

SYN CIBRO NI CITY

High society indeed. As cities worldwide invest in radically vertical architecture to manage growth harmoniously, New York turns its eye to needle buildings and other lofty architectural strategies to accommodate the rise of Lower Manhattan. **By Claudia Steinberg**



this spread:
At a height of 821 feet (250 metres), 56 Leonard Street towers over TriBeCa. The cantilevered glass structure boasts an original Anish Kapoor sculpture at its base.

CANAL STREET WAS ONCE an actual canal—a waterway carved into the bedrock in the 1800s to drain the swamps around the Hudson River. Today, pedestrians crossing the street from SoHo (to the north) to TriBeCa (to the south) navigate instead an unrelenting stream of cars. But on the other side of that turbulent Canal divide, a New York version of peace awaits. As you walk towards the towers of the Financial District in Lower Manhattan, the cacophony of horns and sirens recedes. Yet one category of sound is still present: the hubbub of construction.

Lower Manhattan, roughly defined as the area below 14th Street—including the neighbourhoods of Greenwich Village, SoHo, Little Italy, the Lower East Side, Chinatown, the Meatpacking District, Battery Park City, TriBeCa and the Financial District—is home to the single largest concentration of construction in New York's history. Around 20,000 people lived here in 2001; today that number is more than 70,000. TriBeCa (the Triangle Below Canal Street), home of the upcoming Four Seasons Hotel and Residences New York Downtown (see page 142), is one of the fastest-growing neighbourhoods in the city, and among its most affluent. And TriBeCa offers a challenge for development—it's home to so many noteworthy buildings that much of its 0.333-square-mile territory is under landmark protection.

Unlike its neighbour SoHo, famous for homogeneous blocks of 19th-century cast-iron façades, TriBeCa revels in architectural diversity: stately Romanesque Revival and Italianate structures, for example, most built in the 1800s when the “Lower West Side” was an important centre of America's cotton and textile trade. The 32-storey New York Telephone Building from 1923 was the first Art Deco tower, one of the earliest skyscrapers built after the 1916 Zoning Resolution demanded the stepped-back top that so defines New York's *style moderne*. In the early 1970s, when the area had around 300 inhabitants, artists began to colonise the abandoned textile loft spaces. In an environment so rich with history, even the few formerly sinister passages like Cortlandt Alley and Collister Street now afford great prestige; their zigzagging fire escapes, bricks, blackened doors and metal shutters are marks of prized authenticity.

No wonder TriBeCa—one of the city's oldest residential areas—is constantly sought out as a movie backdrop. Yet it refuses to

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this spread: (left) The Shanghai Tower, in a city that has faced many of the same development challenges as New York; (below) historic view of Canal Street (when it was a canal)



freeze into a film set: Within the strict limitations prescribed by the Landmarks Preservation Commission, new architectural life sprouts from the smallest lots and even on top of existing buildings. Case in point: Enrique Norten's six-storey glass addition to a 19th-century brick building at the corner of Sixth Avenue and Canal Street—luxury loft apartments offering expansive views of the Manhattan skyline.

While some new buildings mimic their 19th-century brick and stone predecessors, others share Norten's fresh approach. At V33, located at 31–33 Vestry Street, architect Winka Dubbeldam integrated a fragmented relief of glass and stone between two buildings from previous generations. It's a respectful but uncompromising newcomer, asserting what architecture critic Michael Sorkin calls “multiple synchronicities,” the peaceful coexistence of a many-layered past and a complex present.

TriBeCa and Lower Manhattan, of course, aren't the first to face the challenge of incorporating rapid growth thoughtfully into an existing cityscape. Shanghai has experienced the doubling of its population to more than 24 million in the last three decades, and has opted to deal with that expansion by growing significantly upwards. Since 1990, nearly 400 high-rises of 20 storeys or more have been built in the historic core of Puxi. (Like New York, Shanghai possesses a treasure trove of Art Deco buildings from the time of its first economic boom.) After the city outgrew its historic business district, skyscrapers arose across from The Bund waterfront promenade on the formerly agricultural stretch called Pudong. Completed in 2015, the Shanghai Tower conquers 2,073 vertical feet (632 metres) while minimising land use. The tower and two near neighbours, the Shanghai World Financial Centre and Jin Mao Tower, now figure among the world's tallest buildings. As an urban entity of unprecedented size, Shanghai is testing the limits of how a city can grow without losing its personality.

TriBeCa is now poised to follow suit, expanding radically and creatively upwards while preserving as many of the surrounding structures as possible. This year, the most individualistic example will be completed at 56 Leonard Street. Neither sleek nor anonymous, this 821-foot (250-metre) stack of dwellings by Herzog & de Meuron eschews the repetition of a singular floor plan and offers

NEW YORK CITY | A HISTORY OF HEIGHT



Since 1997 *The Skyscraper Museum* has celebrated New York's architectural heritage. According to the museum, these are a few milestones from the early days of the city's skyscrapers:

1846 **Trinity Church** was built at the head of Wall Street. At 281 feet (86 metres), including its spire and cross, the neo-Gothic building was the highest point in New York.

1857 The ornate cast-iron façade of the six-storey **Haughwout Building** was designed by architect James Bogardus. It was the first commercial building with a passenger elevator.

1870 The **Equitable Building**, hailed as one of New York's first skyscrapers, reached a record 142 feet (43 metres). It was dwarfed in 1875 by the **Western Union Building**, at 230 feet (70 metres), and

the **Tribune Building**, at 260 feet (79 metres).

1884 At 150 feet (46 metres), the red brick **Hotel Chelsea** became the tallest residential structure in the city. The 12-storey private apartment cooperative was converted to a hotel in 1905 and is famous for its avant-garde residents, including Andy Warhol, Mark Twain and Bob Dylan.

1890 The **New York World Building**, home to

Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World* newspaper, reached 309 feet (94 metres) at the top of its gold dome. Its hybrid “cage” system used steel framing to support the structure and embedded metal columns to bear the weight of the floors.

1894 The **Manhattan Life Insurance Building** was one of the first to use pneumatic caissons for its foundations, and reached a height of 348 feet (106 metres).

1908 The slenderness of the **Singer Building** required architect Ernest Flagg and engineer Otto F. Semsch to employ innovative wind-bracing designs. When it was completed, the 612-foot (187-metre) tower was the tallest in the world.

1913 At 792 feet (241 metres), the **Woolworth Building** was proclaimed the “world's greatest skyscraper.” To celebrate its

opening night, the building was lit by 80,000 incandescent light bulbs.

1931 The **Empire State Building** was erected in 11 months. The 204-foot (62-metre) spire atop its 103 storeys pushed its height to 1,454 feet (443 metres).

1932 The 66-storey building at **70 Pine Street** was the last structure added to the Lower Manhattan skyline before World War II.

this spread:
Uruguayan architect
Rafael Viñoly will
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Lower Manhattan
that's similar to his
432 Park Avenue
needle building
(centre).



“ So far, towers of the new super-tall, super-skinny genre have arisen mostly in Midtown, spurred by foreign investment and vertical competition with Beijing, London and Dubai. Rafael Viñoly’s 432 Park Avenue tower (centre) already surpasses the Empire State Building by 150 feet, and several more ‘needles’ now pierce the sky over Central Park. ”

Photography courtesy DBOX for CIM Group & MacLowe Properties

instead 145 pixellated variations on the glass box, with its most extreme extensions jutting out at the top in a reversal of the receding Art Deco crown. Just a few blocks away at Park Place and Church Street, architect Robert A.M. Stern's 937-foot cast-concrete and limestone edifice reaches into the clouds. (See "Opening Soon," below right.)

Though on the very edge of structural feasibility, skyscrapers like 56 Leonard are a harbinger of even taller buildings that will soon punctuate TriBeCa's low- to medium-rise landscape. So far, towers of the new super-tall, super-skinny residential genre have arisen mostly in Midtown, spurred by foreign investment and vertical competition with Beijing, London and Dubai. Rafael Viñoly's 432 Park Avenue tower already surpasses the Empire State Building (without the spire) by 150 feet, and several more "needles"—usually with a base-to-height ratio between 1-to-10 and 1-to-23—now pierce the New York sky. But a new giant will change the face of Lower Manhattan. With a very slim, glass-clad, 1,356-foot (413-metre) rectangular tower on Greenwich Street, Viñoly will make another minimalist mark.

While the rapidly proliferating needles have been criticised by some, architecture critic Paul Goldberger defends their slenderness as a virtue: "What they take away from the street they give back to a skyline that has been robbed of much of its classic romantic form by the bulky, flat-topped office towers." Carol Willis, the founder, director and curator of The Skyscraper Museum in Lower Manhattan's Battery Park City, devoted an entire exhibition to the improbably lean towers, and now considers them part of the fabric of New York. Their lines may appear fanciful, but they are a product of strictly regimented land and air rights and the artful negotiations that maximise the finite square footage allotted to each building.

Even though, in Willis' words, "form follows finance," and needle towers embody "the logic of luxury," the skyscraper, she says, is still a romantic figure. The quest for elegant slimness dates to its very beginnings: The Woolworth Building carried as little bulk as was possible in 1913, and in 1924 the architect Raymond Hood even proposed a "City of Needles." Now, improvements in materials like super-strength concrete and innovations in wind management and load distribution have pushed those needles higher into the

“Bjarke Ingels’ Two World Trade Center is the most adventurous of the city’s new towers. When complete, the glass-clad skyscraper will consist of a series of stacked ‘boxes’ that decrease in size towards the top, rising to a height of 1,340 feet (408 metres) in a stepped format that will lead the eye to the neighbouring Freedom Tower.”



this spread: (left) View from atop Bjarke Ingels' stacked-cuboid design for Two World Trade Center, in Lower Manhattan; (below) the tower will rise to 1,340 feet (408 metres)



OPENING SOON | Four Seasons Hotel and Residences New York Downtown



What's it like to design a 937-foot (286-metre) skyscraper that will become part of the iconic New York skyline? We asked **Daniel Lobitz**, a partner at **Robert A.M. Stern Architects** and lead designer of the new **Four Seasons Hotel and Residences New York Downtown**.

"The 30 Park Place property bridges TriBeCa and the Financial District, adding a five-star hotel and upscale residences

to a neighbourhood that's transitioning from a business district to a vibrant 24/7 community," Lobitz says.

The firm looked to the neighbourhood's historic development patterns to design a slender tower with a base that hugs the street on three sides, defining a public park to the east. The lobby on Barclay Street, the **Wolfgang Puck restaurant** along Church Street and a sweeping staircase

to the ballroom are visible through large windows, visually inviting guests inside. "This active participation in the **revitalisation of Lower Manhattan** will weave our building not only into the urbanism of the neighbourhood but into its **social life**," Lobitz says.

He notes that people first started moving back Downtown when developers reimaged the industrial buildings of TriBeCa as loft-like residences. Then

dawned a romantic notion of living high in a pre-war office tower. "It turned out, though, that most of those towers don't adapt well to residential living," Lobitz says. "Our building weds the dream of skyscraper living to that of the spacious TriBeCa-style apartments in a **state-of-the-art building**."

The **Woolworth Building**, just down the block, provided inspiration from the early days of the

skyscraper; the firm complemented its terracotta façades with masonry façades for 30 Park Place. "A glass tower would have been wrong on this site," Lobitz says. "Glass connotes office use, and stone residential. The Woolworth is capped with a pyramidal spire; **our building relates** with a series of setbacks that create the idea of a crown.

"All of this individuality will inspire passersby to ask, 'I

wonder who lives in that apartment?' The expressive façades are another way that our building **communicates with the larger community**."

No doubt, 30 Park Place makes a well-considered new **statement within the skyline**. "We respect the iconic older masonry towers of Downtown," Lobitz says. "By adopting the same strategies as those buildings, I think ours fits beautifully."

heavens. One of the most important factors for determining the slenderness of a building is its intended use, which fits with Lower Manhattan's population growth: Often, only residential towers can achieve a super-thin contour, because they don't need the wide elevator core that an office tower requires.

High-rises can now be planted on the tiniest parcels, helping to preserve historic neighbourhoods. In the 1960s and '70s, hundreds of old buildings—produce and meat markets dating to the early 19th century—were razed in TriBeCa to make room for middle-height, horizontal development. By contrast, needles offer a way to help keep neighbourhoods from wiping out historic structures—or from stagnating and resisting growth.

Needle buildings will no doubt continue to be part of the area's expansion, as planners and developers seek to accommodate growth in the smartest ways possible. Architect **Vishaan Chakrabarti**, whose "wafer-thin" tower overlooking Central Park has been praised for its ethereal sophistication, sees not only prestige, profit and beauty but also civic virtue in these high-reaching structures. Founder of the Partnership for Architecture and Urbanism (PAU) and an associate professor at Columbia University, Chakrabarti argues for skyward expansion as the most important tool for contributing to the "health, prosperity and sustainability of cities."

In a way, the attacks of September 11, 2001, forced Lower Manhattan into an architectural experiment. With the destruction of the World Trade Center, a huge swathe of space was left to be reclaimed, and the reclamation is in progress. Bjarke Ingels' Two World Trade Center is the most adventurous of the city's new towers. When complete, the glass-clad skyscraper will consist of a series of stacked "boxes" that decrease in size towards the top, rising to a height of 1,340 feet (408 metres) in a stepped format that will lead the eye to the neighbouring Freedom Tower. The stacked cuboids, which will sport rooftop terraces planted with lush vegetation, bring to mind historian Jacques Barzun's assertion about the city's personality-defining silhouette: "New York is a skyline, the most stupendous, unbelievable man-made spectacle since the Hanging Gardens of Babylon." ■

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