

RALPH WALKER RENAISSANCE

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To Frank Lloyd Wright, Ralph Walker was “the only other honest architect in America,” and to *The New York Times*, he was the “architect of the century.”* Throughout his lifetime, his art deco style redefined the notion of a skyscraper thanks to his innovative detailing and ornamentation that finessed the building’s rigid structure. The 1920s and 30s witnessed Walker’s heyday—as a principal at Voorhees, Gmelin & Walker, he contributed to Manhattan’s skyline with the Barclay-Vesey Telephone Building (1926) and the Irving Trust Building at 1 Wall Street (1931). Walker was a true advocate for a new modernist architectural vision in New York and America; and starting today, an exhibition celebrating his oeuvre opens at one of the architect’s overlooked buildings at 212 West 18th Street.



1931 Beaux-Arts Ball at the Hotel Astor. (L-R) A. Stewart Walker as the Fuller Building, Leonard Schultze as the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, Ely Jacques Kahn as the Squibb Building, William Van Alen as the Chrysler Building, Ralph Walker as the Irving Trust, D.E. Ward as the Metropolitan Tower, and Joseph Freedlander as the Museum of the City of New York.

Walker’s architectural legacy extended beyond New York and its skyscrapers with his work for the Chicago World’s Fair (1933) and another fair on his home turf in 1939. By the late 1940s, he was elected as head of the AIA New York, and in 1957 he received the national organization’s highest honor, the Centennial Medal of Honor.



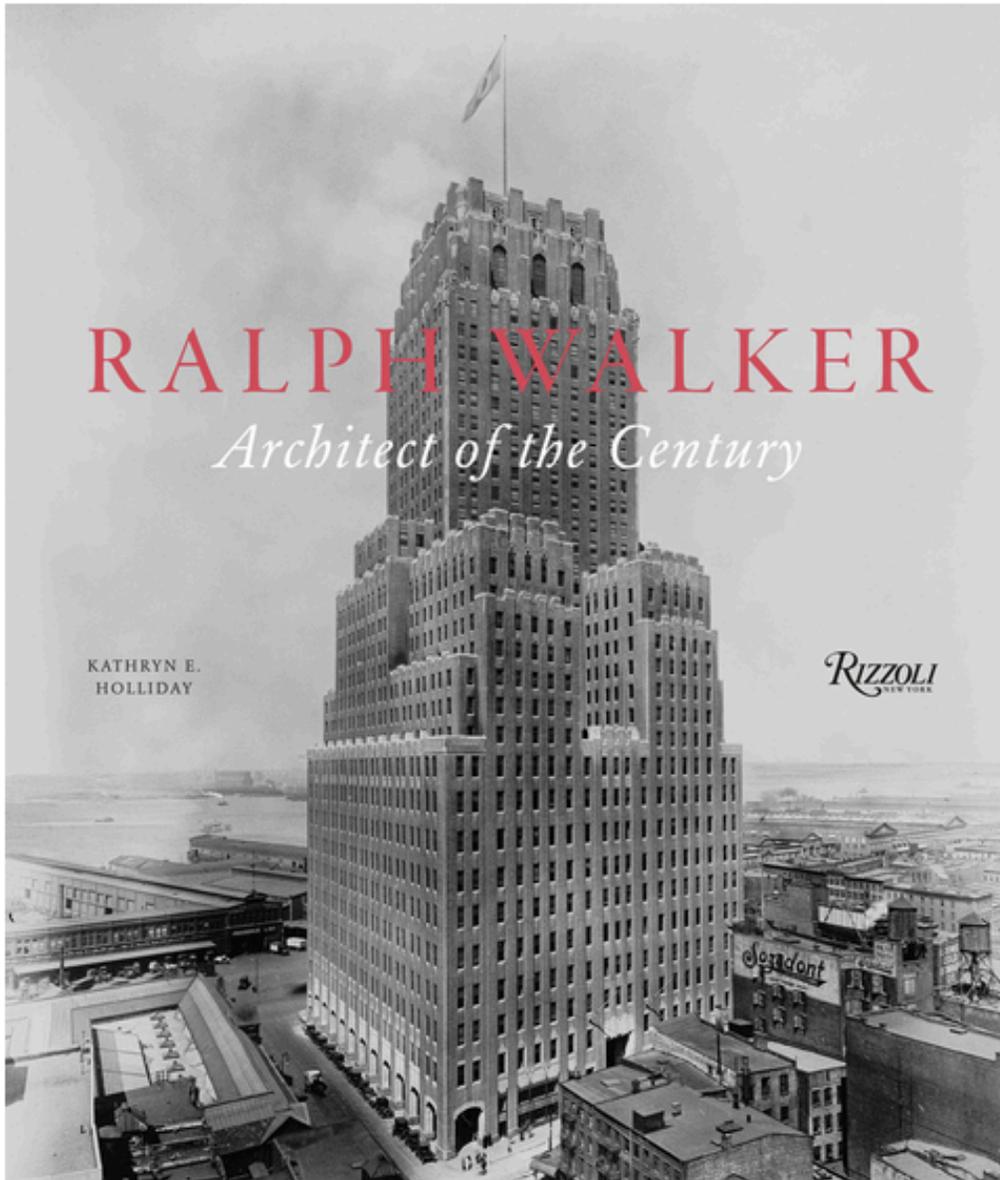
At left, a preliminary drawing of the Telephone Building at 212 West 18th Street from the late '20s. The building at completion, photographed in 1931 (at right), which shows the lack of a full-height spire, something the Walker Tower developers are planning to add back at penthouse level.

The [Walker Tower](#), nestled off Seventh Avenue between West 17th and 18th Streets, was once known as the Verizon Telephone Building and housed the company's corporate headquarters for decades. (Verizon will maintain its toehold on floors one through seven; the new condos will occupy all the space from the 8th floor on up.) Designed in 1929, the building's exterior displays the essence of Ralph Walker with its folded, curtain like façade and detailed ornamentation. Today the developers Michael Stern of JDS Development and Elliott Joseph of Property Markets Group, with the help of local architecture firm [Cetra/Ruddy](#), are carefully restoring the façade. The hat trick here is to retain Walker's early 20th-century aesthetic while gutting the interior space and refiguring the layouts of the upper floors to accommodate Manhattan's luxury-condo-hunting population. (One thing that won't be edited: the tower's interior ceiling heights of 14 feet and more.)

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Ralph Walker: Architect of the Century will be available September 2012. Pre-order it at [Rizzoli](#).

Ralph Walker: Architect of the Century opens free to the public this week (by appointment only) and displays original drawings, renderings, and plans done by Walker's hand, in addition to archival photos and details on the building's present incarnation as [luxury condominiums](#).

<http://www.dwell.com/articles/ralph-walker-renaissance.html>