

Views from the 35th floor: Smith Tower tours begin anew

By DANIEL DEMAY, SEATTLEPI.COM STAFF Published 2:18 pm, Thursday, August 25, 2016



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Dick Phillips looks out of the vintage Otis elevator for passengers at the newly-renovated Smith Tower public spaces, Thursday, Aug. 25, 2016.

It's an office building built on a typewriting empire.

That seems appropriate.

The Smith Tower's original owner and developer was none other than **Lyman Cornelius Smith**, one of the brothers who had, years before, helped invent the first typewriter that used both upper- and lower-case letters, thus beginning what would later be known as **Smith Corona**.

Smith's office building was part investment and part advertisement, it seems, as it drew widespread attention at its opening in 1914, being christened as the tallest building west of the Mississippi (or tallest outside New York, depending on which ad placards you read).

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Now, some 102 years after its first patrons rode the Otis elevator to the 35th floor to see the 360-degree views and enjoy what was then the Chinese Room, the building's public areas have opened anew.

The 42-story office building -- the tallest skyscraper west of the Mississippi when it was first completed -- **was purchased last year** and the new owners began a not insignificant renovation of the public spaces.

As of Thursday morning, the public was invited back to a revitalized space with a new ground-floor market, self-guided historical tour, and an observation deck level that retains elements of its Chinese-themed past (carved ceiling tiles, Chinese signs and the famous Wishing Chair), with a new speakeasy take on what was once the Chinese Room (now called the Temperance cafe).

Renovations also include a private space on the 22nd floor that serves as a lounge for building tenants during business hours, and then can be rented out for special events. That space includes a 1,500-square-foot deck with views to the south of downtown, across the tops of Safeco Field and CenturyLink Field.

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Views from the open-air deck around the Observatory are as stunning today as they likely were in 1914, albeit with fewer trees and a heck of a lot more steel and concrete than L.C. Smith saw. Visitors can grab a cocktail or food while they take in the sights as well, and interact with some of the exhibits around the space.

While tours of the building's public areas could be had for two bits back in 1914 (that's \$0.25 in modern lingo), the price has gone up just a hair since. As of the reopening, the full self-guided tour runs \$19.14 or a trip straight to the top runs \$10, with discounts for seniors, children, military and the like.