

First look: REX's Sleek Retrofit of Brutalist 5 Manhattan West

Jonathan Hilburg & Audrey Wachs, 11.15.17



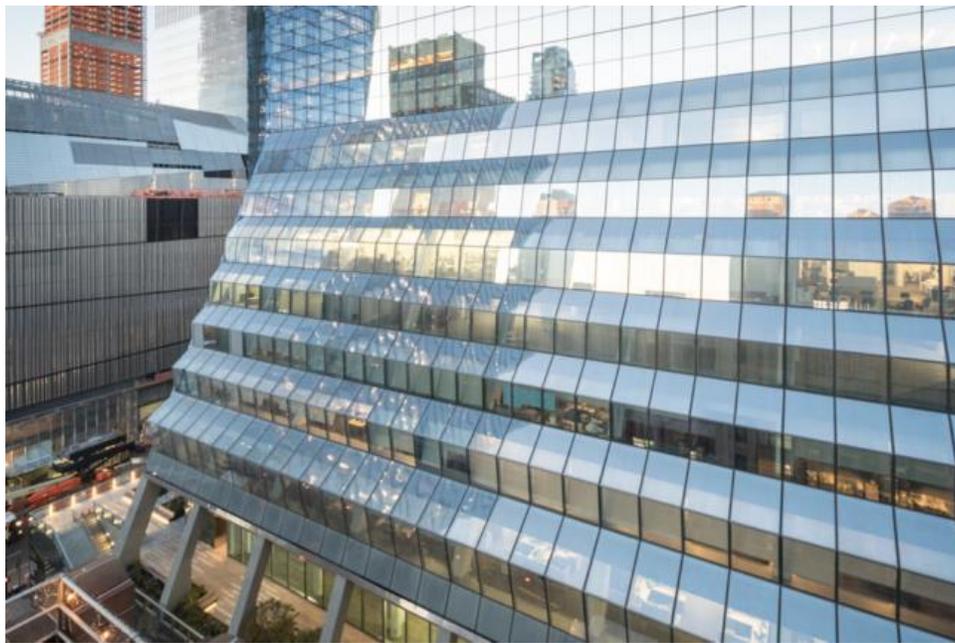
REX has bestowed a shiny new skin on a late Brutalist office building that was, until recently, one of the ugliest buildings in Manhattan.

Up until the renovation, the building was known as the elephant's foot, in dubious honor of a horrific 1980s renovation that left the elegant concrete structure clad in brown metal panels and beige paint.

Now called 5 Manhattan West, the building has undergone yet another makeover, spearheaded by REX, to update its facade with the latest in form-fitting fenestration.

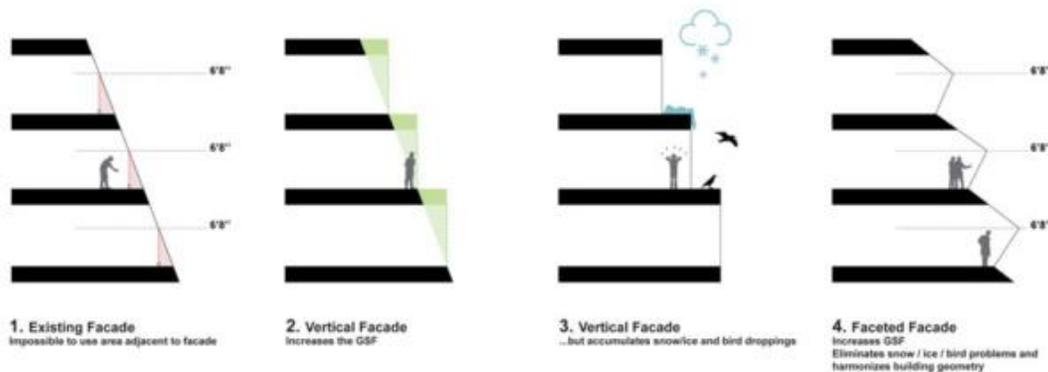


The Brooklyn-based firm ultimately devised a pleated glass facade that ripples down the building like a stretched ziggurat to flood the large, open interiors with light. These pleats are composed of panels angling out toward each other from the floor and ceiling, a design driven by the need to mitigate the structure's slope, which limited the leasable space along the interior perimeter. But the unique form is more than just window dressing. According to Joshua Prince-Ramus, REX's founding principal, "What's interesting about the geometry is that the sun doesn't hit the lower piece of glass, so we can have a building that is transparent and simultaneously energy efficient."



Prince-Ramus praised REX’s client, Brookfield, for its holistic approach to sustainability that centered reuse—not just LEED-level performance. “In our lifetimes, adaptive reuse is going to be the stuff from which we make ‘capital A Architecture,’” he said.

The pleating also complied with ADA standards for head strike, allowing for uninterrupted exterior views while maximizing tenants’ floorspace, and allowed the designers to rigorously test the concrete from the 1960s, which was cast using different standards from today.



The structural maneuvering honestly exposed concrete from Davis Brody’s (now Davis Brody Bond) original design, a move that was especially evident on the east-west breezeway.



The renovation was done with tenants in place, on a feverish nights-and-weekends schedule. Although some floors have yet to welcome new tenants like J.P. Morgan Chase and Amazon, 5 Manhattan West’s common spaces and outdoor areas by James Corner Field Operations are largely complete. The squat, 1.7-million-square-foot structure features ground level retail, a two-

story elevated breezeway on the southern side, and a full interior renovation, with open floor plates ranging from 86,000 to 124,000 square feet (no, that's not a typo). With ceiling heights from 15 to 17.5 feet, the super-sized office spaces allow the old-new building to compete with Hudson Yards' office spaces, which feature large, and largely column-free, interiors.

Adamson served as executive architect for the \$350 million project.

The 5 Manhattan West re-clad slots the office building squarely into Brookfield Office Properties' Manhattan West development. Bounded by Ninth Avenue to Tenth Avenue and 31st Street to 33rd Street, Manhattan West encompasses nearly six million square feet across six buildings.

<https://archpaper.com/2017/11/new-photos-rex-sleek-retrofit-5-manhattan-west/#gallery-0-slide-0>