

NEW YORK

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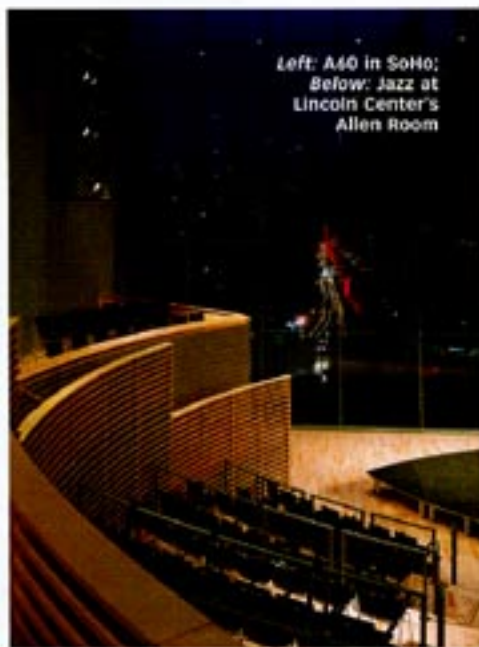
AUGUST 2007

**PEAK
EXPERIENCES**
WINING AND DINING
HIT NEW HEIGHTS

**CULTURE
CRUNCH!**
A TIMELY PLAN
FOR SEEING IT ALL

**PLAYING
BALDWIN**
BILLY'S ULTIMATE ROLE

REM KOOLHAAS, architect and theorist, calls it the metropolitan paradox: "The greater the distance from the earth, the closer the communication with what remains of nature." Indeed, upward-bound visitors to Manhattan can breathe rarefied air, gaze at the far horizon and revel in pleasures unavailable when their feet are planted on *tera firma*. Rooftop gardens offer celestial food and drink, cloud-touching spas become Olympian sanctuaries and stellar views from observatories simply astound.



Left: A60 in SoHo;
Below: Jazz at
Lincoln Center's
Allen Room

From the 86th-floor deck of the Empire State Building (350 Fifth Ave., 736-3100), the city is hushed and seemingly at rest. Throngs of visitors who patiently snaked the velvet ropes below to jet up in an elevator, ears popping on the ascent, gaze out at a metropolis that unfolds for miles in every direction. The melting pot that is New York is rarely so evident, as voices speaking every language search for the right words to describe the outlook from this heavenly perch.

Central Park looks like a sprawling jade carpet, while smaller squares of green are strewn about like scatter rugs. Strips of water define the edges of the island's landmass, and building blocks with spires and peaks, so imposing from street level, seem low and child-like from this lofty vantage point. The iconic structures stand out—the Flatiron Building, a triangle that boldly drives a wedge between Fifth Avenue and Broadway as they converge at

23rd Street; the MetLife Building in Midtown, emblazoned with its bright neon logo; the cakelike Woolworth Building in Lower Manhattan; and the Chrysler Building, 77 years old but still as shiny as a new automobile. These enduring testaments to human ingenuity, engineered to defy gravity and reaching up to a heaven that has both challenged and rewarded the great city and its inhabitants, are periodically separated by long avenues dotted with what can easily be mistaken for yellow matchbox cars. It is both invigorating and jarring to think of the millions of lives being lived at that moment nearly 100 floors below. Despite the altitude, or perhaps because of it, the distance from the hustle and bustle makes the heart grow even fonder. The city's possibilities are endless.

Architects in New York City, for whom the sky is literally the limit, raise the roof whenever possible, and we seem to have a primal need to ascend to the summit. Dr. Charles Goodstein, a clinical professor of psychiatry at New York University Medical Center, explains the phenomenon this way: "When standing on the top, looking down, one has a sense of mastery." (Continued p. 26)

This feeling of control, Goodstein speculates, can be traced back to infancy and is a reactivation of early feelings of awe experienced when looking up at tall, possibly overpowering parents, only this time viewed from the elder's vantage point.

Certainly, a lookout point such as Top of the Rock (30 Rockefeller Plaza, 698-2000) in Midtown affords that feeling of conquest. At the end of an elevator ride that takes only 50 seconds to climb from ground level to the 67th floor of the GE Building, visitors step out onto open-air terraces, some of which are enclosed by safety glass, while those on the 70th floor are totally—and thrillingly—exposed, offering unobstructed views in all directions.

Vatsal Thakkar, a clinical assistant professor of psychiatry at New York University School of Medicine, believes that a fascination with height begins in childhood with an awareness of gravity. Take the playtime activity of stacking blocks: "There's a precarious thrill in seeing how powerful the earth and its gravitational pull is, and yet a bigger thrill in being able to cheat it," says Thakkar.

The skyscraper scramble—or stacking blocks for grown-ups—has often been viewed as a global game of one-upmanship. "The ambition to erect the world's tallest building is as old as the ages, whether it be a pyramid in ancient Egypt or a Gothic cathedral in medieval Europe," says Carol Willis, founder and curator of Lower Manhattan's Skyscraper Museum (39 Battery Pl., 968-1961). In Dubai, for example, the American architectural firm Skidmore Owings & Merrill is creating what will be the tallest building in the world. "The Burj Dubai is an epoch-defining tower," observes Willis of the giant that is now under construction. "New Yorkers should imagine the Chrysler Building sitting atop the Empire State Building." William Baker, head of Skidmore Owings & Merrill's structural engineering team, says "gravitating up" is innate. "If there is a hill, it's human nature: We want to go to the top." A "hill" that New Yorkers and visitors alike are looking forward to climbing is the Freedom Tower, which Skidmore Owings & Merrill is currently building in the footprints of the World Trade Center's Twin Towers, destroyed on Sept. 11, 2001. The structure has a projected occupation date of 2011 and will rise a patriotic 1,776 feet, capped by an outdoor observation platform.

Being high-up, though, is a double-edged sword. "From a feng shui perspective, it is traditional to be sited in a high place—a commanding position—to see what is coming at you," says Judith Wendell, founder of Sacred Currents, a New-York-based company dedicated to creating vital, thriving and well-balanced home and work environments. "But," she adds, "not too high: You must still feel protected, not exposed."

The Iris and B. Gerald Cantor Roof Garden on top of the relatively low-lying two-story Metropolitan Museum of Art (1000 Fifth Ave., 535-7710) is one such ideal spot, according to Wendell. It is favored with great energy, she maintains, and successfully blends the clean air of Central Park, which it overlooks, with the world-class culture of the museum's collections. The 35th-floor sky lobby of the Mandarin Oriental New York (80 Columbus Circle) reaches greater height—it is 280 feet above the street—yet it "grounds visitors with the earthly attributes of plush chairs and low tables in its sunken lounge," notes Wendell.

But is city life necessarily better from on high? Roger Erickson, a broker at Sotheby's International Realty, says "yes." (Continued p. 28)

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The Mandarin Oriental's sky lobby

(Continued from p. 26)

He revels in his own 46th-floor apartment, with its commanding views of the Hudson River, abundant natural light and endlessly blue front yard.

Sky-high addresses promise not only exclusivity, but also glamour and mystique. That may be why rooftop bars and restaurants are popular places in which to play king for a day.

Sixteen stories above the crowds, the brand-new Private Roof Club and Garden atop Ian Schrager's über chic Gramercy Park Hotel (2 Lexington Ave., 920-3300) has been designed

as a fashionable haven for the privileged few who hold the key to its special elevator. At the southernmost tip of Manhattan, imbibers can enjoy bird's-eye views of the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island from the 14th-floor indoor and outdoor lounge Rise in the Ritz-Carlton Battery Park (2 West St., 344-0800). The two open-air terraces in Chelsea's Maritime Hotel, collectively known as Cabanas (363 W. 16th St., 242-4300), offer comfy lounge chairs, lush plants and a Hollywood crowd. Nearby, in the Meatpacking District, Plunge (18 Ninth Ave., 206-6700), the Gansevoort Hotel's top-floor lounge and bar, looks out on the Downtown skyline and beyond the Hudson River to New Jersey; a stylish crowd gathers here nightly.

Cool is the operative word for A60 (60 Thompson Hotel, 60 Thompson St., 219-2000). Over a glass of housemade plum sangria, couples can retreat to a landscaped corner for a quiet tête-à-tête under the stars at this SoHo venue with a discreet vibe. Overlooking verdant Madison Square Park, 230 Fifth (230 Fifth Ave., 725-4300) is a sprawling penthouse lounge with a velvet-rope admissions policy that serves, in equal measure, tasty Malaysian nibbles and brilliant 360-degree views of the Empire State Building and other architectural gems. In the Theater District, The View

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230 Fifth, a rooftop with a view

on the 47th floor of the New York Marriott Marquis Times Square (1535 Broadway, 704-8900) is the city's only revolving restaurant and lounge; it affords distant views to the north, south, east and west.

Jazz lovers experience the best of all possible worlds—world-class musicians and jaw-dropping vistas of the skyline through a 50-by-50 wall of glass—when they attend a concert in Jazz at Lincoln Center's Allen Room (Time Warner Center, Broadway at W. 60th St., 258-9800). The 23rd-floor Pen-Top Bar & Terrace in the Peninsula Hotel (700 Fifth Ave., 956-2888), both a glass-enclosed wunderbar and an alfresco deck, watches over Fifth Avenue and Central Park (as do the hotel's spa and swimming pool a floor below). The Ava Lounge (210 W. 55th St., 956-7020) brings a touch of Old Hollywood to the Dream Hotel's 14th floor; it is named for screen beauty Ava Gardner. Dinner and dancing at the Rainbow Room (30 Rockefeller Plaza, 65th floor, 632-5100) is elegant and romantic, a throwback to the Art Deco heyday of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.

Whatever your motivation—feeling powerful, finding Zen, perusing art, seeking beauty, experiencing glamour or simply enjoying the fabulous panorama—the metropolitan paradox awaits. All you have to do is ride an elevator to the top.