



Sydness Architects and Continental Finance Corp. constructing 24-story retail and condo. building

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There is a new residential landmark under construction on Manhattan's midtown east side. Located at the corner of East 49th St. and Second Ave., it's called The Alexander, a 24-story retail and luxury condominium building whose curved tower commands the site, neatly turning from the side street to the avenue. Designed for the developer Continental Finance Corp., it is the latest in a series of significant residential buildings already underway or planned for an area dotted by parks and such imposing structures as the United Nations and the Ford Foundation.

"Corner sites are a rare and welcome opportunity for both developers and architects," said the building's architect Jeff Sydness of Sydness Architects, formerly a partner with John Burgee Architects and its predecessor firm Johnson Burgee, founded by Philip Johnson. "Developers know that condo buyers are willing to pay a premium for the panoramic views a corner allows. And in New York City, it's not often that an architect can create more than a one façade, so we welcomed the challenge. For us, the most direct and compelling solution was a continuous, curved façade that lends a monumental quality."

"But being a good neighbor at the ground level is also part of the design," Sydness said, "and this building rises from a five-story podium that continues the street wall." Adding to the street life are retail shops located on the first two floors that will have entrances on the ave., while the residential lobby will be on 49th St. The upper three floors are for residences.

Another advantage of the podium is the transition it offers from the low-rise scale of the residential side street to the avenue's more monumental scale. And while the retail floors have glass facades, the upper three floors are clad in deep red terra cotta panels that suggest the masonry facades of the side street's 3-5-story residential buildings. Vertical breaks in the façade introduce balconies and give a hint of the glass wall that rises above.

Standing over it is a 19-story tower whose central façade consists of a curving glass curtain wall. It is flanked by walls clad in tan colored terra cotta panels that visually connect the tower with the podium. A total of 88 condominiums with one, two or three bedrooms will comprise the residential portion of the building, with larger duplex penthouses on the tower's top floors. A vertical pattern of punched windows on the flanking terra cotta walls contrasts with the flatness of the glass curtain wall. "These juxtapositions provide visual interest and energy throughout the building," said Sydness.

But the curved wall isn't the only feature designed to take advantage of the city-wide views. The floor heights are 11 feet 6 inches and the accompanying floor-to-ceiling glass windows will allow for expansive views uptown and across the East River. At the top, a curving glass wall that acts as the tower's crown, wraps around most of the building and creates a protective screen for the penthouse terrace.

The generous views are complemented by the luxury and amenities to be found inside. In addition to a 24-hour doorman and concierge services, there's also a fitness center and a cold food storage room and private storage.

The units are themselves spacious, underscored by the amount of light that is reflected by white oak floors. The layouts are open and loft-like, with kitchens offering microwave ovens, refrigerators and gas stovetops and cooking ovens.

It is this combination of spacious luxury inside and quietly commanding architecture outside that makes The Alexander such a significant addition to Manhattan.

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