



104 FLOORS

71 LIFTS

12,774 GLASS PANES

1,776ft — HEIGHT — 1,016ft
£3bn — COST — £1.5bn
3 — TENANTS — 1

HEIGHTS OF
AMBITION

95 FLOORS

44 LIFTS

11,000 GLASS PANES

TWIN TOWERS

Two skyscrapers. In two rival cities.
Built at the same time, and taller than
ever. Can London beat New York in the
first transatlantic battle of the skies?
John Arlidge tells a tale of two cities



CAPITAL ASSET
The Shard's viewing gallery will be one of its biggest attractions. Right: construction workers ascend One World Trade Center. Condé Nast, the publisher of Vanity Fair (below), is one of the few New York tenants so far



of the world”, as the Victorian novelist Henry James called it.

Many cities have shrunk during the recession. Not London. Its population has

Despite being the tallest buildings in Europe and North America, both the Shard and One World Trade Center draw attention to the waning economic power of the old world. The towers are dwarfed by the latest skyscrapers built in Asia and the Middle East. Since 2004, 13 of the tallest skyscrapers in the world have been built. All but two, One World Trade Center and the Trump tower in Chicago, are in Asia and the Middle East. In the time it took to complete the Shard and One World Trade Center, Dubai raced ahead and built itself a skyscraper nearly the height of both, one on top of the other — the 2,717ft Burj Khalifa.

The Shard and One World Trade Center commemorate an era of unprecedented and catastrophic western financial recklessness. Each was born in the go-go years when financiers in the City and on Wall Street thought they had discovered financial alchemy, turning the base metal of dud mortgages into the pure gold of triple-A investments. When the house of Mammon crashed to the ground in 2008 and lending dried up, both the Shard and One World Trade Center tottered. “We nearly died several times along the way,” sighs Sellar, as he looks at the early models of the Shard on display in his Bond-villain-style Mayfair bunker office.

The Shard was bailed out by Qatar. The gas-rich Gulf state bought the glass wigwam project, then still on the drawing board, from Sellar and his two original backers in 2008 for £1.5billion. One World Trade Center was passed from developer to developer and financier to financier and, as the buck was passed, so the bucks rose. The cost has almost doubled to £3billion and it is the American taxpayer who is footing the bill. The Port Authority is funded by the people of New York ➤➤➤

London and New York look best at dawn. It's fun to walk to the top of Primrose Hill or climb a skyscraper and watch as the pale sun burns off the scrim to reveal the concrete canyons, the rows of brown and white townhouses and the grey surges of the Thames, the Hudson and the East River. On a clear day, you can make out the glowing fairy lights at the airports that connect NY-LON every hour.

There are two new reasons for Londoners and New Yorkers to take a fresh, ear-popping look at the cities they love. Two new buildings make the cityscapes look more dramatic than ever. In London, the gleaming Shard of glass at London Bridge was completed in July. In New York, the final beam of the jutting Freedom Tower, officially known as One World Trade Center, was bolted together last month. The skyscraper replaces the twin towers that were destroyed 11 years ago next week.

The new landmarks have a lot in common, much of it — although, as we shall see, not all — good. They're tall, not just a bit taller than their local rivals, but hypodermically taller. The final jagged steel-and-glass fragments of the Shard reach 1,016ft. That's almost 250ft higher than its nearest London rival, One Canada Square, and taller than its closest western European rival, the headquarters of Commerzbank in Frankfurt.

If you include the unicorn spire being driven into the roof, One World Trade Center will reach 1,776ft, to mark the nominal birth date of America. That's taller than the twin towers, at 1,368ft, and the Willis (formerly Sears) Tower in Chicago, which, at 1,450ft, was previously the tallest building in America. Britain and America have new summits.

Each tower is so much higher than anything else around it that it reconfigures the cityscape, creating a new trig point. One World Trade Center is the first thing you see out of the window when Virgin flight OO1 banks hard left and drops towards the tarmac

of rain that whip off the Atlantic. It is a muscular retort to the destruction of 9/11.

And it inspires some pretty muscular language. Patrick Foye, executive director of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which owns the World Trade Center site, says the lofty building with the noble name “is a new icon that symbolises the revival, restoration and resurgence of New York and sums up a resilient America”. Standing on the 100th floor, looking towards the art-deco Empire State Building, he insists it is “aesthetically and commercially better than not just the buildings it replaces but any other skyscraper in New York”.

MOST OF US CELEBRATE THE ELEGANCE OF THE RAZOR-EDGED TRIANGLE THAT INJECTS THE SKY

at Newark airport. The big, silver obelisk fills the gash where the twin towers used to stand and serves as a visual marker for Memorial Plaza, the elegant and sombre monument to the almost 3,000 people who died on 9/11, which opened last year.

The giant silhouette fills the window of the taxi on the way into Manhattan. You see it everywhere in the city — stepping out of a downtown subway station, from midtown, from New Jersey and from Brooklyn. When you get up close, it's so big it blots out the sun, stifles the wind and swats away the giant gobs

There's plenty of rather un-British bragging in London, too. As he triumphantly welcomes dignitaries to the 69th-floor observation deck, Irvine Sellar, boss of Sellar Property Group, the developer of the Shard, says: “This is the best new building in the world in the best city in the world.” He adds: “God is English and everybody has to understand that!”

It may not be divine intervention, but the Shard symbolises something big, all right: the victory of modernity. Londoners have had an uneasy relationship with new, especially tall buildings, since the first appeared at

Centre Point a generation ago. We tend to give them silly names, such as the Gherkin, the Cheesegrater or the Walkie-Talkie, as if we are embarrassed by them, or for fear that critics might come up with another, ruder name. Not the Shard. Its sharp-cut title reflects our new Empire State of mind.

From up close at London Bridge or from afar, from Hampstead Heath or the North Downs, most of us celebrate the elegance and simplicity of the slender, razor-edged triangle that injects the sky and then shatters into fragments. Peter Murray, chairman of London's Centre for the Built Environment, calls it the “most beautiful and least macho” tall building in the world. The naysayers who dismiss the tower as a grotesque gatecrasher on low-rise London have all but given up complaining. Even Prince Charles has buttoned his traditionalist lip.

We love the Shard because it symbolises the ascent of London to become not only the most important, modern city in Europe but also the new capital of the world. Thanks to the waves of money and immigrants that have flowed into London and continue to crash onto its shores in spite of the financial crisis, the city has regained the title of “the most complete compendium

risen 12% in the past decade and will soon be the largest in its history. More than one-third of today's Londoners were born outside Britain, the highest proportion for any city. Almost 350 different languages are spoken. The capital attracted more foreign direct investment projects last year than any other in Europe, according to Ernst & Young. It recently overtook Luxembourg to become the richest of all the 271 official EU regions.

With its multinational backers — designed by an Italian modernist architect, Renzo Piano; built by a British developer, Sellar; financed by Qatar, the Gulf state that owns the building; and screwed together by workers from all over the world — the Shard is an epic international victory dart, pinpointing and confirming London's conquest of New York to become, well, the new New York.

Freedom! Power! The triumph of the West! London rising! Thanks to these two new icons, things are certainly looking up. Ah, if only it were that simple. However much Londoners may admire the Shard and New Yorkers may revere One World Trade Center, each reveals as many awkward truths about ourselves and the cities in which we live as they offer reasons to be cheerful.



PREVIOUS PAGE, LEFT, AND THIS PAGE, ABOVE RIGHT: MARCO DI LAURO/REPORTAGE BY GETTY FOR THE SUNDAY TIMES MAGAZINE. PREVIOUS PAGE, RIGHT: DANIEL HEWITT/VIEW. ABOVE: COURTESY OF SELLAR. RIGHT: AP

and New Jersey. Like Wall Street, One World Trade Center is propped up by Main Street.

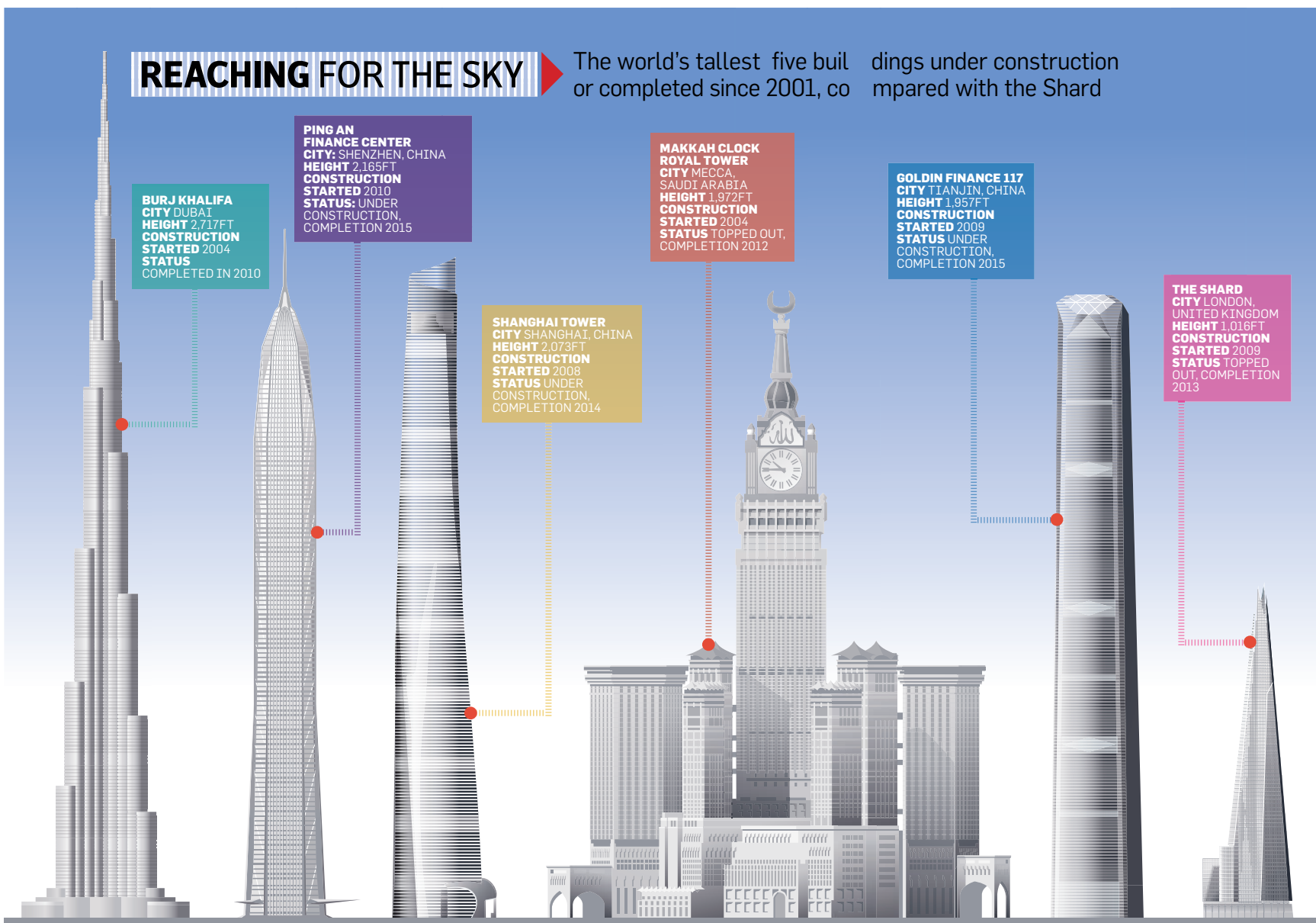
To add commercial insult to financial injury, these hot-money buildings are opening their doors in a cold-money climate. Sellar has only signed up one significant tenant so far for the Shard. The Hong Kong-based luxury hotel group Shangri-La has agreed a 30-year lease to build its first hotel in London, with 200 rooms. Not a single square foot of the 600,000 sq ft of offices has been let.

One World Trade Center is doing — a bit — better. It has let about half its space, most to a single tenant, Condé Nast. The publisher has taken 1.2m sq ft over 25 floors. Another few hundred thousand square feet have gone to the US government and Chinese investment agencies. But that still leaves some 1.4m sq ft on the market. That's a lot of square feet.

And there are even mutterings that Condé Nast might not take all the space it has reserved. Many company staff, already aghast at having to move from their current Times Square headquarters in swanky midtown Manhattan to downtown, an area they regard as social and style Siberia, fear working in a building that is inevitably a prime terrorist target. "Condé Nast signed that deal a few years ago in the depths of the magazine slump," says one former staffer. "Things aren't so bad now and opposition to moving is growing. The deal is looking a bit squishy."

In London, Sellar insists he has agreements lined up to bring in banks, media outfits, and the kind of restaurants that serve £20 pieces of moss and splodges of foam to the nibbling classes. "We're in serious discussions with a number of parties for office space and the restaurants. The building will be fully leased by 2014," he says. Piano, who is as silver and wiry as the building he has created, insists that once everyone has moved in, the tower will be "a vertical city".

It may well be, but not, critics say, in the positive way he and Sellar intend. When, if, it is full, the Shard will reinforce and extend the ways in which London's economic boom has failed to trickle down. In the time it has taken to build the tower, the difference between the rich and the rest in the capital has grown and is now greater than at any other time. Research by Professor Danny Dorling of Sheffield University reveals the richest tenth of Londoners now have 273 times the wealth of the poorest tenth of Londoners. For each stop on the Jubilee line you travel east of the Shard, life expectancy falls by one year. The diamond tower, down which Prince



'ONE WORLD TRADE CENTER MAY BE BIG, BUT TO MANY, THAT'S ALL THAT'S GOOD ABOUT IT'

Andrew will abseil tomorrow, seems to celebrate the capital's new winner-takes-all culture. Just look at the 62,000 sq ft apartments on floors 53-65 of the 95-storey tower. While many austerity-weary Londoners struggle to find a home they can afford, these new homes are selling for up to £50m a pop. The skyscraper is a home from home for the 0.001% of the 1%.

And it's not just growing social inequality that the Shard reinforces. It is an inescapable reminder, a giant Post-it, that emphasises we are still too dependent on the one sector that got us into our financial mess in the first place. Many of those who will end up working in the offices will be from the financial services sector, which has spread from the Square Mile to Docklands, to Mayfair and now to the South Bank. The Swiss bank UBS, a Gulf-based financial services giant, and the US

management consultants AT Kearney are rumoured to be taking space.

"It's yet another monument to the power of finance, which at this moment in particular is the last thing London needs," says John Lanchester, author of the acclaimed novel *Capital*, which charts the effect of the City of London on the city of London. "Ordinary Londoners will look at it and wonder what it offers them and what it has to do with their lives."

Across the Atlantic, One World Trade Center is also the subject of bitter criticism. The soaring, almost evangelical rhetoric of eminent New Yorkers, such as the former governor of New York, George Pataki, who claims the tower "symbolises our steadfast commitment to our most cherished value — freedom", simply does not cut it for many New Yorkers. That's partly because of the name of the new skyscraper.

RIGHT: AP

It was christened the Freedom Tower, but the title was abandoned when commercial real-estate brokers warned it was putting off prospective tenants, who feared it made the building too much of a bull's-eye for terrorists. So much for a self-confident retort to Al-Qaeda. The Chinese state-backed investment agencies that have taken 200,000 sq ft in the building also objected to the word "Freedom" for political reasons. So much for standing by traditional American values in the face of the Asian tiger.

The recent protests by New Yorkers against plans to build a mosque near the base of the tower all add to the growing sense that the thrusting edifice is the very opposite of an indestructible icon of freedom. The cultural critic Nicolai Ouroussoff, who backed the development as a national imperative, now dismisses it as "a monument to a society that has turned its back on any notion of cultural openness". Paul Goldberger, former architecture critic of *The New Yorker*, has rechristened the skyscraper the "Fear Tower".

The building's new formal name, One World Trade Center, is far too dull for the

most important new building in America. Worse, it actually seems more, not less, likely to encourage terrorists. World Trade Center was, after all, the name of the twin towers. Having destroyed America's greatest symbol of economic might once, you don't have to be a Condé Nast staffer to fear the terrorists will be itching to have another go.

But the biggest criticism of One World Trade Center is reserved for the way it looks. It may be big, it may fill a brute void but, to many New Yorkers, that's about all that is good about it.

Most weekday mornings, Ann Siegel takes the Staten Island Ferry to lower Manhattan. She likes to stand on deck and feel the wind on her face. She used to admire the twin towers as "unique, very strong and, before 9/11, reassuring". But she says One World Trade Center "looks just like something you would see by the side of the road in Houston".

Standing at the bottom on the corner of Vesey Street and West Broadway, it's hard to disagree. The tower may be big but it boasts none of the proud, two-fingered, dollar-sign self-confidence of the twin towers. Those two rectangles may have looked rather plain but they captured something of the American psyche — optimistic, stupendous and, frankly, little concerned with what others think. What's there now looks like a clumsy, bloated American in a shiny suit.

Surprisingly, the architects seem to agree. Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM), the Chicago firm that has designed more tall buildings than any other, can't talk publicly about the building any more. It has had too many run-ins with the Port Authority and has been banned from doing interviews. Another victory for freedom! But, privately, senior figures in the practice describe the building as "disappointingly humdrum".

It's not SOM's fault. One World Trade Center was probably doomed from the start to end up as a bland compromise. Unlike the Shard, which was the joint, megalomaniacal vision of Sellar and Piano, backed by visionary mayors, first Ken Livingstone and then Boris Johnson, and

privately funded, One World Trade Center was designed and built by committee and publicly funded.

Thousands of people had — and still have — a stake in the most valuable 16 acres of land in America. They include the Port Authority; successive mayors and governors of New York; architects, developers and insurance firms nursing multi-billion-dollar losses following the destruction of the twin towers; government agencies, all 19 of them; and, of course, the relatives of those who died on 9/11. Each had conflicting ideas of what the development should be: a solemn memorial, a soaring commercial complex, a vital transportation hub, a vibrant retail destination, and the keystone in the revival of lower Manhattan.

Small wonder developers, architects, financiers and city officials have spent the last 10 years arguing, blowing deadlines and running up billion-dollar cost overruns. The Polish-American architect Daniel Libeskind, best known for the Jewish Museum in Berlin, came up with the first elegant plan for getting Ground Zero off the ground. A series of spiralling towers would cascade down in a curve that would recall the swirl of the Statue of Liberty's copper skirts. The buildings would be arranged so that the sun's rays would emerge as a "wedge of light" from behind the new skyscrapers each year at the exact time of the 9/11 attack.

But, after a struggle of egos and a period Libeskind describes as "lawyers, so many lawyers", his plans were rejected as too

complex, expensive and unlikely to deliver enough floor space to satisfy insurers' and developers' desire for return on their vast investment in building the new tower.

Step forward David Childs, senior architect at SOM. He came up with an elegant, twisting building with intricate cabled detailing. A 20-ton granite cornerstone honouring the victims was laid, as "rock-solid proof that the building is under way". But nobody had bothered to show the plans to the New York Police Department. They vetoed it because they said it was too close ➡➡➡

Blocked vision: the architect Daniel Libeskind's plan for the Ground Zero site



to a main road and, therefore, too vulnerable to a truck bomb. Childs designed another tower — by now the third “agreed” for the site — in a new location, with a hideously ugly 20-storey stone bombproof base. It had to be built on the spot where the cornerstone had been laid, so it was removed and trucked to Long Island, where it sits to this day.

The squabbling continued throughout the building process. Along the way, most of the good bits of the building were lopped off. And it's still going on. The latest row is over whether the tower's spire should simply be a plain steel antenna or be clad in a brilliant white shell. The debate is about more than aesthetics and money. If it is clad, it is likely to be classed as a sculptural addition to the building and count as part of its overall height. If not, the building will be a few hundred feet shorter and, crucially, could lose its title as America's tallest.

Relatives of those who died on 9/11 are reluctant publicly to criticise the skyscraper because it has cost so much public money and is built on what they and many others regard as the most sacred site in America. But, privately, they express frustration at the amount of time it had taken to build and lambast its design.

“It looks like a giant, upended fridge freezer,” says one widow. Another sums up the tower's troubles pithily: “Failure,” she says, “has many architects.”

It's easy to carp from the sidelines and the sidewalk. Skyscrapers, like all big, bold things, are divisive. Some people will always hate them, regardless of how they look and what they are called. What's more, the Shard and One World Trade Center are not the first, and won't be the last, to fall victim to the uncomfortable relationship between construction and recession. The great skyscraper boom in the 1930s was conceived before the 1929 crash. The Empire State Building was empty for so long it was nicknamed the Empty State Building. It took 20 years to turn a profit. Yet it remains and seems destined to remain the best-known and, perhaps, best-loved skyscraper in the world.

What matters is not the beginning but the end. Once the headwinds of recession have whipped around their toothpick peaks and subsided, once the critics have run out of things to say, what will London and New York's twin towers become? Latter-day



IN REMEMBRANCE

The Memorial Plaza stands at the base of the old towers

background in all the television coverage of the Olympics and has even started turning up on “I ♥ London” T-shirts.

Yes, it is for the rich. Yes, it's exclusive. Yes, it harks back to the debt-binge decade. But it seems to capture something good, something optimistic. It's transparent, open, infinite and welcoming, just like modern London. You can look in through the windows and see what's going on. It's a happy presence that flips a giant finger at those who say last summer's riots and the recent banking, political and media scandals have cost London its place as the world's capital. London has nothing to fear.

By contrast, One World Trade Center is barricaded, sinister and defensive. The 200ft bombproof base, with 5ft-thick reinforced concrete walls, makes it as unwelcoming as a nuclear-power station. The office floors above are clad in reflective glass. Like a person hiding behind giant sunglasses, the tower looks shifty and nervous. Those are two things America is not and should never be. The optimism, originality and poetry of Libeskind's

original proposal has been replaced with a banal stack of anxieties. Nobody much likes the new World Trade Center building — and

'SKYSCRAPERS ARE BIG, BOLD, DIVISIVE THINGS AND SOME WILL ALWAYS HATE THEM'

the size of Kent — and is sandwiched between mighty Saudi Arabia and Iran. It needs big, powerful friends and, thanks to its investments in prestige projects such as the Shard and Chelsea Barracks, the US Embassy building in Grosvenor Square, Harrods, Heathrow airport and the most expensive homes in the world at One Hyde Park, Qatar and Britain are closely tied. Looking out of the 14th-floor windows of the Shard over the House of Commons, Downing Street and Buckingham Palace, Al Thani says: “The height of the Shard is secondary. What is special is the solid relationship between two nations, Qatar and Britain.”

Full or empty, the Shard seems to be well on the way to achieving its creators' cherished dream of attaining iconic status, rivaling Big Ben as the symbol of London. In a city more used to dreary, lumpen blocks, such as Canary Wharf, it has reconfigured the skyline in a way that no other modern building, not even the stylish Swiss Re “Gherkin” Tower, has. It looked a natural part of modern London in the

even fewer want to work in it.

Just as America squandered the opportunity to make the world fall in love with it all over again after 9/11, by declaring the disastrous “war on terror”, it has now missed the chance to make us fall in love all over again with downtown Manhattan, the place where New York, once the capital of the world, was born. The country that created the skyscraper, as a symbol of swashbuckling entrepreneurship, corporate might and engineering and architectural prowess, has botched the most important tower it has ever built. Those who died 11 years ago next week, the jumpers whose bodies landed where you now walk into the lobby of One World Trade Center, deserve better.

So, after a decade of struggles on both sides of the Atlantic, this tale of two cities ends with a victory for London. A soaring glass steeple in a city of spires looks down on a fat, dumb Yank. Britain beats New York at blocks! Ha! It feels good. But only a bit. This time, for once, it would have been nice if it had been a draw ■