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Chicago group names Shanghai World Financial Center the world's top tall building for 2008

With the Olympics in Beijing last summer, the city of Shanghai and its striking new 101-story skyscraper, the Shanghai World Financial Center, didn't get much attention.



But that may change, if only a little, now that the Chicago-based Council on Tall Buildings and Urban Habitat has named the office building the winner of its annual "Best Tall Building" award for 2008.

Designed by the New York firm of Kohn Pedersen Fox (KPF), whose Chicago credits include 333 W. Wacker Drive and the 900 North Michigan building, the [Shanghai World Financial Center](#) (in foreground) is a sleek, sculpted modern tower that rises to a trapezoid-shaped void rather than a spire.

Originally, the void was circular but that offended Chinese sensibilities because it was said to suggest the rising sun of Japan, which occupied China during World War II. The design was subsequently changed.

The Council on Tall Buildings, which held an awards dinner Thursday night in Chicago, recognized the

skyscraper "for its revolutionary structural design and inspirational symbolism in a city emerging as a global capital," a spokeswoman for the Council said.

The council also praised the way that the design reduces the amount of structural material in the skyscraper, thereby cutting its "embodied energy."

The Shanghai World Financial Center includes an observation deck, which is the world's highest publicly accessible space.

The tower was selected from a group of four finalists representing different parts of the world.

The other three were The New York Times Building in New York City (Americas), 51 Lime Street in London (Europe) and the Bahrain World Trade Center in Manama (Middle East/Africa). The Shanghai skyscraper represented Asia and Australasia.

This was no beauty contest. The judging criteria, the Council said in a news release, were "seamless integration of sustainable design strategies, architectural form, structure, building systems and life safety for the building's occupants."

Separately, the Council honored architect Cesar Pelli of New Haven, Conn., designer of the Petronas Towers and Chicago's 181 W. Madison for lifetime achievement.

William Baker, the chief structural engineer in the Chicago office of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, also won a lifetime achievement award. Baker is the engineer for the Trump Tower in Chicago and the Burj Dubai, which will be the world's tallest building when it is completed next year.

Here's another [link](#) to information about the Shanghai World Financial Center, including the factoid that its construction was halted during the Asian financial crisis of the late 1990s.

So maybe there's hope for the stalled Chicago Spire.