



Winter 2014

Oculus

A Publication of the American Institute of Architects New York Chapter Volume 76, Issue 4 | \$10

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Not All High Line Highlights Are On the Skyline

As a “museum of architecture” rises along the lush, elevated park, some streetscapes are coming to life

BY CLAIRE WILSON

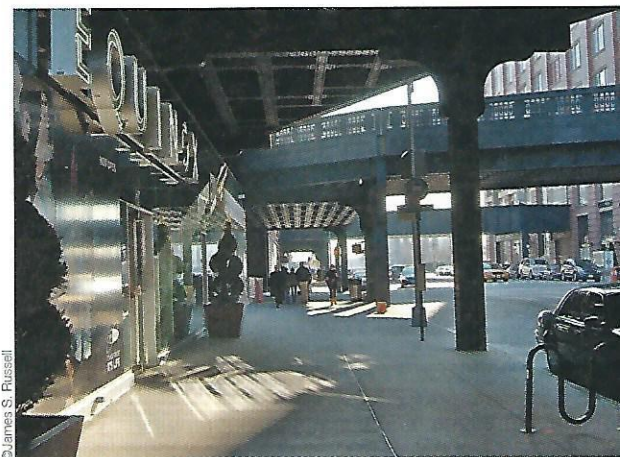
“Build it and they will come.” This quote from the film, *Field of Dreams*, is often used when referring to the High Line and the unprecedented residential, commercial, and cultural development along the 1.4-mile-long elevated railroad-turned-leafy park, whose final phase opened in September. While some call the park the greatest urban redevelopment project of the Bloomberg Administration, it is certainly one of the biggest and most ambitious in the city’s recent history.

Designed by James Corner Field Operations, Diller Scofidio + Renfro, and horticulturist Piet Oudolf, the High Line runs from Gansevoort Street in the meatpacking district to West 34th Street. Its surrounding corridor has been called a “museum of architecture” and an “architectural petting zoo” that now includes the new Renzo Piano Building Workshop-designed Whitney Museum, set to open next year. The effect is an unusual patchwork of glass, metal, and embossed and pierced metal in building styles that range from Gehry Partners’ squat, schooner-like IAC building and Tamarkin Co.’s industrial style informed by early 20th-century factories, to Atelier Jean Nouvel’s whimsical window patterns, and Neil M. Denari Architects’ cantilevered building.

(right) Under the High Line along 10th Avenue at 17th Street, looking south.

(below, left) Mathews Nielsen Landscape Architects designed the street-level courtyard for Robert A.M. Stern Architects’ 312-unit Abington House to reflect the paving and plantings of the High Line – and thrive in its shadows.

(below, right) Renzo Piano’s Whitney Museum, under construction, and the Standard Hotel by Ennead Architects, which straddles the High Line.



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Robert A.M. Stern Architects’ 312-unit Abington House at 29th Street takes its cues from the High Line with a street-level garden and a series of four terraces, common spaces for tenants’ use, designed by Mathews Nielsen Landscape Architects. Beginning with the lowest terrace, which is level with the High Line, the design is meant to evoke a mountain as it ascends. Each level has different plant material chosen to reflect varying “climactic” conditions, such as more wind up high and sunlight, shade, and water at street level. The walkways and landscaped beds at street level are laid out around High Line support columns. “We wanted people to look at our landscape as if it were part of the High Line,” says Signe Nielsen, RLA, FASLA, principal, Mathews Nielsen. “We interpreted how the paving and plantings weave in and out of each other.”

Galleries still thrive here, and that artsy vibe is an important part of the neighborhood’s appeal, according to Cary Tamarkin, AIA, principal, Tamarkin Co., architect of three area buildings. “It has a younger, artistic bent and a cool factor you don’t find on the Lower East Side or West Village,” says Tamarkin. “There is a young energy about it that is unprecedented.” David Falk, president, Newmark Grubb Knight Frank New York Tristate region, a commercial real-estate firm, notes that vibe spillover is bringing companies like Google, Twitter, Apple, Samsung, and the Food Network to former warehouses along Ninth Avenue. “The location says those brands are hip, cool, and forward-thinking,” he says.

Retail along West 14th Street will get a boost when the Whitney opens, but for the moment, stretches of 10th Avenue have little foot traffic and none of the banks and chain pharmacies so ubiquitous in other residential areas. “The neighborhood needs retail and will get it,” Tamarkin says. “Build it and they will come.”

Claire Wilson writes for the *New York Times*.

