

New York's Newest Skyscraper

BY SAMUEL MEDINA | APRIL 26, 2012 | THE ATLANTIC

A new Manhattan skyscraper is an event. We are far removed from the days of the city's erstwhile competitive tower builders who manically thrust their stone edifices up in an intense race to the top. Things have changed, and the skyline must now be protected from the invasion of the new indignant glass towers, whose very materiality, it seems, is inherently inferior to that of their stone and brick forebearers. Yet, it cannot be said that there has been insufficient opportunity to produce a contemporary tower that at least approaches the exemplariness of New York's greatest skyscrapers—few of the towers built in the last generation can be described as good, let alone great. But that may change, as 11 world famous architects will be given their chance to recast the typology on their own terms.

As the Wall Street Journal reports, developer L&L Holding Co. has shortlisted Zaha Hadid, Foster + Partners, Herzog & de Meuron, Jean Nouvel, Richard Rogers, Renzo Piano, Richard Meier, and other top international firms to develop ideas for a new office tower to be built at 425 Park Avenue, which, ironically enough, is situated near the Seagram Building—easily the greatest structure to be erected on the island in the last half century. The list will be soon narrowed, and those remaining will have till next month to present their proposal. The city hasn't seen this many architectural egos since the (ongoing) disputes forged during the World Trade Center competition or when the UN Building committee pitted Wallace K. Harrison and Le Corbusier against one another in a battle of wills. Who will triumph and who will retreat, their prestige battered and bruised?

The site is currently inhabited by a 32 story building dating from 1957. Given Park Avenue's peculiar zoning laws, leveling the structure in its entirety would prevent L&L from constructing the iconic skyscraper that they hope will rival Seagram and nearby Lever House both in height and quality. To work around this obstacle, the developers are planning to leave 25% of the existent steel structure intact, atop of which the new tower will rest.