

COMMERCIAL OBSERVER

November 9th, 2017

On the Waterfront: The Architecture Reshaping the Face of the East River

By Rey Mashayekhi

Last month, Douglaston Development threw a lavish grand-opening bash at Level, its new 40-story, 554-unit rental tower on North 6th Street on the Williamsburg waterfront. As they sipped drinks served by statuesque models in outfits bedecked with flowers, the couple hundred people in attendance enjoyed panoramic views of the Manhattan skyline from the building's ninth-floor outdoor patio. Just to the south, towering over Level's patio, stood the Edge and 1 North 4th—the other two Williamsburg residential towers that Douglaston has built and completed just steps from the East River.

With their gleaming glass facades rising hundreds of feet above the river, the Douglaston projects are an embodiment not only of Williamsburg's transformation into a destination for high-end living, but of how New York City developers are more than ever recognizing the potential of building on the East River waterfront. From the redevelopment of South Street Seaport and the new projects lining Brooklyn Bridge Park near Dumbo to the massive residential buildings rising in northern Brooklyn and Long Island City, real estate investors are—to an unprecedented extent—capitalizing on the demand for apartments and offices near one of New York City's main marine arteries.

Of course, this influx of real estate projects along the East River hasn't happened overnight; it's been years in the making with policy changes, like the major rezoning of Williamsburg and Greenpoint, in the last decade facilitating the transformation of those neighborhoods' formerly industrial waterfronts.

But as developers are now springing at the chance to cash in on the rapidly evolving communities on both sides of the water, the East River has become a hotbed for architectural statements that, for better or worse, take many shapes and forms—whether it's monolithic glass behemoths or metal-clad structures that play with angles and space in different ways.

“It's hard to generalize about [the buildings], except to say that they're all intended to take advantage of the riverfront,” said Paul Goldberger, the Pulitzer Prize-winning architecture critic and writer. “What we're seeing is development that had begun in bits and pieces but is now happening more intensely. Now, it's as if every last piece of the waterfront is seen as a potential high-end parcel.”

Goldberger noted that “there's a huge variation in the architectural quality and the type of building” going up along the East River—a claim echoed by Justin Davidson, a fellow Pulitzer winner and architecture critic for *New York* magazine. “I wish, looking back, that New York had faced this issue with a more

M.

holistic sense of what kind of architecture it wanted to foster on the [East River] waterfront,” Davidson said.

What we have, instead, is a disparate and varied array of new projects that are reshaping the riverscape, and the city’s skyline, as we speak. While there are dozens of projects in the works and in various stages of planning or construction, here is a look at some of the more interesting buildings currently being built, in the order one would see them riding up the East River ferry from New York Harbor.