

Oculus

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Tower Power

City Point, a retail and residential complex, will be the beating heart of the Downtown Brooklyn development boom

BY CLAIRE WILSON

The pop-up DeKalb Market was wildly successful when it opened in 2011 in a heaving swath of Downtown Brooklyn that, until then, galloping gentrification had mysteriously circumvented. Shipping container architecture made it funky. Gritty surroundings gave it hipster appeal. Local customers of Fulton Mall found the food and flea offerings fresh and new, even if the idea was imported from tonier brownstone neighborhoods.

The spaghetti junction of a transit hub made it convenient to all comers.





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Fast forward to 2015, and a new version of the DeKalb Market is being resurrected as part of City Point, a 1.8 million-square-foot retail and residential project smack on the once-fabled Brooklyn shopping mecca, Fulton Street.

Designed by COOKFOX Architects, the project includes Phase 1, the 675,000-square-foot, four-story retail center, and Phase 2, housing with market-rate and affordable towers. A third residential component may top out at 600 feet; its architect has not yet been announced. According to Rick Cook, FAIA, COOKFOX founder and principal, the site's location over a major transit hub and opposite the new Willoughby Park epitomizes the future of urban life. "This is more and more how people want to live and work in cities," Cook says. "Close to transportation but around nature."

Located in New York's third busiest retail district after Manhattan's 42nd and 34th Streets, the irregular parcel is bordered by the Flatbush Avenue Extension, DeKalb Avenue, Albee Square, and Willoughby, Fleet, and Gold Streets, and was the site of a failed shopping mall razed in 2007. The new complex is designed around an interior retail corridor called Prince Street Passage, named for a demapped street that begins at Albee Square and intersects the Great Hall, future home of the new DeKalb Market, which runs inside the building between Gold Street and Flatbush Avenue. Almost a metaphor for Cook's vision of the city of the



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(above, top) Aerial rendering of City Point shows the landscaped setbacks atop the retail podium that will be accessible to tower residents.

(above, bottom) Site plan

future, the Great Hall links subways on one side with a view of Willoughby Park through two high glass portals that let in natural light. The 60-foot portal on the Gold Street side will have an outdoor terrace that overlooks the new park. Inside will be an unusual 45- by 45-foot glass and papier mâché mural by Steven and William Ladd.

The container theme of the 2011 DeKalb Market shows up on the Gold Street exterior, where whimsical container-shaped glass windows with wood returns alternate with striated terra cotta panels in the same shape laid out in six vertical configurations. According to Mark Rusitzky, AIA,



(left) The 19-story affordable housing tower (left) and the 30-story market-rate tower (right) appear to be two distinct buildings, but are actually sitting on top of the retail podium.

(above) Large windows in the four-story retail center overlooking Albee Square allow the mall and historic 1906 Dime Savings Bank to play off each other.

LEED AP, COOKFOX senior associate and City Point project director, the choice of terra cotta was inspired by the historic 1906 Dime Savings Bank and Offerman Building next door. The building fronts on Albee Square, and its scale allow mall and bank to play off each other while the windowed mall design draws the historic building inside. “We designed a large opening that is free of structure and mullions, so you can see through the building and see the bank and dome,” he says.

The Rockwell Group designed the interior retail space. Walls are terra cotta, storefronts are glass and blackened steel, and doors flip up garage-style. “We were trying to choose materials that connected all the different aspects of the urban fabric of Brooklyn,” says Catherine Yatrakis, LEED AP, Rockwell associate and project manager.

The Fleet Street side of the complex houses building services, residential bike storage, and entrances to nine below-grade loading docks. “This keeps trucks from idling in the street or blocking traffic, and it allows the most street-front real estate to be available to retail or public space,” says Susie Teal, AIA, LEED AP, COOKFOX project architect.

Ventilation was a particular challenge COOKFOX met by concentrating louvers in a single area to provide maximum flexibility as retail tenants come and go. The firm also devised a new type of screen made of corrugated perforated zinc that conceals roughly 20,000 square feet of louvers but lets rainwater run off.

The 19-story mostly (not all) affordable housing tower, developed by BFC Partners, and the

30-story market rate tower, developed by The Brodsky Organization, were designed to look like two distinct buildings. Both appear to meet the ground instead of sitting on top of a retail building, and each has a main structure and landscaped setbacks. The market-rate tower has much more outdoor space, including an expansive green space atop the podium that overlooks the new park.

Materials further set the towers apart. The affordable tower is clad with lightweight gray zinc panels, featuring a standing seam system that adds texture. The addition of stainless-steel panels that won’t weather in the same way will add character over the years. The market-rate tower has a much tighter curtain wall system made up of smaller terra cotta panels. On the Fleet Street side of the project, the two are further distinguished by a 60-foot gap building clad in treated black zinc, also with standing seam texture and bright yellow window trim.

Extell is the developer of the third tower, but further details were unavailable at press time. Parts of the first two phases of City Point, including the mall, are set to open early next year. Cook recalls that he wasn’t sure he wanted to take on the project, even though half the people in his office (many of whom live in Brooklyn) said it was an important site. They turned out to be right. The takeaway? “Send young architects out,” says Cook, “and all they see is the vibrancy.” ■

Claire Wilson is a New York-based freelance writer.

CLIENT: Acadia Realty Trust; Washington Square Partners; The Brodsky Organization; BFC Partners

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EXECUTIVE ARCHITECT: SLCE Architects

INTERIOR DESIGN: Rockwell Group (retail); BanG Studio (Tower 1 Residential Interiors)

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT: Weintraub Diaz Landscape Architects

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER: DeSimone Consulting Engineers

MEP ENGINEER: Cosentini Engineers

CONSTRUCTION MANAGERS: ZDG Construction (retail); BFC Partners (Tower 1); Lend Lease (Tower 2)