

The world's sexiest new development?

25 September 2016

Ruby Warrington

It's the biggest private development America has ever seen: over the next nine years, Hudson Yards will transform 28 acres of Manhattan, with 4,000 flats and prices from \$2m. Ruby Warrington gets a first look



A city within a city: computer-generated images of the completed Hudson Yards scheme

Nothing gets New Yorkers going like a conversation about real estate. They are as neurotic about the size, location and price of their apartments as they are about the latest killer workout (anti-gravity yoga, since you ask) or getting a table at Daniel Humm's ever-impossible-to-book restaurant Eleven Madison Park.

Cutting through all the chatter at the moment, though, is the buzz about Hudson Yards. Covering 28 acres and seven whole blocks of Manhattan's underdeveloped West Side, the luxury "city within a city" is the biggest building project to hit the island for decades — and a Briton, in the form of the designer Thomas Heatherwick, already has his foot in the door. Heatherwick's Vessel, a huge bronzed-steel and concrete structure, will be the centrepiece of what is being trailed as "a new neighbourhood for the next generation".



Manhattan's huge scale building project

Last week, Hudson Yards finally launched its first off-plan residential sales. Could this be the sexiest new district in the world? “We obviously picked this location strategically — just look at that money shot,” says Sherry Tobak, senior vice president of sales at the developer, Related Companies. She gestures to floor-to-ceiling windows that offer a view across and down the Hudson River, pitching up at the Statue of Liberty.

Tobak is practically levitating off her Louboutins as she ushers me into the swish sales office on the 24th floor at 10 Hudson Yards, the first building of six under construction (and that’s just phase one), which opened earlier this year. Heatherwick’s sculpture, which is being made in Italy, will stand 15 floors tall, weigh 600 tons and have 2,500 climbable steps. “It will be as iconic as the Eiffel Tower,” she says.

Her team have just begun to work their way through a 7,000-strong waiting list for just 285 apartments up for sale in 15 Hudson Yards, which will be the first residential building to open. This is, after all, the single largest private property development in US history. Designed by the architects Diller Scofidio + Renfro (who were also responsible for the High Line city park, which snakes around the development), it will add 16 skyscrapers to the Manhattan view; 15 Hudson Yards will be ready for occupancy in 2018, followed by numbers 30, 35, 50 and 55.

In effect, “we’ve created a whole new neighbourhood”, says Jeff Blau, chief executive of Related and a native New Yorker. He likens the project to the development of Canary Wharf. “But in this instance, the city invested in the infrastructure first. Canary Wharf didn’t become successful until they extended the Jubilee line out there.” In contrast, the City of New York has already spent \$4bn (£3bn) on a new subway stop, 14 acres of public parks and a network of maintenance tunnels, “so we don’t have to dig up the roads if something needs to be fixed”.



Neiman Marcus will be an anchor store in the seven-storey shopping mall

Built on top of the old rail yards, where the Big Apple's subway trains still go to sleep, the area was something of a wasteland until it was earmarked for development in 2005. The new neighbourhood is the unforeseen consequence of losing out to London as host city for the 2012 Olympics. A decade on, it has state-of-the-art outdoor wi-fi and even a dedicated zip code.



Thomas Heatherwick's Vessel sculpture

The businesses were the first to move in, with some heavy hitters setting the tone: Time Warner, Coach, L'Oréal, CNN, HBO and the pioneering private-equity firm KKR have all relocated to the Yards. "And if the corporations are coming, so will the buyers," Tobak says, guiding me into a space-age chamber with an LED-lit 3D map of the local area and a glittering model of the expansive development. "We like to say that the centre of gravity in New York has now moved to Hudson Yards."

That's a bold claim, but the project offers the ultimate work-play-eat-sleep lifestyle. "It's not 100% consistent with the zoning in the rest of the city, where you have residential areas, office areas and hotel areas," Blau says. "But the truth is, that's not how people live today." Residents and workers alike will find every convenience — and then some — on tap. Not to mention triple-filtered water coming from the actual faucets.

Opening in two phases (the second will include a school with 750 places and the third and final stage of the High Line), the entire development is expected to be finished by 2025. Two show suites flaunt the different finishes on offer — one in inoffensive shades of beige, the other in edgier blacks and greys — with Miele appliances and a wine fridge in every unit. And, unlike other buildings she's sold, Tobak says: "Here, your lobby is gorgeous. You're not going to want to change your bathroom. You'll just want to hang your clothes up and move in."

"It will have NYC's highest observation deck — 'Just a couple of inches taller than the Empire State, but it counts!'

At the top of 15 Hudson Yards, floors 50 and 51 will house amenities for the 285 one- to four-bedroom flats, including restaurants and a 40,000 sq ft, state-of-the-art gym by Equinox (another Related company). Then there is the proposed seven-storey mall, which will have NYC's first Neiman Marcus department store as an anchor tenant, and luxury retailers such as Dior and Chanel alongside high-street favourites like Zara.

At 30 Hudson Yards, another office block, they're installing the highest observation deck in the city ("Just a couple of inches higher than the Empire State, but it counts!" Tobak says), while 35 Hudson Yards will be home to a SoulCycle studio and the first Equinox hotel, which promises a luxurious fusion of travel and wellness.



Just up from the arts district of Chelsea, with its 350 galleries, and the relocated Whitney Museum, in the Meatpacking District, the project is being billed as the crowning glory of Manhattan's "cultural coast". This is mainly thanks to the Shed, a flexible arts space that will be used as a theatre, a concert venue and a gallery. The hope is that it will become home to New York Fashion Week in 2019.



The million-dollar question, naturally (and literally), is: how much does this vision of next-generation luxury living cost? Prices, Tobak tells me, are anywhere from just under \$2m to more than \$30m, "with close to 200 apartments under the \$7m mark. I know that might sound a little crazy, because, oh my God, who can afford \$7m? But more and more people now can afford \$2m or \$4m, and we are very, very heavy on one- and two-bedroom apartments." That money will buy you floor space ranging from about 850 sq ft to a little over 5,000 sq ft at the top end.



It's unlikely, then, that many actual artists will be moving in. "That depends how successful they are," Blau laughs. Anyhow, the bohemian dream of Lower Manhattan is long a thing of the past, with New York now home to more billionaires than any other city — including two of the world's 10 richest people, the industrialist David Koch and the media titan Michael Bloomberg. If anything, Hudson Yards will only further cement New York as one of the leading luxury locations in the world, edging the have-nots ever further from the centre of the action.

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