

# Chicago Tribune Magazine

SECTION 10

Why Jordan  
can't hit

The snooze-button  
approach to life

## BACK TO THE HEIGHTS

Another lofty look at Chicago

# SKY HIGH

*More of what's on top of Chicago's buildings*

By Robert Sharoff • Tribune photographs by Bob Fila

**T**op of the world, Ma," Jimmy Cagney crowed just before being blown to smithereens atop an exploding gas storage tank in the 1949 gangster film "White Heat." He might have been any one of a number of architects and developers—not to mention prospective tenants—whose imaginations lean toward what Shakespeare once called "the cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces."

That people have always sought a higher vantage point is nothing new. During the late 1980s, Mark Segal, a photographer whose studio occupies the top floor of the Carbide and Carbon Building, remembers that he organized a club whose members met every Wednesday for lunch on the roof of a different downtown skyscraper.

Segal recalls the club's lunch sites: "We did the Stone Container Building, Pure Oil, the Lincoln Tower—basically any building where we could

scam our way onto the roof."

And why? "For the fun of it," he says. "For the view and the adventure."

Last summer, we did part one of this article, where we looked at what was at the top of six downtown buildings—Britannica Center, the Wrigley Building, First United Methodist Church, 35 East Wacker Drive (the Jewelers Building), Two Prudential Plaza and the Chicago Title and Trust Center. This summer, we wrap it up with five new entries and then wait for the next downtown building boom.

What have we learned? Well, in general, the extravagant post-modern creations that went up in the '80s tend to be less than scintillating inside. The tops of these buildings invariably are occupied by water tanks and elevator systems. But if you want individuality and quirkiness, the buildings from the 1920s and earlier are the ones to look at. And here they are:

## Carbide and Carbon

230 North Michigan Avenue

Is it or isn't it? A champagne bottle, that is. Numerous articles about the Carbide and Carbon Building make the point that the top resembles an exploding bottle of bubbly. Is this intentional? No one seems to know.

The building, which was completed in 1929, is flawless art deco—a green terra cotta facade that over the years has turned a sooty black, and a top that appears to have been dipped in liquid gold. It's dramatic, all right. The top also includes a 50-foot campanile topped with a beacon



The Carbide and Carbon Building (left and above), its art deco exterior worth a look itself, provides a photographer tenant with TV-worthy views. The building dates from the late '20s.

that has been dark for many years. Lawrence Hearn of the Hearn Company, the manager of the building, says there has been talk of rewiring the beacon, but that so far the costs outweigh the perceived benefits.

The building is 39 stories tall, with the top floor occupied by elevator machinery. The 38th is rented out to commercial photographer Mark Segal. Segal took over the space earlier this year after waiting half a dozen years for the previous tenant—an architect—to move out.

Segal shoots cityscapes for commercial clients—including the opening skyline shots for a number of local news broadcasts—and says the building gives him a competitive advantage. "I've shot from the windows and from the roof and no one else has that vantage point," he says. >

Robert Sharoff is a free-lance writer who, in July of 1995, wrote the first article in this series, "What's Up There?"