

A Nightclub To Call Home



HIROKO MASUKE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

NOW LEASING

The developer of the 288-unit Ohm, in Chelsea, used the area's nightclubs as inspiration for amenities. The high-ceilinged lobby includes a soundstage where bands will perform, and there is an arcade with foosball and Ms. Pac-Man games.

By ALISON GREGOR

THE name "Ohm" may conjure ideas of meditative tranquility for some. But developers of one of Manhattan's latest rental apartment buildings have another "Ohm" in mind — one that has more to do with a high-wattage lifestyle.

Douglaston Development recently began leasing apartments at Ohm, a 288-unit tower at 312 11th Avenue and 30th Street, just north of the heart of West Chelsea's nightlife. In a marketing approach called "untested" by other property marketers, Douglaston is using the area's nightclubs as inspiration for building amenities.

Along with the typical armchairs and security desk, Ohm's cathedralesque lobby, with 50-foot ceilings, has a soundstage where bands from Knitting Factory Entertainment will perform two nights a month.

Other nights, Douglaston plans to have a D.J. spinning tunes or hosting karaoke, or even open mic performances for residents. Equipped with

Residents of a new rental building won't have far to travel for musical entertainment.

two huge video screens, the lobby may also be used for televised sporting events.

"It's a loungelike performance space that we think people in this neighborhood will really love," Steven Charno, the president of Douglaston Development, said. "During the day, we'll probably have different video on the screens, like old silent movies, or we're talking with the School of Visual Arts about having student video competitions.

"People will hopefully get that this is not Midtown West — this is Chelsea."

Developers have good reason to identify with Chelsea. Just a few blocks north in the center of Midtown West, there are several new high-rises, with more than 2,300 rental apartments, coming to market simultaneously.

The 34-story Ohm, designed by the architect Stephen B. Jacobs with funky interiors by the designer Andi Pepper, includes studios, one- and two-bedrooms, with one three-bedroom apartment and four duplexes.

To attract the 25- to 35-year-olds developers see as prime targets, it has add-ons beyond the requisite gym, lounge and rooftop terraces. For instance, there is an arcade with games like foosball and Ms. Pac-Man. Mr. Charno cited a machine with 1,000 games, from Asteroids to Millipede. "Now, everything is so high-tech, but we found all these retro games that people love," he said.

Developers are also connecting the lobby to a 5,000-square-foot retail space, where there are plans for a gourmet delicatessen. Apart from that, there are details like apartment safes, which could matter to clubgoers who party in their own cribs.

"You may trust your friends and roommates, but you don't have to," said Jeffrey E. Levine, the chairman of Douglaston Development and its con-

struction arm, Levine Builders. "And every medicine cabinet has a keyed lockbox for pharmaceuticals. Viagra, Vioxx, Vicodin — nobody needs to know but you."

The smallest studio is just under 400 square feet and it's \$1,850 a month and one month free rent. The smallest two-bedroom apartment is just under 900 square feet and it's \$3,590 and one month free.

Since the leasing office opened, property marketers said they had received about one application daily. This is before the start of a "guerrilla" marketing campaign including posters with 25 images playing on the "Ohm" name, with coinages like "Chrohmosomes" and "Ohmbama."

Marketers saw the building's visibility, and its proximity to clubs like Marquee and Bungalow 8, as already having the desired effect on the developers' sought-after demographic.

"The club scene has been an enormous channel of applications thus far," said Seth Rosner, a managing director at Nancy Packes Signature Marketing Services. "We may not continue to average a home a day, but if we did, we'd lease it up in about 10 months."

Other property marketers have expressed curiosity about the building's marketing strategy, wondering if it's necessary, even in a market downturn when supply so exceeds demand.

"Douglaston is one of the top developers in the city and builds superior product, so my sense is they should focus on that, which is what concerns a lot of buyers and renters," said Shaun Osher, the chief executive of CORE, a property marketing group.

Mr. Levine, an experienced builder who manages all his own developments, is known for building thoughtfully designed properties. One of Ohm's drawbacks may be that it is surrounded by little, but that is also one of its attractions: It has stunning 360-degree views from about the sixth floor.

By late 2010 or early 2011, the second of three parts of the High Line park will open, from 20th to 30th Streets, its northern end just a half block from Ohm's door.

Critics also suggested that a marketing campaign aimed at hard-partying 20-somethings might create the obvious problem of renters' tripling or quadrupling up to split the rent. Douglaston marketers said that wouldn't happen.

"First of all, there are New York City laws against that," Mr. Levine said. As for the lobby attractions, he said they would be closed to the public, much like the lounges in other Douglaston developments.

"We have learned to incorporate a set of rules and regulations," Mr. Levine said, "not only to protect our residents from invasions of outsiders, but also to manage, both from an insurance perspective and the day-to-day working perspective, those types of spaces."

Yet even if developers keep a tight rein on high-spirited residents, property marketers say the campaign risks turning off other kinds of renters.

"I think it's an interesting idea," said Andrew Gerring, an executive vice president leading new-development marketing for Prudential Douglas Elliman Real Estate. "It's just, does everybody want that in their building?"