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Skyline stars of

New works salute Gwathmey Siegel's bold urban vision

BY MATT CHABAN
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The work of architects Charles Gwathmey and Robert Siegel seems ill-suited to New York. Their love of brash geometric buildings mixing sharp angles and swooping curves is at odds with the city's rigid grid.

But Gwathmey Siegel & Associates was, and is, one of the city's most successful and influential architecture firms of the past half century. To see its indelible impact on the skyline, look no farther than a pair of new monographs just released by Rizzoli.

Gwathmey, who died of cancer in 2009, was often described as macho, and his work with Siegel has a certain swaggering elegance. Take, for example, the undulating "Sculpture for Living" condos that ripple above Astor Place.

"We always felt there was an abstract and artful nature to making buildings, going back to ancient times, but it should never be abstract for its own sake," Siegel tells *The News*.

It's larger buildings like the glassy Astor Place tower that are the focus of

"The Sculpture for Living" on Astor Place.



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KAYLEIGH JANKOWSKI/RIZZOLI



PAUL WARCHOL PHOTOGRAPHY, INC.



Clockwise from top left: U.S. Mission to UN, Jewish Children's Museum, Steven Cohen apartment, art collector's duplex.



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"Gwathmey Siegel 3: 2002-2012."

"Gwathmey Siegel 3: 2002-2012," and the suave strut in those projects sometimes seems out of step with the surroundings.

The "Sculpture for Living" was a shock when it opened in 2004. Yet the project heralded two important changes: the transformation of Astor Place and the rise of starchitecture as a selling tool in the city.

"It's a major downtown intersection, deserving of a major work of architecture," Siegel says. "We wanted something

that floated over the space, rather than occupying it."

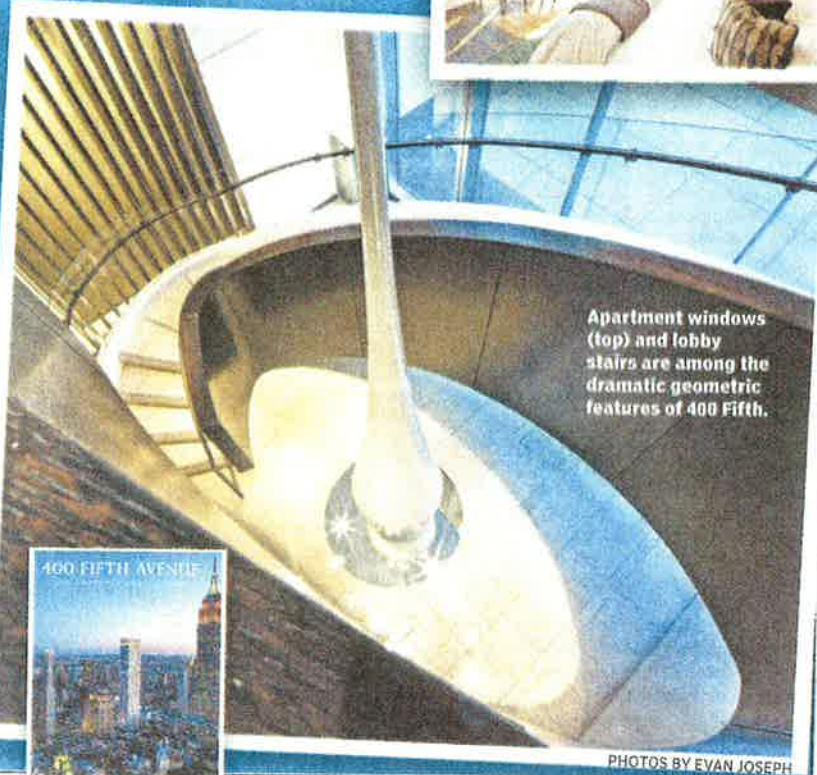
More successful is the similarly curvaceous Jewish Children's Museum, which brought just the right amount of whimsy to staid Eastern Parkway in Crown Heights.

The same spirit can be seen in a penthouse for hedge-fund titan Stephen A. Cohen at the Bloomberg Building, or a duplex for an apartment collector where the piano hangs over a balcony.

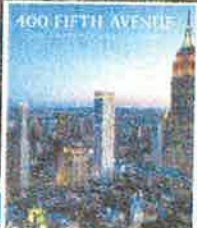
Even at the bunker-like U.S. Mission to the United Nations — one of the first federal buildings commissioned after 9/11 — Gwathmey Siegel creates an inviting entrance with a sweeping roof and well-placed Alexander Calder sculpture.

A frequent challenge for the architects has been marrying their work to that of others, whether it's building across the street from the UN, creating an addition to the Guggenheim or constructing

NYC



Apartment windows (top) and lobby stairs are among the dramatic geometric features of 400 Fifth.



PHOTOS BY EVAN JOSEPH

a tower two blocks north of the Empire State Building.

But that high-rise is one of the firm's finest large-scale works, and it gets a loving survey in "400 Fifth Avenue," shot by star apartment photographer Evan Joseph.

"Doing a book about a single building is a huge challenge, but they created so much variety at 400 Fifth, it's hard to know what to shoot," Joseph says.

The 60-story tower is home to 214 hotel

room, 157 condos, a restaurant, spa and just about everything else that has come to define modern New York City living.

A mix of prewar shapes and 21st-century materials, the tower zigzags into the sky. Inside, guests and residents twist and bend their way to the unusual rhythms of the city.

"We've always been building among landmarks," Siegel says. "Hopefully we've created a few, too."



Jung Lee creates a festive holiday table without the cheesy trimmings.