

A WAREHOUSE TOO HANDSOME TO REMAIN ONE

Like a confident giant standing astride a broad valley, Davis, Brody & Associates' Westyard Building spans the Penn Central tracks between 31st and 33rd Streets on 10th Avenue in New York City. But behind any such comparisons, and the striking appearance of the building itself, lies a complicated succession of problems the architects met and solved. The monumental difficulties of building in midtown Manhattan were added to by the special engineering feats involved in spanning the 220-foot-wide open railroad cut with a fifteen-story structure flexible and strong enough to contain a variety of functions including offices, warehousing and even some light manufacturing. It was here, in the area of tenant mix, that perhaps the greatest problems were encountered. *During construction* a planned 65/35 per cent industrial facilities/offices ratio was almost directly reversed, as tenants, taken with the building's appearance, sought to have more of their offices housed in it.

Norman McGrath

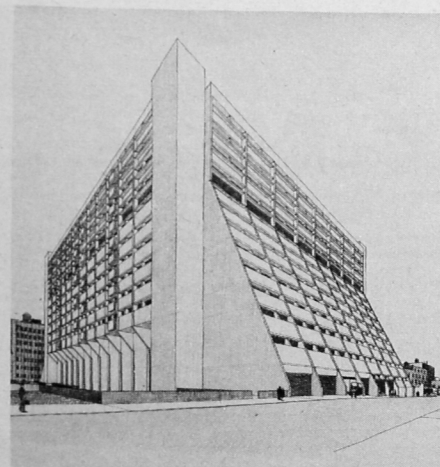


WITHIN EXISTING CODES, A UNIQUE AND INVALUABLE CONTRIBUTION TO THE CITYSCAPE

Norman McGrath



Despite the many complicated problems created by constantly changing tenant requirements well into the construction phase, the Davis, Brody firm succeeded in stabilizing the exterior form of Westyard at a much earlier date. In so doing, they secured a maximum amount of flexible interior space, while at the same time making a major contribution to the much fabled New York skyline. Yet the building is no monster to be admired only from afar, but seems designed, above all, from the point of view of the city dweller's view of the cityscape. It is both comfortable in its surroundings (yet not without recriminations to its neighbors for their monstrous uniformity and lack of imagination) and nonoverbearing to its users and passers-by. The building's bold form is in part the architects' imaginative response to certain of the major tenants' need for large uninterrupted warehousing areas, especially on the lower floors, nearest the truck loading docks that almost completely line the base on the three street sides. From the base, the building rises in a sloping line following the set-back provisions of the zoning code. This space-making yet design-conscious solution results in the flaring out of the lower two-thirds of the building on three sides (the fourth or east side is sheer, and cantilevered fifteen feet out over a



vehicular traffic approach to the Lincoln Tunnel), and gives the highly satisfying feeling that the building is straddling the railroad cut, which in engineering fact it indeed does. More importantly, and giving new dimensions to the term "air rights," the building's pyramidal facades open up the street vistas, both on the avenue, and on the side streets, especially with regard to the view of the river. The architects have made a double contribution to the country's most densely packed yet necessarily growing metropolis: by building on a site previously unused and an eyesore, and by a design that contributes to the enhancement, rather than the further congestion, of city space.



Jon Naar

Above, Davis, Brody & Associates' Westyard Building from the New Jersey shore, forming with the Empire State Building a composition vaguely reminiscent of the 1939 World's Fair Tylon and Perisphere—magnified to superscale for the '70s. Far left, north on Tenth Avenue. Left, a 33rd St. perspective. Despite the many substantial interior changes, the completed structure adheres closely to the earliest design conceptions. Below, west toward the Hudson past McKim, Mead & White's 1910-13 Post Office.

Jon Naar

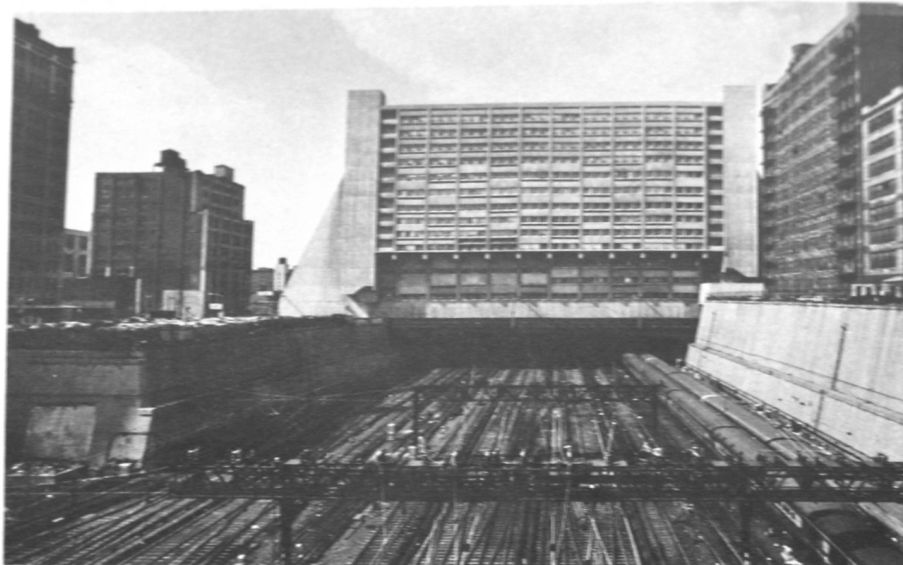


AN ENGINEERING ACCOMPLISHMENT TO MATCH AN INNOVATIONAL ARCHITECTURAL DESIGN

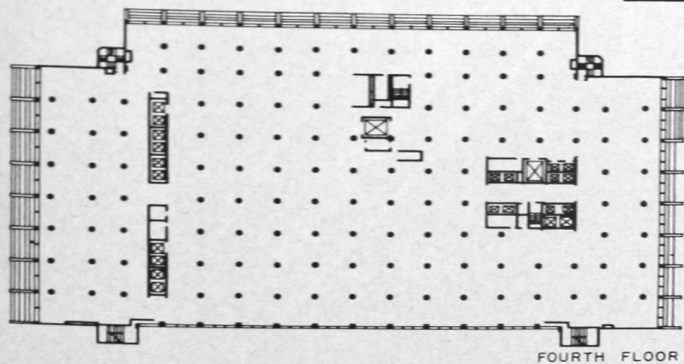
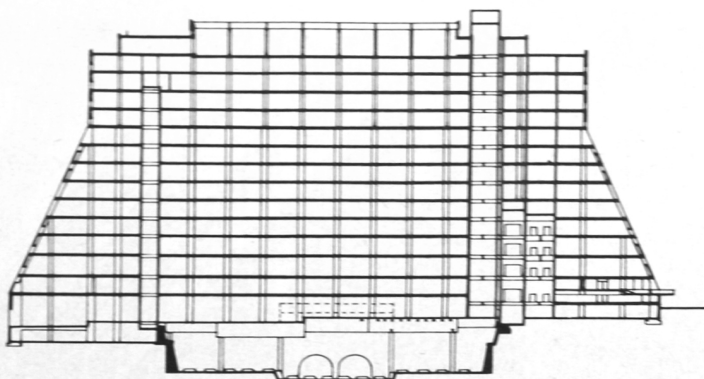
Robert Gray



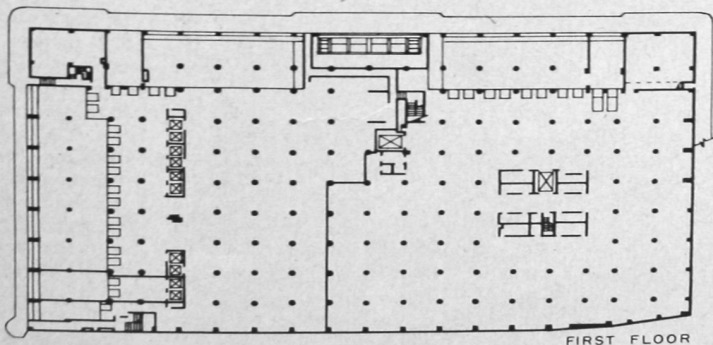
The rather spectacular photograph opposite was taken from the observation deck of the Empire State Building, using a telephoto lens, by a member of the Davis, Brody firm. The roof structure of the Westyard Building is a long-span truss system allowing a clear floor area for a professional ice skating rink—another blockbuster-type program requirement. The main part of the building is a cast-in-place textured reinforced concrete frame of beams and round columns which are approximately 26 feet on center and support waffle slab floors. The entire superstructure is designed for extra-heavy duty in order to achieve flexibility of tenant mix and uses. At the corners of the building the enclosed fire stair towers appear as massive piers. At ground level the sides rest on rock footings. The center portion of the building spans the 220-foot railroad cut in three 77-foot spans employing welded steel plate girders 12 feet deep. It was found that the existing retaining walls for the railroad cut were strong enough to carry the ends of a number of these girders. The walls were therefore sheared off to the desired height and notched to receive them (photos, lower right). Additional girder support is provided by steel columns and base plates on concrete footings be-



Robert Gray



FOURTH FLOOR

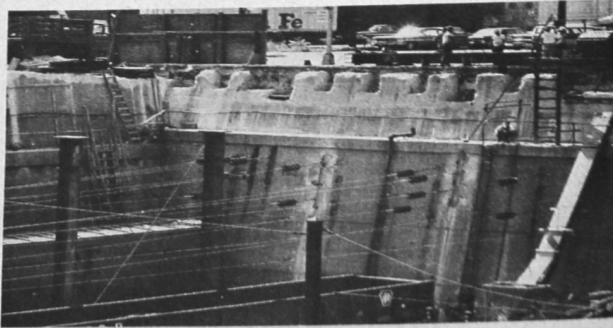
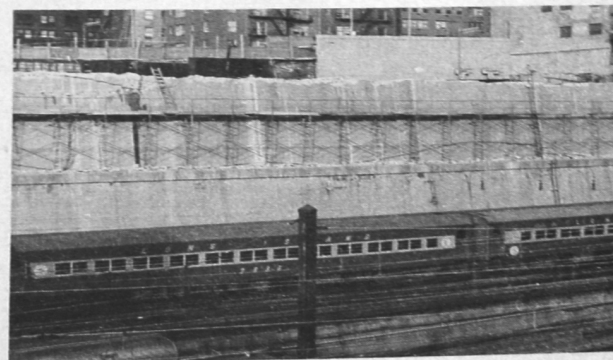


FIRST FLOOR



tween the tracks. Since the positions available between the tracks did not match the column centers of the superstructure, the girders were located to carry strings of columns. At the same time the footings had to be kept relatively small in relation to the substantial loads they carry in order to minimize disturbance to the track bed. All work in this area was done at times specified by the railroad to avoid major traffic movement.

Westyard was built without interruption of rail service, and provisions against noise and vibration from passing trains was built into the building's fabric. There are plans, presently at an indeterminate state of development, that call for a housing project, also to be built over the tracks, east of the Davis, Brody building (in the foreground of the picture above).

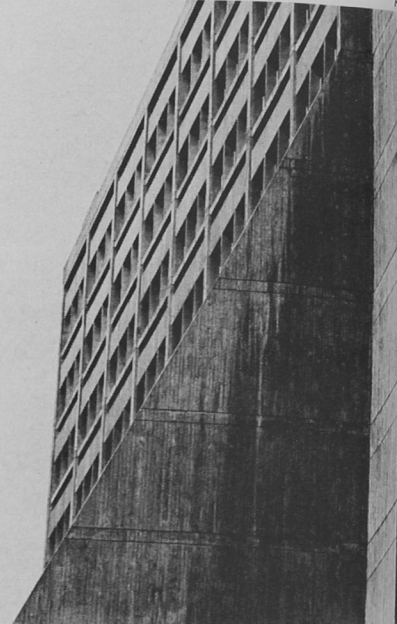


SCULPTURE-STRONG DETAILING

One of the best examples of the flexibility designed into Westyard is the use of a precast concrete modular wall panel. The panel is invertible, with the window usually placed high, as a clerestory, in the manufacturing and warehouse spaces, and low, at eye-level when sitting, in offices. In addition, a separate punch-out panel allows for additional air-conditioning intakes for the more populated building areas. The random exterior pattern that results from arranging these elements to meet the various tenants' needs is an ideal contrast to the building's strong, near-monumental quality.

WESTYARD BUILDING, New York City. Architects: *Davis, Brody & Associates*—*Jack Lebduska, associate-in-charge*. Structural engineer: *Robert Rosenwasser*; contractor: *H. R. H. Construction Corp.*

Norman McGrath



Strong sculptural detailing, in addition to the wall packed by the sloping wall itself, contribute to the building's attractiveness and power. At left, the bottom of the massive beams (10 feet high at point-of-support) that carry the cantilevered floors above. The latter device compensates for the loss of space due to the easement for the tunnel approach. Below, the main lobby, the fluorescent lighting integrated with the pan-formed concrete waffle ceiling. Structure is painted white, walls are dark gray slate panel infilling.

