

Flatiron Building, Admired but Rarely Copied, Inspires Developers

The Appraisal

By MATT A.V. CHABAN APRIL 4, 2016



A new corner building at 10 Sullivan Street in the SoHo section of Manhattan.

Christian Hansen for The New York Times

New York is awash with architectural imitators: the rows of identical 19th-century brownstones, the spires and setbacks of the Art Deco era, the Seagram Building knockoffs strewn around Midtown Manhattan in the 1960s and '70s, the luxury fishbowls rising now.

Yet one of the city's favorite landmarks, the Flatiron Building, with its prow looming over Broadway and Madison Square Park, has been rarely copied. At least, not until now.

New York developers prefer to stick to the grid. This results in buildings that are square — in ambition as much as aesthetics — but as the cost of land, particularly in Manhattan, has increased, builders have begun to look to odder-shaped plots.



The corner living room of a new building at 10 Sullivan. Christian Hansen for The New York Times

“The lots that determine the Flatiron shape have previously been avoided since the resultant interiors are unusual and not easy to market,” Patrice Derrington, director of the Center for Urban Real Estate at Columbia University, wrote last week in an email. “However, ‘as needs be’ developers are attending to these less favorable sites, as they eke out every last possibility.”

Standing at a corner in SoHo, where Avenue of the Americas and Sullivan Street meet, the possibilities of such a profile are apparent.

When, starting in 1925, the path for the avenue was blasted through the areas now known as Greenwich Village, SoHo and TriBeCa, it left more than a few half-standing buildings in its wake. Some were walled off, others torn down and some replaced. A few become parking spots and carwashes.



By The New York Times

At 10 Sullivan Street, a stalk of flowing bricks and curved glass now shoots 16 stories into the air. While the building resembles one of the industrial lofts in neighboring Hudson Square that has been wrapped into a 204-foot-tall wedge, the building's architect, [Cary Tamarkin](#), said the shape was not intended as a homage.

"Obviously we're well aware of the Flatiron Building," Mr. Tamarkin said. "It's three blocks from our office, but I wouldn't call it an inspiration. The whole shape, it was always just a question of making the site work."

The lot gave him 92 feet at the back and just a few at the front, with 360 feet in between. About 100 of that went to creating four townhouses, while the rest of the site contains the tower. A set of balconies at the rear even shares the curved shape of the tip, which helps make the jutting spaces more functional. "The curve at the front, it's 20 feet across," Mr. Tamarkin said. the curved shape of the tip, which helps make the jutting spaces more functional. "The curve at the front, it's 20 feet across," Mr. Tamarkin said. "It may look tight from the street, but inside, it's a lot of space to play with."



A "double Flatiron," made from two triangular lots at 100 Franklin Street. DDC

And what might be lost in room is gained in wraparound views. The developers tried a dozen different designs with the tower set back from the corner before settling on moving it to the front. "We definitely have buyers who like it and buyers who don't," said [Kevin P. Maloney](#), the founder of Property Markets Group, which is developing the site with Madison Equities. "We're O.K. with that. It's a big city."

Just a few blocks south, near the beginning of Avenue of the Americas, the development firm DDG is tackling two triangular lots. Both between Franklin and White Streets, they were bought for \$9.5 million. That is what some lofts cost in TriBeCa these days, not an entire building site, and it is easy to see why. The parcels, one 35 feet wide, the other 25 feet at its widest point, will soon be home to 10 new apartments and a pair of shops, called 100 Franklin.

If 10 Sullivan celebrates its wedge-shaped site, 100 Franklin masks it and embraces it in equal measure. Looking north, it almost appears to be a typical loft building, with big windows recessed into a patterned brick facade (a [DDG specialty](#)). But move to the other end of the building and it is apparent that the facade tapers down to a fine point, before vanishing into the building next door. An arched buttress at the street, which creates a doorway for a retail space, appears to be holding the entire end aloft.



A corner building in downtown Manhattan. Much of Manhattan adheres to the street grid and the square lots it creates. Sometimes, though, the lots are oddly shaped, leading to triangular buildings.
Christian Hansen for The New York Times

The two lots meet at opposing corners in a way that made it unfeasible to connect the interiors. So DDG has essentially created two buildings that look like one, joined by a wall of patterned bricks. As with almost any project in the city, the highly prescriptive zoning code is responsible as much as the architects for a building's look. As in this case, the code requires an uninterrupted facade along most wide avenues. This was one of the reasons that Joe McMillan, [the chief executive of DDG](#), wanted the properties in the first place.

"Where else can you get 200 feet of uninterrupted frontage on a major avenue these days?" Mr. McMillan said. "And with all these streets converging, it gives us more light and more visibility."

"This is really about turning constraints to your advantage. If this was an easy project, it would have been built years ago."



The property at 285 West 110th Street, at the roundabout of Central Park, comes to a curvaceous point.
Christian Hansen for The New York Times

Even with their complexity, there is a considerable competition for many of these unusual sites, some of it spurred by the city. At an old parking lot by the Brooklyn Academy of Music on Flatbush Avenue, Two Trees Management is [building a 32-story tower](#), and the controversial [redevelopment of the library on Cadman Plaza](#) in Brooklyn Heights has been called the Flatiron of that borough.

In Harlem, a project on Frederick Douglass Circle, at the northwestern terminus of Central Park, was similarly sold off by the city after many suitors placed bids on [yet another old gas station](#). The site comes to a point, but a curvaceous one.

Appropriately called Circa, the complex of 48 condominiums has a more conventional layout than appears from the street. The middle of the property is left open to create more of a cursive V than a triangle, which makes for longer units, with more views of the park. Where the building, developed by Artimus Construction, comes to its point along 110th Street, balconies were added so as not to create complicated interior spaces.

“Very rarely do you get a curve or an arc in a building in New York, so we wanted to embrace that and create a real presence on the circle and the park,” Dan Kaplan, a senior partner at FXFowle Architects, said.

Even the swooping buildings in the city by Frank Gehry and Zaha Hadid tend to be glorified squares. Unlike the crooked geographies of San Francisco or Paris, where Flatirons abound, New York is perhaps a little too frenetic for obtuse living.

Then again, that may be why the city could use fewer square spaces. [Robert Stilin](#), a designer tackling a full-floor apartment at 10 Sullivan, said, “I don’t really love angles or arches,” though they have their advantages.

“You can really float the living space around you,” he said. “You have to create your own symmetries.”

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