

Zaha Hadid for Park Avenue? She and 10 Starchitects Compete to Design a \$750-Million Skyscraper

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Mid-century modernism did wonders for New York's Park Avenue back in its heyday. Case in point: Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building and the neighboring Lever House by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill. The two buildings were pioneers of high-end office design, leaving a trail of boxy facsimiles along Manhattan's ritzy boulevard. Few designs have really broken the mold since then, but now, half a century later, a not-so-little developer called L&L Holding Co. has come along, hoping to shake up the city skyline.

The site of 425 Park Avenue now awaits its fate as a star-studded line-up of prospective architects compete for the chance to helm the \$750 million project. L&L Holding Co. has tapped Jean Nouvel, Herzog & de Meuron, Foster & Partners, Zaha Hadid, Rem Koolhaas, Richard Meier, Renzo Piano and others with high hopes to create a "bespoke skyscraper that will both complement Park Avenue's existing architectural treasures and make its own indelible mark in the world's most timeless office corridor," as described by Columbia director of the center for urban real estate Vishaan Chakrabarti, according to the Wall Street Journal.

The current building is already occupied by a pristine office tower, and L&L have bold plans to knock down the bulk of it to construct a bigger, badder "crown jewel." Moreover, the plan to leave part of the existing building in place is to dodge finicky city zoning codes, which would have forced L&L to build a smaller tower had the existing building been completely razed.

It is clear that L&L have placed incredible faith in the appeal of the site as well as the appeal of name brand design, enough to expect that tenants will happily shell out \$100 or more per square foot. The plans exhibit architecture at its most aggressive, aiming to find a form that will turn dollar signs into even more dollar signs, or in more relevant terms, architecture of the 1%. Judging by the shortlist of architects, the aesthetic of Park Avenue's new skyscraper will make a similarly forceful statement, breaking through the uniformity of an avenue fossilized in the 1960's. Picture it now: a contorting sculpture churned out by Zaha Hadid Architects, resting atop a Duane Reade.