

The chrysler building architecture history essay



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The business revival that came after World War One led to the period known as the roaring twenties. Buildings and businesses rose in urban areas of America. Limitless opportunity seemed to lurk in every city. And with these near infinite boundaries, came a new appeal: the race toward the sky. Skyscrapers in New York City had already been constructed in the previous decades, such as the Woolworth Building (1918), which topped the Metropolitan Life Insurance Tower (1909) by 50 feet to become the tallest building in the world.[1]In August 1928, one party claimed to take over the game. William Van Alen, an extremely talented and elaborate architect working under William H. Reynolds, drew up blueprints for the sixty-seven-story skyscraper to be built on 405 Lexington Avenue.[2]Reynolds, failed to fund the project, but owned a valuable sixty-seven-year lease on an extraordinary site. In October 1928, Walter P. Chrysler showed up and snatched the property and Van Alen's plans for two and a half million dollars. [3]Chrysler was one hell of a man and could provide the site with what it deserved: a mind-blowing masterpiece that would accent the New York City skyline for decades to come. Obstacles occurred such as the race to the sky with the Manhattan Company Building, but the clever Chrysler always overcame them. Chrysler's building that rose on that site just short of two years later, made from the finest materials and genius ingenuity, became the tallest and most well constructed piece of architecture the world had ever laid eyes upon. The Chrysler building captivates that with extreme wealth and abundant resources, just about anything could jump from dream to reality in the roaring twenties.

The five-story building that stood in what Walter Chrysler saw as the absolute perfect location for his skyscraper, became his in 1928, along with Van Alen's plans of the structure to be built there.[4]Van Alen shared his plans with Chrysler, and they designed a skyscraper together that would consist of state of the art architecture. Expenses were not an issue, so Van Alen finally had the opportunity to make his art reality. He struggled before Chrysler showed up because an architect differed from other artists. While musicians, artists, and authors could see their concrete creations after jabbing out a few notes, brushstrokes, or pages, an architect needed to realize his vision. He can draw up as many plans as he pleases, but without a patron, he is like a composer with a great score and no orchestra.

[5]According to Chrysler, the building had to exceed the height of the Woolworth Building and be of the finest character.[6]The man destined for the job joyously accepted and put every ounce of his heart and mind into his work. Van Alen rose from catching minnows to reeling in the big kahuna of the architecture industry. Ideas got thrown back and forth as Chrysler and Van Alen looked over each detail together. They enjoyed their work very much, knowing that they indeed were about to create a marvel to the whole world. The excitement factor kicked in and the plans looked very promising. Right after the finalization of the blueprints, orders for the finest materials started to be placed around the globe. They looked up to completion of their stunning landmark.

In the third week of the October of 1928, demolition and foundation construction began. They broke down the building that stood there and then dug into the earth to create a foundation. To break down the walls of the old

building, simple wrecking ball tactics proved ineffective. The walls were designed to withstand cannon fire. Old, reliable techniques such as the “plug and feather” and “growler” methods, where stone would get chipped away chunk by chunk, became popular among the demo crew. Another process included quicklime, a chemical that releases gas. It prompted the expansion of gases to break away tougher spots. Chutes carried the rubble to trucks, where useful materials and garbage were separated. Anything useful was salvaged for resale, and the remains dumped into the Atlantic from barges. They cleared the site and dug to the bedrock.[7]Six steam shovels along with a slew of other machines tore the ground up. The massive steam shovels carved out a yard and a half with each plunge and repeated thousands of times to reach the bedrock.[8]Spectators watched in awe. They looked over into the sixty-nine-foot hole in the ground, unprotected by a rail guard, and rarely tired of the show.

The immense scale of the building required worldwide efforts. The most state of the art materials came from around the globe, with fine woods from Japan and South America, metals from Connecticut and Tennessee, Granite and Marble from Sweden and Italy, and fine glass from Belgium. Large ships carried the materials across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.[9]The enormous effort shows how well the world economy worked in the 1920s. With so many countries working as a refined machine, steel, stone, and glass could rise to the sky.

The blueprints held a grand secret. Amazingly, months after excavation and Chrysler’s claim to wanting the world’s tallest building, not a single word about the kind of building to be built on the land leaked into circulation. Only

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those involved knew about the icon that would change New York City's skyline forever. Chrysler rendered Van Alen's design to the press on March 7, 1929. The New York Times called it the "World's Tallest Edifice to Cost 15,000,000-Topped by Artistic Dome"[10]. A sixty-eight story Art Deco tower was erupting from a New York City block. Details such as the thirty elevators, 3750 windows and housing for eleven thousand led to uprising ideas and conclusions. Imaginations fired throughout the minds of Americans.

A month and a day after Chrysler's reveal, The Manhattan Company released word that a 63 story building capped by a sparkling finial would finish by May 1, 1930. Its architect, Craig Severance cleared up, however, that it would actually be 67 stories, the same as the Chrysler building, and have fifty feet on it.[11]Chrysler, as a solo boss, had options. With no worry about time or expense, he explored new ideas. In his meeting with Van Alen over the circumstance, he got straight to the point. "Think up something. Your valves need grinding. There's a knock in you somewhere. Speed up your carburetor. Go to it!"[12]With that said, Van Alen dug into revisions. The secret weapon to claim the race's prize was only known by Chrysler, Van Alen, and a select few others.

The first columns stood on April 20, 1929. The big build shot off. With conventional building techniques of the time, such as driving red-hot rivets through steel beam to connect them, and scaffolding that moved up as the structure grew, the workers achieved maximum efficiency. Frank Richards ran the show. He worked steel on buildings for thirty-two years and fearlessly attacked jobs with his crew of convicts. They used impeccable teamwork on the job and knew their business like the back of their hand. Few people had

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what it took and these rigid men were undoubted exceptions.[13]When the steel frame towered at a staggering 808 feet the press heard that the final beam had been laid, making the Chrysler building the taller than the Woolworth Building by sixteen feet.[14]Their fame would be short lived since The Manhattan Company building's finish was in the near future. Van Alen smirked as the press released false information right before his eyes. The media covered everything in the booming world of the 1920s. He and Chrysler proceeded with flawless cleverness since they heard about the contending Manhattan Company Building. They hid their needle inside the haystack of metal framing. Within the core of the building, what Van Alen named " the vertex", was built in secret. Van Alen designed it to " one-up" the traditional art deco architectural style of the day. He felt his design exceeded the limits of art deco with its exploding, layered spire. The vertex consisted of seven large pieces that were arranged one on top of the other with transitioning-setbacks.[15]A derrick perched on the seventy-fourth floor raised five sections, biggest to smallest. Each section would be tightened by rivets as the derrick held it in place.[16]The construction photographers who monitored the building's progress every couple of weeks were the only people told to have their cameras loaded for October 23, 1929. They snapped away when as they experienced the vertex reveal like a " butterfly from its cocoon." The rumored sixty-foot vertex emerged at an unexpected 185 feet and scraped the sky at 935 feet off the ground.[17]The breathtaking beauty of the crown truly set the new high for architectural style in America and the world.

Bricks went up with the Chrysler Building striped the exterior with ancient Egyptian design. After the discovery of King Tutankhamen's tomb, much of the details on the Chrysler Building related back to Egyptian lotus decoration. The entire lobby ceiling that depicted the different stages of the build assumed a place in history in Chrysler's mind equal to that of the Great Pyramids.[18]Art deco consists of a mixture of elements from abroad. Along with the Egyptian feel, a total luxurious ambiance floated through the massive, decorated halls. Swedish marble and granite, cut in abstract shapes, decked the halls. The observatory brought visitors to space with stars and planets embedded on the floor, walls, and ceiling. The finished exterior boasted a stainless steel product from Germany called nirosta.[19]It was used to plate the eagles darting from the inset on the 61st floor, which were actually enlarged versions of hood ornaments that Chrysler included on his line of cars. Giant Chrysler radiator caps constructed from nirosta jutted from the 31st floor corners. The material most notably covers the terraced vertex that has brilliantly shone for almost one hundred years. The incredible design of the Chrysler building, put together by materials from across the globe, takes the breath away from anyone who just stands back to take a solid look at it.

Chrysler made his dream come true. From figment of the imagination, to paper, to marvel, he accomplished the ultimate feat of the 1920s, to be the biggest and the best against a massive sea of strong opponents. With his captivating eye-pleaser on the New York City skyline, he revolutionizes art deco with new materials such as nirosta and designs such as lotus décor.

Because of his ingenuity and high spirit, Walter P. Chrysler perfected a 20th century skyscraper, which would boast its beauty forever.