



RAISING THE ROOFTOP
Rick Cook, owner of CookFox Architects, transformed his office's roof deck into a garden with herbs and vegetables, and an apiary that's home to 50,000 Italian bees.

SECOND NATURE

WITH HIS INNOVATIVE FIRM, COOKFOX ARCHITECTS (COOKFOX.COM), RICK COOK IS ELEVATING NYC LIVING WITH BUILDINGS THAT MARRY ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY, BIOPHILIA—THE NOTION THAT DESIGN CAN CONNECT HUMAN BEINGS WITH NATURE—AND HIGH STYLE.

By Suzanne Gannon
Photography by Tim Melideo

A New Yorker in search of organic honey to sweeten his or her morning yogurt might stroll through the neighborhood farmers market or hit up Whole Foods. A New Yorker who's one of the nearly 70 employees of award-winning CookFox Architects needs only to walk out onto the office roof deck. There, outside the penthouse of a former department store eight stories above Sixth Avenue, is a miniature ecosystem: sedum, beans, corn and squash in season, volunteer grasses whose seeds are believed to have blown in on easterly breezes from the High Line, and a bright yellow apiary that is home to 50,000 Italian bees.

The CookFox honey—lighter in the spring, darker in the fall—symbolizes the ethos of the practice formed in 2003 when Rick Cook joined Bob Fox to create a firm that would take on residential, institutional and commercial

projects. Shortly afterward, the new firm was credited with designing the first LEED Platinum-certified commercial skyscraper, otherwise known as the Bank of America Tower at One Bryant Park. (LEED is an acronym for Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design, a rating system established by the U.S. Green Building Council to govern sustainable building design, construction and operation.)

CookFox's ethos, evidenced in the interiors of its office, the first LEED Platinum-certified office in the city—recycled carpets, natural-wood cubicles, auto-dimming lights, waterless urinals and a curved wall of glass windows—is inspired by the biophilia hypothesis. First introduced by psychoanalyst Erich Fromm and later embraced by biologist E.O. Wilson, biophilia theorizes that human beings possess innate connections with the

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GREEN SWEEP
Clockwise from top left:
300 Lafayette St., which
will feature greenery covered
balconies; the facade of
150 Charles St.; the Bank of
America Tower, the first LEED
Platinum-certified commercial
skyscraper; a landscaped
terrace at 301 E. 50th St.



...CONTINUED other living things in their environment.

“We all want to feel part of something larger,” says Cook, a sustainability advocate who believes in the healthful benefits of sunlight, greenery and natural materials in the workplace and the home. “You’re practicing good stewardship when you view life as something to leave to the next generation rather than to use for your own instant gratification.”

Just as likely to be overheard discussing blast-furnace slag and V.O.C. off-gassing as he is stair towers and I-beams, Cook has incorporated his commitment to low-impact urban living into nearly every commission the company has won. The Bank of America Tower set the standard for the future: Materials must be evaluated for their impact on a building’s occupants and for a percentage of reuse; HVAC and electric must be efficient. In a move ahead of its time, the firm decided to use concrete that was 45 percent blast-furnace slag, a byproduct of steel production that reduces the carbon dioxide output of the concrete.

In the portfolio, some of the highlights that are under construction and in development include:

- The reconceived warehouse at 150 Charles St.—which is adjacent to Richard Meier’s glass buildings and has a

completion date of summer 2015—has a brick facade, green rooftops and planted, tiered terraces.

- At 510 W. 22nd St., ample glass will permit panoramic views of the High Line gardens; landscaped terraces will feature metal ceilings to echo the industrial nature of the elevated park.

- Limestone and zinc cladding and custom sun shading will protect occupants from the summer’s heat at the residential building at 301 E. 50th St. Well-being is a top priority at the property, so landscaped terraces, cedar sauna rooms and a tea lounge will be among the amenities.

- The site of the future 300 Lafayette St., once a gas station, will appear like a stack of window boxes set in glass and festooned with greenery.

When he’s not immersed in a project in the city or out at the beach, Cook is likely brainstorming on behalf of one of his projects in Cambodia. They include a visitors’ center for a children’s hospital, a school and a biofuel venture aimed at nonprofits that need to control costs and reduce their dependency on fossil fuels.

But on days he’s in the office, he sometimes spots a North American kestrel, the tiny, brightly colored falcon whom he says feels at home in the outdoor habitat that CookFox built. Then, when the little raptor flies the coop, its admirer can go sample some honey. **M**

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—RICK COOK



150 CHARLES PHOTO BY HAYES DAVIDSON; 300 LAFAYETTE PHOTO BY COOKFOX ARCHITECTS; 301 E. 50TH PHOTO BY VUUV STUDIO; BOA TOWER PHOTO BY RYAN BROWNE OF COOKFOX ARCHITECTS