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ARCHITECTURE REVIEW | JAMES GARDNER



30 Park Place: A nod to a masterpiece

The Robert A.M. Stern tower is a rebuke to Gehry's 8 Spruce, but a tribute to the Woolworth Building

Although Robert A.M. Stern has a number of high-rises to his credit, including the Seville and the Chatham, both on the Upper East Side, he is not generally known as a designer of tall buildings, with all the clamorous modernity that such structures imply.

It is interesting, then, to watch the emergence of 30 Park Place, which is already rising on the same street as the fabled Woolworth Building, its neighbor to the east.

Developed by Silverstein Properties, this new structure is being billed as Downtown's second-tallest residential tower, at 926 feet. It will house 157 luxury condominiums, along with a 185-room Four Seasons Hotel on the first 38 floors.

Silverstein, of course, is the developer of the World Trade Center and many other Downtown buildings. But while the company's other developments in the vicinity of Ground Zero have been (or will be) in the pristine Neo-Modern idiom that one associates with their architects — Fumihiko Maki, Lord Norman Foster, Richard Rogers and Skidmore Owings & Merrill — Stern's building is more traditional in its references, as one would expect from this architect.

Across City Hall Park, a stone's throw away if you have a good enough arm, stands Frank Gehry's 8 Spruce Street. Stern's new tower stands as an implicit reproach to that noisily contemporary structure, which is the tallest residential tower Downtown. It has had to take sides, literally and figuratively, and it has done so by sidling up to the Woolworth Building, which it resembles in hue, and in material as well, in the granite facing that adorns its façade.

Inspired by the vague and eclectic Classicism that Stern traditionally favors, 30 Park Place is hardly as ornate as the Woolworth Building, with its Rayonnant Gothic façade. But the fact that a building of this height should avoid a Modernist and Rationalist idiom is nearly as striking today as was Cass Gilbert's decision, a century ago, to conceive his masterpiece, the Woolworth Building, in the language of Medieval architecture.

Scheduled for completion in early 2016, 30 Park Place resembles, at its base, the far larger base of the Hearst Building at 300 West 57th Street, above which rises the more conspicuous addition by Foster. The resemblance is so close that it's hard to imagine that the Uptown building, designed by Josef Urban in 1928 and added to years later, was not on Stern's mind when he was

embarking upon his newest project.

This resemblance extends from the cast stone used for the two buildings to their pared-down Classical vocabulary, and, perhaps most of all, to the charming way in which their corners are chamfered at street level, with a portion excised above that. Although this chamfering of the corner is very rare in New York,

However, when the corners are chamfered, they suddenly become areas of intense urban interest, without any diminution of the status of the center of a block. And when, as in Buenos Aires and parts of Barcelona, all four corners of each intersection possess this point of urban interest and energy, then suddenly the end of every block becomes

with Barclay Street and with Park Place will be much improved because of this grace note.

The base of 30 Park Place will rise five or seven stories, depending on how you count the first two levels, which are double height. The main entrance will be on Church Street, diagonally across from another classic, the 1934-'35 Federal Office Building.

Two-story terraces will be set into each of the corners at the fourth floor, two floors below the point where the setback will begin. The renderings show that the shaft continues in a fairly uneventful and uninflected fashion up to about the 30th floor, at which point the

interplay between terraces and chamfered corners resumes, all the way up to the summit, which promises to recall something of the elaborate style of the Woolworth Building in its volumetric complexity.

In some respects, the exterior of 30 Park Place reflects the style sometimes known as Moderne, which bears some similarities to Art Deco, but without that style's theatricality or its frequent Medieval references. (An excellent place to see an abundance of such buildings is the Grand Concourse in the Bronx.) Perhaps the greatest master of the style was the Parisian architect Auguste Perret, best known for his Théâtre des Champs Elysees.

The interiors of 30 Park Place, which were also designed by Stern, fully bear out that Moderne aesthetic in the lobby, with what is being billed as its "Grand Staircase." Here, there are none of the obviously historicist frills that one tends to associate with Stern. Rather the mood that dominates this space is one of smoothness and placidity that have been achieved through the planar and purely geometric distribution of tall, flat panels of rich marble, granite and wood.

And yet, even without any overt references, the serene mood delightfully reprises that of European Modernism before the hegemonic take-over of the International Style after the Second World War. As such, it is one of Stern's most successfully historicist inventions.

Some of the other renderings for the interiors, as well as for the hotel's bedrooms, elect a more obviously contemporary idiom. But even these suggest something of the serenity that, if the renderings are to be believed, will soon reign across the lobby of 30 Park Place. **MO**



A rendering of 30 Park Place in Lower Manhattan



Robert A.M. Stern



Developer Larry Silverstein

it is the rule in places like Buenos Aires and Ponce, Puerto Rico, and (to a lesser degree) Barcelona. It is a marvelous innovation, though all too rare in New York, where the corners of four streets are throwaway spaces that are impediments to the pedestrian and have no visual or urbanistic interest.

charged with interest and variety.

It is, of course, too late to impose this modification on a built-up city like New York. But it is worth mentioning that the chamfered corner is a most welcome modification of the grid, and that in regards to 30 Park Place, the two corners where Church Street intersects