WHAT MAKES A SUCCESSFUL URBAN SKYLINE?
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A successful urban skyline has . . .
- Vertical Extensibility
- Signature Towers
- A Group-Hug Gestalt
- A Frame for the Tableau
- Canyons of Open Space
- A Night-Time Alter Ego
- A Sedge of Cranes
- Opportunities for Public Access

Just as you may know people by their signatures, you may know cities by their signature skylines.

A GROUP-HUG GESTALT
- More than the sum of its parts
- Visual dimensions:
  • Complementarity (not competition)
  • Variety (not homogeneity)
- Communicates:
  • Size of place
  • Importance of place

VERTICAL EXTENSIBILITY
- City-to-city homogenization: All cities want to reach for the sky.
- Trends:
  • More skyscrapers
  • Higher skyscrapers
- Competition: For the most, the highest

SIGNATURE TOWERS
- City-to-city differentiation: Each city wants something unique.
- Trends:
  • Fewer ‘glass and metal filing cabinets’
  • More unique shapes and claddings
- Competition: For the most unique, striking

A FRAME FOR THE TABLEAU
- Foreground:
  • Viewsheds that focus attention
  • Freeway and waterway views
- Background:
  • Mountains or hills for local color
  • Blue skies, clouds, aircraft in flight

CANYONS OF OPEN SPACE
- Set-backs required by building codes:
  • Tapering with elevation
  • Light and shadow management
- Vertical differentiation:
  • Streets as activity zones
  • Open space above streets

The prominence of towers suggests the prominence of place.

A NIGHT-TIME ALTER EGO
- Brilliance that communicates:
  • Intelligence (“smart cities”)
  • An Evening & Night-Time Economy
- Changes with:
  • Seasons
  • Holidays
  • Events

A SEDGE OF CRANES
- Construction, maintenance, window washing
- Technologies for dealing with verticality
- Communicates:
  • Dynamism
  • Progress

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PUBLIC ACCESS
- The Norm: Higher Floors = Higher Status
- Sharing elite space and ‘the view’:
  • Observation decks
  • Restaurants and bars
  • Rooftop microworlds
- Feelings of shared pride in the city

About the Author/Photographer: Don Zeigler is professor of geography, emeritus, at Old Dominion University, and co-editor of Cities of the World, 3rd – 7th editions, Rowman and Littlefield.