



Executive of the Month: Wright a principal of IBI Group & Gruzen Samton; An architect with 25 years of experience

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An architect with 25 years of experience, Susan Wright's past projects span a broad spectrum of roles and industries from managing affordable housing projects to designing and developing commercial properties, including boutiques for global brands such as Tumi and Kipling. However, Wright's true passion is working in an urban environment on multifamily residential projects.

"...I studied environmental design as an undergraduate since I'm attracted to the emphasis on the social science of design, and the challenge of creating environments that enhance residents' lives, specifically their family life," said Wright.

It came as no surprise that in 2003, when New York based architectural firm IBI Group & Gruzen Samton hired Wright, AIA, LEED AP, they did so knowing she would enhance the firm's ability to deliver complex multifamily residential projects. Now, a principal at IBI Group & Gruzen Samton, her reputation is built on her uncanny ability to appreciate the unique requirements of diverse residential projects from luxurious condominiums and senior-living communities to affordable housing. Nowhere is Wright's acumen more evident than in two very different projects she has successfully completed: a luxury Manhattan condominium that contributed to the revitalization of an entire neighborhood and a vanguard affordable housing community located in Flushing, New York.

The first project - 20 Pine St. - started in 2006. The commercial structure in Manhattan's Financial District presented Wright's team with numerous challenges, as it was one of the first major residential conversions in the area. The 38-story commercial tower constructed in 1928, had incongruous floor plates and long and narrow corridors, features not conducive to a luxury condominium. To overcome these structural obstacles, the architectural team designed the individual condominium units to fit together like Lego pieces thereby maximizing each unit's usable s/f. At the same time, the design team re-purposed six levels of sub-cellar space into tenant amenity areas. For example, an existing bank vault now houses the swimming pool. Ultimately, The Collection, as it is now known would serve as the benchmark for an effective commercial to residential conversion, paving the way for similar projects and the eventual revitalization of the Financial District. This project was designed in conjunction with Armani Casa.

The second project was a compilation of renovations and new construction for Selfhelp Community Services, a non-profit housing and social services organization founded in 1936 to help Holocaust victims resettling in New York City. In 2011, Wright and her team completed renovation and infrastructure upgrades to the Kissena II Martin Lande House located in Flushing. Gruzen Samton namesake Peter Samton had originally designed the 289-unit residential community in 1967, In January, the team completed "Kissena VII," a 15-story 92-unit independent apartment for low-income seniors adjacent to the Lande House. The new 100,000 s/f building features a green roof, and numerous amenities aimed at improving the ability of the residents to continue living

independently: the Selfhelp Virtual Senior Center, a video conferencing room for Skype calls with family, and Tele-health and Brain Fitness kiosks in the lobby.

"Transitioning into a senior community can be very stressful; offering a range of communal spaces enables new residents to build a new community and share their passions. This helps create a more familiar, 'home-like' environment thereby reducing the stress of transition," said Wright.

If you ask, Wright will say the foundation of a successful residential project is predicated on the design team's ability to add true value during a project's preliminary planning phase and to carry that knowledge through to the eventual occupancy by the residents. During this developmental stage, she evaluates the potential impact that social and economic trends will have on the project and subsequently the project's residents. This early understanding enables Wright and her team to propose cost-effective yet innovative design solutions that increase the project's marketability. For example, leading the charge to make senior living facilities "greener," Wright and her team implement LEED principles and practices as a baseline of design. As a result of this conscientious project approach the firm remains at the forefront of residential space planning and design, especially when it comes to senior living communities.

A testament to IBI Group & Gruzen Samton's expertise and experience is the firm's relationship with Hebrew Home for the Aged, a senior living community comprised of 13 plus buildings situated on twenty acres in the Bronx. IBI Group & Gruzen Samton designed an awarded-winning 157,000 s/f, five-story skilled nursing facility known as the Jacob Reingold Pavilion. The Reingold Pavilion serves as the focal point of the 20-acre campus. The team achieved this goal by designing shared amenity spaces at the lower level that would draw residents in from adjoining Hebrew Home for the Aged buildings.

"New residents of the Pavilion often were living in another building on the campus, and have moved to the facility for increased day-to-day assistance. Providing a rich living experience and enhancing social interaction can elevate their quality of life," said Wright.

With that in mind, IBI Group & Gruzen Samton designed the Pavilion to feature North America's first aquatic fitness center, a museum, several lounges and a wellness spa. Furthermore, unlike traditional nursing environments that offer double bed rooms, every room in the Reingold Pavilion is a single.

Not only did the Pavilion help revitalize the 20-acre campus and serve as the model for the next generation of senior housing but it has also received ENR's Award of Merit: Assisted Living Facilities.

As IBI Group & Gruzen Samton begins to expand its residential expertise internationally to places like Seoul, Korea where the firm is building Mijoo, a luxury collection of five, 28-story condominium buildings each with their own heliport, it can rest assured that its principals, such as Wright will always plan, design and develop structures that add true and lasting value to the residents' lives.