

# Bauwelt 10.12

[www.bauwelt.de](http://www.bauwelt.de)

2nd March 2012, 103. year

TOPIC

## Affordable New York

On instruments of subsidized housing and its impact on the city and its architecture ▶ **Seite 12**

BETRIFFT

**Architektur der freien Liebe.** Die Utopie der Kommune von Oneida ▶ **Seite 6**

WOCHENSCHAU

**Zeit visualisieren.** Fotografien von Martin Sigmund und Dirk Brömmel ▶ **Seite 2**

WETTBEWERBE

**Klassischer Vorhang.** Fassadenwettbewerb für die Hainspitze in Leipzig ▶ **Seite 8**



## WOCHENSCHAU

**2 Zeit sichtbar gemacht. Fotos von Martin Sigmund und Dirk Brömmel** *Ursula Baus* [.de](#)

**4 Zwangsvollstreckt – und nun? Das MoMA fahndet nach neuen Ideen für den amerikanischen Vorstadt-Traum**

## BETRIFFT

**6 Architektur der freien Liebe** *Rudolf Stumberger* [.de](#)

## WETTBEWERBE

**8 Geschäftshausfassade Hainspitze in Leipzig** *Friederike Meyer*

## TOPIC – AFFORDABLE HOUSING IN NEW YORK

**12 What is affordable housing?** *Susanne Schindler* [.de](#)

**18 Restoring the Urban Dream** *David Grahame Shane*

**22 Via Verde: Replicable Modell or Singular Success?** *Karen Kubey*

**26 Luxury for all?** *Juliette Spertus*

## RUBRIKEN

**5** wer wo was wann | Leserbriefe | **31** Rezensionen | **32** Kalender | **35** Stellenanzeigen

Title: View out of the "Toren" in Downtown Brooklyn towards Manhattan  
Original photo: Alexander Capoccia

Guest editor of this issue:  
Susanne Schindler  
Responsible editor:  
Nils Ballhausen

**Baustelle Bauwelt** | Die Männer um Erik Neubert waren wieder da. Wir kennen sie bereits seit dem erfolgreichen Küchen-und-Toiletten-Umbau von 2008. Alles begann damit, dass sich der Umleimer endgültig von der Tischplatte löste – ausgerechnet im Meeting mit der Geschäftsführung. Handlungsbedarf! Weil auch der Beamer zuletzt schwächelte bzw. die Jalousien hakten, sich verhedderten und nicht mehr ausreichend verdunkelten, sollte ein neues Präsentationsmedium her. Aber wie integriert man einen 55-Zoll-Flatscreen, ohne dass es aussieht wie im Fitnessstudio? Bündigkeit mit der neuen Magnetwand war gefordert. Zwischenzeitlich blickte die Redaktion in die Abgründe von Detailplanung und Bauleitung. Nach Abschluss der Arbeiten sieht alles andere im Raum besonders alt aus – die Männer werden also wieder kommen. *Red.*



Foto: Redaktion

## VORSCHAU

### Bauwelt 11.12

## DIENSTAG ONLINE – 6. MÄRZ

► Bildstrecke: informeller Städtebau in Belgrad



► Bildstrecke: MoMA PS1 YAP 1998–2012



► Film: João Onofres Yacht im Pool



## FREITAG IM HEFT – 9. MÄRZ

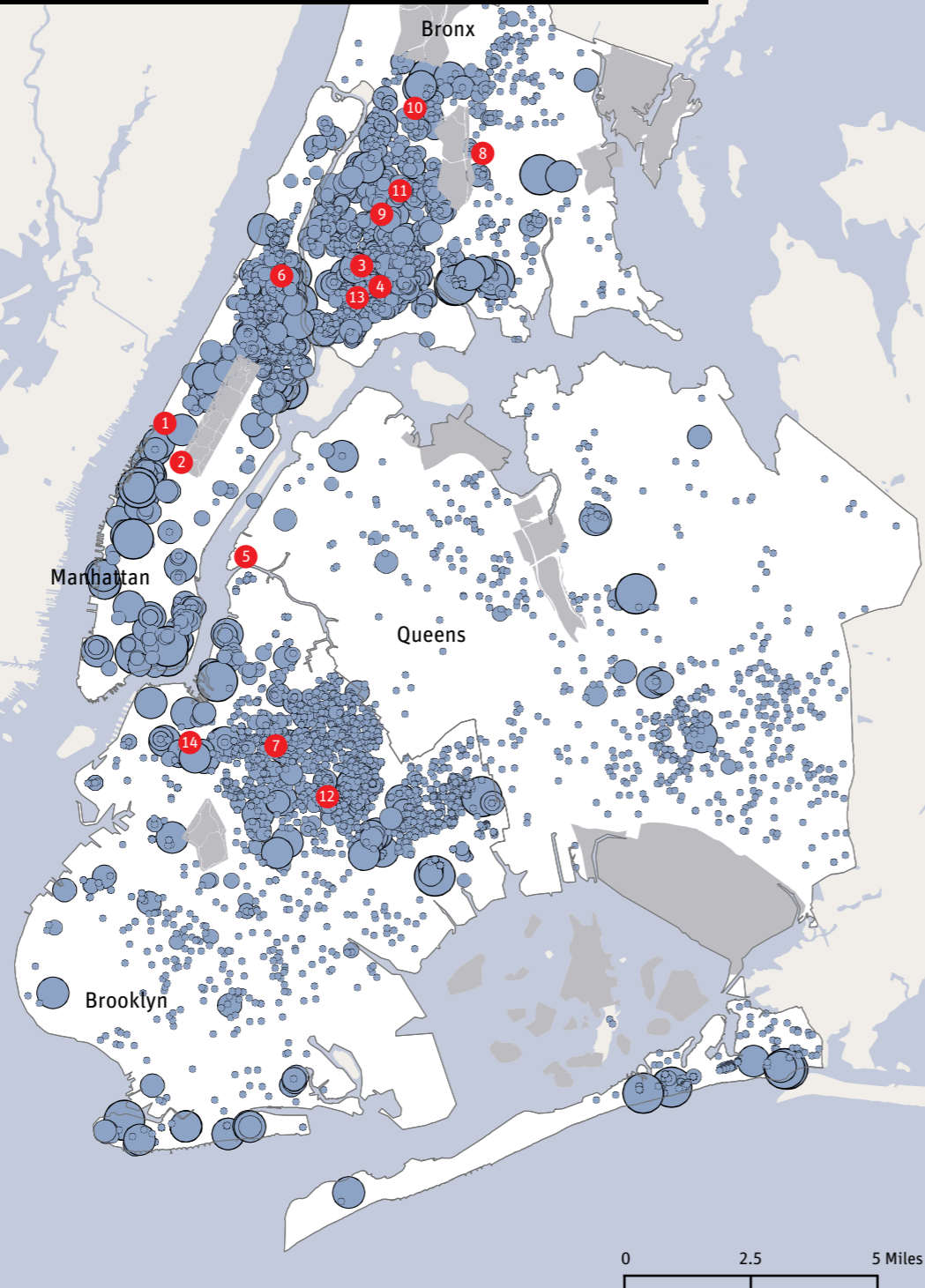
► Resträume aktivieren



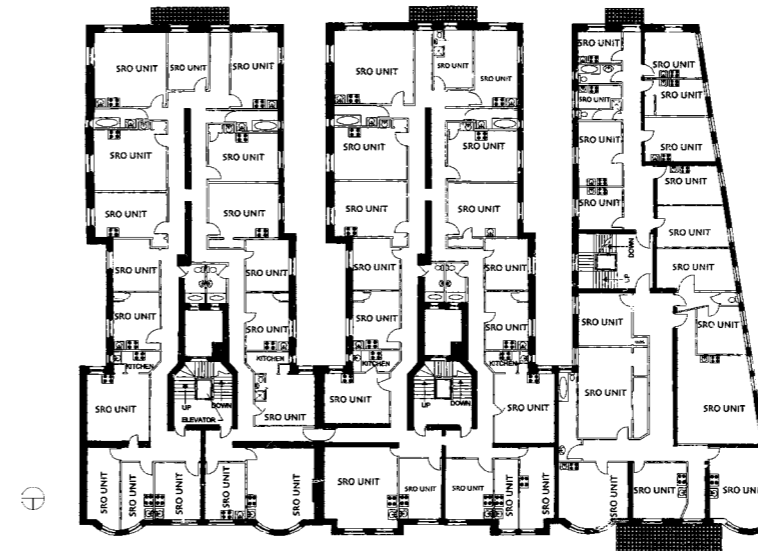
# Affordable Housing in New York | Government-funded housing in the capital of capitalism? What happens when the growing city of eight million inhabitants subsidizes low- and middle-income households?

- 1–15 units
- 16–75 units
- 76–150 units
- 151–500 units
- 501+ units
- Airports and Parks

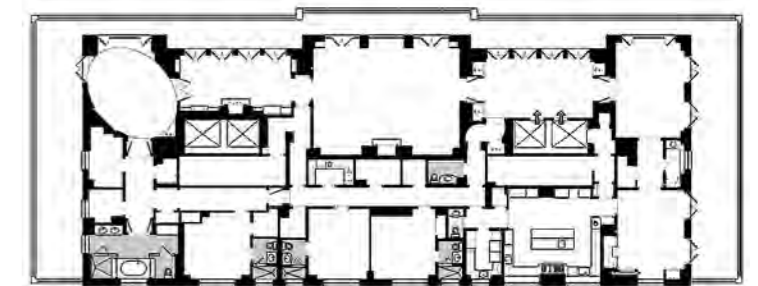
- 1 350 W71 | page 13
- 2 15 CPW | page 13
- 3 Parkview I und III | page 14
- 4 St. Ann's Terrace | page 14
- 5 Hunter's Point South | page 16
- 6 Sugar Hill | page 17
- 7 614 Marcy Avenue | page 19
- 8 2230 Bronx Park East | page 19
- 9 1401 Teller Avenue | page 19
- 10 2950 Grand Concourse | page 21
- 11 1974 Hughes Avenue | page 21
- 12 1501 St. Mark's Avenue | page 21
- 13 Via Verde | page 22
- 14 Toren | page 26



350 West 71st Street, Manhattan | Typical Floor Plan



15 Central Park West, Manhattan | Penthouse Floor Plan



The two ends of the housing market. Above, penthouse with views of Central Park, sold for \$88 million in 2011 (sales price in 2007: \$43 million), architect Robert A.M. Stern for W.L. Zeckendorf. Above left, a few blocks away, a Single Room Occupancy (SRO) in three consolidated, 1920 apartment buildings, 2011.

Plans at scale 1:500 (1"=40')

## What is affordable housing?

A quarter of all New York households already pays more than half of their income for housing. Affordable housing – income-restricted, government-subsidized housing – is the instrument with which, over the course of the past twenty years, entire neighborhoods have been revitalized. What effect does this have on the future of the city? An introduction to terminology, actors, and outcomes.

Text **Susanne Schindler**

**Location and size of affordable unit developments financed between fiscal years 2004 and 2011 as part of the “New Housing Marketplace Plan”. The numbers include both the preservation of existing affordable units as well as new construction.**

Source: NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development

Richard Plunz's *The History of Housing in New York City* (1990), the seminal study of New York housing policy and design to this day, illustrates social change almost entirely by analyzing floor plans. In his epilogue, he points to the growing gap between rich and poor, between the building boom of luxury high-rises in central Manhattan (Donald Trump) and the devastation of the outer boroughs (South Bronx) where suburban-style row houses are built in lieu of the abandoned and burned-down six-story apartment buildings. Plunz blames the demise of social housing in New York on a conservative turn in national politics, which shifted the patronage of low- and moderate-income housing to the private sector. He cautions: “A new amalgam of government and private production has yet to materialize on any scale.”

Today, it is no longer just about luxury; brokers use the term “ultra-luxury” to describe apartments in the top five percent segment of the market, or which are selling above 7 million dollars. The conversion of a former residence for young women run by the Salvation Army at 18 Gramercy Park South, a prime Manhattan location, is a perfect illustration of what this means for life in the city. In 2007, a single room with shared

bath and two meals a day could be had for 700 dollars a month. In 2008 the property was sold for 60 million dollars. The 300 single rooms are now being replaced by 17 floor-through residences, designed by Robert A.M. Stern for developer W.L. Zeckendorf, the team responsible for the record-setting ultra-luxury building 15 Central Park West, completed in 2007.

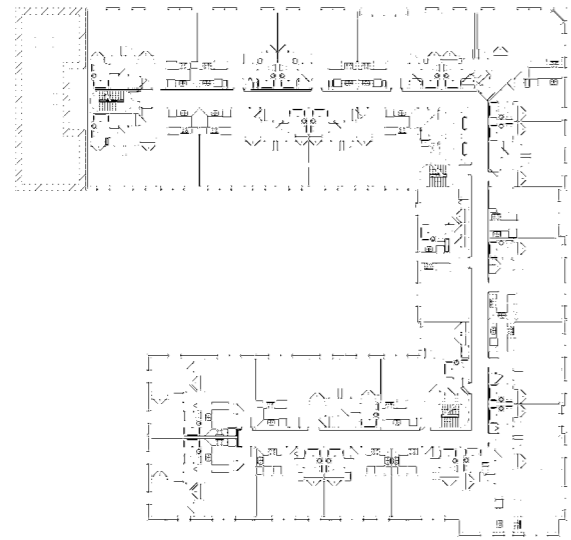
Elsewhere, however, the situation could not be more different than what Plunz describes. Walking the South Bronx today means passing new ten-story residential and commercial buildings. In Harlem, the traditional brownstones, mid-nineteenth-century four-story row houses, have been restored, as have the tenement buildings. Between them, high-end new construction has been built. Whether you want to call it revitalization or gentrification: in the mid-1990s it was still impossible to find a supermarket or a bank here. This upswing clearly comes against the backdrop of an overall economic growth. It can also be attributed to the reigning in of crime under mayor Rudolph Giuliani (1994–2001). But studies, for instance by the Furman Center for Urban Real Estate and Policy at New York University, show that the stabilization and economic growth of the city is also the result of the development of housing for



Typical building organization around a double-loaded corridor, apartment sizes from studios to two bedrooms. 110 rental apartments for households up to 60 percent AMI.

Typical floor plan at scale 1:750 (1"=30')

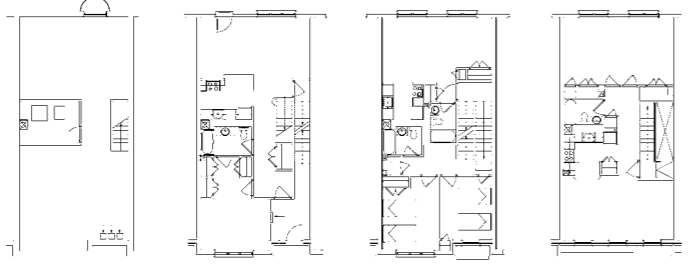
Photos: Andrea Brizzi



Parkview Commons I (2007), 406 East 161st Street, Bronx



Parkview Commons III (2008), 409-415 East 160th Street, Bronx



Four town houses with three units each that can be used by one extended family or rented out separately. Architects for Parkview I and III: Magnusson Architecture and Planning for Nos Quedamos/Melrose Associates/L+M Equities.

Basement, Floors 1, 2 and 3 at scale 1:500 (1"=40')

St. Ann's Terrace (2014), St. Ann's Avenue between 156th and 159th Streets, Bronx



The new dimension of current affordable housing projects: 641 rental apartments (of which 380 are affordable) in eight buildings. Unusually well-resolved apartment plan with a walk-through kitchen and compact closet and bathroom arrangements. Architects: Aufgang+Subotovsky for Jackson Development Group/Joy Construction.

Illustrations: Architects



Aerial photograph looking northwest across Melrose Commons, South Bronx (2008). The red brick buildings, up to twelve-story-high apartments as well as row house developments, largely consist of affordable housing built since the late 1990s. This housing is at the core of the neighborhood's reconstruction. In the foreground, adjacent to the ball field, is the triangular, still vacant site of Via Verde. The larger excavation site is the future St. Ann's Terrace.

Below: A computer model showing vacant parcels and the few remaining structures in Melrose Commons in 1993. The dashed line marks the Melrose Commons Urban Renewal Area, established in 1994, extending between Courtland and Brook Avenues, 156th and 163rd Streets.

Aerial photograph: NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development; Simulation: Magnusson Architecture and Planning

low- and moderate-income households, initiated and co-financed by the municipal government.

The City's active role in housing began in the mid-1980s as mayor Edward Koch (1978-89) was confronted with an enormous stock of real estate which had become public property due to the non-payment of taxes. In the mid-1970s, sixty percent of Central Harlem was City-owned. Koch launched a six-billion-dollar ten-year-plan to rehabilitate this inventory with the goal of selling it to residents or to private developers. His strategy proved successful and was continued in its broad outlines by his successors. Michael Bloomberg, mayor since 2002, set a new benchmark by launching his 8.4-billion-dollar "New Housing Marketplace Plan" with the goal of preserving and creating 165,000 units of affordable housing by 2014. Two-thirds of the goal has been reached today, more or less on schedule despite the economic downturn after 2008.

In the process, the "amalgam of government and private production" Plunz alluded to has come into play involving three main actors: non-profit community development corporations (CDCs), many of which came into being during the fiscal crisis of the 1970s, securing local political participation;

for-profit developers, guaranteeing professional implementation; and the municipal government. Accordingly, no one speaks of "social housing" anymore, as Plunz did in 1990. Today it is all about "affordable housing", implying an altered notion of the role of government. Literally, the term means housing that is affordable to its residents; federal guidelines define housing to be affordable if it consumes no more than a third of a household's gross income. In practice however, since the 1990s, the term refers to publicly subsidized housing designated for certain income groups at a regulated sales or rental price. The key criterion is the Area Medium Income (AMI), also referred to as Median Family Income (MFI), the median household income of a certain geographic area, recalculated annually by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). In 2011, the AMI for a four-person household in New York City was \$80,200. Therefore, if a two-bedroom unit is designated for households earning up to 50 percent AMI, only families with





an annual income of up to \$40,100 can apply. The sale or rental price is set accordingly and must also be maintained for subsequent residents. Once in an apartment, a resident can generally stay even if the household income rises above the original limits. A unit's income-restriction may be unlimited or expire after a certain period of time, depending on funding sources.

In New York City, the lead agency for the construction and supervision of affordable housing is the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). Through requests for proposals, HPD initiates the development of City-owned land, generally for a mix of affordable and market-rate housing. The land is given away at a symbolic price, and the City, through its Housing Development Corporation (HDC), secures the financing by issuing bonds and providing below-market mortgages. The remaining funding is often secured through Low Income Housing Tax Credits (LIHTCs), a form of

indirect federal subsidies for private investment in affordable housing, and through private banks. In parallel, various mechanisms have evolved to create affordable housing through the private market, such as granting a floor area bonus or extended tax abatements (page 26)

Despite all the small government rhetoric in the United States, publically owned and managed housing does still exist, generally known as "public housing". It is restricted to households making up to 60 percent AMI, and is funded by the federal government and managed by local agencies. While federal budgets have consistently been reduced, the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) continues to operate 334 projects serving a total of 400,000 residents. Another component of public housing is the Section 8 voucher program, which subsidizes rents for individuals in the free market. Approximately 235,000 New Yorkers benefit from this program. The demand vastly outweighs the supply: the waiting period for both programs is currently around eight years.

### When the scale is right but the typology isn't

The scale of affordable housing projects emerging in New York is impressive. Often, projects involve entire city blocks as in Harlem's Bradhurst neighborhood, but entire new neighborhoods are also emerging. Hunter's Point South is a 12 hectare (30 acre) project on the East River waterfront in Queens; sixty percent of the projected 5,000 housing units will be reserved for household making between 60 and 130 percent AMI. It is astonishing that the City is placing itself in the legacy of the satellite towns of the 1970s, which have long been frowned upon, even if their residents report a high quality of life. As the press releases state: "The largest affordable-housing project since Co-op City and Starrett City."

The resulting housing, regardless of its being affordable or market-rate, follows only one formula in terms of program and typology, however: the double-loaded corridor in a 60-foot (ca. 18.5 m) deep bar with studios to three-bedroom apartments. Up to twelve stories in height the structural system is block-and-plank: bearing exterior walls with one bearing interior wall made of concrete block supporting pretensioned concrete floor elements. Accordingly, variations between the apartments are limited. Depending on income levels, there are one or two bathrooms, large or small windows, granite or laminate counters. The formula can be expanded through penthouse duplexes or subterranean parking, but the double-loaded corridor is never challenged. Even in the most politically important showcase projects such as Hunter's Point South, this basic organizing scheme is defined by the master plan. Even promising architects such as SHoP, only recently involved in affordable housing, cannot change anything here. Their influence is limited to the exterior.

Proponents of this rather banal and ever same solution argue that the double-loaded corridor is the only economical option on the basis of the net-to-gross ratio, the relationship of rentable to non-rentable floor area. The lack of large apart-

ments is attributed to the fact that the subsidies are calculated on a per-unit basis, regardless of the number of bedrooms. Even in Melrose Commons in the South Bronx, where new construction is co-developed by the neighborhood organization "Nos Quedamos" (We are staying) and where there is a known demand for larger apartments due to large families, the response is: Not to be funded! Instead, for-sale row houses are built which include up to two accessory units to make room for extended family or secure the owner's mortgage through rental income.

The lack of programmatic and typological variation is also due to the fact that in the awarding of projects through HPD, or in the allocation of tax credit funding, team experience and the financial model (the lower the required subsidies, the better) are decisive. With few exceptions, the design proposal is judged only in terms of meeting dimensional and other code requirements. Introducing design competitions to shake up the established ways of doing things or to draw emerging practices to the field is rare. Special selection processes such as those implemented for Via Verde (page 22) have not been replicated despite the obvious improvements (cross-ventilated units!) in the resulting project.

A central politically fraught issue surrounding affordable housing is the fact that construction costs are often higher than for market-based housing. This is partially due to the fact that contractors working in publicly funded projects must pay a living wage, which is generally about double the minimum wage. Unsubsidized developers can go with the lowest bidder. Furthermore, affordable housing generally requires multiple sources of funding which are sometimes contingent on one another, complicating the administrative process. And then there are questionable minimum standards pertaining to affordable housing that are higher than those in market-rate housing: Why does every apartment need to be at least 400 square feet (ca. 40 square meters) in size and contain a full kitchen?

### Long-term affordability, better architecture

Better architecture is, in many ways, a direct result of the development model. If the client is a non-profit organization that will operate the building with a long-term perspective, chances are good that innovative solutions can be found within the budgetary and regulatory constraints. The six supportive housing projects by Jonathan Kirschenfeld prove the point (page 18). If the developer is profit-driven and the project involves no market-rate units at all, the chances for architectural innovation are slim. What New York, and the United States as a whole needs, is a discussion of alternate ways to ensure the long-term affordability of housing. Examples of limited-profit models exist, for instance in the form of community land banks or limited-equity cooperatives. The client's interest in the long-term quality and economic feasibility of a project has an immediate impact on architectural decisions. In a country that continues to see home ownership as the primary form of individual wealth formation, as well as the basis

Sugar Hill, 404-414 West 155th Street, Manhattan | expected date of completion 2014



of a morally responsible citizenry, however, these models are not widely supported. The financial advantages offered to private investors through subsidies are considered more important than the costs incurred by the public sector in doing so: as an example, most housing funded through Low Income Housing Tax Credits must remain income-restricted for only 15 years.

We need to acknowledge that securing affordable housing, in the literal sense of the word, is only possible with subsidies – not only for low- and middle-income households but, as New York shows, even for households earning far beyond the average. In order to make the point politically, it helps to recall that all housing – from infrastructure-intensive suburban development to tax-abatement supported luxury highrise construction – is directly or indirectly funded by the public sector. The Center for Urban Pedagogy summarizes it best: "Almost all affordable housing is subsidized, but not all subsidized housing is affordable."

**Susanne Schindler** | works as architect and author in Princeton. Her recent publication is *Growing Urban Habitats: Seeking a New Housing Development Model* (2009).

**124 apartments for formerly homeless families above an art museum in Harlem. The striking massing and the offset façade elements disguise a double-loaded corridor. Architect: David Adjaye for Broadway Housing Communities.**

Rendering: Architect

Hunter's Point South, Queens | in construction since 2008



Queens is the site of a new neighborhood with other 5,000 apartments, of which 60 percent will be affordable. The masterplan (Architects: FXFOWLE) establishes the double-loaded corridor type.

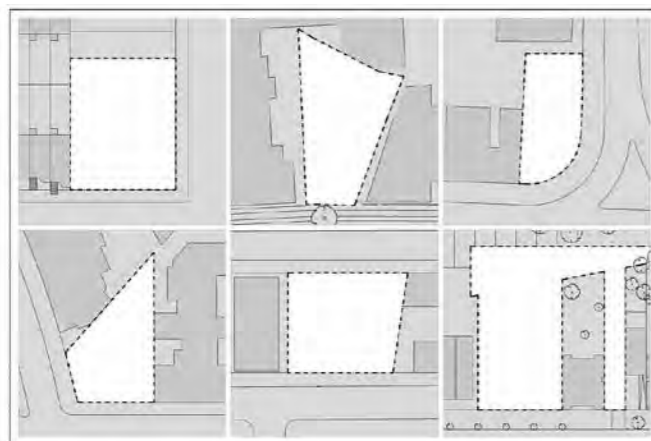
Phase I (A and B) are currently in construction.

Masterplan at scale 1:10,000 (1"=800')  
Rendering: SHoP with Ismael Levya



Six sites, unattractive for traditional residential use, were developed for supportive housing.

Site plans not to scale.  
Photos: Paul Warchol, Rodrigo Pereda, Pedro Pulido (2), Jason Gibbs, Philippe Baumann



## Restoring the Urban Dream

Through precise and formally strict interventions, **Jonathan Kirschenfeld Architects** create dignified housing for the underserved. What are the larger implications for the revival of urban space?

Text **David Grahame Shane**

Aldo Rossi in the *Architecture of the City* (1966 Italian, 1984 English) made a distinction between the great collective monuments of the community and the everyday living spaces of the citizenry, the urban fabric. Both urban systems represented a collective memory but at different scales. Both systems in Rossi's view were shared morphological codes that gave the city its character. With industrialization and scientific knowledge many of the earlier craft traditions were lost, but the traditional forms became collective archetypes, memories symbolic of place and culture. In the recent work of Jonathan Kirschenfeld Architects these archetypes reappear as inspirations for a surreal and courageous recreation of a lost urbanity exploiting to the maximum the local codes and conditions.

Kirschenfeld's designs play on a deep knowledge of the housing typologies of New York and the codes that created these archetypes. Kirschenfeld skips the evolution of the tenement blocks and prefers the courtyard, u-shaped and other perimeter block typologies that flowered in the 1920's and 1930's, often with moderne or art deco styling in the lower cost outer boroughs like Brooklyn and the Bronx. The office builds on unusual, irregular, residual infill sites selected for

his clients, their difficult geometries having rendered them difficult to market or build on. His clients are non-profit organizations dedicated to providing services and permanent housing to special-needs populations such as the mentally ill, formerly homeless, or people living with HIV. The construction of this so-called supportive housing is largely funded by federal, state, and municipal agencies. New York City zoning code regulates this housing not as Use Group R2 / Residential, applied to most forms of housing, but as Use Group R3 / Community Facilities, which includes not only supportive housing but other forms of housing managed by non-profit or governmental organizations such as student dormitories, housing for the elderly, or hospital staff accommodations.

Requirements of Use Group R3 and Use Group R2 differ significantly. First, for Use Group R3 there is no minimum dwelling unit size (even if in practice minimum room dimensions result from the application of accessibility requirements and other guidelines). Second, there is no parking requirement. Third, there are no density rules limiting the number of units per building. Finally, the minimum courtyard dimension is only 20 feet (6.60 m) as opposed to the 30 feet (9.10 m)

### 614 Marcy Avenue, Brooklyn

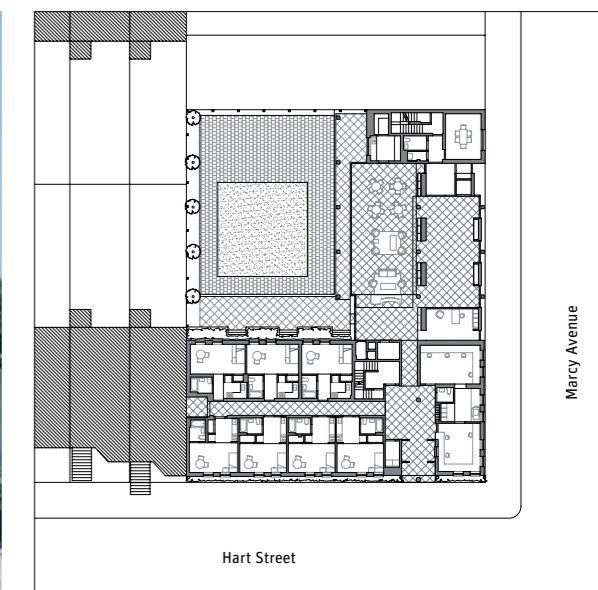
**Client**  
Services for the Underserved

**Program**  
50 studios for formerly homeless

**Construction cost and year**  
\$7,968,000 (2004)



Ground floor plans and building sections at 1:750 (1" = 62')

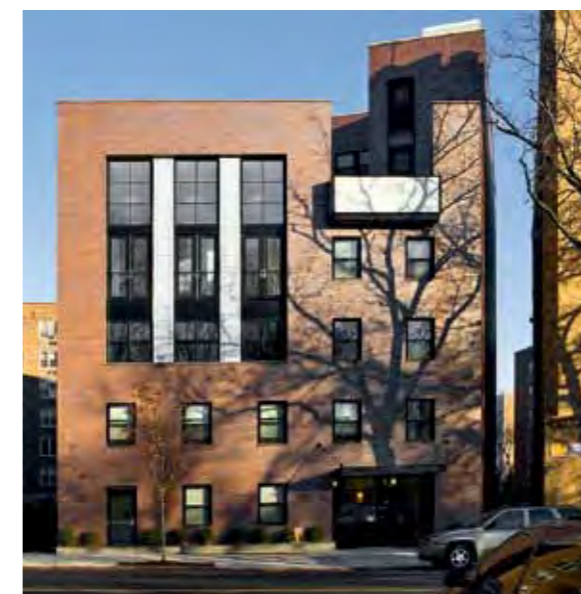


### 2330 Bronx Park East, Bronx

**Client**  
Postgraduate Center for Mental Health

**Program**  
68 studios and supportive services for mentally ill and formerly homeless

**Construction cost and year**  
\$11,977,000 (2010)



### 1401 Teller Avenue, Bronx

**Client**  
Postgraduate Center for Mental Health  
Urban Pathways

**Program**  
43 studios and supportive services for mentally ill and formerly homeless

**Construction cost and year**  
\$8,453,000 (2011)





required in residential construction. It is only due to the fact that supportive housing is governed by these more liberal codes that Kirschenfeld is able to revisit archetypes and realize buildings on sites deemed undevelopable by builders of multi-family housing.

### The House is a City

Kirschenfeld provides a remarkably civilized public realm inside the building, replicating his vision of the city in deceptively simple plans, generating complex sections and massing. At the city gate a doorman-concierge station at the entrance is standard to ensure security, and a waiting area behind generally gives onto the bank of elevators and stairs leading upstairs. Mailboxes, laundry rooms, and recycling rooms cluster around the elevator cores. Common rooms – little town squares for meetings or dining – are typically located on the ground level, opening up to a courtyard garden, as at Marcy Avenue or Hughes Avenue. In some schemes support services occupy the second floor, or the sequence of public rooms continues up to the top floor, culminating in a double height common room and a roof terrace, as at Bronx Park East (marked by a magnificent Loosian window facing the park). Attention is given to detail: Floor tiling and ceiling coves articulate the entry sequence in the front halls with small bench alcoves by the el-

evator entrances. Along the upper corridors, ceiling coves and floor patterns mark the entrance to each apartment. In this case the house is elegantly and economically embedded deep with the protective matrix of codes and regulations, reflecting the best in the city's urban morphology, placed at the disposal of those most fragile and at risk in the city. This is a great achievement, creating a network of small, wonderful monuments to a hidden safety net, almost invisible and hardly known, but gifts that enrich the life of the great city (as recently noted by the New York Times). The Times placed Kirschenfeld's work in the context of the "Making Room" initiative, a larger effort to revise New York City's building codes to allow for housing that responds to current needs. There, Kirschenfeld, working as "Team R8," made the case for extending the logic (and the existent R3 code) underlying his housing to apply to the needs of the general public, proposing four new buildings with mixed-income populations on the Grand Concourse in the Bronx. Team R8 converted the boulevard into a tree-lined public space like Barcelona's Ramblas.

### Subsistence Dwellings for the 'Creative Class'

In this Rossian urban fantasy of bottom-up infill building, the new, local netizens return from the cold to reclaim the sidewalks and center lanes from cars, creating a new, courageous, and more flexible future urbanism. In a surreal twist the infill housing of the underprivileged suddenly takes center stage on the Grand Concourse to serve a new, upwardly mobile bourgeoisie, a fluid networked generation left out of New York City's current housing equation. These micro moves would invigorate the city and Grand Concourse from within and from the bottom-up, offering a new, wired, hyper-flexible *Existenz-minimum* dwelling type to the currently endangered 'creative class' whose participation is crucial for the city's future. Out of New York's collective morphological unconscious, Kirschenfeld and Team R8, like a magician, draw a sketch of a new emergent urbanism beyond Rossi's wildest dreams.

**David Grahame Shane** | is an adjunct professor of urban design at Columbia University and the Cooper Union in New York. He is the author of *Recombinant Urbanism* (2005) and *Urban Design Since 1945; a Global Perspective* (2011).

ator entrances. Along the upper corridors, ceiling coves and floor patterns mark the entrance to each apartment.

Kirschenfeld's strict, urban, organizational hierarchy, from public to semi-public to private, proves extremely flexible in these infill micro-sites. Kirschenfeld employs both single- and double-loaded corridors on the residential floors, which are generally composed of studios, each with a full kitchen and a full bathroom. Double-loaded corridors have windows at both ends where possible, and their midpoint is marked by a resident lounge, another mini urban marker. Single-loaded corridors, as at Teller Avenue and at St. Marks, are daylit by, in the first case, Kalwall-insulated fiberglass panels and, in the second case, by fixed lot-line windows with sprinkler heads directly above, the only way to place openings on the property boundary. Even within each unit, Kirschenfeld manages to center a room with ceiling coves, giving each space a quiet dignity, while making clever plan moves to secure excellent corner rooms with windows in two directions if the site permits.

The work of Kirschenfeld's office demonstrates the ancient Alberti dictum that a house is a small city and the city

*Supportive housing is governed by codes that allow Kirschenfeld to realize innovative courtyard solutions on irregular infill sites.*

### 2950 Grand Concourse, Bronx

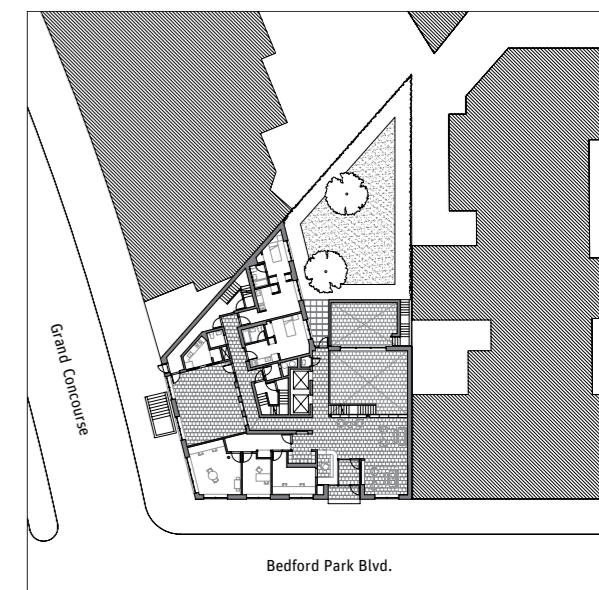
**Client**  
Postgraduate Center for Mental Health

**Program**  
76 studios for mentally ill and family homeless

**Construction cost and year**  
\$16,290,000 (2012)



Ground floor plans and building sections at 1:750 (1" = 62')

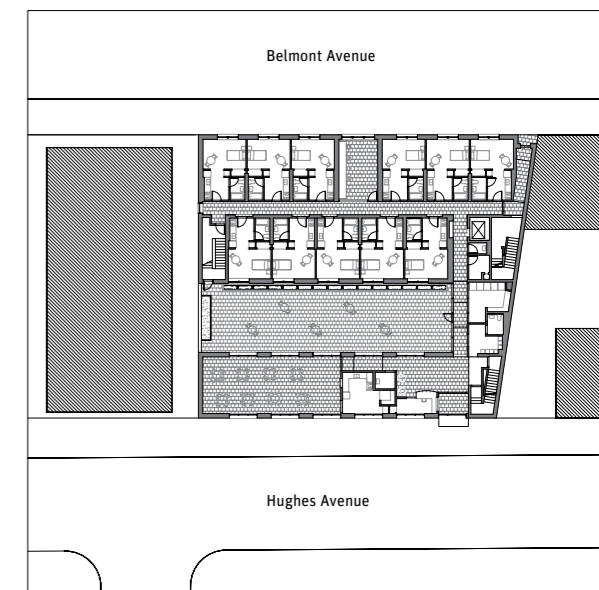
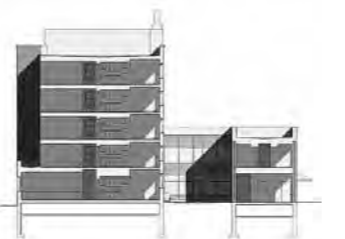


### 1974 Hughes Avenue, Bronx

**Client**  
Urban Pathways

**Program**  
55 studios for mentally ill and formerly homeless

**Construction cost and year**  
\$10,558,000 (2012)

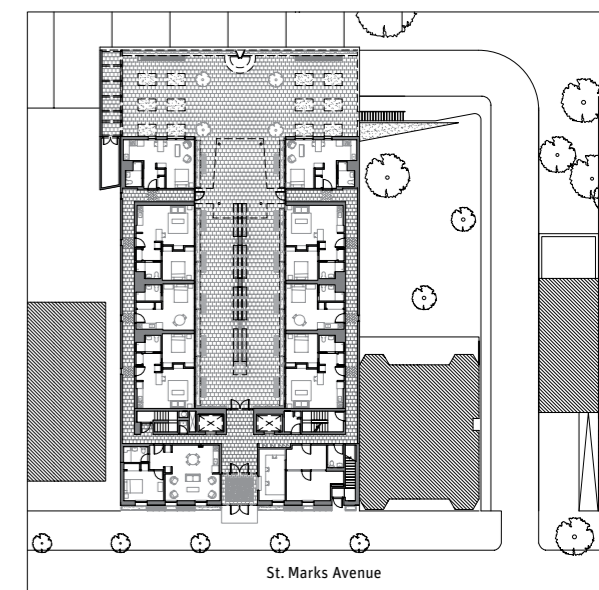
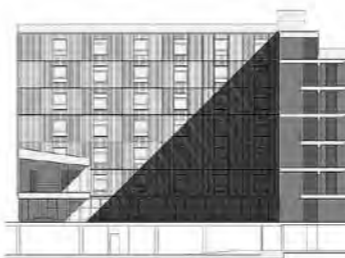


### 1501 St. Marks Avenue, Brooklyn

**Client**  
Common Ground Community

**Program**  
54 studios and one-bedroom units for formerly homeless, mentally ill, seniors

**Construction cost and year**  
\$20,111,000 (2011)



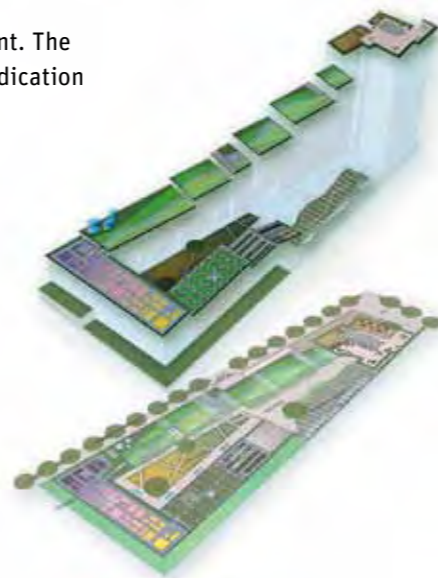




## Via Verde: Replicable Model or Singular Success?

In the Bronx, **Dattner Architects** and **Grimshaw Architects** have designed a much-noted housing development. The unusual design competition process and the innovative architectural solutions could prompt a renewed dedication to the unglamorous field of affordable housing.

Text **Karen Kubey**



Even before a single resident has moved in, Via Verde in the South Bronx is already a hit with the media and elected officials. New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg called the project “one the most environmentally advanced affordable housing developments in the nation,” while architectural critic Michael Kimmelman made Via Verde the subject of his front-page, New York Times debut, writing that the development “makes as good an argument as any new building in the city for the cultural and civic value of architecture.” The South Bronx has been a site of intense development for the last two decades, largely with new low- and middle-income housing, in efforts to revitalize a borough that was devastated by building fires and abandonment in the 1970s. The area known as Melrose Commons is once again a dense neighborhood (page 15).

The 222-unit Via Verde is the result of the 2006 “New Housing New York (NHNY) Legacy Project” competition. Co-sponsored by the American Institute of Architects New York Chapter and the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), the competition’s explicit challenge was to create housing that would be “affordable, sustainable, and replicable.” A team comprising the New York architectural firms Dattner and Grimshaw, with the for-profit affordable housing developer Jonathan Rose Companies, and New York City’s oldest non-profit housing developer, Phipps Houses, won the competition. The team combined standard construction methods with a sophisticated façade system, innovative apartment layouts, and extensive green elements, rising to the competition challenge.

### Ascending the Green Way

Via Verde’s dramatically stepped form, along with the sharp lines of its prefabricated façade, complement the range of building types in the area. Rising south-to-north from three-story townhouses to a 20-story tower, Via Verde wraps around the edges of its narrow, triangular site, forming an intimate courtyard and maximizing sun exposure. The name Via Verde, or “Green Way,” refers to the project’s system of planted roofs. Starting at the courtyard amphitheater, residents will climb to the roofs, spiraling up through plantings of conifers, an orchard, and resident gardening plots, finally arriving at a “fitness roof,” with a covered terrace for exercise classes, opening into an indoor fitness center. Via Verde also incorporates a ground-floor health clinic and has become a test case for New York City’s Active Design Guidelines, adopted in 2010, promoting healthful living through architectural features like inviting, open stairs as an alternative to the elevator. Via Verde’s emphasis on healthy living expands the concept of “green” building.

The designers of Via Verde deviated from tried-and-true efficient unit layouts, creating instead more livable apartments that revive historical experiments in housing. While mid-rise housing in New York is typically 60 feet (18.30 m) deep, with double-loaded corridors, Via Verde’s depth at its mid-rise section is an unheard-of 47’-6” (14.50 m). The

building’s most innovative units are the two-story, two-bedroom units in the mid-rise section along Brook Avenue. Double-loaded corridors, located on every other floor, provide access to the lower level of each unit, whose upper, floor-through level allows for cross-ventilation and incorporates courtyard-side balconies, rare in medium-income housing. In the building’s southern section there are two-story townhouses with private gardens and up to three one-story, floor-through apartments above, accessed by exterior stairways, elevator-free. Ground-floor, live-work units line the site’s Brook Avenue edge. The tower provides studios to three-bedroom units, oriented about a double-loaded corridor, with every living room incorporating a corner window. All residents will access the building via a Brook Avenue entrance to the courtyard, activating the semi-public space.

### Government Support

In addition to Via Verde’s extraordinary design, the project boasts quantifiable benefits in affordability and sustainability. Prices for the project’s 151 rental apartments are set for households making 30 to 60 percent of the Area Median Income (AMI), which is currently between \$24,000 and \$48,000 annually for a family of four; the monthly rent for a two-bedroom unit is \$942. The 71 co-ops are priced for those making 70 to 100 percent of the AMI, with the purchase cost for a two-bedroom apartment beginning at \$146,000. The design team estimates that the building will be over 30 percent more energy efficient than standard housing developments. Via Verde’s waitlist—7500 applicants for the 151 rental apartments—says more about the lack of affordable housing in New York, unfortunately, than it does about the specific project.

The quality does come at a cost. The building’s developers estimate that the \$100 million project, at \$236 per square foot (\$2,600/m<sup>2</sup>), cost five percent more to construct than a typical affordable housing project would have, with cast-in-place tower construction and remediation of the brownfield site accounting for most of the extra expense. Via Verde’s architectural achievements were possible only because of extensive governmental support, not only through funding, but also in terms of regulatory exceptions: a mayoral override exempted the project from having to provide car parking, typically a major expense in housing development. The comparably higher costs are the cause for some criticism. “You could make anything affordable with enough subsidies,” said Jerilyn Perine,

View of Via Verde from the south; to the right, a 1970s public housing project as well as a school. Below: View from the tower across the roof terraces toward Manhattan.

Axonometric view: Architects Photos: Robert Garneau/Phipps, Rose, Dattner, Grimshaw







**View from the east: The façade was assembled from pre-fabricated panels complete with sunshades and balconies. The materials include wood, cement, and aluminum.**

Ground floor and fourth floor plans, building section at scale 1:1000 (1"=80')

executive director of the Citizens Housing and Planning Council and former commissioner of HPD. "Via Verde is like the High Line. These things are great for what they are, but they are not good public policy models because they are too expensive to do again. The challenge of government is to spend the least and get the most." Other experts point to the fact that housing, inherently expensive to construct, must be publicly subsidized to remain affordable for residents. As New York City Department of Design and Construction commissioner and NHNY juror David Burney put it recently, "Design is not the obstacle. It's the way we deliver housing that's the problem. The rest of the world does it with central government financing. If we can spend 10 billion a month on wars, we can get a little bit back and spend it on housing."

### Learning from Via Verde

Via Verde emerged from a unique selection process: initiated and organized by the New Housing New York Steering Committee, an independent group of architects, developers, and City representatives, NHNY was an open, two-stage competition for architect-developer teams. 32 teams from around the world submitted responses to the first-phase request for qualifications, of which five were awarded stipends and invited to submit full design and development proposals. An independent jury used weighted evaluation criteria, with 30 percent each for "innovative design" and "economic feasibility," 20 percent for "green building," and 10 percent each for "replicability" and "team experience," placing a much higher value on design than typical in affordable housing. Rick Bell, executive director of the AIANY, highlighted the importance of the "combination, from the outset, of the design and development teams sharing linked goals of building affordable housing that is emphatically green."

Can NHNY's results be replicated? Architect and compe-

tion co-organizer Lance Brown feels that "the question of replicability [of Via Verde] has been superseded by a sea change within HPD." While the two-stage process has so far proven too time-intensive for HPD to repeat, the agency has revised its own project-team selection criteria, giving 25 percent weight to design. Holly Leicht, a former deputy commissioner for development at HPD, saw design quality in proposals to the agency rise across the board after the NHNY competition. She believes Via Verde's media exposure has raised the bar for housing design in New York and across the country. Leicht also pointed to the successful results of NHNY's relatively open-ended brief, countering the "knee-jerk reaction that in order to get good design you need strict requirements."

Via Verde marks a turning point in New York City housing. With the cost of living continuing to rise and once-plentiful City-owned sites increasingly rare, the need for well-designed housing is growing. Via Verde has achieved one of the most difficult feats in urban housing, producing both a sense of community and access to open space at a high density. The project sets a precedent for what is possible with investment in housing and design.

**Karen Kubey** | is an architect based in New York specializing in housing design and research. She was the founding co-chair of the New Housing New York Steering Committee and is currently producing an exhibition on low-rise, high-density housing titled *Suburban Alternatives*.

Lance Jay Brown, Mark Ginsberg, and Tara Siegel, architects and co-organizers of the New Housing New York competition, have authored a book documenting the competition process and results: *New Housing New York: Legacy Project. Best Practices in Affordable, Sustainable, Replicable Housing Design*, to be published later this year by Oscar Riera Ojeda.

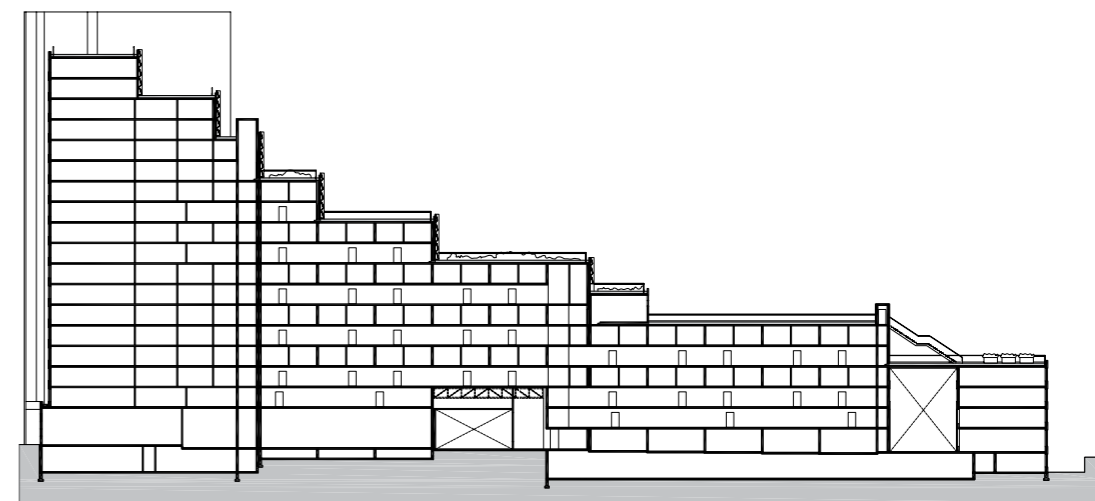
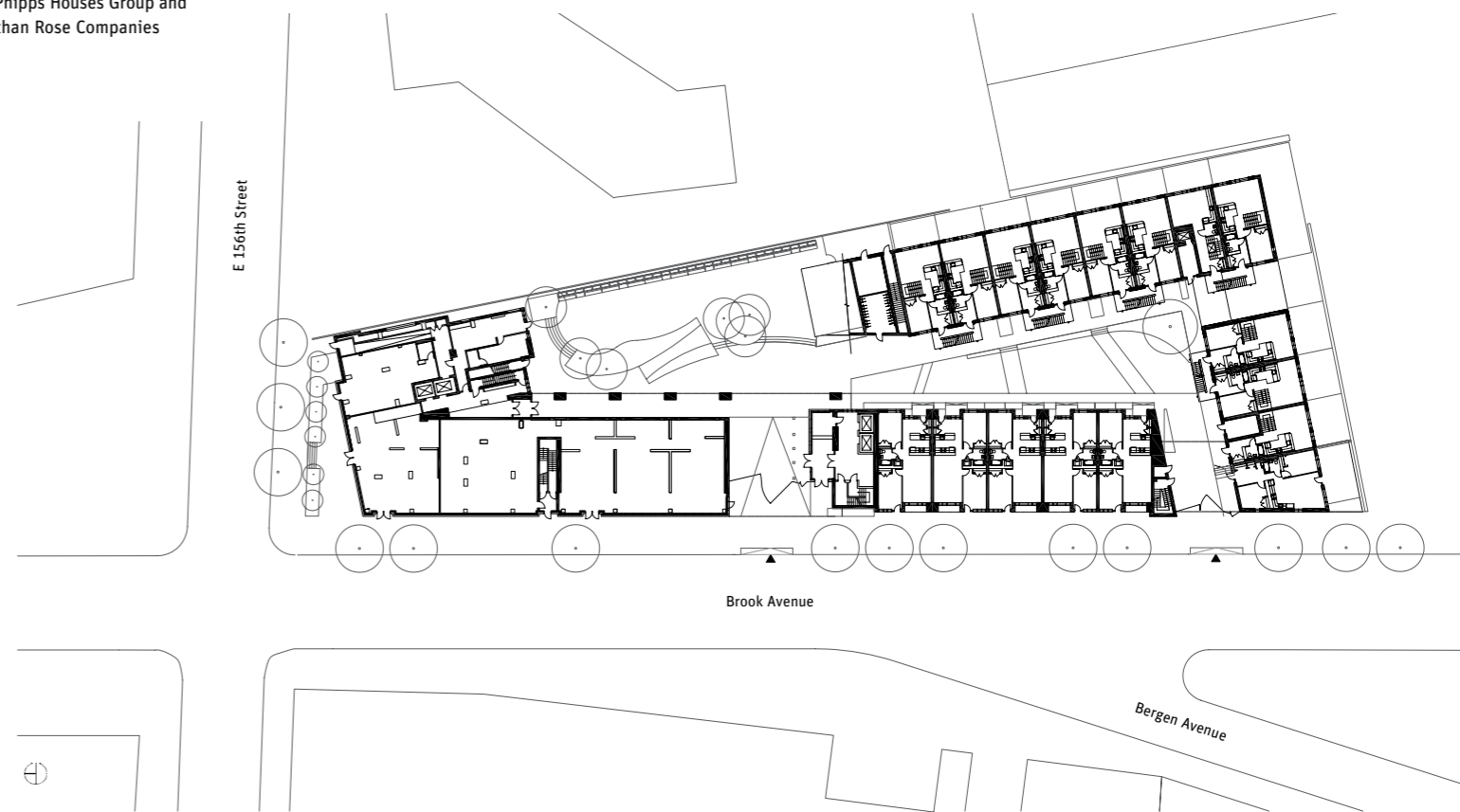
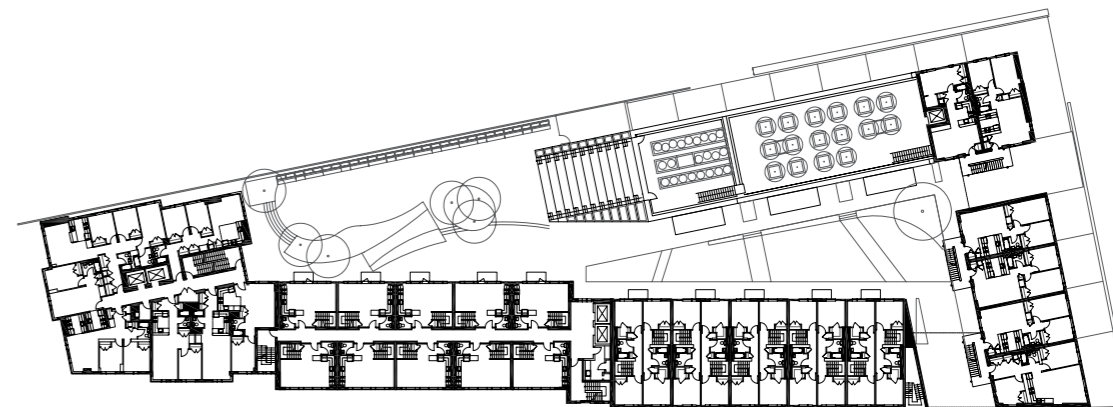
**Project Team**  
PRDG – Phipps Rose Dattner Grimshaw

**Architects**  
Dattner Architects, New York, and Grimshaw Architects, New York

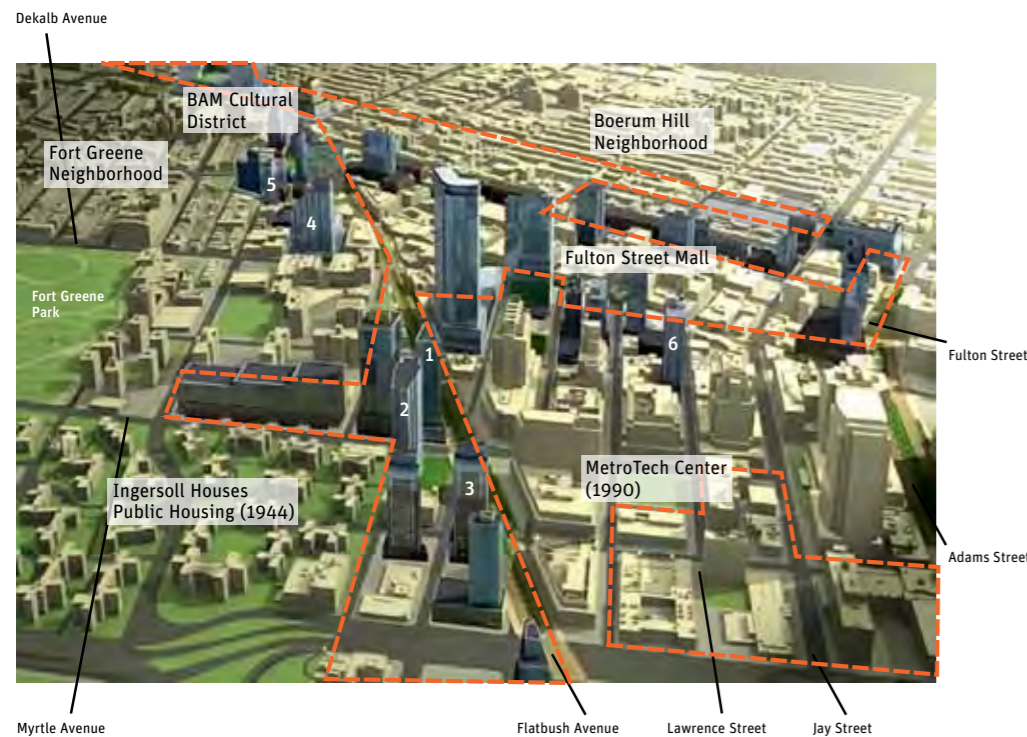
**Structural Engineer**  
Robert Silman Associates, New York

**Landscape Architect**  
Lee Weintraub Landscape Architecture, New York

**Client**  
The Phipps Houses Group and Jonathan Rose Companies







**Downtown Brooklyn, model view looking south. Projects that have resulted from the “Special Downtown Brooklyn District” 2001 rezoning (dashed line) are marked in blue; keyed are residential towers that were occupied by 2011.**

Image: Still from a video by Downtown Brooklyn Partnership, 2006.

- 1 Toren, 240 condominiums incl. 40 affordable units
- 2 Avalon Fort Greene, 620 rental apartments
- 3 Oro, 303 condominiums
- 4 DKL BKL N, 365 rental apartments incl. 73 affordable units
- 5 Forte (230 Ashland Condos), 108 condominiums
- 6 Brooklyner, 491 rental apartments

## Luxury for all?

The Toren residential tower by **Skidmore, Owings & Merrill** exemplifies a market segment that has transformed Downtown Brooklyn over the past decade. By including affordable housing in luxury projects, developers and condominium buyers gain financial advantages—but what does this arrangement offer the city?

Text **Juliette Spertus**

I used to know that I had arrived in New York City when I saw brick housing towers file past in rows from the expressway. These superblocks, built as various forms of low- and middle-income dwellings into the 1960s, constitute only a small part of the city’s housing stock. But the scale and the ubiquitous red brick, punctuated by pairs of small double-hung windows, announced: Here is New York.

Fast forward ten years. If I think of a single housing typology that epitomizes New York City today, it is the luxury condo: glass and steel residential towers up to 40 floors high, clustering in former industrial areas like the Far West Side of Manhattan or the Brooklyn-Queens waterfront, areas that were rezoned for high-rise residential and commercial development over the last ten years. Downtown Brooklyn, the city’s third largest business district after Midtown and the Financial District in Manhattan, was rezoned in 2001. The City Council approved a “Special Downtown Brooklyn District” to stimulate investment in an area that, despite the economic and construction boom of the 1990s, was characterized by parking lots and aging government and commercial buildings unchanged since urban renewal efforts stalled in the 1970s. The

plan allows for a variety of commercial, entertainment, and residential uses; residential zoning was changed to R10 (highrise), ultimately envisioning 35,000 new residents. The rezoning brought the borough some of its first luxury residential towers with over two thousand apartments in Downtown Brooklyn to date.

The luxury condo does not, at first glance, seem to have anything to do with brick superblocks for low-income residents. But it turns out that many of the new high-rises incorporate income-restricted housing. The 37-story Toren (Dutch for “tower”) is perhaps the most architecturally striking of the new high-rises rapidly changing the face of Flatbush Avenue in Downtown Brooklyn. It was designed by architect Roger Duffy of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) for developer BFC Partners. Of the 240 units, 40 are income-restricted. Why would developers incorporate these units in their project?

In the late 1960s, as the city was experiencing rapid population loss, a new tax law was written to stimulate residential construction. Between 1971 and 1987 every residential development in New York was eligible for a 421a tax abatement, or the right to continue paying taxes on the pre-construction



### Architects

Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, New York

### Structural Engineer

Severud Associates, New York

### Façade

Israel Berger & Associates, New York

### Client

BFC Partners, New York

**Flatbush Avenue, corner of Myrtle Avenue, shortly after the completion of the Toren. Vacant parcels still dominate the area. In the background: DKL BKL N, a new residential tower completed in 2010, and the 1927 Williamsburg Savings Bank, converted to high-end residential use in 2007.**

Photo: Robert Polidori



value of a property for up to 25 years. By 1987 the housing market in mid-Manhattan had recovered and the tax abatement was removed from that area. The general housing subsidy has since been repurposed to preserve affordable units and economic diversity in high-rent and gentrifying neighborhoods. Most of Manhattan and the wealthier parts of the outer boroughs are “geographic exclusion zones.” Here developers have to set aside 20 percent of the units for families earning 60 percent of Area Median Income (AMI) to qualify for the 421a tax abatement. Downtown Brooklyn has been an “exclusion zone” since 2008. There is no affordable housing requirement outside of these zones, but developers can qualify for additional tax benefits if they set aside the required number of affordable units. Critics point out that the city loses millions of dollars in taxes through the 421a program – \$911.6 million in 2011 alone – for a relatively small number of affordable units created. Critics also note that units generally stay affordable for only 35 years, after which restrictions are lifted.

velopers often chose to build the affordable units off-site in a less costly part of the city. In 2005, the City required developers to distribute these apartments within the project itself and equip them to the same standards as the market-rate units. Here, too, critics point to the inadequate number of units produced compared to programs in other high-cost cities such as Boston which require including affordable units in all developments above a certain size. Advocates emphasize that the units stay permanently income-restricted and that the program, at least in theory, does not cost the city anything. (In practice, the floor area bonus is frequently accompanied by further subsidies for the affordable units.)

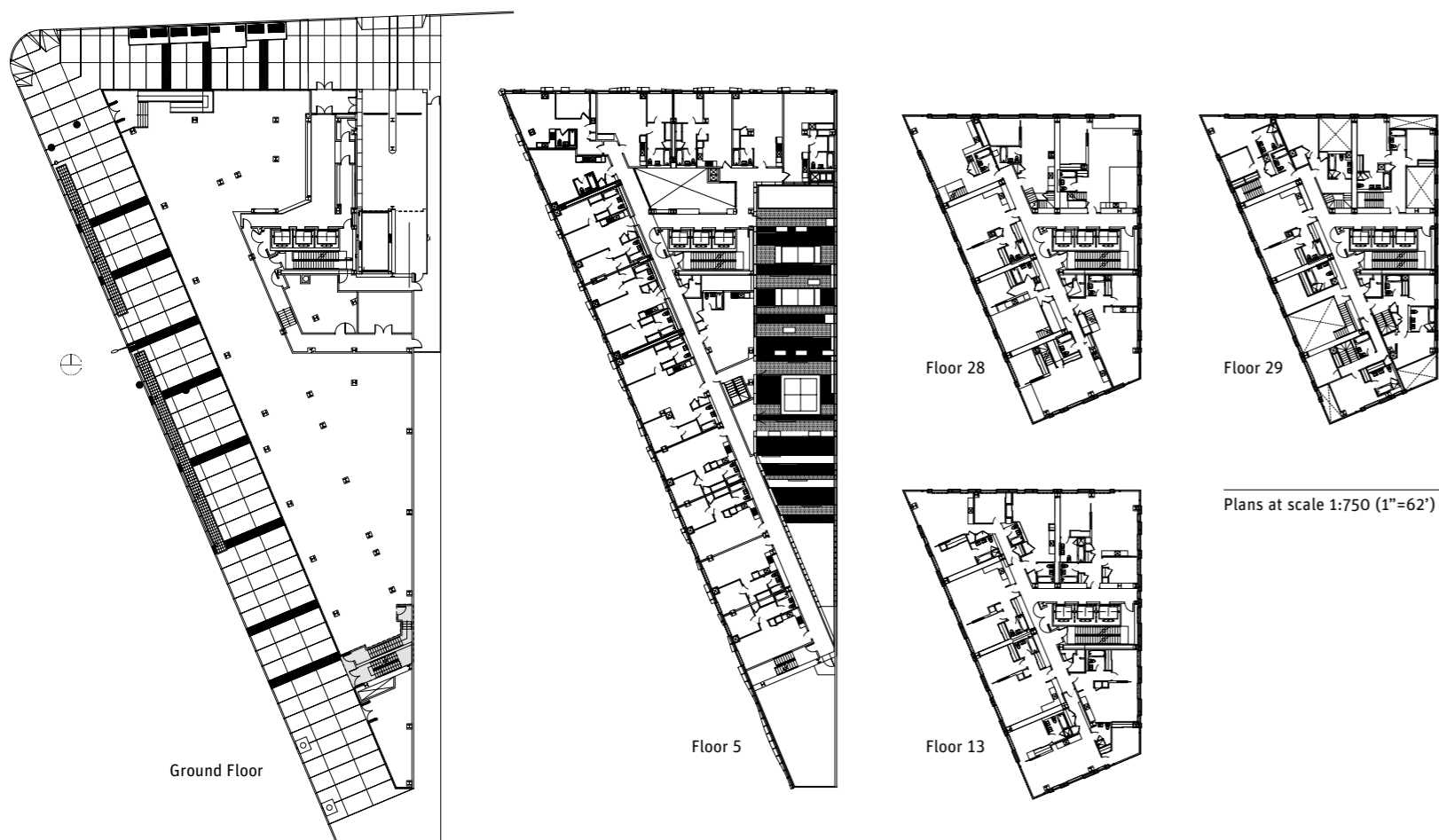
The Toren's affordable housing was not the result of either of these programs in their current versions. BFC Partners broke ground in 2007, several months before the 421a rules were updated and the City made Downtown Brooklyn an exclusion zone. Under the old 421a rules, the Toren was already eligible for extended 421a tax benefits because it received significant government assistance (SGA) in the form of a grant for a combined heat and power (CHP) plant. The City required BFC Partners to include affordable units in the Toren in exchange for allowing BFC to purchase adjacent publicly owned land at below market value. Since the affordable units were not set aside as part of a specific housing program, BFC Partners was able to negotiate a relatively high 175 percent AMI income restriction, which translates to approximately

**Tax policy: progressive or wasteful?**

In 2008, the City also applied a complementary planning instrument called the Inclusionary Housing Program to Downtown Brooklyn. Under this program, developers generally receive a 33 percent floor area bonus if they set aside 20 percent of the units for low-income households (up to 80 percent of AMI). In the first iterations of the program, created in 1987, de-

**Distribution of program elements in the Toren**

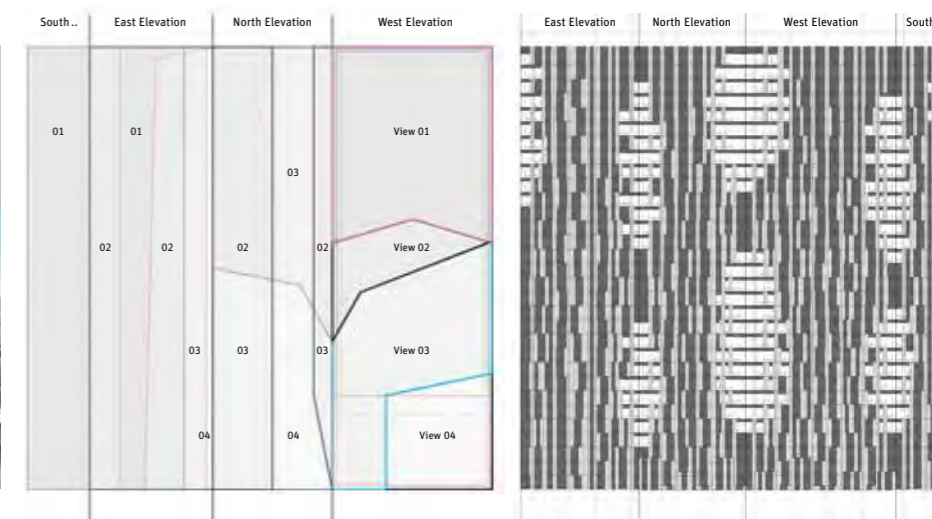
- Below Grade** | parking
- Ground Floor** | supermarket, lobby
- Second Floor** | BFC office, parking
- Floors 3 to 5** | affordable condominiums
- Floors 6 to 28** | market-rate condominiums
- Floors 29 to 37** | market-rate penthouse condominiums



**View from a penthouse duplex. The façade openings were not laid out according to a strict grid, but grouped to focus on views. The dia-**

**grams below relate views to the building footprint.**

Photo: BFC Partners/Alexander Capoccia



**Unfolded elevation I: analysis and classification of views**

**Unfolded elevation II: fenestration and paneling**

\$140,000 annually for a family of four. Under the current 421a rules, 20 percent of the units in an SGA project like the Toren would have to be set aside at 125 percent AMI.

Property taxes constitute the largest part of a condo buyer's ongoing housing costs, so advertising 421a status helps developers sell apartments. The ultimate impact of 421a on the Toren is not clear, however. It was one of the best selling towers of 2010, but it is still not fully occupied. Despite a huge demand for the affordable housing – the building's forty units drew two thousand applicants when it went on the market in 2008, at the height of the financial crisis – a number of the apartments did not sell because City-approved buyers could not find financing. In a gesture to neighborhood groups, applicants who were long-time residents of the district, municipal employees, police officers, or individuals with disabilities were given priority. Without City-approved buyers, the remaining affordable units were sold on a first come, first served basis to anyone who met the income requirements and could get a loan.

Many observers consider it economically wasteful to subsidize units in buildings with concierge services and swimming pools. For architect Duffy, this is precisely what makes the tax incentives and inclusionary housing so progressive: “There is no class distinction. All residents share the same lobby and ride in the same elevators. In contrast to the social engineering of the 1960s, there is no separation between different income levels.”

**Upstairs, downstairs**

The Toren's floor plans tell a slightly different story: all of the affordable units are concentrated in the base and differ in size and finishes from those in the tower above. The Toren did not have to meet the requirement of evenly distributing the units throughout the building because it was not part of the Inclu-

sionary Housing Program. Perhaps more detrimental to the goal of ensuring economic diversity in a gentrifying neighborhood, the Toren provides only studios, one- and two-bedroom apartments as affordable housing, too small for families with more than one child. Three-bedroom units are available as penthouse duplexes. Income levels may be mixed (if you consider an annual income of \$140,000 as a fair point of departure for the mix), but if household sizes are all the same, what demographic diversity can result? With its curtain wall façade, the Toren certainly stands out from the other luxury towers nearby. The idea of using views to generate the architecture from the unit layouts to the exterior detailing was consistently well implemented. This makes it all the more disappointing that the views, marketed as being so central to the Toren's concept, cannot actually be shared by its residents.

Roger Duffy ended our conversation with an anecdote about raising his own family in Stuyvesant Town, the 8,757-unit middle-income housing development in lower Manhattan built by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company in the 1940s. “The buildings themselves are very plain Jane and repetitive and brick. But the amount and quality of the green space in between, the pathways, the playgrounds, the parks make the project so attractive. A lot of the early housing projects relied on that kind of strategy and did not put all of the heat on the architecture to do the work.”

Note: In the original German version of this text, the Toren's 421a tax benefits were attributed to the incorporation of affordable units in the building. This error been corrected in this English version.

**Juliette Spertus** | is an architect and curator based in Brooklyn. Most recently, she curated *Fast Trash*, an exhibition about Roosevelt Island's pneumatic garbage removal system.

