



HGI, Vocon and MdeAS Architects complete Black Rock skyscraper; original design by Eero Saarinen

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Manhattan, NY Harbor Group International, LLC (HGI) have reached completion of the \$128 million repositioning of 51W52, also known as Black Rock, a 900,000 s/f skyscraper in Midtown. The 38-story building, first designed by world-renowned architect Eero Saarinen as the headquarters for CBS, has been revitalized in the spirit of its original design intent, with a classic, symmetrical style and Florence Knoll furniture, while meeting current office space demand with amenities and interiors.

Affiliates of HGI acquired 51W52 in October 2021, becoming the second owner since the building was originally constructed. Alongside architecture and design firms Vocon and MdeAS Architects, HGI saw an opportunity to transform the centrally located building with award-winning architecture into a modern office environment that pays homage to the building's history. 51W52's initial design presented an model for office tenants, with column-free floor plates, natural light, and access to the 53rd St. corridor, allowing the renovations to be subtle and intentional, while still preserving the landmark.

Originally constructed as the headquarters for CBS, 51W52 is the only skyscraper to be designed by Finnish-American architect Eero Saarinen, who was tapped to build the "simplest skyscraper in New York." With roots in media and entertainment, the 900,000 s/f building served as an icon from the start, reflecting the innovative energy of classic New York. Saarinen's design was simple – classic, symmetrical, and minimalistic, with a palette of sable granite, statuary bronze, and light travertine. Saarinen's design was ahead of its time with many architectural features that are found in newly constructed buildings today.

51W52 offers a desirable work environment with flexible floor plates, floor-to-ceiling windows, amenities, access to the 53rd Street corridor of shops, restaurants, and businesses, and close proximity to Grand Central Station and Central Park. Also known as the “Black Rock” building, 51W52 is built and character-filled, with its dark granite facade standing out amongst the steel and glass projects that dot today’s skyline.

New features of 51W52 include two renovated lobbies on 52nd and 53rd Sts., with the former representing a traditional come-and-go lobby format and the latter resembling a hotel lounge with custom furniture and quiet spaces; new elevators; enhanced interiors; and a modern cellar-level amenity suite, outfitted with tenant lounge areas, a fitness center with equipment, yoga room with guided mirrors and Pelotons, locker rooms with showers, a conference and event space, and a private cafe with a selection of grab-and-go breakfast and lunch options, artisan coffee, protein shakes, and smoothies.

“From the beginning, we understood the immense potential of 51W52 given its architectural significance, desirable floor plans, and central location in Midtown. The structure of the building was optimal, we just needed to make subtle enhancements to reflect and appreciate its original design,” said T. Richard Litton Jr., president at HGI. “We’ve already started to feel the impact of the renovations, with palpable excitement from existing tenants, consistent leasing activity from prospective tenants, and activation within the lobby and lounge spaces. It’s incredible to see our vision for the reimagined space come to life and an exciting moment to officially introduce the ‘new’ 51W52.”

Since acquiring the building, HGI has experienced strong leasing activity, executing both new leases and renewals accounting for 350,000 s/f, a direct result of the restoration’s appeal to office users. Last fall, HGI relocated its New York City headquarters to 51W52, occupying 25,000 s/f on the 19th floor.

National architectural and design firm Vocon and renowned New York-based architecture firm MdeAS Architects led the design vision for 51W52. The team selected modern elements to enhance rather than detract from the experience Saarinen had envisioned, including the restoration of the bronze fin walls, curating the lobby and lounge areas with original Saarinen and Florence Knoll furniture, and utilizing simplistic design to let the significant architecture speak for itself.

“The expressive and timeless design of Saarinen’s Black Rock building at 51 W 52nd St. provided the perfect canvas to support a reinvention into a modern workplace experience,” said Dan Shannon, managing partner at MdeAS Architects. “By conceptualizing the experience from the outside in, we were able to restore the fundamental beauty of his design and apply the principles of form, light, and even water to new elements such as the feature stair and water feature that meet the preferences of contemporary office users.”

“Today’s employers want to build workplace cultures that are authentic and give their employees an inspiring ‘sense of place’,” said Tom Vecchione, vice chairman and managing principal of Vocon

Architects. “51W52, with its classic NYC modernist style, is full of authenticity and inspiration. The creation of private lounges, a conference center, and fitness studios help the building meet the expectations of today’s best corporate talent, while their designs maintain the integrity of Saarinen’s original architecture. Fine detailing, sleek materials, and an artful under-stair water feature create an ambiance only found in select world-class business districts.”

CBRE is overseeing leasing for the building with Howard Fiddle, Scott Gottlieb, Andrew Sussman, and Evan Haskell at the helm. The team is marketing the 135,600 s/f of available space. 51W52 is an attractive asset to a variety of tenants seeking flexible, open, and column-free space in a trophy-quality building that possesses a rich history and prominent location.

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