



THE

PLACE

MAKER

BY JEANNIE GRIFFITH

The Great Room of the Shops and Restaurants at Hudson Yards, with Neiman Marcus in its New York debut, rendering by Elkus Manfredi Architects

Kenneth A. Himmel '70 stood in the July sun, in shirtsleeves and a hardhat, gesturing eastward toward Tenth Avenue and the skeletal beginnings of a building. Rising directly next to a nearly completed 52-story office tower, the assemblage of steel uprights and floorplates was on its way to becoming Manhattan's largest and most alluring shopping destination. With Neiman Marcus making its New York debut as an anchor tenant, and with a spectacular restaurant collection co-curated by Himmel and Thomas Keller, of French Laundry fame, the Shops and Restaurants at Hudson Yards is expected to draw more than 20 million visitors into its orbit when it opens in the fall of 2018.

"This is the fastest-growing part of New York today," said Himmel, who is the president and chief executive officer of the mixed-use development firm Related Urban. Pointing out the adjacent High Line and all the apartment construction going on to the north and all the way south on Manhattan's west side, he said, "It's really the new heart of New York."

After explaining that this seven-story, million-square-foot retail showpiece will connect to two office towers—there is another, 90-story building starting up on the other side of it—Himmel noted that we were standing in an area to be landscaped with a public plaza, seasonal plantings, and water features.

It took some effort to visualize this, because the ground underfoot wasn't ground at all—it was a partially completed platform made of six-foot-thick steel-and-concrete slabs. The slabs are being set on steel trusses, which are supported by steel columns. The columns rise from reinforced concrete caissons, up to six feet in diameter, that are being drilled and poured 80 to 100 feet down through the bedrock.

There will be 300 of them under the thirteen-acre platform for this eastern half of the enormous development known as Hudson Yards.

Time Warner Center at Columbus Circle in New York, one of the top-performing retail properties in the world. Image courtesy of the Related Companies.

Visible past the unfinished edge of the platform and more than two stories down, the trains of the Long Island Rail Road stood packed together, waiting to move into Penn Station to collect the evening's commuters. There are 30 active tracks running under Hudson Yards, and many of the supports for the platform have to be driven between them—without closing the tracks.

In a few years the entire 26-acre rail yard will be covered over, but the trains will still idle below, their tops about sixteen feet from the bottom of the platform.

This platform has been engineered to carry an incredibly massive load. The half that makes up the Eastern Yard will support the Shops and Restaurants at Hudson Yards; the two flanking office towers—the first



almost 900 feet high and the second one, at 1,296 feet, with an outdoor observation deck that rivals the Empire State Building's in height; a residential tower of 910 feet; and a 1,000-foot tower to house offices, residences, retail, and an Equinox-branded luxury hotel. The platform will also hold a smaller retail pavilion, acres of public open space, and the Culture Shed, a major facility for art and music.

Across West Thirty-third Street from the rail yard, and off the platform, two more office towers will rise, one 780 feet high and the other 1,068 feet high.

A CITY WITHIN THE CITY

By any measure—size, cost, or complexity—Hudson Yards is the biggest private real estate development project in the history of the United States. Seven years after it began, it will take another eight years, and a total of 20 billion dollars, to complete.

"Take every experience that I have had in the last 40 years, then combine it all in one project in the only place in this country where you would really have an opportunity to platform that kind of experience, and translate it into the most extraordinary mixed-use project ever in the United States. That is Hudson Yards," said Himmel, who described himself as "one of three or four of us who are at the top of this project, making all the decisions and creating the vision."



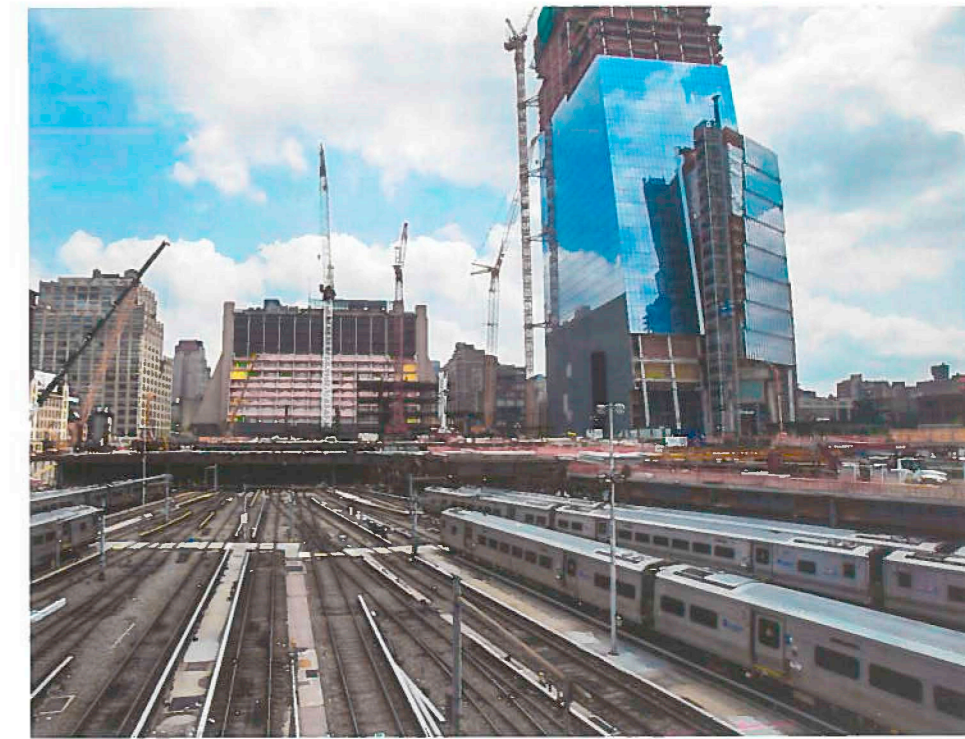
The man at the very top of the project is Stephen Ross, founder and chairman of the Related Companies. He is also Himmel's partner in Related Urban, a Related subsidiary.

"Ken is truly a visionary," said Ross. "He understands all of the pieces—retail, restaurants, hotels, residential, and the public realm—and he knows how to put them all

together. His attention to detail is extraordinary, and he knows how to create an experience that draws people in. He was always ahead of his time and mastered mixed-use development back when naysayers still believed that no one would come to shop or eat in a vertical retail development."

Hudson Yards seems destined to stand as the paragon of mixed-use development. As many as ten leading architects are respon-

sible for designing different parts of it, beginning with the platform and continuing with the buildings and landscaping. (Howard Elkus, the founding partner of Elkus Manfredi Architects and Himmel's very close friend of



Hudson Yards is being built over the 26-acre John D. Caemmerer West Side Storage Yard, where 30 active tracks feed the trains of the Long Island Rail Road into Penn Station. Photo by Jesse Winter

nearly 40 years, is designing the Shops and Restaurants at Hudson Yards.) “We’re working with absolutely the finest architects in the world,” said Himmel.

“The people working on Hudson Yards are top-of-class in every single category,” he added. “Whether it is hospitality, retail, office development, residential development, infrastructure development, or technical engineering development, there is no better team of people ever assembled on any project anywhere in the world.”

Over eleven million square feet of development is planned for the Eastern Yard, the section currently being built from Thirtieth to Thirty-fourth streets between Tenth and Eleventh avenues. The Western Yard, which is expected to be completed five years after the Eastern Yard, will comprise more than six million square feet of primarily residential development and will include a school for 750 students. It will extend from Thirtieth to Thirty-third streets between Eleventh and Twelfth avenues, reaching nearly to the Hudson River.

“Hudson Yards really and truly is city-building within the city,” Himmel said. “This is a nearly 30-acre site in total; I mean, where in New York do you get to work on 30 acres? It is the birth of a part of the city that just did not have its sense of place yet, because it was completely undeveloped. This is how you create it.”

BUILDING ON HOSPITALITY

Ken Himmel left Cornell in 1970 knowing what he wanted to do. “I went right for the development side of the hospitality business, because I had gotten enough out of the school to realize the process of creating these assets really interested me,” he said.

It was his love of the restaurant business, however, that had led him to enroll in SHA two years earlier, after completing a bachelor’s degree in psychology at the College of William and Mary. While there, Himmel had worked at restaurants in Colonial Williamsburg, “so I already had this in my blood,” he explained.

“I knew that I wanted to end up somehow

in the hospitality business, and there was only one place to go if you were going to go into that business; you needed to go to the number-one school, and that was at Cornell,” Himmel said, adding, “I couldn’t get enough of Cornell when I was there.” He pursued a comprehensive business education, including courses from ILR and Johnson, but left room for as many courses in hospitality marketing and operations as he could. He also worked in food and beverage at the Statler Inn.

“I knew I wasn’t going into day-to-day operations, but I was also smart enough to know that was probably going to be the one window

where I wanted to get as much exposure as possible,” he said.

Himmel got his start in hospitality at age thirteen, at the Salem Country Club in Peabody, Massachusetts. He continued to work there whenever he was home from college.

“He likes to remind me that he had to scrub the floors and work his way up to being a server and eventually being one of the head servers at the club,” said his son, Chris, who is managing partner in three

Himmel with restaurant entrepreneur and master chef Thomas Keller and Related founder and chairman Stephen Ross at Per Se in the Time Warner Center



restaurants—Grill 23 and Bar, Harvest, and Post 390—belonging to Himmel Hospitality Group in Boston. “Really, for him, it led to him becoming who he is.”

“I was a jack of all trades in that club,” the father reminisced.

WATER TOWER PLACE

Himmel was just 26 years old when he landed the opportunity to develop the second Ritz-Carlton in the United States, at Water Tower Place in Chicago. After working for three years as the assistant to George Page, the first Hilton franchisee and owner of the Hilton franchises for all of New England, Himmel had recently moved to the real estate group at Cabot, Cabot, and Forbes Land Trust, a highly pedigreed firm whose principals owned the Ritz-Carlton in Boston.

“I really couldn’t wait to get my arms around the new Ritz in Chicago at Water Tower Place, and I found a way to get in the door,” said Himmel, who has a genius for finding a way through most of them. On this particular occasion, he found his way into the seat next to the company chairman, Gerald Blakeley, on a long flight. “When I got off the airplane, I was invited to a meeting at 8:30 the next morning, and by 4:00 that afternoon I was on my way to Chicago.”

Himmel had talked his way into the opportunity to develop a 450-key, fifteen-story luxury hotel and be “thrown into the

middle” of the 90-story, mixed-use development project that encompassed it. Overseen by Philip Klutznick, the principal of Urban Development and Investment Company and the future secretary of commerce under President Carter, and developed by his 36-year-old son, Thomas, Water Tower Place pioneered the concept of “vertical retail” in this country.

“Tom Klutznick was nothing short of brilliant,” said Himmel. “He really understood politics, demographics, the technical side of the business, the creative side of the business. He was one of those rare people who could both teach and press you to perform to levels that you would never think possible.”

Under Tom Klutznick’s mentorship, Himmel saw his world open up dramatically. “That project took me to the top of a mountain, and in some ways I feel like I never came down,” he said.

COPLEY PLACE

After Water Tower Place opened in 1975, Himmel went looking for a development project closer to home on which to partner with Klutznick. He found a “very interesting” project in Boston’s Back Bay neighborhood.

The decision to run the Massachusetts Turnpike through the heart of Boston in the early 1960s had cut off parts of the Back Bay, and south Boston, from the downtown area.

“That scar remained there for years, and nobody was able to figure out how to mend it, how to stitch the city back together, until Ken came along,” said Elkus. “He was a very young guy at the time; I think he was 28, which is a testament to Ken’s genius. You knew he just had it.”

The Copley Place project involved building over a highway interchange and a commuter rail line, property owned by the Massachusetts Turnpike Authority. Another architect had been selected to design the project but was not up to the task. At the eleventh hour, Himmel, on his own and Klutznick’s behalf, asked Elkus to take over the design of the whole project.

Himmel called Elkus, who had just landed in California after a 20-hour flight from Manila, and told him to get on the next plane home. (Elkus declined, but flew back the next day.) “We had 45 days to reinvent Copley Place, and we pulled it off,” said Elkus, who holds a Stanford engineering degree as well as his architecture degree from Harvard.

While Himmel and Elkus were figuring out the how and what of building a mixed-use retail development in the air over a turnpike and rail lines, Himmel was also working the political channels. “I was so young and unknown at the time that, under the radar, I worked directly with Kevin White, the mayor, and Michael Dukakis, the governor, and went through a whole community process and got the project approved before anyone knew what was going on.”

“Ken has unbelievable energy and vision and perseverance,” said Elkus. “He went through many blows. We had over 500 meetings with various neighborhood constituencies. He dealt with every unexpected issue, constraint, interference, political

Boston architect Howard Elkus, who has led the design of almost every Himmel project since Copley Place. Photo by Jesse Winter.

ambition—all kinds of factors that had to be managed. He was a genius not only in the creative side of development, which meant that you had to create





Hudson Yards as it will look from the Hudson River. This city within a city will completely transform the skyline of midtown Manhattan. Image courtesy of the Related Companies.



Al Maryah Central in Abu Dhabi. Image by Elkus Manfredi Architects

and recreate, but also in putting people together, and cities and neighborhoods.

“In the long run,” he added, “Copley Place strengthened the whole area.”

With Copley Place Himmel also scored a major retail coup, bringing Neiman Marcus to New England for the first time. “Our project would never have worked without their department store,” he said. “Now you fast-forward from 1984 to 2014, and Neiman’s commits to come to our project for the west side of New York—a very similar dynamic, as fate would have it.”

Copley Place, at 3.5 million square feet, was in its time the largest mixed-use development in the United States, and the most complex. According to Elkus, it attracted quite a bit of interest from the Japanese. “Copley Place was a real prototype for a country like Japan, so densely populated that they have to take advantage of air rights and lacing development with infrastructure.”

It was also good practice for Hudson Yards.

RELATED PROJECTS

Himmel and Ross have known each other since the 1980s, when they met through the Real Estate Round Table, an informal network of high-powered developers and investors that Himmel helped found. Of all the “top guys” who got together twice a year, Himmel found himself spending the most time with Ross, “because I really enjoyed him the most and was most stimulated by the work he was doing. His interests and my interests were in line.”

About ten years into this relationship, Ross, whose Related Companies by then owned, managed, and/or had developed more than seven billion dollars’ worth of residential and commercial property, offered Himmel opportunities to collaborate on two transformative projects. Back then, in the mid-1990s, Himmel was president of Himmel and Company in Boston. He had developed, in partnership with Tom Klutznick, Reston Town

Chris Himmel '01 at Grill 23 and Bar. Photo by Jesse Winter



Center in Reston, Virginia; 730 North Michigan Avenue, which included a Peninsula Hotel, in Chicago; and Pacific Place in Seattle, with Nordstrom’s corporate offices and a flagship downtown store.

The first of the Related opportunities to come to fruition was CityPlace, a 72-acre city center in West Palm Beach, Florida with destination shopping and dining, entertainment venues, a public plaza, and residential and office buildings.

Related’s bid to develop CityPlace was a particularly high-stakes gamble. The area to be developed had been gutted of buildings by a previous, failed developer, and the city’s mayor was looking for a bold vision to resurrect this barren tract in a blighted and dangerous area of town. Before the city would allow construction to begin, Himmel had to convince retailers and restaurant companies to open shop in such a place. He had half of them lined up in a little over a year, and CityPlace was 90 percent occupied when it opened in October of 2000.

The effect of CityPlace on West Palm Beach was transcendent. With its attractive architecture and lifestyle appeal, CityPlace became a model for urban mixed-use development and a major regional draw, not just for tenants and consumers but for other developers. It is credited with sparking the economic revival of West Palm Beach. Today, under Himmel’s leadership, CityPlace is opening a new 400-room Hilton hotel next to the County Convention Center after eight years of negotiations.

Related also recently announced plans to extend CityPlace northward by building another 450,000 square feet of retail and residential space. In addition, Related will add more apartments, parking, and retail space to the existing site. As managing partner of CityPlace, Himmel continues to refine the mix of offerings that underlie its ongoing success.

Although it was the first project that they completed, CityPlace was the second collaboration that Ross and Himmel

initiated. Ross first called Himmel about an eyesore that had been staring back at him through his office windows for years.

A short distance down the street, on Columbus Circle, stood the New York Coliseum. Never attractive to begin with, the convention center had long been empty and awaited demolition.

“There’s a competition going on at Columbus Circle,” Himmel recalled Ross telling him one day in 1996. “It’s been in the works for fifteen years. No one has ever unlocked it, but its time has come.” Eight other developers (including Donald Trump) were submitting proposals for the site.

Early in 1997, Ross and Himmel formed a business partnership as the Palladium Company, the precursor to Related Urban.

Less than a year later, they and their financial partner beat out the other developers and embarked on another paradigm-shifting project, the 2.8 million-square-foot Time Warner Center.

“Ken and I developed a plan for a complex that has now become the benchmark of mixed-use development globally,” Ross said of Time Warner Center. “It was all about the fine points—the right tenant, the placement of Jazz at Lincoln Center, the design details, the way the public interacted with the place. Those fine points are what won the bid and why the project has been an overwhelming success, anchoring a whole new gateway to the upper west side.”

With Elkus as his architect, as he has been on every project but one (Reston) since



CityPlace transformed a derelict sector of West Palm Beach into a thriving commercial and tourism magnet.

Copley Place, Himmel oversaw the development of the Shops at Columbus Circle, the complex's four-story, vertical-retail center. With Thomas Keller, he assembled a renowned set of restaurants, including Masa and Per Se—each with three Michelin stars—and A Voce, Landmarc, and Michael Lomonaco's Porter House New York. (Himmel and Keller are partners in Per Se.)

Time Warner Center quickly became one of the top-performing retail properties in the world; it attracts eighteen million visitors every year. In addition to the Shops at Columbus Circle and Jazz at Lincoln Center, it is also home to a Mandarin Oriental hotel and some of the most valuable office and residential space in New York. The development increased the value of real estate not just at Columbus Circle but throughout the surrounding neighborhood, which had been in decline. It won numerous awards, including the Urban Land Institute's Award for Excellence, the Building Owners and Managers Association's Pinnacle Award and Office Building of the Year award, and the Visual Merchandising and Store Design Award.

DREAMS IN THE MAKING

Related has two more large-scale projects in the pipeline, the Frank Gehry-designed, mixed-use Grand Avenue development in Los Angeles and another, 40 miles south of San Francisco, that is currently referred to as Related Santa Clara. The plans for Santa Clara call for 9.2 million square feet of development including hotels, retail, restaurants, entertainment, and residential and office space. Both projects have been envisioned to create city centers where none has existed, and the Santa Clara project, like Hudson Yards, is proposed to be built on a huge platform—but this time over a landfill. Himmel is leading the development at both locations.

"My dad can take a look at a pile of rubble and figure out how to build a world-class project with places where everyone wants to be," his son remarked.)

As co-managing partner of Gulf Related, a joint venture of Gulf Capital and the Related Companies, Himmel has also been collaborating with Elkus on two dazzling waterfront developments in Abu Dhabi. The

first, the luxury mall the Galleria, opened in 2013, and the second, the contiguous, 3.1 million-square-foot Al Maryah Central, is due to open in 2018. Together, they will offer nearly three million square feet of retail, leisure, dining, and entertainment venues, including Al Maryah's open-air, rooftop food hall, with 145 dining options, and rooftop parks with an outdoor amphitheater. Al Maryah Central will also incorporate a luxury residential tower and a life-style hotel/residential tower. Al Maryah Central will bring the first international Macy's store to the United Arab Emirates and the second Bloomingdale's store to the region.

"He is really involved in the whole stratosphere of mixed-use development," Chris Himmel said of his father. "Usually, developers have some sort of specific specialty. Some focus on the hotel side of it, some on the retail side, and others on the restaurant side. Then there is the office component and the residential. For somebody to encompass all of them is really a rarity. I think that is where he excels, and it separates him from other people."



Himmel meets with members of the Cornell Real Estate Club during a visit to the school in late January. Photo by Jon Reis



Peter Peterson '93 hosts the members of the Cornell Real Estate Club at Related Urban. Photo by Jesse Winter

HOSPITALITY IS IN THE DETAILS
Certainly, great design and a focus on placemaking are at the heart of all of these projects, along with a commitment to excellence that is unmatched in the industry. But the overall impact of a large development depends not just on a grand vision, but on the attention given to a swarm of details, large and small. Himmel cares greatly about the details, and his education and experience in hospitality operations have contributed to his uncommon ability to put himself in the place of leaseholders, customers, and communities and envision how they will experience the properties he develops.

"Because of the complicated nature of putting different uses into one building, you have all kinds of different stakeholders and different priorities in terms of how the building should function," said Peter Peterson '93, who first worked for Himmel at Grill 23 and Bar and now focuses on restaurant development as a vice president at Related Urban. "Trying to weave all of those things together in a way that everyone gets a better experience is very complicated. Ken has the drive, the patience, and the diligence to go through that process, and not many people do."

"He's also very passionate about it," Peterson continued. "This is something that he really loves to do, and it's evident in every interaction that he has with the entire team that he's built here. When he's talking about

projects, that passion is very infectious, and that's what leads you to seek to focus in on all those details."

"Ken is as concerned about the handrail and the pattern of graining in the marble on the floor as he is about the impact of an entire project in a city," said Elkus. "You have to place yourself wherever a human being can be. You can't let your game down anywhere."

"He is thinking about all the program ingredients that are going to make a place happen, all the merchants that would fit together," he continued. "He's got his inventory very early in the game, and he's thinking all the way through. How do you create the ambiance, the DNA of a place, and make it fit its context, the history of the place, the culture of the people? Abu Dhabi isn't New York or West Palm Beach; they have very different cultures."

There is a word for this kind of care and attention, of course. It is hospitality.

"It is popular for developers to work with notable architects and designers to create something special for notoriety; the distinguishing factor for our projects is that we work with the same world-class teams to create something special for people," said Anthony Fioravanti, CHE '95, Related Urban's director of design, who helped lead the design of the Abu Dhabi projects and Hudson Yards and is now working on the

design of the Grand and Related Santa Clara. "Placemaking is a widely used term today, but we champion it empirically and experientially to make projects about the guest, customer, shopper, resident, user. We drive it through the entire process, from when you first enter the parking garage to when you take your seat at the perfect table on the window."

As practiced by Ken Himmel and his colleagues, mixed-use development is the differentiator that wins multi-billion-dollar bidding competitions, enhances the enjoyment of countless diners, shoppers, sightseers, entertainment seekers, and residents, earns record sales revenues, increases property values, and revives whole neighborhoods.

"Civilizations are represented by the castles they build, so to speak," said Elkus. "What I think drives Ken is the end game, the promise of what these projects will mean to their communities. He leaves everywhere he goes better off."

"That is a tremendous legacy." ♦



JEANNIE GRIFFITH is SHA's senior writer and editor. She welcomes your comments at jeannie.griffith@cornell.edu.