



## Tall Buildings: The Next Generation

### Antony WOOD

Architecture, Ph.D., R.I.B.A.  
Council on Tall Buildings and  
Urban Habitat  
S.R. Crown Hall, Illinois  
Institute of Technology  
3360 South State Street  
Chicago, Illinois, 60616  
United States of America  
*awood@ctbuh.org*



Dr. Antony Wood has been Executive Director of the CTBUH since 2006. Based at the Illinois Institute of Technology, Chicago, Antony is a Research Professor in the IIT College of Architecture and a visiting professor of tall buildings at Tongji University, Shanghai.

### Abstract

This paper investigates tall buildings from an aesthetic and social, as well as commercial and environmental, viewpoint; as contributing elements in the fabric of a city. Against a backdrop of the large-scale homogenization of cities architecturally around the world, the paper suggests ten design principles which, if adopted in skyscraper design, could result in tall buildings which are more appropriate to the place in which they are located – physically, environmentally, culturally, socially and economically. In doing this, it promotes the need for a new vernacular for the skyscraper in each region of the world, and suggests this would have significant ecological, as well as social, benefits.

Keywords: Tall Buildings; Ecological; Social; Aesthetic; Design Principles, Vernacular

### 1 Are we there yet?

Though we have seen major advances in the technologies, efficiencies and performance of tall buildings over the past couple of decades (Parker & Wood, 2013), arguably the urban expression of the typical skyscraper has not changed much from the predominant glass-and-steel aesthetic championed by Modernism in the 1950s. The architectural details have become much more refined since then, and certainly both materials and systems perform much better than a half century ago, but the rectilinear, air-conditioned, glass-skinned box is still the main template for the majority of tall buildings being developed around the world. Many of these boxes vary with how they meet both ground and sky, but they are part of a globalized expression.

There is, of course, a smaller group of ever-more adventurous sculptural forms that have come to the forefront over the past decade or two. But, in both the “box” and the “sculptural” approach, the relationship between the building and its location is predominantly either a commercial one or a visual one. Thus these buildings are largely divorced from the specifics of the place they inhabit – physically, culturally, environmentally and, often, socially too. For hundreds of years, the vernacular architecture in many cities had to be intrinsically tied into its location – for its materials, its ventilation, its ability to function within a given climate and culture – but this was largely rejected in the Modernist belief in a “universal architecture”, which transcended mere “context” and worked on a higher philosophical plane.

The consequence of this was, the aesthetic (and arguably, cultural) homogenization of cities around the world – a force that has gathered pace exponentially over the past two decades, with the easier flow of capital, labor, goods, and imagery –that now ensues. Now a “progressive” city is largely defined by its set of skyscraper icons, but the association is largely “synonymous” rather than “indigenous” – the same set of icons would largely become