

NEW YORK

March 28, 2012

HOME DESIGN

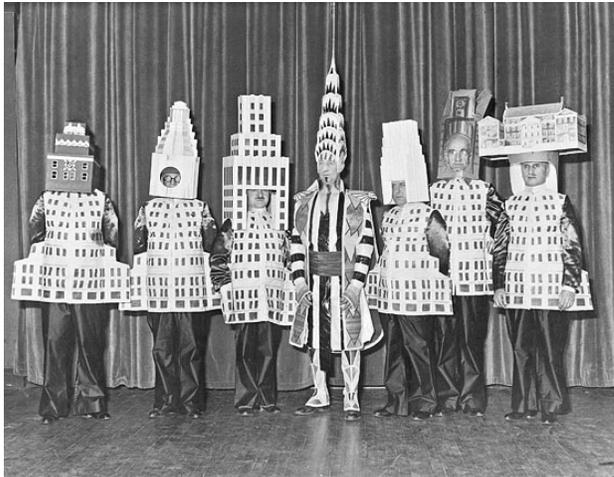
First Look: A Legacy Deconstructed

By [Wendy Goodman](#)

Published Mar 28, 2012



Had “starchitect” been part of the popular lexicon in Ralph Walker’s day, he would have definitely fit the description. The American master builder (1889–1973), who designed skyscrapers and elaborate Deco interiors that changed the skylines of Manhattan and Chicago, is being celebrated with a new book, *Ralph Walker: Architect of the Century*, published by Rizzoli this fall, and an exhibit of his work, curated by the book’s author, Kathryn Holliday, opens March 28 in one of Walker’s iconic buildings (212 W. 18th St.; 212-335-1800 or ralphwalkerexhibit.com; free admission; by appointment only). Here, the “Red Room” of the Irving Trust Building at One Wall Street, one of the many magnificent Art Deco interiors he designed.



A sublime portrait of Walker and his architect peers wearing the buildings they designed as costumes for the famous Beaux-Arts Ball of 1931. It was called a “Fete Moderne” held at the Hotel Astor. From left to right: A. Stewart Walker as the Fuller Building, Leonard Schultze as the Waldorf-Astoria, 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.

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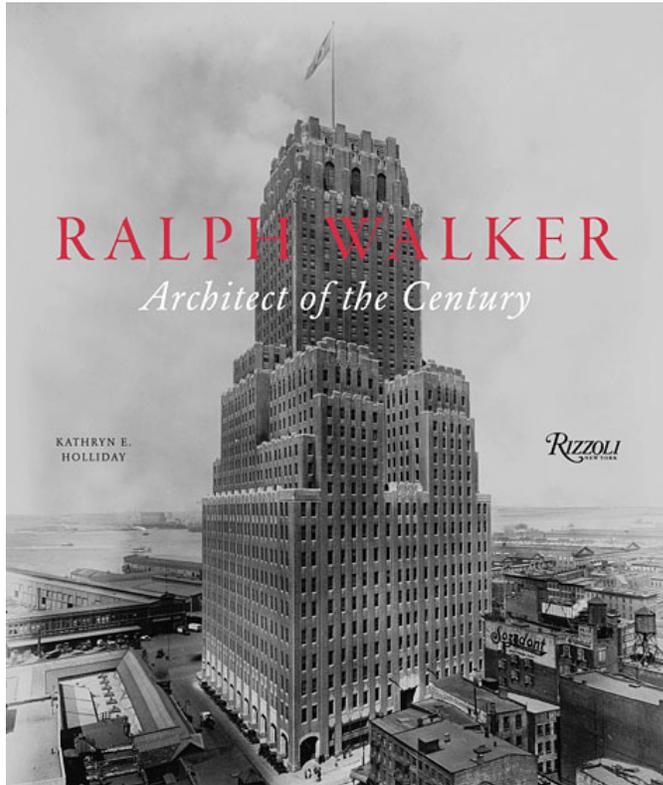
A photo of Walker's West 18th Telephone Building in 1931 just after it was completed and where the show is being held today. This photograph illustrates the huge transition from the city being composed of neighborhoods of small brownstones and tenements to the new massive proportions of modernity.



As contemporary as this looks, it is Walker's proposal for his Tower of Water and Light for the 1933 Chicago World's Fair. His intention was for the 600-foot tower to be built of aluminum and glass with water flowing down to the ground creating a dreamlike mist. It was never built, but there is a model of it in the show.

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On the book's cover, the elegant Barclay Vesey Building Walker designed on West Street in 1926. Frank Lloyd Wright called Walker "the only other honest architect in America".