NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT
PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

SUBMIT ALL ATTACHED MATERIALS ON PAPER AND IN ELECTRONIC FORM ON CD (MS WORD FORMAT)

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1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE (must comply with a Board of Revision of Taxes address)

Street address: **100 S. Independence Mall West**

Postal code: **19106** Councilmanic District: **1st District**

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2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: **Rohm & Haas Building**

Common Name: **Dow Building**

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3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☒ Building ☐ Structure ☐ Site ☐ Object

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4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: ☒ excellent ☐ good ☐ fair ☐ poor ☐ ruins

Occupancy: ☒ occupied ☐ vacant ☐ under construction ☐ unknown

Current use: Mixed Use Office/Commercial

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5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

SEE ATTACHED

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6. DESCRIPTION

SEE ATTACHED

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7. SIGNIFICANCE

Period of Significance (from year to year): **1965**

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: **1963-1965**

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: **Pietro Belluschi, George M. Ewing Company**

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan:

Original owner: **Rohm & Haas Company**

Other significant persons: **F. Otto Haas**

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

☒ (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,

☐ (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,

☒ (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,

☒ (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,

☒ (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,

☒ (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,

☒ (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,

☒ (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,

☐ (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or

☒ (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

SEE ATTACHED

9. NOMINATOR

Name with Title: **Benjamin Leech, consultant** Email: **bentleech@gmail.com**

Organization: **Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia** Date: **May 23, 2016**

Street Address: **1608 Walnut Street, Suite 804** Telephone: **(215) 546-1146**

City, State, and Postal Code: **Philadelphia, PA 19103**

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: 28 June 2016

☑ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 29 August 2016

Date of Notice Issuance: 30 August 2016

Property Owner at Time of Notice

Name: KPG-IMW Owner, LLC c/o Keystone Property Group

Address: One Presidential Blvd, Suite 300

City: Bala Cynwyd State: PA Postal Code: 19004

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: _____

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: _____

Date of Final Action: _____

☐ Designated ☐ Rejected

5. Boundary Description

Beginning at a point at the intersection of the northerly side of Ranstead Street (36.00 feet wide at this point) at the westerly side of the former Marshall Street (stricken and vacated from the City Plan):

Thence along the westerly side of the former Marshall Street along lands now or formerly of the City of Philadelphia - Atwater Kent Museum (13-17 S. 7th Street) and then along lands now or formerly of Richard Bascino (618-34 Market Street), North 7°55’12” East, a distance of 298.22 feet to a point on the southerly side of Market Street (100 feet wide at this point);

Thence along the southerly side of Market Street, South 82°38’54” East, a distance of 222.96 feet to a point on the westerly side of Independence Mall West (formerly known as 6th Street);

Thence along the westerly side of Independence Mall West, South 7°54’54” West, a distance of 298.53 feet to a point on the northerly side of the aforementioned Ranstead Street;

Thence along the northerly side of Ranstead Street, North 82°24’10” West, a distance of 222.98 feet to the point of beginning.

6. Description

The Rohm & Haas Building is a modern, nine-story office building designed by architect Pietro Belluschi in collaboration with the George M. Ewing Company [Fig. 1]. Completed in 1965, the building occupies a prominent corner lot at the southwest corner of Market Street and Independence Mall West (formerly 6th Street) in Center City Philadelphia, facing and immediately opposite Independence Mall, the Liberty Bell Center, and the President's House Memorial [Fig. 2]. Rectangular in plan and elevation, the building has a reinforced concrete frame with an exterior envelope of exposed concrete, glass, acrylic Plexiglas, and anodized aluminum. It sits on a raised granite plinth, with its primary east elevation set slightly back from Independence Mall West. Its north elevation faces Market Street and its south elevation faces Ranstead Street. Its rear west elevation faces a narrow pedestrian plaza occupying a vacated right-of-way formerly designated as Marshall Street [Figs. 3-5].

The base of the building is split into two glass-enclosed ground-floor pavilions separated by a central open colonnade connecting Independence Mall West to the rear plaza [Fig. 6]. The building's upper floors cantilever out over these pavilions, supported by a regular grid of prismoidal, poured-in-place concrete columns. Each column tapers inward as it rises before flaring outward into an oversized inverted pyramid capital. These capitals join to form a folded soffit pattern along the building's perimeter and a vaulted, faceted ceiling surface across the central colonnade and pavilion interiors. Full-height glazing spans between columns around the building's perimeter and through the colonnade. Visible from the building's exterior, interior lobby walls are lined in vertical teak wood battens; this treatment also continues across two facing wall panels at the middle of the exterior colonnade. Prismoidal anodized aluminum sconces mounted to these wall panels light the vaulted ceiling [Fig. 8].

The building's upper stories are wrapped in an anodized aluminum lattice-like grid mounted to cantilevered, porch-like concrete slabs at each floor level. On the east, south, and west elevations, this framework supports bronze-hued, translucent corrugated acrylic Plexiglas brise-

soleil screens [Fig. 10]. Approximately four feet behind this semi-open grid, the building's main exterior envelope features fixed-pane aluminum-framed windows grouped into six-light bays separated by slim concrete mullions. Each bay is centered over a ground-floor column; the longer east and west elevations are each nine bays wide, while the shorter north and south elevations are five bays wide. Opaque brown Plexiglas spandrel panels sit above and below each window band. The building's flat slab roof features a short, unfenestrated concrete mechanical penthouse set back from all four elevations. The far northwest corner of the penthouse features sign panels for the building's current main tenant, the Dow Chemical Company, facing north and east.

The building's main entrance is located in the easternmost south-facing bay of the north pavilion. It features a pair of revolving metal and glass doors flanking a set of double-leaf glass and metal swing doors. A "Dow Chemical Company" sign panel spans the doorway. Opposite this entranceway, across the central colonnade, is the main entrance to the south pavilion. Its two pairs of double-leaf glass and metal doors, one of which has been modified into a single-leaf door and flanking sidelight, are not currently operable from the exterior. Originally this space was occupied by a Fidelity Philadelphia Trust Company bank branch, but is not currently leased to a commercial tenant. A variety of auxiliary entrances exist in their original locations, some with modified door configurations, around the periphery of each ground-floor pavilion [Fig. 7].

The building's raised plinth was originally accessed from the surrounding sidewalk level by four sets of granite steps, two primary (one centered along Independence Mall West in front of the open colonnade, and one other in line with the rear courtyard along Market Street) and two auxiliary (one connecting the rear plaza to 7th Street via a pedestrian walkway and one serving Ranstead Street). The plinth featured a grid of landscaped planting beds along the building's perimeter. A small fountain in the rear plaza included artist Clark B. Fitz-Gerald's 1965 bronze and stainless steel sculpture *Milkweed Pod*. Three original plinth steps and the sculpture survive

intact, though the original landscaping plan has been modified. An ADA-compliant concrete ramp at the corner of Independence Mall West replaced the Ranstead Street steps in 2009.

Minor alterations to the ground floor and original site plan have accompanied the recent (2014-15) incorporation of two new commercial tenants into the building's ground floor: the Independence Beer Garden in the outdoor areas surrounding the south pavilion and the La Colombe cafe occupying portions of the north pavilion lobby. For the latter, a new single-leaf glass and metal doorway was inserted into the northernmost bay of the east elevation, and a new stairway was cut into the northeast corner of the raised plinth, with granite treads and bronze and wood handrails detailed to match the building's existing stairways [Fig. 11]. Alterations accompanying the Independence Beer Garden were more extensive, but in general do not physically alter or damage original building fabric. Wood and metal trellises, benches, seating, and bar structures now occupy the southern half of the raised plinth area and portions of the central colonnade, while the rear plaza is partially filled with storage containers and other temporary structures [Figs. 12-13]. Another recent alteration involved the creation of a new public parking garage in the building's basement, accessed via an original loading ramp off Ranstead Street that runs beneath the rear plaza. This alteration had no significant exterior impact.

Figure 1: Rohm & Haas Building, 1965, with Independence Mall in foreground. Lawrence S. Williams Collection, The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

Figure 2: Rohm & Haas Building, 2014, with Independence Mall at right and Market Street in foreground. Photo courtesy of Bradley Maule.

Figure 3: Market Street (north) elevation and rear courtyard (west) elevation, 2016.

Figure 4: Independence Mall West (east) elevation and Ranstead Street (south) elevation, 2016.

Figure 5: Ranstead Street (south) elevation and rear courtyard (west) elevation, 2016.

Figure 6: East elevation detail, 2016, with colonnade at center.

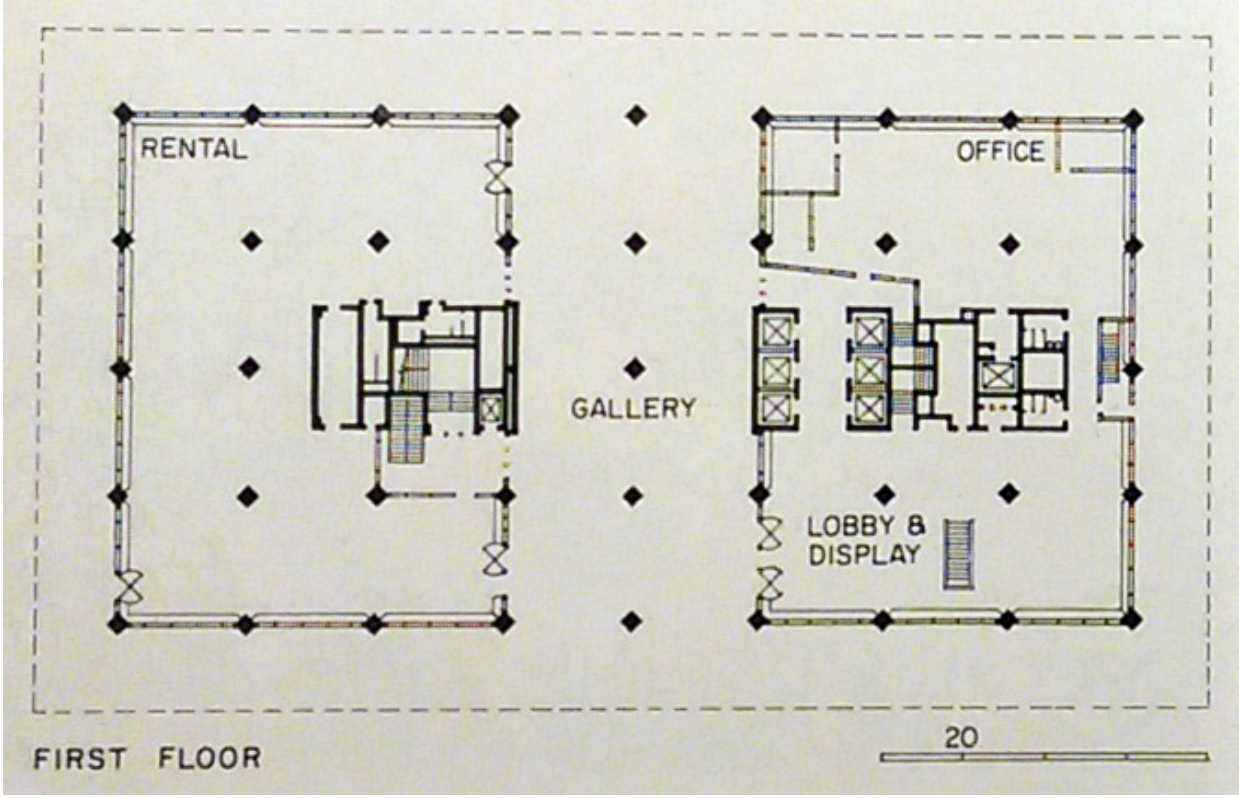

Figure 7: Original ground floor plan, Independence Mall West at bottom. Architectural Record, *January 1966.*

Figure 8: Colonnade looking east from rear plaza, 2016. Teak wall panel and anodized aluminum wall sconces visible on the right. Non-original commercial alterations visible at right.

Figure 9: Colonnade prior to commercial alterations. Photo courtesy of Bradley Maule, 2014..

Figure 10:Typical brise soleil and façade detail, southeast corner. Photo courtesy of Bradley Maule, 2014.

Figure 11: New stairway (c.2015) at northeast corner.

Figure 12: Milkweed Pod *(1965) in rear plaza, prior to commercial alterations. Photo courtesy of Bradley Maule, 2014.*

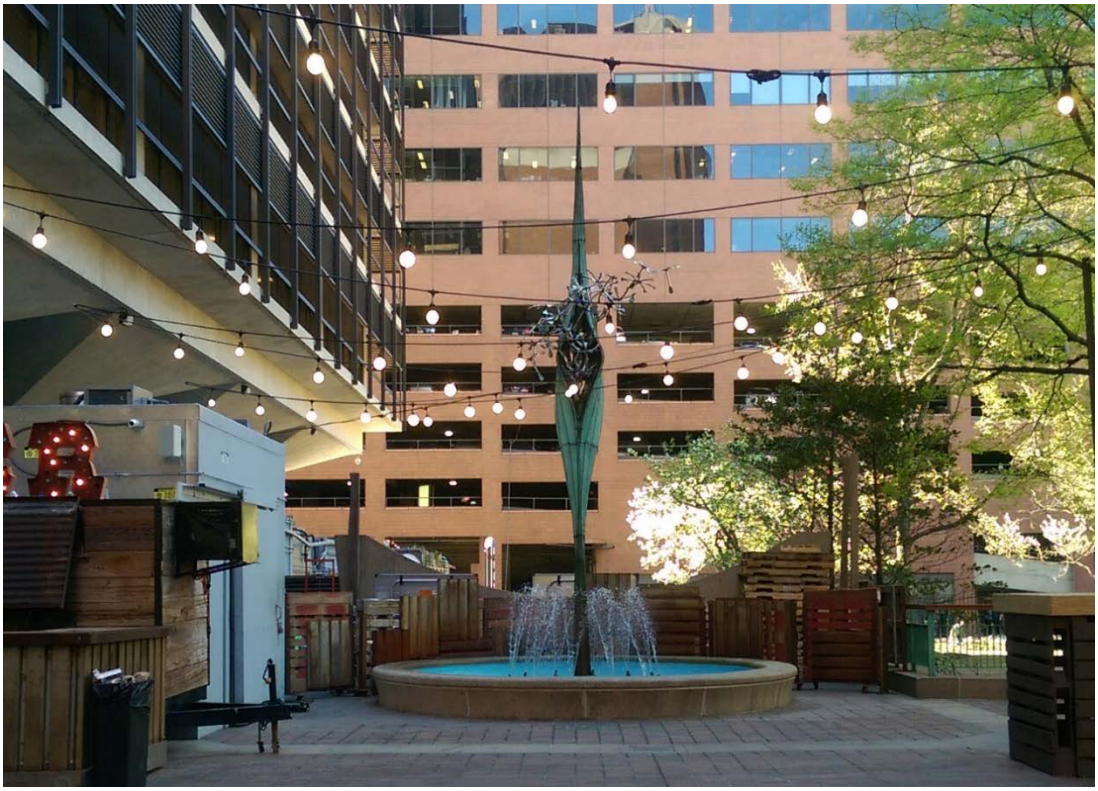

Figure 13: Milkweed Pod *and rear plaza, 2016.*

7. Significance

The Rohm & Haas Building, a nine-story office block designed by Pietro Belluschi in collaboration with the George M. Ewing Company, is an architecturally and historically significant modernist icon commissioned by one of twentieth-century Philadelphia's leading corporations, the specialty chemical manufacturer Rohm & Haas Company. Developed in close cooperation with the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority and the Philadelphia City Planning Commission under Edmund Bacon, the Rohm & Haas corporate headquarters was the first new building to be constructed along the recently-cleared Independence Mall. The building broke ground in 1963 and was completed in 1965; in 2007, at only 42 years of age, it was individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places "for its exceptional importance in the area of architecture as one of Philadelphia's premier examples of the modern movement style of architecture and the work of a nationally significant architect."[1] The Rohm & Haas Building likewise merits listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, meeting the following eight criteria as established by Philadelphia's Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 14-1000 (1):

> A: Has significant character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth, or nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past;
>
> C: Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style;
>
> D: Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen;
>
> E: Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or professional engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth, or nation;
>
> F: Contains elements of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship that represent a significant innovation;

[1] Hamilton, Cynthia Rose. "Rohm and Haas Corporate Headquarters," National Register of Historic Places Registration Form. December 20, 2006, Section 8, p. 1.

G: Is part of or related to a square, park, or other distinctive area that should be preserved according to a historic, cultural, or architectural motif;

H: Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community, or City;

and

J: Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social, or historical heritage of the community.

The Rohm & Haas Company

The Rohm & Haas Company originated in 1907 as a partnership between businessman Otto Haas (1872-1960) and chemist Otto Röhm (1876-1939) in Esslingen, Germany following Röhm's discovery of a synthetic substitute for animal dung used in the tanning of leather. At that time, Philadelphia was a major producer of "kid," a soft, thin type of goat leather popular for gloves and shoes; recognizing the potential of this burgeoning market, Otto Haas traveled to Philadelphia in 1909 to establish an American office for their young enterprise. Röhm remained in Germany to focus on the European market, and while the two remained friends and collaborators for the rest of their lives, the partnership eventually evolved into two independent corporations: the American Rohm & Haas Company and the German Röhm and Haas A.G.[2]

Over the course of the twentieth century, the Philadelphia-based Rohm & Haas Company grew to become one of the world's leading specialty chemical manufacturers, diversifying beyond its historic roots in the tanning industry and into the rapidly-expanding field of synthetic plastics. Its best-known and most successful product, acrylic Plexiglas, was initially developed in the

[2] Blaszczyk, Regina Lee. *Rohm and Haas: A Century of Innovation.* Bainbridge Island, Wash: Fenwick, 2009, pp. 16-24; Hochheiser, Sheldon. *Rohm and Haas: History of a Chemical Company.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986, pp. 75-6.

1930s as a moldable, shatterproof glass substitute for the automobile industry and home furnishings, but soon proved indispensable (and extremely profitable) in the manufacture of airplane cockpit and gun turret canopies during World War II. Following the war, Rohm & Haas successfully rebranded Plexiglas for a variety of other applications, including illuminated sign panels, architectural glazing and cladding, automotive components, etc., while simultaneously developing a number of other specialized chemical products used in the manufacture of acrylic paints and coatings, electronics, personal care products, pesticides, and assorted other applications.[3]

Under Otto Haas' half-century of leadership, Rohm & Haas grew from a small loft in Old City to a large multinational corporation with manufacturing plants on four continents and a bustling Philadelphia headquarters that filled four buildings on Washington Square. When Haas retired as president and C.E.O. on New Year's Eve 1959, the company boasted ten thousand employees worldwide and annual sales of $200 million.[4] He passed away only two days later, transferring control of the company to his son, F. Otto Haas, and leaving much of his estate to the Phoebe Waterman Foundation, a charity he and his wife established in 1945. This would later become the William Penn Foundation, a major civic and philanthropic leader in Philadelphia to this day.[5]

F. Otto Haas (1916-1994) served as president and C.E.O. until 1970 and remained on the board until 1984; his younger brother John C. Haas (1918-2011) was named executive vice president in 1960 and served on the board until his retirement in 1988, including four years (1974-1978) as chairman. Both men were also passionate philanthropists and civic leaders; among many other interests, F. Otto Haas chaired the Philadelphia Historical Commission from 1972 to 1986 and spearheaded the preservation of the Walnut Street Theater, Morris Arboretum, and many other Philadelphia landmarks, while John C. Haas was an early supporter of Rev. Leon Sullivan's Opportunities Industrialization Center, was active with the Boys and Girls Club, and helped found the Chemical Heritage Foundation. Both men donated millions of dollars to arts,

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[3] Blaszczyk, pp. 61-79.
[4] Hochheiser, p. 119.
[5] "History and Heritage," http://www.williampennfoundation.org/history-and-heritage

heritage, social services, and environmental organizations across the city through the William Penn Foundation and other Haas family charities.[6]

Under the Haas brothers' leadership, the Rohm & Haas Company underscored its commitment to the city of Philadelphia at a time when many other businesses were decamping to the suburbs. Having long outgrown its Washington Square site and with rented offices in nearly a dozen more buildings scattered across Center City, the company announced plans in 1961 for a state-of-the-art office building on Independence Mall to house their 1,000-employee corporate headquarters.[7] Completed in 1965, the building became an instant point of civic pride and a symbol of Philadelphia's national reputation for ambitious urban renewal efforts under Edmund Bacon and the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, which sought to stem the tide of disinvestment and job losses that plagued Philadelphia and other urban cores in the decades following the Great Depression and World War II. When the new Rohm & Haas project was announced, John C. Haas famously stated, "This city may— or may not— survive. But if companies like Rohm & Haas desert it, then surely the city will not survive!"[8]

Urban renewal and the creation of Independence Mall

The Rohm & Haas move was major validation for redevelopment efforts in the blocks surrounding Independence Hall, which prior to World War II had grown into of a densely-packed neighborhood of mostly nineteenth-century commercial and light-industrial buildings [Fig. 14]. As early as 1915, various plans for open parkland around Independence Hall were discussed and debated by local architects and officials, but it wasn't until the founding of the Independence Hall Association in 1942 that lobbying for a major urban intervention began in

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[6] Jaffe, Mark. "F. Otto Haas, Industrialist, Philanthropist, Dead at 78," *Philadelphia Inquirer,* Jan. 4, 1994; Morrison, John F. "Chemical Heir John C. Haas, Who Gave Away Millions to Charities, Dies at 92," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 5, 2011;
[7] "Offices Planned in Philadelphia," *New York Times,* Feb. 27, 1961; Hochheiser, p. 134.
[8] *Elegance on the Mall: The Rohm and Haas Corporate Headquarters Building.* Philadelphia: Rohm & Haas Company, 2007.

Figure 14: Independence Hall and surrounding neighborhood, looking north, c.1950. Arrow points to approximate site of the Rohm & Haas Building. Photo courtesy of Independence National Historical Park.

Figure 15: Independence Mall Redevelopment Plan, 1960, Harbeson, Hough, Livingston & Larson

earnest. Association president Edwin O. Lewis and his allies argued that the hodge-podge commercial character of the neighborhood was an unbecoming backdrop for such an important historic landmark, and that the surrounding buildings were obsolete fire hazards and a source of crippling blight and congestion. Influenced by Beaux Arts landscape principles and the "make no small plans" ethos of the City Beautiful movement, architect Roy F. Larson's 1937 speculative plan for a five-block promenade north of Independence Hall was adopted as the new group's vision for what would eventually become, with major and minor revisions, the master plan for Independence Mall. In 1945, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania approved legislation establishing Independence Mall State Park between Chestnut, Race, Fifth and Sixth Streets, and one hundred and forty-three buildings—the three entire city blocks immediately north of Independence Hall— were eventually acquired and razed through eminent domain. Construction of the park itself occurred in phases between 1952 and 1969, following revised designs by Roy F. Larson and his firm Harbeson, Hough, Livingston and Larson.[9]

While the initial impetus for Independence Mall was rooted in patriotic reverence and concern for Independence Hall itself, its most persuasive supporters also championed the project's potential to catalyze major reinvestment in the surrounding neighborhood. To this end, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission (established in 1942) and the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority (established in 1945) were both instrumental in the Mall's planning and development. Under Edmund Bacon, the Planning Commission envisioned the Mall as the backbone of an expansive new office district; a 1960 report by Harbeson, Hough, Livingston and Larson proposed long rows of office towers facing the full length of the Mall along Fifth and Sixth Streets [Fig. 15].[10] Of course, this vision would require even more land acquisition and clearance, as the blocks immediately adjacent to the Mall remained densely built up and largely occupied by small retail, wholesale, and manufacturing firms. Accordingly, the Philadelphia

[9] *Cultural Landscape Report: Independence Mall.* Philadelphia: Independence National Historical Park, 1994, pp. 3, 22ff.
[10] *Plan for the Old City: A Report to the Philadelphia City Planning Commission.* Harbeson, Hough, Livingston and Larson, 1960.

Redevelopment Authority began acquiring and consolidating parcels in an effort to attract large-scale investors and office tenants to the area.

The Rohm & Haas Company's relocation to Independence Mall, announced to great fanfare by F. Otto Haas in February 1961, was significant not only for being the first such private investment in the Mall redevelopment area, but also for its close adherence to the Planning Commission's ideal development model in terms of use, site orientation, and building massing. Two years earlier, Rohm & Haas had hired the George M. Ewing Company to remodel and expand their Washington Square headquarters, but early in the design process, it became evident that the constricted site could not accommodate the company's recent growth. With the change in leadership following the death of Otto Haas, the company began to consider alternative sites, including possible relocation to the suburbs, but early meetings with the Planning Commission and the Redevelopment Authority confirmed a strong mutual interest in keeping the company's headquarters in Center City.[11] A deal was soon struck: the Redevelopment Authority would acquire and consolidate a large plot of land for Rohm & Haas on the block bounded by Market, Sixth, Ranstead, and Marshall Street, facing the first completed block of the Mall. The Redevelopment Authority also agreed to purchase Rohm & Haas' existing Washington Square properties for future redevelopment. In exchange, Rohm & Haas agreed to abide by the Planning Commission's vision for the Independence Mall area, essentially becoming a test case and demonstration project. Among the conditions: the new building should be scaled and massed to complement the Mall, its design should be contemporary but not a distraction from Independence Hall, and the site should provide pedestrian access from the Mall to the historic Atwater Kent Museum on the opposite side of the block facing 7th Street— a gesture borrowed from Edmund Bacon's successful pedestrian walkways in Society Hill.[12]

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[11] Hamilton, pp. 8.3-8.6.

[12] "$6 Million Set as Cost in Pilot Project," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Feb. 22, 1961; "Mall Redevelopment Approved," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 8, 1961.

Rohm & Haas enthusiastically endorsed this vision and set about designing its new headquarters with the George M. Ewing Company as architects, while the Redevelopment Authority commenced with the acquisition and demolition of eleven existing buildings in the newly-certified "Independence Mall Redevelopment Area."[13] Initial plans for a fourteen-story, vertically-oriented structure met a lukewarm reception with the Planning Commission, however; in response, Rohm & Haas agreed to retain an "innovative, persuasive, and widely-recognized" consulting architect to assist the Ewing Company. At the suggestion of Rohm & Haas staff architect Stanley Cole, Pietro Belluschi was approached for the position in March 1962. Believing the Independence Mall redevelopment efforts to be "one of the best civic developments in the country," Belluschi enthusiastically agreed to participate, and quickly proposed a redesign with shorter, broader massing more compatible with the historic Curtis Center and Public Ledger Building fronting 6th Street to the south. Belluschi also insisted on a subdued, neutral color palette over the Ewing Company's initial preference for a more colorful facade, while at the same time championing modern materials over a "colonial" brick approach. A fruitful three-way collaboration between Belluschi, Cole, and Alexander Ewing (son of George M. Ewing and head designer for the firm) ensued, and by September 1962, revised plans for the Rohm & Haas Building were presented to and approved by the Redevelopment Authority, the Planning Commission and Art Commission [Fig. 16].[14] Groundbreaking in April 1963 was presided over by F. Otto Haas and Mayor James Tate [Fig. 17].[15]

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[13] *Independence Mall Area Redevelopment Plan,* Philadelphia City Planning Commission, October 1962; "Furniture Firm Battles Plan for Building on Mall," *Philadelphia Inquirer,* Oct. 11, 1961.
[14] Hamilton, pp. 8.5-8.6;
[15] "Ground Broken for Rohm, Haas Headquarters," *Philadelphia Inquirer,* April 16, 1963.

Figure 16: Presentation rendering, c. 1963. George D. McDowell Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Collection, Temple University Libraries, Urban Archives.

Figure 17: F. Otto Haas (left) and Mayor James Tate (right) wield a ceremonial Plexiglas shovel at the groundbreaking ceremony for the Rohm & Haas Building, April 1963. http://mattorourke.net/samples/dow/fromthearchive/photographs.htm

Pietro Belluschi (1899-1994)

At the time of the Rohm & Haas commission, the 63-year-old Belluschi was dean of architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and had recently designed (with Walter Gropius and Emery Roth & Sons) the highly-controversial Pan Am Building in New York City, then the largest office building in the world. A leading proponent and practitioner of modernism, Belluschi first gained national attention with his Equitable Building in Portland, Oregon (1944-1948), one of America's first International-style glass curtain wall office blocks. Credited with more than 1,000 designs over the course of a seven-decade career, Belluschi received the American Institute of Architects' prestigious Gold Medal in 1972 and the National Medal of Arts from the National Endowment for the Arts in 1991. In addition to his large-scale office towers, Belluschi is also widely celebrated for a series of smaller-scale houses and churches that reflected a more intimate, regionally-inspired approach to modernist design.[16] The Rohm & Haas Building is Belluschi's most significant Philadelphia-area work, though he also designed the Temple Adath Israel synagogue in Bala Cynwyd (with Charles Frederick Wise, 1956-7), the parking garage adjacent to the Rohm & Haas Building (with the George M. Ewing Company, 1966), and the University Lutheran Church of the Incarnation (with Alexander Ewing & Associates, 1969) in West Philadelphia.

Belluschi was born in Italy and studied engineering at the University of Rome before attending Cornell University as an international exchange student in the early 1920s. Remaining in the United States following his graduation with a degree in civil engineering, Belluschi eventually settled in Portland, Oregon as a draftsman in the office of A.E. Doyle. He became the firm's chief designer following Doyle's death in 1928; in 1931 he completed the Portland Art Museum, his first high-profile project and a stylistic departure from the firm's typical historicist oeuvre. Growing increasingly attuned through the 1930s and 1940s to the modernist approaches of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius and Le Corbusier, his portfolio of houses, offices,

[16] Goldberger, Paul. "Pietro Belluschi, 94, an Architect of Major Urban Buildings, Dies," *New York Times*, Feb. 16, 1994.

university buildings and shopping centers across the Pacific Northwest eventually attracted a national following. In 1951, M.I.T. selected Belluschi to head its prestigious School of Architecture and Planning, a position he held for fourteen years while also maintaining an active design consulting practice.[17]

Figure 18: Pietro Belluschi (right) and Alexander Ewing (left) during construction of the Rohm & Haas Building, c.1964. Elegance on the Mall. *Philadelphia: Rohm & Haas Company, 2007.*

[17] "Oral History Interview with Pietro Belluschi," Aug. 22-Sept. 4, 1983, Smithsonian Archives of American Art," http://www.aaa.si.edu/collections/interviews/oral-history-interview-pietro-belluschi-11614.

The Rohm & Haas Building: Modernism on the Mall

In addition to the project's high-profile location, Belluschi was attracted to the Rohm & Haas commission by the client's interest in incorporating new and innovative applications for its products, including its signature Plexiglas acrylic plastic.[18] Like many other leading modernists, Belluschi believed in the honest expression of materials and the potential for new twentieth-century building products to inspire new approaches to architecture. Especially after World War Two, historicist styles had fallen decisively out of favor and modern materials replaced traditional ornamentation as the symbolic and literal "face" of contemporary architecture. This instinct dovetailed perfectly with a new generation of corporate patrons who, in the prosperous postwar decades, eagerly embraced modernism's popular associations with progress, efficiency, and ingenuity when commissioning new headquarters; Skidmore, Owings & Merrill's Lever House (New York, 1952) and Inland Steel Building (Chicago, 1957), Harrison & Abramovitz's Alcoa Building (Pittsburgh, 1953), Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building (New York, 1958), and Eero Saarinen's John Deere Headquarters (Moline, Illinois, 1964) stand among the more distinctive corporate commissions of this era. Though each was unique in its own way, all were simple rectangular volumes whose architectural character was conveyed primarily through the straightforward expression of their structural grids— a hallmark of modernism since the emergence of the Chicago School's steel-framed skyscrapers of the late nineteenth century— and the material qualities of their exterior skins. In addition to their functional qualities, cladding materials were chosen to convey corporate identity— sometimes symbolically, sometimes literally. The Seagram Building's bronze mullions and tinted windows were famously intended to invoke the hue of a tumbler full of whiskey, for example, while the John Deere Headquarters' weathered Cor-Ten steel frame consciously recalled the company's rugged steel plows. The Inland Steel and Alcoa buildings were even more direct in their symbolism, putting the companies' own innovative construction materials on bold display.

[18] Hamilton, p. 8.5.

"I am fascinated by the problem of using plastics," Belluschi wrote to Alexander Ewing early in the design process for the Independence Mall headquarters project, following Rohm & Haas's encouragement that Plexiglas— the company's best-known and most profitable product— be incorporated into the building's design.[19] A highly versatile acrylic plastic polymer, Plexiglas could be crystal-clear or tinted in a range of translucent or opaque hues, manufactured in sheets of any thickness, and molded into myriad shapes and textures. Since its discovery in the 1930s, Plexiglas had been promoted by Rohm & Haas for a wide range of applications, but rarely if ever as an architectural cladding material.[20] Eager for new peacetime markets following the extensive use of Plexiglas in the war effort, both Rohm & Haas and Belluschi recognized the project's potential as both a technical proving ground and a promotional showpiece.

The final design incorporated more than 73,000 square feet of Plexiglas in a variety of applications— by far the most ambitious architectural installation of its kind at the time of its construction.[21] Central to Belluschi's design concept was a system of brise-soleils or louvered screens wrapping the facade, designed to reduce solar heat gain and deflect direct sunlight. Though not a wholly original scheme in concept (Saarinen's nearly-contemporaneous John Deere Headquarters shares remarkable formal similarities, for example), Belluschi's application of Plexiglas was unprecedented and innovative. Working closely with Rohm & Haas engineers, the architect studied dozens of custom-fabricated Plexiglas panels of varying hues, textures, thicknesses, and opacities to achieve his desired functional and aesthetic effects.[22] He also specified opaque, flat brown Plexiglas spandrel panels for the window walls behind the bronze-hued screens. At the time of construction, neither application was considered code compliant, which required special approvals from City officials and eventual revisions to the Philadelphia Building Code.[23] In addition to exterior applications, Plexiglas also featured prominently throughout the building's interiors, used functionally and decoratively in its elevator cabs, mail

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[19] Hamilton, p. 8.8.
[20] *Plexiglas: Crystal Clear Plastic (7th Edition).* Philadelphia: Rohm & Haas Company, 1948.
[21] Hamilton, p. 8.12.
[22] Ibid., p. 8.9.
[23] Ibid.

chutes, fluorescent office lights, building directories, doorknobs, kickplates, coat racks, etc. Bellusci also tapped fellow M.I.T. professor and accomplished designer Gyory Kepes to create a set of large, cruciform chandeliers for the building's highly visible ground floor: the fourteen matching fixtures were composed of Plexiglas rods of various lengths and diameters, precisely arranged to showcase the material's unique light-transmitting qualities [Fig. 19]. Other Plexiglas artworks commissioned by Rohm & Haas included two etched murals by Freda Koblick and Shirley Tattersfield and a sculpture by Arturo Cuetara.[24]

Belluschi's design embraced other fundamental modernist principles as well. Nearly four decades earlier, in 1926, Le Corbusier published "Five Points Towards a New Architecture," a manifesto for "an entirely new kind of building" that became one of his most influential and consequential contributions to modernist theory.[25] Drawing on the engineering potential of reinforced concrete construction, Corbusier proposed five basic rules for modern design that eschewed or subverted traditional architectural norms. First, a building should be supported not by load-bearing walls, but by a regular grid of columns, or *pilotis*, that raised its mass off the ground and allowed its surroundings to flow underneath it. Second, gardens and terraces should be placed on flat roofs, both to aid in insulation and moisture control and to encourage inhabitation of the space. Third, interior partitions, freed from the responsibility of bearing loads, could be located wherever use dictated and be placed independently from floor to floor. Fourth, maximum illumination could be achieved with horizontal bands of windows stretching between structural supports, rather than traditional vertical windows punched into solid walls. Finally, the upper floors of a building could project outward beyond their supporting *pilotis*, allowing complete freedom in both the functional and aesthetic design of the exterior facade.[26] Though not universally endorsed— Frank Lloyd Wright famously ridiculed Le Corbusier for designing "boxes on stilts"— these five principles guided most of Le Corbusier's subsequent

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[24] Van Trump, James D. "Elegance on the Mall: The Rohm & Haas Building in Philadelphia," *Charette: The Pennsylvania Journal of Architecture*, April 1966.
[25] Curtis, William J.R. *Modern Architecture Since 1900, Third Edition.* New York: Phaidon Press, 1996, p. 176.
[26] Le Corbusier, "Five Points Towards a New Architecture." http://www.learn.columbia.edu/courses/arch20/pdf/art_hum_reading_52.pdf

career and became a touchstone for a wider circle of architects advancing what would eventually become known as the International Style. Their clear expression in the Rohm and Haas Building, save for the absence of a roof garden, demonstrates the enduring influence of Le Corbusier and his ultimate success in establishing a new architectural vocabulary. In setting the building's main mass atop a grid of concrete pillars, in projecting the upper floors outward beyond this grid, in wrapping the exterior in long bands of ribbon windows and brise-soleils, and in organizing an open, flexible floor plan around a concentrated central core, Belluschi and Ewing created one of Philadelphia's most prominent examples of Corbusier-inspired modernism.

Within the parameters of this basic formula, the Rohm & Haas Building achieved a rare balance of structural expression and contextual repose that was widely praised by contemporary critics— as much for its "restraint" as for its innovation. "Not only is the nine story and penthouse building very pleasant to behold, it is very justly scaled to the great void of the Mall, wrote James D. Van Trump in the journal *Charette* in 1966. "In no way obtrusive, it is an elegant addition to the historical area in which it stands. Many architects today in an ever more frantic search for "originality" or the sculpturesque have forgotten the virtues of restraint and good manners."[27] A feature in *Architectural Record* echoed this sentiment, exclaiming, "The Rohm & Haas Company… has acknowledged the public character of the new setting, and the company's responsibility to all citizens, by erecting a building of dignity and restraint, which should establish a standard for this redevelopment sector."[28] And in the *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, architecture critic Michelle Osborne (in consultation with Romaldo Giurgola) wrote, ""[B]ecause of the rhythm of its parts— louvers, panels, windows of tinted solar glass, and the concrete colonnade— and because of its restrained height, there is a classic overtone consistent with Independence Hall. And this in-and-out rhythm of its surface accords well with the inside-outside idea of the ground floor."[29]

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[27] Van Trump, n.p.
[28] "Private Building Respects Public Site," *Architectural Record*, January 1966, p. 141
[29] Osborne, Michelle. "Meeting the Problem of History," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, April 16, 1965.

Figure 19: Rohm & Haas Building lobby with Plexiglas light fixtures designed by Gyorgy Kepes. Photo courtesy of Bradley Maule, 2014.

While “restraint” was a central theme in all three reviews, so was “openness,” a testament to the sophistication of Belluschi's muscular yet diaphanous ground floor design. Rather than typical cylindrical *pilotis,* Belluschi insisted on tapered, prismoidal concrete columns whose massive inverted pyramid capitals joined to form a folded ceiling surface that stretched continuously over both ground-floor pavilions and the central, open colonnade that bisected the building. Seamlessly cast in specially-selected brown cement with Delaware River sand, these columns stood as freestanding sculptural masses within the colonnade and the ground floor interiors, and were infilled with full-height glazing along the building’s perimeter to form crystalline exterior walls.[30] Just as the folded ceiling surface flowed uninterrupted across the threshold separating interior from exterior, so too did the brick floor pavers continue into the lobby interiors. Prominent interior walls clad in thin teak battens also returned into the central colonnade, spot-lit both inside and outside by angular sconces.

This “inside-outside idea” accentuated the public character of the building and its site, a clear mutual priority of the architect, the client, and the various city agencies involved in the project’s development. Another prominent public feature was sculptor Clark B. Fitz-Gerald’s bronze and aluminum sculpture *Milkweed Pod*, an original 1965 installation. Set in a small fountain basin on the building’s rear terrace, the sculpture stands on axis with the central colonnade, inviting pedestrian through-traffic from Independence Mall West and Market Street. It is also visible from Ranstead Street, sitting atop the subterranean garage entrance above and behind an original concrete backdrop forming an inverted parabolic curve. The sculpture and fountain were commissioned through the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority’s Percent for Art Program, established in 1959 as the nation’s first such program mandating original, site-specific art for new development (one percent of the total construction budget for private projects built on land acquired or assembled by the PRA was earmarked for art; a sister program required similar expenditures for municipal projects).[31] *Milkweed Pod* was one of the earliest major public sculptures funded by the program, and was selected by a

[30] Hamilton, p. 8.7.
[31] *Philadelphia Public Art: The Full Spectrum.* Philadelphia: PennPraxis, 2009, p. 34.

specially-formed Rohm & Haas art committee in close cooperation with Belluschi and the Ewing Company.[32] The sculpture depicts airborne stainless steel seedlings emerging from a bronze seed pod, said by the artist to represent "the dissemination of democratic ideas."[33] While a number of PRA Percent for Art commissions were identified as contributing features within the Philadelphia Register-listed Society Hill Historic District (1999), no property individually listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places to date has incorporated art from this significant and precedent-setting program. Though the sculpture's surroundings have been impacted by the adjacent Independence Beer Garden, *Milk Pod* nevertheless remains an original and character-defining feature of the overall project.

Conclusion

The Rohm & Haas Building is one of Philadelphia's most distinctive and significant buildings constructed in the mid-twentieth century and meets eight of the Philadelphia Historical Commission's criteria for historic designation. Its association with the Rohm & Haas Company, who commissioned the building, and the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority and the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, who were heavily involved in its development, satisfy Criteria A and J. The building's high-profile location adjacent to Independence Mall, and the clear influence this setting had on its design, satisfy Criteria G and H. The involvement of Pietro Belluschi, a nationally-acclaimed and influential modern architect, satisfies Criterion E, while the building's modernist characteristics and innovative incorporation of modern materials satisfy Criteria C, D, and F. Individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2007 at only 42 years of age, the highly-intact Rohm & Haas Building clearly merits listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

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[32] Hamilton, p. 8.12.
[33] Nelson, Todd R. "Castine sculptor Clark B. Fitz-Gerald, 87, dies at his home," *Bangor Daily News,* Oct. 21, 2004.

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