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Q and A: Joan Lindsay, Chicago skyline expert

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Winnetka resident Joan V. Lindsay recently published her third edition of "Chicago from the River."

The book contains magnificent pictures of Chicago architecture, with Joan's personal narrative, from her experience conducting architecture tours on the Chicago River, for Chicago Line Cruises, for the last 20 years.

1. How did you get interested in architecture?

While an undergraduate student at Northwestern, I took a class in "History of Architecture". I thoroughly enjoyed the class and found the teacher to be extremely interesting and knowledgeable. As a graduate student I took an architecture class again, with the same teacher, and found the teacher to be fabulous at both levels. My parents always showed an interest in architecture when I was growing up and my Dad's best friend was an architect. It seemed to follow that I would pursue my interest and I took a training course at the Architecture Foundation about 20 years ago.

I went to work for Chicago Line Cruises, my first job as a docent on architectural cruises, about 18 years ago and I've been with them ever since.

2. What about Chicago's skyline keeps you interested after all these years?

There's always something changing about Chicago's skyline, and that keeps me interested. A fine example would be "Aqua Tower", a magnificent building, designed by Chicago Architect, Jeanne Gang, which earned the prestigious gold medal award from Emporis, the global building database, who named the Aqua Tower the "2009 Skyscraper of the Year". Aqua was praised for its fascinating shape, which changes depending on the perspective and was cited for the precision of its construction. The honor, known as the Emporis Skyscraper Award, has been given since 2000 and recognizes excellence in aesthetic and functional design. This marks the first time that the prize has gone to a Chicago skyscraper, and to the first woman recipient, Jeanne Gang, founder of Studio Gang Architects.

Another Chicago skyscraper, Chicago's Trump International Hotel and Tower, was also listed among the Top 10 Skyscrapers of 2009.

3. What's your favorite piece of Chicago's skyline?

It has to be "333 Wacker Drive". I love the views, and the great blue-green curve of glass that is presented to the northwest, as the Chicago River splits into its Northern and Southern branches. Notable is how this curve reflects the setting sun and shows off the colors like a fiery display. Nothing can come close to that. 333 West Wacker was voted "Favorite Building" by Chicago Tribune readers in 1995.

4. What's the most exciting thing to happen to the Chicago skyline since you've been working on these books?

Again, I would have to say "Aqua Tower" and also Chicago's Trump International Hotel and Tower, designed by Chicago's own Adrian Smith. Adrian Smith designed the world's tallest building, the Burj Khalifa in Dubai. Chicago's Trump Tower was originally planned to be the world's tallest building, but after 9/11 plans were downsized from 150 stories to 92.

Anything you can't stand?

I have no favorite "ugly" buildings.

5. Do you think there's another edition of Chicago from the River to come?

At this point in time with the economy the way it is, I don't foresee a lot of building in the near future. If someone comes along and decides to build, it's a possibility.

6. As a boat tour docent, you must have talked with thousands and thousands of tourists over the years. What's the funniest question you've had to answer?

Not surprisingly, the people who decide to attend my tours are at least somewhat educated in architecture in Chicago. As a result, they come armed with enough knowledge not to ask silly or unusual questions. They have to be interested in architecture or they wouldn't want to sit and listen to me talk for 90 minutes. . I can honestly say I don't remember any funny or odd questions.

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