

# LIBERTY TOWER

*The 'World's Tallest Building on so Small a Plot'...it introduced the Gothic style to skyscrapers and is one of the earliest of the romantic skyscrapers which changed the skyline of Manhattan in the early 1900s.*

--New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission Wall Plaque

## The Financial District

*Cathedrals of Commerce*

In the middle of the 19th century, as the Financial District became more established, mercantile interests simply reused the existing dwellings and shipping related warehouses. As the 19th century drew to a close, steel became readily available, and its structural strength permitted taller buildings. Additionally, the newly invented elevator permitted ready access to the upper floors of these taller buildings. These budding technologies allowed businesses to adapt to new structural layouts which permitted expansion upward, maintaining the same amount of space on the ground while providing greater space above.

Eventually commercial buildings developed into a new form of architecture, the office building, whose intent was to provide an infrastructure where people could conduct their daily business independent of facilities for the handling of goods. The office buildings were different from the open lofts in that they were compartmentalized into individual spaces, allowing workers to have privacy from each other.

In the 20th century, the ever-taller office buildings became known as skyscrapers. Their height limit was tested, economically and practically, as each developer tried to outdo the previous. New York became known as a city of skyscrapers. By the end of the 20th century, zoning regulations and the impact of skyscrapers on their surroundings and the environment began to control their popularity. At the beginning of the 21st century a new concern, the terrorist, caused a rethinking of the prudence of their existence.

On September 11, 2001, for the third time in Manhattan's history, a significant portion of the Financial District was destroyed and the District was again severely adversely impacted. Although the directly impacted area was about the same size as the earlier destructions, this time the loss of lives was enormous and, being an attack, it brought international attention to the Financial District.

While this catastrophic event could have stigmatized the Financial District, instead it has emerged more popular than prior to the attack. Restaurants and shops abound, as well as families with strollers and hoards of tourists. While still a work-centric part of city, and one that still does not have a significant nightlife, the Financial District is now yet another embodiment of New York reinventing itself.

The Financial District in Lower Manhattan, is the unique-to-the-world home of the most extraordinary



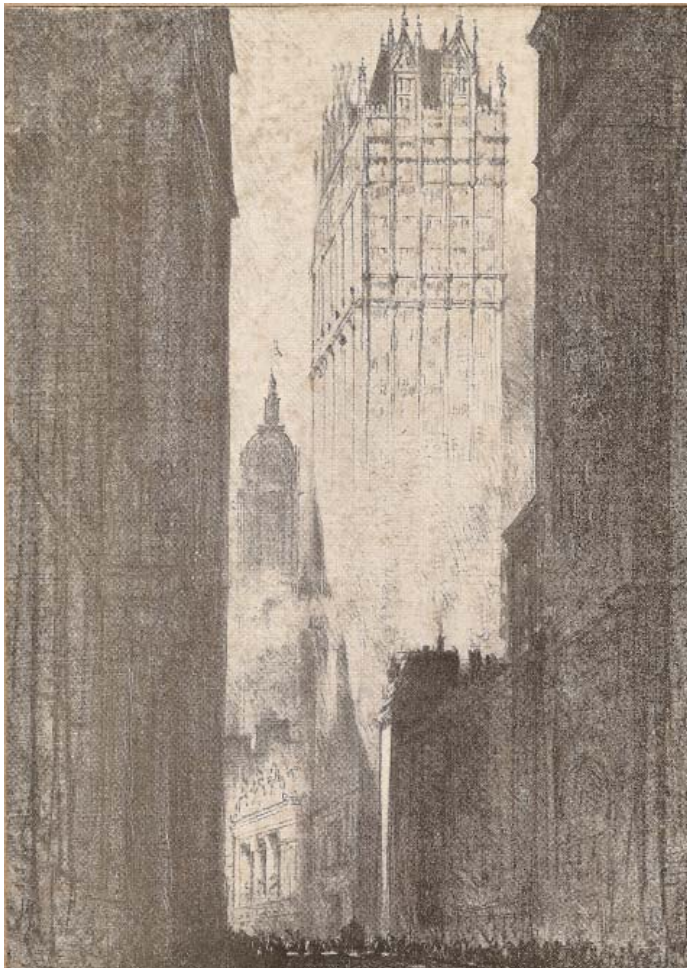
*Downtown Cavern, 1913 George Herbert Macrum (1888-1970), (Author's Collection)*

collection of 19th and 20th century masterpieces of financial architecture. Each year, millions flock to the canyons of Lower Manhattan to view these “Cathedrals of Commerce” with names known in households throughout the world. The skyscrapers and, at one time, twin 110 story monoliths are built in almost every architectural style including Gothic, Neoclassical, Art Deco, Modernism and Egyptian revival styles. They are uniquely set side by side with a 19th century seaport, 18th century churches all laid out in a 17th century street pattern.

In the 21st century, the early skyscrapers are becoming 100 years old. Lower Manhattan is the first location which will experience the phenomena of a multitude of huge ancient buildings. These monuments are not unlike the pyramids. They are mammoth, practically indestructible and were built for very specific purposes. And, like the pyramids, they will remain forever because they are structurally sound (concrete hardens as it ages), they are increasingly historic (protected by law) and uneconomic to replace (destruction would be costly and replacement buildings under current zoning regulations would be smaller).

Civilization existed for thousands of years without special buildings to which people went daily to conduct a commercial activity. New communication devices are changing this concept. Tomorrow’s devices may result in old office buildings becoming even more redundant. The only way to assure that old skyscrapers do not become the dinosaurs of the future is through continuing use and adaptation. Economic recessions, natural catastrophes and human acts like the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack result in substantial vacancies in commercial buildings. The older buildings are usually the most vulnerable, but are wonderful opportunities

for residential conversion.



*Liberty Tower*, Joseph Pennell (1857-1926), (Author’s Collection)

During the recession of the late 1970’s, the vacancy rate in the Financial District soared and, in 1978, my associates and I purchased Liberty Tower, a seventy year old, almost vacant, thirty-three story neo-Gothic skyscraper which I converted to residential use. The residential conversion of Liberty Tower created a lonely residential outpost, but it also introduced a whole new activity to the Financial District. Over the next several years, the old, tall needlelike towers and the upper portions of the great skyscrapers began to be converted to extraordinary residences. This was followed by residentially orientated shops and markets.

Converting commercial buildings to residential use had been a Lower Manhattan phenomena. Now it would become a Financial District phenomena.

## LIBERTY TOWER, 1909-1978

A skyscraper with “romantic picturesqueness”.  
Cobb’s work: Montgomery Schuyler, architectural critic

In 1909, at the edge of the horse age, the architect, Henry Ives Cobb received the commission to design Liberty Tower. Cobb’s design presaged Cass Gilbert’s famed 1913 Woolworth Building and advanced the use of the Gothic style for skyscrapers. At 33 stories, it was one of the world’s tallest buildings. Along with Ernest Flagg’s 47 story 1908 Singer Building, it was one of the first of the spectacularly tall buildings which eventually enhanced the entire Financial District skyline.

Henry Ives Cobb (1859-1931), was a prolific architect who completed many important commissions throughout the country. Born in Massachusetts, he studied architecture at M.I.T., graduated from Harvard in 1881 and spent a year at the *Ecoles des Beaux Arts* in Paris. He began his practice in Chicago, ten years after the Great Fire. While many architects flocked



Potter Palmer Residence 1885 Detroit Photographic Co. (Author’s Collection)

to prosperous and growing Chicago, few were as well-trained as Cobb.

Cobb’s first major commission was from Potter Palmer, a Chicago millionaire who had made a fortune in the dry-goods, real estate and hotel businesses. Cobb’s design of a large castellated neo-Gothic mansion for the socially prominent Palmer quickly led to numerous other residential commissions.

Cobb’s celebrity led also to a number of important commercial buildings and early Chicago skyscrapers including the Chicago Opera House, the University of Chicago for John D. Rockefeller and the fairy tale castle-like Owings Building. In 1895, he completed the Yerkes Observatory in Wisconsin in a Romanesque design with Saracenic details. The entire facade is a maze of ornamentation and the interiors are equally opulent. By the end of the 19th century Cobb became known as an expert in steel construction. His design for the Fisheries Building at the Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago was considered one of the triumphs of the Fair. After Chicago, Cobb first moved to Washington, D.C. to work as an architect for the United States Government and then, in 1902, he moved to New York where he designed numerous commercial buildings primarily fenestrated in historical styles. In 1906, the architectural critic Montgomery Schuyler stated:

*Mr. Cobb works in styles and takes thought for academical correctness.  
But it is not classic purity but romantic picturesqueness that is the object of  
his quest, certainly in his successes.*

Drawing on the verticality of Gothic Architecture and the “aspirations to reach Heaven and God” which symbolically drove the Gothic form, Cobb re-appropriated these elements and ideals to create a, then modern, translation of Gothic Architecture to emphasize the heights that architects could now achieve through steel.

Cobb use of an adaptation of English Gothic for the ornamentation of Liberty Tower was highly praised. The exterior is divided into a classic tripartite division with a richly decorated four story base, a 23 story shaft body with generally repetitive detailing surmounted by an elaborate peaked roof head with numerous dormers.

Liberty Tower is essentially a freestanding tower, rising 33 stories without a break in its verticality. It was built prior to zoning regulations which would have required setbacks. On a plot of only sixty by eighty feet, it had the distinction of being the “World’s Tallest Building on so Small a Plot.” It is primarily clad in cream colored glazed terra-cotta in the form of flat panels, decorative trim and applied pieces of sculpture. Liberty Tower was one of the first buildings to utilize terra-cotta, a material which eventually became the vocabulary of early skyscrapers. It is one the most beautiful of the early romantic skyscrapers.

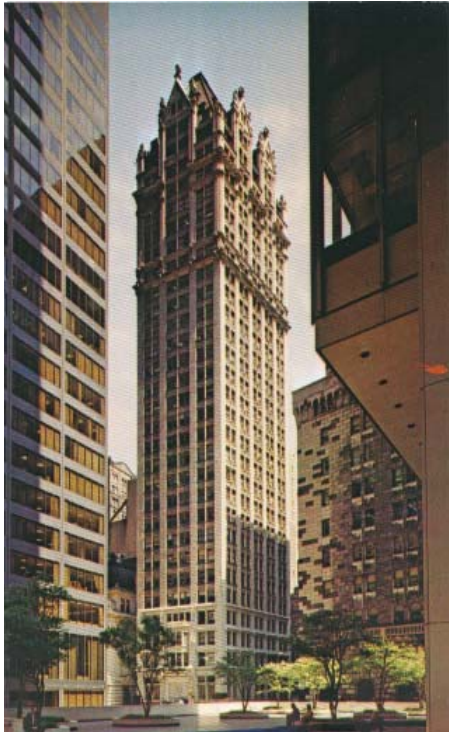


Liberty Tower, 1910 Underhill (Author's Collection)

## LIBERTY TOWER, 1978-1979

*I'm like a one-eyed cat, peepin' in a seafood store.*

--Charles Calhoun for Big Joe Turner, later  
Bill Haley & His Comets *Shake, Rattle & Roll*



Liberty Tower postcard 1976 Photo by  
David Sagarin (Author's Collection)

On the first day of May, 1978, Dave Waldman called and said. "Listen Joe, I just got in a troubled piece downtown. When I looked at it and saw the gargoyles, I could see that it had your name written all over it". Dave was an old friend from my Helmsley-Spear days and knew well my affinity for old buildings. My excitement was hard to contain.

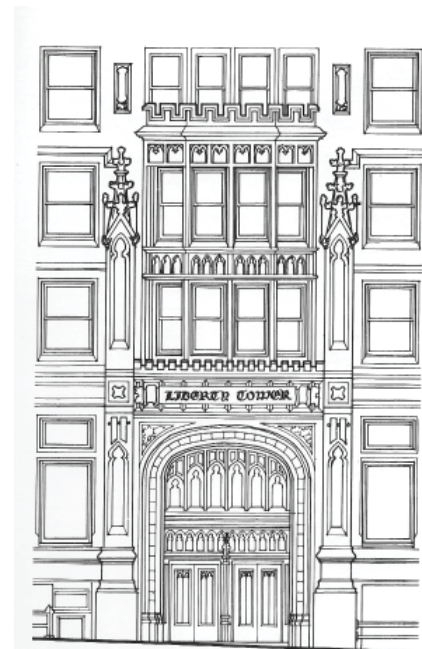
In 1978, Liberty Tower was still a marvelous skyscraper with one of the most beautiful facades in the world. It had high ceilings and large windows on all four sides, but, it was an economically failed building. Substantially vacant, it was in a rundown condition with antiquated mechanical facilities and only one stair (two were required). New York was in the midst of a severe recession and soothsayers were again predicting that the Financial District would never recover.

Liberty Tower was in a foreclosure action which meant that payments to the bank were not current. Within a week a public auction was going to be held with the building going to the highest bidder.

Rather than waiting for the auction, I visited both the owner and the bank. I offered the owner \$25,000 for the ownership with my assumption the mortgage. I told the bank, I would pay the past-due \$50,000 mortgage payments. Both parties agreed to my proposals; the owner because he was on the verge of losing everything and the bank which did not want to own a deteriorated, empty skyscraper in the financially distressed Financial District.

I reached out to people familiar with my work who had said that I should contact them if I saw an opportunity. In 1976, I had met the Globus brothers, Steve, Rick and Ronnie: they lived in three different loft buildings. I had helped each of them with their buildings. Their father, Morty Globus, an equally interesting entrepreneur, had made a fortune on Wall Street investing in unusual upstart companies. They would continue that tradition. The brothers and their father were my most logical potential investors.

The Globi (they liked using this word to describe themselves collectively) quickly saw the same thing I had seen -- the opportunity



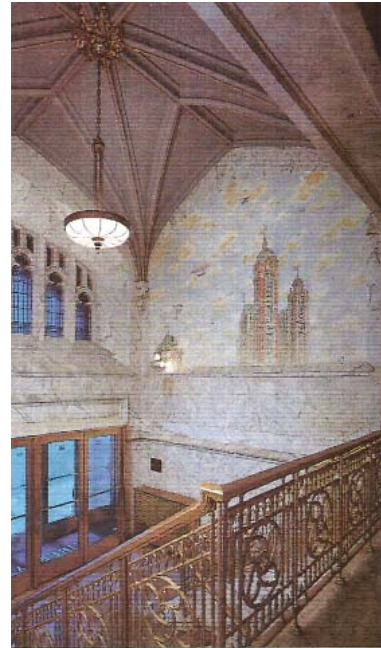
Liberty Tower Entrance, (Drawing by the  
Office of Joseph Pell Lombardi, Architect)

to create apartments in a unique-to-the-world beautiful, old Gothic skyscraper.

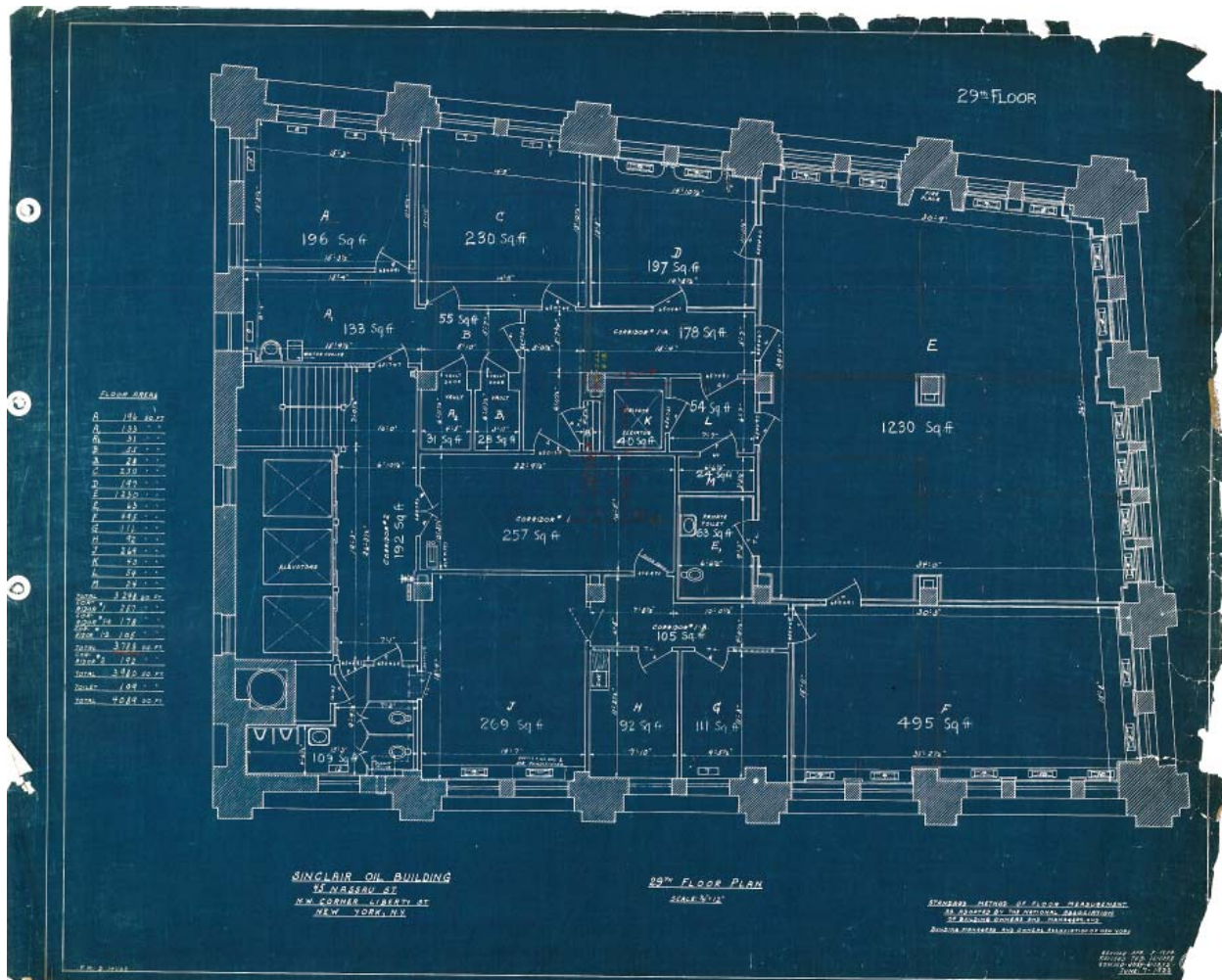
Following the same procedure I had used in the loft districts to the north, I installed the common area improvements and sold units as “raw space”, totally unfinished without bathrooms or kitchens. Like a SoHo or TriBeCa loft, this allowed the purchasers to create their own individually designed interiors to meet their design inspirations and their budget.

Purchasers also had freedom as to the size of their unit. None of the 89 units were the same. On any floor an apartment door lead to a California modernism, a neo-Gothic or a Oriental style interior -- all in a different size and layout.

Even in that deep recession, great excitement was generated by the notion that one could own, create a home and reside in such a venerable structure. Liberty Tower was the first major residential conversion in the Financial District. Much to my critic’s surprise, and to my delight, owning an apartment in an historic, beautiful skyscraper was sufficiently appealing to overcome the then strangeness of living in a nonresidential district.



Liberty Tower, Entrance Vestibule



1919 - 29th Floor Plan, Henry Ives Cobb (Author’s Collection)

## LIBERTY TOWER 1979-2000

*A residential Gothic skyscraper*

-The New York Times, July 11, 1979

From the late 1970s, the neighborhood that surrounded my home at Liberty Tower changed dramatically. The Financial District slowly evolved into a livable residential neighborhood. After my 1979 conversion of Liberty Tower, a number of smaller and medium sized buildings had been similarly converted. But, it would take the recession of the late 1980s and early 1990s to result in further skyscrapers being converted to residential use. That recession was so deep that building prices plunged to practically nothing. As businesses contracted, there were simply no office tenants and entire skyscrapers became vacant. Ownership of the buildings eventually wound up with the holders of the mortgage. Faced with accumulating real estate taxes, the lenders saw no solutions. Huge buildings were for sale at as little as \$10 per square foot (at a time when it would have cost over \$100 per square foot to build a new building). The City reinstated a real estate tax abatement program to encourage conversions. The program and the low prices of buildings resulted in Liberty Tower being joined by other residential Financial District skyscrapers.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the empty land fill created from the World Trade Center excavation became Battery Park City, with 7,500 residents and residential related shops. Enlargement of Battery Park City and conversions continued to occur during the last two decades of the twentieth century. Baby carriages became a common sight and the first supermarket arrived. Battery Park City and the conversions were joined by several new hotels. All of which resulted in further residentially related shops and restaurants and services. By the turn of the twentieth century, the Financial District had become a very comfortable place to live.

At the same time, the Financial District became the main destination for New York City tourists. A 1986 celebration of the centennial of the Statue of Liberty included a highly visible parade of tall ships, a magnificent harbor celebration and a worldwide televised firework display. The birthday of the Statue of Liberty and its restoration along with the 1990 opening of the Ellis Island Immigration Museum made the tip of Manhattan a destination for most New York City visitors. In the mid-1990s, the enlargement of the South Street Seaport on the East River, with its historic ships, restaurants and shops, gave tourists another reason for visiting the Financial District. But clearly the World Trade Center was one of the most recognizable landmarks in the world and one of the greatest tourist attractions, especially for foreigners. With a name symbolic of capitalism, the tallest buildings in New York sported a panoramic observatory and restaurants in the sky. The World Trade Center had 2 million visitors each year.

These two 110 story monoliths were not without critics. Their "fuck the sky" attitude was a powerful symbol of America proudly sporting not one, but two side-by-side tallest buildings in the world.

Initially catering to daily office workers, the addition of residents and tourists resulted in the World Trade Center shops and underground mall remaining open seven days a week. A large bookstore and a huge multi-screen cinema opened. The American Indian Museum moved into the Customs House at the tip on Manhattan, the Guggenheim Museum announced the construction of a spectacular Frank Gehry designed annex on the East River and the Museum of the City of New York began planning work on their new home at the magnificent old Tweed Courthouse.

The tip of Manhattan had been the residential and commercial center of New York City from its establishment in the mid-seventeenth century to the beginning of a dramatic northward growth in the mid-nineteenth century. For the next hundred years, it was the center of commerce for the world. The end of the twentieth century saw its aged buildings being reused for residential and cultural uses. At the beginning of the twenty first century it had come full circle as both a commerce, residential and cultural center.

On September 11, 2001, the advancement of the tip of Manhattan seemed to be irretrievably damaged.

The plans for the Guggenheim Museum and the Museum of the City of New York were abandoned. But, as in the past, New York showed its resiliency and by the end of the first decade of twenty first century the Financial District's prominence as a commerce, residential and cultural center was even more established than any other time in its history.



Liberty Tower, 1978 (Photograph by Author)

# TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

*Technique is long, life is short, opportunity fleeting, experiment perilous, judgment difficult*

Hippocrates

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 -- 8:00am

*Perhaps he knew, as I did not, that the earth was  
made round so that we would not see too far down the road*

---Isak Dinesen, the film *Out of Africa*

Liberty Tower is one and one half blocks from the World Trade Center site. On the morning of September 11, 2001 I left my apartment and walked north to TriBeCa to a meeting with contractors at the Julliard Building, one of the loft buildings I was then converting to residential use. It was one of those warm, clear Indian Summer days that enhance the cultural and social happenings of autumn in New York.

In the meeting I tried, unsuccessfully, to offset melancholic thoughts regarding the end of a recent relationship by thinking about my evening plans. I was to have dinner with a Pulitzer Prize winning Washington Post reporter. She and I had met when she was in New York writing an article about an Algerian Muslim accused of a possible Osama bin Laden terrorist plot to blow up American landmarks in the name of Islam.

My dinner plans for that evening never materialized. My guest viewed the Twin Towers horror from a halted train in New Jersey which returned to Washington and I was engulfed by a whirlwind of events which overshadowed and, at the same time, intensified my melancholy.



The World Trade Center with Liberty Tower in the foreground. Photograph courtesy of the New York Times

SEPTEMBER 11, 2001 -- 8:46am

*Try to remember the kind of September*

*When life was slow and oh, so mellow*

---Jones & Schmidt, *Try to Remember*

Shortly before 9am, my meeting at the Julliard Building was interrupted by a huge jet plane flying over us at an impossibly low elevation, followed by an enormous noise. I moved to a location on the roof that enabled a clear view of the Twin Towers. The plane had completely entered the North Tower. Only a slightly smoking opening in the shape of the wings and tail were discernible on the face of the building. But within moments the igniting jet fuel engulfed the upper portion of the Tower in flames and smoke.

I watched in horror as workers in the Windows on the World restaurant desperately waved tablecloths in what would be a fruitless effort to be rescued. Their plight was impossible to accept. This was New York City in the 21st century, somehow they would be rescued, they wouldn't all die, there had to be a solution. But this was not to be.

Some moments last forever. Seeing people, including a couple holding hands, jumping from the North Tower is permanently etched in my mind. One desperate daredevil managed to get below the impact area on a

fire hose. He scuttled across the face of the building seeking a way back into the building. I prayed for his success, but the roaring fire burnt the hose before he could reenter through the sealed-from-the-inside windows.

Fifteen minutes later, when the second plane was flown across the Hudson River and banked sharply north to undermine a corner of the South Tower, the word “attack” first came into my mind. I instinctively decided to return to my Liberty Tower apartment. This instinct was rooted in the need to protect my home. It surely was not a rational choice but, upon later reflection, I realized it fit the pattern of my life — the desire to safeguard a home. My deeply rooted obsession was causing me to put my well-being at risk!



9:45am - World Trade Center from Vesey Street & Broadway  
Trilogy Photo Lab Author's Collection

The walk back to Liberty Tower was against large crowds escaping from the Trade Center and the neighboring buildings. There were pedestrians on the streets that had been injured by fallen airplane and building debris. The upper floors of the Twin Towers were now being consumed by intense fires and the sky was filled with a large intense black smoke plume. When I arrived at the Liberty Tower lobby, I found the chaos of people fleeing with their children and possessions.

Shortly after my arrival in my apartment on the 29th floor, the South Tower collapsed with enormous noise and obliterating black smoke. This was followed, one half hour later, by the collapse of the North Tower which caused Liberty Tower to shutter. Each collapse took thousands of lives in only fifteen seconds.

The smoke and dust from the collapses caused a total blackness. All communication ceased with the failure of the mobile phones, land lines and e-mail. The last word from the television newscaster was that there were possibly as many as eight hijacked planes in the air. Later that afternoon, my television began to provide a weak picture and the voices of the CBS newscasters. The apartment remained filled with smoke and all surfaces were covered with an inch of dust. Throughout the day and while sleeping, I wore a dust mask.

## September 12, 2001

*The number of casualties will be more than any of us can bear*

---Mayor Rudy Giuliani, 9/11/01, 2:38p First televised press conference after the attack

At dawn, I struggled down the twenty nine flights of Liberty Tower stairs. Unlike any previous New York City morning, there was utter silence. Everything was covered in a 12” blanket of dust and ash. Arriving at what would eventually be known as “Ground Zero”, I found the despair of exhausted rescue workers. All that was left of the twin 110 story monoliths were two huge piles of rubble surrounded by portions of exterior walls without floors. I again felt compelled to return to my apartment.

I had a great sense of peacefulness sitting alone in my apartment that first day after the Attack. A greater sense of peacefulness than I had felt in years, much like when I was a child secure in the fold of my family. A terrible ordeal had happened, but now the struggle was over. I could relax, rest, my life was no longer in my control. The second night there was a loud thunderstorm. Many New Yorkers awakened thinking more buildings were being hit.

Two days after the attack, 1 Liberty Plaza (a huge building across from Liberty Tower) was reported to be unstable. The failure of that building would have unequivocally compromised Liberty Tower, so I finally

left.

I moved into a loft in TriBeCa where there was great camaraderie. People cheered when firemen entered the local smoky hangouts. A waitress embraced me after seeing my Liberty Street address on a magazine I had left behind in her cafe. TriBeCa was in a sealed zone with visitors being barred by soldiers at its northern boundary. The streets, heavily covered in dust, were only occupied by the remaining local residents, rescue workers and soldiers. The restaurants, fancy and modest, had free buffets for all. Food was supplied by the restaurants and by residents in the nearby lofts.

Deep emotions gripped us. Utter sorrow for the hopelessly dead - the despair was in everybody's eyes. A disbelief that such destruction had instantly happened - it would take only two or three seconds each awakening morning for the dread to arrive. A guilty elation for being alive - a need to hold someone and to make love for hours. A recklessness for having been invincible - traffic lights and huge speeding trucks were disregarded. Empathy for all - everybody hugged each other and politeness ruled. Continuing fear - activities stopped when a plane flew overhead.

We were displaced from our homes. We had warships in the harbor, fighter planes above us, soldiers in battle gear on every corner, armed Humvees on the streets, acrid smoke in the air and gritty dust covering all, but none of it mattered and nobody complained. We were alive.

For weeks, the sealed off sections of Lower Manhattan remained removed and isolated from uptown Manhattan and the rest of the world. The despair remained in the streets. Nobody who had to be near the World Trade Center site can ever forget the images that became etched in one's mind. On the sidewalks there were scores of desperate husbands, wives, family members and friends holding up photographs of their missing loved ones. In passing, even distant acquaintances would embrace.

Two weeks after the attack I went to a meeting uptown and was amazed to see a normal New York day with smartly dressed hurrying pedestrians, busy shops and restaurants and streets jammed with cabs and ordinary cars. Unshaven and dressed in my escape outfit of worn chinos, a turtleneck and sneakers, I felt like an alien amongst my colleagues in their neatly pressed business suits.

A shadow passed over my life. The sense of peacefulness I had felt in the first days vanished. It was a huge effort to concentrate on anything and there was great difficulty in sleeping, I remained hypervigilant. A few days after the attack, I sent an e-mail to friends and relatives which concluded, "While much is in chaos, I remain the eternal optimist. But, I have a great emptiness within me that I have to overcome." In fact, it would take months for that "great emptiness" to diminish.

In the ensuing weeks and months, life was slow to return to any form of normalcy. In fact, many things would never be the same and nothing was ordinary. In October, the Yankees were again in the World Series. I shall never forget sitting in cold, windy Yankee Stadium waiting for the first home game of the Series. Instead of throwing from the stands, President Bush walked out to the pitcher's mound to throw the opening ball. Jet fighters flew



View from the 29th Floor, Liberty Tower  
September 12, 2001 Author's Photograph

overhead to assure his and our protection. At that time we needed such assurances to allay our fears.

The Attack had caught me in a very precarious economic position. I was scheduled to close title on September 28th on a large property overlooking the Hudson River in TriBeCa. I had worked intensely on the project for ten months and had over one million dollars at risk. But, it needed one hundred million dollars in financing. In the weeks immediately following the Attack, banks refused to make loans on large Lower Manhattan development projects. Like most real estate "wild catters", my one million dollars in cash was my liquidity. When September 28th came and went, I had to forgo any hope of recovering my cash leaving me without liquidity. These were dark days. My clients were slow in paying, my partners slashed the prices on a project that was about to produce a substantial profit and no new projects were beginning - everybody was scared.



I approached the emergency loan agencies of FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) and the SBA (Small Business Administration). But the process started to drag on for weeks and I needed immediate cash to pay my employees and meet my current obligations or else everything would start to unravel. Conventional business loans and mortgages on my houses were possible, but everything would take time. My sense was that if I could buy some time, eventually projects would begin again and my clients would get back to business. But there was no one to turn to for some cash to tide me over and nobody was paying.

In 1999, in a moment of exuberance, I had traded up from my old Ferrari to a new top of the line beauty. But, like everything else, the Ferrari market was stalled. Fortunately, I was able to find a finance company that would give me a loan for half of its value. Every owner rationalizes that a Ferrari is good investment, but they rarely are. However, if I had not bought that Ferrari, I would have put the cash in the project with the tied up liquidity. The car loan helped tide me over and eventually new projects began.

At Liberty Tower there was no reprieve from the reminder of the recent horror. For endless months when one heard the keen sound of an ambulance siren, it often meant that another victim's body had been discovered. The newspapers and television provided a constant sadness. Each day the New York Times published a picture and a small biography of victims. In October, the front page of the Daily News had a haunting photograph of the fire truck of fire station Ladder II8 speeding across the Brooklyn Bridge with the Twin Towers aflame in the background. All six fire fighters in the truck would perish -- not until January would some of the bodies be found.

My melancholy lingered.

That Christmas a huge American flag covered the facade of the New York Stock Exchange and every subway car carried our nation's emblem. The workers at the World Trade Center site continued to toil day and night removing the ashes of the dead and the wreckage of the buildings. Gigantic cranes filled the sky and huge spotlights made night the same as day. Three months after the Attack, pedestrians in Lower Manhattan would still halt to look up when a low flying jet plane passed overhead. The fires burned for 99 days.

SEPTEMBER 22, 2001

*It was with some difficulty that he found the way to his own house, which he approached with silent awe.  
Rip Van Winkle - Washington Irving (1783–1859)*

Months before September 11th, I had agreed to hold a benefit at Octagon House to raise money for a bronze statue of Washington Irving's legendary character, Rip Van Winkle. Octagon House is one mile south of the small village of Irvington which lies on the east bank of the Hudson River, twenty miles north of New York City. Irvington contains the 19th century home of Washington Irving. The statue was to be placed on the Main Street of the Village.

Ten days after the attack, I was still temporarily living in a loft in TribeCa in surreal circumstances. Lower Manhattan, south of Canal Street, was still covered in dust, without phone service and sealed off from the rest of the world. If I went north of Canal Street, I had to pass through checkpoints in order to get back to my loft and office. Occasionally I would think about my house, but they seemed indulgent and irrelevant.

A station wagon I kept in Manhattan was inaccessibly parked in a garage in the totally sealed off area across from the World Trade Center. Months later, when I finally retrieved it, I found it completely covered in dust, alone in the 600 car garage.

In the first few days after the Attack, I had not thought about the Octagon House benefit, much less attending. The Attack was in the forefront of all our minds. When I first thought of it, the benefit seemed to me to be almost disrespectful. But, the day before the event, I boarded a train in Grand Central and took the beautiful ride up the Hudson River to Irvington. As the train wound its way along the Hudson, away from the city, I realized that not postponing the benefit was the right thing. That all of us must start back with our lives. But arriving at the station, I couldn't help looking back down the river at the empty skyline and the still smoking Lower Manhattan.

The party was a success. Most guests, like myself, were delighted to have a reprieve from the heavy weight of the past days. At the end of the event, I asked that we all join in to sing *America*. As I looked through the house, I realized I was seeing it differently than in the past. My twenty three years of ownership had always seemed to be an architect's assignment to conserve this extraordinary monument. I did not think of myself as an owner free to enjoy his home. But because of the complexity of the house and my unwillingness to compromise on quality, it had been an architectural assignment without end.

I was well aware how fate had treated each of us on September 11th. My departure time from Liberty Tower that morning had been based on chance. I resolved to complete my "assignment" before my decades of work went unfinished. I was now in a rush



View from the 29th Floor, Liberty Tower September 25, 2001

## NOVEMBER & DECEMBER, 2001 -- LINGERING

*I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercises; and indeed it goes so heavily with my disposition that this goodly frame the earth seems to me a sterile promontory.*  
---Shakespeare: *Hamlet II.ii.295*

One morning, in mid-December, I awoke with a sense of well-being, a sensation that I had not felt since prior to September 11th. This new sensation, which only stayed with me a moment, startled me. I suddenly remembered well-being as a typical sensation, but I couldn't understand how I had not missed it. Something was terribly wrong. I became concerned that I was unaware of other missing aspects of my behavior.

Usually slim, by mid-December I had lost twenty pounds. Travel, south of Canal Street, could only be accomplished by walking -- roaming cabs were not permitted. The exercise was wonderfully healthy, but I was also not eating.

I visited a psychiatrist who advised me that I was suffering from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. In February he would write a report stating that my "prognosis was poor." My internal despair was causing any sense of well-being to regress. When asked, I was startled to hear myself saying that I was having recurrent dreams about airplane attacks and spending hours each day reliving the experiences of the victims - dreaming up ways they could have fled to safety. I was in a fog and, I would shortly learn, unable to share my emotions with anybody. Strangely I was not aware of these problems, until somebody asked about them.

## FEBRUARY, 2002 -- OCTOBER, 2002

*There's no off switch*  
Anonymous

In early 2002, my drive began to return. I started to seek new projects to develop, encourage my clients to keep going and, with extra time afforded by my still slowed practice, I began to intensely prepare for the completion of my houses. But the Attack was never far away.

New York City celebrates St. Patrick's Day with an energetic parade up Fifth Avenue followed by much celebration in the crowded upper East-side Irish pubs. The parade includes our Mayor, Governor, Senators and the New York Cardinal. With their large Irish constituency, the firemen and policemen are always very well represented.

Dr. Kevin Cahill, an old family friend, invited me to watch the first St. Patrick's Day Parade following the Attack from the windows of the American Irish Historical Society. Housed in a handsome bay windowed and balconied townhouse across from the Metropolitan Museum; there is no better place to be on St. Patrick's Day. Kevin, as President of the Society and past Grand-Marshal of an earlier parade stands on the balcony and is greeted with waves and salutes from the marchers.

At 12:30pm, the parade stopped and then turned around to face downtown. The marchers and the large boisterous crowd went completely silent. It was a dramatic and poignant moment. After the cadence of the marching bands and the cheers of the multitude of onlookers, the silence was very loud.

At Ground Zero on September 11, 2002, at 8:46am, Rudolph Giuliani tolled the names of the victims: Gordon M. Aamoth, Jr...Edelmiro Abad...Maria Rose Abad...Andrew Anthony Abate...Vincent Abate. It would take two and half hours to read all of the names of the victims.

It would not be until February 15, 2003, seventeen months after the Attack, that I could break away from my efforts in New York and visit my fifth house - the Erdödy-Choron Castle in Jánosháza, Hungary. Prior to 2001, I would visit Hungary every few months. The interlude brought into focus the undone work. Here too, I resolved to finish what I had started.

*A differenza dei pesci che possono vedere lateralmente e delle mosche che possono vedere in tutte le direzioni, gli umani possono solamente guardare avanti*  
(Unlike fish who can only see sideways and flies that can see all around, humans can only look forward)  
---The movie, *Caterina va in Città* 2005

# NOVEMBER, 2002

*from now on even begonias are amazing*  
---Jim Moore

By Thanksgiving of 2002, I had found a project to develop. The Mohawk Building is a prominent landmark in TriBeCa. It was Designed by Babcock & Morgan for Wood & Selick, wholesale confectioners. In the 20th century it housed the Mohawk Electric Company, a wholesaler of electric devices.

The adjacent building to the east started life as a single family house in the first half of the nineteenth century. In the second half of that century, a fourth floor was added and for many years it housed a whalebone cutting establishment. When it closed in 1873, it was the last of its kind in the country.

In 1996, the two buildings had been acquired by the prominent chef, David Bouley and the famed restaurateur Warner LeRoy to use as a restaurant and a cooking school. But with an economic slowdown after the Attack and the death of LeRoy, Bouley decided to sell.

I had always thought of the building as a wonderful conversion - in fact Bouley and LeRoy had outbid me when they had bought. I had stayed in contact with Bouley and, in late 2002, I signed a contract for the purchase.

During that winter and early spring, the plans were created by my office and approvals obtained at the Landmarks Preservation Commission. By mid-2003, the project was in high gear.



Mohawk Atelier - Hudson Street Facade



Mohawk Atelier - Duane Street Facade