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SPACES | By Dana Rubinstein

Project Puts Brooklyn First

Profit is the lodestar of most building design in New York City. So it is the rare and refreshing development that is driven by something other than revenue maximization.

Take the case of 212 S. Oxford St., a 10-story red brick and aluminum cooperative development on Fort Greene's Atlantic Avenue border. From its bathroom vanities to its bamboo floors, the building is steeped in and guided by ideology: more precisely, by the desire to propagate an economically integrated society in rapidly gentrifying Brooklyn.

"We want something that fits into the Brooklyn culture," says Michelle de la Uz, executive director of the Fifth Avenue Committee, a community development and social justice organization based in Gowanus that is the co-developer of the building, named Atlantic Terrace. The building's motto is "Made in Brooklyn."

"We want to make sure the neighborhood feels this is not just a branding exercise," Ms. de la Uz says.

A walk through the inside reveals it most certainly isn't. Of the building's 80 units, 59 are designated affordable. In a measure of just how scarce affordable housing is in New York City, 5,000 people applied for the 59 apartments in a lottery. The building was designed to earn a "gold" certification from the Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design program, an ambitious goal for a building of

that size.

At the same time, the common amenities—a community room with couches and kitchenette and the 3,000-square-foot outdoor terrace, planted with flowering dogwood trees—are accessible to everyone in the building. That stands in stark contrast to mixed-income developments like the Edge in Williamsburg, where the market-rate units are strictly segregated from the affordable ones, and where only market-rate residents can access the development's common amenities.

Keeping with the motto, the finishings of the development were, as often as possible, sourced in Brooklyn, as opposed to, say, Italy. The ice stone counters were made from recycled glass and concrete in the Navy Yard. The kitchen cabinets are from Williamsburg. The bathroom vanities were crafted at Gowanus' Brooklyn Woods, a woodworking training program.

Even more principled: the 11,400-ground-floor retail space is being marketed primarily to local tenants. "We've received some interest from some national chains," says Heather Gershen, the director of housing development for the Fifth Avenue Committee. "We think it's important for people to get fresh produce, milk, the morning paper. We would like to see some of the new Brooklyn retailers."

Or, as Ms. de la Uz puts it, "There's already a mall."

Indeed, there are two. The development sits on Atlantic



A new co-op development sits across the street from the Atlantic Yards construction site. Above and right, views of a model apartment.

Avenue and South Oxford Street, right next to the Atlantic Center and Atlantic Terminal malls developed by Forest City Ratner Companies. All fall within the Atlantic Terminal Urban Renewal Area, of which Atlantic Terrace is the final piece.

Before the Fifth Avenue Committee's involvement, the site, a former gas station, had lain fallow for more than 20 years. When the committee and Magnusson Architecture and Planning, who are co-developers on the project, won the development rights in 2003, they had a brownfield on their hands, with

seven tanks leaking lead gas into the soil below. Extensive remediation follow.

Today, from the sound-proofed windows of 212 S. Oxford, visitors can see cranes lifting pieces of the Nets arena into place across Atlantic Avenue. The advent of the arena should make the retail space below even more desirable to potential tenants.

"Obviously, Atlantic Avenue is one of the largest streets in Brooklyn," says Ms. de la Uz. "We have Barneys and Juan's tire shop and everything in between. We want the retail space to be part of that transition."



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