Blue Tower

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The Blue Tower, also known as the Blue Condominium, is located in the Lower East Side neighborhood of New York City at 105 Norfolk Street. Designed by Bernard Tschumi, it is his first residential and first high-rise structure. At 16 stories tall, it opened in 2007 with 32 condominium apartments, a ground floor commercial space occupied by the Thierry Goldberg Gallery, and a roof terrace for residents on the third floor. Commercial at the ground floor with residential above is a common method of programming space in urban residential projects. The Blue Tower is not LEED certified.

The faceted form, a reaction to the zoning and set back requirements, is clad in a blue panel and window curtain wall system, contrasting with the low rise brick buildings that typify the neighborhood.

The Blue Tower	
General information	
Type	residential
Location	Lower East Side, New York, NY
Country	United States
Completed	2007
Cost	17 million USD
Client	Angelo Consentini and John Carson
Technical details	
Structural system	cast-in-place concrete
Floor area	50,000 sf residential, 3,000 sf commercial
Design and construction	
Architect	Bernard Tschumi with SLCE Architects
Structural engineer	Thornton Tomasetti Engineers
Other designers	Arc Consultants, Inc. (code), Isreal Berger & Associates, Inc. (curtain wall consultant), Ettinger Engineers (MEP engineer)
Main contractor	On the Level Enterprises, Inc.

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History

The Blue Tower was planned, designed, and constructed in two years and included the purchase of air rights over several neighboring buildings.[1] Developers Angelo Consentini and John Carson commissioned the project, and their company, On the Level Enterprises, Inc., was the general contractor. On the Level Enterprises, Inc. started with residential redevelopment projects in the early 1990s and has since grown to include construction, management, and financing of large scale projects. Most of their projects are now condominium developments.[2] Historically, the Lower East Side (LES) was an immigrant neighborhood, including Germans, Irish, Italians, and Hispanics. In conjunction with the neighborhood's roots as an immigrant neighborhood, property owners and city officials continuously re-imagine the LES. The LES is currently experiencing a period of gentrification.[3] Building the Blue Tower in the Lower East Side has caused debate among residents, design professionals, and the general public. It is an example of the growing number of new luxury condominiums in the neighborhood; a phenomena that

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has caused alarm and concern among the public over the physical and demographic preservation of the LES.[4] Construction of the Blue Tower heralded several first time milestones. For Bernard Tschumi, this was his first residential building and skyscraper. For the Lower East Side, this was the first building with 24-hour doorman service (along with cold storage for food deliveries).[2]

Architect

Bernard Tschumi's first notable project was the Parc de La Villette, a competition project he won in 1983. Other projects include the new Acropolis Museum, Rouen Concert Hall, and Bridge in La Roche-sur-Yon. Over his almost twenty-year career, his built accomplishments number over sixty, including theoretical projects.[5] Tschumi studied at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, Switzerland where he received an architecture degree in 1969. After school and prior to winning the Parc de La Villette competition, he built his reputation as a theorist through his writings and drawings. From 1988 to 2003 he was the Dean of Columbia University's Graduate School of Architecture, Planning and Preservation. Additionally, academic teaching positions have been held at Princeton University, Cooper Union, and the Architectural Association in London. In 1996 he received the French Grand Prix National d'Architecture. He established his practice in 1983 in Paris with the Parc de La Villette competition commission. In 1988 he opened Bernard Tschumi Architects (BTA), headquartered in New York City. In 2002, Bernard Tschumi urbanistes Architectes (BtuA) was established in Paris.[5]

Site and Context

The Blue Tower is surrounded by Delancy Street and the Williamsburg Bridge to the south, public housing and the East River to the east, low-rise apartments and Houston Street to the north, and the Essex Street Market and Sara D Roosevelt Park to the west.

The Blue Tower is positioned within the primarily residential neighborhood of the Lower East Side where several urban planning projects have been built. Notable interventions include the Williamsburg Bridge that opened in 1903 and the Essex Street Market that opened in 1940. The Lower Manhattan Expressway, planned by Robert Moses but never constructed, would have been a monumental public intervention, including the probable destruction of the Blue Tower site along with thousands of other properties lining Delancy Street.

Beginning over a decade ago, Manhattan experienced a boom in development and construction, including the Lower East Side with the construction of high-rise luxury residential towers. The Hotel on Rivington, completed in 2005, was the first high-rise building in the Lower East Side. Just north of the Blue Tower site is the nArchitects Switch Building, also a luxury residential building. In 1996, the site was a parking lot, along with several other lots across the street. These have all been replaced by infill construction consisting exclusively of luxury condominiums.

Since the Zoning Resolution of 1961, the site has been zoned as R7-A (residential) with adjacent lots zoned as C6 and C4, both commercial areas. The area is included in the map amendment of 2002, and adjacent to a Business Improvement District (BID). The area is not a part of a designated historic district, nor are any surrounding buildings landmarked. As of 2012, he site is located within a FRESH program district, along with all of the Lower East Side. Food Retail Expansion to Support Health program (FRESH) is a New York City program providing zoning and financial incentives to establish grocery stores in underserved areas, thereby providing residents with the means to obtain a full selection of food products.[6]

Materials and Methods

With a flat plate, cast-in-place concrete structural system, the Blue Tower is built like many high-rise residential buildings in New York City. What is not similar to other high-rise residential towers is the unconventional massing that required special floor plate cantilevering and curtain wall detailing. For example, floor plates on fourth floor cantilever up to 11'-0" and up to 21'-0" on the twelfth floor. These cantilevered plates are a function of the angular form.[1] The curtain wall system is a Uni-Wall Curtain Wall System by Architectural Glazing Technology. Some of the corners have up to four angled walls connecting to each other and these relationships required 3D modeling. Unlike conventional curtain wall construction, the system employed unitized components that were glazed, sealed, and assembled in the factory, shipped to the site, then assembled in the field.[7] The curtain wall system is composed of clear glass pieces, tinted blue vision glass pieces, and opaque spandrel panels in four shades of blue.

Interior materials vary depend on their location, either in standard apartments, premium apartments, or common areas. In the standard apartments, materials include bamboo and stone flooring, white tiled bathrooms, white stone kitchen counters, and metal cabinets. In the premium apartments, materials include palm and stone flooring, glass tiled bathrooms, and Boffi brand kitchens. In the common areas materials include bamboo wall paneling, stone floors, and white back-lit glass panels.[1] The structural and interior materials are not uncommon in high-end residential projects, but the unconventional form necessitated an innovative approach to methods of construction.

References

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