

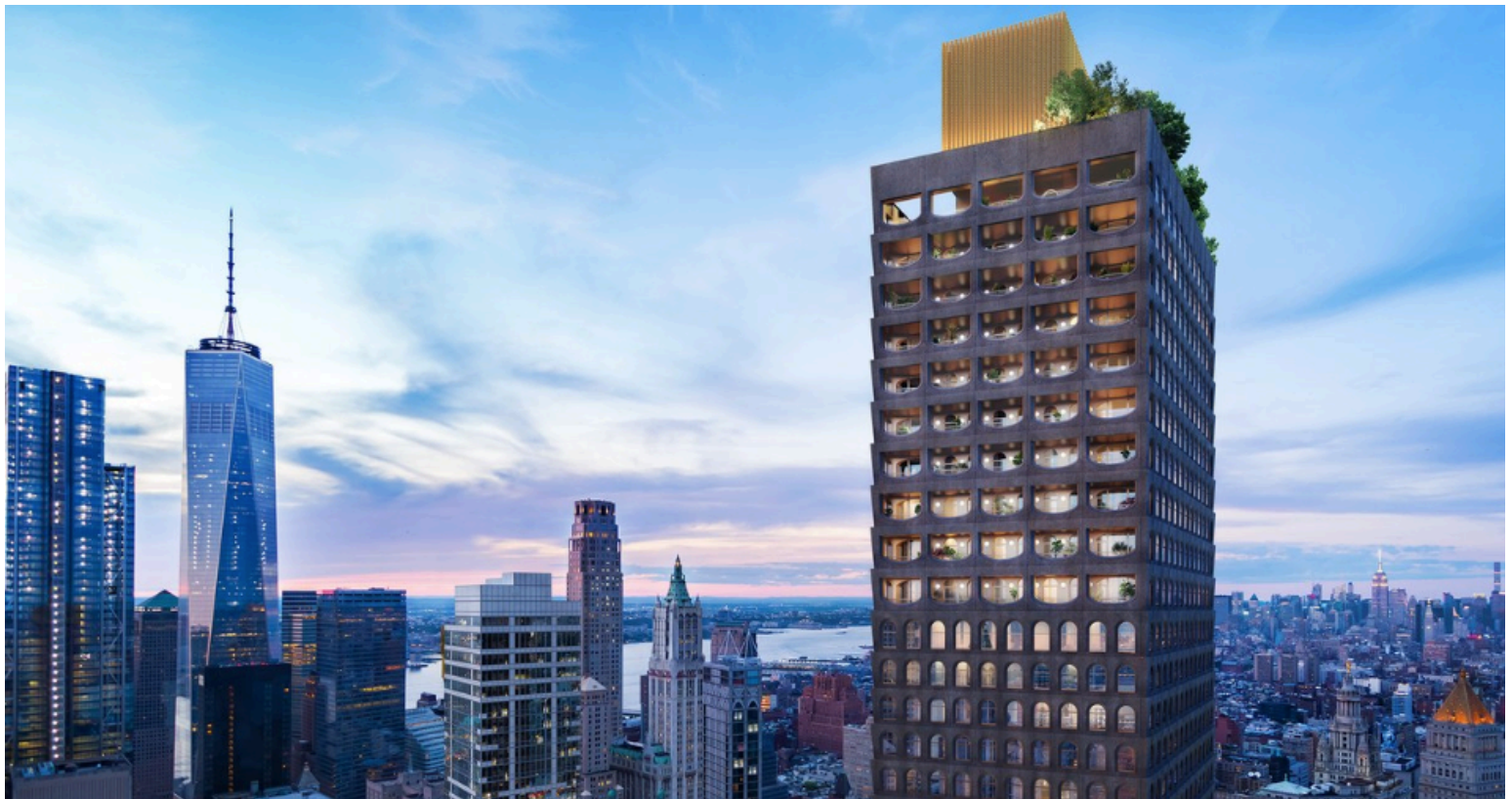
Profile

Hill West, Architects Behind Some of New York's Most Recognizable Buildings, Celebrates 10 Years

For a decade, the firm has been quietly defining New York's skyline as architects on buildings like David Adjaye's 130 William and Herzog & de Meuron's 56 Leonard

By Hadley Keller

February 8, 2019



A rendering of 130 William, with architecture by Adjaye Associates.

Image courtesy of Lightstone.

David Adjaye's [130 William](#), Herzog & de Meuron's [56 Leonard](#), [Waterline Square](#) by Rafael Viñoly, [Richard Meier](#), and Kohn Peterson Fox: These starchitect-designed buildings have all caused a buzz of excitement (not to mention a [buying frenzy](#)) as they rise in New York. They're also the work of the same firm you've never heard of.



Waterline Square, which contains buildings by Rafael Viñoly, Richard Meier, and Kohn Pederson Fox (Hill West's most frequent collaborator).

Since 2009, L. Stephen Hill and David West have been working alongside international architects to bring some of their most daring projects to life, marrying eye-catching design and practical function to create livable landmarks.

Alums of high-rise masters [Costas Kondylis and Partners](#), Hill and West founded their own outfit with architect Alan Goldstein as Goldstein, Hill & West; when Goldstein retired a few years ago, they adopted the shorter mantle Hill West. "We started with 18 people and now we're about 120," Hill says of the firm's rapid growth.

In that time, Hill West has designed more than 100 projects, comprising 2,844 stories and 41.8 million square feet of space. West estimates about half of that work is collaborative.

That said, Hill points out, "when it comes down to it, it's all about collaboration, whether you're collaborating with your own team or with a different firm. Maybe there's a little more politics, but most of the firms we've worked with are repeat collaborators, so the process works very smoothly."



211 East 14th Street, [the d'Orsay](#), which Hill West worked on with Jacques Garcia.

Photo: Courtesy of Hill West

When working with another firm as architect of record, Hill West often focuses on the interiors and what West calls the "back of house." There is also "a lot of zoning assistance and preschematic and schematic planning," Hill explains. "Then we design the units in the building, while the other firm focuses on the design aesthetic and the exterior details."

Sometimes there's a third type of arrangement: when the developer who hires Hill West is also the architect. "We've done a few projects with [Cary Tamarkin](#)," Hill says by way of example. "He's one of the easiest to work with. He's laid-back and very collaborative."

Solid advice, garnered from decades of experience working in New York, is what Hill West is there to offer. "Because these condos are being sold for a lot of money, people want to be sure that they stand the test of time in all respects," West says. "It's extremely important that the building is sound. And that's very, very complicated in New York City, so we're able to navigate that."



56 Leonard, completed with Herzog & De Meuron.

Photo: Courtesy of Hill West

Adds Hill, "There are things we think are common knowledge that are difficult for others to understand. The depth of units, for example: We had one project where the firm came to us with units that were 70 feet deep. They were seeing their sculptural vision, but maybe not seeing how that would relate to how people actually live. So sometimes we have to be that reality check."

The demand for Hill West's work has grown in time with a distinct shift in the industry. "One of the biggest changes since we've been working is the role of very well-known architects on residential architecture," Hill says. "When we first started, there was a feeling that residential architecture wasn't really architecture with a capital A. They were buildings that went up because there was a need, and they were all in a certain style."

Then, West continues, "that started to break down in the '90s, when there started to be more of an appreciation for style. A few buildings started pushing those boundaries, and then it became the norm."



The lounge at 91 Leonard, by Hill West and SOM.

Photo: Courtesy of Hill West

At the same time, advancements in materials and technology have better allowed for stylistically daring structures. "We have better elevators, better concrete, so you can build higher; wall types have changed, which allow for curtain walls," West says.

Plus, he adds, "there's a higher sophistication level among buyers. In New York, certainly, we have an international audience. These clients are very familiar with global styles, they're culturally informed, and they're looking at the apartment as an investment."

"But good aesthetic design, especially as an investment, is only as good as its foundation," Hill says. "The design architect is brought in to bring vision and brand and something novel to the table, which is very important in this market, but the buildings are still essentially similar, and we have a deep understanding of them."

At the end of the day, despite the complex technical know-how that goes into its projects, the firm's mission is simple: "We like to keep our clients happy, to work really hard and give them good design," says Hill.

QUINN