



Sidewalk Sheds of Tomorrow

What will New York City look like in the future? It won't matter much — because all you'll see are the beams, walls and roofs of the sidewalk sheds guiding your every step.

You know the structures: the not-so-temporary block-long huts the city requires developers to place beneath the construction scaffolding that climbs high-rises like steel ivy.

City sidewalks now contains about 200 miles' worth of the sheds. They're ostensibly to protect you — from wall-scaling construction workers in Midtown or loose gargoyles on the Upper West Side.

And they're not going anywhere — because the city can't be bothered to find ways to reduce this ugliness. It could, for example, ease building-inspection regulations —

massively toughened in the Giuliani years after a child was injured by falling debris.

Instead, it's trying to make the sheds less awful. Last week, the New York Building Congress unveiled four new shed designs in the hopes of making your stroll through the rickety tunnels a bit more pleasant — the winners of a contest run by the group.

They're all nice enough — letting in more light, or less rain; raising roofs to expose more storefront, and in one case even giving pedestrians more room.

But they'll all cost more. How many developers will fork over the cash to make temporary cosmetic upgrades that yield no profit?

The smart bet, in short, is that dark, dank and cramped sheds will continue to hold New York's prime real estate hostage.