

City Room



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In Winning Design, City Hopes to Address a Cramped Future

By VIVIAN YEE



New York City Mayor's Office

The interior of the winning design, "My Micro NY," in New York City's tiny-apartment competition. The entry packs a lot into units less than 370 square feet.

Updated, 5:42 p.m. | The apartment of New York City's future, as the city imagines it, has all the amenities of modern life: wheelchair-accessible bathroom, a full kitchen, space for entertaining and access to a gym, communal lounge, front and back porches and a rooftop garden — all in 250 to 370 square feet.

The city on Tuesday unveiled the winner of a competition to design and build an apartment tower on city-owned land composed entirely of micro-units, 55 homes the size of hotel rooms that Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg hopes will be the first in a wave of tiny apartments aimed at addressing the city's shortage of studio and one-bedroom apartments.

Small as it might be, the winning design was chosen for the way that it maximized light, airiness and storage space through the use of 9-foot-high ceilings, large windows, lofts and Juliet balconies.

"We have a shortfall now of 800,000, and it's only going to get worse," Mr. Bloomberg said during the news conference announcing the winning team, a partnership between Monadnock Development, Brooklyn-based nARCHITECTS and a nonprofit that serves creative arts professionals, the Actors Fund Housing Development Corporation. "This is going to be a big problem for cities with young people."

In another futuristic twist, the 10-story tower at 335 East 27th Street in the Kips Bay neighborhood will rise thanks to modular construction, becoming Manhattan's first apartment building to do so: units will be prefabricated, then stacked on top of one another like Legos.

Forty percent of the units will be affordable, restricted to tenants earning no more than \$77,190 a year, with the rest at market rate. Rents start at \$914 a month for those earning up to \$38,344 a year, well below Manhattan's average studio rent of \$2,000, and go up to \$1,873 for those making \$77,190 or less.

If the interior renderings are any indication, the micro-units are designed to appeal most to young professionals, perhaps to a young academic: a person who requires lots of bookshelves for scholarly tomes and hosts the occasional dinner party.



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A rendering of the exterior of the building, which will have 55 units.

"But there's another side to the person — he or she likes to surf and so on," said Eric Bunge, a principal at nARCHITECTS. Thus the bright-green surfboard, depicted in an interior rendering as stowed in a large loft storage space. (Another unexpected touch was a ghostly image of an old man's bearded head, which Mr. Bunge said was meant to be a drawing on a chalkboard-painted wall.)

But he was quick to caution that the micro-units could be for anyone, from retirees to the nurses at nearby Bellevue Hospital Center. Apart from the kitchen and bathroom, the space is designed to be flexible, he said: "It's all about appropriating your space, really."

The announcement was made at the Museum of the City of New York, whose new exhibit, "Making Room: New Models for Housing New Yorkers," displays the winning proposal alongside a different 325-square-foot micro-unit model that features an electric toilet that doubles as a bidet; Italian shower fixtures; a Murphy bed that pulls down over a hot-pink sofa, a flat-screen TV that slides to reveal extra shelving and a coffee table-cum-ottoman that deconstructs into four stools.

As for whether people would consider living in one, the answer on the streets of Kips Bay, perhaps predictably, seemed to depend on whether you asked a Manhattan dweller or a suburbanite.

Cataline Vincent, 26, who works at Bellevue, said she had struggled to find affordable rentals on her \$40,000 salary. "In New York City, space is limited, and we're willing to settle for what we can get," she said. "In New York, people will live in a garbage can!"

Others were quicker to turn up their noses.

"I wouldn't keep a dog in that size room," said one woman, indignantly.

She declined to give her name, but she said she lived in New Jersey.



APT. #4D - DUSK

Preparation for a dinner of 6 is underway.



APT. #4D - NIGHT

Dishes have been cleared, foldable table hung on a rail, Murphy bed folded down from bookshelf, counter also folded down, ready for breakfast tomorrow.

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The floor plan of the apartment shown in the rendering above.