

New York City's First "Gold" Office Building Opens

Hearst Tower becomes a reality after three-quarters of a century



by Russell Boniface
Associate Editor

Summary: The Hearst Tower, with its distinctive triangular frame, opened in New York City October 9 as the city's first Gold LEED® certified building. The 46-story, 856,000-square-foot Midtown structure is defined by vertical and horizontal energy-saving, diamond-shaped bands of bright stainless steel. The design is by AIA Gold Medal recipient and Pritzker Architecture Prize winner Lord Norman Foster, Hon. FAIA, of U.K.-based Foster and Partners. The New York-based office of Gensler worked with Foster and Partners to incorporate green design and construction features to create an energy-conserving office environment. The \$500 million Hearst Tower occupies the shell of the original six-story Hearst edifice, design by Joseph Urban and George B. Post & Sons and called the International

Magazine Building. Completed in 1928, the reinforced structure anticipated an office tower that was never constructed—until now.

Gensler along with Foster and Partners implemented a sustainable design for the glass and steel triangular Hearst Tower, which rises 597 feet from its original 40,000-square-foot base, signifying a link between old and new. The L-shaped, pre-cast, tan limestone façade from the original 1928 building, replete with columns, balustrades, sculptures, spandrels, and windows, has been preserved and restored. Its façade—a two-story base with four stories set back—now wraps around as a pediment for the new tower. (The original building is outside the Art Deco norm and is a combination of styles.) After three years of construction, the tower's green design paid dividends when, on September 22, it received official green status by the USGBC for high environmental performance. The Hearst Tower is designed to be 26 percent more energy-efficient than a standard office building.

The sustainable diagrid

Called a "diagrid" design, the exterior is a series of four-story, peeled-back steel triangles on a facade of sloping floor-to-ceiling glass, allowing the office and plaza areas to be flooded with natural light. In addition, its frame eliminates the need for 2,000 tons of steel that a conventional frame would employ.

Ninety percent of the steel is recycled, which includes the interior diagonal columns and braces behind the fa-

çade in the tower's 10-story atrium.

Energy-saving features in the tower also include:

- Glass coating to reduce solar radiation and therefore cooling load
- A limestone atrium floor with embedded polyethylene for circulating water for cooling in the summer and heating in the winter
- Sensors that control artificial light based on the amount of natural light
- Motion sensors to turn off lights and computers when an area is unoccupied
- High-efficiency heating and air-conditioning equipment that uses outside air for cooling and ventilation for 75 percent of the year
- A roof that collects rainwater in a 14,000-gallon basement reclamation tank, which then replaces water lost to evaporation in the office air-conditioning system and feeds into a pumping system to irrigate plantings and trees inside and outside of the building



PRACTICE

- The “Icefall,” a two-story waterfall that chills the 10-story atrium, drawing off warm-season heat using rainwater from the roof
- Few internal walls and low workstation partitions to maximize natural light
- Walls are coated with low-vapor paints
- Low-toxicity furniture, finishes, and carpeting have content that is recycled or harvested from sustainable forests
- Concrete surfaces are treated with low-toxicity sealants.



“Not only is the Hearst Tower a beautiful addition to the city’s skyline, but as an office space, it is one of the healthiest, most enviable environments for workers in New York City,” says Joseph Brancato, managing director in Gensler’s New York office.

Social heart of the Hearst community

The main spatial “event” of the Hearst Tower is the grand internal plaza that occupies the entire shell of the historic base. Inside is a dramatic 10-story atrium and café space surrounded by the original windowed masonry facade. More experienced Hearst employees have voiced a feeling of connection with the new facility because they can actually see the windows of their old offices intact in the old masonry shell. The space has been called “the social heart of the Hearst community.” A series of diagonal esca-

tors set amid the waterfall connects the street level to the plaza.

Above, an open-office layout emphasizes increased communication among Hearst employees. In addition, prime space such as the building’s corners and the eastern perimeter are “public” areas.

“Employees have been unbelievably enthusiastic about their new office space,” said Brian Schwagerl, director of Corporate Real Estate and Facilities Planning at Hearst. “They’re effusive about the natural light and the quality of the air, and there’s greater contact, interaction, and idea-sharing within the company. It’s no exaggeration to say that staff at all levels feels energized working in the new tower.”

Said architect Lord Foster at the groundbreaking: “The completion of Hearst Tower is a defining moment for New York. I am grateful to have been given the opportunity to work on the realization of this dream originally envisioned in 1926.”

Did you know . . .

- The entire original 1920s limestone facade has been restored at a cost of \$6 million.
- The design of the original consists of fluted columns, carved balustrades, an arched entrance, and proportioned windows on the first and second stories. The four upper stories are set back from the base with massive piers that accentuate the height of the building.
- Allegorical sculptured figures set against the outside columns represented music, art, commerce, sports, and industry.
- When the Stock Market crashed in 1929, Hearst’s grand plan to add the tower to the six-story base fell through. Between 1945 and ‘47,



proposals were made for nine additional stories, but never executed.

- Pre-cast limestone was experimental in the 1920s.
- The original building was designated a New York City landmark in 1988.
- The cost of foreign-sourced materials represents less than 10 percent of the cost of the construction of the tower itself.
- Each steel triangle in the new tower is 54 feet high.
- Newspaper publisher William Randolph Hearst was the model for Orson Welles’ media baron character in the 1941 film Citizen Kane.