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Curved Buildings: Softening the Edges of the City

In the Details...

By CARTER B. HORSLEY
Special to the Sun
January 31, 2008

The rectilinear street grid north of Washington Square may not be so conducive to curved buildings, but curves are among the most interesting architectural details in the city, and they are making something of a comeback.

One new structure that horizontally undulates its main façade is One [Kenmore Square](#), designed by Gluckman Mayner Architects in 2006. This building is not as prominent, however, as One Astor Place, the freestanding, sinuously curved glass apartment tower designed by [Gwathmey Siegel & Associates Architects](#) and completed in 2005.

The 26-story building is clad with blue reflective glass and has a rippling midsection and a boxy element near its top that compromises its curvaceous aesthetics. Despite some critical reviews, One Astor Place has become an instant landmark as the portal to the emerging skyline on the Bowery and the Lower East Side.

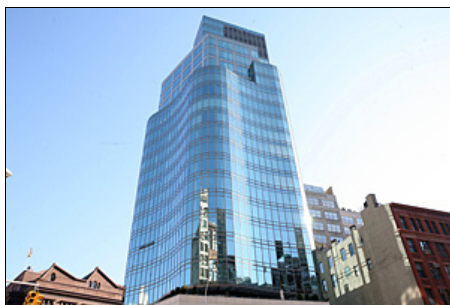
The current renaissance in curved architecture is due in large part to the enormous popularity of [Frank Gehry's](#) sinuous design a few years ago for the Solomon R. [Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain](#).

Mr. Gehry recently completed the IAC headquarters building for [Barry Diller](#) on the West Side Highway between 18th and 19th streets, and despite its relatively modest size, its sail-like shape makes it the city's most important curved building since the upside-down spiral of [Frank Lloyd Wright's Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum](#) on Fifth Avenue and 88th Street.

The IAC headquarters is across the street from a taller project designed by [Jean Nouvel](#) that is now under construction at 100 Eleventh Ave. It will feature broadly curved south and east façades, along with a spectacular arrangement of angled windows.

These new buildings take their curves from historic New York architecture.

One of the city's earliest curved structures was the circular "west battery" fort at [Battery Park](#), built by [John McComb Jr.](#) and [Lieutenant Colonel Jonathan Williams](#) in 1811. Other historic buildings include the Fuller Building at 23rd Street, at the intersection of Fifth Avenue and Broadway, known for its "flatiron"



A new curved building at 445 Lafayette St., across from Cooper Union on Astor Place. *Heuichul Kim*

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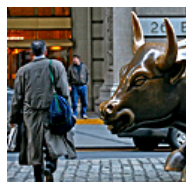
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shape, and its smaller partner, the former Cocoa Exchange building, which was recently converted to apartments at 1 [Wall Street](#) Court. [Daniel H. Burnham & Co.](#) designed the Fuller Building in 1902, and Clinton & Russell designed the building at 1 Wall Street Court in 1903.

Mr. Horsley is the editor of CityRealty.com.

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