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A New Condo in Gramercy, With an Emphasis on Green

By C.J. Hughes
Impressions 72,000,000



The new 20-story tower at 200 East 21st Street will use low-energy appliances, sustainably grown lumber and windmill-generated electricity. Credit Rendering by Alfa Development

If the construction boom of a decade ago had a tint, it might have been green, as developers hustled to make their buildings as eco-friendly as possible.

Energy efficiency has not seemed as much of a priority during the current development wave, according to brokers, builders and designers, but there also may not be as much of an audience for it. At least, the marketing campaigns of recent condos rarely seem to tout environmental bona fides.

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Yet Alfa Development, a firm that jumped on the green bandwagon early, does not seem ready to jump off just yet.

Since 2007, when Alfa broke ground on its Village Green project, the firm has constructed a total of four climate-change-conscious condos. And it is now at work on a fifth, 200 East 21st Street, at Third Avenue, a 20-story, 67-unit building near Gramercy Park with low-energy appliances, sustainably grown lumber and windmill-generated electricity.

“Unfortunately, just a handful of us are doing it, and it’s shameful,” said Michael Namer, Alfa’s chief executive officer. He added that the multiple hurricanes that have rocked the United States and the Caribbean this year should be a reminder that climate change is real, and dangerous.

Alfa hopes to earn a gold award for this building under LEED certification, the country’s most recognized seal of approval for green buildings, and to do so without sacrificing style.

The East 21st Street building, which is scheduled to open at the end of 2018, has a facade that is made of gray, thinner-than-usual bricks, a material that has become increasingly trendy in residential buildings. Windows, meanwhile, are framed in bronze, and patterned black-and-white marble lines the lobby’s floor.



Floorboards in the building will come from oak trees that were selectively cut, and not clear-cut in a way that might devastate a forest. Credit Rendering by Alfa Development

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While green touches are prevalent throughout the condo, which has one- to four-bedrooms, they are not always obvious. For instance, instead of using granite slabs quarried from a mountain for counters, Mr. Namer went with Caesarstone, a stone-and-resin product that he said does not take as much of a chunk out of the earth.

Similarly, the boards used for the floors came from oak trees that were selectively cut, and not clear-cut in a way that might devastate a forest.

Appliances at 200 East 21st are from Miele, which gets strong reviews from Energy Star, a product ratings system. In addition, the condo developer chose to get electricity not from coal or oil, but from wind power — a more expensive but cleaner option, while hot water is mostly heated by dozens of solar panels on the roof. The condo's eco-features did not significantly raise construction costs, Mr. Namer said.

The developer hopes that besides reducing energy consumption, those features will also give a marketing edge to the building. "The competition is basically zero in this realm," said Justin Tuinstra, a salesman with Douglas Elliman Development Marketing, which is handling sales.

Prices average \$2,200 a square foot, or starting at \$1.45 million for a one-bedroom, while the penthouse, with four bedrooms and 1,800 square feet of outdoor space, is about \$12 million, Mr. Tuinstra said.

In the Gramercy Park neighborhood, the average price of co-ops and condos for sale in mid-October was \$3.07 million, according to StreetEasy.com; among the 49 units in new developments, the average was \$3.18 million.

Most of those new apartments are clustered in just two projects. There is 121 East 22nd Street, a 133-unit condo with prices that average \$2,200 a square foot, according to StreetEasy, and Gramercy Square, a 223-unit four-building complex east of Third Avenue, where prices average between \$2,100 and \$2,400 a square foot.

Alfa's green track record is long. The 36-unit Village Green, at 311 East 11th Street in the East Village, was followed by the 51-unit Chelsea Green, at 151 West 21st Street. After, came the 27-unit Village Green West, at 245 West 14th Street, and the 11-unit 199 Mott Street, in NoLiTa.

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A rendering of a bathroom at 200 East 21st. Credit Rendering by Alfa Development

But the firm doesn't have a lot of company right now. Searching online listings for green buildings yields just a handful of apartments, and it is not always clear which eco-friendly features are offered.

Then again, this may reflect building codes. They have gotten so much more "aggressive," forcing landlords to make changes whether they wanted to or not, said John Haugen, a founder of Third Partners, a four-year-old consulting firm that has worked with landlords on green initiatives. (The firm is not affiliated with the East 21st Street project.)

Buyers in some ways can take small carbon footprints for granted, he said. For instance, developers seem to have almost universally embraced light bulbs that last a long time, like LEDs, which offer obvious cost savings, he said.

Indeed, at 200 East 21st Street, in addition to using them in common spaces, Alfa has offered a free lifetime supply of the bulbs to any buyer.

"There's really no excuse to not have them now," Mr. Haugen said of the bulbs. "It's just a no-brainer."

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