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Ten At Work: The Top Construction Firms of New York City



BY [LIAM LA GUERRE](#)

New York is a city that's experiencing a construction boom.

About \$39 billion was spent throughout the five boroughs in 2015 on construction projects—about a 10 percent increase from 2014 when the spending was clipped at \$35.4 billion, according to a recent New York Building Congress report. The organization also expects that to increase even more, to \$41 billion in 2016, and then \$40.8 billion in 2017.

And while construction companies are quieter about their achievements than, say, the developers who bathe in publicity and a good sound bite, construction management is a vital part of the real estate business.

The Building Congress estimated that on top of the money for construction projects, spending associated with construction, like for architectural, engineering and legal work, contributed another \$22 billion. That figure also

includes construction workers spending their wages on local products near sites, such as food, transportation and clothing.

So who are the top dogs of this critical business to New York real estate and how do you determine who they are? Commercial Observer consulted Dodge Data & Analytics, which accumulates data about the construction business, as a place to start. The names of the very biggest accounted for roughly \$50 billion worth of real estate projects around the city (after the top three, the dollars drop considerably). Our main criteria were that the company had to have projects in the city; an office in one of the five boroughs; contractors who work on private commercial developments (the names would be slightly different if we factored in contractors who did public works or transportation projects); and projects under construction or in the “start phase,” which is defined as work scheduled to begin within 60 days, according to Dodge.

These are the big 10.



1. Tishman Construction, an AECOM company (2)

Lead officers: Michael S. Burke, chairman and CEO; Jay Badame, president; and Daniel McQuade, group president of construction services

Project portfolio: 37 million square feet in New York City and 83.3 million square feet globally

Employees: 1,200 in New York City; AECOM has 14,000 employees globally

Valuation of projects in the Big Apple: \$15.52 billion

Global valuation: \$17.3 billion

If we are talking just about New York City, Tishman Construction is the big kahuna based on monetary value of projects that the 118-year-old company has in the pipeline.

It started as part of Tishman Realty & Construction, which sold the construction arm off to AECOM for \$245 million in 2010.

Here in New York City, Tishman is constructing what will be included in the city’s list of iconic towers.

Tishman was responsible for rebuilding the World Trade Center buildings, including the 1,776-foot-tall 1 World Trade Center for the Durst Organization and the Port Authority of New York & New Jersey, and is about to top out the 2.8-million-square-foot 3 World Trade Center for Silverstein Properties in July.

But that's just at the tip of the island. At Hudson Yards, Tishman is constructing the 2.6-million-square-foot office tower 30 Hudson Yards for Related Companies and nearby Brookfield Property Partners' One Manhattan West, a 2.1-million-square-foot office tower. It is also building SL Green Realty Corp.'s 1,500-foot tall office skyscraper One Vanderbilt Place adjacent to Grand Central Terminal (another 1.6 million square feet).

"It's a very dense neighborhood," Jay Badame, the president of Tishman, said about the area round One Vanderbilt. "The job is smaller than 3 World Trade Center, smaller than 4 World Trade Center, smaller than One Manhattan West—so it's on the smaller side of jobs that we have done, but it's a significant structure being done right at Grand Central, so you couldn't ask for a busier neighborhood."

Tishman's scope isn't limited to just Manhattan, either.

It has reached into the outer boroughs for some of the largest projects there as well, including the residential buildings at Forest City Ratner Companies and Greenland USA's Pacific Park in Brooklyn and F&T Group, AECOM and Rockefeller Group's 1.8-million-square-foot mixed-use complex Flushing Commons in Queens.



2. Lendlease (6)

Lead officers: Ralph Esposito, head of East Coast operations and construction

Project portfolio: 8.83 million square feet in New York City and 23.8 million square feet outside the city

Employees: 520 in New York City and 1,740 employees across the country

Valuation of projects in the Big Apple: \$10.72 billion

Global valuation: \$22.29 billion

Globally, the Australian-based Lendlease would be No. 1 on CO's list with a staggering 23.8 million square feet of projects currently under construction, but it has a relatively young New York City operation (at least in comparison to Tishman's 118-year-old business), so that means it was relegated to the second spot.

Lendlease's New York construction office has managed more than 1,680 projects since its founding in 1979, and today it is erecting some of the city's largest luxury residential condominium skyscrapers.

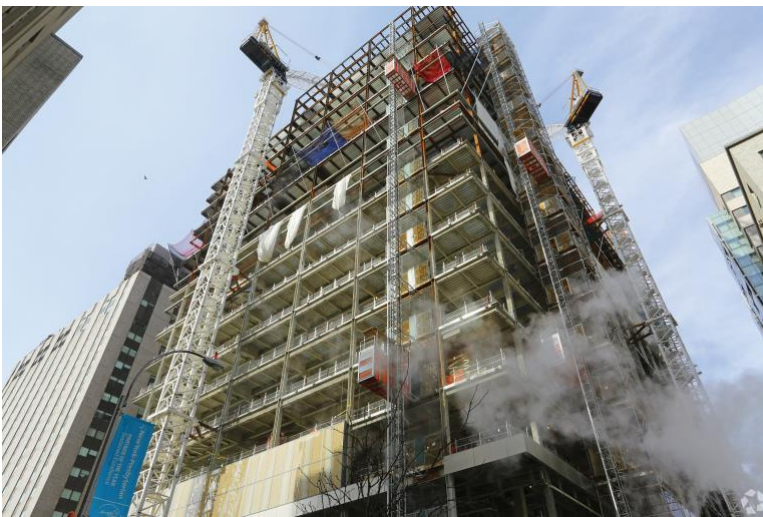
Downtown, the firm is working on a 60-story, 145-unit building (which looks like a glass Jenga tower) at 56 Leonard Street for developer Hines. Heading north to Midtown, Lendlease is constructing for Hines (and partners) the MoMA Tower, a luxury 82-story condo at 53 West 53rd Street.

"It's kind of a combination of big and complex as well as kind of important and challenging," said Ralph Esposito, Lendlease's head of East Coast operations and construction. "Our construction people are well educated. They like to be challenged, they like to do tall and big and complicated. But I think those are the type of projects that we like—things that are kind of significant to New York and at the same time of significant scale in the marketplace and that have a high degree of architecture."

If you thought that was the extent of Lendlease's condo portfolio, you're sorely mistaken.

On Billionaire's Row, Lendlease has done all of the new residential projects, except for the one by JDS Development and Property Markets Group's 111 West 57th Street. Lendlease is wrapping up another—the building at 432 Park Avenue for CIM Group and developer Harry Macklowe, and the builder recently completed Extell Development Company's 75-story condo One57. Lendlease is also working on Extell's even taller (1,550 feet) building nearby, the Central Park Tower at 217 West 57th Street, which is unofficially called the Nordstrom Tower.

And Lendlease isn't just working on shiny and transparent condos. The firm is building both the 950-square-foot 220 Central Park South for Vornado Realty Trust and the 54-story, 33-unit 520 Park Avenue for Zeckendorf Development, both designed by Robert A.M. Stern.



3. Turner Construction Company (4)

Lead officers: Pat Di Filippo, executive vice president; Charles Murphy, senior vice president; Christopher Zegler, vice president and general manager

Project portfolio: N/A

Employees: 750 workers in New York City and 5,200 employees globally

Valuation of projects in the Big Apple: \$9.22 billion

Global valuation: \$22.04 billion

Turner Construction Company has just the right medicine for the construction industry—metaphorically speaking, of course.

The global firm is working on a swath of enormous projects in the medical field throughout New York City. This includes Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center's 750,000-square-foot David H. Koch Center for Cancer Care adjacent to the FDR Drive between East 73rd and East 74th Streets that is currently being built.

Also, Turner is constructing NYU Langone Medical Center's 830,000-square-foot, 21-story Helen S. and Martin L. Kimmel Pavilion at 403 East 43rd Street to be finished in 2017 and New York-Presbyterian Hospital's 740,000-square-foot ambulatory care center at 1283 York Avenue.

Possibly the most interesting project the firm is building now is the expansion of Rockefeller University's campus at 1228 York Avenue. There, Turner is constructing an 850-foot platform above the FDR Drive to the east of the campus, on which it's putting up a new 160,000-square-foot building, with a research facility, a health and wellness center and a conference center.

“Over a series of nighttime operations they are going to close the FDR Drive down,” said Christopher Zegler, a vice president at Turner. “We are building the structural part of the platform on a piece of land in New Jersey, and that is being put on barges, and that will be lifted from cranes.”

Besides health care-related construction projects, Turner is working on the 2.5-million-square-foot interior renovation of Citigroup's global headquarters at 388 and 390 Greenwich Street, which is set for completion in 2020. And Turner finished the ground-up, 220,000-square-foot Whitney Museum of American Art building at 99 Gansevoort Street last year.



4. Plaza Construction (11)

Lead officers: Richard Wood, president and CEO

Project portfolio: About 5 million square feet in New York City and 12 million nationally

Employees: 325 employees in New York City and 550 workers nationally

Valuation of projects in the Big Apple: \$4.22 billion

Global valuation: \$4.85 billion

Once part of development company

Fisher Brothers, Plaza Construction has grown to be one of the largest construction management firms in the city.

It has become so big that it attracted the interest of China Construction America, a subsidiary of the massive China State Construction Engineering Corp., which acquired Plaza for an undisclosed sum in April 2014.

“Plaza had grown to be a pretty large company, and I guess everyone had recognized at some point in time that the construction was really a service that was provided to the bigger company, which was Fisher Brothers,” said Richard Wood, Plaza’s chief executive officer and president. “And it got to the point where we needed to be a construction enterprise and a company that was focused solely on construction to continue to grow.”

Since then Plaza has been working on a number of notable projects in the city such as Continuum Company’s 65-story, 777-foot-tall condo at 45 East 22nd Street and the planned 91-story, 275-unit condo at 125 Greenwich Street for SHVO, New Valley and Bizzi & Partners Development.

Plaza is also working with its old parent company Fisher Brothers, and partners New Valley and Witkoff Group, on a nearly 800-foot-tall condo at 111 Murray Street, which will be 64 stories and will contain 157 homes.

And while it’s not exactly in New York City, immediately across the Hudson River in Jersey City, Plaza is constructing that city’s tallest tower at 99 Hudson Street for developer China Overseas America. The planned 79-story building will stretch 900 feet into the sky and is set to open in 2018. The building will have 781 condo units.



5. Hunter Roberts Construction Group

Lead officers: James McKenna, president and CEO; Gregory Pulitano, chief financial officer; Kevin Barrett, executive vice president and general manager

Project portfolio: N/A

Employees: 166 employees in New York City and 373 employees in total

Valuation of projects in the Big Apple: \$3.51 billion

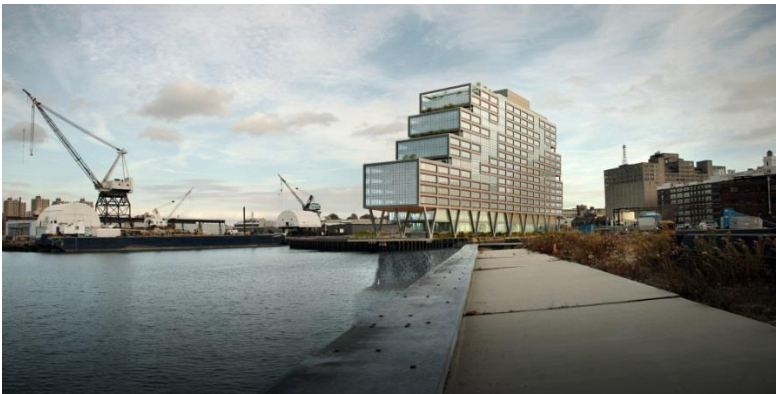
Global valuation: \$4.52 billion

Hunter Roberts is the second youngest firm on this list having started in a temporary 300-square-foot office in Manhattan in February 2005. (It truly upgraded when it signed a 37,000-square-foot lease in December 2014 on the 51st floor of 55 Water Street.)

Nevertheless, Hunter Roberts has done yeoman's work in its 11-year lifespan. The company is working on large projects around the five boroughs and the East Coast.

Most notably (since it's hard not to notice) would be Durst Organization's 860,000-square-foot VIA 57 West at 625 West 57th Street. Designed by Danish architect Bjarke Ingels, the 709-unit rental looks like a pyramid. The tetrahedron-shaped building will rise 460 feet and will include 45,000 square feet of retail space.

Other large projects the firm is working on are the \$100 million renovation of 500,000 square feet at Building A in the Brooklyn Army Terminal for the New York City Economic Development Corporation and a 90,000-square-foot, nine-story laboratory building for Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center at 327 East 64th Street.



6. Gilbane Building Company (5)

Lead officer: William Gilbane III, senior vice president and managing director

Project portfolio: 5.7 million square feet in New York City and 6.5 million square feet in total in New York State

Employees: 350 employees in New York City and 2,609 employees globally

Valuation of projects in the Big Apple: \$2.21 billion

Global valuation: \$2.69 billion

The family-owned Gilbane Building Company's history stretches back more than 140 years, but it has also managed to nab a reputation as a solid workplace for young employees.

Although the company has had many successes over the last year, fifth generation member William Gilbane III, who oversees the New York division, is proud of the fact that his firm was ranked #37 in Fortune Magazine's

first-ever “50 Best Workplaces for New College Grads” this year. According to the magazine, 16 percent of the company’s new hires were recent graduates.

“From my discussions with our employees, I think people like a family-owned construction firm, and if you are going into the business of construction there aren’t many privately held construction companies left,” Gilbane said. “And I think people feel like part of the family here.”

While it may have a family-like atmosphere where employees come together for “fun and educational events,” as Fortune wrote, the amount of large commercial and residential projects that Gilbane is working on in New York City is no joke.

This includes the residential conversion of One Wall Street for developer Harry Macklowe’s Macklowe Properties. The building, a 1-million-square-foot former 50-story office tower, will have about 524 residential units, comprised of a mix of condos and rental apartments. There will be nearly 95,000 square feet of retail space in the building.

Gilbane is also constructing the 51-story, 780-foot-tall commercial office building at 55 Hudson Yards for developer Related Companies. The tower clocks in at a mammoth 1.3 million square feet.

And in Brooklyn, Gilbane has started working on Boston Properties and Rudin Management Company’s Dock 72 office building in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. It is a 600,000-square-foot, 16-story property that will be anchored by coworking giant WeWork.



7. Structure Tone

Lead officers: James Donaghy, chairman; Robert Mullen, CEO

Project portfolio: 2.17 million square feet in New York City under construction

Employees: 350 workers in New York City and 1,625 in the entire organization

Valuation of projects in the Big Apple: \$1.8 billion

Global valuation: \$1.87 billion

Structure Tone is known for completing some of the most recognized office interior buildout work in the city—but one project shines brightly above the rest: The organization recently completed the \$177 million restoration of St. Patrick’s Cathedral, which gets some 3 million visitors per year, giving the exterior and interior of the historic, landmarked structure a top-down detailed revitalization.

On the commercial side, the 45-year construction manager is working on building 280,000 square feet of office space for Bank of China at the recently completed 7 Bryant Park (Turner Construction Company erected the building), representing about 40 percent of the 470,000-square-foot, 30-story glass tower.

The space will include a fitness center, a cafeteria and a retail branch on the ground floor and offices from the second through 14th floors for trading floors, conference rooms and executive suites. Structure Tone is also working on the 28th floor and the two lower level spaces for the bank.

In another major project, Structure Tone is building law firm White & Case’s new 440,000-square-foot headquarters at 1221 Avenue of the Americas. The tenant will be on the 42nd through 50th floors of the tower, and the new digs will feature administrative space, attorney offices, a conference center, dining areas, library spaces and a gym.

Plus, the firm is building another sizable office for MetLife at 200 Park Avenue. The tenant is increasing its footprint in the tower to about 550,000 square feet from 110,000 square feet. The new space comprises the entire mezzanine level and floors three through six. MetLife already occupies the 56th and 57th floors, which will also be renovated.



8. J.T. Magen & Company

Lead officer: Robert Scheinman, principal

Project portfolio: N/A

Employees: N/A

Valuation of projects in the Big Apple: \$1.1 billion

Global valuation: \$1.15 billion

For nearly a quarter of a century, J.T.

Magen & Company has provided general contracting and construction management services for a variety of office and retail spaces, such as advertising company Droga5's space at 120 Wall Street, L'Oréal's headquarters at 575 Fifth Avenue and the National Football League's headquarters at 345 Park Avenue.

J.T. Magen recently completed Microsoft's flagship store at 677 Fifth Avenue, which encompassed 22,369 square feet of construction from the cellar through five floors. The project, which opened late last year featuring a multilevel glass façade as well as space to test out Microsoft's software and hardware products, was valued at more than \$16 million, according to Dodge Data & Analytics.

J.T. Magen is also working on the renovation of SL Green Realty Corp.'s 1.5-million-square-foot, 47-story glass and steel office tower at 919 Third Avenue. The job includes new partitions, doors and finishes throughout the building and modifications to the existing HVAC system. That work is valued at about \$15.2 million, according to Dodge.



9. Pavarini McGovern

Lead officer: Eric McGovern,
president and CEO

Project portfolio: 3 million square feet in New York City plus 1 million square feet under construction in New Jersey

Employees: 100

Valuation of projects in the Big Apple: \$1.07 billion

Global valuation: \$1.27 billion

From a skyscraper in Midtown to a public elementary school in Queens, Pavarini McGovern has its hands in a wide range of project types of all different sizes.

The aforementioned Midtown skyscraper is RFR Realty, Hines and China Vanke's 63-story condominium at 100 East 53rd Street. Pavarini recently topped out the planned 94-unit, aluminum and glass-clad residential tower, and the \$280 million project is slated for completion in 2017.

Building amenities will include a ground-floor restaurant, a swimming pool, a sauna, a gym and a relaxation room in 33,000 square feet.

Pavarini is building the 576,000-square-foot, 60-story residential rental tower at 242 West 53rd Street for Algin Management. The \$300 million project will be comprised of 426 apartments, a retail space, a gym, a basketball court and an outdoor and an indoor swimming pool.

But they're not simply about the big projects; Pavarini is the construction manager for SL Green Realty Corp.'s planned four-story retail building at 719 Seventh Avenue in Times Square. The 6,000-square-foot job will come with about 5,500 square feet of digital billboard space that extends 150 feet tall for advertising purposes, according to various reports.



10. New Line Structures

Lead officer: Martin Loy, president

Project portfolio: N/A

Employees: N/A

Valuation of projects in the Big Apple: \$924.8 million

Global valuation: \$924.8 million

Martin Loy, a former vice president of Tishman Construction, created New Line Structures in 2008, making the construction company the youngest firm on our list.

Its earliest projects include the Columbus Square East residential developments on Manhattan's Upper West Side, such as the 12-story 775 Columbus Avenue, the 15-story 795 Columbus Avenue and the 14-story 805 Columbus Avenue for the Chetrit Group and Stellar Management. Since those projects, New Line has really grown up.

The firm is working on a 56-story, roughly 610-foot residential tower for Steiner Studios at 333 Schermerhorn Street, which has already reshaped Brooklyn's skyline despite not opening until 2017. The mixed-use project, dubbed "The Hub," will be comprised of 750 apartments and 32,000 square feet of retail.

And New Line is converting the landmarked 108 Leonard Street, also known as 346 Broadway, to 151 condos for Peebles Corporation and Elad Group.

The company also recently completed a 57-unit condo at 234 East 23rd Street for Naftali Group. The 20-story building features a red brick façade with floor-to-ceiling windows. And New Line was the construction manager for the 47-story hotel-to-condo conversion at 135 West 52nd Street for Chetrit Group and Clipper Equity, which wrapped up late last year.