CTBUH 2009
Chicago Conference, 22-23 October

EVOLUTION OF THE SKYSCRAPER

New challenges in a world of global warming and recession

Post Conference Review
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In recent years, supertall buildings have been emerging again at an unprecedented scale, especially in Asia and the Middle East. In conjunction with rapid economic growth in both regions, oil wealth in the Middle East and government-supported developments in Asian countries are among the primary driving forces of this phenomenon. Though certain gaps still exist between economic building heights and supertall heights due to many complex factors, it is true that advances in building technology have continuously raised the economic height and narrowed the gaps.

Arthur Gensler talked about designing a building as part of a trio of supertall buildings. In this context, the neighboring Jin Mao Building (1999) was designed to honor China's past, the World Financial Center (2008) as a tribute to the present, and the new Shanghai Tower is to reflect the future of China. The tower's 120 degree twist is stretched over its 140 floors. With a height of over 600 meters, the Shanghai Tower will be clad with a double-layered façade to provide for a better indoor environment, as well as mitigate the wind effect. Despite their superior environmental performance, application of double-skin façades to tall buildings has been very challenging because of the cavity space which encroaches on a substantial amount of occupiable space. However, Gensler's very ambitious design of this double-layered façade provides unprecedentedly wide cavity space that also functions as sky gardens and atriums.

In his presentation about the Gazprom Tower in St. Petersburg, Tony Kettle commented on the debate about designing a supertall building in a city whose historic center has been recognized as a world heritage site by UNESCO. He argued that the location of the tower—a brownfield regeneration site—isn't a threat to the character of the preservation area, and that in a city with an iconic history, there should be room for an iconic future as well as an iconic past. The building will be an icon for the 21st Century of Energy, just like the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries were shaped by the context of religion, trade and communism respectively.

Through comparing east and west coast cities of the United States, AIA President Elect, Clark Manus, recommended more attention to the urban space between tall buildings and the livability of city centers and communities. Not only the building itself but the space it creates should be iconic. Development should be focused on more than obtaining LEED certification alone, but take on a more holistic approach. Sustainability is more than the sum of the proper ingredients, it is also about how these are mixed and create a synergetic effect that adds value.

Today's profound shifts in design approaches toward sustainable architecture take environmental issues more seriously than ever, leading to the technological challenges and, at the same time, opportunities to produce more effective and efficient building systems and theories.
Question & Answer Session

Q: How hard is it to stand out as an iconic skyscraper when so many supertall towers are trying to be iconic?

Arthur Gensler: I’m hopeful that we don’t get into this game of some of the buildings that I’ve seen which are incredibly ridiculous to me, geometries that don’t work for the user at all and have no interest in thinking about the user, just to create an “icon”. I think we as designers have an incredible obligation to create facilities that both work for the user, are good investments for the developers and are a great enhancement to the community.

Tony Kettle: I think the recession has had a very positive effect in some regard because the kind of outlandish designs that were proposed for some parts of the Middle East have been drawn back. I think we should just return to doing proper architecture: contextual projects which are about people and place. With regard to icons, people decide if they are icons or not. And I think, once every 100 years you are allowed one in St. Petersburg anyway—hopefully.

Clark Manus: I guess my thought is I hope the word is less used. We seem to overuse it and I think that the marketing pitch about the iconic is really tired. My view is that I would rather see iconic skylines. Do I think that we will stop building buildings that have a noticeable presence? No. Human civilization will continue to challenge that, but I would challenge a group like this to actually take a bigger stance in terms of its position in how skylines get formed.

Q: Which US city most deserves the title: “Greenest City in the US”?

Clark Manus: The city that always seems to come out far higher than any is Portland, Oregon. They have been far out in front in creating what I articulate as livable communities in every way from residential to office. Everybody is really clamoring for that title but the proof will be in the pudding in terms of being able to demonstrate that the legislation and ordinances are just not enough; you’ve got to see stuff manifest into physical form.

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Gazprom are having. Part of the whole idea of bringing Gazprom to the city was to get them to contribute their taxes to the city and therefore the city could decide what to do with that. I think that is one of the key reasons to try and get them into the city.

Q: Would the project be built before or after the infrastructure?

Tony Kettle: I think that is the debate that the city and Gazprom are having. Part of the whole idea of bringing Gazprom to the city was to get them to contribute their taxes to the city and therefore the city could decide what to do with that. I think that is one of the key reasons to try and get them into the city.
The conference Welcome Reception was held in the luxurious 16th floor ballroom facilities of the recently completed 92-story Trump International Hotel and Tower on the evening of October 21st, 2009, the night before the conference began. Delegates were treated to sweeping views of the Chicago skyline and riverfront as the sun set over the city. As the sun dipped, each building from a pantheon of Chicago high-rise greats came into illuminated view: the 1922 Wrigley Building with its iconic clock tower, which seemed to be at almost eye level from the Trump terrace; the 1925 Tribune Tower, with its neo-gothic crown; the 1927 neo-classical Jeweler’s Building (now 35 East Wacker); Bertrand Goldberg’s 1964 seminal Marina City; Bruce Graham’s olive-colored 1695 Equitable Building; and Mies van der Rohe’s 1972 IBM tower (now 330 North Wabash) standing proud next door. Beyond these immediate buildings, the tops of Chicago’s other tallest added to the tapestry: the 1969 John Hancock Center, the 1973 Aon Building (formerly the Standard Oil Tower), and the 1974 Willis Tower (formerly Sears Tower) specifically. As the Council celebrated not only the start of the Chicago conference, but 40 years of its existence, one could hardly imagine a more apt setting.

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The evening was sponsored by CICO consultants of Doha, Qatar, who were in town with their client—QIPCO Holding—to celebrate the recognition of the CTBUH Best Tall Building 2009 Middle East & Africa award, with the Tornado Tower, at the awards dinner the following night. Manager of CICO, Stuart Allen, gave a brief message of welcome to the attendees, intimating how delighted he was to be a part of both the conference and the reception. He noted the fantastic opportunity the conference posed for architects and other building professionals to meet, exchange thoughts and share their ideas, “We are all aware of the delicate state of our planet, and the more sustainable systems and components that we can incorporate into our designs, the more our children and their children will appreciate the benefits of our efforts.”

Following Stuart’s welcoming address, Executive Director Antony Wood presented Eric Trump of the Trump Organization with a plaque to recognize the significant height achievements of the reception venue, the Trump International Hotel and Tower Chicago (for more on the awarding of this plaque, see page 28). Mr. Trump said a few words on behalf of the Trump Organization and the building team, then the formalities closed and the socializing began.

Approximately 300 conference attendees mingled and networked over cocktails and hors d’oeuvres that evening, against the fantastic backdrop outside the windows. The international make-up of the conference to start the next day was reflected in the make-up of people that evening, as representatives of 24 countries were in attendance, some having just arrived in Chicago that day. Some of these colleagues had gone straight from the airport to get involved in one of the building technical tours taking place that afternoon (see pages 30–35), and one or two colleagues had come straight from the airport to the reception itself! Jetlag, however, was not apparent, as many guests stayed well past the official ending of the event, carrying their conversations into the hotel lobby and beyond.
The Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat, based at the Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago, is an international not-for-profit organization supported by architecture, engineering, planning, development and construction professionals. Founded in 1969, the Council’s mission is to disseminate multidisciplinary information on tall buildings and sustainable urban environments, to maximize the international interaction of professionals involved in creating the built environment, and to make the latest knowledge available to professionals in a useful form.

The CTBUH disseminates its findings, and facilitates business exchange, through: the publication of books, monographs, proceedings and reports; the organization of world congresses, international, regional and specialty conferences and workshops; the maintaining of an extensive website and tall building databases of built, under construction and proposed buildings; the distribution of a monthly international tall building e-newsletter; the maintaining of an international resource center; the bestowing of annual awards for design and construction excellence and individual lifetime achievement; the management of special task forces/working groups; the hosting of technical forums; and the publication of the CTBUH Journal, a professional journal containing refereed papers written by researchers, scholars and practicing professionals. The Council actively undertakes research into relevant fields in conjunction with its members and industrial partners, and has in place an international “Country Representative” network, with regional CTBUH representatives promoting the mission of the Council across the globe.

The Council is the arbiter of the criteria upon which tall building height is measured, and thus the title of “The World’s Tallest Building” determined. CTBUH is the world’s leading body dedicated to the field of tall buildings and urban habitat and the recognized international source for information in these fields.