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Gary Barnett's Biggest Blockbuster Yet: 225 West 57th Street, New York's First 1,550-Foot Tower



A hypothetical skyline, with 225 West 57th at right, One57 middle, 432 Park at left. (Curbed/NYO)



1780 Broadway, the one piece that will remain. (City Realty)

If King Kong were to swing into New York sometime this decade, he might actually have a hard time figuring out where to go.

In the original 1933 black-and-white classic, King Kong famously scales the two-year-old Empire State Building, cementing it in the conscience of the world as arguably its most famous skyscraper. Four decades later, the giant gorilla set his sights higher, standing astride the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. Today, perhaps he might climb atop their successor, the new 1 World Trade Center. But one gets the sense that King Kong is given to gigantism, so only the city's tallest tower will do.

Until a few months ago, that would have been 1 World Trade. But since [432 Park Avenue began to rise skyward in April](#), the 1,397-foot condo tower developed by Harry Macklowe and CIM on the old Drake Hotel site would have claimed the skyline crown. It beats out its downtown rival by 29 feet, so long as one ignores the silly 400-foot sorta spire atop 1 World Trade. Should King Kong arrive sometime in 2014, this slinky tower would probably be his choice.

But a year or two after that, and he might turn his gaze further down 57th Street, past the already striking 1,005-foot One57 tower, Gary Barnett's [billionaire bauble](#) nearing completion despite that crane accident. There it would settle on another tower being developed by Mr. Barnett, at 225 West 57th Street, just one block from what was already going to be the city's tallest apartment building when it opens next year. The new tower's height, according to building permits filed last week: 1,550 feet.

That would make it the world's sixth tallest building—at least until something else comes along and knocks it off its pedestal.

That is a good 50 percent taller than either the Chrysler Building or One57, while all three are about the same size, between 1.2 and 1.4 million square feet. The tower will be slender, but it will also be solid unlike some of its spindly rivals, notably 432 Park and predecessors like the Trump World Tower. (Amazing how that held the record for tallest apartment building for a decade, surpassed by only a few feet by Frank Gehry's Spruce Street tower, and now, it's just off to the races, especially when the 1,050-foot MoMA tower is added into the mix. And never mind all the super-tall office towers on the horizon, like the 1,300-footer at Hudson Yards and all those maybe-taller towers coming out of the Midtown East rezoning.)

The tower will reach 88 stories, which sounds like a lot, but when the overall height is considered, that belies exceedingly high ceilings. At the same time, much extra space will also likely be devoted to mechanical systems to keep such a colossus running, as well as the fact that the first five floors, as construction documents show, will be given over to a Nordstrom, [as was announced in July](#). On the seventh through 12th floors, there will be a hotel, and then, boom, 223 residential units. That is almost twice as many units as One57, though the hotel is also considerably larger there.

"I don't want to confirm anything except to say we've filed permits," Mr. Barnett told *The Observer* Monday by phone, when asked if the project had financing and was set to rise.

As noted by the eager architecture savants on Skyscraper City and Wired New York, [who first noticed the building permits yesterday](#), construction equipment is already on hand at 217 West 57th Street, one of the lots Mr. Barnett controls and will be building on some day. Similarly, the Morton Williams grocery store at 225 West 57th Street closed last month, paving the way for demolition of that building and its replacement to rise.

This is one of Mr. Barnett's most complicated deals ever, requiring the assemblage of numerous parcels of land and air rights from surrounding buildings and properties, including tax lot mergers and air rights purchases, essentially turning the entire block into a piece of the project, even if some of the buildings thereon will remain standing. "We've been at this seven or eight years," Mr. Barnett said. "We've bought different parcels and air rights, etc, etc, and here we are." Building documents show no fewer than nine different parcels tied up in creating the lot.

[Back in the spring](#), Mr. Barnett told *The Observer* he was still working on assembling pieces for the project, with the implication that the goal would be to reclaim the title of New York's tallest apartment tower. (The Burj Khalifa in Dubai still boasts the world record, with apartments through the tower's 108th floor.) Previously, it had been speculated that 225 West 57th Street [would top out around 1,250 feet](#), but Mr. Barnett has pushed beyond that to new heights.

"There won't be a spire or anything like that, the floors will go all the way to the top, or almost to the top, with some mechanicals above," Mr. Barnett said. "This is not a gimmick."

On the highest occupiable floor, the 85th, construction documents call for a "residential accessory lounge open to sky." Apartments will be from the 15th through 84th floors, with no mention of layouts (full-floor, duplex, etc.). The building permits also mention another residential lounge on the 14th floor, and the seventh floor houses a number of amenities for the hotel: a restaurant, salon, gym, lounge and "sky lobby." The ground floor has separate entrances for the Nordstrom, the hotel and the residences.

One thing that will not be new is the facade along Broadway, the former BF Goodrich building. Because of [a deal struck with the city's Landmarks Preservation Commission in 2009](#), the old auto building at 225 West 57th can come down, despite the protests of preservationists, but its sibling at 1780 Broadway must remain. A 1920s red brick building, its 12-story facade must be integrated into whatever Mr. Barnett builds. The building will have T-shaped configuration as a result, with section on Broadway, 57th and 58th streets.

What lucky architect gets to design such a multifaceted project? *The Observer* had heard that Herzog & de Meuron had beat out the likes of Jean Nouvel, Norman Foster and SHoP, but on that count, Mr. Barnett demurred. "I'm not going to confirm or deny that, but I wouldn't print that if I were you," he said. The associate architects listed on the construction documents are Adamson Associates, who were the architects of record on all three of Larry Silverstein's World Trade Center towers, Durst's One Bryant Park, the Goldman Sachs headquarters and the still unbuilt MoMA Tower by Mr. Nouvel. So whomever the architect is, it must be a pretty high caliber firm.

Still, Mr. Barnett is taking nothing for granted. When *The Observer* tried to congratulate him on a new project, and the city's tallest at that, he responded, "Congratulations are only in order when you've finished the building and cashed the last check."

“We’re just working hard and hoping the market stays healthy,” he added.

No doubt when this project is finally finished some years from now, Mr. Barnett will stand atop it, perhaps out on the residential accessory lounge open to the sky and thumping his chest in triumph. King Kong certainly would.