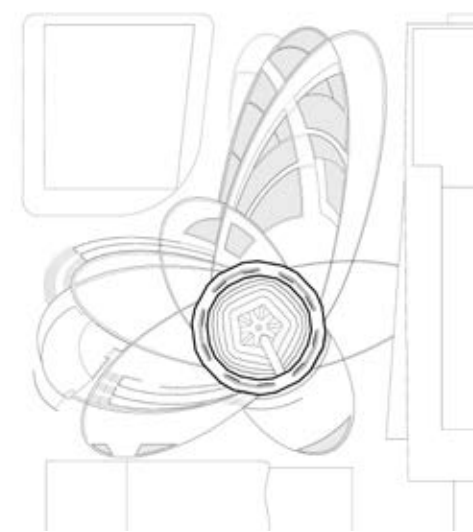
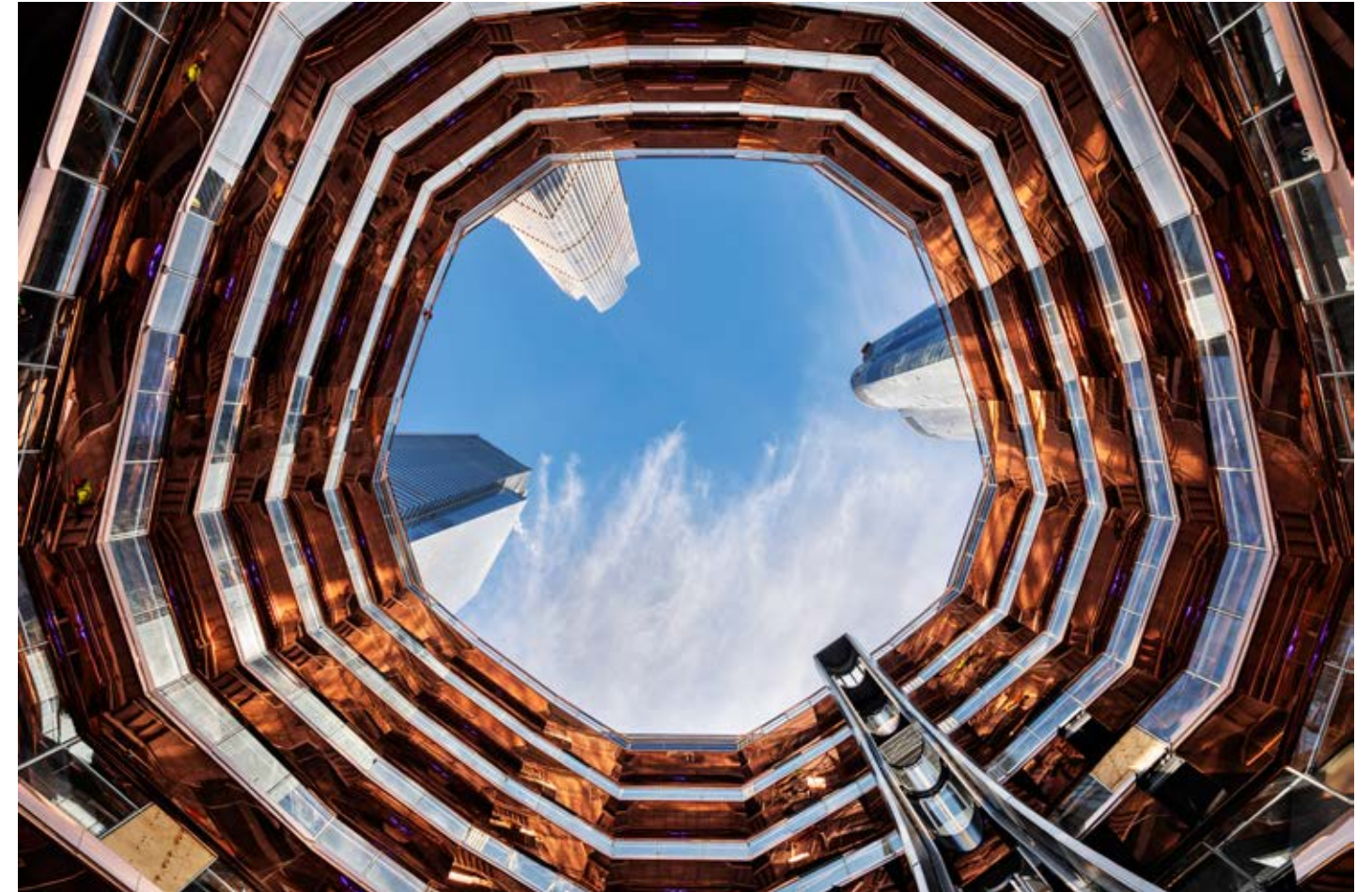


Project by **HEATHERWICK STUDIO**

View of Hudson Yards, which will include 1,700,000 square meters of residential and commercial spaces, skyscrapers with 4000 residences, 100 shops, restaurants, a school, a hotel, the arts center The Shed (designed by Diller Scofidio + Renfro and Rockwell Group), the permanent exhibition Snark Park and an area of five hectares of outdoor spaces, all connected to the High Line. Photo courtesy of Michael Moran for Related Oxford

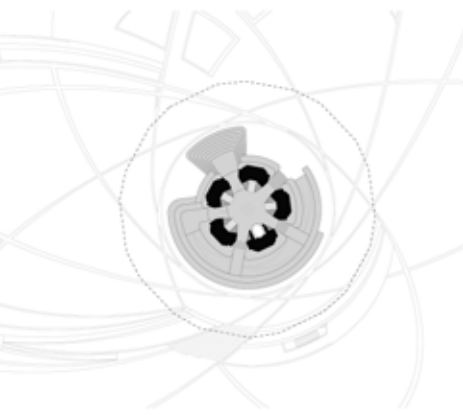
The Vessel represents a new type of landmark: with a height of 46 meters, the structure has 16 circular levels with 154 ramps and 2465 steps, for a total staircase length of more than 1.6 kilometers, 80 platforms and views of the Hudson. Photo courtesy of Michael Moran for Related Oxford. Below, a project sketch.



STAIRS & STRIPES

British designer **Thomas Heatherwick** in the center of **New York** with the **Vessel**, part of an extensive project, confirms his interest in **urban public spaces**

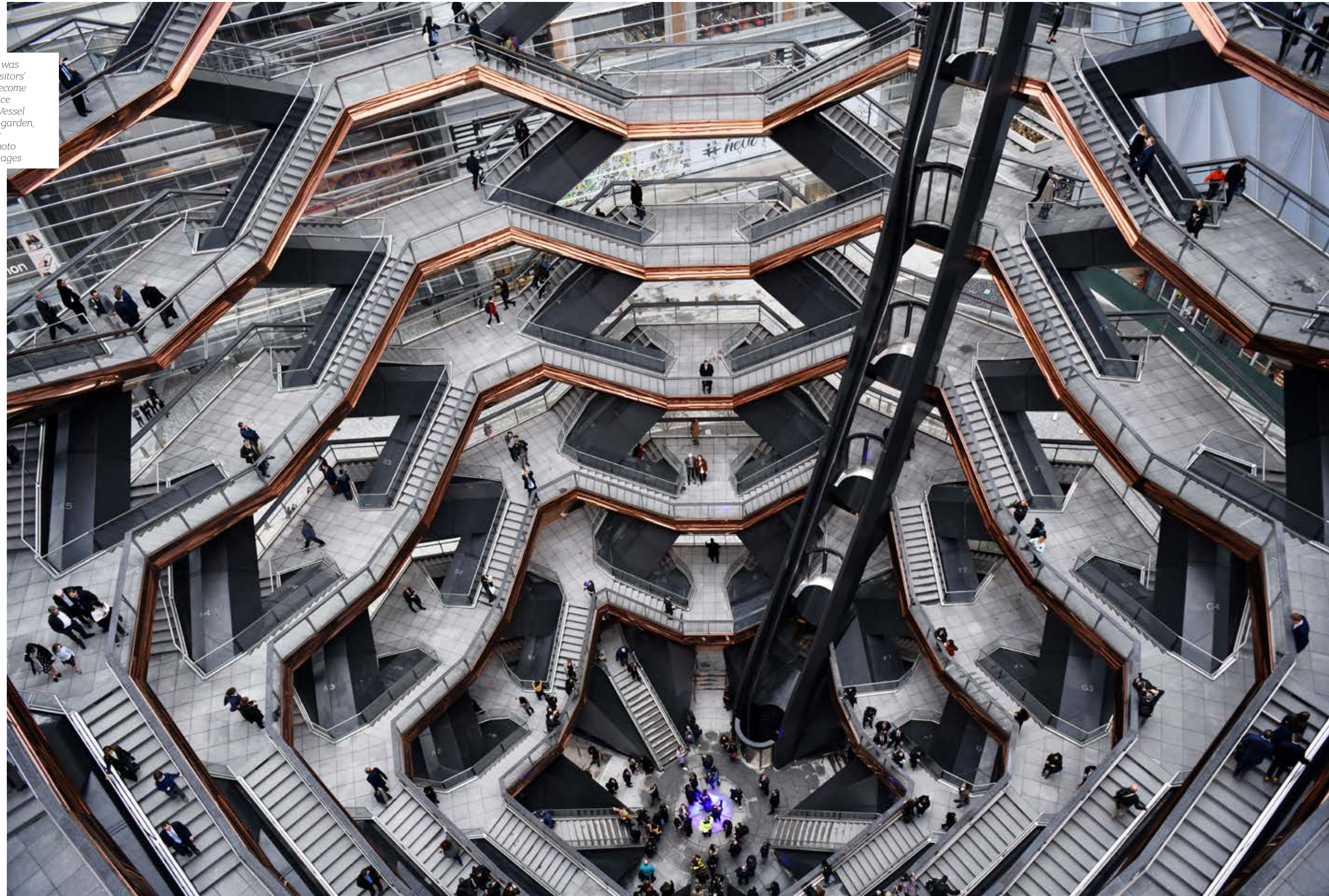
photos courtesy of Michael Moran for Related Oxford, courtesy of Getty Images article Massimo De Conti



Heatherwick Studio was asked to design a visitors' center that would become a new gathering place in Manhattan. The Vessel overlooks the plaza-garden, containing a variety of 28,000 plants. Photo courtesy of Getty Images

The stats of Hudson Yards, the biggest private real estate venture in the history of the United States, comparable only to Rockefeller Center in the 1930s, are extraordinary. The investment amounts to about 20 billion dollars, for a final overall area of about 11 hectares, transforming a former rail yard on the West Side of Manhattan into a completely new district between the river and Midtown. The Vessel, the provisional name of the structure designed by London-based Heatherwick Studio (a public competition will assign the definitive name this summer), is a sort of monumental amphitheater that rises at the center of this garden-plaza (landscape design by the firm Nelson Byrd Woltz), becoming a pivot point of the overall project. The construction of the Vessel speaks Italian, with components and materials all Made in Italy. At least 265 steps for the ascent (likewise to go back down) to the highest level, 46 meters above ground, depending on the route you choose to take, along a zigzag or circular path. There is something medieval about the experience of this new public space. Though it remains open – the surroundings and the city are constantly perceptible – it also conveys a sense of disorientation, a constant loss of direction, along a path that Heatherwick has awedly based on the intricate traditional *stepwells* of India, but also with similarities to the impossible perspectives of Escher or the allegory of the labyrinth: a maze, but also the philosophical puzzle of the library in *The Name of the Rose*. The overall Hudson Yards project has raised critical hackles in the press, but – a sign of the times – it is a huge hit on Instagram. A controversial undertaking that should be assessed in terms of American or at least strictly New York dynamics. After the whirl of the opening days, we talked about the project with the British designer.

Hudson Yards has met with mixed reactions in the press. While your Vessel is innovative in various ways, the overall project is quite conventional, with a very commercial outlook. What is your opinion?



The Vessel is Italian, to a great extent: the 75 steel members were made by the Friuli-based company **Cimolai**, transported by barge from Italy and up the Hudson River, and assembled on site over a period of three years. The copper-color stainless steel cladding was made by **Permasteelisa**

Photo courtesy of Getty Images



Photo courtesy of Michael Moran for Related Oxford

(another project by Heatherwick Studio for a platform-park on the Hudson. The English studio is also working on 515 West 18th Street, a residential complex in Chelsea with over 200 apartments in two towers at the sides of the High Line, *ed.*).

The Vessel has been compared to the Eiffel Tower, which was also a target for criticism at the outset, and then became the symbol of Paris. What is your view regarding the design of something in which function is only a secondary concern?

There was a job to do: to design a new center for the city. To make the best possible public space and to make it enter the imagination of people. To create an emotion as part of the function. To be simplistic, the Vessel can be used for fitness: you can take the steps to climb up the 16 levels, saving money on health clubs, which are quite expensive in New York. The place can be interpreted in various ways: a facility for exercise, a gathering place for New Yorkers, a piece of landscape, a climbing frame, but it is essentially a three-dimensional public space.

What personal importance has this project had for you?

Honestly, I do not see it as a mere sculpture. We proposed making something that was not just to look at, a place for people, who after the opening have finally been able to invade it and understand it from the inside, not just from the outside. A theatrical setting, a sort of amphitheater with 80 public zones along the ramps, a facility with a social value. The probability of being able to create a space of this type in such a competitive urban situation was minimal. I am actually impressed by the fact that we were able to do it, to have the support of the investors.

The Vessel is very Italian...

Definitely. The steel components were produced by the Cimolai company at Monfalcone (Gorizia) and then transported to New York from Italy, on barges that sailed up the Hudson; the copper-color stainless steel cladding (made with the physical vapor deposition process, *ed.*) was done by Permasteelisa.

How did you choose the copper color?

The beauty of copper is that over time it takes on a dark patina, which I like very much. It is unexpected in the context, because on this urban scale all the buildings are gray, gray-blue, gray-green. The Vessel thus becomes a sort of distinctive, idiosyncratic pivot around which the various parts of the Hudson Yards gravitate. ■

We had the opportunity to work with property developers who have enormous experience, who commissioned us to create something unconventional, that would make a clean break with the traditional approach to landscapes and parks. I cannot speak for the rest of the initiative, but we were impressed by the decision to take a pioneering approach to the design of public space. The work is different, as will be Pier 55