

May 8, 2012

Field Trip Friday: Ralph Walker Exhibition

This week, volunteer council members Connie Finstad and Joseph Giargiana are our guest bloggers who have written about their visit to the *Ralph Walker: Architect of the Century* exhibition. Ralph Walker, called “the only other honest architect in America” by Frank Lloyd Wright, was one of the most influential minds to shape New York’s skyline, producing most of his work during the first half of the twentieth century. His most notable buildings include the Irving Trust Building at One Wall Street and the Barclay-Vesey Telephone Building, now known as the Verizon Building. The exhibit, open through mid-May by appointment only, celebrates and explores the life of this legendary American art deco architect and his influential works, which subtly surround us and which we pass every day. Read about Joe and Connie’s experience below.



I had passed the building so many times before and certainly had photographed the entrance a number of times. Last summer, my best friend, visiting with his son, stopped me in front of 212 West 18th Street and asked, “what *is* this building?” I had to answer honestly, and say I just didn’t know.

Here was our conversation:

“I think it used to be a telephone building, but I don’t know what is it now.”

“This was a utility building? No, it’s too elegant for that.”

“No, I’m sure it was, see the subtle signage?”

“What are they doing with it, what’s all this scaffolding for?”

“I don’t know, but I’m sure we’ll find out.”

His son photographed the elaborately designed grill and glass work above the entrance, and we moved on.

It’s those details we pass, every day, that make me stop and appreciate the inherent design, architecture and history of this city. Needless to say, living here, I feel blessed and inspired every day.



Walker’s words brought to you by TriBeCa signage shop Let There Be Neon

Last weekend I entered the construction site with a colleague to visit the first ever exhibit to explore the life and work of Ralph Thomas Walker (1889 – 1973), the great and influential architect to shape New York’s skyline during the “roaring twenties” through iconic skyscrapers with asymmetrical setbacks and art deco ornament.

“Ralph Walker?” I thought. I’ve never heard of him.



Preliminary drawing of the Barclay-Vesey Telephone Building at 212 West 18th Street (late 1920's).

The New York Telephone Building (constructed 1929 – 1931) at 212 West 18th Street is being restored, modernized and transformed into a collection of 53 expansive residences and renamed “Walker Tower” (floors 8 to 23). Verizon owns the lower floors. His passion for elegant detail separated his designs and ornate details from other applicants of proposed civic architecture

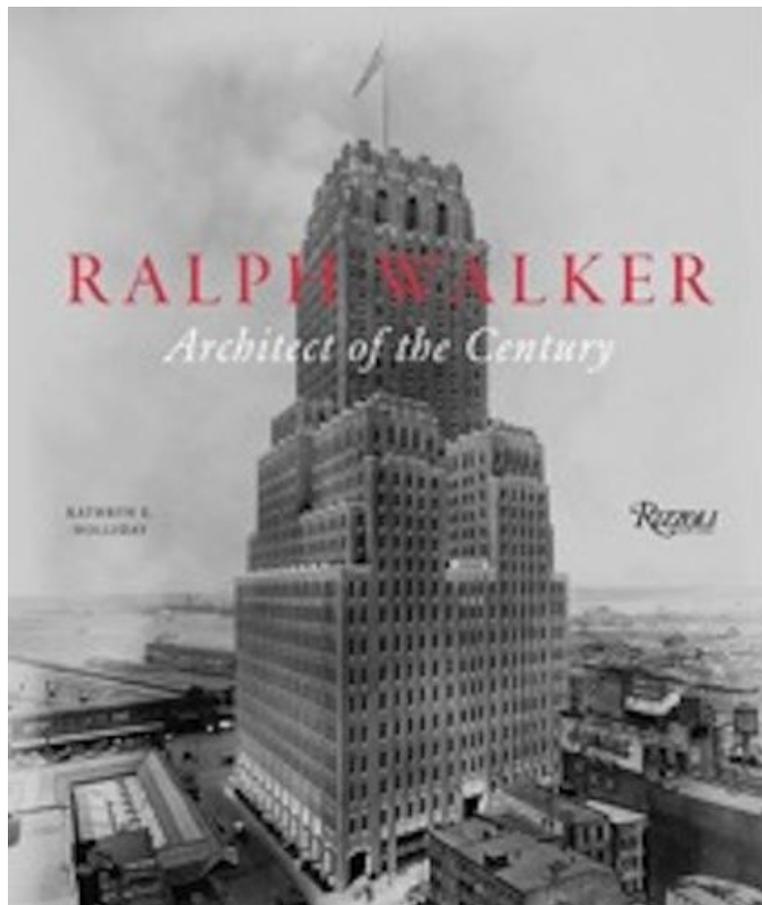


Archival photo of Walker Tower

Building at completion (1931) shows the lack of a full-height spire.

Walker's architectural style is best known as "humanism," the attempt to design buildings less industrial and more warm and appealing to the eye. In the exhibit we saw a number of examples of the buildings he designed and proposed, as well as photographs of his breath-taking interiors. The docent, Marci, is pleasant, knowledgeable and informative, and answered most of our questions before we even asked.

Walker Tower is being developed by JDS Development Group and Property Markets Group. Their intention is to complete Walker's original design, which had been compromised due to budget restraints when first constructed. An architectural model of the project is also in the exhibit. CORE reality at 127 Seventh Avenue and 18th Street has the exclusive offering agreement and will launch sales in the building during 2012.



The Barclay-Vesey Telephone Building (constructed 1922 – 1926) at 140 West Street is his masterpiece. The recently published, limited edition book by Kathryn R. Holliday is available at the exhibit.



Marci holds Holliday's limited edition book showing the magnificent golden interior in front of an image of the original Irving Trust Building at One Wall Street and Broadway.

The exhibit located on the ground floor at 212 West 18th Street is free and open to the public daily, by appointment only and should be available for viewing through mid-May. Call 212-335-1800 or email info@ralphwalkerexhibit.com to make an appointment or visit www.ralphwalkerexhibit.com for more information.

Ralph Walker: Architect of the Century
212 West 18th Street