METROPOLIS

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April 2002

Renzo Piano's
Translucent Tower

EXTRA! EXTRA!

N.Y. TIMES NEW BUILDING TO LIGHT UP MANHATTAN SKY!

News
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The New York Times

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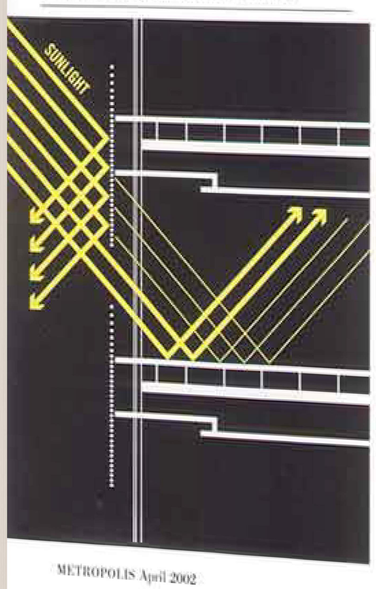
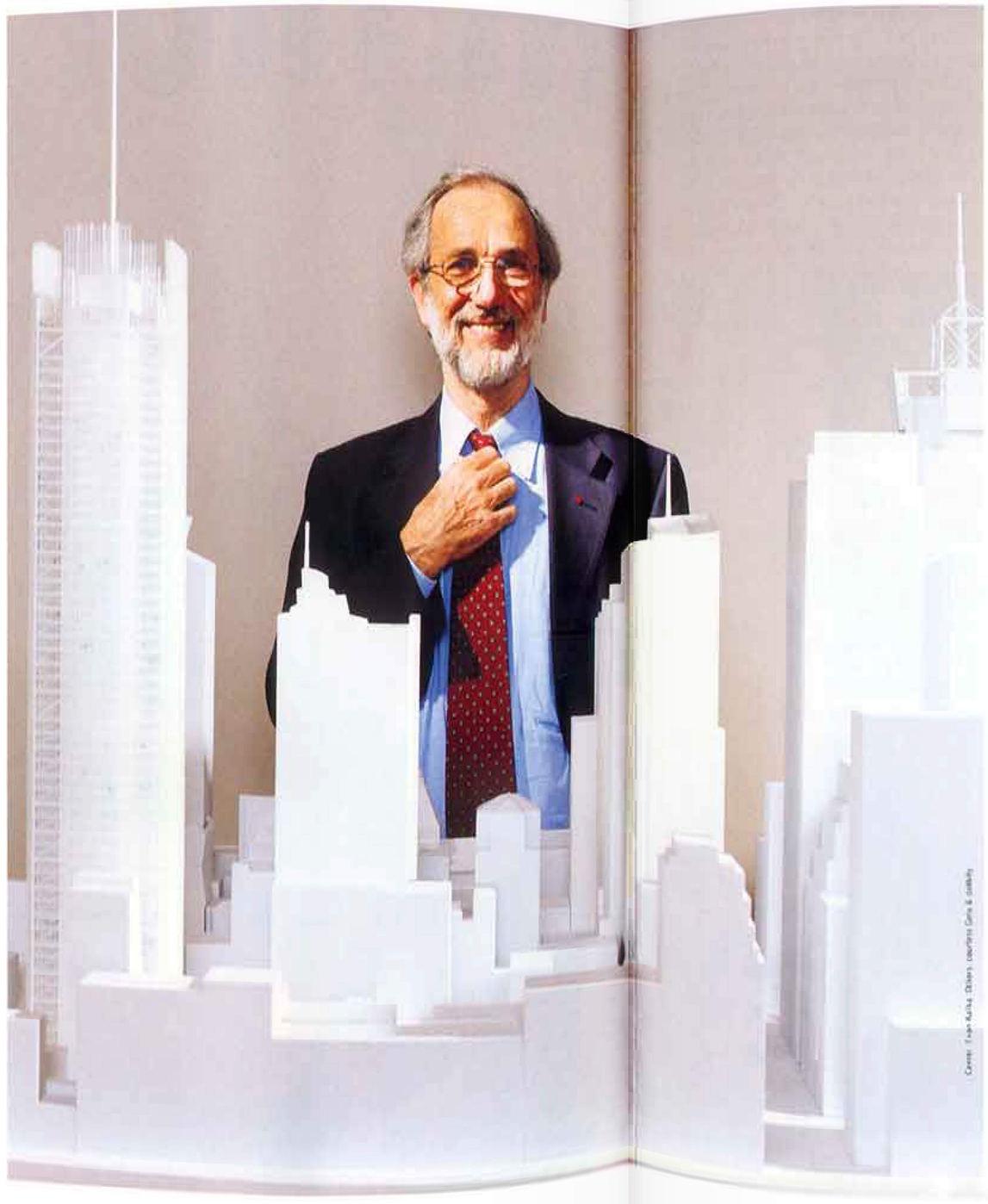
Renzo Piano and Fox & Fowle Architects' design for the New York Times headquarters may become as iconographic as the design of the newspaper itself (to which we've paid homage here). Their plan leaves eye-level openings (below) in the barred curtain wall so occupants have unobstructed views. Made from irregularly spaced ceramic rods (above), the curtain wall bounces some sunlight onto ceilings bringing light deep into the interior. The building also has a rooftop garden (above).





Center: Tom Kurka. Others courtesy Gehry & Partners

White Out

New York Times unveils plan to create new Eighth Avenue home; Piano design hailed as breakthrough for Manhattan skyline.

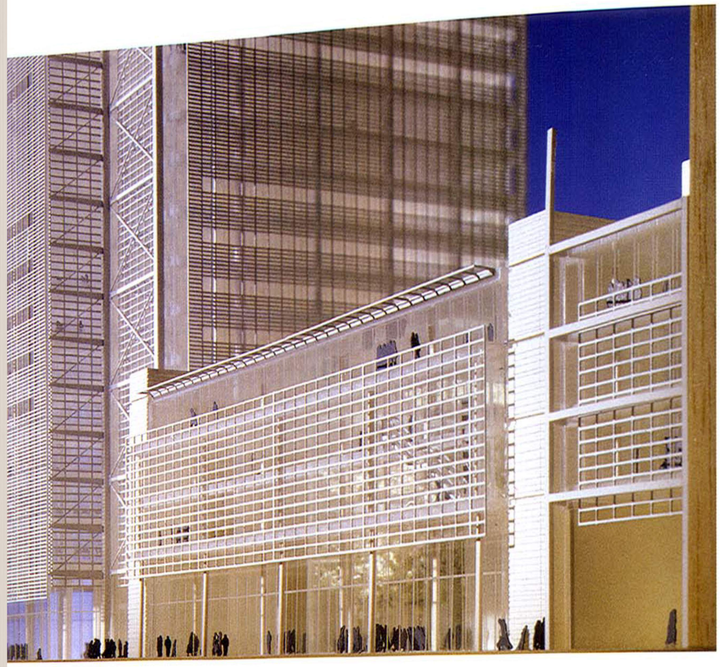
By ALEXANDRA LANGE

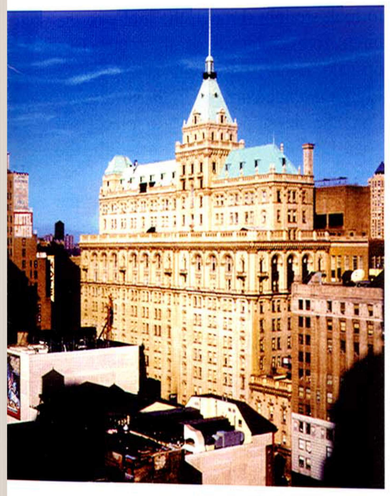
NEW YORK, Feb. 4—A stylist of the skyline, Renzo Piano is suggesting a wardrobe change for the skyscraper. "Normally you have to use tinted glass, and your vision is not that clear," he says. "It's like wearing sunglasses." But the 1998 Pritzker Prize winner's *New York Times* building design (done in collaboration with Bruce Fowle of Fox & Fowle Architects and unveiled late last year) dispenses with the dark glasses and sports the other kind of shade: the chicest possible venetian blind—a shimmering 800-foot curtain wall. "There is a wall that is glass and in front of it we fly another layer that is like a "suncoat"—not a raincoat," Mr. Piano says of the elegant white-on-white tower scheduled for completion in 2006.

"The story I hope the building will tell is not one of arrogance, of power," Mr. Piano says. "Quite often towers are not liked, and I hope the story this will tell is one of lightness." Lightness—the suggestion of flight—would also be a sartorial switch for Eighth Avenue and 41st Street, the site of the building: the seedy area has always been better known for the blacked-out windows of peep shows than for gleaming, transparent facades.

From its first appearance, as winner of the Times headquarters competition, Mr. Piano's building has floated serenely above the status quo. His original proposal, which beat out entries by Norman Foster and Cesar Pelli (Frank Gehry dropped out in the final weeks), included a larger building, off which the tower appeared to cantilever, and recalled Lever House in silhouette. The lower building, intended to house an atrium and topped by a reflecting pool, looked like Mr. Piano's (with Richard Rogers) most famous building, Paris's Centre Pompidou, bleached and beached in Midtown. But the new profile, filling the block from 40th to 41st Streets with the 52-story tower, tucks a reduced version of the low building in back (where the atrium has morphed into a garden open to the sky) and looks more like the slab-and-bustle formation of the Seagram Building. The latter tower was indeed on Mr. Piano's mind. "I always thought the Seagram Building, with its purity and clarity, was the best interpretation of the DNA of the city," he says, the DNA being the gridiron plan. "But I also like the romantic skyscrapers—the Empire State Building, the Chrysler Building. I love the idea that the tall building is a romantic expression of power, of levitation—that it vibrates."

Remembering Madelon Vriesendorp's painting for *Delirious New York*, in which the Empire State and Chrysler buildings are surprised postcoitally by the straitlaced RCA Building, one might imagine Mr. Piano's Times tower as a





The four-story structure (top) in the back of the building houses an auditorium and a garden. The New York Times offices have been located in this neo-Gothic building (above), on 43rd Street, since its construction in 1913.

BRUCE FOWLE (ABOVE LEFT), PRINCIPAL OF THE NEW YORK FIRM FOX & FOWLE ARCHITECTS, COLLABORATED WITH PIANO ON THE PROPOSED TIMES BUILDING, ON 41ST STREET. DAN KAPLAN (ABOVE RIGHT) IS THE PROJECT LEAD.

new bride for the Seagram Building, waiting crosstown in a bronze tux. (Little blue-haired Lever House waited too long to get her face-lift.) There is something irresistibly feminine about a building that seems wrapped in gauze. Mr. Piano refers to the skin as lace. Tower developer Bruce Ratner, of Forest City Ratner, has said almost gleefully, "I'll use a word—it's not an architectural word—to describe it: *pretty*."

This double skin is in fact sturdy, made of extruded white ceramic tubes carried on an aluminum frame, and shields the building's glass walls from the direct sunlight and energy-wasting heat gain that usually calls for inhospitable tinted glass. The irregularly spaced horizontal rods bounce daylight up to the ceilings, tossing it into the tower's interior. Partitions will stop shy of the ceilings, set at loftlike heights, allowing even interior offices to get some daylight. On each panel the rods are interrupted at eye level, creating an open viewing space so those inside the building will not be seeing the city behind bars.

The building's transparency also puts the employees on view, most notably in the four-story bustle behind the tower. Mr. Piano calls these floors the "bakery."

The sunscreens are also pulled away at the building's corners, which are ornamented with staircases sheathed in transparent panes. These stairs are one of Mr. Piano's pet touches, an attempt to increase the sense of interoffice community within the tower, as well as animate its edges. "The stair is not a dull place, and it will give you a minute to look at the city, to come back to reality," Mr. Piano says. "When you lift your head up you will see a stair opposite you. It will be psychologically more easy to move from floor to floor. You won't even think to take the lift."

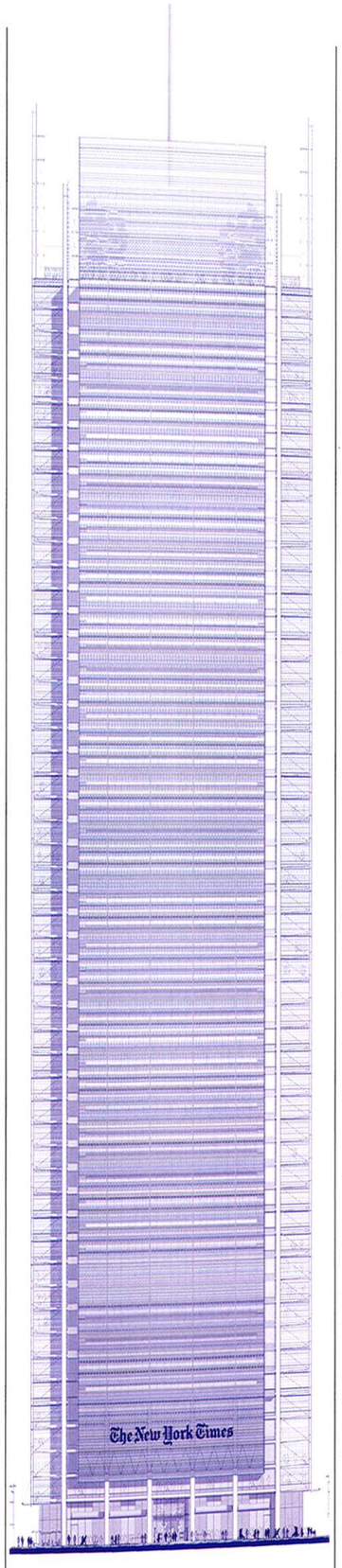
The building's transparency also puts the employees on view, most notably in the four-story bustle behind the tower, which contains the garden and a 350-seat auditorium on the ground floor and the Times's newsroom operations above. Mr. Piano calls these floors the "bakery." The architect says, "it will be constantly lit; people will constantly be at work. It will be like a magic lantern."

The architects had to fight to keep the people as decor, arguing against those who hoped to wrap Times Square's neon belt down Eighth Avenue.

Like his competitors, Mr. Piano spent a great deal of time in the current Times building, a 1913 neo-Gothic fortress on 43rd Street two blocks from the new site, studying the different needs of the newspaper's editorial and business staff. He and Mr. Fowle make as much a point of the interior environment as they do about the unique sunscreens, following a mandate from the Times to make it both humane and ecoconscious. Daylight and ceiling height are only part of the larger program, which includes a more efficient underfloor air-conditioning system of a type already popular in Europe, superior air filtration, and a commitment to nontoxic finishes and furniture. (The specifics of the office spaces will be orchestrated by Gensler.) The building will also have a cogeneration system that will allow the Times to produce a portion of their electricity on-site via a natural gas turbine. Other sustainable systems are still being considered.

"The green building concept isn't just doing things responsibly," says Times real-estate vice president David Thurm.

This page, bottom middle and right: courtesy Fox & Fowle Architects. All other images, both pages: courtesy Geto & deBilly



PIANO'S TRANSLUCENT TOWER SHOULD GLOW AMID MANHATTAN'S DENSE SKYLINE.

"The employee experience is better for being in this type of building. College Point [the company's Queens printing plant, designed by Polshek Partnership] was formative for us as a company. People really like working there. It's a better environment and a great-looking building."

Stepping out from Port Authority, commuters will be confronted with a relentlessly vertical wall rising 51 stories—as proud and soaring as Louis Sullivan could have imagined. The sunscreen starts at the second floor, leaving the first entirely transparent: one should be able to look straight through the lobby to the birch forest planted at the rear. Two upscale retail spaces sit at the site's Eighth Avenue corners. In the lower section, the developers hope to place two open-kitchen restaurants beneath the newsroom, adding to the visual play.

The architects had to fight to keep the people as decor, arguing against those who hoped to wrap Times Square's neon belt down Eighth Avenue. "Why should we submit to that kind of razzle-dazzle when we can create something beautiful?" asks Mr. Fowle, whose firm has recently completed two blinking towers—for Condé Nast and Reuters—along 42nd Street. "Port Authority is not like Grand Central Station. Our feeling was, let's make this a very sophisticated but also very lighthearted building. Let that be the arrival point in New York City. Here was the opportunity to do something that would change the flavor of a whole section of New York."

This sense of public purpose—replacing Port Authority as a symbolic gateway to the city—has not wavered since September 11. The Times maintains that "We cannot design against every possibility," says Catherine Mathis, Times vice president of corporate communications. "If a building could be built to withstand the impact of a large commercial jet loaded with fuel, it would be an inhospitable fortress. We've reviewed our life-safety and security after

the tragic events of September, and believe that our building will be safe and secure while still maintaining the open feel of the architecture."

Mr. Fowle sees the Times tower as the vanguard of a new conception of Eighth Avenue, one that will tempt Madison Avenue–type office tenants ever westward—just as Lever House spawned a series of stylish neighbors along formerly residential Park Avenue. Mr. Piano's elegant facade says business, as 42nd Street's neon says pleasure. "When you put this beautiful, glorious building on our site it immediately begins to transform the way you look at Eighth Avenue," says Forest City vice president of commercial development MaryAnne Gilmartin, who is in charge of finding tenants for the lobby's retail spaces. Because the Times will take only the bottom half of the tower, Forest City is also in talks with banks and law firms to fill the offices in the upper half (the ones with the views across half of New Jersey). "Over the next three to five years there will be lots of changes, so you're looking at a very different location than what you see today," Ms. Gilmartin says.

The transformation of Eighth Avenue has already begun. In the weeks before the design was unveiled, the city's planning department published a proposal to develop the area south and west of 42nd Street and Eighth Avenue as a business district, extending the Number 7 train to the Javits Center on Eleventh Avenue. At Columbus Circle two mirrored steel-and-glass towers designed by SOM's David Childs are under construction. One of them will house the headquarters for AOL–Time Warner. At 56th Street Times competition loser Lord Foster has designed a faceted space-frame tower to top Hearst Corporation's Joseph Urban–designed headquarters.

Fox & Fowle has done preliminary studies of the block just north of Mr. Piano's building, at 42nd and Eighth, for Milstein Properties, giving them all the neon the Times tower eschewed. "As you enter 42nd Street, two massive electronic displays would define that space," Mr. Fowle says, "signaling that *you are now in the entertainment world*."

Even the dreary Port Authority building on 8th Avenue may be upgraded. Paula Scher of Pentagram has proposed using supergraphics to cover the structure's X-braces, and Port Authority officials have plans to top the terminal with a tower of its own. But an elegant bus station may be just too much to ask for. "In any city in the country, the bus station is in the seediest part of town," Mr. Fowle says. The Times tower, he hopes, will simply rise above the aspects of Eighth Avenue no amount of design can disguise.

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FOREST CITY RATNER COMPANIES

The New York Times Company

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