

Glass Towers on the Rise Outside of Manhattan

By CASSANDRA VINOGRAD
Special to the Sun

Glass towers are rising outside Manhattan, as big-name developers reappropriate the design sensibility that reshaped the New York skyline in order to take advantage of the panorama they created.

"The best views are looking at Manhattan, not looking out from Manhattan," a professor of architecture at the Columbia University Graduate School of Architecture, Planning, and Preservation, Laurie Hawkinson, said.

The glass towers appear to be bringing a Manhattan sensibility to Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Queens. But developers and architects say the new buildings appeal to contemporary aesthetes, not just Manhattanites fleeing higher rents.

Amid all-brick buildings, glass makes an architectural statement, the executive vice president of the residential brokerage firm the Marketing Directors, Jacqueline Urgo, said. "It's memorable, it's iconic, it's sculptural," she said.

"Having views has always been one of the no. 1 value points of new construction offerings," Ms. Urgo, whose firm has handled sales for glass towers in Queens and the Riverdale section of the Bronx, said. "When you're in the living room of an all-glass space, your eye goes out and expands that space tremendously."

Glass is design's "next step," Ms. Urgo added. "Like what comes after the iPod. The new next step here is floor to ceiling glass."

The Lever House, Manhattan's first glass skyscraper, made Park Avenue avant-garde when it opened in 1952. Still, it took architect Frank Gehry 20 years to build in New York; he only recently completed a commercial building for mogul Barry Diller in Chelsea. Some experts say the city has lagged Los Angeles and Miami in creating contemporary living spaces, but the completion of Mr. Gehry's building along the West Side Highway is a sign that New York is finally waking up to glass.

Recent developments include a former office building in Long Island City, Queens, that Rockrose Development Corporation is transforming into a glass residential tower and the 20-story Solaria, in Riverdale. At the Solaria, an estimated 25% of the 65 units have been sold and buyers are expected to move in this fall, Ms. Urgo said. Amenities include views of the Hudson River and a private rooftop observatory.

Waterfront views spurred the development of Northside Piers, the 29-story all-glass tower crowning the waterfront in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn.

"It's a unique location," a vice president at Toll Brothers, David Von Spreckelson, said. "We thought we could command premium prices because it's on the water."

Prices for studios started at \$360,000, and 50% of the 180 units are already spoken for, Mr. Von Spreckelson, who oversaw the development, said. The construction of two more towers has been approved, and they likely will have similar design sensibilities, but plans have not yet been finalized,



CHANGING SKYLINE Northside Piers in Williamsburg, Brooklyn. Inset, the vice president of Toll Brothers, David Von Spreckelson, inside the glass tower.

according to the developers. Part of what is driving the glass revolution is changes in the material itself. Glass today has higher performance capabilities, such as energy efficiency, making it an economical way to build.

Mr. Von Spreckelson and his peers say the contemporary aesthetic of glass towers does not detract from typical brownstone neighborhoods' charm. Initial fears that a modern product would not be accepted by Williamsburg's "trendy, downtown-ish hipster community" were unfounded, he said, as more than 20% of Northside's buyers come from within the borough.

Jason Jeffries, 36, is one of them. He owns three Williamsburg businesses and has lived in the neighborhood for 10 years. Mr. Jeffries recalled crawling through a hole in a chain link fence with his wife, past burnt out cars and scattered tires, to sit on the waterfront in Williamsburg and enjoy "million-dollar views of Manhattan."

Now the father of two is purchasing a two-bedroom on Northside Piers' southwest corner. "The fact that, a few years later, we can live there and look at those views is what drew us to it," he said.

Another new glass tower opening in Brooklyn is On Prospect Park, the 150-foot tall luxury condominium at Grand Army Plaza. "It's one of the most prominent sites in the borough," the developer, Mario Procida, said.

Architect Richard Meier designed the building. "We could've hired anybody to design a building. We could've built a far less elaborate product," Mr. Procida said. "But ... if we'd just built another building there, we would've missed an opportunity to have an impact on the urban landscape."

But while the residential market has been chugging along for some time, the recent turmoil in credit markets could hinder future luxury condominium projects.

"We haven't seen really any negative effects yet," Mr. Von Spreck-

elson said. Summer is typically a slow sales period, so the real impact of the markets might not be known until September. Toll Brothers is considering offering mortgage incentives for buyers, he added.

As developers and lenders await the potential mortgage fallout, Paula Madrid is anxiously awaiting her new apartment at Northside Piers. Her friends, however, questioned her decision to leave her \$3,000-a-month pre-war apartment on the Upper West Side for an all-glass tower on the Brooklyn waterfront.

"Everyone was surprised that I was moving ... but I wouldn't do it unless it was luxurious, Manhattan living, in addition to this awesome neighborhood."

The issue of gentrifying the neighborhood was not a concern, she said. "It's what's happening in the neighborhood anyway," Ms. Madrid, 31, said. "I think that it's beautiful and it's aesthetically pleasing. I love that it's all glass."