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### Low-Rise Condo Raises Brooklyn's Green Profile

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By Diana Mosher, Editor-in-Chief

New York--What's black and white and green all over...? The Silhouette. And, if all goes according to plan, this four-unit eco-friendly condominium in South Park Slope, Brooklyn will soon be the first low-rise LEED Platinum project in New York City.

Besides the expected LEED certification, The Silhouette was also designed and constructed in accordance with Energy Star's energy efficiency requirements. That means it will use 30 percent less energy than a similar building designed to conventional building standards. The Silhouette is also expected to meet the Architecture 2030 challenge for a 60 percent reduction in energy use by 2010 ([www.architecture2030.org](http://www.architecture2030.org)).

Currently the project team is putting finishing touches on the building, which is slated for completion in early October. While this recessionary environment isn't an ideal time to be marketing a new condo project, The Silhouette's four development partners—Robert Brown, Summit Strategic Advisory; Robert Roth, GreenEnvy Development; Andrew Giancola, Giancola Contracting; and Lawrence Vento, Ridge Iron Works—are optimistic given the growing demand in New York City for green living, and the product they're offering.

Still, green isn't the only consideration, or even at the top of the condo buyer's list of criteria. According to Giancola, who recently provided *MHN* with an interesting walk-through of the building, "Location is super important, design is important and green is a bonus. [Beyond green factors], we still have to ensure a building is aesthetically pleasing and also comfortable." Giancola adds, "We made the decision to aim for Platinum LEED in order to differentiate ourselves in a really bad market."

**Click here to read "Greening the Middle Class," an opinion by Robert Roth.**

Another selling point is that The Silhouette is among the last of New York City's new construction residential projects that qualifies for the 421 (a) real property tax abatement. This program has been terminated by the city, but not before The Silhouette's unit owners enjoy the benefit of 15 years of property tax breaks.

The developers credit LEED Consultant Kate Randolph, at Shift Industries in San Francisco, with facilitating and streamlining the LEED process. "She did a tremendous amount of research," says Giancola. She also chased down required data from vendors and submitted the tremendous quantities of paperwork to the USGBC.

According to Giancola, having a LEED consultant on board has been critical to the project's success. While working with Randolph has been like attending a "master class" on the LEED process, he would not do without a LEED consultant on future green projects.

"LEED works on a point system," he adds. "It works globally based on dollar value and there are many different categories for materials and equipment installed in the building. You have to figure out which is the best place to put your money in order to get the most points."

"For instance," Giancola explains, "one category is wood. This includes all the wood in the building from the ground floor up. It's the plywood, two-by-fours, doors, flooring, cabinets, etc. So you have to keep in mind—from the minute you start until the end—all the types of wood you'll use and how that will impact the overall volume/dollar amounts that will ultimately add up to the points you get."

One notable green flooring choice at The Silhouette is reclaimed wood from old factories and barns.



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"But you can't just say I used reclaimed flooring. I get a point," says Giancola. "That flooring gets thrown into a pot of all the wood in the building and then they take a percentage of that dollar value. You have to meet certain criteria in order to get that point. You can also get additional points for exemplary performance."

The architect of record is local firm Coggan + Crawford Architecture Design. West Coast-based Organic Architect provided green expertise as well. The theme of the building is "yin and yang" and this overall concept emerged based on the location of the building. A development goal was to have passive heating and cooling in the building. Since the rear is south facing, it made sense to outfit the back of the building with white brick that would reflect the sun back. The front of the building is black brick that absorbs the sun. The black and white weave between materials is repeated on the window frames as well as throughout the interior of the condo homes.

The Silhouette's green attributes include:

- Steel and concrete structures are certified with recycled content and locally or regionally distributed, for reduction of environmental impact.
- Wood finishes, such as cabinetry, were acquired only from sustainable forests. White oak floors are reclaimed wood.
- South-facing facade has white brick, as well as shading from the trees in the backyard, which will help reflect the heat that would otherwise be absorbed by the building.
- Triple-glazed windows promote energy efficiency as well as reduce the volume of noise from the streets below.
- All paints and finishes are low VOC.
- All appliances have Energy Star label.
- The Silhouette employs a state-of-the-art solar hot water system in combination with ultra high-efficiency Buderus natural gas boilers. This system will provide two-thirds of the domestic hot water needs of the building, and one-third of the space heating needs.
- Rooftop is pitched to capture storm water, which is collected and distributed to each floor for balcony and rear garden irrigation.
- Roof designed to reduce the heat island effect. The term "heat island" describes built up areas that are hotter than nearby rural areas. The annual mean air temperature of a city with one million people or more can be 1.8–5.4°F (1–3°C) warmer than its surroundings. In the evening, the difference can be as high as 22°F (12°C). Heat islands can affect communities by increasing summertime peak energy demand, air conditioning costs, air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, heat-related illness and mortality, and water quality."

[Click here for more about the heat island effect.](#)

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