

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM).
Fact Sheet on the Author of the Architectural Concept



About the Firm

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) is an American architecture and engineering firm, one of the world's leading firms in skyscraper design. Founded in Chicago in 1936, the firm designed the Burj Khalifa in Dubai and One World Trade Center in New York and is the author of the architectural concept for Iconic Complex in Alatau City, Kazakhstan.

SOM works across several disciplines: architecture, structural engineering, urban planning and interior design. The firm designs the appearance of buildings and their structural systems, develops interior layouts and plans entire urban districts.

History of SOM

The firm was founded in Chicago in 1936 by architects Louis Skidmore and Nathaniel Owings. In 1939, engineer John Merrill joined them, and the firm adopted its current name, Skidmore, Owings & Merrill.

After the Second World War, SOM became one of the leading American designers of skyscrapers and major commercial buildings. The integration of architecture and engineering became the foundation of the firm's approach.

Scale of Operations and Professional Recognition

- **More than 10,000 projects** in over **50 countries**.
- **Nearly 2,000** professional awards.

SOM is the only firm to have received the Architecture Firm Award twice, the highest honour awarded to architecture firms by the American Institute of Architects (AIA). The firm received the award in 1962 and 1996.

SOM's Landmark Projects

- **Burj Khalifa, Dubai, UAE.** Height: 828 m. The world's tallest building, opened in 2010.
- **One World Trade Center, New York, USA.** Height: 541 m. The tallest building in the United States, opened in 2014.
- **Willis Tower, formerly Sears Tower, Chicago, USA.** Height: 442 m. The tower was the world's tallest building from 1973 to 1998.
- **Jin Mao Tower, Shanghai, China.** Height: 420.5 m. The tower opened in 1999.

Other notable projects by the firm include Lever House and the Chase Manhattan Bank headquarters in New York, John Hancock Center in Chicago, and the international terminal at San Francisco International Airport.

SOM in Kazakhstan

Talan Towers, Astana. Designed by SOM, this mixed-use development consists of two towers, 145.6 m and 119.8 m tall, connected by a retail gallery. One tower houses a Class A business centre, while the other accommodates the five-star Ritz-Carlton, Astana hotel and residences. According to the architects' concept, the composition of the complex echoes the Baiterek Monument.

In 2018, Talan Towers became the first development in Kazakhstan to receive LEED Gold certification for green building.

Esentai Tower, Almaty. SOM designed Esentai Tower, a mixed-use tower forming part of the Esentai complex.

SOM's Work on Iconic Complex

SOM is the author of the architectural concept for Iconic Complex in Gateway District, the business and financial district of Alatau City. The firm presented the project on 5 March 2026. It was covered by ArchDaily, Dezeen, Domus and other international architecture publications.

The "Mountain Landscape" concept is inspired by the Trans-Ili Alatau. The stepped silhouettes of the towers and their terraces echo the mountain slopes, while the podium terraces follow the contours of the foothills. The angular façades of the retail section evoke cracked ice, the warm tones of

the metal canopies recall sunrise in the mountains, and the office buildings' varied shapes resemble rock formations.

SOM describes Iconic Complex as a “vertical district” bringing together business, residential, hospitality, retail and cultural spaces. The complex has a total area of 276,800 m². The project comprises two towers, rising to 272 and 78 metres, a three-level podium with an area of 58,000 m², and six low-rise office buildings.

Upon completion, the main tower of Iconic Complex is set to become the tallest building in southern Kazakhstan and a landmark of Gateway District.

Website: [som.com](https://www.som.com)