

Safeguarding Public Safety

An Interview with Francesco Bruni, Principal, THE VSA Group

EDITORS' NOTE *With decades of experience in the design and execution of complex building projects, Francesco Bruni has earned a reputation for excellence, innovation, and integrity. Under his leadership, THE VSA Group has become a trusted partner for high-profile clients, including major institutions and cultural landmarks such as the Nederlander Organization, which operates nine Broadway theaters. Bruni's expertise spans architectural design, project oversight, and strategic planning, making him a sought-after voice in the industry. His commitment to quality and client satisfaction has positioned THE VSA Group as a top-tier firm in New York's competitive construction landscape.*



Francesco Bruni

Will you discuss your career journey?

Looking back on my career, I see a blend of “sliding door” moments paired with daily perseverance and an ongoing drive for learning and curiosity. In 1995, a sudden health condition prevented my father from attending a wedding in Florence, and I was asked to attend in his place. Freshly graduated in architecture, I met Vincent Stramandinoli, the founder of the well-respected engineering firm, THE VSA Group, at the reception. At the wedding, he offered me a one-year internship that ultimately shaped the course of my professional life. Had my father not fallen ill, I may never have started down the path that brought me to where I am today.

While working at VSA and soaking in the energy of late-90s New York, I pursued several continuing education degrees at NYU. In 2001, feeling that I had reached the limits of growth in my junior architect role at VSA, I moved to a different architectural firm. I then returned to full-time study after being accepted into Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation. With a master's degree in hand and five years of professional experience, I became eligible in 2004 to begin taking the exams for my

New York State architecture license, which I obtained in 2005. This allowed me to return to VSA as a Senior Associate. In 2010, I was offered to transition the company into a new chapter under my leadership. The transfer was finalized in 2012 and since then, I have been the owner and president of VSA, working with a fantastic group of collaborators and continuing to deliver consulting services to NYC real estate companies – some of whom have been with us since the 1980s.

Will you highlight the history of THE VSA Group?

THE VSA Group is a consulting firm providing architectural and engineering services since 1985 to nearly every major real estate company and medical institution in Manhattan. The firm's core mission has always been to provide New York City building owners with tailored professional services aimed at maintaining the safety

and efficiency of building envelopes, as well as ensuring the structural integrity of framing systems – often modified to accommodate the ever-changing demands of commercial building occupants.

A pioneer of the façade safety program based on periodic inspections, THE VSA Group – alongside a handful of professionals – was deeply involved with the NYC Department of Buildings in the late 1980s during the development of Local Law 11/98, a regulation well known to any property manager in the city. Over the decades, this initiative not only helped safeguard pedestrian walkways, but also significantly impacted the NYC real estate landscape. As a result, the number of DOB-approved exterior wall inspectors has grown from a few individuals to nearly 500 professionals today.

While the industry has often pushed for expansion, VSA has remained true to its boutique – or more aptly, “gazebo-sized” – identity, ensuring daily, hands-on involvement from its principals and senior associates. This personalized approach is the primary reason our loyal clients return to VSA time and again.

The realization that one-third of this 40-year legacy has unfolded under my leadership is both humbling and a profound responsibility – toward our clients, our staff, and ultimately, the city we serve.

How do you describe THE VSA Group's mission?

The world has transformed over the past 40 years at a pace unmatched in any previous

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era of recorded history. This transformation has significantly impacted New York City, its real estate landscape, and the way business is conducted. In the architectural and engineering professions, we’ve witnessed the disappearance of drafting tables, the decline of FedEx-shipped drawing rolls, and the rise of information technologies – culminating in the latest advancements made possible through AI.

Despite these sweeping generational changes, the core mission of THE VSA Group has remained constant since its inception: to safeguard public safety while helping real estate owners and their property managers keep the building envelopes watertight and the interior spaces structurally sound and architecturally efficient. Whether it’s a landmarked vaudeville-era theater in the Broadway district requiring meticulous façade restoration, a 53-story Midtown Manhattan commercial tower impacted by a helicopter crash and in need of structural remediation, or a hospital facility on the Upper East Side needing building envelope modifications to accommodate a new MRI installation through the facade, THE VSA Group’s team of engineers and project managers has worked side-by-side with building representatives – from initial assessments, feasibility studies, and budget estimates, through field investigations and construction documentation, to bidding and negotiation, contract administration, construction oversight, and final agency signoffs.

Will you provide an overview of THE VSA Group’s capabilities?

VSA has earned a strong reputation in the industry as a solid and reliable consulting firm, built on an aggressive, results-driven approach to resolving building conditions efficiently – both in terms of time and cost. We offer our clients tailored, personalized engineering and architectural services that address their specific needs. These range from ensuring compliance with safety and energy efficiency codes to coordinating proposed tenant build-out plans with the structural load limitations of the building.

Our services include forensic investigations to identify the root causes of reported building issues, issuing targeted recommendations for resolution, designing scopes of work for bidding and permitting, assisting with contractor selection, conducting periodic construction inspections to ensure compliance with approved drawings and specifications, and securing final signoffs from city agencies.

Whether the consulting services are based on traditional pencil and tracing paper or on the latest AI-powered technologies, hands-on site assessments, deep knowledge of building construction types, and decades of experience remain the foundation of the trust our loyal clients have placed in THE VSA Group for over 40 years.

What have been the keys to THE VSA Group’s strength and leadership in the industry?

VSA has proudly delivered consulting services to many of New York City’s most prestigious properties, including Lever House, the Ansonia Condominium, the Carlyle Hotel, the Seagram Building, and the Met Life Tower. Our client roster features some of the most prominent institutions in the NYC real estate landscape, such as Vornado Realty Trust, Cushman & Wakefield, The Stahl Organization, The Nederlander Producing Company, Mount Sinai Medical Center, and New York University.

Despite the world-class portfolio and high-profile clientele, the true strength of THE VSA Group lies in the personal relationships we’ve built – rooted in trust – with all individuals involved in our projects. From COOs and portfolio managers of public companies to infrastructure directors, property managers, chief engineers, building staff, general contractors, bricklayers, pointers, and caulkers, we believe that loyalty to people matters more than their job titles.

While the real estate industry can often feel impersonal and transactional, VSA’s continued success is grounded in our commitment to human connection and our ability to solve real, practical problems.

How important has it been to build THE VSA Group team?

THE VSA Group is built on a team of skilled, hardworking professionals who contribute to the firm’s success by making each client representative feel like our only client. I’m proud to work alongside dedicated colleagues – some of whom, like our Comptroller, Evelyn Bruni, and Senior Project Manager, Kenneth Durden, have been with the company since the 1990s and now serve as mentors to our younger team members.

Since taking leadership of the firm in 2012, I have blended legacy team members from the original organization with newly hired talent. One of my key decisions was to replace the traditional vertical structure with a more agile, flat organizational model. This shift empowers

employees to take greater ownership of their work, rather than relying on direction from upper management.

With this horizontal structure, each team member oversees their assigned project from design through construction completion, engaging directly with owner representatives and members of the construction team. Their involvement in every stage of the project – not just in compartmentalized tasks – makes them more accountable, well-rounded, and deeply invested in delivering successful outcomes.

How do you focus your efforts leading THE VSA Group?

Assisting clients by balancing reactive and proactive approaches is the driving force behind my typical day. Once a resolution to reported building conditions is achieved and public safety is ensured, discussions begin with building representatives to define a scope of work. This scope must integrate mandated repairs with proactive measures to address other potential issues likely to arise in the near term – reducing the need for additional projects and minimizing redundant costs and disruptions to occupants. This level of efficiency is only possible through our deep knowledge of each individual building and the mutual trust we’ve established with ownership, both cultivated over many years of dedicated service.

What are your priorities for THE VSA Group as you look to the future?

Our top priority is to honor the legacy of 40 years spent contributing to a better and safer New York City – while continuing to deliver high-end architectural and engineering services today and for the next 40 years. To achieve this, we must recognize the immense value of the knowledge and history we’ve accumulated through decades of completed projects across countless properties.

Simultaneously, it is important to continue developing the soft skills essential for leading THE VSA Group into the future, such as the ability to communicate clearly and persuasively, the leadership skills to inspire and effectively manage the team, and the time management techniques to improve efficiency and boost productivity.

By investing in both our technical expertise and our people, we ensure the lasting success of THE VSA Group’s mission and our impact on the city we serve. ●