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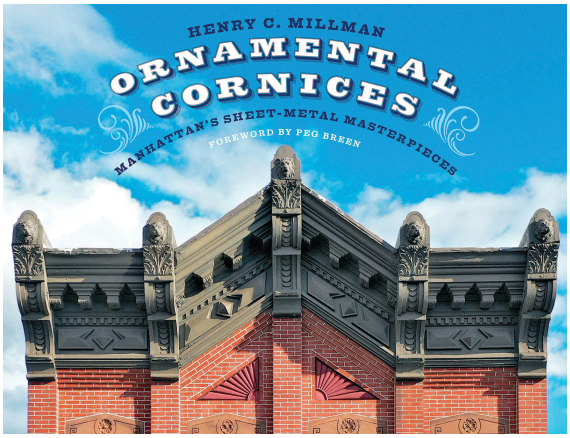

Ornamental Cornices

Manhattan's Sheet-Metal Masterpieces

Henry C. Millman

ISBN	9780789214942
Publisher	Abbeville Press
Binding	Hardback
Territory	World excluding USA, Canada, Puerto Rico, and Australia
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- The first-ever book about some of New York's most beautiful, intricate, and unsung architectural treasures — its sheet-metal cornices
- Sheet-metal cornices crown many late nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings across America. But some of the best examples are preserved in Manhattan neighbourhoods like Chinatown, the Lower East Side, the East Village, and Harlem
- This oversize book features original photography and detailed elevation drawings of some 100 exceptional cornices, neighbourhood by neighbourhood
- A valuable introduction traces the history, style, and construction of sheet-metal cornices
- New York City's cornices are endangered by time, the elements, and indifference — so this book has a strong preservationist message

A landmark publication that invites New Yorkers to look up — and marvel at some of the city's greatest unsung architectural treasures, its sheet-metal cornices.

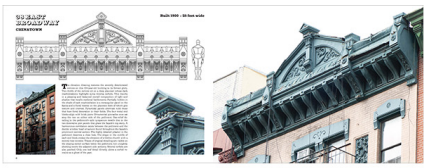
In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the facades of many, if not most, residential and commercial buildings in America's cities were crowned with sheet-metal cornices. These offered certain practical advantages over stone or brick cornices — for example, they were lighter and safer to install — but the easy workability of sheet metal also allowed for greater decorative possibilities. It was in the sheet-metal cornice, in fact, that the architectural eclecticism of the era found some of its most elaborate and impressive expression; in their complex play of geometric elements, of light and shadow, of multiple symmetries, the finest cornices can almost rival the ornament of a Gothic cathedral or a Moorish mosque. And of all the cities where these cornices were installed, New York may preserve the greatest number and variety — particularly in such Manhattan neighbourhoods as Chinatown, the Lower East Side, the East Village, and Harlem.

Henry C. Millman first became fascinated with New York's sheet-metal cornices when, as a draftsman for a building preservation firm, he had the unusual opportunity to examine their remarkable workmanship close up, from scaffolding or a swing stage. Decades later, he surveyed nearly every building in Manhattan to select some one hundred examples that would showcase the artistry and variety of the sheet-metal cornice. He then orchestrated an ambitious drone photography campaign to document these cornices, and made a detailed elevation drawing of each one, to illustrate its scale, structure, and graphic patterns with the utmost clarity. This volume presents the fruits of Millman's multiyear project, organised by neighbourhood, along with his incisive text exploring the history, construction, and design of these sheet-metal marvels.

Ornamental Cornices is an essential volume for architects, builders, and curious urban wanderers alike — but it is also an eloquent plea for the preservation of Manhattan's metal masterpieces, which even now are falling victim to time and elements.

Peg Breen is President of the New York Landmarks Conservancy, one of the oldest and largest preservation organisations in the US. She first joined the Conservancy in 1994 and has been invited to speak about architectural preservation internationally. She lives in New York City. **Henry C. Millman** lived in New York City for 33 years. He worked as an off-Broadway theatrical set designer (winning an Obie Award in 1977), historic building draftsperson, and shop drawing professional for the architectural millwork trade. He currently lives in Storrs, Connecticut.







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