

Real Estate

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The Newest Lure: Great Landscaping

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DEVELOPERS building new apartment buildings in the highly competitive Gold Coast condo market are focusing on something that used to get only perfunctory attention: the landscaping.

In the same way that they have begun relying on name designers to impress would-be condo buyers with lavish interior designs, they are now seeking high-profile landscape architects to create exteriors, as evidenced by several projects under way in Hoboken and Jersey City.

Thomas Balsley Associates, a New York firm, was hired last year to create a landscape design for a 128-unit residential condominium complex being built in Hoboken by REMI Companies. Among Balsley's projects are an urban design study for downtown Brooklyn, a master plan for Reflection Bay in St. Croix, Virgin Islands, and public plazas for 100 United Nations Plaza, One Penn Plaza and Osaka's World Trade Center.

Erik A. Kaiser, the president of REMI, said he sought Mr. Balsley because of his "awesome" reputation and portfolio in urban design. Mr. Balsley said he was intrigued by the idea of designing a landscape for a residential community in a neighborhood near a train station with a lot of foot traffic.

REMI's condo project, called Velocity, involves two buildings set across from each other on Sixth and Seventh Streets, with a 25,000-square-foot courtyard in between. The Velocity site lies within a state-designated Transit Village centered on the new Ninth Street light rail station that serves Union and Weehawken as well as Hoboken. Velocity is to be completed next spring, with prices ranging from \$400,000 to \$800,000.

The site used to be a junkyard on the so-called bad side of town, where cars towed from Hoboken's parking-starved streets were stored. Now it is part of the rapidly transforming northwest corner redevelopment area, where multiple developers of upscale condos are at work — including those creating an arts-oriented "mini-village" called the Monroe Center just a block away.

But while the Monroe Center's courtyards, which feature retail



Above, Thomas Balsley Associates; below, CW Craig Productions Inc.

A COURTYARD AND A GARDEN

At Velocity in Hoboken, above, the courtyard will have a geometric pattern. At Montgomery Greene in Jersey City, a roof garden is planned.



shops at ground level, are designed to attract the public with large benches, fountains and a plaza with trees hung with hammocks, the courtyard at Velocity is designed as a sort of "ultimate amenity" for the residents, Mr. Kaiser said. "If you took the design and put in on white board and framed it," Mr. Kaiser said delightedly, "you might even call it art."

Mr. Balsley has used paver stone in unusual color combinations — salmon, gray, brown, and red — and

designed a geometric pattern for the courtyard platform, which is not broken except by small groupings of tables and chairs, and which sweeps along a city block beneath a canopy of trees. The 63-by-250-foot courtyard will be a live wireless computer site, and the tables are designed to be comfortable places to set up a laptop.

Tables and chairs will be set beneath trees that will include birch, dogwood and cherry, with small alcoves created by flowering shrubs like rhododendron, azalea and burn-

ing bush, Mr. Balsley explained. "Ground cover such as ivy, pachyandra and lily turf will provide a nice low green carpet," he added, "with strategically located beds featuring a mix of perennials and annuals, so there will be some color all the time."

Storm water runoff will fuel sprinklers for the plants. The architect has also designed spotlighting for the garden that he said will produce "softer edges" than flood lighting.

At the Montgomery Greene Condo tower, now rising in Jersey City, KOR Companies has hired Jan Saliel of Edgewater Design, based in Millburn, to create a rooftop garden that will provide residents of a thoroughly urban site with a suburban-style backyard.

It isn't feasible to install a pool atop what will be a 19-story building, said Edward Yorukoff, sales and marketing director for the project. But residents of the 133 lofts, studios and one- and two-bedroom units will have access to a roof deck overlooking the Hudson and the Manhattan skyline, the Verrazano-Narrows Bridge and the Statue of Liberty.

Montgomery Greene is to be completed next spring, with prices ranging from the low \$400,000's to \$2 million. It is to feature a 23-foot bar and stools under a vine-covered pergola, with a barbecue and picnic area and sunbathing alcoves.

The rooftop will be planted with hardy grasses, ornamental grasses, flowering trees and perennials, according to Ms. Saliel, who said the choices had to be carefully made because of the rooftop's windy location and proximity to the river.

"We wanted to provide some semi-privacy in the sunbathing area without interfering with the views," Mr. Yorukoff said. "The architect adeptly provided this by designing opaque glass dividers in rows wide enough for two chaise lounges that fan out from the core of the terrace and don't interrupt sight lines."

"We will also have an outdoor shower on the roof," he said, "and wanted some privacy for that."

The effect of Ms. Saliel's design is to provide space for entertaining while maintaining privacy for those who want to commune with the sky and vistas, Mr. Yorukoff said.

Ms. Saliel has designed other urban area landscapes, for Montclair State University, William Paterson University, the city of Millburn and the Jersey City Housing Authority.