

BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

WESTBETH (AKA WESTERN ELECTRIC COMPANY BUILDINGS, AKA BELL TELEPHONE LABORATORIES)

463 WEST STREET (AKA 445-465 WEST STREET, 137-169 BANK STREET, 51-77 BETHUNE STREET, 734-754 WASHINGTON STREET)

The complex of buildings bounded by West, Bethune, Washington and Bank Streets in Manhattan's Far West Village is highly significant both as the former telecommunications laboratory of one of the oldest and most prestigious American industrial research institutions and, later, as the first federally-subsidized artists' housing project in the United States.

Built in various stages, the complex consists of five buildings that occupy an entire city block: 445-453 West Street built c. 1861 as a wood-planing mill; 455-465 West Street (1896-99) and 734-742 Washington Street (1899-1900), both designed by Cyrus L. W. Eidlitz as factories for the Western Electric Company; 744-754 Washington Street (1924-26), designed by McKenzie, Voorhees & Gmelin for Bell Telephone Laboratories; and 151-153 Bank Street (1929), designed by engineer Warren B. Sanford as an experimental motion picture sound stage.

From 1899 to 1966, the complex was occupied by the American Telegraph and Telephone Company's (AT&T) manufacturing branch Western Electric and later their research branch Bell Labs. Many important inventions were made here, including the transistor, television, radar, and a device that brought sound to the movies.

From 1968-70, the entire complex was converted into artists' residences and work space known as Westbeth; acclaimed architect Richard Meier designed 383 studio units at 455-465 West Street and an entrance courtyard at 155-168 Bank Street. Westbeth was conceived by Roger Stevens, the first chairman of the National Endowment for the Arts, as the largest government-subsidized artists' colony in the world. Artists and their families also benefited from on-site gallery and performance spaces, offices and theatrical facilities. Until Westbeth, low-cost housing of this kind had only been available in Europe, and its presence in New York City, where rents were increasing drastically beyond the means of an artist's income, was vital. The complex continues to serve working artists today.

BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN



BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN



BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN



BOROUGH OF MANHATTAN

