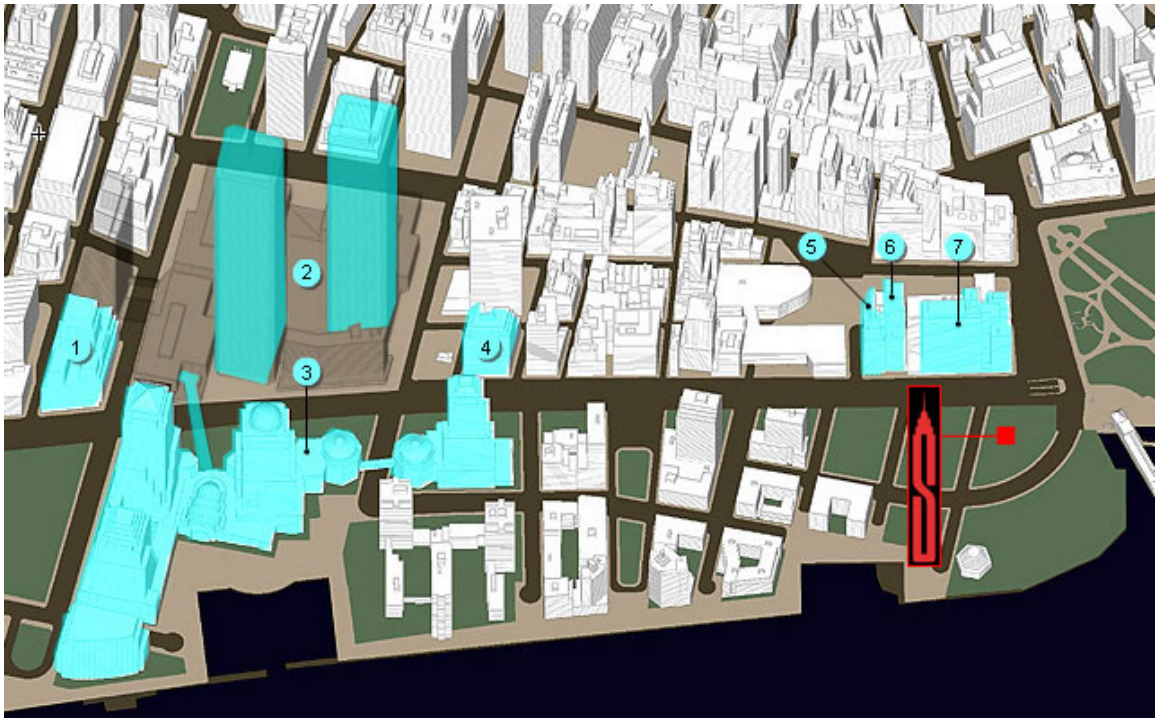




THE SKYSCRAPER MUSEUM PRESENTS  
**THE DOWNTOWN NEW YORK WEBWALK**



**TOUR 4: WEST SIDE**

## Downtown New York Webwalk

### WEST SIDE

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#### 1. **The Barclay Vesey Building** - 140 West Street

Architect: Ralph Walker of MacKenzie Voorhees and Gmelin  
Completed: 1926

The Barclay Vesey Telephone Building was one of the first skyscrapers built on downtown's gritty westside - a working waterfront dominated by piers, warehouses, and small-scale industry. The building housed offices and communications machinery for the New York Telephone Company. This dual function explains the building's unusual massiveness, as the machines housed on the interior did not require natural light.

At ground level the builders provided generous public arcades as well as a fantastically decorated lobby. Architect Ralph Walker's complex sculptural accents play off of the skyscraper's somber brick bulk. These accents on the building's exterior and in the lobby feature stylized shallow-relief trees, flora and fauna.



The Barclay Vesey Telephone Building was one of the first major skyscrapers of the "setback style," the ziggurat-like form suggested by the city's 1916 zoning law. It was also a masterpiece of Art Deco design by the architect.

The famed French architect and theorist, Le Corbusier, used the Barclay Vesey Telephone Building as the frontispiece for the English language edition of his polemic, *Towards a Modern Architecture*. For him it represented the functionality and power of American building in the late 1920's.

2. **World Trade Center** - Site of the Hudson Terminal Buildings, 1907-1908 by Clinton & Russell. Architects: Minoru Yamasaki and Emery Roth and Sons  
Completed: 1973-1974



The Viewing Wall, along Church Street on the east side of the site, provides the best vantage point of Ground Zero and the ongoing construction at the World Trade Center site. For an extensive history of the World Trade Center from its conception to destruction, see our online exhibition [WTC: Monument](#).



The entire World Trade Center was more than its signature twin towers; it was designed as a complex of seven buildings on 16-acres comprising a city-sized 10 million square feet of rentable office space. The World Trade Center was built and operated by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey from 1966 to 1974. The Twin Towers, One and Two World Trade Center, represented the ambition of the bi-state authority and of the confident modernism of the late 1960's that saw bigger as better.

## Downtown New York Webwalk WEST SIDE

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The World Trade Center replaced the Hudson Terminal Buildings, a pair of 23-story buildings that housed offices as well as a three-level underground commuter rail facility from New Jersey. Dey Street divided the complex into two distinct buildings, which were connected both underground and by a sky-bridge. James Hollis Wells of Clinton and Russell designed the complex for the Hudson and Manhattan Railroad Company. Altogether, the buildings yielded more than 1 million square feet of office space, which made the complex the largest in the world in 1908.

The Japanese-born architect Minoru Yamasaki considered more than a hundred different building configurations before settling on the concept of twin towers and three lower-rise structures. Initially the towers were to rise 80-90 stories. Only later were they to become the world's tallest



man-made structures at 110 stories, following a suggestion said to have originated with the Port Authority's public relations staff. Tower 1 was 1368 feet tall; Tower 2 was 1362 feet.

Yamasaki and structural engineer Les Robertson worked closely to create an innovative structural solution, an exterior wall of rigid "hollow tube" construction- closely spaced steel columns with floor trusses extending across to a central core. The columns, clad with a silver-colored aluminum alloy, were 18 3/4" wide and set only 22" apart, making the towers appear from afar to have no windows at all.



One World Trade Center was ready for its first tenants in late 1970, even though the final construction on its upper stories were not completed until 1972; Two World Trade Center was finished in 1973. The foundations, which required excavation to bedrock 70 feet below, produced the material for the Battery Park City landfill project in the Hudson River.





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#### 3. World Financial Center

Architect: Cesar Pelli

Completed: 1992

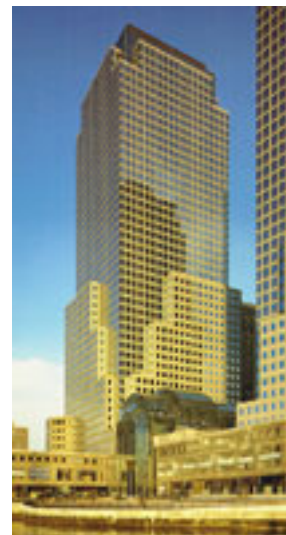
The four major towers of the World Financial Center are the business and commercial center of Battery Park City, a 92-acre swath of landfill built over the closely spaced piers of the working port. Separated from historic downtown by West Street an eight-lane highway, Battery Park City has been developed since the 1970s. The recently completed esplanade, the beautifully landscaped Wagner and Rockefeller Parks, and a rich program of public sculpture compliment the residential high-rises to the south and north of the World Trade Center site.



Expanding on the success of the World Trade Center, and building literally on the landfill created by it, the World Financial Center was developed by Olympia & York in partnership with a state entity, the Battery Park City Authority. Planner Alexander Cooper was responsible for the master plan of the site, and architect Cesar Pelli designed the four towers and the waterfront plaza that connects them.

In contrast to the barren plaza of the former World Trade Center, the World Financial Center centers on a lively Winter Garden with upscale shops and restaurants that spill onto a large riverfront terrace. The complex also has a ferry landing and a marina for sailboats, large yachts and charter boats. Badly damaged on September 11, 2001, the Winter Garden has since been rebuilt and reopened. The riverfront area is a nice place to stop and rest while enjoying views of the Statue of Liberty.

To access the World Trade Center site from the World Financial Center, take the escalator up to the second floor of One World Financial Center, and follow the signs to the South Bridge, the pedestrian bridge along the south side of the site. Makeshift memorials, including a memorial to the firefighters who perished in the terrorist attacks of September 2001, have been set up along the side of the temporary pedestrian bridge that has been added to Cesar Pelli's pre-existing South Bridge to link the World Financial Center to Liberty Street. For those in wheelchairs, access to the second floor of One World Financial Center can be gained for the entrance to the South Bridge via elevators in the lobby of the building, and the South Bridge is entirely navigable courtesy of a wheelchair lift on the bridge. Because of the ever-changing nature of the World Trade Center site, this information is liable to change at any point.



## **Downtown New York Webwalk**

### **WEST SIDE**

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#### **4. 90 West Street - West Street Building**

Architect: Cass Gilbert

Completed: 1907

Badly damaged on September 11, 2001, the façade of 90 West Street remains shrouded in protective covering, and the building's interior is completely inaccessible.

Cass Gilbert, later architect of the Woolworth Building, designed this speculative office tower for developer General Howard Carroll. Originally called the Railroad & Iron Exchange Building, the West Street Building housed the offices of transportation and shipping companies. Originally, 90 West Street stood across the street from the Hudson River wharves and warehouses used by its tenants. This area became landfill in the late 1960s using material excavated in the construction of the World Trade Center. It is now occupied by the World Financial Center and Battery Park City.

The tower's restrained granite base and shaft contrast sharply with its crown-like finale which is marked by a graceful three-story arcade, elaborate over-hanging cornice, and mansard roof decorated by pinnacles, look-outs, and niches – all expertly rendered in terra cotta in the style of the French Renaissance. This was Gilbert's most elaborate use to date of colored glazed terra cotta, and can be seen as a clear precursor to the Woolworth Building.



#### **5. 21 West Street**

Architect: Starrett and Van Vleck

Completed: 1931

Starrett & Van Vleck designed 21 West Street in concert with its neighbor, the Downtown Athletic Club. The two designs contrast strongly in their use of color and textured brick, but set back at the same points and utilize similar materials. Built for the speculative office market, 21 West Street was converted into apartments under the incentive of the 1995 Downtown Revitalization Plan.

Vertical piers in a mottled golden brick contrast with spandrels in textured red brick, creating a woven effect. Cantilevers at the building corners create wrap-around windows. The bright red aluminum window frames – which have recently been replaced – add to the liveliness of the composition. The open arcade on the street is supported by massive columns with gilded stepped capitals reminiscent of Inca and Aztec architecture. The marble lobby retains most of its original fittings, as well as a beautiful wall map rendered in marble.



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### **WEST SIDE**

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#### **6. 18 West Street – Downtown Athletic Club**

Architect: Starrett & Van Vleck

Completed: 1926

In the booming prosperity of the mid 1920s, the Downtown Athletic Club abandoned its quarters in the Singer Building to establish its own, purpose-built skyscraper. This 35-story club building stacked up all of the amenities of a suburban country club including squash courts, a swimming pool, a miniature golf course, as well as a restaurant and guestrooms for overnight stays.

The exterior is fittingly Spartan; only the heroically scaled entrance distinguishes the club's architecture from that of a utilitarian loft building. Dark metal decorative spandrels under the windows form vertical stripes that emphasize the height and slenderness of the tower. Large windowless areas of the façade indicate the presence of facilities such as squash courts and changing rooms. The many closely packed windows of the upper stories light the club's guestrooms.

Like its neighbor, 21 West Street, the club is converting its guest facilities into condominiums.

#### **7. 17 Battery Place – Whitehall Building**

Architect: Henry J. Hardenbergh; Extension, Clinton & Russell

Completed: 1904; Extension, 1910

Once one of the largest office buildings in the city, the Whitehall Building was constructed in two phases. Planning for the larger second structure began immediately after the original 20-story building opened to great success in 1904. The 31-story addition quintupled the building's size. Cass Gilbert's newly completed U.S. Custom House had generated a new demand for office space in the district to the east of Broadway which had formerly been dominated by the port and its warehouses and small scale industrial facilities.

In the original building, the frontage on Battery Park guaranteed offices light and expansive views. Henry J. Hardenbergh (also the architect of the Dakota Apartment Building and the Plaza Hotel) created a boldly scaled design equal to its prominent riverfront site. The larger addition, by Clinton and Russell, has stylistic affinities with Hardenbergh's earlier work.

The building has recently been converted into a mixed-use commercial and residential complex.



## **Downtown New York Webwalk**

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#### **Credits**

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## **Downtown New York Webwalk WEST SIDE**

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**The Manhattan Borough Presidents Office and the Manhattan Borough  
President, C. Virginia Fields**



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