



# DOWNTOWN *state of* MIND

*The city of the future is here & now.*

*by Matt Kapp photography by Kirit Prajapati*

**IN THE LATE SUMMER OF 2010**, I got a phone call about a potential documentary film project. Would I like to meet with the producers, who were looking for someone to help develop their storyline? Sure, I replied. Could I come down to 7 World Trade Center for a meeting? A wave of dread washed over me. The World Trade Center, where 2,606 of my fellow New Yorkers were murdered nine years earlier, which I'd watched from my neighborhood in Brooklyn?

Nine years after 9/11, I still hadn't been down to the site. The endless parade of headlines trumpeting lawsuits, stalemates, political opportunism, incompetence, greed, and infighting hadn't exactly inspired a trip down to see what stagnation looks like up close. Why rebuild anything at all? I was still of the Speed Levitch school: just turn it into a buffalo park. Seven World Trade was the only tower that had been rebuilt (because its footprint wasn't on Port Authority land) and still hadn't reached full occupancy. That it was already home to an eclectic mix of firms from range of industries didn't matter to me. Ground zero was still ground zero. I wasn't alone. When I later asked our agent to come down for a meeting, his reply was unequivocal: "No way." Such were the depths to which many New Yorkers' feelings about the site still ran, even nine years after the event. I'm being irrational, I thought, and agreed to meet with them.

I spent much of the next three years on the site. On it, above it, beneath it, surrounding it, as we recorded the rebuilding process — from 70 feet below grade to a quarter mile above it — for what would become the documentary film *16 Acres*. I watched as the "Freedom Tower" rose from a concrete stub up into the clouds, only to be rebranded the flaccid, if less ostentatious, "One World Trade." I rode the interminably slow construction elevators and climbed the vertiginous open-air "stairways" that clung to the side of the structure, humbled by the seasoned construction pros who nimbly bolted up and down them as the tower surged skyward at the breakneck pace of a floor per week.

I touched the concrete slurry wall at the base of the pit — now part of the museum, then little more than mud and dust — with site master-planner Daniel Libeskind. I watched as an elite team of plumbers tested the colossal 26,000-gallon-per-minute water pumps beneath the Memorial pools, an area that would later be flooded by Hurricane Sandy, molding up the drywall and shorting out the vast below-grade electrical web mid-installation. This is just to name a few of the more memorable moments. It was only through this protracted, granular engagement with the site that I was finally able to fully process 9/11.

That I'd one day be working in One World Trade Center had never entered the imagination. But sure enough, on August 3, 2010, Condé Nast — a company I'd freelanced for, for almost a decade — signed a tentative deal to become the



anchor tenant of One World Trade. “Think: Anna Wintour, the imperious editor-in-chief of Condé Nast’s *Vogue*, who inspired the novel and film *The Devil Wears Prada*, and Graydon Carter, the bon vivant editor of *Vanity Fair*, stepping out of black limousines at ground zero,” marveled Charles Bagli in the *Times*. It would be another four years until moving day, but it was a major turning point for One World Trade and a bellwether in the evolution of downtown from “the Financial District” to the home of a diverse array of companies from a range of industries, many of the newcomers big media and technology firms. (The financial industry now represents just a third of the pie, down from 56 percent in 2000.)

Not everyone at Condé was thrilled about the move. I heard more than once: I hope they fire me before I have to work in there. It didn’t help when Chris Rock joked on *SNL* that the building should be renamed the “Never Going in There Tower” the very same week the move began. But it didn’t take long for the skeptics to thaw once we’d settled in. It only took a few Instagrammed sunsets over the Hudson for the anxieties to begin to melt away. Dazzling views like these certainly weren’t something we had at the company’s previous spread in Times Square.

Reinvention, transformation, innovation, devastation – these are just a few of the themes of downtown. Build it up, tear it down, and build a better one, or a worse one, depending on your point of view (but in any case, a newer one). The grand, ornate “skyscrapers” of Newspaper Row, arguably the world’s first, were torn down in the mid-20th Century. Radio Row, once home to the largest concentration of electronics businesses in the world, was reduced to rubble to make way for Minoru Yamasaki’s gleaming, gargantuan Twin Towers and their surrounding superblock. The iconic 47-story Singer Building was razed in 1968, at the time the tallest building ever to be torn down, to be replaced by One Liberty Plaza. “Do you actually think they might one day tear down this building to make way for something new?” a colleague at One World Trade once asked me. The question hadn’t yet occurred to me, but the answer was unequivocal: Why, yes, I do. Change is the only constant. Oh, and those stunning views. **DT**



CHANGE IS THE ONLY CONSTANT.

—Heraclitus





## BALANCE

*Three Downtowners talk about Lower Manhattan life.*

### LARRY SILVERSTEIN CHAIRMAN, SILVERSTEIN PROPERTIES

“Twenty-seven percent of the people who live downtown, work downtown,” developer Larry Silverstein likes to point out. “It’s the highest work-live ratio in the United States.” The 87-year-old developer and his wife recently left the “old fogeys” uptown for decidedly more upscale digs downtown, joining those lucky 27 percent and abbreviating his commute to a mere five-minute stroll.

“Two things really tipped the scale in favor of moving down here,” says Silverstein, who earlier this year moved into a penthouse at 30 Park Place, one of his company’s developments. “Number one: my 12-year-old grandson says, ‘Papi, if you move down here I’ll show you how to go to work by skateboard every morning. It’s two blocks, downhill, piece of cake.’” Number two was the rejuvenated neighborhood, where the residential population has tripled since 9/11. “It’s young, it’s vibrant, it’s enormously exciting. Should add ten years to our lives.”

### ERIC HIMMEL EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, ABRAMS BOOKS

“One of the most stimulating aspects of living and working downtown is the sense of being part of its history,” says Eric Himmel, editor-in-chief and vice president of Abrams Books. “So many of the innovations of modernity happened here, from clipper ships to skyscrapers, mass transit, and electric power and communication.” Himmel and his wife have lived on Water Street for the past three years, and Abrams recently moved from a “quite run-down space” on West 18th Street down to 195 Broadway. “The lobby, of course, is memorable for anyone who visits,” Himmel says of entering the landmarked neoclassical building, once the headquarters of the American Telephone & Telegraph Company. It’s hard to disagree. Rows of two-story-tall Doric columns rise up to meet the ornate coffered ceiling, from which forty bronze and alabaster chandeliers hang.

The biggest change Himmel has observed downtown is the accelerated pace of development. His commute is a 10-minute walk along Fulton Street, which has transformed “into a street of new high-rises before my eyes,” he says, which worries him. But “as a Manhattanite by birth and a student of the city’s history, I try to keep in mind that change is the one constant in New York.”

### GLENN PLASKIN JOURNALIST/AUTHOR

“It was a promising frontier, a little like the Wild West,” says journalist and best-selling author Glenn Plaskin of Battery Park City when he first arrived in July 1985. “There was just one of everything: one dry cleaner, one grocery store, one liquor store, one bank, one drug store, a ‘one-of-kind’ neighborhood to be sure.” But the low rents and spectacular views enticed Plaskin, who’s lived and worked there ever since. “People walked into my living room and their eyes went directly to the river,” he recalls, “sailboats and yachts coming and going, the coast of New Jersey still undeveloped.”

But 9/11 “changed everything,” Plaskin recounts. “The infrastructure of the neighborhood was decimated. Our homes were a crime scene, literally.” He and his neighbors had just ten minutes to gather personal belongings and weren’t allowed to return for six weeks. Many never did. “Nobody with children wanted to move back,” he recalls. “The buildings emptied out.” But Battery Park City has since made a full recovery, “so instead of a ghost town, it’s now a boom town. It’s a testament to human perseverance.”

## COMFORT STATION

**AS THE OFFICE EVOLVES**, so too must office furniture. And downtown—where new buildings go up seemingly every day—is leading the way in new thinking about how offices should look and function. Gone are the days of uncomfortable chairs, non-descript laminates, and emotionless—and colorless—workspaces. Steelcase, long a leader in modern and cutting edge office furnishings, in recognition of the changing frontiers in office design, have partnered with groundbreaking home furnishings company Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams to create comfortable and timeless furniture for the new office. Says Allan Smith, Vice President of Global Marketing for Steelcase, “We are excited about the convenience this relationship brings to architects, designers, and clients as they create places where people can unleash their best thinking, collaborate more comfortably, and work in a variety of informal postures.” For Mitchell Gold, CEO and co-founder of Mitchell Gold + Bob Williams this new partnership makes perfect sense. “Collaborative workspaces are among the most important trends making worklife more engaging, effective, and comfortable.” [mgbwhome.com](#); [steelcase.com](#) **DT**



**“WHEN THE NATIONAL SEPTEMBER 11 MEMORIAL & MUSEUM OPENED, THEY BECAME VISIBLE SIGNS OF REMEMBRANCE, RENEWAL AND HOPE. THIS NEIGHBORHOOD’S STRENGTH, BOTH HISTORICALLY IN THE FACE OF TERRORISM AND PRESENTLY AS A GLOBAL ECONOMIC CENTER AND FAMILY-FRIENDLY DESTINATION, MAKES IT A TRULY EXCEPTIONAL PLACE TO CALL HOME.”**

— ALICE M. GREENWALD, PRESIDENT & CEO, 9/11 MUSEUM & MEMORIAL

## #METOO ON THE JOB

*Employment attorney **William K. Phillips** drops some knowledge about on-the-job harassment.*

Not everyone understands that discrimination and harrassment are two different things, but that can be useful information if you find yourself being victimized. Discrimination is treating someone less well due to a protected trait, while harassment is typically offensive behavior that is meant to insult or demean a person. Physical assaults and threats are also harassment, however, in order for that behavior to be illegal it must be related to your membership in a protected class such as age, disability, gender, pregnancy, race, religion, or national origin. For example, if you’re being bullied in the workplace, that is generally not illegal. However, making a negative comment regarding your race or gender is illegal. Harassment based on membership in a protected class can lead to a claim of discrimination.

Sexual harassment is on everyone’s minds these days because of the #metoo movement. Unwanted sexual advances or comments about your appearance, sexual jokes or innuendos, or unwanted hugs and touching all constitute sexual harassment. While we have made great strides with regard to civil rights and laws to protect against sexual harassment and race discrimination in the workplace, the reality is that these problems still exist. It’s important to remember that any words or actions based on a person’s protected traits that alter the terms conditions of the workplace and make it difficult to work, may constitute a hostile work environment regardless of whether the person has been terminated.

Because of the media attention that #metoo has garnered, more people have been empowered to come forward with their claims and hold their employers, or former employers, accountable for past illegal conduct. Additionally, the movement has empowered other victims of harassment, such as in racial or pregnancy discrimination, to come forward. We are now seeing many new cases dealing with old harassment because of #metoo. However, the statute of limitations in New York for a sexual harassment or discrimination case is generally three years from the last discrimination act.

*William K. Phillips is an employment attorney in New York and is the Managing Partner of Phillips & Associates. Phillips & Associates is one of the largest plaintiffs’ only employment law firms in New York Metro, representing victims of sexual harassment and discrimination. To read more about this subject, please visit our website, [downtownmagazinenyc.com](#).*

**"DOWNTOWN MANHATTAN IS A LIVING BREATHING TESTAMENT TO THE COURAGE AND STRENGTH OF NEW YORK CITY. WE CAME TOGETHER ON ONE OF OUR DARKEST DAYS AND HAVE BUILT A VIBRANT HUB OF THE FINEST CUISINE, SHOPPING, CONSTRUCTION AND URBAN LANDSCAPE. I'M PROUD OF DOWNTOWN NY AND LOOK FORWARD TO CONTINUED GROWTH AND SUCCESS "**

— RORY MCCREESH, DUCE CONSTRUCTION