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What's that Building? By Annik LaFarge

One of the most common questions I hear as I walk along High Line is: *what's that building over there?* The surrounding architecture — new and old, beautiful and shabby, original and bland, industrial and residential — is a fundamental part of the High Line experience. And true to the history of New York, it's a constantly changing landscape. So this Livin' The High Line feature will always be a work-in-progress, just as the city itself is.

Each entry includes a photo (click on the thumbnail to enlarge it) and basic information about the building: the year it was built, where it's located, the name of the architect. A few have more than one photo; this is because the building is either so beautiful that I couldn't resist, or because different views encourage a better understanding of the building's character (see, for example, the IAC headquarters). I've been photographing the High Line since it opened in 2009, and have come to appreciate something about architecture via photography: the way we see buildings is greatly influenced not only by the position from which we view it — like a piece of sculpture — but also by the weather and light, seasonal as well as diurnal. So that's another reason I've included multiple images for some buildings.

The buildings in the High Line viewshed are presented very roughly from south to north, as you encounter them in the park. My book [On the High Line](#) goes into much greater detail about the history of many of these buildings and includes gorgeous photographs by professionals, including many archival photos. The companion app ([more info. here](#)) includes an interactive map that enables building identification from the High Line.



Former Manhattan Refrigerating Co. warehouse

This former warehouse of the Manhattan Refrigerating Company, which in the late 19th century pioneered the technology of refrigeration by developing a complex system of underground pipes, was completed in 1926. The complex actually consists of ten buildings; the western section (with the water tower on top) was completed in 1898. [Architects: J. Graham Glover, Lansing G. Holden, John B. Snook & Sons.] If stand along the bike path in the Hudson River Park at around 13th Street (by Pier 54) and look south, or stand opposite Horatio Street and look east, you will very clearly see the demarcation between the individual buildings. Archival photos show how this building, like the Merchant Refrigerating Company warehouse a few blocks north, was originally constructed without windows, to obstruct sunlight and help keep the building cool.

Today this is the West Coast Apartments. More images appear below to show the different views.



The Standard Hotel

Gazed upon from the south, the towering Standard Hotel, designed by Todd Schliemann of Polshek Partnership Architects, looks like a giant open book. The hotel was completed in 2009, a few months before the High Line, which it famously straddles, opened. Its 20 stories extend 265 feet above the street level, and it's the only modern building to rise over and above the new park. It's also the last; all future development will take place to either side of the linear park.



DVF Headquarters

The “diamond in the sky,” as it has been called, is the headquarters of fashion designer Diane Von Fustenberg, famous for creating the wrap dress. She and her husband Barry Diller — who works a few blocks north in the stunning IAC Headquarters — are major supporters of the High Line. The DVF headquarters occupies a 19th century former warehouse, and was designed by Work Architecture Company. At the top, and visible from the High Line, is a geometric set of angled windows. Computerized heliostat mirrors track the sun and reflect the maximum amount of natural light down a fancy staircase, which the architects (in their inimitable way) refer to as a “stairdelier,” because along the steps are panels of glass made from more than 3,000 Swarovski crystal prisms that disperse the light.



450 W. 14th Street

The new office tower at 450 West 14th Street was designed by Morris Adjmi and was completed in late 2011. This is the only building along the High Line that shares the structure and support system of the original elevated railroad. If you peer down over the rails you can see how the two structures connect. When the architects were first investigating the site one of the designers stumbled upon a vivid reminder of the building’s original use: in the basement he found sixty enormous vats containing the remnants of animal carcasses. Dana Rubinstein of the [Wall Street Journal](#) noted that “the north and south facades of the glass skyscraper bear four-story indentations, as though a giant pair of fingers had gently pressed in the glass.” The day I took my photograph there was a message in the window: “THAT’S IT. KEEP LOOKING UP.”



The Liberty Inn

There are a number of triangular, “Flatiron”-style buildings in the Meatpacking District, including the Liberty Inn on 14th Street. This building has a long, louche history that begins in 1908 when it was the Strand Hotel, a boarding house for sailors who passed through town at a time when New York’s port was the busiest in the world. During Prohibition it became a speakeasy, but its most notorious period was as The Anvil, a gay club famous for go-go dancers. Felipe Rose of the Village People got his start here. The Anvil closed in 1985; like so many of the clubs along the West Side Highway — long the heart of Manhattan’s gay life — it was a casualty of the AIDS crisis. Today the recently renovated Liberty Inn is the last remaining by-the-hour hotel in the neighborhood and its website promises to welcome you at all hours with “Fast, discreet check-in service.”



The Hoboken Terminal

The grand Hoboken Terminal was designed in the Beaux Arts style by Kenneth M. Murchison, with stained-glass windows by Louis Comfort Tiffany. It’s considered one of the most beautiful and historically important transportation hubs in the country. Opened as a rail and ferry terminal in 1907 for the Delaware, Lackawanna and Western Railroad, the site has been in use since the colonial era, when it provided one of the main forms of access to Manhattan. Carl Condit, in his book *The Port of New York*, describes the state-of-the-art switching technology that was deployed in this terminal, and how it wasn’t always appreciated by commuters. Over the course of a 12-month period in 1913, he writes, “the number of individual lever movements...reached a total of 28,721,000, of which only 36 were imperfect, for a ratio of one to 797,837. Far more commuters were delayed at the station saloon than on trains confronted by a mistakenly set adverse signal. Skeptical wives had ceased to accept the excuse.”



Goldman Sachs Tower

The skyscraper that rises above the Hudson River at the foot of New York Harbor is Goldman Sachs Tower. Designed by Cesar Pelli and completed in 2004, it's the centerpiece of a recent wave of new development that started in Jersey City in the 1980s. The building occupies the site of a former Colgate factory and is perhaps most famous (in New York, at least) for the fact that masses of Goldman Sachs executives refused to step off Manhattan island to go work there. I wouldn't want to work there either, but it's a fun building to photograph because light dances off its glass facade and, like a giant mirror, it reflects other buildings nearby. Architectural Height: 781 feet.



Former Merchant Refrigerating Co. Warehouse

The former warehouse that occupies the west side of Tenth Avenue between 15th & 16th Streets was a cold storage facility owned by the Merchants Refrigerating Company. It was completed in 1917 and in the 1930s was retrofitted to accommodate the tracks of the New York Central railroad via what today is called “the Northern Spur.” After the warehouse was closed in 1983 the developer who purchased the property told a reporter at the *Times* that it took seven months for the entire building to thaw. Today it houses the Drug Enforcement Agency and serves as a vast stage for the humorous advertising campaigns of the Manhattan Mini Storage Company. (In this photo: “If you don’t like gay marriage, don’t get gay married.”)



Maritime Hotel, aerial view

The Maritime Hotel was designed in the 1960s by Albert C. Ledner around a nautical theme — porthole windows included — for the National Maritime Union of America. Until the early 20th century this neighborhood was filled with sailors and dockworkers who worked along the Hudson River piers. The Maritime Hotel is, somewhat baffling, referred to as “the pizza box” by Wikipedia. The aerial view (taken from the London Terrace Apartments) shows both sides of this unusual building.



IAC Building (left)

The IAC building, headquarters for Barry Diller's Interactive Corporation, was designed by Frank Gehry and completed in 2007. For more about this extraordinary building, including a stop-time video of the entire construction process, [see the official website](#). The building is also referred to as “the sail building,” and to appreciate why it's best to view it from the west, either from the Chelsea Piers — with an actual marina in the foreground — or from the West Side Highway. (See the slideshow images.) The taller building to the north is the Chelsea Nouvel, a condominium designed by Jean Nouvel. Its multi-colored windows, inset at varying angles and framed in steel, makes a remarkable contrast with the IAC headquarters. These two buildings change appearances hourly, depending on the light and the weather.





459 & 457 West 18th Street at dawn

The two condominiums that sit side-by-side on 18th Street are among my favorite buildings along the High Line, not because they're so striking on their own, but because they look so interesting together. Della Valle + Bernheimer Design conceived 459, the angular, black & white building closer to the park, and they considered the appearance of neighboring 457 — with its undulating blue and white windows, designed by Audrey Matlock — as they drew up their plans. They wanted the geometry, colors, and surface textures of both structures to complement each other. I think they succeeded brilliantly. The result is a pair of frequently photographed buildings that's fascinating to look at in every type of light, particularly at dawn, which is when I took my photograph.



The Kitchen, aerial view

The Kitchen was formed in 1971 as an artists' collective, operating from the kitchen in the Mercer Arts Center in Greenwich Village. In 1985 the group moved to this beautiful, almost stately, former ice factory (which explains where there are no windows) on 19th Street. The Kitchen was the first major arts organization to make the move to Chelsea and it remains one of the neighborhood — and the city's — most important.



Metal Shutter Houses

Between the IAC headquarters and The Kitchen is the Metal Shutter Houses on 19th Street, designed by Japanese architect Shigeru Ban. The residents of each apartment in this building can raise or lower a set of motorized metal shutters, thereby controlling the amount of light and privacy the rooms facing 19th Street receive. Ban intended the exterior roll-up blinds to echo the after-hours shutters on galleries and bodegas that were ubiquitous before this neighborhood became so tony.



Empire State Building & General Theological Seminary

General Theological Seminary is an Episcopal seminary chartered in 1817. In 1819 Clement Clark Moore donated a former apple orchard to the Church on the condition that a seminary be built here. The library at GTS houses one the greatest collection of Latin Bibles in the world, and includes a Gutenberg. It also has a set of fifteen tubular bells that are the oldest of their kind in the United States. Visitors to the High Line can hear the bells as they are rung during the day by the seminary's Guild of Chimers to call the community to worship.



London Terrace Towers

The London Terrace Apartments was built on former Dutch farmland originally purchased in 1750. The developer, often described as “the Donald Trump of the 1920s,” demolished acres of old houses to build what would become the largest, most luxurious apartment of its day. There’s a persistent urban legend that developer Harry Mandel leapt to his death after going bankrupt in the late 1920s, but the story is untrue. London Terrace has among the most beautiful water towers in Manhattan: stone turrets with arched window openings that are part of the architecture of the building.



HL23

The metallic, undulating condo on 23rd Street is somewhat pretentiously known as HL23, which made it the first piece of architecture to be named after the park. Designed by Los Angeles architect Neil Denari, it's a rare building in that it gets wider — by as much as forty percent — as it rises above its much smaller street-level footprint. This design, the result of New York's strict zoning laws, allows it to lean over its namesake.



Avenues School

The Avenues World School, scheduled to open in Fall 2012, occupies the former R. C. Williams Company warehouse on 25th Street. On August 1, 1933 R.C. Williams, a wholesale grocer, became the first client of the High Line when a freight train pulled up to a special siding to receive a load of goods. This wonderfully handsome building was designed by American architect Cass Gilbert to take advantage of the new elevated freight rail line.



H. W. Wolff Book Building

Opposite the former R.C. Williams Company warehouse is a factory once owned by the The H. Wolff Book Manufacturing Company, which provided printing, binding, and distribution services to publishers. Wolff, which had no direct access to the High Line, made an agreement with the wholesale grocer to transport goods via the Williams Company's rail siding. All the materials necessary for book manufacturing — paper, binding cloth, glue — arrived by truck at Wolff's 26th Street loading dock and then finished books emerged on the High Line for distribution by train around the country.



Met Life Tower

The tower and cupula of the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company Tower can be seen from various spots along the High Line, and is particularly beautiful at night, when the golden dome shines against a dark sky. The building is located on Madison Avenue at 24th Street and was designed by Pierre LeBrun of Napoleon LeBrun & Sons. It was completed in 1909 and has an architectural height of 700 feet.



Glimpse of NY Life Bldg.

The High Line offers tantalizing glimpses of the golden triangular tower — consisting of 25,000 gold-leaf tiles — of the New York Life Insurance Company Building, but it's hard to get a full view. The building is located on Madison Avenue between 26th – 27th Streets on a site once occupied by the Union Depot, a terminal of the New York and Harlem Railroad. Designed by Cass Gilbert, it was completed in 1928 and has an architectural height of 615 feet — almost one hundred feet lower than its neighbor the Metropolitan Life Building, with its tall clock tower and gilded cupula.



Bank of America Tower from 29th Street

The Bank of America Tower is one of my favorite new buildings in Manhattan. At night, the 255-foot ornamental spire — which consists of 368 LED floodlights — changes color every few seconds, creating a light show with its neighbor the Conde Nast Building that's so beautiful and uplifting it can melt the heart of even the most jaded New Yorker. Designed by Cook + Fox Architects, the building was completed in 2009 and was decreed the greenest building in Manhattan by the New York Academy of Sciences. The slideshow shows some additional views of this marvelous building.



The spire of the Conde Nast building

Completed in 1999, the Conde Nast Building in Times Square is considered one of New York's greenest buildings and was recognized by the American Institute of Architects for its use of solar and fuel-cell technology. Its 300-foot mast is used to support television and radio broadcasters, and at night it joins the Bank of America Tower spire in a theatrical display of light and color. The architect was FXFOWLE.



Morgan General Mail, Old

The Morgan General Mail Facility, a massive complex that joins one very old building with a modern one (see below) via pedestrian bridge, is one of the largest mail-processing facilities in the country. In the northwest corner of the original building on Tenth Avenue between 29th-30th Streets you can still see the outline of the bricked-up entryway where as many as 8,000 mail trains a year passed into the Morgan after traveling down the High Line and across Tenth Avenue on a special “spur.” But this wasn’t always a mail center; in the 19th century it was a railway station owned by the Hudson River Railroad. The first passenger to use the station was Abraham Lincoln, on his way to Washington, DC for his inauguration as President. Four years later, on April 25, 1865, Lincoln’s funeral train passed through on its westward journey to Springfield, Illinois.



Morgan General Mail Facility, New

The modern annex to the Morgan General Mail Facility (between 29th – 30th Streets) was built in the 1990s and connected to the older building via pedestrian bridge. For several years it topped the Audubon Society’s collision list because so many birds crashed into the huge expanse of windows and fell to their death in the street below.



NY Times building (foreground)

The *New York Times* headquarters was designed by Renzo Piano and completed in 2007. The building’s facade, a curtain of ceramic rods that rises from street level to roof, reduces energy costs by helping block sunlight. The exterior cladding also encourages climbers: at least three men have been arrested trying to summit the building. The 1,000 foot mast on the roof contains

radiometers that gather and transmit solar data to a computer system that in turn controls the position of the window shades throughout the building.



One Worldwide Plaza

One Worldwide Plaza is an office tower on 8th Avenue between 49th & 50th Streets. It was designed by David Childs of Skidmore Owings & Merrill and completed in 1989. The distinctive triangular roof is made of copper and glass and can be quite striking at dusk and in the early evening when the pyramid at the very top begins to glow.



Javits Center

The Javits Center is Manhattan's most tormented architectural complex. Completed in 1986, it has elicited endless complaints: it's not big enough, it's ugly, the windows look perpetually dirty. New York's Governor Andrew Cuomo is proposing to build a new convention center in Queens, miles away from the attractions that convention-goers seek, including Broadway theater and great restaurants. The Javits Center, originally designed by Pei Cobb Freed & Partners and now in the midst of a \$500 million renovation by FXFOWLE architects, would then be torn down and redeveloped. For a great piece about this ongoing saga and how it relates to the new Penn Station, [read Michael Kimmelman's excellent article in the *Times*](#). One good thing you can say about Javits: it sure is beautiful at sunset.



Monastery and Church of St. Michael the Archangel

Across the Hudson River and visible from many spots along the High Line is the Roman Catholic Monastery and Church of St. Michael the Archangel. It's located in Union City, New Jersey, and was "solemnly dedicated" in 1864, according to the *Times*, which also commented that "The tender influences of religious meditation could scarcely have a more agreeable retreat for exercise." The architect was Patrick C. Keely.



Westyard Distribution Center

The brown, oddly shaped, monolithic building on 31st – 33rd Streets is the Westyard Distribution Center. A noted example of the architectural style of Brutalism, this building occupies two full city blocks and makes an arresting view from the High Line, but it's even more interesting from above, as the aerial photo shows. Commuter trains from the Long Island Railroad pass directly under the Westyard building en route to Pennsylvania Station (click to enlarge photo and see the tracks). Shimmy through a fence on the east side of the building and you can see the trains emerging just before 9th Avenue ([click here](#) for a photograph). The building was completed in 1970 by architect Davis Brody.



Hearst Magazine Tower

One of my favorite new buildings in New York is the Hearst Magazine Tower. I watched it go up with great fascination when I worked at Random House, just a block or two away, and now get great joy from the glimpse of the tower at the end of the High Line at 30th Street. The architects, Foster + Partners, managed to place a whimsical modern structure atop a 70-year old landmark and succeeded in creating one building that successfully, even gleefully, embraces old and new styles. It's New York City's first LEED Gold skyscraper, and has an absolutely wonderful atrium with a 3-story waterfall and tons of natural light.