



Stephen M. Ross Discusses His vision for Hudson Yards

March 10, 2016 | By David Moin



One hundred thirty thousand tons of steel. Sixteen skyscrapers. Twenty million square feet. Twenty-three thousand construction jobs. Twenty-eight thousand shrubs. Two concrete platforms covering 660,000 square feet.

It's difficult to get a handle on the mammoth, 28-acre, \$20 billion Hudson Yards, and to imagine what it will be like with all of its components and complexities, and its impact on New York City.

Here's what is clear: It will be sprawling and soaring, with supertall office towers altering Manhattan's skyline. It will have an observation deck higher than the Empire State Building's; a one-million-square-foot mall with the city's first Neiman Marcus and 100 other stores; about a dozen restaurants run by chefs such as Thomas Keller, José Andrés and Costas Spiliadis; 14 acres of open public space; 5,000 apartments, and a Culture Shed for New York Fashion Week, exhibits and performing arts.

Hudson Yards, extending from 30th to 33rd Streets, between 10th and 12th Avenues, and from 33rd to 34th Streets, between 10th and 11th Avenues, will reshape what's largely been a vast, barren swathe of Manhattan's West Side — pockmarked by parking lots, auto shops and a drive-through McDonald's that recently closed — into an entirely new neighborhood and tourist destination.

“What really turns me on is building impactful projects that are transformative,” says Stephen Ross, founder and chairman of the Related Cos., developer of Hudson Yards along with Oxford Properties Group.

Hudson Yards is considered the largest private development in the history of the U.S., larger than Rockefeller Center (22 acres), or the World Trade Center (16 acres). In a feat of engineering, it will sit atop two huge

concrete platforms covering the railroad yards funneling into Penn Station. The platforms are supported by hundreds of caissons (steel tubes) four to five feet in diameter, drilled into the bedrock and filled with concrete. The trains will continue to run underneath the platforms, which will have drainage, sprinklers, fans to vent out heat, and electrical gear for lighting.

And those 130,000 tons of steel — that's just for Hudson Yards East, the first phase, encompassing retail, office, public space and the Culture Shed. Hudson Yards West, which is the second phase and planned to be mostly residential, will require additional steel tonnage.

The centerpiece of the project will be a monumental sculpture by Thomas Heatherwick that anchors the



outdoor public space. “It will be to New York what the Eiffel Tower is to Paris,” claims Ross. “We are keeping it under wraps. We will introduce it in July. I don’t think anybody in the past 50 years or more has spent \$150 million privately to develop a public art piece that will really be the icon to the city. The last time something like this happened, we got the Statue of Liberty from France. I realize that’s a bold statement. But everybody we have shown it to has agreed.”

Ross, who some consider an urban visionary and an unabashed showman, is also the owner of the Miami Dolphins and the developer of the Time Warner Center, another mixed-use project, which, in some ways, inspired Hudson Yards, having demonstrated for the first time that vertical retailing in New York City can work. Related owns and operates assets valued at more than \$20 billion.

For Ross, Hudson Yards was inevitable due to all the money and development that has been flowing into the West Side — \$2.4 billion to extend the number 7 subway line from Times Square to 34th Street and 11th Avenue; \$1 billion for the High Line and Hudson River Park, and an estimated \$500 million for the renovation of the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center. The area also contains the last large, undeveloped parcel of land in Manhattan.

“I looked at all that and saw that something had to happen here, something big. That’s what really excited me about the project,” Ross says. “This was always like a wasteland waiting to be developed. It will be a city within a city. At the same time, it has to be part of New York City. We are using great architects, each doing separate buildings. I am trying to make this a model for the future of the sustainable city — a total mixed-use live, work, play environment, incorporating all of the latest in technology and sustainability. It’s really a



model that the rest of the world will want to adopt.

“The issue is that most New Yorkers don’t know what’s coming, and most people, when you talk about the type of things we are talking about, don’t have any vision for it,” he continues. “They’ve got to see it to inform their beliefs. We have spent very little money on advertising, so it’s all been kind of viral. People don’t really understand what Hudson Yards will do or what impact it will have on New York City. We think the center of gravity, which I regard as Rockefeller Center, will shift to Hudson Yards with all the things that we are doing....If you look at the companies that are coming here, they are leaving Midtown and places like Rockefeller Center. They’re leaving some of the most prestigious addresses in the city. They recognize that the way you do business, the amount of space you need to occupy, the way buildings are powered, the sustainability, the resiliency of the buildings to withstand storms, and the backup systems, have all changed. Technology has changed.”

“I see Hudson Yards as an episode within the city,” says William Pedersen, founding design partner of Kohn Pedersen Fox Associates, which is the architect for the 10 Hudson Yards and 30 Hudson Yards office buildings. “I don’t see it as a city within the city, which implies an inner sanctum that doesn’t really receive you. This is going to be an extremely public place. When you think of how public it already is with the High Line, just imagine what it

is going to be like when you have all of the buildings together with the High Line,” which flows right into 10 Hudson Yards and picks up again at 55 Hudson Yards, on the north side of the project. Hudson Yards, Pedersen observes, “really becomes an integrated part of the city. It becomes a crescendo. Not something that stands alone. It tries to open its arms as much as it possibly can.

“The key is going to be this sculptural piece,” he adds. “The beauty of the Eiffel Tower is that it is participatory. You ride up it. This is going to be participatory as well. It’s not as tall. It will be more civic. It can contain more people. It will be symbolic of community, of people enjoying a place. It will allow the other buildings to rally together, creating an ensemble of buildings.

“The one analogy I can make to Hudson Yards is Roppongi Hills in Tokyo,” where many Japanese and multinational corporations have headquarters. “The components that were introduced were all powerful and enormous, and the result has been a tremendous urbanistic success. The number of visitors that come to that complex on an annual basis is staggering, close to 10 million. That is what is going to happen here. You won’t have anything else like it in New York City,” he says.

“We tried to design our buildings to respond to every aspect of the context around them,” Pedersen explains. “That responsiveness, that gesturing, the sense that there is dialogue between buildings, is really the es-

sence of what we are trying to do.”

With the two buildings, “we are creating a type of dance,” with 10 Hudson Yards sloping toward the Hudson River, and 30 Hudson Yards facing the city as if “gesturing” to people emerging from the number 7 subway extension, which has the longest escalator in New York’s subway system. “Frankly, the biggest challenge is creating an architecture that really will be enjoyed by everybody.”

At the 90-story, 30 Hudson Yards, “the drama is going to reside in the observation deck,” Pedersen says. “You come out 80 feet into the air, just a little bit higher than the Empire State Building. The real excitement is getting out on the prow. We put a circular opening through it, so you can stand and look straight down through a glass opening.”

At 10 Hudson Yards, which is 52-stories high, the drama lies in the High Line flowing into the atrium at the headquarters of Coach. “We said, ‘What if we took a part of their building and pulled it apart, so we have a vertical atrium in between that makes an anchor for their campus?’” The nearly completed 10 Hudson Yards building has been leased to The Boston Consulting Group, VaynerMedia, Intersection and Sidewalk Labs, L’Oréal USA and SAP, as well as Coach.

Hudson Yards has two major construction phases. Phase one, developing above the Eastern Rail Yard between 10th and 11th Avenues, consists of the office buildings 30 Hudson Yards and 10 Hudson Yards, with the mall situated between them; the



outdoor sculpture and public space, and the Culture Shed, among other buildings.

Phase two entails developing above the Western Rail Yard, between Eleventh Avenue and the West Side Highway, and will be primarily residential, both affordable and luxury, with some office and retail space and a school. “So much of it depends on who is interested in taking space,” says Pedersen. “We do have a vision for phase two that will continually evolve depending on who the participants are. In any master plan, that is always the case.”

Daniel Doctoroff, who was deputy mayor of economic development and rebuilding for the city under Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg, and a former chief executive officer of Bloomberg LP, has been a strong advocate for Hudson Yards. “This is most akin to a Rockefeller Center of the 21st century, driven by a developer making a bold architectural statement,” Doctoroff says.

“It’s very clear — Manhattan is tilting to the west. It’s a very profound shift, and it’s not just commercial. It’s retail, residential and recreational. The beauty of Hudson Yards is that it’s truly mixed-use and it will be an economic engine for the city forever. It illustrates how the public sector and private sector can work hand in glove. There will be a huge impact in terms of lease payments Hudson Yards makes to the Metropolitan Transit Authority,” he continues.

Doctoroff is ceo of Sidewalk Labs, a Google-funded technology company that is moving into Hudson Yards



and is focused on developing ways to improve city life. He's also chairman of the Culture Shed, while Alex Poots serves as artistic director. The Culture Shed will be encased in a retractable shell that will move to enlarge or shrink the seating capacity and will have galleries and a rooftop café. The Culture Shed is likely to begin hosting New York Fashion Week in 2019. The foundation has been laid and steel has begun going up. More than \$300 million of the estimated \$400 million needed for the construction has been raised, with the city having made a \$75 million commitment. The six-story, 200,000-square-foot complex is being designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro and the Rockwell Group.

"It will be the world's most flexible cultural institution," says Doctoroff. "The idea really started when Diane von Furstenberg came to Mayor Bloomberg, me and Patti Harris [another deputy mayor] when we were in office in 2004, saying there is no home for fashion in New York."

It's amazing Hudson Yards has begun to spring up at all, considering the 50-year history of failed proposals and debates over how to redevelop the area. There has been continuing speculation over whether it will evolve into a major shopping destination, and there is competition for office tenants from Brookfield Properties, the Moinian Group and Tishman Speyer, which are developing properties all around the area.

In the Fifties, William Zeckendorf Sr. proposed a huge project on the site with the world's tallest skyscraper. Sonny Werblin, the late owner of the New York Jets and builder of the Meadowlands Sports Complex, and George Steinbrenner, the late owner of the New York Yankees, both wanted the site to house a stadium for their teams. Later, Bloomberg and Doctoroff advocated creating a sports complex in a failed bid to host the 2012 Olympics, which was lost to London. Afterward, they spearheaded the rezoning of the district from 42nd to 30th Streets, between Ninth Avenue and the West Side Highway, in a redevelopment scheme planned and funded by the city, the state and the Metropolitan Transit Authority.

Within the district, the Hudson Yards project is a private joint venture between Related and Oxford, which has a 99-year, \$1 billion lease on the air rights over the rail yards from the MTA. "The whole idea for developing Hudson Yards actually originated out of the Olympic bid," says Doctoroff. "Think about the plan consisting of different elements — the extension of the number 7 subway, the development of infrastructure and parks, rezoning the entire area. By January of 2005, all of that was approved," minus the stadium.

In 2007, the MTA received proposals on developing Hudson Yards from Related, Brookfield, Extell Development Co., Vornado Realty Trust, the Durst Organization and Tishman Speyer, which was awarded the project. But it pulled out due to economic concerns, the then-declining real estate market and the beating it took on its 2006 purchase of the Stuyvesant Town/Peter Cooper Village residential complex for \$5.4 billion.

That's when Related stepped up again, and in 2008 it was awarded the project. Related has had to battle skeptics who questioned whether companies would uproot and relocate there and whether retailers would expand into untested territory on the West Side. Earlier, Condé Nast expressed interest in the site, but opted to relocate to the World Trade Center, and, in addition to Neiman's, other department stores were contacted

about being the anchor in the mall, including Bloomingdale's, Nordstrom and Saks Fifth Avenue. No other retail tenants have been revealed yet.

"The biggest challenge in pulling this off was getting the tenants to buy in and lease the space," Ross admits. "We convinced them. We had a lot of selling to do over the past two years. It hasn't taken that long. We started off with Coach [which signed two years ago], then L'Oréal and SAP....We now have 7 million square feet of office tenants."

The first piece of Hudson Yards to open will be the 10 Hudson Yards office building this spring, while the retail mall, restaurants and public space are seen opening in 2018, and the Culture Shed probably in 2019. The entire Hudson Yards project is expected to be complete in 2024.

Elsewhere at Hudson Yards, construction is under way on the 30 Hudson Yards and 55 Hudson Yards office towers. The 30 Hudson Yards building is fully tenanted and will house Time Warner Inc., which is moving from Columbus Circle; KKR, and Wells Fargo Securities. So far, 55 Hudson Yards has leased space to Boies, Schiller & Flexner.

According to Ross, Hudson Yards has been attracting companies to relocate, in part, because their existing offices in Manhattan have become obsolete. "You need less square-foot space per employee. Probably when most of these buildings were built, they were looking at over 300 square feet per person. Today, we are down below 200 feet per person. Corporations see they don't need as much space as they needed in the past. And you have to have the ability to service those people with more elevators, because there are more employees in that space, more bathrooms and more power. Millennials work differently. They work different hours. They stay very late. They work together, requiring all of our tenants to stay open with extended hours. Employees are going to want to walk home. They want to accomplish a lot more," he says. "Now the biggest challenge is building probably the largest construction project in the U.S., and in New York City, it's not an easy thing."