Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street Tower
New York, New York
Project, 2002

Architect: Steven Holl | Steven Holl Architects
Engineers: Robert Silman, Nat Oppenheim | Robert Silman Associates

585 FEET (178 METERS) HIGH

This tower was designed by Steven Holl to mark a critical intersection of two of Manhattan's most celebrated thoroughfares, Fifth Avenue and Forty-second Street. It rises over the northeast corner of this juncture, diagonally opposite the block occupied by the grand neoclassical New York Public Library, with its terraced front facade and its rear parterre garden, Bryant Park.

The diagonal axis between the vertical tower and the horizontally composed library and park is reinforced by Holl's structural and spatial solution for the building. It is a hybrid of concrete shear walls that stiffen the structure along the east and the north, making it read in plan "like an open book," and a lattice of steel columns and beams forming the curved glazed surfaces of the west and south facades.

Within the deep concrete walls' lateral zones, glass-backed elevators move up and down the blue-green zinc-paneled facades. These, along with other service elements, are visible from the north and east. From the elevator cores, views up Fifth Avenue toward Central Park and east to Grand Central Station, the Chrysler Building, and the East River orient the viewer.

The complexity of the tower's glazed surface appears to be a gridded scrim wrapped over a still-life composition of stacked rectangles, cylinders, and other geometric forms. Beyond its monumental sculptural presence at a key crossroads, its somewhat mysterious forms can be read in a consistent way. At each point where the tower "warps" to a concave form—street level, the ninth floor, and the apex—a public or semipublic space is created. At the street, this space becomes a place to survey the intersection itself with commercial space behind it. At the ninth and the thirty-sixth floors, terraces flow out from cafés overlooking the library and the park. From the upper-level café, spiraling ramps lead up to a "sky space," a spherical room conceived by the architect and the artist James Turrell.

The south and west orientations ensure that the glazed surfaces, embedded with photovoltaic cells, can generate enough power to illuminate the entire building with low-voltage fluorescent lights. At night, the sculptural form emits a glowing presence. The measurable scale of the glazing system gives the whole structure a human dimension that reads through its urban presence. Each of the glass panels is roughly the height of a passerby and has the proportions of 1:1.6, the relationship between the horizontal and vertical elements underlying many of the compositions of the ancient Greek architects and artists. The building as a whole can be read as a very metaphoric composition, with its open book and slouching man-about-town figure standing across the street from the magnificent library.

Holl's project recalls the importance of the tall building in creating urban identity, both in its dialogue with the immediate surroundings and in its place among the canyons of high-rises of Midtown Manhattan.

—Terence Riley
TOP TO BOTTOM
Typical plan, floors 16-35
Plan, library terrace café, floor 9
Typical plan, floors 5-8

Site plan and ground-floor plan

Sectors, west–east
30 St. Mary Axe
Swiss Reinsurance Headquarters
Architect: Norman Foster & Partners
Engineer: John Bovis & Ove Arup & Partners
Height: 590 feet (180 meters)
Inhabitable floors: 40
Site dimensions: 1.4 acres
Gross floor area: 693,950 sq. ft. (64,469 sq. m)
Program: Office, retail, catering
Foundation and soil: Straight-intoed concrete piles in London Clay
Floor structure: Lightweight concrete on metal deck over composite structural steel frame
Lateral system: Penner steel “diaphragm” of inclined intersecting columns and horizontal hoops around building circumference
Principal materials: Glass, steel, and concrete
Developer: Swiss Reinsurance
Design team: Ken Shuttleworth, Robin Partington (principals); Francis Ash, Gamma Basra, Geoff Bee, Ian Bogle, Julian Cross, Joel Davenport, Ben Dobbin, Michael Genta, Rob Harrison, Paul Kalikow, Chris Kallan, Jörgen Kuppers, Paul Leadbetter, Stuart Milne, Jacob Narow, Tim O'Rourke, Ben Puddy, Jason Parker, Simon Reed, Narinder Sagoo, Sebastian Sciejteś, Michael Seehsdsdorf, John Small, Robbie Turner, Neil Vandersteen, John Walden, Tim Waiopole-Walsh, Hugh Whitehead, Richard Wotton, Helen Yabsley; Paul Scott (project architect); Adrian Campbell, Paul Cross, John Hirst, Dominc Munro, Hilson Moran Partnership Ltd. (mechanical engineers); BDS Partnership (environmental engineers); Emmer Pfenniger & Partner (curtain wall); Derek Lovejoy Partnership (landscape architect)

New York Times Headquarters
Architects: Frank O. Gehry & Partners, David Childs
Engineers: William F. Baker, Holmeylender & Skidmore, Owings & Merrill
Height: 606 feet (185 meters)
Inhabitable floors: 43
Site dimensions: 80,000 sq. ft.
Gross floor area: approx. 1,530,000 sq. ft.
Program: Office, retail
Client: The New York Times Company / Forest City Ratner Companies
Developer: Forest City Ratner Companies
Design team: Randy Jefferson, Jim Glyph (project partners); Edwin Chan (project designer); George Metzger (project architect); David Nam, Stai Gallivan, Matthew Gagnon, Ana Henton, Steffen Leisner, Christopher Deckwitz, Anand Devarajan, Jose Daniel Téllez, Michelle Kaufman, Kamran Arslan, Cara Cragin, Chad Dykens, Sean Gale, Eric Jones, Meaghan Lloyd, Diego Pieretto, Brigit Schneider, Zohar Schwartz, Brian Zarora (project team); Marilyn Taylor (project architect); Ross B. Wilner (project designer); T.J. Gottsdiener (managing partner); Scott Duncan, Ursula Schneider, Donald Hoff, Michael Fei, Tran Yinh, Samer Bitar, Simone Pfaffler, Dale Greenwald, SSash Cann, Peter Buoncina, Kaz Morohata (project team)

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New York, New York. Project, 2002
Architect: Steven Holl, Solange Fabião & Steven Holl Architects
Engineers: Robert Silman, Nat Oppenheimer & Robert Silman Associates
Height: 585 feet (178 meters)
Inhabitable floors: 37 (36 above grade, 1 below grade)
Site dimensions: 13,355 sq. ft.
Gross floor area: 401,330 sq. ft.
Program: Office, retail, restaurant
Client: Fifth at 42nd LLC
Developer: Axel Stavski
Design team: Ziad Jamellddine, Irene Vogt (architects); Simone Giostra (project architect) Gordon Smith (curtain wall)