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[A Day in the Life: Skyscraper Structural Engineer, John Shmerykowsky](#)

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When John Shmerykowsky began his career as a structural engineer he remembers walking across steel beams twenty stories in the air without any safety nets or harnesses. Things have changed a lot since then. I recently had the opportunity to sit down with Mr. Shmerykowsky, principal at the firm Shmerykowsky Consulting Engineers and learn about his storied career. Mr. Shmerykowsky was partner in charge on the Philip Morris building, a skyscraper we previously covered on Untapped New York, “From Forge to Skyscraper: the story of 120 Park.”

Structural engineers, as explained by Mr. Shmerykowsky, are structural consultants to the architects. By dictating where support beams must be placed and where load bearing floors must be installed, they ensure that the buildings architects design can be realized. Mr. Shmerykowsky studied engineering in college and studied architecture at Fountainebleu in Paris. He began working as an architectural engineer in 1961 and transitioned into a structural engineer because he was fascinated with the way in which building were put up.



John Shmerykowsky and son Marco on a site visit

As Partner-in-Charge for Weiskopf & Pickworth on the construction of the Philip Morris Building located at 120 Park Avenue, Mr. Shmerykowsky had to overcome a unique set of challenges; close to one quarter of the building is situated over subway tracks. While it was the first building on which he worked that was located directly over subways tracks, the site had presented similar challenges in the past. From our end, we hoped that Mr. Shmerykowsky had come across August Belmont’s private tracks where he used to keep his private train, the Mineola, from when the Hotel Belmont had occupied the site, but they’ve never been found.

Since the tracks were still operable, Mr. Shmerykowsky had to ensure that his excavation and support beams did not compromise them. He had to work around tracks that were used to transport garbage and to allow trains turn around and return to Queens. At times, he was like a modern day Roebling, watching the construction from his office on the 28th floor of the PanAm Building (Met Life Building).

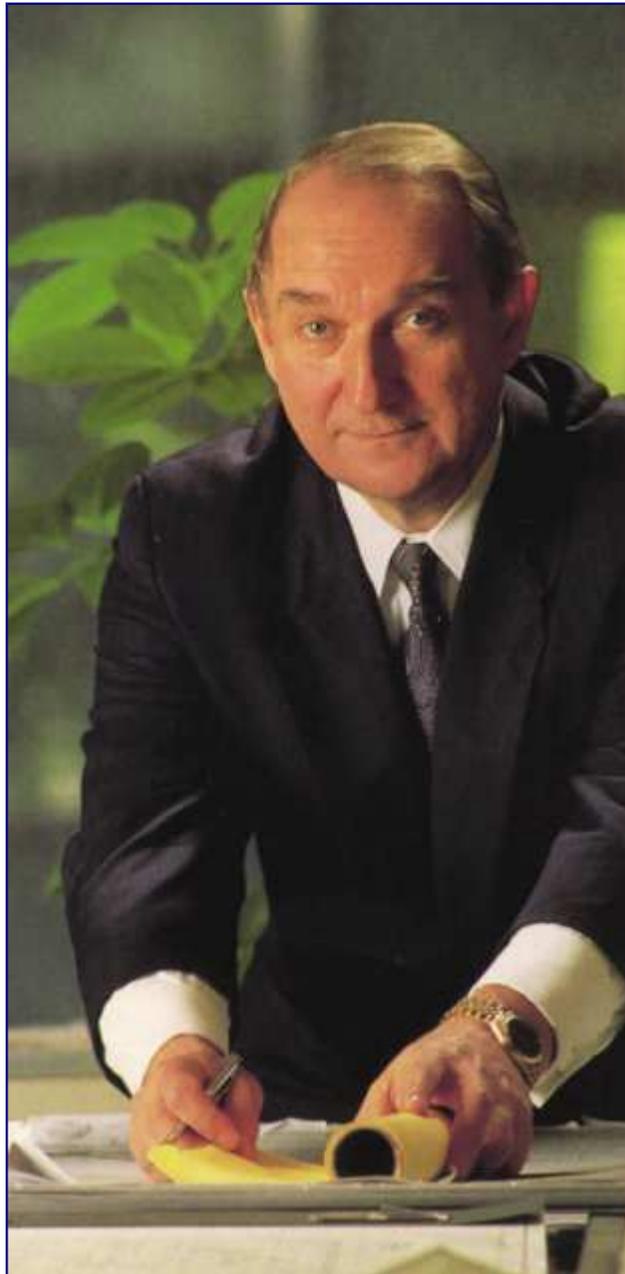


Scale model of 120 Park Avenue

While poring over the original blueprints from the Phillip Morris Building with me, Mr. Shmerykowsky reminisced about the way his industry once was and spoke about the many changes his industry has faced over his long tenure. Computers now play an integral role and corporations rarely design their own headquarters. Instead, they are more likely to rent space in buildings designed by developers. As a result, buildings are no longer built by the corporation as their face to the world.

120 Park was constructed in that prior era. During its construction, Mr. Shmerykowsky would discuss the design of the Phillip Morris Building with the president of Phillip Morris, who would opine on the building's design. For example, as a result of the energy crisis during which the building was constructed, the president insisted that all of the windows be operable and that every room have a ceiling fan in order to lessen the use of the air conditioners.

Just because the times have changed, doesn't mean that Mr. Shmerykowsky will be retiring anytime soon. He is still working for SCE Engineers on important buildings throughout the City, though he said he wasn't authorized to speak about his current clients.

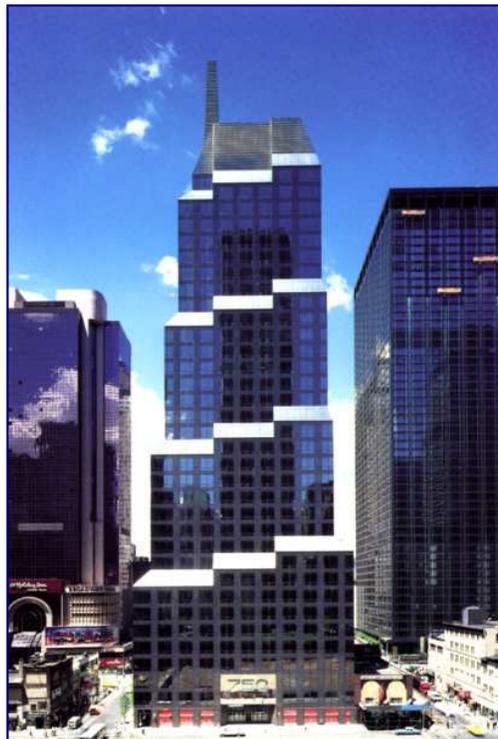


John Shmerykowsky in the 1982 Weiskopf & Pickworth brochure

Despite having worked with Phillip Johnson and I. M. Pei, and having worked on numerous notable buildings throughout the City including Hunter College, the Union Carbide Building, and 33 Maiden Lane, Mr. Shmerykowsky is extremely humble. When asked if he has left a large mark on the City he responded, “I’ve got a couple of buildings.” Here’s a roundup of some of those famed buildings:



1 Chase Manhattan Plaza



Located near Times Square, 750 7th Avenue’s ziggurat-like structure required an astonishing 70 column transfers. The architect for 750 7th Avenue was Kevin Roche John Dinkeloo & Associates.



1515 Broadway



33 Maiden Lane. This high-rise was designed by architect Philip Johnson and sits right up the block from the New York Federal Reserve