



## New York 2000: Architecture and Urbanism Between the Bicentennial and the Millennium

By ROBERT A.M. STERN, DAVID FISHMAN AND JACOB TILOVE. *Excerpt-Pg 354-355.*



Proposal for The Seasons, 328 Spring St, btw. Washington and Greenwich St. Philip Johnson Alan Ritchie Architects. Rendering Sven Johnson. View to southeast. VG

Philip Johnson's and Alan Ritchie's proposal for the twenty six-story 348-foot-tall habitable Sculpture; also called The Seasons,. 328 Spring Street, between Washington and Greenwich Streets, on a site occupied by an automobile repair shop housed in a nondescript two-story warehouse, was to have been situated next door to the venerable, century-old Ear Inn Tavern, located in the landmarked James Brown House (1817), a wood-framed, brick Federal-style building built by an African American who was reputedly an aide to George Washington. The project was conceived by developer Antonio Nino Vendome, who considered his role to be as much art dealer as developer and the building to be a literal work of art by Johnson. The remarkable scheme was both highly abstract and distinctly vernacular, "turning contextualism on its head," according to Muschamp, by using forms and materials familiar from the immediate surroundings to "fashion a surprise, a symbolic gateway to the downtown state of mind" The fifty-apartment Neo-Expressionist tower, said to be inspired by one of John Chamberlain's semi-figurative crushed automobile constructions, consisted of distinctly

shaped, faceted elements cantilevered from a conventional, square-shape service core and clad in bricks drawn from a color palette based on those found in the neighborhood, punctuated by regularly spaced, traditional double hung guillotine-type windows and a ziggurat of cascading cornices, which together formed what Muschamp described as the "mirth-making part of the collage. These details are a cackling downtown descendant of the carved masonry facade of 1001 Fifth Avenue", where to appease the Fifth Avenue neighbors, Johnson provided "a classical limestone mask for a modernoid building already designed." On Spring Street, Muschamp continued, Johnson "deploys the cornices and rows of uniform, period-style windows as a sign of normalcy that is subverted by the fragmented facades. You almost want to see lines of laundry looped along the upper stories." *continued...*

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Pg 2 of 2

On June 1, 2001, the Board of Standards and Appeals, acting on strongly worded advice from the City Planning Commission, rejected an appeal by Johnson's clients; the Vendome Group, to realize the project on the site, which was zoned for manufacturing uses accommodated in buildings restricted to twelve stories.

Johnson continued to battle for his design, arguing, "It's New York and New York is tall buildings. However, it was not the height of the proposed building that interested him but the interplay of its cubist composition with its down-home fenestration: "I call it 'the victory of double-hung windows'".

In July 2002, Johnson and Ritchie proposed a new fourteen-story, 147-foot-tall design for the site, calling for a banded brick and glass, round cornered , Starrett Lehigh Building-inspired tower. This proposal was also deemed too tall .by members of the community.

In 2009, approval was given for the construction of a 120 foot-tall building on the site but rather than work with either of the two previous schemes, the developer sent Johnson and Ritchie back to the drawing board. The Vendome Group remained intent on building the original design else where in New York or in another city.

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