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## **Architectural design, code enforcement, and construction trends in New York City for fall 2019 - by William Gati**

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William Gati,  
Architecture Studio

I have just completed a “major alteration” in Richmond Hill, Queens and have encountered quite a few “trend-setting” changes in architectural design, code enforcement, and construction.

The Building Department approval and permitting process was more complicated, confusing and challenging than ever before. We had to meet with the examiner many times to get the approval for the plans. The contractor had to be a certified site safety manager. We needed permits for all the trades, a fence, curb-cut, etc. The building code was very restrictive and did not allow us to do what we wanted to. My client received a violation during construction. We had to file many post approval

amendments to obtain the final Certificate of Occupancy.

All this was very costly and time-consuming. Fortunately for me, the client agreed to pay all expediting expenses separately. The Building Department plan examiner approved the plans with so many technical issues that came up after we filed for the Certificate of Occupancy. My expeditor and I pursued making all these changes and prevailed. Thank goodness that we did not get discouraged.

The New York City Building Code is continually changing and now incorporates the Zoning Code, Energy Code, Safety Code, Construction Code, and many other codes. It is practically impossible to memorize all these codes and to comply with them initially. Many discrepancies and interpretations come up during the review process, in the form of “objections.” Fortunately, I have been in practice for over 30 years and have encountered most of these objections. Once all of these are met, the plans are approved and can be permitted. That does not mean that complaints can’t be issued later on and the permit revoked. The design professional is now liable not only to the client and the contractor, but also the city. They can have some of their filing privileges revoked and a stiff fine imposed upon them. Thankfully, I try to do the right thing and avoid problems like this.

We don’t think about cybersecurity until it is too late, but hackers are now targeting the architectural design firms, contractors, and developers also. My website was compromised recently, and I had to restore it completely. I had to change my operating system to Apple to lower the risks of viruses and attacks. I need to run Site-Lock and Malware Bytes regularly to prevent cyber-attacks. In researching information for this article, I clicked on a picture, and a pop-up said my computer became infected with a virus. Not to mention, receiving frequent requests for money in cryptocurrency, etc. Technology can also malfunction on its own. The printer sometimes stops working right before a major presentation, the AutoCAD program crashes, and you lose all your data, etc. Thanks to Apple Care, and HP support, I manage to get through most of these issues.

I am a “Baby-Boomer,” and I am considering retiring soon. It seems like many of my peers are retiring, passing away, or working till they “can’t work no more.” This void leaves a lot of high-skilled jobs up for grabs with very few skilled people to fill them. I am unable to find qualified drafting help here at an affordable price. It may come as a shock for most people, but architects do not make a lot of money. When a draftsman demands to earn more than I make, there is a real disconnect. I am forced to spend endless hours drafting myself or hire drafting consultants. There will come a time that I will be forced to retire. The cost of keeping my practice going will be higher than my income, and more significant than the amount I can claim from Social Security. Thankfully, I have paid into the system for over 40 years and have adequate savings to retire.

And now for the Construction Trend in NYC that you all have been waiting to read. Some neighborhoods are increasing in value, and some are not. The Northern Bronx is now very hot, but Northern Queens is cooling off. Parts of Brooklyn are losing favor, but others are doing very well. Staten Island is keeping its own. Manhattan is in the most demand for luxury housing. It seems as if the sky is the limit for fancy, tall, sleek, expensive, apartments.

Investors and developers from all over the country and the world are looking at Manhattan real estate as an excellent investment opportunity. But, some areas have gone down in price recently like the Upper East Side and the Convention Center area. Quality of life issues may be at play here. I am not sure how long this market can maintain its momentum, but tariffs to China will hit the real estate markets eventually. I am thankful that I bought my house 20 years ago, because I would not be able to afford it today.

William Gati, AIA, is the president of Architecture Studio, Kew Gardens, N.Y.

New York Real Estate Journal - 17 Accord Park Drive #207, Norwell MA 02061 - (781) 878-4540