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## James Gardner -- Is One 57 the new 30 Rock?

Even partially complete, the Portzamparc-designed tower represents a breathtaking change to the Central Park South skyline

By James Gardner

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That signature skyline of Central Park South, one of the most illustrious and iconic in the city, is about to change more fundamentally and definitively than it has in well over a generation.

Long before it has topped out, One 57, the goliath designed by Christian de Portzamparc at 157 West 57th Street, is a thing of pharaonic immensity that will be, at 90 stories, the tallest residential tower in the city. It will even dwarf Trump World Tower, which stands at a puny 72 stories, and 8 Spruce Street, which at 76 stories is currently the tallest residential tower in the city.

The new building, formerly known as Carnegie 57, will contain 135 residential units, designed by Thomas Juul-Hansen, and will rise above a 210-room Park Hyatt Hotel.

A project of the Extell Development Company, One 57 has not yet risen so high as to be visible from the park or the Upper East or West sides. But when it does -- in a matter of months, if not weeks -- the skyline looking toward Central Park South will be changed in one of two ways. Either it will remain at its present height, with the exception of this one vastly larger protuberance, or this new intervention will ignite another race to the skies.

The last time we saw anything like this was when Rockefeller Center's GE Building, also known as 30 Rock, was erected in the early 1930s. While that building -- which was formerly known as the RCA Building and which was designed by a team led by Raymond Hood -- stands near 50th Street, it nevertheless protruded in isolation above the skyline of Central Park South several blocks away for nearly a generation. It was later joined by the Carson & Lundin-designed 666 Fifth Avenue in 1957; the Skidmore Owings and Merrill-designed 9 West 57th Street in 1974, and the Cesar Pelli-designed Carnegie Hall Tower in 1991.

But based on the renderings released by Portzamparc's office, this new tower, whose considerable breadth is minimized only by its great height, will drastically change the calculus of Central Park South once again. Not only will it set a new bar for size, but it will also change the area's design vocabulary.

Portzamparc is one of the more illustrious architects to build in Manhattan. Indeed, before there was Frank Gehry and Rem Koolhaas, and before there was Lord Foster and Lord Rogers or Shigeru Ban and Herzon & DeMeuron, the 65-year-old Portzamparc -- who won the coveted

Pritzker Prize in 1994 -- had created the much-admired Louis Vuitton headquarters building, known as the LVMH Building, three blocks east of his newest venture, at 19 East 57th Street. Whatever the ultimate merits of that 23-story building, completed in 1999, it has proven to be one of the most influential in the recent history of Manhattan architecture. Its Deconstructivist idiom -- which was new to the city at the time -- introduced a vocabulary which gave rise to One Bryant Park (the recently completed Bank of America Building) as well as Kohn Pedersen Fox's 505 Fifth Avenue and Daniel Libeskind's initial design of the under-construction One World Trade Center.

Among the other projects Portzamparc designed are the Cité de la Musique in the Parc de la Villette in Paris, as well as the headquarters of the newspaper Le Monde in that city.

As for One 57, even in its state of partial completion, one senses a feeling of immense consequence. Much, but not all, of this is attributable to the enormous breadth and height that the building is destined to attain. But more than that, it has to do with the sense that history is being made -- and that, quite aside from the skyline of Central Park South, West 57th Street itself will never be the same.

To judge from the renderings, the building will consist of two main and antithetical façades, one showing its face to the park, the other to the south. The main one, to the south, consists of a billowing cascade of wavelets that course down its surface. They achieve -- or at least aspire to -- something like contextualism, in that they most closely resemble the detailing on such monuments of the Art Deco style as Irwin Chanin's the Majestic at 115 Central Park West, or his Century Building, a few blocks to the south.

The allusions to Art Deco are surely calculated to promote associations with what was the golden age of the New York skyscraper. (Many more skyscrapers went up in the '50s and '60s than in the '30s, but in the postwar era, they had become sordid, boring and routine.)

Portzamparc hopes to restore some of the poetry and wonderment that was once associated with this building typology, to de-banalize the concept of skyscrapers. It's too early to tell if he'll succeed (the building is not scheduled to be completed for another two years), but there is reason to be optimistic. Most skyscrapers built in New York in the past two generations have been surprisingly self-effacing. If they appeared big, that was because they probably were big -- but the design of the towers was intended to neutralize, as much as possible, any sense of scale. Size was not part of their poetry, as it had originally been with skyscrapers, and as it continued to be in the Woolworth Building, as well as the Chrysler and Empire State buildings.

Yet in conceiving his latest project, clearly Portzamparc had size uppermost in his mind. The sharp, coursing lines that shoot vertically up the southern façade of One 57 were clearly meant to enhance the sense of height (as though 90 stories were not sufficient by itself), while the breadth of the building promises to suggest the impressive presence of the Empire State Building.

And so, even in its state of partial completion, there is a breathtaking drama in the very terms of One 57, which will doubtless seem flattering to the vanities of the plutocrats being invited to purchase an apartment. (Units will start at \$5 million and go up to \$30 million.)

Worth noting is that the design of the northern side of the building is very different from that of the south. In the tower facing the park, the glazing to the east and west settles into a familiar and sheer curtain wall enlivened by parti-colored windowpanes set in a syncopated rhythm such as we last saw in Bernard Tschumi's Blue building on the Lower East Side. Facing north, however, it creates an illusion -- despite its being attached to the larger building behind it -- of a nearly freestanding tower of almost inconceivable thinness.

Here, again, the strong vertical thrust of the lines serves to underscore, even exaggerate, One 57's all-important sense of height. The ultimate success of this development cannot be known until it can be seen fully, in the flesh. What seems likely, however, is that for the first time in decades, pedestrians will soon look up at it and be astounded by its immensity.