

Reaching the heights in New York

Katerina Hojgrova, US West Coast Correspondent, Wednesday 25 Nov 2015

With a long history of skyscraper construction New York was the ideal location for the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat's annual conference.

Recently the Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat (CTBUH) held its annual conference in the heart of New York's Midtown Manhattan district. The event took place at the Grand Hyatt New York, just a stone's throw away from famous Chrysler Building, Rockefeller Center and Empire State Building.

At a busy event 1,200 delegates gathered with many of the world's leading architects, engineers, developers, academics and other leading professionals from the tall building industry in attendance. The theme of this year's two day conference was "Global Interchanges: Resurgence of the Skyscraper City". CTBUH chose New York for its evident involvement in the resurgence of skyscraper construction. Indeed, several new typologies are emerging within New York including the super slim luxury residential towers One57 (Atelier Christian de Portzamparc) and 432 Park (Rafael Viñoly Architects) and pre-fabricated high-rises as seen at Pacific Park (under construction). There are also large scale urban regeneration clusters such as Hudson Yards and the new World Trade Center site and new urban spaces such as the High Line. This fascinating city is a home of other iconic landmarks as One World Trade Centre, Bank of America Tower, 56 Leonard Street, Nordstrom Tower, 125 Greenwich Street, Journal Squared and the list continues...

CTBUH Executive Director Anthony Wood Associate Professor at Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) and CTBUH Chairman David Malott (Principal KPF) opened the conference with a panel discussion along with five top New York's developers to focus on the key issues including the challenges and benefits of developing tall buildings in New York.

The conference began with five simultaneously running sessions. It featured 90 distinguished speakers and renowned architects such as Rafael Vinoly, Moshe Safdie, Daniel Libeskind to name few, from an array of disciplines across the industry, including major developers around the world. The conference explored technical innovations that drive new heights, forms, materials, construction techniques, multi-national investment scenarios, and challenges of the age and future of the skyscraper and urban habitat.

Jeddah Economic Company' CEO Mounib Hammoud who is developing the world's tallest Kingdom Tower in Saudi Arabia said "There are no projects without challenges and difficulties, but with the experience with engineers and designers, project managers, contractors and my team nothing is impossible!" The project will be an iconic marker of Jeddah's historic importance as the gateway to the holy cities of Makkah & Madinah. See [EarthCam's](http://www.jec.sa/en/3_53/portal/Live_Cam_Feed/) live time-laps highlighting progress of the development here: http://www.jec.sa/en/3_53/portal/Live_Cam_Feed/

As World Architecture News' representative at the conference I was delighted to meet several CTBUH UK Executive Committee members including Chair - Steve Watts (Alinea), Deputy Chair - Temoor Ahmad (Grimshaw), Ian Skelton (AECOM) and Vince Ugarow (Hilson Moran). The CTBUH UK Chapter was officially launched in June 2015 as a localised hub for built environment professionals specialising in tall buildings and the urban habitat working in the UK. The UK Chapter encourages discussion on current built environment issues in the UK and engages in the growing issues surrounding tall buildings in London. It also aims to facilitate the exchange of knowledge between the growing community of professionals involved in high rise construction in the UK and within the industry and the wider public, helping to create better urban environments in the long term.

Commenting at the conference on New York's expansion in the coming years Rafael Vinoly said: "The increasing density really represents it's change of the notion and this city shows that what happens on the ground will very soon happen up in the sky."

Moshe Safdie also focussed on New York's future development saying: "There is a lot of talk about the High Line at this conference. What fascinates me is this beautiful public resource... it's an example where urban design needs to intervene to preserve something that we have." While Daniel Libeskind observed that, "Architecture is not technology, density or infrastructure, it's a civic art"

I also joined KONE, the elevator and escalator manufacturer, for a VIP lunch. The firm won the WAN Product of the Year 2013 with its innovative lift cable, UltraRope, that is now used in many high-rise buildings across the world such as the Shard, Leadenhall Building and Doha Tower, to name few. One of KONE's more recent achievements is being selected by Jeddah Economic Co as the vertical transportation provider to deliver the world's fastest and highest double-decker elevators for Saudi Arabia's Kingdom Tower, the world's tallest building. Americas CEO Larry Wash, KONE Mexico MD Alicia Bandala, Modernization Project Manager Dan Walsh and Christopher Wein, CEO at Great Gulf, a Toronto-based real estate developer updated attendees on the global the elevator industry. This session also covered modernization and construction growth in Canada, the U.S. and Mexico as well as taking part in a discussion on urbanization related to product development, with specific reference to Jumplift technology.

Discussing New York 2050 BIG's Partner Kai-Uwe Bergmann said "You can make changes and do huge things in a lifetime and maybe do a few things that are really transformative to the same degree as investments in public place or buildings that service catalysts to make people's perception of a place different. These places are in every city and sometimes a simple visionary is able to unlock the potential of site, infrastructure or the place. Maybe the water is the next High Line; if we clean it we can create the most amazing city."

"Towards the Future" closing plenary chaired by CTBUH Trustee Timothy Johnson (NBBJ) started with an outstanding presentation by BIG's Founding Partner Bjarke Ingels who introduced a new generation of responsive design for tall buildings. He said, "We have a responsibility to make the cities we live in a bit more like our dreams."

CTBUH leaders Anthony Wood and David Malott closed the conference by introducing the launch of the 2016 CTBUH Conference that will take place progressively across the three cities of: Shenzhen, Guangzhou, and Hong Kong. Please join CTBUH in the Pearl River Delta "mega-region" for an investigation into the true facets of urbanization and vertical growth. I hope to see you there...

