



CITICORP CENTER, NEW YORK CITY, BY HUGH STUBBINS & ASSOCIATES

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CITICORP CENTER:

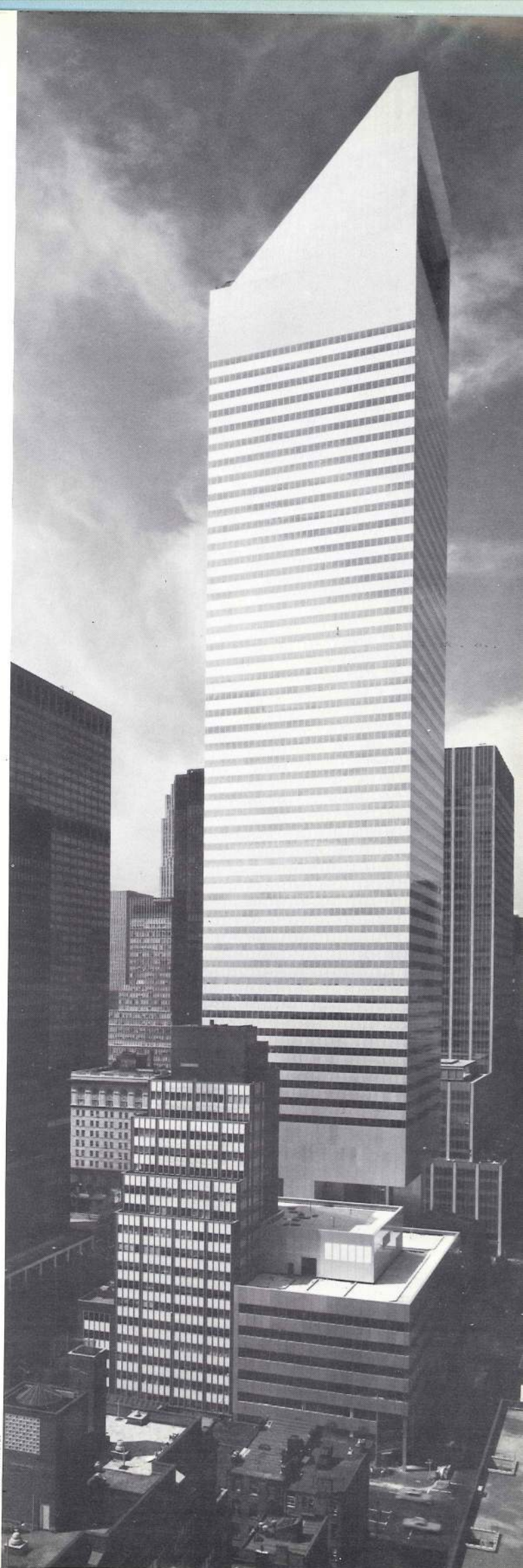
IF YOU
DON'T LIKE
ITS CROWN
LOOK AT
ITS BASE

Architects now working on the next generation of New York City skyscrapers should be paying close attention to Citicorp. Designed by Hugh Stubbins & Associates, it is the best new office tower in the city as of now. You don't have to like its top—a lot of people think it's arbitrary. (There was a rationale; page 108). You may not like its skin—some people question a shining building in a matte city. (I admire it—especially from certain angles and in particular lights). But you have to like the base. The church, plaza and galleria at the ground level of Citicorp form a truly humane space which actually *invites* ordinary people to use it, offering them such small pleasures as comfortable places to meet and sit, and bring their own food. It is not necessary to have money to spend to enjoy the public spaces of Citicorp; and depending on the time of day you see a sprinkling of older people relaxing at tables in the tree-filled, skylit atrium. And the church is there for quiet meditation.

Think of the plazas of the skyscrapers of the past decade, each empty except for its single correct, non-objective and non-objectionable sculpture of brightly colored bent steel—sensitively placed, of course. Think of the grudging, gloomy public space in other recent New York buildings—like the Galleria and Olympic Towers; public spaces put there by the owners in exchange for the profits to be made from higher floor area ratios granted by the City Planning Commission's incentive zoning program. Few citizens know that these empty concourses are supposed to be amenities, hard won by the Mayor's urban planners, for public enjoyment. But people know, because the architecture is inviting, that Citicorp is for them. Study Citicorp. Watch how people are responding to it already, with the plaza still unfinished and many of the shops not yet open. The story of how it all happened begins on page 114.

—Mildred F. Schmetz

Nick Wheeler



Stubbins sought
a unique image for
the Citicorp Center tower
in its midtown setting



The current generation of New York skyscrapers are look-alikes, sheathed in black with smoky glass. Their immediate forebears have dingy, precast curtain walls which have begun to take on the colors of the soot-covered facades of earlier skyscrapers and of the old brownstones and tenements. With a few stunning exceptions—the nearby Chrysler and Empire State buildings and (in the photo opposite) the Waldorf and the General Electric Building—all the roofs are flat.

To make Citicorp Center stand out against its neighbors as a recognizable and memorable corporate symbol, Stubbins decided to give it a light, bright, easily cleaned curtain wall with natural aluminum spandrels. And he wanted to do something interesting with the roof. There were economic, stylistic, functional and technological constraints however, to just how interesting the roof would turn out to be.

At today's prices, even if he had wanted to stylistically, Stubbins could never have made his roof silhouette as rich in fantasy and ornament, as for example, the Art Deco swordfish, complete with gills, which crowns the Chrysler building. Further, his no-frills banker client would not have allowed him to devise a roof shape which was expressive and fanciful but not practical. And Stubbins, still a member in good standing of the Modern Movement, would probably not have allowed himself the liberty.

Early in the design process he began to study the possibilities of a diagonally sliced pinnacle as a powerful mark against the sky. As a shape it had the potential of serving more than a sculptural function. An early scheme had two of them—one larger—going in opposite directions (page 114). At one stage of the design, the larger of the two was to contain over 100 terraced apartments—a dramatic idea for which the City refused to grant a zoning variation. Later in the design, Stubbins proposed that the slanting surface become a solar collector, but this proved not yet practicable. Stubbins believes that eventually, as solar technology develops, it will be.

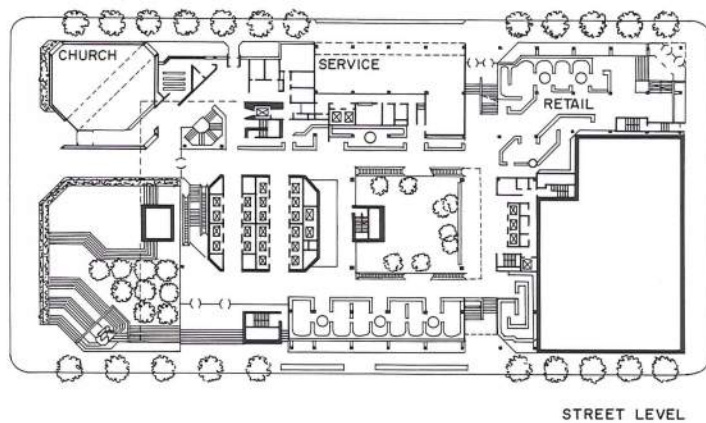
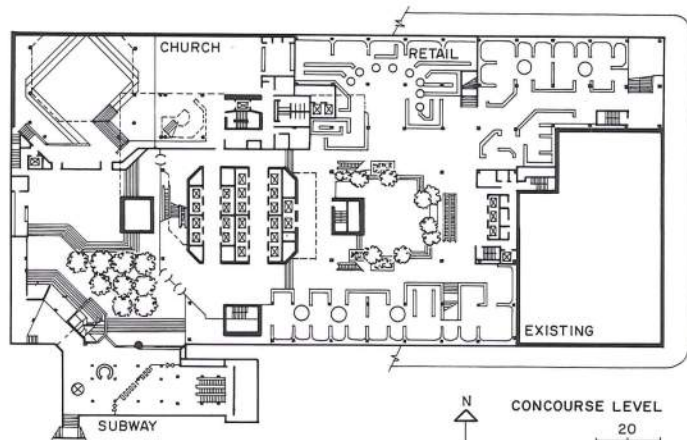
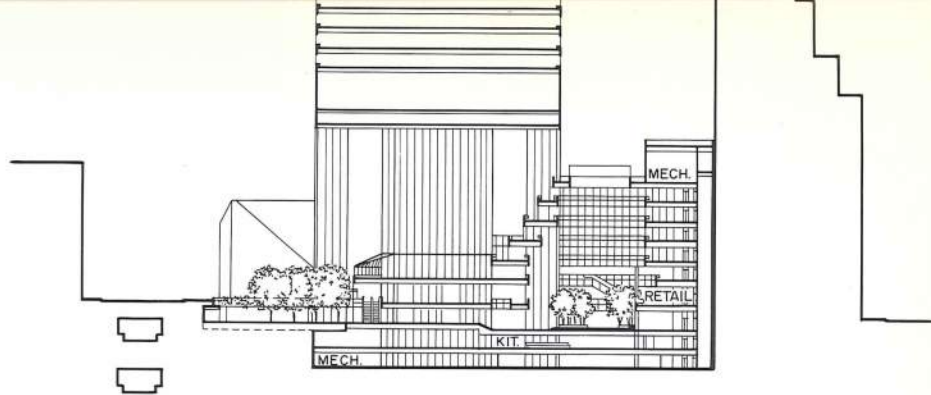


Norman McGrath photos





Not since the thirties, when the public spaces of the original Rockefeller Center were built, have New Yorkers been given community urban terrain of a quality equal to Citicorp's

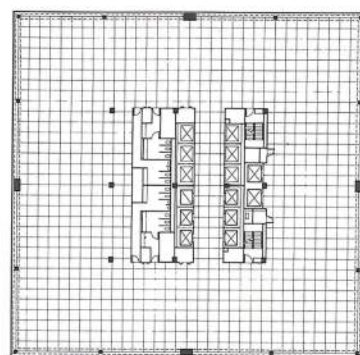


The street environment of Citicorp Center is a triumph of urban design—the first project influenced and helped to fruition by the Mayor's Office of Midtown Planning that demonstrates convincingly what the Planning Commission's Urban Design Group has been trying to accomplish since its founding by former Mayor John V. Lindsay in 1967.

Credit belongs to Hugh Stubbins and his team, who from the beginning wanted to design a skyscraper which would relate to the street in a humane way; and to Reverend Dr. Ralph E. Peterson, pastor of the church rebuilt on the site, who also insisted that Citicorp Center provide ordinary citizens with places to meet, shop, eat and sit as well as worship. The top management of Citicorp, fortunately, were determined to meet their obligation to give the city fair return of handsome usable public space for the right to build at a floor area ratio of 18. The skylit galleria (opposite page and above) is open to the public who may bring their own food to the tables shown, or patronize the food shops adjacent to the court. There are several good restaurants and shops within the galleria (below). Office landscaping (right bottom) is used on typical tower floors.



George Czerna



TYPICAL FLOOR (TOWER-MID RISE)
10



George Czerna

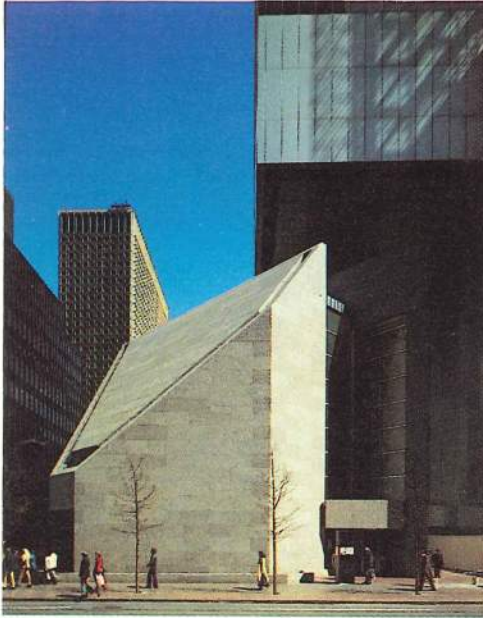


George Czerna

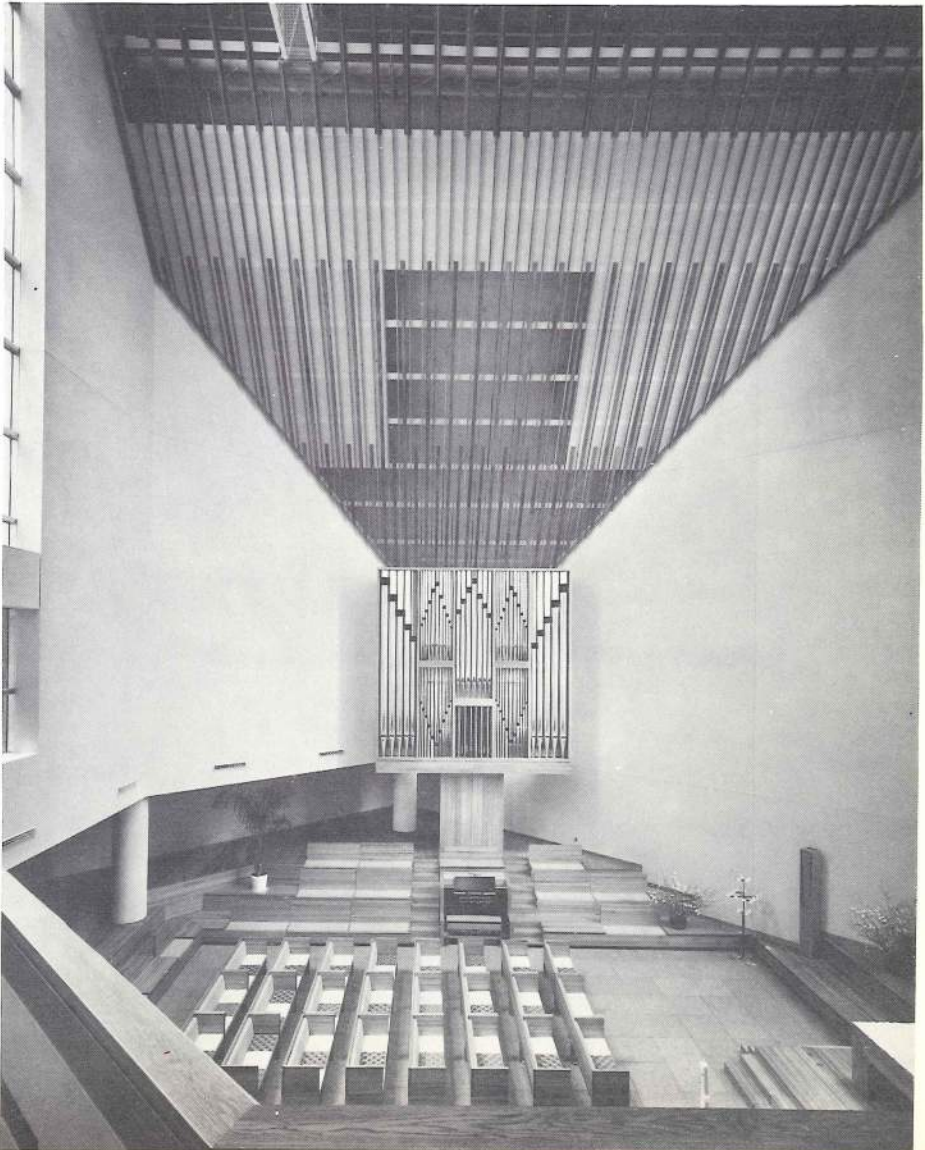


George Czerna

Four great columns hold
Citicorp Center high above the
street so that
a beautiful new church
could be open to the sky



There has been a Saint Peter's Church at the corner of Lexington Avenue and 54th Street since 1862. In 1971, Saint Peter's old church was sold to Citibank with the agreement that the Congregation could build a new structure on the same site. The lantern of the church (above) is at the upper plaza level. The sanctuary floor, however, is one story down, at the level of the lower plaza. The sanctuary is a magnificent surprise. Passers-by on Lexington Avenue look down and into it from a large window at the sidewalk. No one expects to suddenly come upon a church interior without actually entering a church—and many stop, look and find their way in. The church is almost always alive with concerts, jazz festivals, and religious services. Stubbins is responsible for the design of the church. The platforms, seating, and the altar and its fittings are the work of Vignelli Associates. The small chapel (below) has sculptures by Louise Nevelson.





From the outset, Citibank, Saint Peter's Church and their architect Hugh Stubbins proposed to give far more back to the city in public amenity in return for a floor area bonus than any developer had offered since the 1961 zoning ordinance

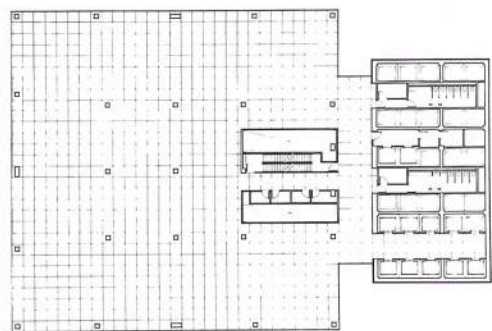
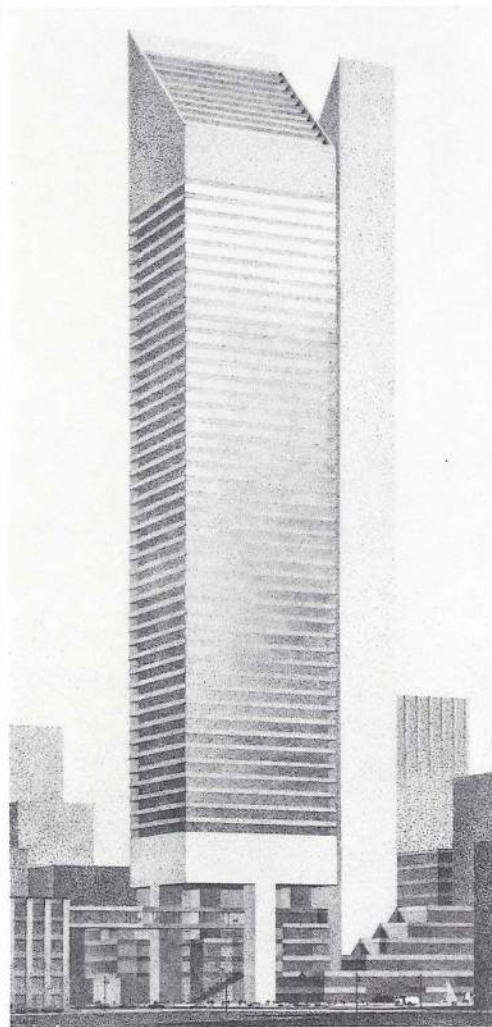
Citicorp Center as urban design

Back in 1970 Hugh Stubbins wrote to Henry J. Muller, a former vice president of the First National City Bank, which now calls itself Citibank. In his letter he set forth some of his first thoughts about what was then known as the office building/church project. Said Stubbins: "The new, slick, slab buildings that march up the avenues of New York and other U.S. cities are symbolic expressions of the Machine. They are anonymous—cool and inhumane. We must use the resources of big business, reinforced by moral and social ideas, to develop a new generation of office buildings planned for the community and expressive of the humanity of the individuals who use them. By revitalizing urban development with an emphasis on people, we could produce a more enjoyable place in which to live and work. Such a building might even be a source of inspiration for other cities.

"With the church as catalyst and the bank as supporter, we can design a new kind of place which all kinds of people will want to enter and become part of. While the church must have its own identity, I like to think how it could be enhanced and magnified if we combine it with a new kind of office building. I think furthermore that we should be able to see into the church from the outside, to see what is going on, be attracted and become part of it. There is a spirit stirring at Saint Peter's Church that could become a bright light in Manhattan."

In 1969 the Lutheran congregation of Saint Peter's Church voted to sell their property to the First National City Bank and agreed to the demolition of the original church. In return they received condominium ownership of over 45,000 square feet of new church space on the same busy corner at 54th Street and Lexington. Their contract with the bank gave the congregation the assurance that their new church would be a substantially freestanding building with "nothing but sky overhead." Profits from this transaction have helped pay for the new church.

From the beginning, the pastor of Saint Peter's, Ralph E. Peterson, knew what he and his congregation wanted the new church and Citicorp Center to be. In addition to serving the spiritual needs of the congregation, the church was to be a place of hospitality for anyone who wished however briefly to join in its activities. And he wanted the Citicorp Center environment to be as hospitable as his church. And so Peterson, like Stubbins, had much to do with persuading Citibank/Citicorp to develop an active marketplace



Initial scheme for site

combined with plazas for relaxation at the foot of its tower.

Most importantly, of course, Citibank/Citicorp itself has a highly developed sense of public responsibility. Its top managers were as interested as Stubbins and Peterson in finding a better way to insert their proposed \$150-million 59-story colossus into the mid-Manhattan gridiron. From the beginning, they were very responsive to the idea of developing a lively multi-level complex of plazas and shops at the street level and above and below. They knew that more than 40,000 people live and over 160,000 work within an eight minute walk of the city block it took them five years to acquire. With Bloomingdale's and Alexander's nearby, and magnets like the Waldorf Astoria and the United Nations in the vicinity, the area had long been a prosperous shopping sector. Citibank/Citicorp's managers had seen other good commercial neighborhoods decline, their web of small shops broken by the intrusions of skyscrapers preempting huge sites. The problem—as they were finding out and as more people now know—is that the large empty plazas lined with banks and automobile showrooms at the street level of these structures have too often heralded the death of the bordering streets.

Paying attention behind the scenes was the Mayor's Office of Midtown Planning and Development, established in 1969 and staffed by members of the Urban Design Group—a special team created in 1967 by former Mayor John V. Lindsay within the New York City Planning Commission. The Office of Midtown Planning, then under the direction of Jaquelin Robertson, had begun to try out the ideas which were eventually to become codified in the 1975 revision to the zoning ordinance.

The zoning incentives established by the Urban Design Group are devised to force a developer to provide and maintain truly lively and useful plazas and midblock galleries in exchange for floor area bonuses. Back in 1970, however, it wasn't easy to get a developer to do anything imaginative with the street level space he traded for his profitable variances. On the contrary, most developers of a decade ago instructed their architects to design "keep-off" space without seating, trees, or amenities of any kind. Some of this so-called public space is hidden behind locked gates and unmaintained, and almost none of it was designed in such a way that the public feels free to use it.

From the outset, Citibank, Saint Peter's Church, and their architect Hugh Stubbins

proposed to give far more back to the city in public amenity in return for a floor area bonus than any developer had offered since the zoning ordinance became law in 1961. From the time the site had been assembled (Citibank bought the whole block between 53rd and 54th Streets and Lexington and Third Avenues, except for one parcel at the corner of Third and 53rd) even Stubbins' earliest designs had all the key elements which were later built: Included in addition to the office tower and the church were a seven-story low-rise building with shops and restaurants surrounding a skylit atrium, a through block arcade, and a sunken plaza with direct access to the subway.

It was clear to the Office of Midtown Planning that at last a project was going ahead that represented their best ideas about what would be good for New York. Throughout the design and construction process, Lauren Otis of its staff worked with W. Easley Hammer, the head project architect on Stubbins' team, to facilitate the project, arranging the necessary variances, coordinating the subway station design with the MTA, and acting as liaison with numerous other public agencies.

The great success of Citicorp Center as urban design should strengthen OMP's position in its efforts to tame the next generation of skyscrapers, now in design after a long hiatus. There is a danger that hard-pressed New York City needs the new giants so badly that in return for a gracious corporate decision to remain in Manhattan, the City Planning Commission will grant the obliging enterprise any zoning variance it wants without insisting too fiercely upon public amenities in exchange.

However, an encouraging sign that the urban designers are still interested in how skyscrapers meet the street occurred at a recent ceremony in New York City honoring AIA Gold Medalist Philip Johnson. Raquel Ramati, the present director of the Urban Design Group, presented him with a single yellow rose. It may have been the opening move to persuade Johnson to better relate the base of his proposed new AT&T skyscraper to the city's urban design goals (RECORD May 1978, page 34).

Citicorp Center as an object in the cityscape

The tower, surrounded by buildings constructed of materials which age (some of them not so gracefully) stands ageless, its brightness bisecting midtown like a shaft of sky. It is a building that must be kept clean

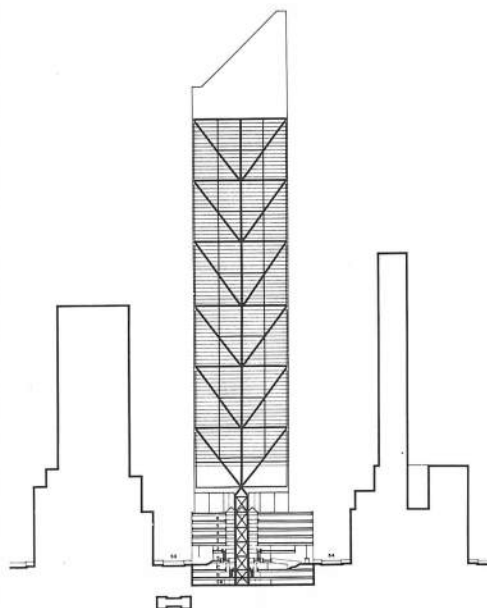
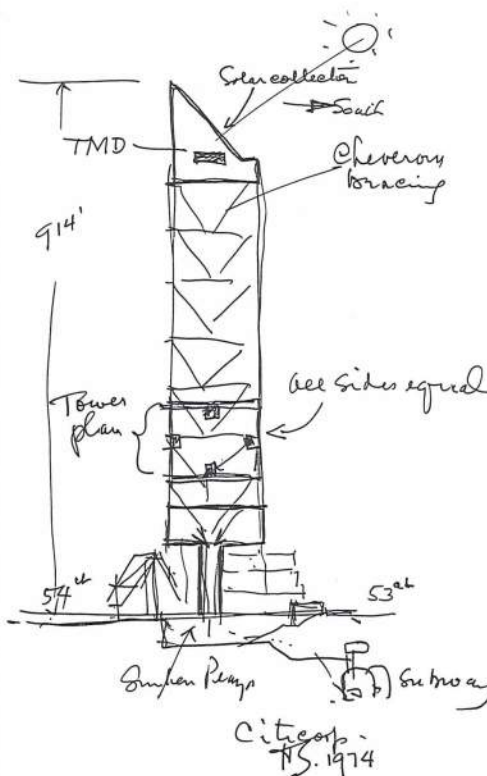


Diagram of structural frame



Sketch by Hugh Stubbins

and is easy to keep clean and shining because its glass windows and aluminum spandrels are on the same plane. The automatic washing machinery treats both as a single unit. It stands out, no question about it, and that was a conscious esthetic decision on the part of Stubbins and Citicorp.

The tower might have been even more spectacular, however, if its structural system had been expressed on the facades as in the John Hancock Building in Chicago. Architects don't do this any more because it costs too much money—too many different sizes of glass following the diagonal members and too much special insulation of the steel to offset movement caused by the difference in temperatures between the inside and outside surfaces. But the structural system by engineer William LeMessurier (note diagram) is not only handsome, but remarkable (RECORD, mid-August 1976, pages 66-71). Had it been possible to expose the frame, the massive size and awesome scale of the building would have been revealed—a truth perhaps too overpowering to behold. At least Stubbins appears to have thought so.

From the early design stages, Stubbins and the late Peter Woytuk—the associate who helped him most on the design of Citicorp Center—looked for ways to attenuate the building to make it elegant and slender. The initial scheme for the site as finally assembled placed the elevator and service elements in a detached core directly behind the main tower (see drawings). With this square footage out of the tower it became leaner and, in Stubbins' words "an exciting and beautiful form. The early scheme had the advantages of leaving the office floors more open for tenants to lay out as they wished; providing a potential fire refuge from the building; and permitting better circulation between the low- and high-rise building. Although the owners were very excited by the model, which also included a dramatic glass bridge across Lexington Avenue, they did not quite have the conviction to develop the concept with the funding and imagination it required. An influential factor was the potential rentability of the office space. Conventional office floors with a central core seem to rent more easily in New York.

"This is always an important consideration, and at the time we were designing, New York office space was going begging and we were working on the most expensive block ever assembled in New York."

Structural engineer William LeMessurier has pointed out, furthermore, that the first developed scheme with the offset core

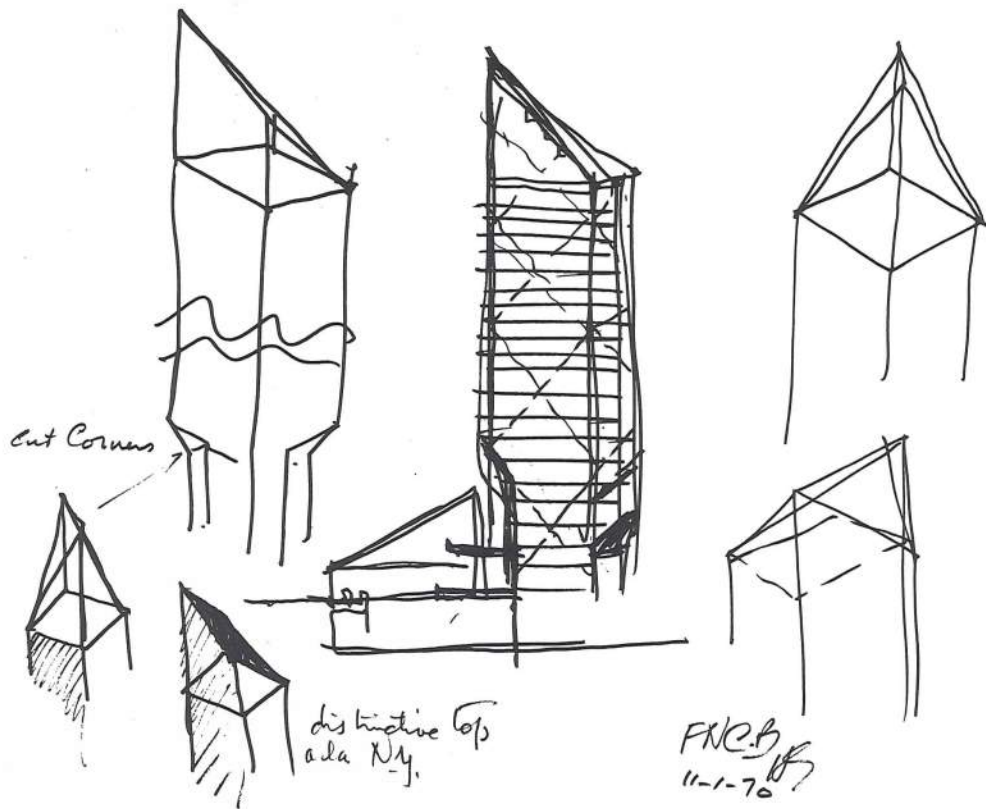
presented difficult wind bracing and other structural problems. The final single tower scheme permits a clean design which is very economical in its use of structural steel. The 915-foot-high wind-resistant columns are placed at mid-point under each face. By lifting the tower in this daring and imaginative way Stubbins and LeMessurier created the space in which Saint Peter's Church exists as a separate entity "with its own sky overhead." They also opened up the space at the ground. Since the tower touches ground at only four points, and since the columns are only 24 feet square, the design permitted the construction of the nine thousand square foot sunken plaza located twelve feet below the street level and interconnected with a new subway station.

Most of the building's load—half the gravity and all the wind load—is brought down the trussed frame on the outside of the tower. The remaining gravity load is carried by the core. The tower is divided into eight-story tiers (see diagram) defined by the steel chevrons that feed the loads into a mast column at the center of each face connecting to one of the four visible supports. The latter, according to LeMessurier, could have been designed to appear much thinner. They were made wider and deeper to enclose space for ductwork and stairs, and as the plans indicate there is room to spare inside them.

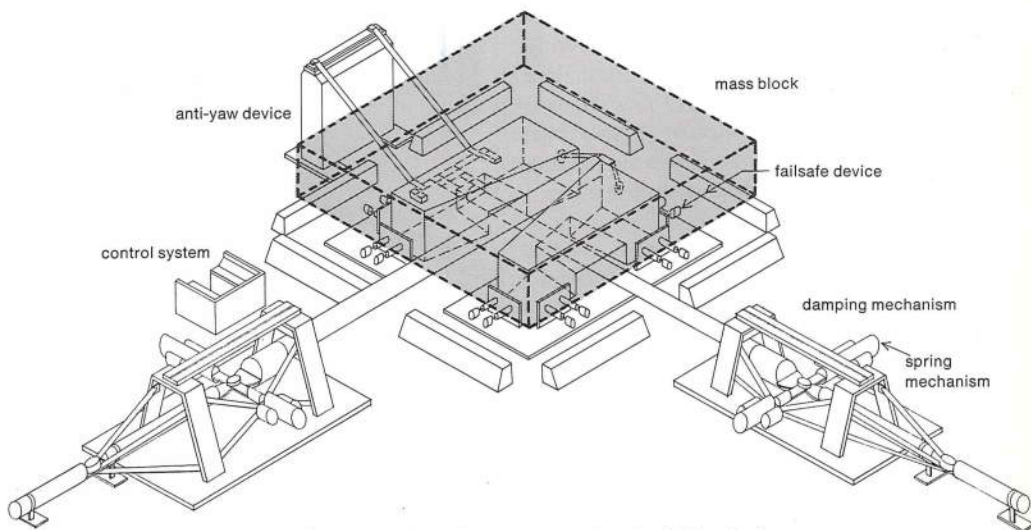
The big columns are not an honest expression of structure—since they are made of far less steel than they appear to be. The wide spandrel at the top of the columns is not "structurally honest" either—since it appears to be a beam transferring the tower loads to the columns. The giant piers and the wide spandrel are esthetic, not functional, choices to make the building look and feel right. Giant buildings need to appear to be heftily supported—and huge pilotis must at least appear to carry big beams. Good architects put art before the expression of structure every time, and Stubbins is no exception.

—Mildred F. Schmertz

CITICORP CENTER, New York City. Owner: Citibank/Citicorp. Architects: Hugh Stubbins and Associates, Inc.—principal architect: Hugh Stubbins; project architect: W. Easley Hammer; production architect: Howard E. Goldstein. Associated architects: Emery Roth and Sons. Consultants: LeMessurier Associates/SCI and the Office of James Ruderman (structural and foundations); Joseph R. Loring & Associates (mechanical/electrical and lighting of office space); Sasaki Associates (landscape); Vignelli Associates (graphics and design of church furniture and fittings). Construction manager: HRH Construction Corporation.



Sketch by Hugh Stubbins



The tower is resistant to motion in high winds. Located at the base of the building's angled crown is a 400-ton concrete block, designed to move out of phase with the tower's motion. A series of pistons and spring mounts (diagram above) secure the block to the building. Should the building move, the block remains stationary for a moment, then moves in an opposite direction. This dampening effect reduces the building's sway by approximately 40 per cent. Called a tuned mass damper, it was developed by MTS Systems Corp.