

NYC's best new architecture of 2017, from Cornell Tech to American Copper Buildings

Take a trip through the year in architecture

By **Amy Plitt** | [@plitter](#) | Dec 14, 2017, 11:43am EST

Photography by **Max Touhey**

It's time to make up a bunch of awards and hand them out to the most deserving people, places and things in the real estate, architecture and neighborhood universes of New York City! Yep, it's time for the 14th Annual Curbed Awards! Up now: the year in architecture.

It's hard not to feel slightly underwhelmed by the state of architecture in New York in 2017. Past years in have been defined by the debut of skyline-altering skyscrapers (One World Trade Center in 2014, 432 Park Avenue in 2015) or long-awaited additions to the built landscape—the *Oculus*, which finally opened in 2016, or the new Whitney the year prior, both come to mind.

But—preservation battles aside, and we’ll get to those soon—it’s hard to think of a single building or project in New York that inspired much chatter, awe, or outrage in 2017. (Perhaps because the world at large was fixated on *so many* other things to feel awe or outrage over this year.)

Still, there were some projects worth celebrating. Here now, the best new architecture—reveals, makeovers, and conversions included—of 2017.



Empire Stores, a warehouse conversion on the Brooklyn waterfront.

Best conversions

2) Building 77: As the Brooklyn Navy Yard gears up for its transformation from working-class industrial hub to, um, creative-class industrial hub, bits and pieces of the former shipmaking site are finally opening their doors.

The biggest by far is **Building 77**, a hulking warehouse that's now an incubator for light manufacturing, with a scaled-back food hall on its ground floor. Its \$185 million rehab, overseen by Beyer Blinder Belle (with the ground-floor portion designed by Marvel Architects), added windows to the 1 million square foot concrete slab, opening it up for its next act.

1) Empire Stores: The transformation of Dumbo's **Empire Stores** into a 21st-century mixed-use hub has been a long time coming, and now that the project is complete, it's clear that it was worth the wait. Spearheaded by S9 Architecture and Studio V, the renovation of the 19th-century warehouse was sensitively rendered, breathing new life into the building while retaining the industrial character that's drawn so many to that neighborhood in the first place.

The building also won the Curbed NY reader's choice for Building of the Year, proving that it struck a chord with the public this year—as much proof as any of a successful project.



Thomas Heatherwick's *Vessel* on the rise in Hudson Yards.

Fun to watch rise award

3) 325 Kent Avenue: SHoP's whimsical rental on the Williamsburg waterfront—the first component of the larger Domino megaproject—took shape over the past few years, and was finally revealed in all of its doughnut-shaped glory this summer.

2) 520 West 28th Street: Zaha Hadid's High Line-hugging luxury condo was on this list before, when construction first began in 2015. But 2017 was the year in which the swoopy condo was fully realized, bringing yet another piece of starchitecture to the area around the elevated park.

1) *Vessel*: It remains to be seen if the public sculpture at the center of Hudson Yards will become the city's next big landmark or mere architectural folly. (And, let's be honest: those two things aren't mutually exclusive.) Nevertheless, it was wild watching Thomas Heatherwick's 150-foot-tall "stairway to nowhere" take shape.



Cornell Tech's Roosevelt Island campus.

Best reason to visit Roosevelt Island

Not that there weren't good reasons to visit Roosevelt Island before, but the long-awaited **Cornell Tech** campus has brought a bit of architectural glitz to the otherwise low-key, largely residential community. The three buildings that currently make up the campus were designed by Weiss/Manfredi, Morphosis, and Handel Architects, and opened in the fall. The architects for each have made strides in adding sustainable design to the island—Handel's 26-story dorm, for instance, is the tallest passive house project in the world—along with new open space that's already proven popular with its residents. A hotel, designed by Snøhetta, will soon follow.

The busiest starchitect award

It's not often that one firm is responsible for essentially building a neighborhood from scratch, but you could argue that **Diller, Scofidio + Renfro** are doing just that with

Hudson Yards. There are many firms working on the megaproject—most of whom, it should be noted, are helmed by men—but the New York team, with Liz Diller as its most visible principal, has its hand in multiple pieces of the project. DS+R's the Shed, its innovative, multimodal culture venue, and 15 Hudson Yards (both designed in collaboration with the Rockwell Group) are moving right along; and that's not even mentioning the High Line, which is the artery that links the megaproject to points south.

Outside of that cloistered neighborhood-to-be, DS+R is also working on the expansive redesign of the Museum of Modern Art, the first piece of which debuted this spring, and the Metropolitan Museum of Art's next big Costume Institute exhibit. The common thread: these are all projects that promise to reshape the way New Yorkers experience the city.

Runner-up: Thomas Heatherwick hasn't exactly been having the *best* year; his proposed redesign of Lincoln Center's Geffen Hall was scrapped, and the back-and-forth over Pier 55—Barry Diller's shiny, \$250 million Hudson River plaything,

designed by the British architect—was a headache for all involved (and, frankly, those of us on the sidelines). But now that Pier 55 appears to be back on, and Heatherwick’s enormous *Vessel* has topped out in Hudson Yards, it’s hard to deny that he’s had a *big* year.

Best reason to take a staycation

2) Public Hotel: Ian Schrager’s latest addition to the world of New York hospitality was one of the most buzzed-about openings of the year. (The Standard-in-2009 levels of hand-wringing over its racier patrons was surely a boon in that sense.) Though reviews on its public-facing spaces, including Jean-Georges Vongerichten’s Public Kitchen, haven’t been great, the building itself (another Herzog & de Meuron joint) is a looker—how many times did its flashy neon escalators pop up on Instagram this year?



A green wall inside the 1Hotel Brooklyn Bridge in Dumbo.

1) 1 Hotel Brooklyn Bridge: Dumbo's first luxury hotel, from the eco-friendly 1 Hotels brand, is a stunner. INC Architecture & Design is responsible for the interiors, which nod to the natural landscape just outside the hotel's door—there's reclaimed wood, shiplap, and other homages to its waterfront location. It's a lovely space, and despite the initial outcry over the building itself (which is incorporated into the larger, once-contentious Pierhouse development), it's a worthy addition to the neighborhood.

Best reason to actually go to Penn Station

A trip through Penn Station is probably unavoidable for most New Yorkers, but now, there's actually a—dare we say it?—not awful place to wait for a train. Its new **West End concourse**, which connects the station to the James A. Farley Post Office below-ground, opened to the public this summer, and is notable for being clean and spacious—so basically, the polar opposite of the current Penn scheme. As a preview of what's to come from the ambitious redesign of the larger transit hub, it's not too shabby.

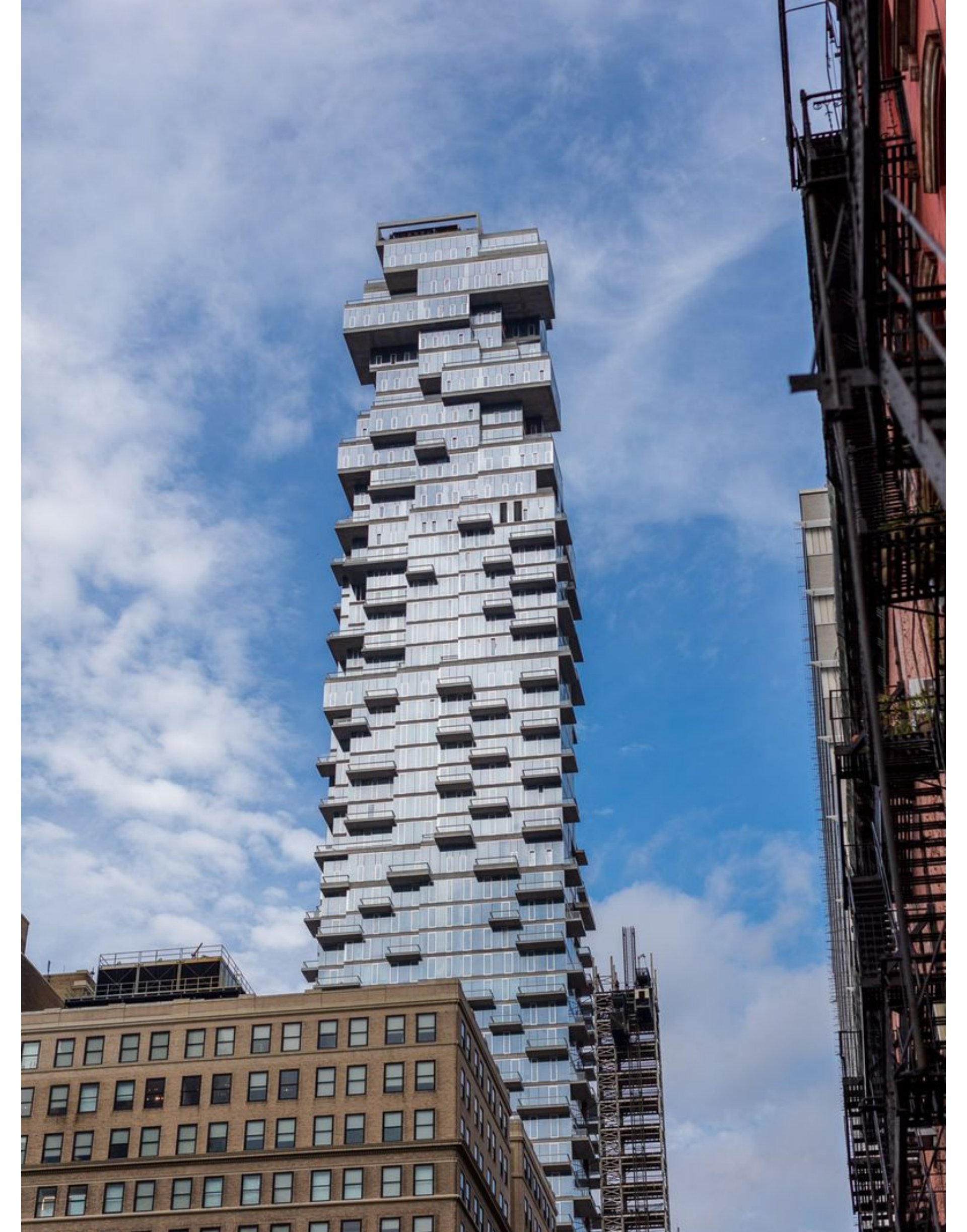


One of the Second Avenue subway stations, which opened at the beginning of 2017.

The “oh my God, finally!” award

The biggest game-changer of the year, in our eyes, wasn't a building at all; it was the opening of the **Second Avenue subway**, which has been nearly a century in the making. While not quite an architectural masterpiece, as Curbed critic Alexandra Lange [noted](#), the line's four stations were nevertheless the biggest change to the urban landscape this year, and a *long* time coming. Hop off the trains to peek at the art in the subway stops—Chuck Close's celeb portraits at 86th Street may get most of the attention, but Vik Munoz's mosaics at 72nd Street depicting everyday New Yorkers are the real stars.







56 Leonard Street, which finally opened to residents this year.

Runner-up: Herzog & de Meuron’s Jenga-like pile of glass at **56 Leonard Street** has been in the works for what seems like *forever*—or, at the very least, since those wild pre-recession days of 2007, when the building was first revealed. But things have steadily progressed since construction picked back up in 2012, and the building finally—finally!—welcomed its first residents this fall. (And had its first flips, too—that, at least, didn’t take long.)

Building of the year

This year, one building—well, technically two—stood out above the rest for Curbed’s editors: SHoP’s **American Copper Buildings** brought a bit of glamour to the otherwise architecturally bland east side of Manhattan, and thus, it’s our building of the year.

We’ll let our critic, Alexandra Lange, take it away:

“Did you know that what the skyline needed was a cross between all-in 1960s corporate branding, the Downtown Athletic Club as described by Rem Koolhaas and a lair worthy of Goldfinger? I didn’t, but it did, which is why SHoP’s fraternal twin, 761-unit rental towers are our 2017 Building of the Year.

We’ve been watching for some time as the copper-clad north and south sides of the two towers, zigzagging within their ho-hum zoning envelopes, rose. First, they were as shiny as copper pennies, then they went dark and streaks appeared, including a stripe of verdigris. “Eventually the whole thing will be Statue of Liberty green,” says SHoP principal Gregg Pasquarelli. “We thought of it as a performance art piece viewed from the FDR Drive.” While other Jenga-inspired skyscrapers already seem old hat, these can still surprise us.



The 75-foot pool situated in the skybridge of the American Copper Buildings.

What will be the first movie to use the skybridge that links the two 40-plus-story buildings as its villain's hideout? It could have been *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* but—probably just as well—they called too soon. Some less cartoonish evil must take place in that three-story parallelogram some 30 stories in the air, with chevron floors and chevron light fixtures and, most glamorous of all, a blue-on-blue tiled chevron lap pool suspended between views of either the Empire State Building and the East River.

“I imagined swimming from one skyscraper to another,” says SHoP principal Gregg Pasquarelli, who, as architect and resident, can now live the dream, one implanted in many of our heads by Koolhaas's vision, in *Delirious New York*, of the vertical club as a paradise for bachelors.

The health club, by the way, is called the Copper Tone, the roof deck, the Copper Top. The light fixtures, custom designed by K&Co., all have copper somewhere; the signage, by Pandiscio Co., uses the same chevrons, plus hits of neon green, to keep the brand story rolling. A scene of seduction at the gym’s two-story climbing wall? A meet-cute in the lobby’s disco-worthy black mailroom? It’s fun to see a building ready for more than Netflix and chill.” ■

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