

# The Architect's Newspaper

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## Off-Ramping It

A retooling of an aging Marcel Breuer showstopper takes the high road.



JOHN MUGGENBORG

In the late 1960s, buildings by Marcel Breuer were being constructed up and down America's East Coast like billboards for a Brutalist future. These hulking concrete structures, akin to dispersed relations, were untethered but for the interstate highway. Now, a particularly zealous archiphile need only hop on I-95 to get a fill of Breuer, be it IBM's "Big Blue" corporate office in Boca Raton, the Housing and Urban Development headquarters in Washington, D.C., the Whitney Museum of American Art in Manhattan, or the Armstrong Rubber Company headquarters in New Haven.

Of this brutish bunch, the latter, known as the Pirelli Building, is the most candid about its relation to the highway: Its stacked massing, completely open at the midriff, encourages rubbernecking. This formal daring may explain why, in the estimation of local architect-developer Bruce Redman Becker, the building is "one of the best-known works of midcentury modern architecture in New England."

Becker is in the final phases of redeveloping the former office complex into a boutique destination. When it opens at the end of 2021, the 110,000-square-foot Hotel Marcel will in all likelihood be the country's first **continued on page 7**

Hashim Sarkis discusses what to expect from the 17th Venice Architecture Biennale.

## PAN SCAN JUMP ZOOM

Read on page 22.



COURTESY SOM

## ARCHITECTURAL AMBASSADORS

An embassy building boom reveals a turn away from symbolism to technocratic competence. **Read on page 18.**



COURTESY OBO/MOORE RUBLE VUDELL

## Slip of the Pen

A new book about architecture and capitalism inadvertently points up the problem with today's more credulous mode of criticism.



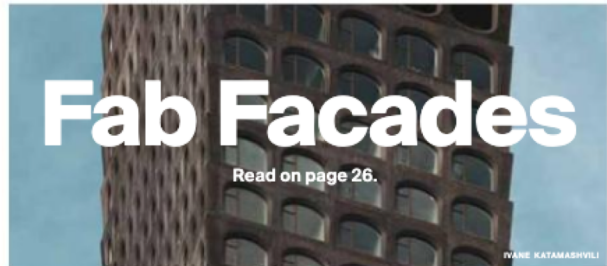
HUI/TOMASCHOWSKI/COURTESY ZAHA HADID ARCHITECTS

There's a specter haunting the Left critique of architecture: the specter of boredom. For decades, a cavalcade of scholarly stars—Peggy Deamer, Mike Davis, Fredric Jameson, Manfredo Tafuri, pick your fighter—has turned in thrilling critical performances on Marxist themes, giving us essential and often startling insights into the built environment. But there's a problem, one particularly evident among a rising generation of architectural thinkers as it grapples valiantly with the world that 21st-century capital hath wrought. It's a sort of Wittgensteinian dilemma: If capitalism is now "all that is the case," what particular facts can be deduced about this condition that aren't merely restatements of the overall premise? That architecture is always and already an instrument of power, economic and otherwise, is a point that certainly bears repeating. Yet just as capital has become increasingly pervasive in shaping buildings and cities, criticism (both academic and, increasingly, journalistic) has resorted more and more to different versions of the same rote response: "It's the exploitative system of social relations, stupid."

Onto this intellectual merry-go-round comes *Icebergs, Zombies, and the Ultra Thin: Architecture and Capitalism in the Twenty-First Century* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2021). The book, by designer and University of British Columbia professor Matthew Soules, is a whirlwind tour of the outrageous physical distortions, urban warp zones, and typological mutants wreaked upon the global landscape by the international finance industry. **continued on page 72**

## Fab Facades

Read on page 26.



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# 180 East 88th Street

**Architect/developer/construction manager:**  
DDG  
**Location:** New York City

**Architect of record:** H. Thomas O'Hara/HTO Architects  
**Consulting architect:** FORM4 Design Studio  
**Facade consultant:** RWDI (Nova Scotia)  
**Structural engineer:** Silman  
**Construction consultant:** Abadie Associates  
**Facade installer:** HDK Construction  
**Facade manufacturers:** Petersen Tegl (brick), Albertini (windows)

New York City's Upper East Side is home to an eclectic variety of building scales and styles thanks to its richly textured history. A few blocks from the marble and limestone chateaus on Park Avenue are brick and stone Neo-Federal and Neo-Georgian townhomes from the late 19th century. The area has some of the most expensive housing in Manhattan and the mayor's residence in Gracie Mansion, so it's no surprise that new developments continue to rise here.

Within the historic district of Carnegie Hill, one of the latest additions is the 50-story residential building at 180 East 88th Street designed and developed by DDG with architect of record HTO Architects and consulting architect FORM4 Design Studio. The textured facade celebrates traditional craftsmanship with a contemporary twist by featuring a gray waterfall of hand-laid brick from Danish family-owned manufacturer Petersen Tegl. Among the small gold accents from the punched window casings are two covered setbacks starting at the 15th and 48th floors that break up the facade with beveled arches and serve as garden outlooks for residents.

DDG was inspired by the boom in mid-rise masonry buildings that occurred in the 1920s, specifically the work of Ralph Thomas Walker. The designers at DDG wanted to recoup brick detailing traditions that have recently been lost as commoditized panel systems have become standard. On the north side of the build-



ing a distinctive herringbone pattern marks a concrete sheer wall, an exit stairway, and an elevator core, and curved lines of bricks snake around the main entrances. Aggregate size and coloration mixes specified by DDG served as the palette for most of the 600,000 bricks that were individually hand-laid by masons from Petersen Tegl. Three shades of Kolumba brick, ranging from light gray to an ashy black, were used. A thumbprint from the brick mason who created it can be seen on each brick.

Every brick in 180 East 88th Street's facade is fired by hand with coal at the same brickworks in Nybøl Nor, Denmark, founded 230 years ago. "The brickmaking process," said DDG founder and CEO Joe McMillan, "is one that has changed many times over the past 1,000 years. There are very few brickmakers that still use the old process of wooden forming that includes molding the clay, pushing it into the form, pushing it out, firing it in the kiln the same way it was done generations ago."

**Katie Angen**



**Left:** The hand-laid brick facade of 180 East 88th Street seen from the southeast corner of 87th and 3rd Avenue.

**Facing page top:** Covered spaces create outdoor spaces for residents.

**Facing page bottom:** Corner details accentuate the bricks.