



THE NEW YORK TIMES BUILDING LOBBY

Steel Brings Transparency
to the Ground Floor

When The New York Times moved into its new headquarters on 8th Avenue, it was a dramatic departure for the newspaper, whose two previous homes—the 1904 Times Tower and the Annex—were imposing stone watchtowers that expressed the power and influence of the so-called paper of record and the media barons within their marbled walls. By contrast, the paper’s new home, designed by Renzo Piano Building Workshop and FXFowle, is renowned for its transparency and egalitarian character—a structure more in tune with the times. This spirit of openness is apparent from the ceramic and steel parapet that evaporates into the sky all the way down to the invisible storefront and colorful lobby on which the rest of the building seems to float. Were it not for narrow profiles afforded by using steel for the structure, this spectacular entrance to one of the city’s most visually impressive buildings could not have been so successfully achieved.

“I think the transparency of the lobby is key,” Says Glenn Hughes, Managing Director of Construction for the New York Times Company. “When you walk into this building, you see all the way through.” This is due in part to the cathedral-like height of the ceiling, but mainly to the uninterrupted views through the ground floor. The lobby is arrayed around four robust steel columns of the building’s core, which allows the spans that make it feel amazingly airy and spacious. Visitors can see 41st Street from the 40th Street entrance and, from 8th Avenue, a garden of birch trees that rises through the newsroom.

But even then the lobby, with its dramatic T-shape, would have been little more than shadowy corridors were it not for the grand expanses of glass that enclose the building’s street fronts. “The only lobby that has this degree of transparency is Lever House,” notes Dan Kaplan, a senior principal at FXFowle. “But it’s sort of unprecedented in New York to have a site that’s lifted up, transparent all the way through.”



PREVIOUS Arrayed around four robust steel columns that provide long spans, the lobby feels amazingly airy and spacious.

Hughes and Kaplan both praise the work of Seele, the German glassmakers, for making the lobby possible. Unlike most storefronts, which use aluminum mullions to support each pane of glass—in this case, panes that measure 5 feet by 10 feet and weigh roughly 750 pounds each—Seele chose steel mullions for their strength and affordability; they are ASTM Grade A283 b+c. “This material is the most economical and achieved the lightweight filigree look that Renzo Piano and the building owners wanted,” explains Charles Bostick, vice president for marketing at Seele. “Any span can be achieved with any material, so aluminum could have been used, but it would have required a much greater amount of material and therefore expense, and with much larger cross sections.”

Most prominent in the storefront are the larger vertical mullions, crafted from ASTM A572 Grade 50 steel. These mullions have circular cutouts, courtesy of Seele’s plasma laser cutter, that mimic the beams on the curtain wall above, which hold the ceramic screen in place. As with the I-beams on the facade of Mies van der Rohe’s

Seagram Building, they look like an ornamental flourish meant to express the building’s hidden structure, but these members actually provide much of the support for the storefront’s glass.

Where Piano does become expressionistic is in the lobby’s detailing. “He always wants to express the structure all the way to the ground,” says Hughes. To that end, each side of the four core pillars are capped with ¼-inch-thick steel plate panels. The panels, made of ASTM A36 grade steel, were welded into place and then painted with a Polyurethane Enamel—POLANE B by Sherwin Williams—which was chosen by Piano to match the Chartek 8 intumescent paint used on the exterior steel members. “What’s nice about [the paint] is it has some depth and texture,” says Kaplan. “It also helps to aesthetically unify interconnected structural pieces. All the steels needed to work together visually.” Intumescent paint was also used on the lobby’s exposed steel, though a different brand was chosen for the interior: Carboline Thin Film III. All of the intumescent paint used at the Times building has a two-hour fire rating.



ABOVE AND OPPOSITE The key to maintaining an open and light feel within the lobby’s corridors was ringing the street fronts with all-glass facades.

This expression and mimicry continues throughout the ground floor and storefront, from the smaller steel columns that dot the lobby to the steel canopies hanging over the entrances. Like most of the steel throughout the building, including the vertical mullions that frame the storefront, these elements are painted with the same grey electrostatic paint. The steel canopies, which are bolted on and use the same steel components as the storefront, serve a special purpose, keeping pedestrians dry, because the ceramic screen functions as a massive drip edge. But there is more, too. “They bring the scale of the tower directly to the pedestrian,” says Kaplan.

The lobby is also finished with vibrant marigold Marmarino plaster side walls and locally sourced oak floors, which add an element of color to the otherwise subdued building. But aside from these flourishes, the lobby is almost entirely made of steel. It was a fitting choice of material: one that both realizes and reflects *The New York Times*’ commitment to an open, flexible, transparent future—not to mention a future that is also strong and reliable. ■

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Owner: **The New York Times Company** New York, NY;
Forest City Ratner Companies Brooklyn, NY
Developer: **Forest City Ratner Companies** Brooklyn, NY
Architect: **Renzo Piano Building Workshop** Paris, France
in association with **FX Fowle Architects, PC** New York, NY
Interior Architect: **Gensler** New York, NY
Structural Engineer: **Thornton Tomasetti** New York, NY
Mechanical Engineer: **Flack + Kurtz** New York, NY
General Contractor: **AMEC Construction Management, Inc.** Schenectady, NY
Interiors Contractor: **Turner Construction** New York, NY; **Lehr Construction** New York, NY; **Structure Tone** New York, NY; **J. T. Magen & Company Inc.** New York, NY
Curtain Wall Consultant: **Heitman & Associates, Inc.** New York, NY;
testing consultant, **Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc.** New York, NY
Structural Steel Fabricators: **W&W Steel** Oklahoma City, OK; **Owen Steel Co.** Columbia, SC; **Afco Steel** Little Rock, AR; **ADF** Terrebonne, Quebec, Canada
Structural Steel Erector: **DCM Erectors, Inc.** New York, NY
Miscellaneous and Architectural Metals Fabricators and Erectors: **Empire City Iron Works** Long Island City, NY; **Skyline Steel Corp.** Brooklyn, NY; **P. I. I.** Waterford, NY
Curtain Wall Fabricator and Erector: **Benson Global** Portland, OR
Metal Deck Erector: **Solera/DCM, Inc.** New York, NY