- 103-105 Greene Street. 1879. Henry Fernbach.
- 110-112 Greene Street. 1884. Henry Fernbach. Note handsome pillars inside.
- 114-120 Greene Street. 1882. Henry Fernbach.
- 121-123 Greene Street. 1883. Henry Fernbach.
- 125 Greene Street.
- 127 Greene Street.
- 130 Greene Street.
- 132-140 Greene Street. 1885. Adolph Zucker.
- 135-137 Greene Street. 1883. Henry Fernbach.
- 142-144 Greene Street. 1871. Henry Fernbach.

#### • Wooster Street

- Only three cast-iron facades here: No. 2 was constructed in 1871; No. 62 in 1872-73, and No. 147 in 1876.

#### West Broadway

The important street numbers here are 380, 386-88, 392-94 (constructed in 1872), 422, and 427-29.