



Windows On The World Restaurant

1976: The Windows on the World restaurant, designed by Warren Platner, opens and becomes one of the highest-grossing restaurants in the world

"WWR" became known, in a very short time, as a great restaurant. The food was superb.

The views from the entire 107th floor of the north tower of the World Trade Center were breathtaking.

It was a very popular private club, and it was easier to get a ticket to Chorus Line than a dinner reservation.

A major part of this unprecedented success went to Warren Platner Associates Architects for the extraordinarily beautiful design

Each square inch of the one-acre space received the most careful design attention-in the creation of scores of very special places, and in the execution of the rich and varied and elegant detail.

Windows on the World was masterfully modernist

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From the moment a party arrives at Windows, the people are treated to a visual feast that in its way is as breathtaking as the view of the harbor and city spread out below. After an elevator trip that covers the 1300-foot vertical lift in 58 seconds, diners are received in a golden reception room (shown later), then enter a crystalline gallery (previous page) in which photo-murals of New York and great pieces of semi-precious stone from around the world are reflected and re-reflected from glass arches and mirrors on the walls, floor, and ceiling.

In this space, images are so kaleidoscopic that for some the walk is like a trip through space; for others, a walk across a bridge defined only by the golden carpet. The gallery gradually widens, lighted at the far end by a luminous mass of color—which proves to be (when you arrive there) light from windows shining through the bottles stacked in the back bar. From there, is but a few steps down to tables along “The Windows” (photos above). As the plan overleaf will show, virtually all of the perimeter space is given over to table space; and, conversely, no one dines without a view.



The banquet rooms, with seating for as few as six to eight or as many as 150 stretch along all of the west wall overlooking, the Hudson River, and extend around the corners into the south and north wall.

Those to be seated in the grill or the main dining room have a longer walk—and Platner’s plan not only makes that walk an experience in itself but minimizes any distraction or sense of bustle for those already at their place.

Visitors walk through the beautiful glass gallery. Those to be seated in the bar or grill turn right at the end of the gallery, then move down banks of steps to the various terraced levels of that space at the southeast corner of the building.

Those moving to the main dining room move left at the end of the gallery. Since it is, from that point, still a considerable walk to the dining room,

That stretch of “window walk” creates the only interior dining space - the Cellar in the Sky - and it received a very special treatment of its own

Its entrance is announced with a flourish of brass handrails, which continues onto the gold leaf of the glass doors.

Within, deeply arched ceilings frame glass walls, and those walls are lined with the supply of banquet wine in geometric wire racks. The “walls” of bottles offer glimpses of the spaces outside; and give the room an extraordinary light, supplemented by lighting designed to give the dappled effect visible in the photos.

Another “special place” is the Belvedere - an elegant room, which can be used for private parties, opened to the banquet space (beyond the iris painting), or opened to the main dining room via the glass doors in the foreground.

The special detailing includes the deeply sculptured ceiling, very private alcoves at the four corners, a general gold tone throughout that works well with the strong flat north light, and is accented by the gold leaf pattern on both sides of the entry door and the columns covered with gold-glazed and deeply arched ceramic tile.





Hilton International named Joe Baum president of Inhilco.

With the backing of the Port Authority, over \$17 million was spent developing Windows on the World into 5 distinctive areas.

The Restaurant (which seated nearly 300 guests); **The City Lights Bar**; **Hors D'Oeuvre**, (serving everything except the main course) **The Cellar in the Sky**, a glass-enclosed working wine cellar which seated just 36 guests and served a seven-course, five-wine, one-seating dinner; and **Six private banquet rooms** capable of seating over 300 people.

Joe Baum was a master hospitality contractor. He hired the best culinary talent available. He asked James Beard and Jacques Pépin to help develop the menus, Warren Platner to design the restaurant, Milton Glaser to design all the graphics, and Barbara Kafka to select everything from glassware to table settings. Joe also hired top restaurant managers, including his partner in other great New York restaurants, Alan Lewis, and a staff that would do anything Baum requested.

In 1976, no one went downtown after 6 p.m. Rooftop restaurants were not considered quality operations.

But that is only the beginning step in Platner's design concept of making each table - as nearly as possible - the best seat in the house.

"People who went to Windows on the World expected a special occasion; they expect a special place."

Platner's skill in creating that "special place" - for each of 1000 diners - is evident in all of the photos but perhaps best expressed in the photos above of the main dining room, which seats between 300 and 350.

The principle involved was a simple one: he created relatively small intimate spaces amidst what is, in fact, a very large area by changes in level and by enclosures that say "this space is special."

To begin with, the main dining room - the largest open space - was divided into three spaces because it was positioned at the corner sharing the best night-time views uptown to the towers of New York and to the east, overlooking the East River bridges and the ships on the river way below

Throughout the spaces, further division was created by many changes of level.

To give everyone a view, the tables were terraced up in steps away from the windows; and there were even changes of level within the terraces. (The given ceiling height is 3.6 mtrs)

Finally, as the photos show, there was a rich variety of dividing enclosures separating the tables, all in fine materials and carefully detailed.

Typical of the thought given by Platner to make each seat that "best in the house": the narrow strip of mirror set into the back of each banquette gave every diner not facing a window an eyelevel glimpse of the view, and also catches some of the light and glitter and movement in the room-reinforcing the luminous quality of the space and multiplying the images

For all of the richness in detail and finishes, in plan Windows on the World is as carefully and functionally organized as an industrial plant.

Upon arrival at the reception area, visitors, who are typically anxious to see the view, can take a moment to step up into the Statue of Liberty Lounge which offers a spectacular panorama of New York Harbor.

By raising the lounge close to the ceiling, Platner not only created a particularly mind-boggling downward view, but gave the small lounge a great sense of importance, created a strong vertical separation between lounge and the south dining room some eight steps below and (more mundanely) created space beneath the lounge for a small dishwashing room which serves the separate grill kitchen.

Having had their first glimpse, visitors then move to their tables. Those attending a banquet move through a short hallway to the West Parlor (photo next page). The Parlor, one of only two perimeter areas not given over to tables, serves as a reception area for the bank of banquet rooms, seating nearly 400 in total.



Careful detailing everywhere:

At left, the West Parlor, which serves as a reception room for the banquet area.

As everywhere, every element in the room from the rug to the lighting fixture was designed by the architect.



Other evidence of Platner's effort to make everything "special":

The photo at left shows the sculptured table which serves as a reception desk at noontime when the restaurant as a club; and simply as a decoration at night. It is backed by a goldleafed wall, on which are gold globes strongly top-lighted.

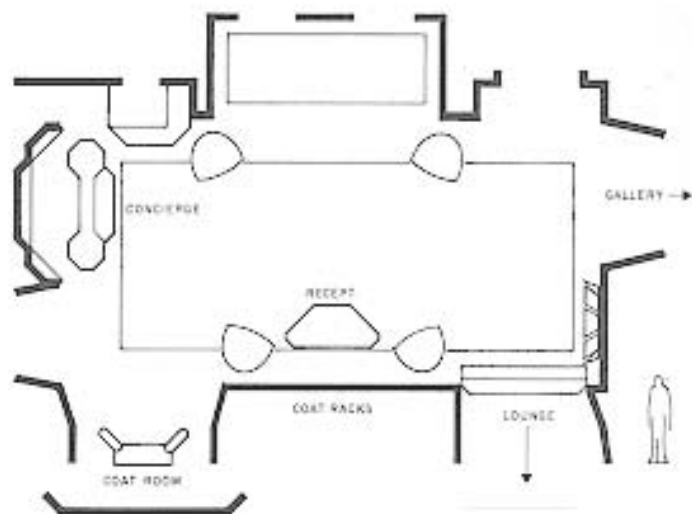
The pointillist pattern established here is repeated everywhere through the restaurant—in the carpet, in tile tufting of much of the upholstery, in wool and silk tassels applied to the fabric in the dining alcoves.

This consistent decorative element enriches all of the spaces without distracting from the essential architectural forms.



A sense of "special occasion, special place" created at Windows on the World is because everything received careful design attention.

And it did. For example, the iris painting covers what, in fact, are quite handsome doors to the banquet rooms; but because it is a painting of flowers - symbol of hospitality - it creates a background for an elegant dining room; whereas doors, visible at both ends of the room would have suggested that it was a passageway.





Another strong element: the pattern of the window wall at the Trade Center is of course pervasive - in a pattern of 27 inches of glass to 13 inches of solid wall. In such large spaces, this pattern read, to Platner's eye, "like a picket fence," and so, at each column, he placed an ivory plastic-laminate half-tube, "creating the effect of an open colonnade without windows."

In the bar Platner created another private world, set back from the windows but raised so that everyone shares the view.

Platner also designed the observation deck atop the south tower of the World Trade Center. It is a very different design for a very different purpose - but the same design attention and skill is evident.

In this space - designed to handle 3 million visitors a year who arrive in 55-passenger elevators the size of a boxcar—the finishes are tough and durable: the floor is heavy, and heavily embossed, rubber mat; the ceiling — in a move to "put the money where it counts" is left exposed, and the seating is all fashioned from nylon-coated steel tube and expanded steel mesh.

The perimeter space is treated here as "a street in the sky"—and ingeniously designed to avoid conflict between the crowds who want to stop and look at the view, and the crowds who want to move on.

As shown in the photo above, Platner raised the circulation space two feet above the slab, but right at the windows left a strip with steps down and steel benches. Thus one group can sit at the windows and another can stand behind, out of the circulation pattern because of the shape of the rail. On the interior wall of "the street," is a strong and lively exhibition.

Architect and designer Warren Platner (1919-) was born in Baltimore and graduated from the Cornell University School of Architecture in 1941.

Between 1945 and 1950 he worked for Raymond Loewy and I.M. Pei. He was a part of Eero Saarinen's office from 1960-65, participating in the designs for the Dulles International Airport in Washington D.C., the Repertory Theater at Lincoln Center and several dormitories at Yale University. It was after this extensive exposure to many innovative modern designers of the period, and having gathered a great deal of experience, that Platner opened his own office, Platner Associates, in Connecticut in 1967.

In the 1960s, working with the aid of a grant from the Graham Foundation and with the Knoll production team, Platner developed what is known as the Knoll "Platner Collection," his major furniture contribution to the mid-century landscape.

For this series of chairs, ottomans and tables, Platner designed both the structure and the production method. Production was complicated because the sculptural bases were made of hundreds of rods and for some chairs required more than 1,000 welds.

An intricate cylindrical mesh steel base, creating a unique architectural play between the interior and exterior space, supported the upholstered seat. Compared, by the Knoll catalogue, to a sheaf of wheat, their shiny nickel finish alluded more to the technological innovations used to create their elegant, distinctly modern appearance.

In creating these pieces he wrote that, "as a designer, I felt there was room for the kind of decorative, gentle, graceful kind of design that appeared in period style like Louis XV."

He also outlined the definition of a "classic" as being, "something that every time you look at it, you accept it as it is and you see no way of improving it," a quality that has often been applied to this series of furniture.

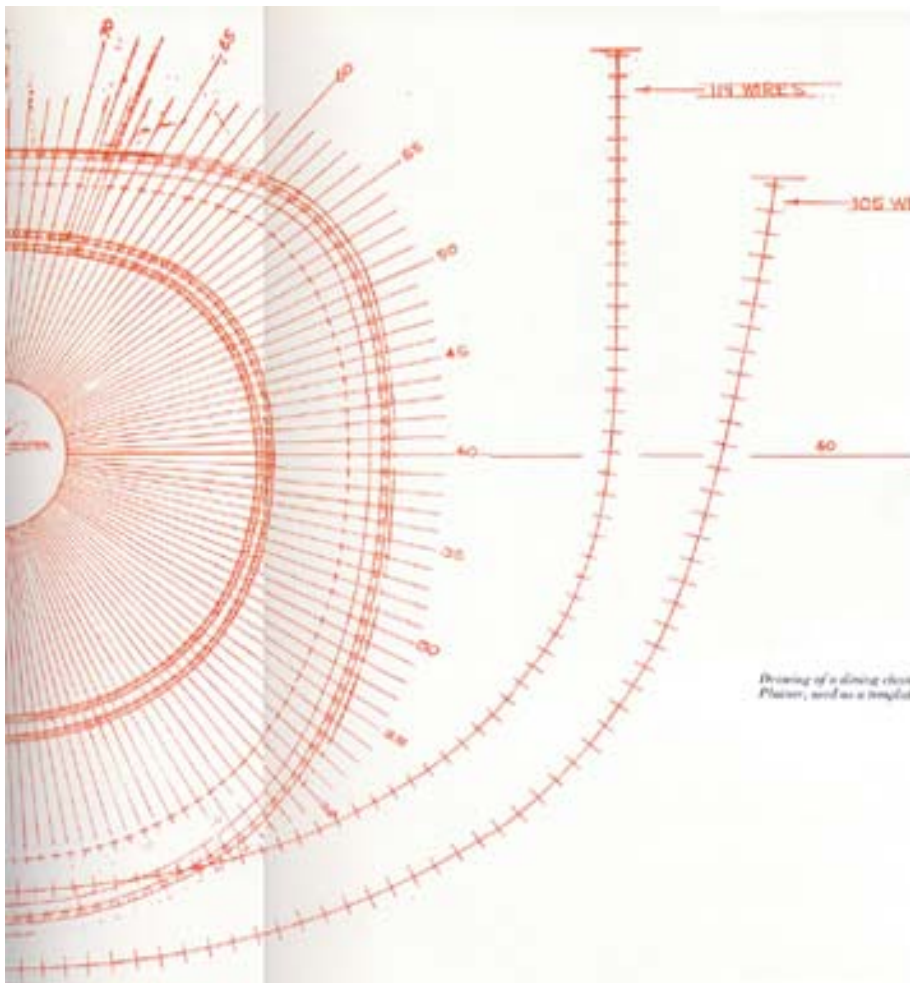
Platner designed other office furniture and was also involved in a number of large architecture and interior design commissions in which he was often responsible for details down to the dishes and textiles, in addition to the furniture and textiles.

Some of his major works were the interiors and lighting for the Windows on the World Restaurant in the World Trade Center, the Georg Jensen Design Center and WaterTower Place in Chicago.

Platner is perhaps most famous amongst the general public for the sumptuous original Windows on the World restaurant, completed in 1976 and located on the 107th floor of the north tower of New York's World Trade Centre.

Yet in design terms he is equally well known for the 1960s "Platner Collection" of furniture by Knoll.

For a 1960s Knoll Platner stool, currently for sale at in excess of \$ 5,000, the modern catalogue notes, "In the 1960s, Warren Platner transformed steel wire into a sculptural furniture collection, thus creating a design icon of the modern era. The furniture's unique, harmonious forms are produced by welding curved vertical steel wire rods to circular frames, producing a moiré effect and capturing the decorative, gentle, graceful quality that Platner sought to achieve."



KnollStudio

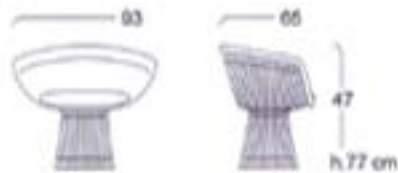
Platner Collection



Side Chair and Stool



Lounge Chair



Dining, Coffee and Side Tables

