

The New York Times

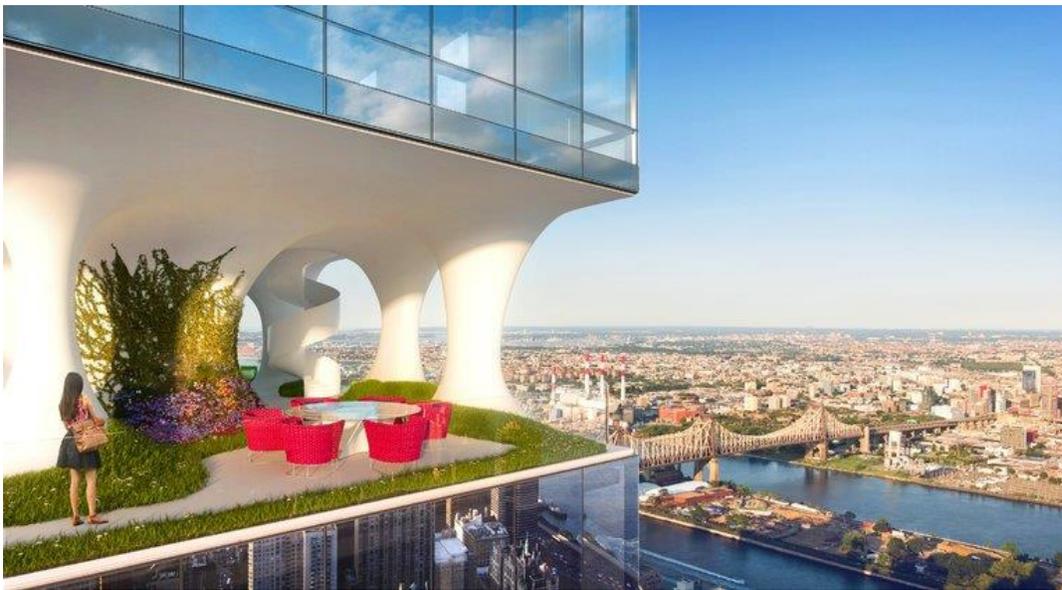
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REAL ESTATE

Terraces to Look At and Linger On

The High End

By JANE MARGOLIES

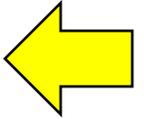


At [305 East 44th Street](#), sprawling 1,400-square-foot terraces will be created between apartment floors, with a spiral staircase leading from an apartment to its outdoor space. Credit Rendering by Moso Studio

If yesterday's terraces were just little rectangular slabs tacked onto the sides of buildings — on which a tenant might cower, or perhaps more likely, rarely step foot — today's are becoming increasingly generous and welcoming.

Some developers and architects are ushering in a new age of terrace design in a bid to provide more interesting outdoor space, capitalize on views and add greenery. In the process, they're adding drama to the buildings themselves.

Low walls edging apartment terraces will undulate across the facade of [1 River Park](#), a 15-story condominium tower that will rise in Cobble Hill. At the building's corners, where the walls will swoop and curve as they round the bend, some of the terraces will expand to 300 square feet, ample room for a gathering of lounge chairs and a small crowd.



Some of the terraces at 1 River Park, in Cobble Hill, Brooklyn, will be as big as 300 square feet, ample room for a gathering of lounge chairs. Credit Rendering by Williams New York

[FXCollaborative](#), architects of the 48-unit residence — part of a multi-building development by the Fortis Property Group on the former Long Island College Hospital campus — took inspiration for the design from the play of light on the rippling water of the nearby East River, according to Gustavo Rodriguez, design director at the firm.



[FXCollaborative](#), which designed 1 River Park, took inspiration from the play of light on the rippling water of the nearby East River. Credit Rendering by Williams New York

“It goes beyond something that’s just utilitarian,” he said.

Eran Chen, founder and executive director of [ODA New York](#), is also rethinking of terrace design. He and others believe that terraces work best when they rest on setbacks of a building — rather than hover in midair, and abut at least two sides of the apartment to which they belong, providing a sense of enclosure and creating an outdoor room that feels like an extension of the interior.

For its projects, ODA has bumped out sections of building facades to create terraces on top, and it has also designed “cascading terraces,” which step down, floor by floor.



The 41-story condo tower at [305 East 44th Street](#) will have 1,400-square-foot terraces. Credit Rendering by Moso Studio

But with his design for [305 East 44th Street](#), a 41-story condominium tower for Triangle Assets that the developer hopes to complete next year, Mr. Chen has tried something completely new; sandwiching sprawling 1,400-square-foot terraces between apartment floors. (Several floors of the building are dedicated entirely to terraces, which surround the structural core of the building.) A spiral staircase made of concrete will lead from an apartment to its outdoor space, adding sculptural forms to the suspended landscapes.

Balconies of old had none of this derring-do.

New York's early apartment buildings had large terraces on the setbacks at the top of buildings, adjacent to penthouses. But they weren't really regarded as outdoor living space.

Some buildings had shallow so-called Juliet balconies, which provided floor area measured in inches rather than feet and thus functioned largely as facade decoration.

In the mid-20th century, developers began adding cantilevered terraces for economic reasons, according to [Robert A.M. Stern](#), founder of his namesake architecture firm and co-author of "New York 1960: Architecture and Urbanism between the Second World War and the Bicentennial." Such slabs were "cheaper than a whole room to build," Mr. Stern said, but building owners could charge considerably more these apartments. Instead of "a four-room apartment, you'd have a three-room-with-balcony apartment."

Small, cheaply detailed, and sometimes overlooking trafficked streets, these “tongue depressors,” as Mr. Stern disparagingly calls them, typically became overflow storage, filled with bikes and baby carriages — not people (unless they were ducking out there for a smoke).

The problem went beyond the fact that a tenant might feel insecure out on a ledge exposed on three sides. The air was more polluted in the days before the Clean Air Act of 1970, and the terraces got sooty. Air-conditioning, which encouraged residents to remain inside, was another reason terraces went out of favor.

But now developers are asking architects to bring them back, albeit in friendlier forms. And green-minded architects, for their part, are pushing developer clients to allow them to include terraces in their plans.

At 100 Vandam Street, a project that [COOKFOX](#) has designed for real estate developer Jeff Greene, there will be outdoor rooms, setback terraces, loggia balconies and what the architects are calling “sky garden planters,” filled with native perennials, grasses and ferns.

Rick Cook, a co-founder of the design firm, said that he adds so many terraces to his buildings that he calls the sum of the horizontal surfaces “the fifth facade.”

Brazilian architect Isay Weinfeld is also adding built-in planters to some of the terraces on his garden-themed [Jardim](#) condominium for Centaur Properties and Greyscale Development Group. The project, which consists of two 11-story towers, is currently under construction next to the Zaha Hadid-designed 520 West 28th Street, which has its own space-age-looking terraces.

The developer Douglas Durst and his wife have experienced old- and new-style balconies, in rental buildings owned by the [Durst Organization](#).

They lived for two years at the Helena, on West 57th Street, which was built in 2003, but the couple did not find their cantilevered terrace particularly welcoming, in part because of wind and street noise.

But down the street at the recently completed Via 57 West, where the Dursts moved in September, the terraces are inset in the angular building designed by Bjarke Ingels. In fact, the architect calls them “cockpits” because they offer protection from wind and noise.



At Via 57 West, the terraces are inset in the angular building. The architect Bjarke Ingels calls them “cockpits” because they offer protection from wind and noise.

“Even on a windy day,” said Mr. Durst, “it’s pleasant out there.”

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