

COMCAST TECHNOLOGY CENTER

COMCAST TECHNOLOGY CENTER

COMCAST TECHNOLOGY CENTER

A NEW ERA
by
James Andrew Miller



WELCOME

Can a building speak to us?

Of course it can. Buildings are about more than their obvious practical functions and any edifice that shows its face without acknowledging a higher role—beyond shelter from the storm or shade from the sun—isn't fit for modern habitation. Good buildings make us feel good; great buildings affect us in ways indescribable.

Enter the lobby of Philadelphia’s strikingly new Comcast Technology Center at 1800 Arch Street—designed by world-renowned architect Lord Norman Foster—and you are likely to feel entranced, embraced, even emboldened.

LIGHT POURS IN FROM ALL ANGLES. Twelve ficus trees sprout up seemingly right out of the floor, and then, as befits a 21st-century wonder, technology takes an immediate bow: just beyond the garden, 60 feet high, bursts “Exploded Paradigm,” created by England’s Conrad Shawcross, youngest living member of the Royal Academy of Arts. His shimmering metallic sculpture of cast iron, mirror and stainless steel manages to make 30 tons seem weightless.

Above that soars American neo-conceptual artist Jenny Holzer’s “For Philadelphia,” with nine digital displays in light featuring words from poets, children and others from the city and beyond, forming messages that flash continuously on the ceiling 70 feet overhead.

This arresting marriage of images creates a tremendous, nearly dizzying sensation of sweeping upward movement.

Breathtaking? Definitely. But having taken your breath, the building obligingly gives it back. Which is good, because you’ll need it if you want to experience the Comcast Technology Center in all its variegated vastness.

As the escalator carries you up, to your right you’ll spy James Beard Award-winning chef Greg Vernick’s circular 40-seat Vernick Coffee Bar. It sits above Vernick Fish, destined to be one of the great seafood restaurants in the country.

And to your left, unexpected and unimagined, a giant white, enclosed, globe-like structure made of fiber-reinforced plastic and steel floats around the second story. The Universal Sphere—39 feet in diameter, 34 feet tall and weighing 140,000 pounds—offers visitors a 4-D experience within its buoyant interior; its content designed in part by imaginative Steven Spielberg himself.

Once past the ground floor, the building becomes a veritable vertical campus with 1.3 million square feet of interconnected open-office space for roughly 4,000 Comcast and NBCUniversal employees. Original works

from Philadelphia artists bring unique personal tales and perspective throughout.

Take a quick glass-elevator ride to the 60th floor, and you will see for yourself how seamlessly the new Four Seasons luxury hotel blends into the city below. Off the hotel lobby, you’ll find the hotel’s lounge, JG SkyHigh, gateway to 219 guest rooms, as well as the Four Seasons Hotel’s luxury spa, an infinity pool and the grand terrace ballroom that holds 500 guests.

Descend the dramatic waterfall staircase and you’ve arrived: the stunning new Jean-Georges Philadelphia restaurant opened by Michelin-starred chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten, its panoramic views of the city accessible through mind-clearing windows that surround the entire dining space.

WELCOME TO A WORKPLACE where Comcast employees deliberate, develop and dream ... Welcome to a public space designed for people of all descriptions who come to feel renewed and be inspired.

No matter how huge a role machinery played in this building’s construction, human beings gave it creation, and human beings gave it the life it now returns. Standing amid all the modern materials and artistry, we come to believe that the human spirit rises and, having risen, reigns supreme.

If we are our buildings, the Comcast Technology Center seems to speak well of us, in words and images, with amazement and amusement, a building about communication that itself does a ton of communicating. You needn’t peer out a window to catch a magnificent view or two. Look upward and downward and take in as much of it as you can. We stand at an enthralling platform, caught up in wonder, eminently ready for whatever’s next.

Bring it on. ■



“
I will always be
bullish on
Philadelphia.”

RALPH J. ROBERTS
THE FOUNDER

C O N T E N T S



INTRODUCTION BY | p. 6
Lord Norman
Foster

3 CHAPTER THREE | p. 32
Mr. Spielberg Comes
To Philadelphia

6 CHAPTER SIX | p. 64
Jean-Georges &
Greg Vernick

1 CHAPTER ONE | p. 10
Genesis

4 CHAPTER FOUR | p. 38
New Environments
for New Professionals

7 CHAPTER SEVEN | p. 72
A World-Class
Four Seasons
Hotel

2 CHAPTER TWO | p. 20
A Marriage of
Public and
Private Spaces

5 CHAPTER FIVE | p. 50
The Art of It All

AFTERWORD BY | p. 86
Brian Roberts

James Andrew Miller is a No. 1 *New York Times* best-selling author. @jimmler



I spent quite a bit of time in Philadelphia in the early 1970s—while I was a student at Yale, my wife was a Fulbright Scholar at Penn—and we both enjoyed our time there immensely.

I ALSO TAUGHT IN PHILADELPHIA in the early days of my practice, and remember the first time I saw the elder Calder's William Penn statue, and sensed just how much it permeated the artistic and civic traditions of Philadelphia. Subliminally and in every tangible way, I think the Comcast Technology Center is also very much rooted in the culture and physicality of the city.

I'm in the very nice position of deciding what projects I want to be deeply involved with and more often than not, those are ones where I want to engage with a particular individual. That was the case with Steve Jobs and the Apple headquarters project, with Mike Bloomberg on the Bloomberg building in London, with Corinne Mentzelopoulos at Chateau Margaux, and it was clearly the case with Brian Roberts and Comcast.

There are chairmen who know what they want in a building and don't particularly want or need any feedback. There are others who yield to an architect's wishes and take a back seat. Brian has been a pleasure to work with because he did have a strong sense of what he wanted, but at the same time, proved to be a great collaborator and was fully engaged on all levels when it came to making choices—not just about the building's design but also about the materi-

als we used, the palette and almost every detail. What has resulted is a truly one-of-a-kind structure, one of the most thrilling corporate centers in the world.

You know, it's funny: You go through a process that takes years and years, and throughout, there's always some level of trepidation. At various times, you ask yourself and others, "How does it feel at this particular point?" You try to leave no stone unturned and be as thoughtful and detailed as possible.

But truthfully, until a building is finished, until people move in and visit, and it actually embarks on a life of its own, you really don't know how to measure its success—or failure. I made numerous trips to the site during construction and monitored the building's progress throughout. When I came back to Philadelphia on its completion, I felt like all of our aspirations for the building were clearly on display and were present for all not just to see passively but to experience in an emotional, visceral way.

Congratulations to the city of Philadelphia on the opening of the Comcast Technology Center. The story that is about to unfold is a remarkable one. None of it could have been possible without the fervent participation of countless individuals working together to create this ever-evolving vision, and I am grateful to be a part of it. ■

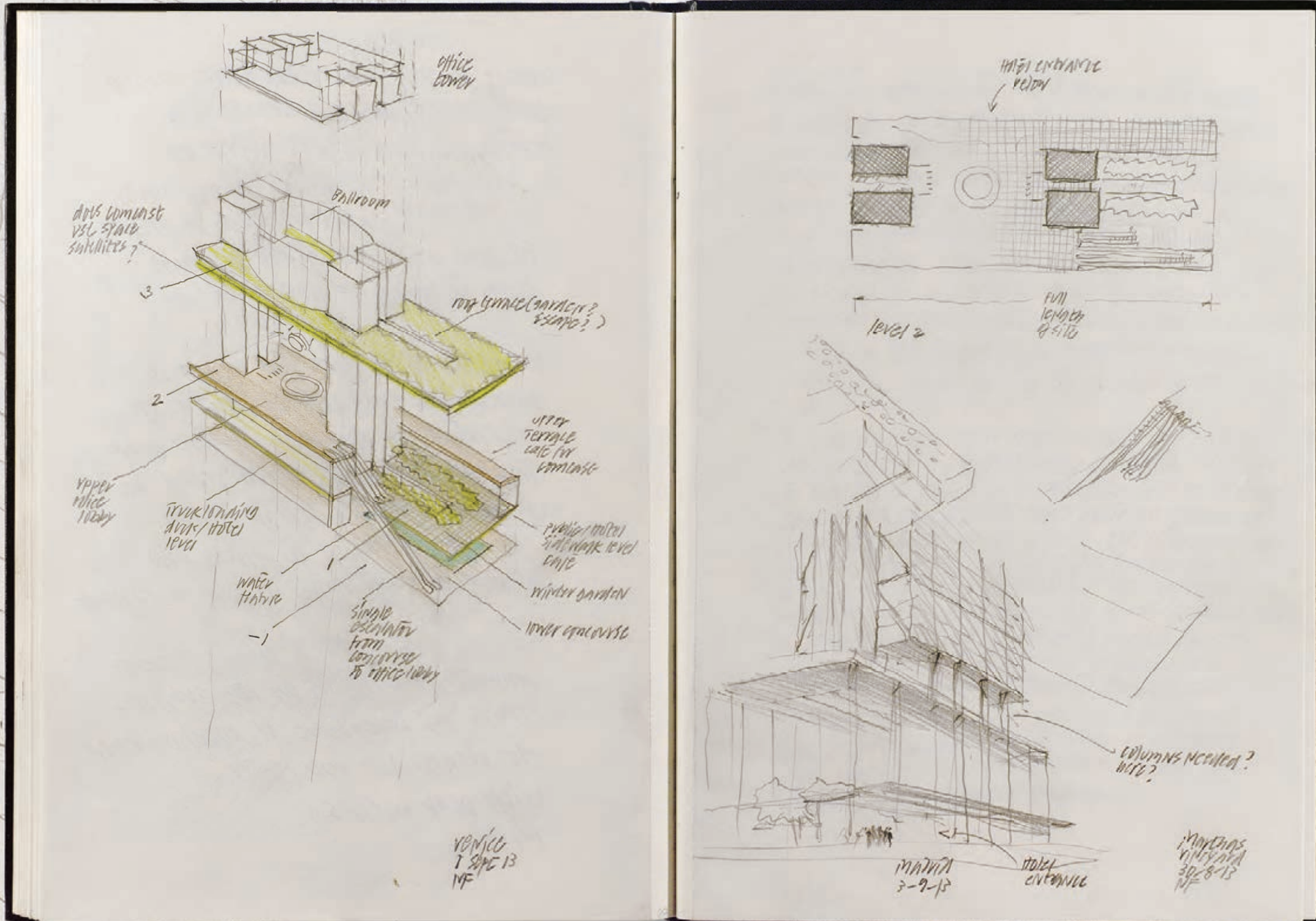
An early sketch Norman Foster created of the Comcast Technology Center.

potential is
emphasized

COMCAST

Nigel 30th Sept

- 1. try fully optimising the plan at lower levels by pushing levels to edge of main core



PUSH TO EDGE

IN ANY VERSION THIS GAP IS VISUALLY IMPORTANT

COLUMNS NEEDED? YES?

HOTEL ENTRANCE
MATERIAL 3-9-13

MARKING VISUAL 30/8/13 MF

SUPPRESSED

VENICE 1 28/8/13 MF

COMCAST
28/8/13
NY MF



“How do we make it us?”

CHAPTER ONE
Genesis

It starts—as all new things do—with an idea: Comcast’s new building, its second Philadelphia skyscraper in a decade, is to be a “technology center.”

“I WANTED US TO CREATE the most exciting home possible for technological innovation,” Comcast chairman and CEO Brian Roberts now explains.

The Comcast Technology Center was never intended to be just another building, but rather a *place*—one that would reflect compelling and unique environments to attract the best talent from across the country and around the world.

It not only had to be good for Comcast but also for Philadelphia. The Comcast Technology Center was created to be a vital part of Philadelphia’s continued evolution as a major entrepreneurial, technological and culinary hub.

Back in the 1980s, when the company was moving from its offices in Bala Cynwyd, Roberts was a junior manager at the company and accompanied his father and company founder, Ralph J. Roberts, to planning sessions for their first Comcast office in Center City. Brian watched as Ralph worked meticulously, blending details that would set the tone for a distinctive corporate culture. And he heard Ralph challenge everyone involved by asking a question that became a Comcast tradition: “How do we make it ‘us’?”

Two decades later, the answer was readily apparent in the design of the Comcast Center—which opened in 2008—and the creation of The Comcast Experience, a multimedia video wall in the lobby festooned with lively audio-visual vignettes that helped give the building a personality unlike any other. “The wall” and the building soon became must-sees for Philadelphians and for tourists, as well as a holiday tradition for the greater community.

In 2013, the elder Roberts’s “make it us” challenge appeared again, becoming central to the birth of the Comcast Technology Center. As Karen Dougherty Buchholz, Comcast’s senior vice president of administration, recalls, “We started our work on the technology center with the question, ‘How

can we create a space that’s reflective of who we are at Comcast today and what we can become tomorrow?’”

The abiding issue quickly became the selection of an architect to tackle the challenge ahead. Comcast held a competition among five of the most prominent architectural firms in the world, including Lord Norman Foster and his company, Foster + Partners, creators of some of the world’s most celebrated architectural achievements, including the Reichstag Dome in Berlin, the Great Court at the British Museum and 30 St. Mary Axe (“The Gherkin”), both in London. Foster had most recently been working with Steve Jobs on new circular headquarters for Apple, sometimes called “the spaceship.” Foster’s footprint wasn’t just earthly; he was also working on a habitat for Mars, which outlined plans for a settlement constructed by pre-programmed robots.

For Foster, this would be anything but some run-of-the-mill project. “I have enormous respect for Brian, and I decided from the beginning that this was a project I really wanted and would immerse myself in,” Foster recalls. “I wanted to be involved in as many aspects of the building as possible—the tolerances, the materials, the junctions, the details, right into the nitty-gritty.”

Nigel Dancey, a senior partner at the firm, admits, “I didn’t actually know anything about Comcast when I started.” He’d learn plenty, however, and quickly, partly by logging eight round trips from London to Philadelphia during the competition.

“Our team was in effect presenting plans for a vertical city, which is an amazing challenge,” Dancey says. “We needed to build something that plugs right into the heart of Philadelphia, something that sits on top of their transit system, and incorporates a pedestrian public route through the building. We also knew it had to be LEED Platinum—a resource- and



Top, from left to right: John Gattuso, Karen Dougherty Buchholz, Jeff Leatham and Ben Shank. Bottom, from left to right: Nigel Dancey and Norman Foster.

“I wanted to be involved in as many aspects of the building as possible.”

NORMAN FOSTER



energy-efficient building—and we had never done one of those before in North America.”

The Foster team understood Comcast required varied spaces that would allow and encourage freedom of expression for all those working in them. They also had to make room for restaurants, a fitness center, a large and innovative dining marketplace and, somewhere amidst all the other enterprises, a world-class Four Seasons Hotel.

“We met with the Comcast team on the day before Good Friday and showed them some models, but they weren’t sure about them,” Dancey recalls. “We realized at that point we had to redesign our scheme, so we worked on Good Friday, Saturday, Easter Sunday and Monday before making our formal submission.

“There’s a shot of adrenaline you get in times like those, and I really like it, particularly when Norman is involved,” Dancey continues. “He was on the phone four or five times a day over that weekend, and there was a ton of creative energy and sketches flying backwards and forwards. We were all in it together, and we did our best to win this competition. It was hard work, but it was also fun.”

Shortly thereafter, Roberts took Foster and Dancey out to dinner and said, “Well, Norman, you’re going to be my quarterback.” All Dancey remembers was, “Norman and I looked at each other and tried to figure out what a ‘quarterback’ was.”

“It’s about chemistry,” Foster says. “Right from the beginning, I wanted to create an environment where the Comcast team could say, ‘I’m worried about this,’ and where you can call each other up at unsocial hours and express a concern.”

That thought would be tested sooner than later. “In the beginning, we were going down a design route that was, I daresay, slightly more commercial and driven by efficiency,” says Russell Hales, another key Foster architect on the project. “Brian took stock and said, ‘This still isn’t right; this still isn’t Comcast. We have to do something *different*.’” Roberts ended his thoughts with a phrase all present took to heart: “I’m not in love.”

Several weeks later, Foster called Roberts to say, “My team’s going to kill me—they told me not to call you—but I want you to forget about that previous version we showed you. Put it in the trash.” He then sent, via cell phone, his own hand-drawn sketch of a new vision. After seeing it, Roberts began to feel the love.

Part of the journey to the finish line had to do with creating an environment markedly different from the first Comcast Center, but with a campus quality that linked them both. That connection manifested itself in myriad detail, like the glass to be used for the exterior, an idea boosted by Foster, who thought the two buildings should have some evident architectural kinship. Similar level of reflectivity in the glass made it seem as if each somehow had evolved from

4,000
EMPLOYEES

**Tallest building
outside of Manhattan
and Chicago**

DAYLIGHT HARVESTING
SYSTEM MONITORS
NATURAL LIGHT LEVELS

“Chilled Beam”

system brings in more fresh air

the other. The exterior, made of insulated glass with an aluminum curtain-wall system and stainless-steel trim, would be gleaming.

What Foster was doing in these embryonic days of the design was to look back to the past in order to project into the future. He knew about Philadelphia’s rich industrial heritage and about the legacy of the Budd Company, a 20th-century metal fabricator that made components for passenger trains and cars. Companies like those permeated many traditions in the city.

Unlike Pittsburgh, its western neighbor, Philadelphia was never dominated by large steel mills or wide-scale industrial enterprises. Instead, Philadelphia’s roots were those of “makers” and high-end craftspeople. Foster decided to use them and their elements as inspiration. In fact, large metal panels that had been corrugated looked very similar to the streamlined railcars that the Budd Company made. End-cut



**IRONWORKERS
LOCAL 401**





wood floors, a distinguishing feature of the sky lobby, are also imbedded in Philadelphia's past.

In July of 2014, construction began on the Comcast Technology Center. The timing proved fortuitous: Comcast founder Ralph Roberts would live to see the launch of the building before passing away just 11 months later at age 95.

The project was a joint venture with Liberty Property Trust, a 20 percent owner in the building, with Comcast owning the rest. L.F. Driscoll served as general contractor.

Two months later, Gensler, a global design firm joined Foster + Partners to plan the interior of the building; several elements were created in conjunction with noted designer Karen Daroff, whose history of working with Ralph Roberts went back to the 1970s. Production architect Kendall/Heaton Associates and Macro Consultants, a key strategic partner from the construction of the Comcast Center, rounded out the team.

John Gattuso, Liberty's then senior vice president, who

was the lead developer when the Comcast Center was built, once again proved a key figure for the new building. "I'm 54 years old," he reflects. "I started working in development in Philadelphia when I was 20. From the very start, the Comcast Technology Center has been one of the most gratifying and significant projects of my entire professional life."

At the height of activity, more than 2,000 workers would be on-site, the beginning of a massive effort that would result in 60 stories and 1,121 feet—the tallest building in North

America outside of those in Manhattan and Chicago. The interior would encompass 1.8 million gross square feet and be home to more than 4,000 employees.

Comcast began in 1963 with the purchase of a nothing-if-not modest 1,200-subscriber cable system in Tupelo, Mississippi, a town often celebrated for its Southern Magnolias. Today, 56 years later, Philadelphia's Comcast Technology Center stands as a glistening city-within-a-city, its glory in the details. ■



“Pretty
radical.”

CHAPTER TWO

A Marriage
of Public and
Private Spaces

Creating a vertical campus within the Comcast Technology Center was a priority from the outset.

PARTICULARLY TRICKY was a challenge Brian Roberts laid out for Norman Foster: “When I’m in the Four Seasons, I want to be able to feel the Comcast connection. There should be a palpable sense of integration.”

An architectural device known by the seemingly prosaic term “split core” provided the solution.

“In my opinion, the split core is possibly one of the most radical design ideas to be implemented at the Comcast Technology Center,” says Liberty’s John Gattuso. “It came out of a desire expressed by Comcast to have visual connectivity between the workplace and the hotel. So, how could we do this? By having circulation slice through the podium.

“Creating a strong visual and circulation axis running east-west the full length of the block seems now to be an obvious solution,” Gattuso continues, “but it represented a major change in how a commercial high-rise office building in the U.S. is typically organized—around a solid core. We see the suggestion of a split core on the ground floor of Renzo’s [Piano] New York Times tower in Manhattan, but nowhere to this scale, pulled all the way through the podium and all the way up the tower shaft.”

“John Gattuso’s response to what Comcast was looking for proved crucial and would lead to the whole public component of the ground floor,” says Foster architect Russell Hales. “The splicing of the core in two was John’s idea. We were in a meeting and he said, ‘Why drive the public around the edge of the building? Let’s drive it right through the center.’ At that moment, he turned the center into a vertical campus.”

“I think the geometry and the expression of the structure

are very much about trying to be honest about what the building is doing,” Hales says. “It designed itself from the inside out. I know that’s a bit of a cliché, but it really did. The way the core works is all about creating floor plates, which do not have a sense of core. The best example of that is actually on the NBC, Telemundo and The Market floors, where you can really see all the way across. By pushing that core asymmetrically in the building, it creates all these different forces. The idea that the public can walk right through the

building and come quite deep into the building means you’re really creating a public space rather than a barrier. That is truly unique.”

Foster partner Nigel Dancey explains further: “On most floors you have this kind of street running all the way from front to back through the building, which basically allows more transparency and more interaction for people who use the building.”

Curiously enough, the split core is technically an inef-

fective design choice to make. “It goes against building efficiency from a field developer point of view,” Dancey says. “Usually in the American developer model, the core would be one solid element as tight as you can make it to maximize the amount of space you could lease to a potential tenant. But what Comcast did with the split-core was about giving something back. The split core design gives more space in which the public can explore and more space for employees to work.”



CONRAD SHAWCROSS EXPLODED PARADIGM

CONRAD SHAWCROSS is, at 42, the youngest living member of England's Royal Academy of the Arts. A renowned and respected British sculptor, Shawcross was first known for his unforgettable mechanical sculptures inspired by philosophy, geometry and physics. In more recent years, he has extended his scope into the public realm, completing a number of



high-profile sculptures and interventions. This includes "Paradigm" (2016) outside the Francis Crick Institute in London's King's Cross, which is one of the tallest public sculptures in Central London. Shawcross has exhibited across the world, from the Wadsworth Atheneum in Connecticut to the Mori Art Museum in Tokyo.

"Exploded Paradigm," his piece at the Comcast Technol-

ogy Center, is a new addition to his ongoing analysis of the tetrahedron, the simplest of the platonic solids. It weighs 35 tons and took more than a year to make.

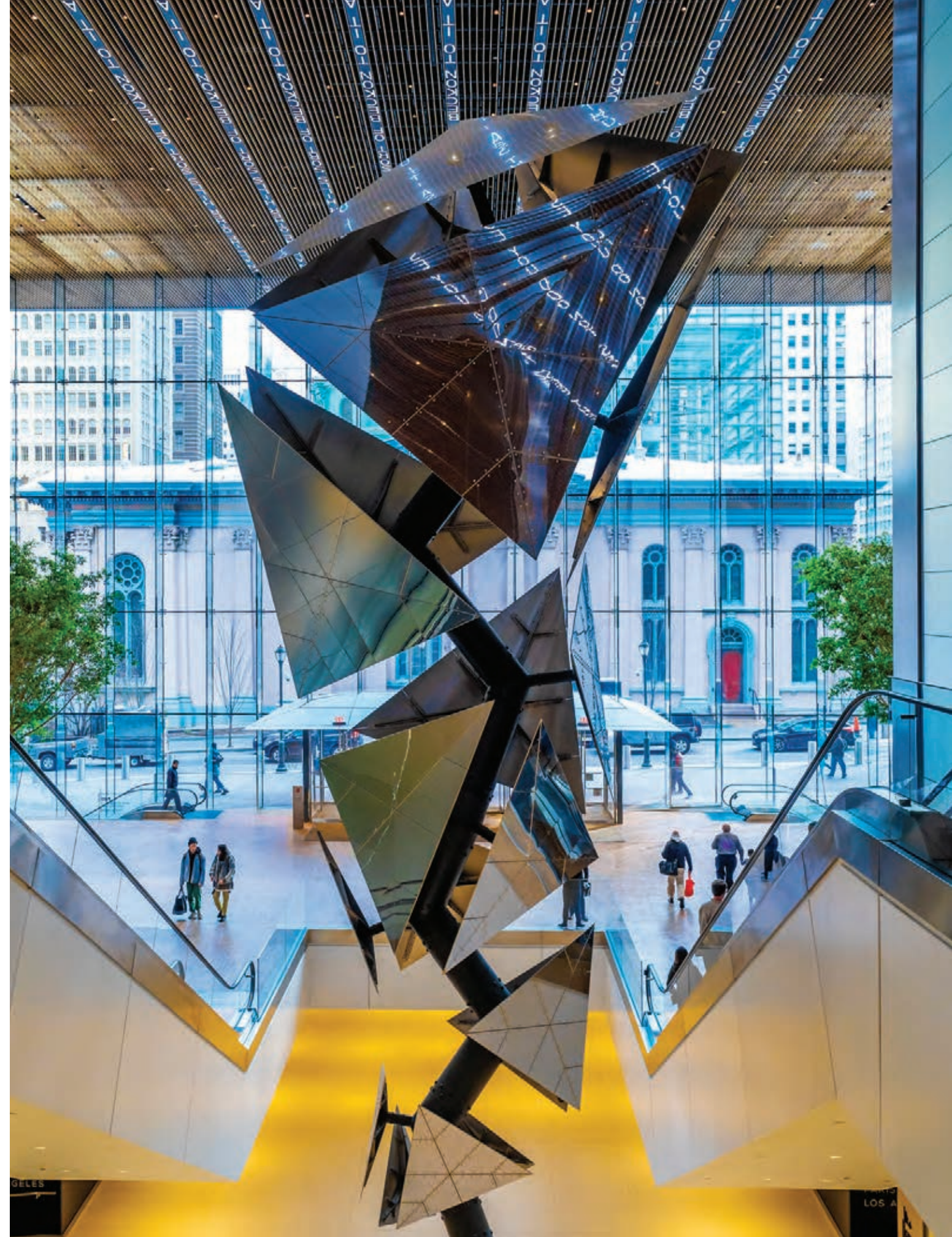
"It's 18 meters, or 60 feet tall," Shawcross says, "It's a big piece, and the first permanent commission I've done in America, so that is very, very exciting for me," he says. "While it is a completely abstract work, there is a clear sense of growth, ascent and entropy. It starts off small, and as it twists up, it grows, becoming more powerful and strong. Yet there is a cautionary aspect, too, as there is a sense of fallibility; that the whole system is precarious.

"When you take a photograph of it, it looks very beguiling, like it's a portal into something else. You have this sense of the room; it reflects a whole other world. Every angle you look at it from sends you a reflection of an unpredictable part of the building.

"I have a fruitful partnership with my structural engineer, Pete Laidler from Structure Workshop. We've worked on a number of projects together. There's a bit of an engineer in me, and there's a bit of an artist in him, and we feed off each other in that sense. He understands my needs to get the proportions and ratios right; the balance and the poise. He's a very elegant engineer—not someone who wants to make it fatter or stronger, but someone who pushes it, making it feel audacious.

"To make something in a position that you know is going to be there forever is gratifying," Shawcross reflects. "If something is used every day, and it's part of the infrastructure of a society, then that enables it to be not only appreciated but completes the creative process and justifies all the money, energy, time and sweat that went into creating it."

Conrad Shawcross is represented by Victoria Miro in London and Tucci Russo in Italy.





JENNY HOLZER FOR PHILADELPHIA

BORN IN GALLIPOLIS, OHIO, in 1950, Jenny Holzer knew she wanted to be an artist from an early age. “I thought I was an artist when I was a very young child,” she recalls. “I’m talking about four, five, six, seven, and then I gave up until I was in the middle of my college life and thought I wouldn’t make anything but a mediocre attorney, so that had me switch.” She would later switch again, in a manner of speaking, thinking she had “failed as an abstract artist” and so began incorporating text in her work to enhance its meaning for those who experienced it.

While enrolled in the Whitney Museum of American Art’s Independent Study Program, Holzer continued experimenting with words, most notably in “Truisms,” a text series featuring phrases about power, politics and complexity. In 1982, she merged art and technology when one of her pieces appeared on the massive Spectacolor billboard in Times Square.

Holzer’s “For Philadelphia” is a series of nine electronic displays installed on the Winter Garden ceiling of the Comcast Technology Center. The displays feature text from poets, architects, visionaries and children—Philadelphians and otherwise.

“I saw renderings and plans relatively early,” she recalls, “and these were precious and necessary.” The marriage of her work and its auspicious venue “had to do with being alert and alive to Norman Foster’s architecture,” she says.

“Also, of course, it needed to reflect the city. To that end, I went to Philadelphia and talked with Pennsylvania writers and school children, as they, of course, will know more about brotherly love than I. I’ve been in and out of Philadelphia for years, but I am not a denizen.”

As her work progressed, she says, “I talked to both Norman and Brian a few times more which was very helpful. Then I was left with myself, the horrible syndrome of artists alone with what’s difficult.”

The content will be updated periodically. Holzer hopes that every year she can ask children, “What do you want to say about what’s important, what’s genuinely lovely, what is frightful?” and record the answers. “One reason I stopped writing, or largely have,” she says, “is so that I could have a much greater range of content than I could generate by myself. That’s why I need hundreds of authors to speak to thousands of people.

“In order not to freeze as an artist—that tempting thing that we artists do, which is to fall into a despairing heap—I tend to imagine myself as a producer or a ringmaster, who gathers content from others in order to speak to the visitors. That’s how I proceeded. And that’s how I got by.”

One consideration for a permanent piece, she says, “is not to bore those who will come through a few times a day, at least, and who will be repeat visitors. When that’s the case, when that’s the mission, we try to include as much content as possible, and not have the content on a 24-hour clock,” to avoid having “the same sentence show up at 9:15 every morning.”

Years that Holzer spent as what she calls a “street artist” taught her one ancillary art: “I learned to skulk,” she says. “I would go back around to see my street posters—you know stand to the side and see whether anyone would stop and look and read, and in some cases, write on the text.

“I do the same with other installations now to see if I like what I did and as before, to watch if anybody is attending happily.”

They are. Stand under Holzer’s work at the Comcast Technology Center and you will see engaged faces not only appreciating her work but interacting with it as well. Such a reaction is fitting. Holzer is, after all, an artist who believes that “what’s difficult is making art good enough” but who stubbornly persists in trying.

“Good enough?” Indeed.

Creating a horizontal campus that linked the new building to the 2008 Comcast Center would prove to be harder than it sounded—requiring an unusually complex feat of urban architecture and ingenious engineering to construct a tunnel large enough to accommodate the all-important connection.

“FINDING A PATH TO join those two buildings was one of the most challenging parts of the entire project,” Gattuso recalls. “We had to go across 18th Street, over the top of the rail tunnel, adjacent to and through all the utilities, and underneath the ramp in the parking garage. We literally had to raise the entire height of the street by two feet, relocate vast amounts of massive utilities and find a way to squeeze the concourse through any number of foundations, including the foundation of the church.”

It looks so inevitable in its finished state that you wouldn’t even imagine it to have been borderline impossible—right? “I think most people faced with that dilemma would not have pursued it,” Gattuso says, “but we thought it was so important to forge this connection between the two buildings that it was worth the effort, the time and the expense to do it. In doing so, we not only established the horizontal campus, but we extended the pedestrian concourse that runs underneath, and made the Comcast Technology Center a truly transit-oriented building.”

Now, both buildings rest on an underground feeder of mass transit that leads directly into each base, enabling



Of her digital art collage “Connection,” Zwerling says, “I like the magic.” Placed prominently within the underground tunnel leading from the first Comcast Center to the new Comcast Technology Center, the 160-foot digital collage evokes a Philadelphia spring day filled with sequoia trees and “gushes” of red and pink.

Sarah Zwerling, “Connection,” digital photo collage.



SARAH ZWERLING

A passageway built within the underground tunnel leading from the first Comcast Center to the new Comcast Technology Center enables employees and visitors to walk between them with ease. As they do, they are met by “Connection,” an eye-catching, digital photo collage by artist Sarah Zwerling. It appears to be a sequential, panoramic photo series of the Philadelphia cityscape, captured on a particularly beautiful spring day—but over time, the environments depicted unfold in unexpected ways and reveal surprising perspectives throughout the dreamlike space.

To help bring a sense of air, light and openness to the underground tunnel, the artist turned her eye upward, taking hundreds of photographs of the trees, skies and architectural facades in a winding east-west trajectory through Philadelphia. Zwerling’s multidisciplinary artwork explores a personal relationship with natural and built spaces through processes of digitally manipulated photography.

“I came here for grad school in 1989,” recalls Zwerling, who now lives and works in Philadelphia. “I went to Penn for fine art, sculpture and installation.”

Of “Connection,” Zwerling says, “I like the magic. It’s really nice to see all the people rushing through. Instead of looking at all the details outside, they’re inside, yet still having those moments of color or flower or detail on something. I wanted to bring nature and architecture down into this existing space. It feels pretty good.”

tens of thousands of commuters to exit Suburban Station and walk directly into either building. Rain? Snow? Heat? No worries.

Design and construction teams also elevated the Comcast Technology Center’s lobby one entire level above the street, adding Greg Vernick’s seafood restaurant, Vernick Fish, along the entire frontage of Arch Street. Those two decisions activated an important pedestrian connection to the Benjamin Franklin Parkway and Logan Square neighborhood.

Driving several key decisions was the belief that the space surrounding the building was as important a consideration

as the building itself. In one of the densest parts of the city, Comcast wanted various components of the project to create a strong sense of place and open space. Consequently, it was a pointed architectural decision to orient the lobby along the narrower frontage of 18th Street, rather than Arch Street, and to reinforce the connection from the Cuthbert Street Walk to the first Comcast Center, located at 1701 John F. Kennedy Boulevard. That decision helped energize the whole Comcast “campus” concept.

From New York, where he is entangled in another major project, Dancey notes how unusual the Comcast campus is.

“We’re struggling to create the same public spaces here that we created in Philadelphia; it’s very difficult,” he says. “Comcast feels a great responsibility toward Philadelphia, and that’s why the base of the building is so open to the public. I think they are a genuine public services company and felt it was important that such a building have a friendly face and allow people to come in, which is what they did with the first Comcast building and its big video wall. The Comcast Technology Center will become another significant attraction, with the Spielberg film in the sphere and two outstanding restaurants.” ■



“The
power
of I”

CHAPTER THREE

Mr. Spielberg
Comes to
Philadelphia

“When I was a young kid living in New Jersey, we used to look up at the storms moving in and at all the shapeshifting of clouds, and it would hurl my imagination into amazing places, most of which scared me.”

STEVEN SPIELBERG

IDEAS HAVE BEEN AROUND for a long, long time—for as long as there have been brains to conceive them. They are the superpower of the human race. Great ones transform our planet, our lives, our culture, indeed every facet of existence. Even bad ideas can yield positive benefits unimagined at the time.

To celebrate the magic and power of ideas, Comcast created The Universal Sphere, an enormous installation ensconced on the second floor of the Comcast Technology Center, guided by legendary filmmaker and globally known Idea Man, Steven Spielberg.

“My involvement was invited by Brian Roberts, who excited me by telling me that a second Comcast corporate building was under construction and that they were building something called ‘The Sphere,’ and all he had left to do was figure out what to put in it,” Spielberg recalls. “Brian turned to me and asked, ‘What should go in there?’ And I said, ‘It’s a challenge; I’m excited to try to help you, a company that I’m a part of, and a company that I’m very, very, passionately involved with as a filmmaker.’

“I went away and thought about it,” Spielberg says, “And the idea that I had was to celebrate the entire notion of *The Idea*. I wanted us to make a film showing how a single idea, both complex and simple, can change the way people live and the way they look at their lives. I wanted to acknowledge all the great contributions that people—the mega-minds in every generation—are celebrated for, but I also wanted this to reflect the fact that any of us can have at any time a great



Russell Hales, left, presents Steven Spielberg with a model of The Universal Sphere during a visit to the Comcast Technology Center.

idea, and if we act on those ideas, and collaborate with others on them, maybe we could go a little way in either changing someone’s mind about how they feel about something, or even changing the world.

“It was also important for me to involve kids and the dreams that children have. When I was a child, I would look up into the sky and imagine things all the time. Some of the greatest ideas come from kids, and I wanted to make sure kids were brought into the story.”

The idea for the sphere itself began early in the design process of the Comcast Technology Center. The team noticed a gaping void on the building’s second level, begging the question of what could be done to make that space not just functional but “very special.”

“The original brief from Comcast called for us to design some kind of retail experience,” recalls Foster architect Russell Hales. “We had been bouncing other ideas around about that big space, asking ourselves, ‘How can we go beyond that amazing LED wall in the Comcast Center?’”

It was the fall of 2015 when Hales thought, “Let’s do something better than just a virtual reality headset in the shop. Let’s do something that can bring people together.” Along with co-creator of the concept, Immersive Limited, Hales and the team developed sketches of an immense sphere.

“We became intrigued with this approach early on,” Karen Buchholz recalls. “We knew we needed to find our ‘Wow!’ We wanted to bring the experiential Comcast NBCUniversal to life.”



Almost silently, the doors of the great round sphere part, and what had appeared impenetrable and forbidding, now opens in welcome, inviting us in. We proceed with both anxious caution and eager abandon, wonder-hunters headed for a prime seat within the bright white orb.

IN A MOMENT, the lights go down and we become part of “The Power of I,” each of us not just an audience member but one of two dozen aspiring explorers about to undergo a multimedia, indoor adventure.

Suddenly, we feel sensational sensations of movement as, surrounded by the circular screen, we are shifted and transported through inner space, studying faces of the world’s great thinker-uppers projected on the curved interior. The walls are the screen, the screen is the walls. We feel a jolt of anticipation and a gulp of apprehension as we are propelled into orb-central, a figurative inner- and outer-space, feeling ourselves being shifted, floated and swirled about at the whim of the mind-bending circular screen.

All 30 bodies in their seats, the show begins around us. From somewhere and everywhere booms a sonorous voice that draws us irresistibly inward.

It’s a voice we seem to recognize—that actor fella, Peter Coyote of “E.T. The Extra-Terrestrial” and many other motion pictures—accompanied by sweeping musical flourishes from Canadian composers Mychael and Jeff Danna, who also devised the score for “The Life of Pi.”

Coyote continues speaking—not telling a story, exactly, but narrating an ever-changing array of images that conjure a mood, an aura, a word-and-picture hymn to humanity, perhaps most poignantly when a group of children of different genders and races utter a gently compressed

version of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.’s “I Have A Dream” speech. We may be nearly as moved moments later when Dr. Carl H. June of the University of Pennsylvania recalls being able to save a young girl’s life through implementation of an experimental cancer treatment that had grown to fruition from a seemingly small and insignificant phenomenon: An Idea. The Star of the Show.

But now, those short seven minutes having flown by in the big bubble of a theater, its doors part again—letting there be light, literally, from outside the Comcast Technology Center. Out go the would-be explorers, into a less cleverly ordered reality, batteries recharged and belief in the possible impossible restored....

There are three striking elements in the second-level lobby—the Conrad Shawcross sculpture, the Jenny Holzer installation and the Vernick Coffee Bar. Comcast and Foster + Partners knew that by adding a sphere to the mix, they had to make sure that no one piece by itself cried out to be the star of the show nor elbowed the others aside.

“We’ve all been to lots of spaces where there’s no coordination,” says Liberty’s John Gattuso. “Here, we wanted to make sure that it all felt like it was inevitable—that someone would walk in and say, ‘Oh yeah, this was supposed to be *a whole thing*.’”

When designing the sphere, Serge Nalbantian, vice president of development at Liberty Property Trust, had to work out a technology that didn’t fit on a wall, which was harder than it may sound.

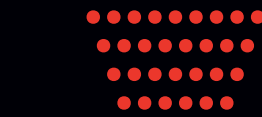
“Starting from an idea of how to project a concept onto a 360-degree surface, it took an incredible number of experts to bring it all together,” Nalbantian says. “We had to find a multitude of designers, engineers, producers and manufacturers, each with their own expertise, then coordinate their efforts so each component worked in unison to bring the experience to the audience.”

One key objective: make sure the technology did not overtake the emotional experience of the story. It took a huge leap of faith to go and spend a large amount of money on a mysterious sphere, but there was less worry about the engineering itself than about the content.

And inside the 360-degree sphere, Steven Spielberg, DreamWorks Animation, Universal Parks and Resorts, and Comcast Labs worked together to create a seven-minute cinematic experience entitled, “The Power of I,” to inspire the people of Philadelphia and Comcast employees who work in the building to realize that they could be the generators of ideas.

“Steven wanted to explore the idea of *ideas*,” says Chris DeFaria, the former president of DreamWorks who worked

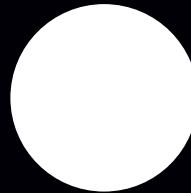
ABOUT THE UNIVERSAL SPHERE



30

SEATING CAPACITY

34
FEET



39
FEET

140K lbs.

WEIGHT



7:33

RUNNING TIME

on the sphere, “but also explain the inherent power of the venue and its defining characteristics—the immersiveness, the use of sound, the sense of isolation the audience would have, and the need to direct an audience’s attention to a seemingly, infinitely complex montage of images and sounds.”

DeFaria also notes the role played by music: “We came up with this metaphor of jazz—to take the idea of ideas and do a kind of jazz riff—sort of a theme-and-variation versus a straight narrative thrust. I think that’s what you see in there, this linking of sequences and concepts exploring the notion of ideas, yet not necessarily drawing one to the next in a traditional narrative structure.”

DreamWorks producer Karen Foster collaborated closely with two other DreamWorks employees on the project—directors Gary Trousdale and Steve Hickner. Co-producer Doug Cooper was also instrumental—as indeed was Framestore, the visual effects company that ultimately manufactured the film. When they first began, they knew vaguely that the team wanted to use the dome experience to explore the authority of ideas—and that was about that.

They worked on the concept for at least six months before meeting with the Comcast team. In an early version, they had included the big idea makers and visionaries, those fabled titans of history, but decided to throw out the “celebrity” names and concentrate on smaller, practical ideas that have made a significant difference to people in

the world. The Spielberg team realized they should focus on accessible notions that feel doable, for the average person to unlock their own feeling of “yes” as opposed to, “This isn’t about me; this is somebody famous that came up with a world-changing idea.”

Then they thought more about what they wanted people to feel—a range of empowerment, inspiration, emotion and hope—as the story unfolded.

“Hand-in-hand with that, I think we learned that *your own* ideas count as much as all these ‘great ideas’ that we might celebrate,” DeFaria says. “They’re the ideas that come

from people who might not think they’re even qualified to contribute. But they *are*,” DeFaria says. “They are going to change the world. We hope people come away taking our own ideas seriously and feeling that they have the power to pursue something—hopefully make a change, and hopefully help change be made.”

“The Power of I” highlights several distinguished idea generators, including Hippo Roller, an organization that helps with water scarcity in Africa; The Empowerment Plan, which works to help people out of homelessness; Liter of Light, an organization that brings solar lighting to villages with no electricity; University of Pennsylvania’s Carl H. June, M.D., who pioneered cancer treatments; and the Emily Whitehead Foundation, named after Dr. June’s first patient, which helps bring Dr. June’s medical innovations to kids around the world.

Alongside these groundbreaking concepts, the children who quote Martin Luther King Jr.’s momentous “I Have a Dream” speech also paraphrase the Declaration of Independence and Title IX—relaying some of the words that define our time in history.

“We came up with this idea of inviting the audience into a ‘secret club,’” Norman Foster says. “And that’s really the secret club of all mankind. We have brains that we can use

to change the world. Once we came up with that narrative, it started making sense to all of us. We’re inviting people into this ‘secret space,’ propelling them on an initiation, then handing them a mission: ‘Go forth and make ideas, for you are the answer to today’s problems.’”

Grand, mediocre, revolutionary; original, hackneyed, bright or trite, ideas keep tumbling forth. The Universal Sphere reminds us that there are neither barriers nor hierarchy required to give birth to great ideas. We are all capable and, perhaps even more important, we are all duty-bound to share thoughts with fellow citizens of the plaintive, pummeled planet on which we all live.

“When visitors leave the sphere, I want them to appreciate their own ideas and be emboldened to share them,” Spielberg says. “When you have an idea, it may not be an idea that everyone jumps on immediately, but it’s an idea that can gestate and can develop as *you* develop and mature and move into your own life. That idea, if it sticks with you, can become something that’s malleable. As young people move into adulthood, and you remember your old ideas, maybe they become a novel, maybe they become an invention, maybe they become part of social outreach.” Spielberg pauses for a moment before one final reflection: “Great ideas never die.” ■



THE COMCAST CENTER VIDEO WALL

The Universal Sphere builds on the public entertainment legacy of the 85-by-25-foot, high-resolution video wall (left) that serves as the backdrop of the Comcast Center lobby at the other end of the campus. Video and images ranging from the historical to sports action to all aspects of musicality change daily, minute by minute. With 10 million embedded pixels, its sharp resolution registers five times the clarity of HDTV and three times that of IMAX.

It makes, in other words, everything perfectly clear.

Known as “The Comcast Experience,” the wall and its annual Holiday Spectacular Show have become staples in the city, with the wall doing its own version of storytelling, and, in the process, becoming a “window” onto another world. It blends the real and surreal with seamless sanity.

What could have been a mere lobby, then, has been transformed by artistry and technology into a memorable destination all its own.



“This is not an office building”

CHAPTER FOUR

New Environments for New Professionals



Principal engineer Mark Francisco at work in the anechoic chamber, a testing facility free of reflections and interference from outside sound.

“One of the critical points in the entire project happened just before we did the very first press announcement,” architect Russell Hales recalls. “Norman banned us from using the word ‘office.’ He said, ‘This is not an office building; it’s a tech center. Think of this space as a series of garages where people design and create stuff.’”

IN RECENT YEARS, there has been a burgeoning movement for companies to reduce office space and give employees the opportunity to work from home. Obviously email and video conferencing have made this easier than ever. But much of what goes on in the field of technology is collaborative and, quite often, when colleagues can be physically together, face to face, feeding off one another, that shared experience fuels not only a better exchange of ideas, but it also creates a collaborative workplace that provides an element of energy that one simply can’t achieve in isolation. In essence, community becomes a great driver of innovation.

“The Comcast Technology Center is a model for the future, incorporating all the features that define and enhance a great working environment,” John Gattuso says. “It has meeting places, open spaces, a huge fitness center, restaurants and coffee hangouts that have all been designed so employees can think of this building as somewhere they want to be rather than have to be. One of the most gratifying remarks I’ve heard is when someone told me, ‘I could be working at home, but I’d rather be here.’”

For Josh Katz, the studio director and principal at Gensler, Inc. tasked with making the “no office” dream a reality, the project was about creating a space that could adapt to the diverse daily needs of the approximately 4,000 employees who work in the Comcast Technology Center.

The Gensler team, in conjunction with Foster + Partners and Comcast, thought a lot about how people spend their time in a workplace and responded to that by designing flexible areas to allow for a range of activities—huddle rooms, team rooms, conference rooms, areas for private calls, booths for collaborative projects, and three-story loft spaces for socializing or taking breaks. More than 300 huddle rooms were created, as were Lantern Lounges on each loft floor: a Lantern Lounge being similar to the quiet car on a train, with carpet, textiles and fabric all contributing to a reduction in noise.

“A workplace has to support the notion of building culture,” Katz says. “We engage in different activities at work throughout the day, so our goal was to create a variety of spaces that could support all of those different modes of activity—focused work, collaboration, learning and so on.” To use another of Katz’s favorite turns-of-phrase: the aim was a “balanced workplace,” a one-to-one ratio where each assigned desk has a corresponding seat in an alternative space, thereby encouraging the free-flowing movement of people and with that, hopefully, the free flow of their ideas as well. To enhance the employee environment, creators of the building wanted to fashion a space that broke walls

down, even made them disappear, and allowed teams to be both highly interactive and productively nimble.

Creating workspaces that met those goals began with surveys to determine optimal workplace design, with some of the world’s most successful technology companies (and the people within them) serving as guides.

As part of the process, Comcast team members journeyed to Silicon Valley. They visited Mark Zuckerberg’s workstation at Facebook headquarters in Menlo Park, California, and stopped by the offices of trendy Riot Games in West

Los Angeles, where they saw how desks were oriented and allocated within an open-office environment.

The resulting mandate wasn’t to mimic Silicon Valley, but rather make it authentic to Philadelphia. Some elements were inspired by things seen in companies out West, but the Comcast Technology Center was definitely going to be different: Unlike those large horizontal campuses out West, this was going to be a vertical campus.

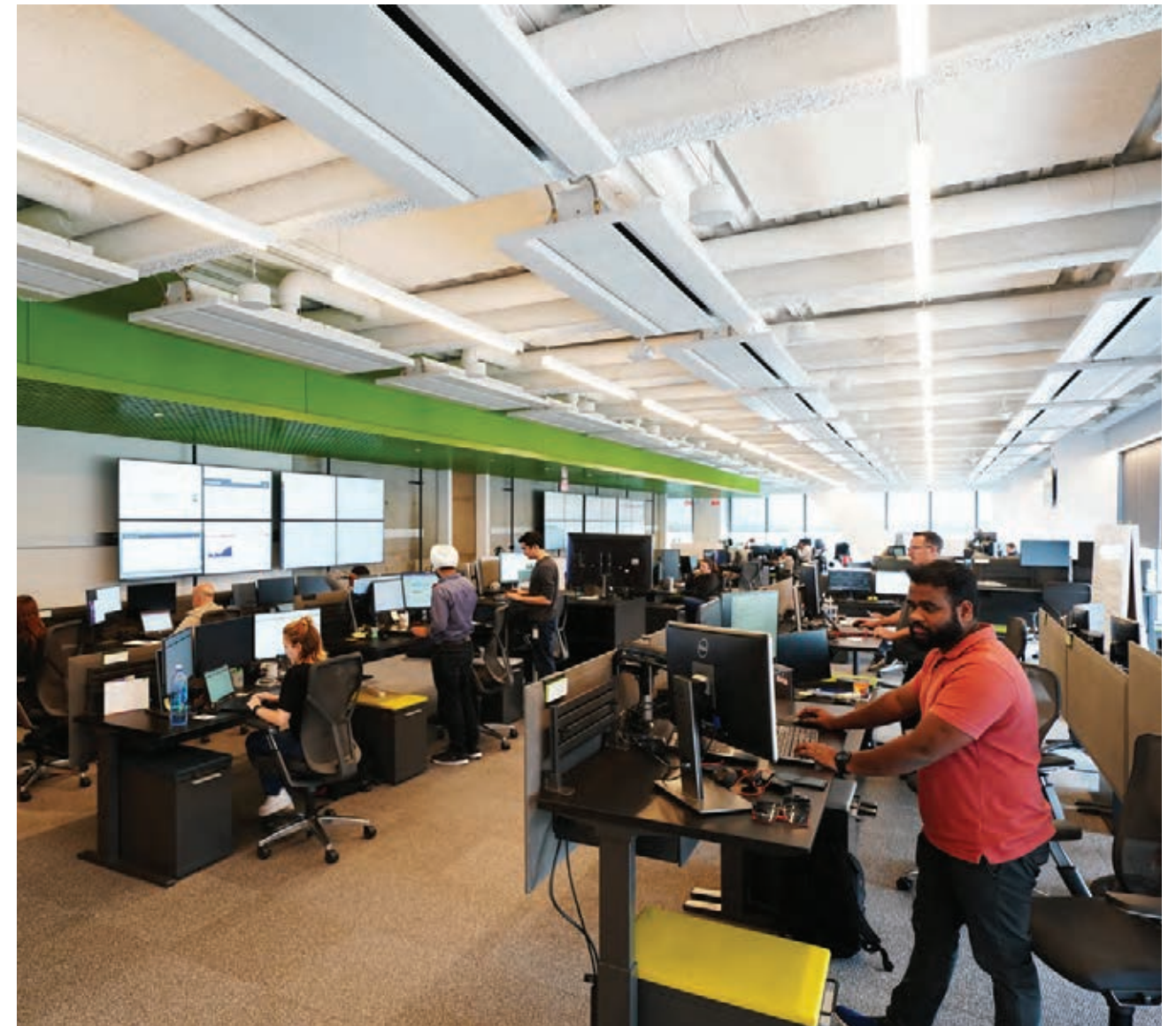
Most companies tell employees how they are going to work based on the office’s existing structure. But the Comcast Technology Center offers employees a multitude of time and place to assemble, confer and consider together—not just come and sit in an office. There are numerous choices open to employees about where they want to be, or not to be, and the choice is everybody’s, more or less.

Reflecting its commitment to accessibility in the products and services Comcast provides, the company also wanted the space design to be truly inclusive, going far beyond the accessibility requirements of the building code. To assist the Comcast employees who are visually impaired, for instance, flooring materials pointedly vary: a wood floor beneath your feet tells you that you’re on “Main Street,” while tile indicates a hallway area, and carpet says you’re in a workspace.

“We learned lessons from the [original] Comcast Center,” Karen Buchholz says, “and kept foundational goals of featuring art, content and technology that employees and members of our community could experience and enjoy.”

One of those innovative additions is the 32,000-square-

Most companies tell employees where they are going to work based on the office’s existing structure. But the Comcast Technology Center offers a wide range of places and times in which to work and confer—not merely hunker down at old-fashioned desks.



foot fitness facility, encompassing the entire 44th floor. It features several group fitness rooms, a hydration bar and machines that go beyond traditional gym offerings.

There are also mothers’ rooms in the building, quiet rooms, all-gender restrooms, extensive bike racks and commuter showers.

And what would a technology center be without—technology? A robust WiFi solution was implemented throughout the building, even in the elevators, so that individuals could move seamlessly from zone to zone with any mobile device.

Additionally, designers outfitted the workspace with automated shade controls that are connected to the light-

dimming system, as well as noise damping technology to keep sound levels—well, level—across the three-story lofts. In the building are more than 800 wireless access points and 60 miles of fiber optic cabling.

“It’s a very people-centered space,” Katz reflects, “and while we think it’s a beautiful space, all of our design work was done around understanding what people’s experience in the space would be, as opposed to creating something that was merely efficient or ‘looked good.’ We wanted to design a space that was as flexible as it could be, largely to deal with future changes in work but also to empower individuals to make the space work the way they want it to.”



100%

CELLULAR AND
WIFI-EQUIPPED
ELEVATORS

Shhh

QUIET
ROOMS

100+

WIRELESS
ACCESS POINTS



MOTHERS'
ROOMS



BIKE
RACKS



ALL-GENDER
RESTROOMS

Voices
From
Inside The
Comcast
Technology
Center



"The abundance of collaborative spaces has served as a catalyst for innovation."

SOFTWARE ENGINEER

"It is incredibly gratifying that we have an entire building designed to host collaborative work."

SR. DIRECTOR

"People seem more relaxed while working and especially during meetings."

SR. ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

"The Views!"

SPECIALIST,
USER EXPERIENCE

"Sunlight!"

COPYWRITER



Inset left: Karen Daroff with Ralph Roberts working on plans for the original Comcast Center. Right: Chef Valerie Dougherty inspects the herb wall in The Market.



THE MARKET

Designer Karen Daroff and her team at Daroff Design, Inc. have worked with Comcast for more than two decades, and Daroff was the lead visionary for The Market, an employee dining experience encompassing 72,000 square feet on the building's 27th and 28th floors. Each floor has its own unique personality—the 27th featuring multiple servery islands and an herb garden wall, the 28th a gathering center around a coffee bar and cooking stations.

"Our goal was to create a food hall that would transport Comcast's team members and their guests to an urban market by incorporating an industrial design palette and a variety of delicious foods," Daroff says.

And while not every cafeteria in the world even has an "aesthetic," this one most assuredly does. That vision is manifested in the details—a concrete floor, chalkboard menus to complement the artisan-quality of the food being made,

quartz countertops, a small forest of trees, and the perfect level of warm lighting needed for a hospitality environment.

"It was really a strategic decision for the campus to have a major food-service experience," Daroff adds. "The concept of providing exceptional employee amenities has certainly expanded over the years to include more health, wellness and fitness, and the food offerings at The Market reflect this growing trend."



NBC10/TELEMUNDO

The operations of Philadelphia broadcast television stations NBC10 and Telemundo62 are prime residents of the Comcast Technology Center.

As President and General Manager Ric Harris says: “NBC10 and Telemundo62 are local television stations that live within arguably the greatest media and technology facility in America. We have unparalleled access to technology and innovation that enable us to develop forward-thinking approaches that make the viewing experience better than any other across the country.”

At 80,000 square feet, the facilities of NBC10 and Telemundo62 were designed to be the most energy-efficient local news stations in the country—with heating/cooling and ventilating systems that improve indoor quality and reduce noise.

“When people spend a little time here and get to interact with us,” Harris says, “they feel it. They see all the connectivity and positivity, and they begin to understand our mantra, which is, ‘Come to win.’ It is a mindset that’s all about not just showing up to work, but arriving with a spirit and an attitude that say, ‘I want to compete, I want to create and deliver the best, and I want to work with the best people.’”

“In addition to our three broadcast studios and our newsroom, the building is our fifth studio,” Harris says. “We have

these broadcast service panels—we call them BSPs—all over the building. We plug in power and fiber and go ‘live’ from anywhere in the building and around the campus. This helps create immersive storytelling, all across the campus.

“The entire thought behind this, and it is consistent with the Comcast Technology Center, is about collaboration, connectivity and clear sight lines, with everyone having access to one another. This is important when we talk about having access, because we’re still storytellers, right? And we do it in specific day parts and times, but we also recognize that this device rules our lives, and we get a lot of our news and information here.

“All the white tables that you see here are ‘show pods,’ and that is primarily where the producers and executive producers work to prepare the next newscast. So if you imagine that we have a collection of stories that affect the Philadelphia area, those stories are touched and told by each one of the people at these show pods.”

There are many advantages to this system, Harris says: “There are more intentional interactions, as opposed to the haphazard kind. We can’t avoid each other, we see each other every single day, every moment of the day, and we connect. We talk about our own functional responsibility, but more importantly we talk about how we can help each other.”



Ric Harris, President and General Manager of NBC10 and Telemundo62.

LIFT LABS

Visible above The Universal Sphere on the next floor is the state-of-the-art incubator space named LIFT (Leveraging Innovation for Tomorrow) Labs, an entrepreneurial incubator developing the next generation of media, entertainment and connectivity innovations. LIFT Labs was created with input from more than 1,500 entrepreneurs from around the world, utilizing Comcast programming to help startups understand technology, develop new intellectual property and become better storytellers.

In 2018, Comcast partnered with Techstars to launch its first annual accelerator program. Selected startups, chosen from hundreds of applicants from around the world, call Comcast NBCUniversal’s global headquarters in Philadelphia home for a 13-week program. ■





FORUM

The treasured legacy of founder Ralph J. Roberts can be seen, among other places, within the building's theater—the Ralph J. Roberts Forum, a two-floor, 500-seat auditorium located in the heart of the Comcast Technology Center. The space serves as a setting for movie premieres, visiting speakers, talent panels, employee "town halls," book signings and more. Not long ago, the Forum played host to the 2019 Philadelphia mayoral debate. It is also the only multi-use Dolby (Atmos+Vision) event space in the world.



“Upward
gaze”

CHAPTER FIVE

The Art
of It All

More than 40 local Philadelphia artists—painters, muralists, sculptors, craft makers, graffiti artists and more—have created original works for the Comcast Technology Center. The array of participating artists is a remarkable cross-section of backgrounds, experiences and exposures. Some are internationally renowned, others local educators or aspiring multimedia artists, and some just out of local schools but eager to create.

PART WORKING SKYSCRAPER, part research lab, part television broadcast studio and part luxury hotel, the Comcast Technology Center is also part art gallery—from the centerpieces in the lobby by artists Conrad Shawcross and Jenny Holzer to the more than 40 pieces produced by local artists and arrayed generously throughout the 60-story building.

“Architecture creates functional space, and when art arrives there, it is both invigorating and inspiring,” says John Gattuso, himself a painter. “In the postwar era, that connection has all too frequently been lost. With the Comcast Technology Center, we wanted to make architecture and art part of the same expression, thereby elevating Norman Foster’s brilliant design.”

Art Advisors Claudia Vick and her mother, Connie, worked with teams from Gensler, Foster + Partners, Comcast and Liberty to thoughtfully integrate a series of murals, sculptures, furniture pieces and many more originals into the architecture.

“Comcast really values art and its place in this building,” Claudia says. “They understand it can create a powerful narrative throughout the entire space.”

“The diversity of the artists in the program is a terrific cross-selection of backgrounds and experience,” she adds. “You have internationally renowned artists, graffiti artists who are local to the city, artists who are professors and artists who are recently out of school. They thought, ‘this is awesome that Comcast is doing this,’ and it really changed their perceptions of the big corporate entity.”

Each commissioned artist knew how to work with expansive spaces, yet it was also important for them to understand that their art was going to be viewed from almost 360 degrees—from the top looking down, from the sides, from people sitting close and those far away. Some pieces are an intimate experience; others convey a vaster one. And the long hallways, which run from one end to another within the building (“Main Street”), gave artists the opportunity to use color and composition to move people through those hallways in intriguing ways.

“With this ambitious art program, we also wanted to honor Philadelphia’s rich industrial past and ‘maker’ history through beautifully executed, handcrafted pieces,” Claudia says. It turned out that many of the artists already knew each other—a great statement about the Philadelphia artist’s community—with several noting that their involvement became “a very lovely communal kind of experience.” ■

PREVIOUS PAGE

FINE ARTIST

ERNEL MARTINEZ

The Dichotomy of Technology

Digital prints on silicone-edged graphic fabric, stretched over light boxes

COLLECTION INCLUDES:

Alex Stadler

BDDW

Brace and Bit

CZ Woodworking

Deckstool

Dennis Beach

Emilie Ledieu & Miriam Singer

Groundwork

Isaiah Zagar

Jaime Alvarez

Jeffrey Greene

Jill Bonovitz

Lostine

MIO & Karen Harmelin

Mark Khaisman

Nate Harris

Philadelphia Independents

Printfresh Studio

Shira Walinsky

Springhouse

The Heads of State

Twelve26 Studios

Uhuru

Valeriya Volkova

Wake the Tree



▲ FINE ARTIST

VIRGIL MARTI

Anomalous Cloud

Polished stainless steel and mirrored acrylic

Philadelphia-based sculptor Virgil Marti’s bright pink and red geometric sculpture, “Anomalous Cloud,” hangs from the ceiling on the 36th floor. Marti grew up in St. Louis but has lived in Philadelphia for more than half of his life, and the city has earned a spot in his heart.

To him, the sculpture comes from the renderings of a flat cubic structure.

“I had started out with renderings of that cubic structure, that could proliferate and continue, and mutate, and

would be reflecting,” he says. “The final sculpture was sort of thinking about that in terms of reflective surfaces, bringing things from the outside in.

“I researched the 1876 Centennial Expedition in Philadelphia and looked at etchings and other images from that fair,” Marti says. “I thought about it as a time and a place when a lot of new innovations were being introduced to the world, and Philadelphia was the center and showcase for that.”



◀ FINE ARTIST

LESLIE FRIEDMAN

Philadelphia Circuit Ramp

Wood, composite vinyl, silkscreen, paper

"It's a lighthearted piece; it's supposed to be humorous," Leslie Friedman says. "There's a lot of different motifs that reflect Philadelphia culture."

"Play" is one word that may come to mind when you come across fine artist Leslie Friedman's creation for the Comcast Technology Center. Located in the arcade lounge on the sixth floor of the building, it's a sweeping, patterned skate ramp, titled "Philadelphia Circuit Ramp," "combining the rebel spirit of Philadelphia street art and skateboarding with the collage and geometric pattern-based aesthetic," typical of her work.

Conceptually, the piece also has a connection to technology, Friedman says, because it's a "graphic interpretation of a circuit board."

▲ FINE ARTIST

ASTRID BOWLBY

Kiosk

Ink on cut paper

For her work, "Kiosk," on the 33rd floor of the Comcast Technology Center, fine artist Astrid Bowlby cut up thousands of ink and brush drawings to create a textured black-and-white collage, which she describes as "A big message board or the inside of somebody's brain, things jostled up all together."

The shapes range from amorphous figures to more distinct everyday things—a donut, spatula, purse, shoe and hammer. She hopes they offer a sort of inspiration on a macro and micro scale.

"I was thinking about how, sometimes when we're working, things aren't as creative as we would like them to be," Bowlby says. "But then sometimes when we're taking a break or we're just kind of staring into space, something pops out of that morass of thoughts that is a solution to a problem."



▲ SCULPTOR

AMUNEAL

"X" Xfinity Sculpture

Aluminum with hand-rusted finish

FINE ARTIST ▶

ODILI DONALD ODITA

Open Access

Acrylic latex wall paint

Philadelphia-based fine artist Odili Donald Odita also teaches at the Tyler School of Arts at Temple University and brought his experience of living and knowing life to his mural, "Open Access," which resides on the 36th, 37th and 38th floors.

Odita dug deep into Comcast—its history and its purpose as a business—as well as the word "democracy," and made the bands of color in "Open Access" like fiber-optic cable feeding information from one point to another. The shapes are also bursting with color, representing multiple points and myriad aspects of information being fed from one zone to the next. The colors were designed to be reminiscent of designs coming out of a television set, like the NBC peacock or test patterns.

In this regard, Odita thought a lot about the "X" in Xfinity, the kind of boom-boom nature to it, and realized



if he were to overlay the design, it would form these X's, even though he wanted to imply that notion without being too literal. As you walk through "Open Access," your body reflects the change in the space. Sometimes when we walk, we become numb to where we are, but the piece helps to make you aware of what you are doing, how you are walking through a space, and

what the space is doing. It's all about repetition, uniqueness and originality. Odita thought about these things aesthetically, but also about how people working in a corporate environment individuate themselves. What makes them the same? What makes them different?

"I am still thinking through ideas of repetition, uniqueness and originality," the artist says. "I'm thinking about

these things aesthetically, but I'm also thinking about them within a social context; in the idea of people being thought of as original, people being unique, and people being different. I am thinking about people working in an office—office workers as worker bees and how we can individuate ourselves within corporate environments?"



◀ SCULPTOR

EMIL LUKAS

Fabric of an Upward Gaze

Aluminum

"Fabric of an Upward Gaze," on the 21st floor, is a series of aluminum tubes melded into a sculpture by Philadelphia-based Emil Lukas. It considers the movements of the viewer and the surrounding architecture of the Comcast Technology Center. The lens work shows that Lukas and Norman Foster share a fascination with architect and futurist Buckminster Fuller. Lukas said that he wants this piece to "present a new view of the city, with the viewer looking up through the sculpture as if it were a lens."

"There is a long history of perceiving the world around us through drawing and painting. For centuries, one-point perspective has been a powerful tool. This lens sculpture flips these ideas into their physical presence."



▲ MURALIST

BEN VOLTA

Synaptic Garden

Archival pigment print, acrylic on polytab; printed film on glass

Muralist Ben Volta was given one assignment by the design team: "We're thinking garden." He began by saying, "Okay, how can we grow a garden that is also in the mind? A sort of neuron garden?"

"So, in the design, we began by exploring how the dendrites of a neuron share a visual pathway with the natural growth of tree branches. We then generated our tree forms using a graphics program that allowed us to create thousands of branches using a computer algorithm. By adding bright colors and overlapping we found these abstractions to exist together, really be happy, and push us towards an image that references brain scans."

Volta explains, "We wanted not just to create a landscape of synaptic art but to explore how you grow intuition, how you grow innovation, and how you grow creative thought. Can an artwork make visible the process of seeding, taking root, sprouting, connecting and searching for creative sparks?"

FINE ARTIST ▾

PHILLIP ADAMS

The Parkway

Charcoal and acrylic

Fine artist Phillip Adams thought it would be playful to combine two aspects of landscapes that he's been doing in his work, but also incorporate some visual Philadelphia element for his piece, "The Parkway," on floor nine, a mural within the Comcast Technology Center loft.

He specifically uses Mark Di Suvero's "Iroquois" sculpture at the Association for Public Art. Then on the other side there is Robert Indiana's iconic "Love" sculpture. The movement throughout the space around this piece is kind of a seamless play between those two.

"It's charcoal, carbon," Adams explains of the piece's medium. With this, he wants it to show the tension between responsibility and the relationship between our environment and the things we decide to do.

"I wanted to engage the viewer in a panorama while walking around," he says. "So initially it was just thinking through kind of compositional foregrounds and engaging the viewer into that deep space and contrasting the surrounding atmosphere and space.

"Part of me is excited," he says. "Then again, maybe people won't 'get it,' or maybe they'll access it in a totally different way than I imagine. But I think on some scale, that's what art is."



▲ FINE ARTIST

JASON ANDREW TURNER

Monomyth

Hand-painted acrylic mural

Jason Andrew Turner considers his work "playful" and says he hopes viewers experience it with that in mind, thinking about how it can connect, and how they can move around the space.

Turner lived in Philadelphia for nine years and gives credit to the city because he sees it as embodying an anxiety, closeness and rigidity that inspired those original drawings.

He sees "Monomyth," his piece in the Comcast Technology Center, as a wayfinding device located on the sixth,

seventh and eighth floors, as something people live with and is useful rather than just acting as a decorative object. Each color's story is in a little box, and Turner thought of those shapes as different people, or different moments, individually. Altogether, they create a giant landscape that is always changing. You're never supposed to experience it the same way twice.

"There is one constant line that goes through the entire piece, and it connects each floor from top to bottom, left to right. It was just a way to not only move you around the space, but also connect those spaces, so that it becomes more apparent that it is one giant piece as opposed to three separate floors through three separate things.

"I want it to be playful," Turner continues. "It is easy for people to find their favorite spots and see how those colors relate to one another. It is really exciting for me."

▾ SCULPTOR

MARIANNE LOVINK

Grit City

Laser-cut powder-coated steel; vinyl on glass

For "Grit City," a sculpture created with metal panels and black power-coated finish, located on the 33rd, 34th and 35th floors of the Comcast Technology Center, Philadelphia-based Canadian artist Marianne Lovink wanted to look at the visually dynamic parts of Philadelphia city infrastructure.

She grabbed her camera and wandered around the city, looking for what makes Philadelphia tick and work. "The industrial infrastructure—its physical manifestations, have an intrinsic beauty," she explains.

"The variations of scale and complexity in the forms create a kind of visual puzzle," she says of the sculpture. "It just gives your brain the chance to pause and step back from your computer screen for a few moments and recharge."





◀ MURALIST

GLOSSBACK

Philly Collage XXIX, Philly Collage XXX and Philly Collage XXXI

Spray enamel

Philadelphia-based muralist Glossback was approached to create his work based on a style that he'd perfected in a South Philly garage.

He spray-painted a long list of Philly-centric wording and things that pertained to the area. He freehand spray-painted everything, writing "Philadelphia," and then "Rittenhouse."

"I'm super thrilled about it. I love it because it's a style that I have developed over time. It's not like I'm trying to replicate something else or do the same old skyline painting."

▼ ILLUSTRATORS + GRAPHIC DESIGNERS

GINA TRIPLETT & MATT CURTIUS

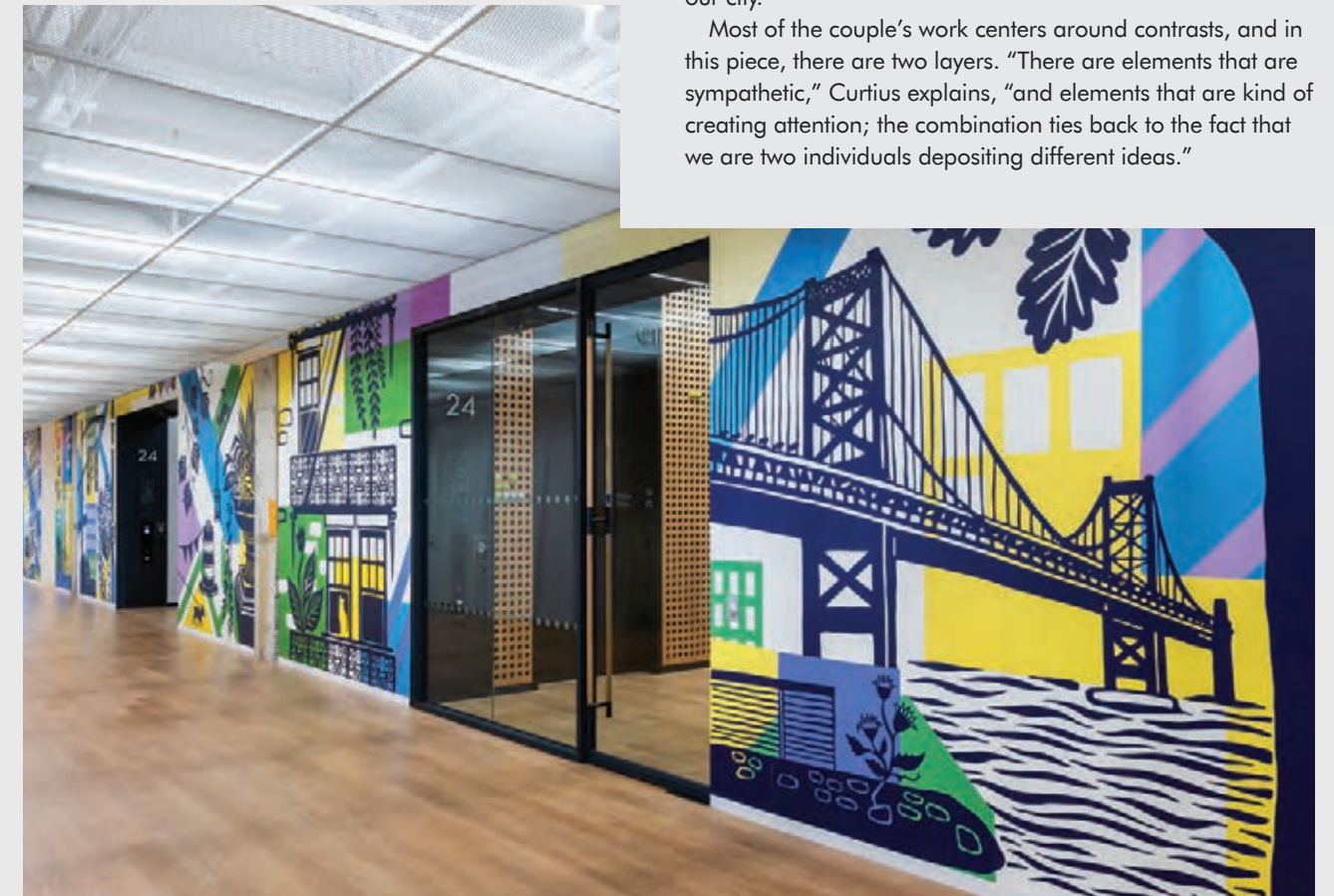
Urban City Park

Inkjet-printed mural designed from ink and digital drawings; printed film on glass; custom-cut and dye-infused carpet

When Gina and Matt were approached to create an original piece for the Comcast Technology Center, the wife-and-husband illustrators and graphic designers used photographs from their family bike rides around Philadelphia as inspiration for their mural, "Urban City Park," located on the 24th and 25th floors.

"We made a list of all of our favorite things about Philadelphia," Triplett says. Adds Curtius: "Gina's sketches were our starting point, and many were referenced by the fact that like a lot of Philadelphians, we like to enjoy the outdoor space of our city."

Most of the couple's work centers around contrasts, and in this piece, there are two layers. "There are elements that are sympathetic," Curtius explains, "and elements that are kind of creating attention; the combination ties back to the fact that we are two individuals depositing different ideas."





“Food for
thought.”

CHAPTER SIX

Jean-Georges
and Greg
Vernick



JEAN-GEORGES VONGERICHTEN

FOR HIS 16TH BIRTHDAY, Jean-Georges Vongerichten's parents took him to a 3-star Michelin restaurant in France. He was, how you say, *tres* hooked—for life.

Soon Jean-Georges would be collecting Michelin stars of his own and rave reviews as well. After opening an eponymous restaurant in New York City, Jean-Georges was awarded a four-star review from *The New York Times* and three more stars from Michelin. Vongerichten's *Vong*, in Hong Kong's Mandarin Oriental Hotel, was hailed as no less than "the Best Restaurant in the World" by the *Robb Report* in 1998.

Today, the distinguished chef commands restaurants in Paris, London, Shanghai, Tokyo, Las Vegas (where it's one of only eight restaurants in the United States to feature A-5 Grade Kobe Beef from Japan) and Sao Paulo,

among others. He is also the head chef of Eden Rock in St. Barths.

And now, Jean-Georges comes to Philadelphia—at the Comcast Technology Center.

Born and raised in Alsace in 1957, Jean-Georges Vongerichten is as French as they come. He studied at Culinary School in Perpignan, France, then worked as an apprentice to master chefs in hotels throughout the world.

Jean-Georges lives in New York City with his wife, model and actress Marja Dominique Allen, where he also runs his own foundation, Food Dreams. He has two children who have followed him in the family business: Cedric, the executive chef of Perry Street in New York City; and Louise, who recently opened a restaurant called Chefs Club in New York.



GREG VERNICK

GREG VERNICK UNDERSTANDS the world of food. He is a local boy who's made very good. Born in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, into a food-fancying family, his mother ran Haddonfield Diet Shop in New Jersey, and his grandfather owned Philadelphia's Friedman's Market, a butcher shop and market inherited from Vernick's great-grandfather.

With the support of his food-happy clan, Vernick earned a degree in hospitality management from Boston University and a culinary degree from the Culinary Institute of America.

His mentors have included, most prominently, the French-born chef Jean-Georges Vongerichten. "I always tell people, to this day, that if I didn't have my own shop, I would still work for him," Vernick says of Jean-Georges. "And if you know the man, you know how many people stay with him. They don't leave, and there's a reason for that—he's just that guy."

Vernick, a James Beard Award winner, opened his Vernick Food & Drink in 2012 with wife, Julie, by his side. The menu

highlights lighter fare to encourage customers to order more dishes and share more with fellow diners.

With his new restaurant, Vernick Fish—designed by the world-famous Adam Tihany—Vernick says he felt there was "room to play," when it came to having a comfortable full-service seafood restaurant as part of Philadelphia's dining scene. And the mentor/mentee dynamic is being revived; Vernick Fish occupies the ground floor of the new Four Seasons Hotel, while Jean-Georges's new fine-dining destination inhabits the 60th floor.

While Jean-Georges may be Vernick's mentor, his wife, Julie, serves as his lead advisor. "I can't make decisions without her," Vernick says. "I don't trust myself to make a decision on my own. I treat it less like a question to her, and more like, 'Let's have a conversation, and I'll get her feedback on that now.'

"I don't deserve her. Julie is smarter than me; I know that, and she knows it. There's a combination of love and partnership."

In 2005, Jean-Georges Vongerichten hired Greg Vernick, a bright young line cook, for his restaurant Perry Street in New York's West Village, and the two soon became mentor and protégé.

FIVE YEARS LATER, VERNICK—by then a chef trainer—left the JG Team to concentrate on his own narrative, while genial Jean-Georges continued collecting awards, seven James Beards for himself and many a sought-after Michelin star for his restaurants. Vernick became a culinary superstar in Philadelphia and captured his own James Beard for Vernick Food and Drink, his hugely popular hot and cool hangout on Walnut Street.

Now, more than a decade after their first encounter, Jean-Georges and Vernick have pooled their culinary acumen in the Comcast Technology Center, operating a total of four different restaurants within the acclaimed new building: Jean-Georges Philadelphia fine dining, JG SkyHigh, Vernick Fish and Vernick Coffee Bar.

For Jean-Georges, the invitation to become part of the Comcast Technology Center was one he “couldn’t refuse,” especially once he’d seen Norman Foster’s design with its 40-foot-high glass walls and mirrored ceiling. “That room creates an ephemeral dining experience like no other—especially at night when the city lights up and the reflection in the ceiling showcases all that lies below,” Jean-Georges says. He was also drawn to Philadelphia because he considers it a “foodie city.”

These are the ingredients which have created the most extraordinary dining experience in Philadelphia. A sophisticated bar, JG SkyHigh is situated on the 60th floor. It overlooks the skyline and the fine dining at Jean-Georges Philadelphia, approached via a dramatic waterfall staircase.

When Jean-Georges decided to go ahead with the project, many elements were considered in the design process—interiors, menu and an electrifying ambiance. The design was kept simple and reflective so as not to distract from the above-ground spectacle, especially the city at night. “You don’t want to compete with views,” he remembers thinking.



JG Sky High

Jean-Georges’s 60th-floor lounge, premier cocktails, stunning vistas, casual JG cuisine

Jean-Georges Philadelphia

40-foot-high glass walls for panoramic views + mirrored ceiling

“This is all about people dining; the view is mainly what’s on the plate.” He considers the stylishness of the building, like the diversity of the clientele, to complement his menu, not wrestle with it.

“The building is so unique, you can’t compare it with anything,” he says. “I think it’s going to be a landmark. It’s already a landmark.”

Of course, for Jean-Georges, it all comes back to the food. And good food starts with impeccable product; that’s one of his mottos. “Virtually all of the produce, herbs, vegetables, food and of course, the fish, come from the East Coast,” he says, divulging a trade secret: “I only buy from small boats. You have the fish from the boats leaving in the morning at six. The small boat is back at 12, and the fish is in our kitchen that same afternoon. Other boats are out all day or for days at a time. Which fish would you rather eat?”

As for Vernick, the younger, budding star, he fondly remembers his time working within the Jean-Georges empire, as “a curriculum in seafood.” It was something he did not forget when curating a menu for his own ground-floor addition to the Comcast Technology Center—aptly-named Vernick Fish.

Vernick places his sophomore restaurant in the context of the city’s culinary traditions: “There’s plenty of that heavy kind of meat-and-potatoes cooking, which is what Philadelphia was and, to an extent, still is,” Vernick explains. “And everybody needs it, because that ‘comfort’ is important. It’s in our civic DNA.”



Vernick Fish
3,400-square-foot
space and
seats 200

**Vernick
Coffee Bar**
Take-away bakery and
barista counter along
with a full-service
40-seat café



“You are attracted to and familiar with the foods you grew up eating, admit it or not,” he says.

“But we wanted to go lighter—more citrusy, more brothy, less butter, less dairy, less cream,” Vernick offers. “We also realized early on that seafood is part of that. There’s a feeling you get when you’re up in Boston—you get your dozen oysters, you get your fried clams, you get your lobster roll,” Vernick says. “You know it’s fresh. I didn’t seem to be getting that feeling here in Philly. And I want it. There are great markets in Boston and New York and a decent one in D.C. We’re on the ocean, so we sort of realized, ‘We have something here.’”

And, of course, the menu reflects touches from Vernick’s early days with Jean-Georges, who showed him the ropes of cooking seafood. “It’s a very JG mindset,” Vernick reflects.

Counting the indoor and outdoor patio (870 square feet), as well as an expansive bar, Vernick Fish seats a hungry 200. The space, at 3,400 square feet, features a custom terrazzo floor along with blue, white and cream aquatic accents—all designed by acclaimed hospitality designer Adam Tihany.

With a markedly different vibe, Vernick Coffee Bar arose out of the desire of the Comcast team to offer a convivial dining concept as people entered the building—a meeting place or a rejuvenating pit stop. Customers can dine in the comforting nook and take in a front-seat view of the majestic winter garden.

A full breakfast and lunch service offers artful flavor combinations from all over the globe, with the breakfast menu including such savory items as roasted asparagus, poached egg, and bacon and brioche. As Craig LaBan wrote in his *Philadelphia Inquirer* review: “...it’s Vernick’s signature culinary approach, with cleverly polished riffs on deceptively simple ideas that elevates familiar dishes, from oatmeal (as a soufflé) to grilled romaine salad (gratinée), paninis, soups and elegant pastries to memorable.”

In the afternoon, the bar has a specific menu for deserts, and Ryan Schmitt, the coffee bar’s executive pastry chef, is always experimenting with delicious pastries. The carrot cake has already been declared a must taste.

If “life is a banquet,” as the famous fictional diva Auntie Mame used to say, the incomparable restaurants of the Comcast Technology Center make for ideal staging areas, in addition to serving as proof that one need hardly be satiated in order to be satisfied. On with the show. ■



ADAM TIHANY

Adam D. Tihany was born in Transylvania and has continued to lead an exotic and exceptional life ever since. Named one of the greatest American interior designers by *The New York Times* in 2001, Tihany is also credited with originating the title “restaurant designer,” so it can truly be said the job is his.

After a childhood spent in Jerusalem, Tihany studied architecture at the Politecnico di Milano in Italy. When the opportunity arose to move to the United States, he grabbed it, and in 1978 established his own multidisciplinary New York design firm. Three years later, he won acclaim with his design for La Coupole in New York and soon was being sought out by restaurant owners offering him the chance to design everything from the interiors and furniture of their restaurants to the Bernardaud tabletops and uniforms. In 1987, he became co-owner of Remi Restaurants with partner and executive chef Francesco Antonucci.

The thread that runs through Tihany’s career is his ded-

ication to the art of hospitality. He collaborated with such acclaimed culinary stars as Thomas Keller, Daniel Boulud, Jean-Georges Vongerichten, Charlie Palmer, Heston Blumenthal, Paul Bocuse and Pierre Gagnaire. Tihany has created several restaurants for Chef Thomas Keller, including Per Se and Bouchon, as well as the recently opened eatery known simply as The Grill on the ultra-luxury Seabourn ships. He worked extensively with the Maccioni family, collaborating on eight projects including Le Cirque 2000, Osteria del Circo and the contemporary Italian restaurant, Sirio. Chef Daniel Boulud and the designer have created three restaurants together, including Boulud’s flagship, Daniel, in New York City.

“I owned my own restaurant for 25 years,” Tihany says. “Very quickly you learn you can control only so much. I always pay respect to the customer. The customer is not always right, but he’s always the customer. They come to you because they

want to enjoy themselves and have a good time, and so we give the chef every opportunity to do what is almost impossible—to please everybody.”

That’s what Tihany set out to do for Greg Vernick and his new Vernick Fish restaurant at the Comcast Technology Center. “Greg wanted to create a modern take on the oyster bar,” Tihany recalls. “I spent a great deal of time talking with him about what he wanted to do, and who he wanted to become. Then we went back and forth about materials and did many sketches, because not everybody can look at a menu and smell or taste. The design is not something you can ignore.

“If someone comes into this restaurant and says, ‘Oh, this is like New York.’ Or, ‘Oh this is like London;’ it means ‘I have failed.’ I didn’t do a good job. We want to make sure that this place works great, but we also want to make sure that it says, ‘Philadelphia.’”

“This,” Tihany says emphatically, “is a local place.”



“I’ve never
seen this
before.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

A World-Class
Four Seasons
Hotel

Atop everything, there stands a grand hotel. A five-star hotel, no less. The hotel highest above street level in all of North America, no less. Philadelphia lacking a world-class Four Seasons Hotel? No more.

A HISTORIC AMERICAN METROPOLIS that is proud home to great sports, famous food, revered art and, of course, a polyglot population, Philadelphia has been long overdue for a hotel to match its other sterling appurtenances. Well, she's there now, that hotel, way way up there, third cloud from the left—occupying the top 12 floors of the Comcast Technology Center

A new Four Seasons Hotel—the jewel in the tower.

Glass-enclosed elevators zip you up 60 stories in less than a minute, its doors gliding open to present you to a magnificent aerial lobby. The hotel includes 219 artfully innovative guest rooms, 15,602 square feet of stellar event space, a 57th-floor luxury spa, salon, huge fitness center and mind-blowing infinity pool.

On the 60th floor, there's JG SkyHigh and on the 59th floor is Jean-Georges Philadelphia, the newest showpieces from one of the world's most masterful of master chefs, with views to make one's senses swirl. At ground level, one of the most acclaimed young chefs in the nation, Greg Vernick, has produced Vernick Fish, with a striking interior designed by the legendary Adam Tihany and already a hugely popular seafood restaurant.

Then there are in-room digital installations by former rocker and all-around Renaissance man Brian Eno, and glorious floral arrangements throughout by the legendary Jeff Leatham, of Four Seasons Paris and Beverly Hills fame.

Isadore Sharp, founder and chairman of Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, says, "Brian Roberts wants this new Philadelphia Four Seasons Hotel to be one of the best in the world, and we are committed to doing everything we can to make that a reality. The time and attention that he and the Comcast team devoted to this project have been amazing,





and he's doing all of it as a proud Philadelphian. I believe this hotel combined with the two Comcast buildings themselves will be to Philadelphia what Rockefeller Center has been to New York—an amazing, major destination that will endure the test of time.”

As President of the Four Seasons Worldwide Hotel Operations, Christian Clerc oversees the entire company. “The Comcast team loved the excellence they found in many of our hotels,” Clerc recalls, “and they really wanted to replicate that in Philadelphia and bring something to the city that it has never seen before.

“Philadelphia has turned the idea of a hotel on its head,” Clerc marvels. “You check-in on the 60th floor and see that double atrium Foster created that reflects the light, and the views are absolutely stunning. Then we whisk you down into

your room, and you see you're above all the buildings around you. There are incredible 360-degree views, which are very, very unique in an urban setting.”

Modern life operates in accelerating, unforgiving and demanding ways—so much so that finding a respite from its hurly-burly is more important and more difficult than ever. This philosophy has become the operating principle for the new Philadelphia Four Seasons Hotel.

Ben Shank, the general manager of the hotel, began his hospitality career in Philadelphia more than two decades ago. “When you're standing in a guest room within the comfortable, tranquil environment that we have created, the city down below is like an oasis,” he says. “It's a totally different perspective than when you're on the street, looking up, beholding this large glass building.

“When you're inside the hotel, with all of the luxury touchpoints waiting to be touched, there's this sense of calm that comes over you. You feel very much connected to the entire wondrous city. It's like nothing else anywhere.” The hustle and bustle, like the hurly and burly, seem to have melted away. Sixty stories make a great buffer zone, for one thing.

Adds founder Sharp: “From the moment you wake up in the morning, there's so much happening in our world today, a lot of it beyond our control. The ability to close oneself off from all of it, and to feel renewed despite seemingly exhausting circumstances, is our goal for customers from the moment they engage with us. And it's not just about beautiful physical surroundings, though that is always important to us. It's also about the way we treat our customers, always being available to them, but never in ways that are obtrusive.”

180 tons of birch wood

(163,000 kilograms)

used to create millwork feature in every guest room sourced from Fessenden Hall, a local, family-owned business

9,500 square feet

STONE USED IN
GUEST ROOM BATH VANITIES

— 39 SUITES —

Presidential Suite

2,137 SQUARE FEET



“You could pick that hotel up and put it down in the most critical of markets—London, Hong Kong, Paris, New York—and it would be instantly ‘the best hotel in town.’”

CHRISTIAN CLERC, PRESIDENT,
WORLDWIDE HOTEL OPERATIONS FOR
FOUR SEASONS HOTELS.

There was widespread interest throughout the Four Seasons Company—employees from properties around the world, eager to transplant themselves so they could be part of this ultimate “Philadelphia Story.” The senior team brought in the best staff from around the world as well as many people from Philadelphia. They merged the two together with pure clockwork excellence as the goal.

“We don’t ask you things like, ‘what qualifications do you have to do your job?’” Clerc notes. “We start instead with behavioral-based questions. We believe that we can teach most of the basic skills required for working in a hotel. There are a few of course—engineering, marketing, accounting, where you need a degree and you need to be especially good, but even with those, we start with wanting to know who you are. We’ll ask questions like, ‘Tell me the last time you did something special for someone, and how did that make you feel?’ You can’t make up an answer to a question like that. Either you care and you have a concrete example of something special that you once did, or many examples of many such things—or you have to make up a fake answer, and as you respond, you’re going to sound artificial or rehearsed, or not actual. Our first filter is: We want people who are authentic and passionate and who care about others and their well-being.”

The goal is, for the well-being of everyone who stays at the hotel: May every being leave here feeling very well, very well indeed.

No less. ■

Swim up to the window, and it's like you're swimming in the sky.



BRIAN ENO RENNAISSANCE MAN

BRIAN ENO is an English musician, composer, record producer and visual artist known as one of the principal innovators of ambient music and generative painting. He joined Roxy Music as synthesizer player in 1971, leaving two years later to record a number of solo albums, and coined the term “ambient music” to describe his new works. He has collaborated with David Bowie, David Byrne, Talking Heads, Devo, U2, Laurie Anderson, Coldplay and James Blake.

As a visual artist he has been exhibiting regularly since the late 1970s. His work is dedicated almost exclusively to the possibilities that the medium of light provides. In 2009, Eno was given the very rare invitation to exhibit on the iconic sails of the Sydney Opera House in Australia, achieved by using powerful projectors to throw the light across Circular Quay.

In 2017, his original sound-and-light composition “Light Music” debuted at the Paul Stolper Gallery in London’s Bloomsbury District. Eno received a Stephen Hawking medal for “contributions to popularizing science” in 2019.



When did you start using light as a creative medium?

BE: I started making these light pieces years ago, the first ones actually intended for hospitals and waiting rooms. I really didn’t want them just to be gallery objects, so the thought of them being useful in people’s lives was appealing to me.

Imagine going into a room with a painting on the wall—a painting made of light, actually—and realizing after a while that the picture is always changing, that the combinations of color are always different. That’s the idea, to make a new kind of painting, really.

How has your previous work led you to this?

BE: I originally studied painting, not music. And then eventually, like a lot of English arts students, I got into music and joined a band. But I realized that the kind of music I wanted to play was not actually available; there wasn’t anything like it around. I wanted to make very slow, still music. And I started thinking of what I was doing as sort of painting in sound, making something still, like a painting, rather than something that was narrative or directional like music normally is. I got into this position in the mid-70s of

making not only records, but this new kind music—this still, rather homogenous kind of linear music, and the idea was to create immersive music that you sort of spent time inside of. I was interested in trying to do that.

At the same time, I also hadn’t given up playing around with visual things. I was still making light pieces. I made my first light piece in 1967; it was very clumsy because technology was very clumsy then, but in the mid-70s, I started making those kinds of pieces again. And gradually I realized that I was trying to make in light what I was also making in music, so the two became closer and closer in many ways. Then, when I started installations in the late 70s, I was starting to have shows of these things. I always chose music and images or objects together and kind of enjoyed the overlap.

So is the goal to promote a sense of tranquility in a hotel room?

BE: I would love it if that happened. I mean, that might not always happen, people might just come in and say, ‘I’d like to watch the news on television instead of this picture,’ and that’s quite alright, but I would like to think that the feeling you sometimes have when you get into a hotel room after traveling is that you’re quite wired and a bit tired, and you just don’t want to put the television on because it’s all so



The entire hotel, including every room, is equipped with Comcast’s latest technology—from the fastest WiFi to the X1 voice remote and its limitless array of entertainment choices. It may well be the best technology available to any hotel guest anywhere in the world.

over-stimulating and so stressful. So you might want to have a beautiful picture on the wall that is very seductively and slowly changing; that could be lovely, I think.

I have a little bit of prior experience with this because I’ve found a few waiting rooms and departments in English hospitals, and I know that you can change people’s sense of tension by what you’re showing. In fact, hospitals were starting to realize that having television playing in the rooms was a bad idea; it made people more stressed. So, they are very happy to have slower, quieter things to watch.

And what is it that you want people to come away with after spending some time with your work?

BE: One of the things I’ve noticed that happens is people relax into a different speed of being. I think that’s quite a good

contribution in an over-stimulating world, which is where we are at the moment.

How do you triage your own creative life, given all that’s going on in the world, and why do you use your impressionistic mind to develop things like this?

BE: That’s always a difficult question, because there’s always a part of my mind that’s saying, ‘Why waste your time being an artist when the world is rushing toward the iceberg as quickly as possible?’ I sometimes feel like I’m the conductor on the deck of the Titanic, trying to decide which tune we’ll play next. There’s such a lot to deal with at the moment in the world. The only alibi I can give myself is that in order to personally stay sane, I have to keep making things. And if I’m sane, maybe I can make a positive difference to the rest of the world—but that’s probably a weak argument.



JEFF LEATHAM THE FOUR SEASONS FLORAL DESIGNER

BORN AND RAISED IN OGDEN, UTAH, Jeffrey “Jeff” Leatham began his career as a floral designer in 1995. But before that, Leatham moved to Europe for two years of modeling work in Paris and Milan, eventually being hired to arrange flowers first by the Four Seasons Hotel in Beverly Hills and then by the George V (Cinq) hotel in Paris.

Honing his craft and realizing that floral arrangements were to be his life’s work, Leatham began splitting his time between Paris and Los Angeles, and before long was designing arrangements for such globally famous celebrities as Oprah Winfrey, Tina Turner, the Kardashians, the Dalai Lama, Bill and Hillary Clinton, and Sofia Vergara—as well as floral designs for such prestigious fashion brands as Louis Vuitton, Bulgari, Burberry and Cartier. He also continued to create breakthrough floral arrangements for the Four Seasons Hotels.

In 2014, the Minister of Culture in France awarded Leatham the prestigious Chevalier de l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, the highest honor for artists who have made a significant contribution to French culture.

You’ve been a part of the Four Seasons world for more than two decades. How would you characterize the importance it has played in your career?

JL: Anything that has to do with Jeff Leatham has to do with Four Seasons. I am Four Seasons, and what we created together has really revolutionized the way people think about flowers and about floral designs in luxury hotels and restaurants. This is where I started, right there [pointing to a table], that table is where I touched a flower for the first time 24 years ago—with literally no experience. I just needed a job. I thought to myself, “they’re creating art with flowers,” and I loved it right from the start.

I definitely started in the right place. Flowers were and remain incredibly important to everything that happens here. Four years later, a woman named Leah Marshal went through here and said to me, “I’m representing this new property in Paris called the George Cinq. I’m here

because you guys have such a great reputation for flowers in your hotel, and we want to do the same.”

I was on an airplane two weeks later, got dropped off in front of the George Cinq in December 1999, and as a result, my life and entire existence of who I am changed. And that’s why I am the artist I am today.

So why Philadelphia?

JL: When Comcast came calling, I had a discussion with Christian [Clerc], and Christian said, “Flowers are going to be the soul of this hotel; they’re what’s going to make this hotel happen. The food will be fantastic, and the service will be out of this world, but the time to grab a client is at the very beginning, with something beautiful that simply floors them. We believe you can do this for Philadelphia.” I was immediately intrigued.

Honestly, I didn’t know much about Comcast. I sat down with Brian Roberts and the people at Comcast and I asked, “Tell me a little bit about yourselves.” And they were like, “Oh, we just purchased NBCUniversal,” and I was like “Huh?!?” [laughs]. How could I not know that?! It was so impressive. And there was one word that was used in that meeting that I still remember: freedom. They said, “We want to create something special, like what you have in Paris, because there’s nothing like that in America.” Which there isn’t—because what we have in Beverly Hills is super pretty, but we don’t have the technology

that Philly will have. And they ended by saying, “We want to give you the freedom to make that happen.” I was hooked.

When you walk into the building, you’re instantly blown away, and we’re going to tease guests with a lot of beauty as soon as they pull in. And then when the guests get off the elevator, it’s like going into the “Wizard of Oz.” You get off the elevator into this amazing wonderland of architecture and flowers. Drama is about innovation. It’s about doing things differently from what you’ve seen before.

I’ve heard you use the word “drama” many times in relation to your work. What is it about the narrative you create between drama and flowers?

JL: For me, drama is about the unforgettable. It’s about seeing something that you will never forget. The flowers in Philly will be art. We are creating art. Or you can look at me as a fashion designer. I look at the body, which is the space, and then I start to dress it with my flowers. I decide how it’s going to look and how it’s going to be taken in.

Philadelphia has great museums, great history, great art and great restaurants, but I believe this hotel is going to enable people to rediscover Philadelphia in incredible ways. I want this city to explode with excitement, and since the hotel has opened, I can tell that’s already happening.



“At our hotel in Paris, we have people coming in from the street every week to see Jeff’s new arrangements,” says Christian Clerc.



When construction began on the first Comcast Center in 2005, it was just four years after we had acquired AT&T’s broadband business, tripling us in size. We needed a building that would enable our employees to collaborate easily, and one that would unify our company’s culture.

NOW, WITH THE ARRIVAL of the Comcast Technology Center, we embark on a new agenda that will accelerate our technological future, celebrate innovation, and attract the finest, smartest and boldest thinkers to Philadelphia. This region has been Comcast’s home since the company’s founding, and our employees enjoy a rare, deep connection.

To create this new epicenter and help us dream even bigger, we searched globally for an architectural visionary who would surprise and inspire us. Lord Norman Foster has spent his career pushing limits and inventing new ways for buildings to interact with their communities. His work around the globe is iconic; every project is distinctive and significant—and that is exactly what he has done for us. Together with his brilliant partners, Nigel Dancy and Russell Hales, and their colleagues, Norman listened intently to our goals and dreams, transforming them into reality. He made a building that reflects the very best of two unique and forever interlinked histories—those of Philadelphia and Comcast. We will always be grateful.

I am also enormously appreciative of our Comcast and Liberty Property teams (particularly Karen and John) and to the other incredible construction and design individuals who delivered on all counts. Collectively, they have exceeded all expectations.

My father, Ralph, founded Comcast in 1963, little knowing where it would all lead. When we showed him plans for the new Technology Center, he was excited to have a glimpse into this next chapter of our journey.

Ralph had a wonderfully heartfelt way of expressing his grateful admiration of employees. He said it well in 2012: “With technology, we’re able to do things today that no one dreamed about years ago, but nothing can be accomplished unless you have the right people to do it. And fortunately, the right people have always gravitated to Comcast.”

I am exceptionally proud of our employees—all 200,000 around the world—for the innumerable ways they have made our company, and continue to make it, a remarkable place to work ... to dream ... and to make a difference. ■

Contributors

4901 Grays Ave. Corp | A.P. Construction, Inc. | A.T. Chadwick Company | ADS | Advanced Drainage | Advanced Glass | Air Distribution Systems | Alelier Ten USA, Inc | Alexander Perry | Alianza | Allied Universal | Allsteel | AMAG | American Anchor, Inc. | American Stair Corp. | Amuneal (Greg Goldman) | Andreu World | Anthony Biddle Contractors, Inc. | AON | Applewood Painting | Art Installation | Artemide | Arthur Jackson Company | Artisan Display | Astrid Bowlby | Atelierten | Auerbach Pollock Friedlander | B. Pietrini & Sons | Bala Engineers | Barbizon TH Controls and Supplemental Systems | Barclay Water Treatment | BDDW (Jon Thorson) | Beachley Furniture | Belden | Belfi Bros. & Co. | Ben Volta | Berlin Metal & Glass | Bernhardt | BFW | Birdstudio | Bittenbender Construction | Black Walnut | Bluestone Communications | Brace and Bit (Blair Buchanan) | BrandSafway Services LLC | Bristol Industrial | Brooksource | Budget Maintenance and Concrete Flooring | Burns Mechanical | Caesarstone | Cahill Controls | Canteen | Capitol Woodwork | Carrigan Electric | Central Metals | Cerami | Certified Installation Services | CFI of New Jersey | Chadwick Service Company | CHBRIGGS | Chesco Coring and Cutting, Inc. | Chief | Christie | Cini Little | Cisco | City Cleaning Company | City Sign Service, Inc. | ClearComm | Colonial Electric Supply Co. | Commercial Flooring | Condeco | Cook Drilling Corporation | Cooper Electric Supply Company | Cornell | CPB, Inc. | Crescent Iron Works | Crestron | Crown Castle | Crystal Steel Fabricators | CZ Woodworking (Chris Zumpano) | D.M. Sabia & Co., Inc. | D'Angelo | Dale Construction, LLC | Dalet | Daltille | D'Angelo Bros | Daroff Design Inc + DDI Architects, PC | Datesweiser | Davis | Deck Stool (Jason Podlaski) | Dennis Beach | Design Within Reach | Designform Furnishings | Diversified | DM Sabia | Dolby | Donovan Balancing | Dougherty Electric | DVL Group | E.W. Cox, USA | Eagle Industrial Electric | Eaton | EDA Contractors, Inc. | Elohim Inc | Emeco | Emil Lukas | Emilie Ledieu | Enclos | Entuitive Corp. | Ergonomic Group | Ernel Martinez | ETS - Lindgren | Eureka Metal & Glass Services | EvensonBest | EW Cox USA, Inc. | Flexmirror USA | FLIK | FM Global | Focal Point Project Management | FontanaArte Corp | Foster + Partners | Fromkin Brothers, Inc. | Fuse Hardwood | Garden State Tile | Genesis Architectural Metal and Glass | Genetec | Gensler | George Young | GGI | Gina Triplett / Matt Curtius | Glossblack (James McMenamin) | Grass Valley | Green Eco Walls | Groundwork (Ernie Sesskin) | Guthrie Glass & Mirror | Halton Co. | Hatzel and Buehler Inc | Haworth | Heartwood Building Group | Herman Miller | Hi Tech Data Floors | High Street Design (Robert Ogden) | Hispanic Ventures Interior Painting & Wall Covering | HMA | Hoffman & Associates | Hoodz | Hope's Windows Inc. | Imagine Communications | Independence Electric | Independent Contract Flooring, LLC | Intenna | Isaiah Zagar | J.W. Carrigan LLC | Jafco Industries, LLC | Jamie Alvarez | Janus et Cie | Jason Andrew Turner | JEFECO Manufacturing, Inc. | Jeffrey Greene | Jenkintown Building Services, Inc. | Jupiter Painting Contracting Company, Inc. | Kalisher | Karen Tropea | Kay and Sons, LLC | Kelly Maiello Associates | Kendall Heaton Architects (KHA) | Kent Design | Knoll | La Colombe | Lan-Connect | Lawo | Ledra Brands Inc. | Legere Group, LTD | Lerch Bates Consultants | Leslie Freidman | LF Driscoll | Liberty Flooring | Liberty Property Trust | Lighting Design Group | Linecom Inc. | Look Walls | Lutron | M. Gitlin | M. Schnoll and Sons | Macro Consultants | Majid Bonakdarpour | Marianne Lovink | Mario Industries | Martino Signs | Material Distributors | McGregor Industries, Inc. | Mecho Shade | Med-Tex Services, Inc. | Merion Pump | Metropolitan Hardwood Floors | MIO (MIOOIM LLC.) (Jaime & Isaac Salm) | Miriam Singer | Mobile Medical | Modernfold | Mortensen Woodworking | Mountain Lumber | Nate Harris | National Glass & Metal Co. | Nature Maker | Next Fab | Northeast Exterminators | Northeastern Pest Control | Odili Donald Odita | Olin | Optum | P & S Electric LLC | PA Flooring | Parker Plants | Pennoni Associates | Pentimenti Gallery (Mark Khaisman) | Pepperdash | Philadelphia Carpentry Systems, LP | Philadelphia D&M | Phillip Adams | PK Spectrum Workplace | Pomerantz | Precision Door Company, Inc. | Precision Stone, Inc. | Preferred Utilities | Premier Window | Primera | Printfresh (Christiane Moore) | Pure + Freeform | Quest | Rabinowitz | Ray Angelini Electric | Re: Source New Jersey, Inc. | Ritter Contracting | Roman Mosaic and Tile Company | Ross | Rottet | RTS Solutionz | S.A.Comunale Co. | SACO | Safeway Scaffold | Sandler Seating | Schindler Elevator | Schneider Electric Buildings Americas | Scholes Electric Communications Corporation | Sean's Landscaping Inc. | SecureUSA, Inc. | Shaeffer Electric | Shira Walinsky | Show Canada Industries | Siemens | Singer Equipment Company | Sistemalux | Solotech-Sphere | Sparks | Springhouse (Adam and Nicole Karr) | SS Gill Flooring | SSI | SSM Industries, Inc. | stadler-Kahn (Alex Stadler) | Stainless Supply | Steelfab | Stenton Corporation | Stewart | Surface Specialist LLC | T&N Van Service | TAIT | Talson Solutions | Teletream | The Asset Group | The Heads of State (Joanna Leigh Simon) | The Petrini Corp | Think Logical | Thomas Company | Thomas Moser | Thomas Roofing | Thomas United | Thornton Thomasetti | Tillotson Design Associates | Transwall Office Systems | Tru-Fit | Twelve 26 (Paul Lichtenstein) | Two Twelve | TygaBox | Uhuru (Kate Ferguson) | Unified Door and Hardware Group LLC | Urban Engineers | Urban Sign & Crane, Inc. | Vick Art Advisors | Video Visions | Vincent Pools, Inc. | Virgil Marti | Wake the Tree (Anthony) | Watson Group | Watson Painting | Wayne Moving and Storage | Whitlock | Wm. A.J. Shaeffer's Sons | Wm. J. Donovan Co. | Won Door Corp | WSI | WSP (formerly YR&G) | Wurz Sign Systems | Wyatt Incorporated

PHOTO CREDITS: Photos by Mike Abrahams, courtesy of the Paul Stolper Gallery (p. 82) | Joy Asico (p. 34, 48-49) | Chuck Choi (p. 28-29, 50-51, 53, 54, 59, 61, 62-63) | courtesy of Marc Fischer (p. 44, inset) | Foster + Partners (p. 14) | Jeff Fusco (p. 20-21, 25, 37, 38-39, 71) | Allison Graul (p. 68, top) | Christian Horan (p. 64-65, 72-81, 84-85) | Joseph Kaczmarek (cover, inside cover, p. 3, 5, 6, 10-11, 13, 16-19, 26, 32-33, 35, 38-39, 40-41, 43, 46-47, 55, 56-57, 58, 60, 61 center, 86, inside back cover, back cover) | Peter Murphy (p. 70 bottom) | Jonathan Pushnik (p. 66-67, 69, 70 top, 83) | Conrad Shawcross Studio (p. 24) | Andrew Supnet (p. 68, bottom) | Jeff Totoro (p. 44-45) | Sarah Zwerling (p. 31) | Ben Volta (p. 59, inset) | Rendering by Gensler (p. 22-23) | Sarah Zwerling (p. 30-31) | Sketch courtesy of Foster + Partners (p. 8-9) | Emil Lukas (p. 59).

To the thousands of individuals who dedicated themselves to making the Comcast Technology Center a reality—our deepest gratitude and respect.

Your efforts will forever shape the destiny of our company.

COMCAST CORPORATION





1800 ARCH STREET | PHILADELPHIA, PA

COMCASTCENTERCAMPUS.COM

This book was produced in partnership with *Philadelphia* magazine's City/Studio.