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Old Buildings, New Views

Recent renovations around town have uncovered views of Manhattan that had been hiding in plain sight.

By Caroline Biggs

Impressions: 43,264,806



While [New York City's skyline](#) is ever changing, some recent construction and additions to historic buildings across the city have revealed some formerly hidden, but spectacular, views to the world.

These views range from close-up looks at architectural details that previously might have been visible only to a select few, to bird's-eye views of towers and cupolas that until

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recently could only be viewed from the street. They provide a novel way to see parts of Manhattan and shine a spotlight on design elements that have largely been hiding in plain sight.

The structures include office buildings that have created new residential spaces, like the Woolworth Building in Lower Manhattan; historic buildings that have had towers added or converted to create luxury housing, like Steinway Hall on West 57th Street and the Waldorf Astoria New York; and brand-new condo towers that allow interesting new vantages of nearby landmarks.

“Through the first decades of the 20th century, architects generally had the belief that the entire building should be designed, from sidewalk to summit,” said Carol Willis, an architectural historian and founder and director of the [Skyscraper Museum](#). “Elaborate ornament was an integral part of both architectural design and the practice of building industry.”

In the examples that we share with you below, some of this lofty ornamentation is now available for view thanks to new residential developments that have recently come to market.



Residents of the 20th floor Landmark Penthouse at 111 West 57th Street will have front-row views of Steinway Hall’s central brick-and-copper campanile-like tower, which is capped with a large copper lantern ornamented with a balustrade, urns and latticework. Credit...Katherine Marks for The New York Times

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Steinway Hall

The neoclassical showpiece [Steinway Hall](#) was completed in 1925 by the famed architects Whitney Warren and Charles Delevan Wetmore, of [Warren and Wetmore](#). New Yorkers have long admired the 57th Street-level views of the prewar structure's ornamental Indiana limestone facade, which features music-themed sculptures by Italian sculptor [Leo Lentelli](#) and a frieze with medallion portraits of musical figures like Mozart.

The development known as [111 West 57th Street](#) combines the 16-story Steinway Hall with an attached supertall condo tower, and was designed by [SHoP Architects](#). The tower — one of the tallest and skinniest buildings in the United States — gives some residents direct sightlines of the adjacent 1925 building's intricate stonework, and of the copper-roofed structures that crown the prewar building, right outside their windows.

“To add skyline prominence and recognition for their client Steinway & Sons, Warren & Wetmore accentuated the required setbacks through decorative urns and Ionic columns, culminating the structure in two rhythmic copper-roofed crowns,” said the architectural historian Marci Clark, the managing director at [JDS Development Group](#), who [oversaw](#) the construction of [111 West 57th Street](#).

Sales for the 60-unit project — which includes 46 units in the condo tower and 14 inside of Steinway Hall — launched in 2018, but the building is still under construction. Only a select number of residences are listed at any given time, and currently range from a two-bedroom condo priced at \$8,750,000 to a four-bedroom penthouse for \$66 million.



Both of the penthouses at The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria, which are currently under construction, will supply straight-on views of the General Electric Building's stylized gothic crown. Credit...Katherine Marks for The New York Times

The Waldorf Astoria New York

In Midtown East, two of the city's most renowned Art Deco buildings, the [Waldorf Astoria New York](#) (designed by [Schultze and Weaver](#)), and the [General Electric Building](#) (by the architects [Cross & Cross](#)) stand within a block of one another. Both buildings were completed in 1931, and both bear enviable exterior elements typical to the period, like geometric detailing and distinctive crowns that dramatically shape the silhouettes of the buildings.

“The dance between those two great Art Deco buildings was something that people interested in the New York skyline noticed right away,” said Andrew Dolkart, an architectural historian and professor of historic preservation at the [Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation](#). “While the tops of the buildings look different, they have a similar aesthetic, so they work well together.”

However, it wasn't until [construction](#) began on [The Towers of the Waldorf Astoria](#), a luxury condominium tower that spans the upper 33 levels of the 52-story landmark building, including two new top-floor penthouses nestled inside its crowning cupolas, that eye-level views of the General Electric Building's stylized Gothic crown were fully revealed. (The hotel on the lower floors remains closed for renovations.)

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Along with stunning views of that crown, a majority of the north-facing residences in the block-wide building also provide protected overhead views of the [recently restored](#) terra-cotta-tiled dome of [St. Barts Episcopal Church](#) next door.

By individually landmarking the Waldorf, the General Electric Building, and St. Bartholomew's, the Landmarks Preservation Commission "preserved a unique urban composition with a spiraling upward thrust," said the architect Frank Mahan, an associate director at [Skidmore, Owings, & Merrill](#), the firm overseeing the restoration of the Waldorf Astoria New York Hotel, as well as the construction of the new residences.

Condo sales began early last year, and available units range from a \$1.825 million studio to a four-bedroom unit for \$18.5 million.



Some upper-level units at VU New York, at 368 Third Avenue, will have overhead views of the two-story mansard roof that crowns the historic 69th Regiment Armory Building on Lexington Avenue, between East 25th and 26th Streets. Credit...Katherine Marks for The New York Times

The 69th Regiment Armory

In Kips Bay, a new 100-unit high-rise condominium building called [VU New York](#) stretches 36-floors high, far above many of its surrounding structures. Its height provides vistas of the uptown skyline, the East River, and many of the hidden architectural gems in between.

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Residents on some of the lower level floors of VU New York will have direct sightlines of the two-story mansard roof crowning the historic [69th Regiment Armory Building](#) on Lexington Avenue, which has hosted everything from the legendary [1913 Armory Show](#) to early 1950s [NBA Finals games](#). (Today, the structure serves as the [headquarters](#) of the New York Army National Guard's 1st Battalion, 69th Infantry Regiment.)

Upper-floor units with western exposures will have overhead views of the [architecturally distinct structure](#), the first armory in New York City (built after the [Seventh Regiment Armory](#)) that was not modeled after a [medieval fortress](#).

Constructed in 1906 by [Hunt & Hunt](#), the Armory's slate-covered mansard roof was originally just one story with circular dormer windows. In 1926 the roof was [raised](#) by the architect George M. McCabe to create more storage for the Armory. Rectilinear and round-headed windows with classical copper surrounds were added. The end result is a French Beaux-Arts-inspired structure with architectural details that can be appreciated from afar, but that are most impactful at eye level.

“The design of the 69th Regiment Armory building is completely different from the other armory buildings found in Manhattan, which typically have a medieval-style,” said Yehuda Mor, of Minrav Development, which developed VU New York. “When residents look out their window and see the armory, it feels like they're looking out a window in Paris.”

Construction is still underway at VU New York, although sales launched in January 2021. Available condo units range from a \$829,000 studio to a three-bedroom for \$3.95 million.



The penthouse at the top of the Woolworth Building, which the developer has named the Pinnacle, includes a wraparound observatory terrace that provides panoramic views of the skyline, framed by copper buttresses. Credit...Katherine Marks for The New York Times

The Woolworth Building

At 792 feet, the [Woolworth Building](#) at 233 Broadway was the tallest in the world from 1913 to 1930. Commissioned by the “five-and-dime” store magnate [Frank Winfield Woolworth](#), the great neo-Gothic skyscraper was designed by the architect [Cass Gilbert](#) to resemble a medieval European cathedral, and is often referred to as New York’s “[Cathedral of Commerce](#).”

Along with elaborate ornamental stonework, all but the lower four floors of the Woolworth Building feature a terra-cotta facade that from a distance reads as limestone, but upon closer inspection is a [polychromatic scheme](#) of vibrant blue, green and golden yellow glazes.

“The intention was to use color in a nuanced way that blended in with the sky,” said Ms. Willis, of the [Skyscraper Museum](#). “Woolworth and Gilbert were serious about the building’s stature as an artistic work, or ‘Architecture’ with a capital ‘A’.”

Over a century later, [Alchemy Properties](#) has transformed the top floors of the 58-story building into 32 condominiums known as [The Woolworth Tower Residences](#), where

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some residents can have up-close-and-personal views of the building's intricately detailed exterior, including its gargoyles, ogee arches, copper roof, and windows framed by colorfully glazed terra-cotta panels.

"There aren't too many buildings in New York where you can look out the window and see the building you're living in," said Ken Horn, the president and founder of Alchemy Properties.

Apartments in the Woolworth Tower first came to market in 2015, including the penthouse at the crown of the building, named the Pinnacle. Alchemy began marketing the property in earnest in 2017, listing it at what would be a [record-breaking](#) \$110 million, but is currently offering the penthouse as a "white box," or raw space, for [\\$79 million](#) after giving it a [price cut](#) in 2019. Other available units include a [five-bedroom apartment](#) listed at \$29.95 million and a [two-bedroom](#) condo for \$5.45 million.



Some units at the new development at 25 Park Row offer direct views of the copper-domed cupola towers atop 15 Park Row. Credit...Katherine Marks for The New York Times

The Park Row Building

Across from City Hall Park (and a stone's throw from the Woolworth Building) at 15 Park Row, sits the architect [R.H. Robertson's](#) iconic [Park Row Building](#). When it was completed in 1899, the 391-foot-tall, [landmark building](#) was the [tallest](#) in the world, and once housed the offices of The Associated Press news agency.

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The exterior of 15 Park Row is marked by classical architectural elements, including columns and pilasters, projected ornamental balconies, and most noticeably, a pair of four-story cupola towers with copper domes that cap the building and help distinguish it in the skyline.

“One critic referred to them as rabbit ears,” Mr. Dolkart said of the cupolas. “They were designed to draw attention to the building.”

Today, certain residents at [25 Park Row](#), a newly constructed 50-story luxury condominium building with 110 units located right next to the Park Row Building, can enjoy front-row-with-popcorn views of the cupolas. Additionally, every single residence in the building offers northwest views of City Hall Park and Woolworth Building, a consideration which the architect Rick Cook of [CookFox](#) said played heavily into the architectural design of the building.

“We believe that these buildings speak to each other around the urban room of City Hall Park,” Mr. Cook said. “Light, shadow, and depth are their common language, yet they each have their own character, their own personality and place in the urban experience.”

The building first came to market in the spring of 2019. Fourteen units are still available, starting at \$2.815 million for a two-bedroom and going up to \$12.5 million for a four-bedroom penthouse on the 42nd floor.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/07/realestate/old-buildings-new-views.html>