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Apple Park in Cupertino, California; photo by Daniel L. Lu for Wikimedia Commons

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Veteran VT Consultant Steve Edgett Talks Technology, Market Trends, AI and More.

By Kaija Wilkinson | Industry Dialogue | August 29, 2026

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AI Overview

Steve Edgett has returned to practice as senior vertical transportation advisor at DeSimone Consulting Engineering, extending a nearly 50-year career advising on projects such as



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Apple Park, Shanghai Tower and the complex JPMorgan Chase headquarters at 270 Park Avenue. He emphasizes early integration with structural teams and the unique challenges of New York City, where aging buildings, tight cores and zoning complicate modern elevator solutions. Edgett favors office-to-residential conversions in older or irregularly shaped buildings, notes destination control solved tricky sky-lobby routing, and predicts industry change driven by AI for dispatching and budgeting, advanced fiber hoist ropes, and improved electric drives and electronic controls to boost safety, accuracy and throughput.

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California-based expert is back in the game with DeSimone Consulting Engineering.

by Kaija Wilkinson

When he was a boy in Indiana, Steve Edgett envisioned himself as an astronomer when he grew up, having had a lifelong fascination with space travel. That career aspiration later morphed into aerospace, then architecture, and finally, vertical transportation (VT), where he has enjoyed a nearly 50-year career. “So it turned out I *did* end up moving people up and down, just not with rockets!” he said. With his recent appointment to the role of senior VT advisor at DeSimone Consulting Engineering (ELEVATOR WORLD, May 2026), which has 16 offices globally and is headquartered in NYC, his illustrious career continues after retiring from Edgett Williams Consulting Group, the San Francisco-based firm co-founded by Edgett that earned a reputation as one of the industry’s premier VT consultancies.

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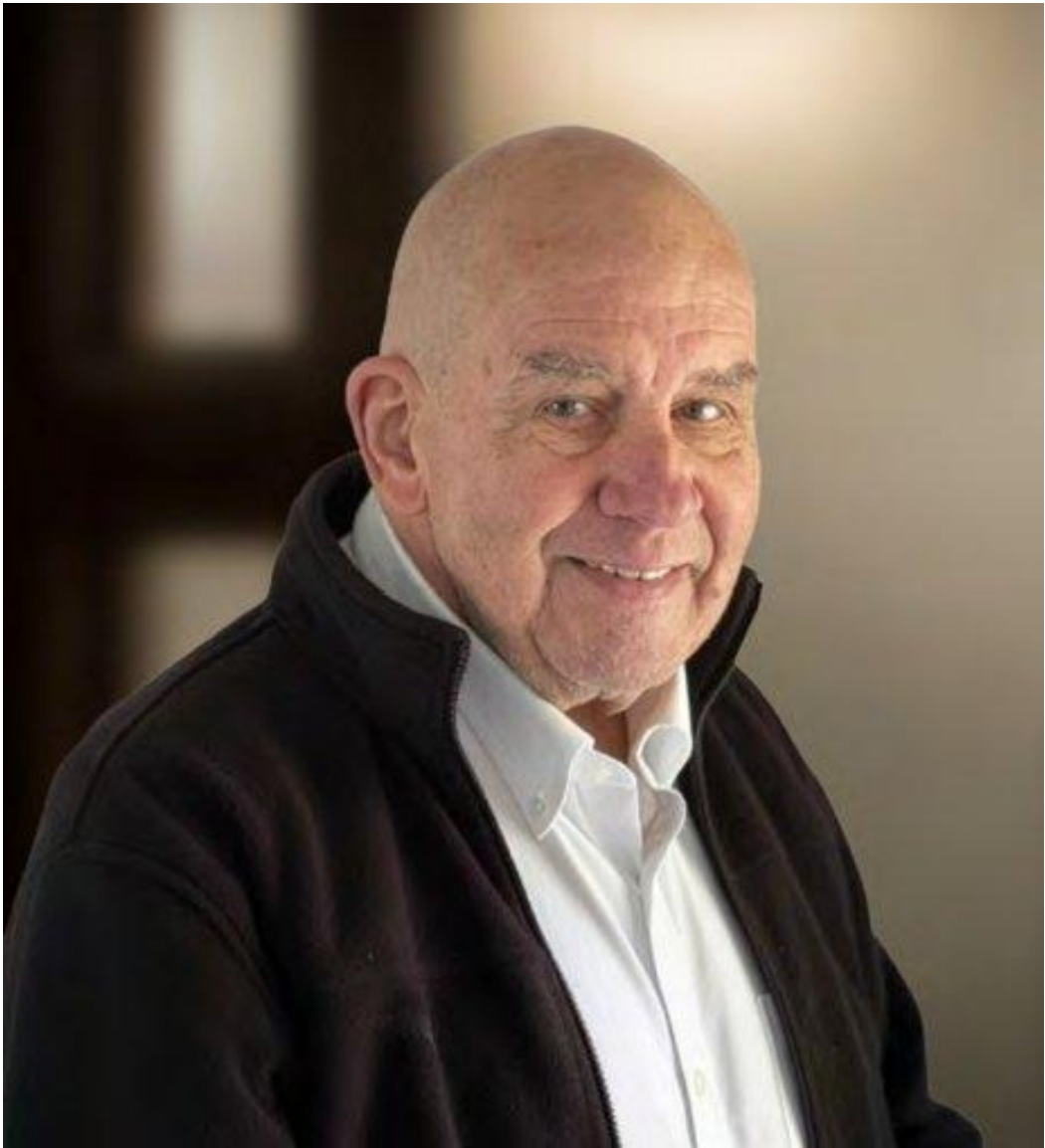
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Throughout his career, Edgett has advised on supertall towers, global corporate headquarters (HQ), landmark mixed-use developments, major technology campuses and high-end retail properties. His portfolio includes Apple Park, Shanghai Tower and the award-winning JPMorgan Chase HQ at 270 Park Avenue in NYC — a 2.6 million-ft², full city block, 1,388-ft-tall supertall designed by Foster + Partners with some 90 elevators and escalators. Edgett — a man who has worked on such buildings as the Burj Khalifa and Kingdom Tower — told EW that 270 Park Avenue was one of his most challenging — but also most rewarding — VT consulting projects. Edgett (SE) took the time to speak with your author (KW) via Microsoft Teams and email

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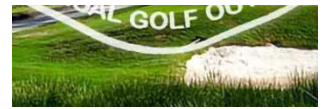
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about his long career, highlights, challenges, how the industry has changed, where it might be headed and more.



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KW: You are based in San Francisco — a beautiful city. Do you live there now, and, if so, what brought you there?

SE: I live north of San Francisco in a small town called Mill Valley (about 14 mi. from the city via the Golden Gate Bridge). I was born in Indiana, went to grade school in Arizona, high school in Connecticut and college in New Mexico (studying architecture

and mechanical engineering). My father sold business equipment for a company that moved him around a lot as he moved up the ranks, like a lot of people did in the 1950s. California came into the picture when I married a woman from San Diego. We had the opportunity to move up to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1978 when I accepted a job with an architecture firm (Skidmore, Owings & Merrill [SOM]), and we just loved it here.



The new JPMorgan Chase HQ in NYC at 270 Park Avenue was one of Edgett's most challenging and rewarding projects; image courtesy of DeSimone

KW: The Shell Building modernization, which you wrote about for us (EW, “Making More Out of Less,” July 1992), sounded like a very important project that you enjoyed very much. In that article, you mentioned the 1965 modernization when it went from having an attendant to being automatic, which is crazy. It’s hard to believe because when I think of elevator attendants I think of Theodore Dreiser novels and stuff like that, and 1965 is really not that long ago. I know you’ve been involved in countless other amazing VT projects. Are there any that particularly stand out?

SE: It’s amazing that there were still buildings in the 1960s that were operator-controlled! More recently, one of the most challenging has been 270 Park Avenue, the JPMorgan Chase HQ in NYC. They wanted to have a central “town hall” area, which became a sky lobby, and we set the sky lobby on the 14th floor, but there was really no space to incorporate shuttles and sky-lobby elevators. So we had to mix them and, fortunately, with destination control, we were able to do that. It’s an exceptionally complex building because part of it is over the Metro-North train tracks so the core had to be elevated to accommodate that. The service and truck elevators at the west side of the project are the only units that are not built over the Metro-North Railway.

The Jeddah Tower (in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia) is another fascinating project. (The megatall was originally called Kingdom Tower and had a different general contractor [GC]). Much of the tower was served by duplex elevator groups going up through the tower serving various functions. I pointed out that, in a two-elevator system, when one goes down you lose 50% of your elevator capacity. So, the cores were revised to allow for a minimum of three elevator groups. The plan initially had a

scheme where the royal apartments at the top of the building would be served by triple-deck elevators that also served the observation deck. I don't think they really thought it through, because when I pointed out that the prince was going to be waiting for an elevator and when that elevator arrived, the likelihood that it was going to be loading and unloading at the observation deck was high, which meant the elevator was not moving until the observation deck passengers departed and refilled the car below. Changing this meant changing the arrangement of the observation-deck elevators.

I think New York is probably the most challenging place in the world for VT design. (AI) Algorithms (for elevator dispatching) will be developed that track traffic volume to handle it more efficiently. Advanced fiber hoist ropes will replace steel hoist ropes for greater efficiency in both tall buildings and, if economics permit, general-use elevators.

KW: Are you and/or DeSimone still involved in Kingdom Tower in any way?

SE: No. Unfortunately, the people we were working for were judged to be engaging in Here is dubious activity. There is a new development team handling it. At 1 km in height, it will be the tallest building in the world when it's completed.

Another challenging project that comes to mind is the Shanghai Tower. That was just a wonderful project to be involved in, with

the progression of it, the sizing of the core and trying to convince the architect we really needed to drag three shuttles up through the core so they could have a workable observation deck. And we had to have two additional fire service elevators that had to go all the way through the building. It was just a lot to cram into one space. But it was really one of the things that made me very interested in coming to work for DeSimone because the structural integration was so good. And I think it could have been even better had we started on the ground floor. It makes more sense, and you can lay the foundation for what comes after. The 270 Park Avenue building was very much done that way. We were one of the first consultants to be brought on board, and our integration with the structural engineer (Severud Associates) was excellent. We had a great relationship with them.

KW: When in your life did you know you wanted to be involved in VT and VT consulting specifically?

SE: When I came on with SOM in San Francisco and learned more and more about how buildings were populated, I gained new perspective on VT and the idea of a vertical mass-transit system piqued my interest. I had the opportunity to work with some truly dedicated architects there. Many of the firm partners were super supportive. Even though they prided themselves on architectural design, they acknowledged that real architecture results in working structures. They were insistent that design had to make sense, and make sense in the context of VT. That's when I decided that this was the career for me.

KW: What does the lion's share of VT consulting consist of in the NYC metropolitan area? I read about conversions all the time, for example, and I know there are certain challenges involved in that.

SE: I think New York is probably the most challenging place in the world for VT design. That's because you have such an incredibly complex built environment, like with 270 Park, where we had active train tracks running under the building. And it's not just that — there are a lot of zoning restrictions, the Department of Buildings, and on and on. Also, New York is highly diverse in its variety of aging buildings. In NYC, it's estimated that 30-35% of all buildings are 100 or more years old. These buildings were not designed to meet modern tenant needs. At Rockefeller Center, we took two of the four service elevators serving the 2 million-ft² building out of service so they could generate income for the observation deck. Then we had to figure out, "How do we service the building with half the service elevators gone?" Then you have to consider the architectural ideals in New York; everyone wants a "statement" building. Economically, if you look at London as a contrast example, developers are pretty (generous) with money. In New York, they're much tighter. So, I'd say New York is the most challenging place.





Edgett and DeSimone will be consulting on the complex, ongoing maintenance of the glass elevators at One Times Square in NYC; image courtesy of DeSimone.

KW: Which kinds of buildings, age wise and layout wise, are most ideal for an office-to-residential conversion?

SE: I don't know if there's a type. I do think that the older office buildings lend themselves to it better because the new buildings are almost formulaic in terms of say, the clear spans — (the distances between interior load-bearing walls or supports) — having to be 40 ft or more. In the residential space, the custom is for shorter lease spans. So that modern clear span is somewhat antithetical to (conversion). That doesn't mean it can't be done, but with any office building you're going to have more elevators than you need (for residential use). So you have to reorganize the elevators and you've got, in this case, more space around the core than you need. What do you do with all this internal space?

KW: The Flatiron Building in New York is a conversion that's underway, and I think its elevator layout is a little more amenable to the conversion concept.

SE: Yes, the Flatiron Building has a high aspect ratio (it is significantly taller than it is wide) and that's good, and secondly, the "flatiron" portion of it is ideal for residential. There's a building in San Francisco — 388 Market Street — a new build that was remarkably successful from a residential standpoint. It has that same flatiron piece to it, and people love the big bay windows on

every floor and are willing to pay for that. So yes, I expect any sort of irregularly shaped building like the Flatiron to be great for conversion. It probably wasn't that great of an office building.





Edgett said Shanghai Tower was a wonderful project with which to be involved; photo by Stefan Fussan with the permission of architects Mashall Strabala and Jun Xia.

KW: What do you see as the next big changes for the VT industry?

SE: One is AI for elevator dispatching. Using existing cameras in a building, the number of people in an elevator lobby can be counted so that an adequate number of elevators can be dispatched efficiently. Current systems have limitations. When someone pushes a button to call an elevator, there's no way to know how many people are waiting, nor accurately estimate how many persons are in each car. Algorithms will be developed that track traffic volume to handle it more efficiently.

AI can also help project managers and property owners go through budgeting variances very quickly, so the cost overruns we see on many projects will be avoided. AI can also look more deeply at a building's design — deep into its past. An

architectural firm has only a relatively short window and record of things that they've done to a building.

Advanced fiber hoist ropes will replace steel hoist ropes for greater efficiency in both tall buildings and, if economics permit, general-use elevators. They're lighter and possess different stretch characteristics to enable more precise elevator landings. Engineering questions about traction, sway characteristics and longevity must be resolved in the meantime.

AC motor efficiencies in speed control and smoothness created for electric vehicles and other industrial applications will trickle into the elevator industry.

KW: What are your hopes for our industry?

SE: While we can be proud of elevators as the first autonomous devices, the controls today remain a mix of 19th-century devices, like the mechanical governor and safety assembly. Yet, we continue to maintain (VT equipment) using 19th-century technology. As an example, there was a rather infamous fatality where a mechanical brake malfunction allowed the car to be pulled upward by the counterweight. We responded in the Code with requiring bi-directional brakes on new installations and the ridiculous "rope brake" applied to existing elevators lacking a bi-directional brake. The tragedy was that the fatality could have been avoided by using modern motor controls to slow and then bring the elevator to a stop at an intermediate floor. Since electronics have proved to be far more reliable than their mechanical counterparts, I believe this kind of event could be prevented with control system changes. We live in a time when passenger aircraft can land themselves. As society moves into truly autonomous vehicles, our industry will find new opportunities to enhance elevator safety and reliability.

I'd like to think that the reliability of electronic logic will enhance our ability to rapidly transport passengers. In the last 50 years, we seem to be in agreement that efficient operation means an increase in the time the elevator uses to deal with passengers. Machine-room-less elevators, in particular, continue to compromise performance as a means to reduce the cost. Some years ago, we had set up a courthouse around high-performance elevators to ensure proper traffic handling. Otis took the job with their Gen2® product, using their premium door operator and an upgraded drive. The result was elevators that were capable of performance outside of what we expect from modern AC-variable-frequency gearless elevators.

More than 60 years ago, floor-to-floor cycle times were one to two seconds faster than today's elevators, despite their use of open-loop Ward-Leonard controls. In the interest of ride quality, acceleration rates have slowed, minimal pre-opening of doors is allegedly enhancing safety and door operators require another second or second-and-a-half of delay before the car starts. Since our primary job is to move people, it should be axiomatic that this requires minimization of standing time at any point.

KW: Who are some mentors you have had in your career?

SE: (The late William S.) "Bill" Lewis (who led the elevator department at JB&B) and George Strakosch (industry veteran, code expert and author) took me under their wing when I met them the first time in New York many years ago. Bob Young at Otis became instrumental in making sense of traffic numbers after Otis invested the time to document real buildings as they built the first Otis plan simulator. Marja-Liisa Siikonen (consultant, worldwide elevator traffic expert and former KONE leader) taught me a great deal about destination dispatch, as did Theresa Christie, formerly of Otis. There are probably at least a

dozen different SOM partners who taught me a lot about architecture from a structural and VT design standpoint.



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