



Synthesizing Two Sides Of The Development Business

Gary H. Silver, R.A. “I’m out there, I’m involved, so that our clients get top quality at a good price.” Gary H. Silver Architects P.C.

Developers are traditionally concerned with the cost and profitability of buildings. Architects are concerned with their form and function. But Gary Silver, an architect and a developer, is concerned with synthesizing both concepts.

“My interest in architecture stems from my interest in the sense of accomplishment to be gained from building aesthetically pleasing things,” said Silver. “It’s this philosophy that guides me to create architecture that provides a quality of life for both work and home.”

Last year Silver joined forces with Andrew Liebhaber of Liebhaber Construction to put together a Harlem condominium project that will be known as The Observatory. It is Silver’s second foray into working on a project as both architect and developer, a concept Silver has been interested in ever since becoming an architect more than 20 years ago.

After returning to school to get his degree in architecture, Silver went looking for work at firms that also incorporated a developer’s component to their business plan. He worked for one firm, then another, each for 12 years.

At his second architecture job, Silver worked on turning the firm’s financial offerings to clients into a more sophisticated service. He helped recruit Albert Marengo, who holds a PhD in economics, to the firm. Then, when Silver began his own company in 2000, Marengo became his partner, giving GHS Architects a

unique dimension in the development arena.

Based in Manhattan, Gary H. Silver Architects P.C. is a full-service architecture firm of ten people – large enough to handle substantial projects but small enough, Silver said, so that he can be involved in every step of the process.

“It’s important for me to be involved in all aspects of the process,” Silver said. “I don’t prepare a set of drawings and then disappear. I’m out there, I’m involved, so that our clients get top quality at a good price.” This concept also applies when he wears his developer’s hat.

The firm anchors itself in traditional architecture projects, including renovations, historic preservation, and residential and commercial buildings. The company’s projects include conversion and restoration work on historic buildings in Brooklyn Heights and TriBeCa; a 35,000 square foot six-story mixed-use building in the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn; and interior architectural work for restaurants, financial institutions, and apartment owners in Manhattan.

Silver’s initial project on his own as a developer was the construction of Harlem’s first loft-style condominiums. A seven-story, 22-unit building on East 111th Street that offered sophisticated living and high-end amenities not typically featured in Harlem buildings. As a result of this unique approach in East Harlem, the building was so successful it sold out before being completed. Today resale

prices remain 10-15 percent higher than those for comparable units in the area.

The Observatory, for which Silver is partnering with Liebhaber, follows a similar model. It will be one of the first green buildings to go up in Harlem, with exposures on three sides of most units and innovative terrace and balcony space wrapped in an outdoor envelope for maximum privacy.

Both The Observatory and its predecessor are geared at attracting young professionals to live in Harlem, but who see the value of owning an apartment with a monthly mortgage comparable or even lower than renting. “We have a clear focus of who our target audience is and what they are looking for,” added Silver. “This gives us an edge in an increasingly competitive market.”

Silver’s practice of partnering with contractors on building projects adds a unique twist in a world where contractors are often at odds with the architectural firms who hire them. “We create quality of life buildings that integrate architecture, construction, and development in a way that has proven to be a very successful model,” Silver added. “I hope we’ll have many more in the years to come.” ■

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