



Building Seagram

By Phyllis Lambert

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Building Seagram By Phyllis Lambert

The Seagram building rises over New York's Park Avenue, seeming to float above the street with perfect lines of bronze and glass. Considered one of the greatest icons of twentieth-century architecture, the building was commissioned by Samuel Bronfman, founder of the Canadian distillery dynasty Seagram. Bronfman's daughter Phyllis Lambert was twenty-seven years old when she took over the search for an architect and chose Mies van der Rohe (1886–1969), a pioneering modern master of what he termed "skin and bones" architecture. Mies, who designed the elegant, deceptively simple thirty-eight-story tower along with Philip Johnson (1906–2005), emphasized the beauty of structure and fine materials, and set the building back from the avenue, creating an urban oasis with the building's plaza. Through her choice, Lambert established her role as a leading architectural patron and singlehandedly changed the face of American urban architecture.

Building Seagram is a comprehensive personal and scholarly history of a major building and its architectural, cultural, and urban legacies. Lambert makes use of previously unpublished personal archives, company correspondence, and photographs to tell an insider's view of the debates, resolutions, and unknown dramas of the building's construction, as well as its crucial role in the history of modern art and architectural culture.

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Building Seagram By Phyllis Lambert Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Review

“[*Building Seagram*] should be required reading for everyone who plans to build in the public realm...”

—*Form Magazine*

(*Form Magazine* 2013-03-25)

“*Building Seagram* . . . is something of a joint biography: a history of this stately Park Avenue landmark that many consider the pinnacle of postwar architecture in New York, rendered through the lens of her vivid memories of its invention and of her privileged early years as the daughter of the liquor baron Samuel Bronfman, who founded the Seagram distilling empire. The book reveals many new details about a building that remains among the most studied of the modern era.”—Mark Lamster, *New York Times*
(Mark Lamster *New York Times*)

[Lambert;s] handsomely illustrated book, *Building Seagram* (Yale University Press), chronicles a golden moment in architectural history...” —Robert Fulford, *National Post*

(Robert Fulford *National Post* 2013-04-09)

“With detailed recollections, snippets of personal letters, poignant anecdotes, and sharp analyses, Lambert’s tome delivers a fascinating insider’s report of the events leading up to Seagram’s construction as well as the legacy that has followed... Arguably one of the most critical contributions of “Building Seagram,” however, is the way it illuminates the history of not just the monument itself but also the social climate in which Seagram’s extraordinary effects were felt.” —*Artinfo*
(*Artinfo* 2013-04-09)

“a fascinating account” —*Metropolis*

(*Metropolis* 2013-04-10)

“Even if your coffee table isn’t as clean-lined and elegant as the Seagram Building, you’re going to want this book on there.” —Ted Loos, *Inside Sotheby’s*

(Ted Loos *Inside Sotheby’s* 2013-04-22)

“The history of the New York building that many, including this writer, consider the masterpiece of the 20th-century architecture is related here by the person who knows the story best and was largely responsible for its genesis...” —Stanley Abercrombie, *Interior Design*
(Stanley Abercrombie *Interior Design* 2013-04-15)

“Lambert’s book is an exquisitely detailed . . . chronicle of how the skyscraper came to be.”—Christopher Hawthorne, *Architect Magazine*

(Christopher Hawthorne *Architect Magazine*)

“Lambert writes with precision and great passion, and largely alters the conventional wisdom about the building” —*Designers and Books*

(*Designers and Books*)

“Lambert’s tour of the genesis and life of the building is an engrossing one, offering a superb account of both the unglamorous planning issues and the specific design choices involved in the project.”—Anthony Paletta, *Architectural Record*

(Anthony Paletta *Architectural Record*)

“A fascinating story about New York’s built environment and those who have made it a livable space.”—*Jewish Daily Forward*

(*Jewish Daily Forward*)

“Sumptuous. . . . No one could tell the history of the most seminal office building of the 20th century as well as Lambert. . . . An exemplary architectural monograph.”—Dietrich Neumann, *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*

(Dietrich Neumann *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 2013-11-21)

“In its own modest way, this monograph on modernism’s most acclaimed tower is as elegant and refined as Mies van der Rohe’s glass temple on New York’s Park Avenue. The author is the daughter of one-time Seagram chairman Samuel Bronfman, who asked her to find the best architect for the job. The period photographs are exquisite; the tales of Mies at work are a primer on how discipline can translate to beauty.”—John King, *San Francisco Chronicle*

(John King *San Francisco Chronicle*)

“Juicy while retaining a scholarly rigor.”—*Architizer* (*Architizer*)

“Her account captures some of the excitement one feels when one approaches the slender tower for the first time.”—Christopher Turner, *London Review of Books*

(Christopher Turner *London Review of Books* 2014-01-06)

Winner of the 2013 American Publishers Awards for Professional and Scholarly Excellence (PROSE), in the Architecture & Urban Planning category.

(PROSE Awards *American Publishers Awards for Professional and Scholarly Excellence* 2014-02-07)

Winner of the 2013 New York City Book Awards given by the New York Society Library.

(New York City Book Award *New York Society Library* 2014-04-06)

“Lambert paints a meticulous portrait of Manhattan in the optimistic years that followed World War II, two brilliant architects at the heights of their careers, and the golden age of the American high rise.”—*Elle Décor* (*Elle Décor*)

About the Author

Phyllis Lambert is founding director of the Canadian Centre for Architecture in Montreal. A licensed architect, she has contributed essays to numerous books and is the subject of the 2007 documentary film *Citizen Lambert: Joan of Architecture*. **Barry Bergdoll** is professor of architectural history in the department of art history and archaeology at Columbia University and the Philip Johnson Chief Curator of Architecture and Design at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.

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